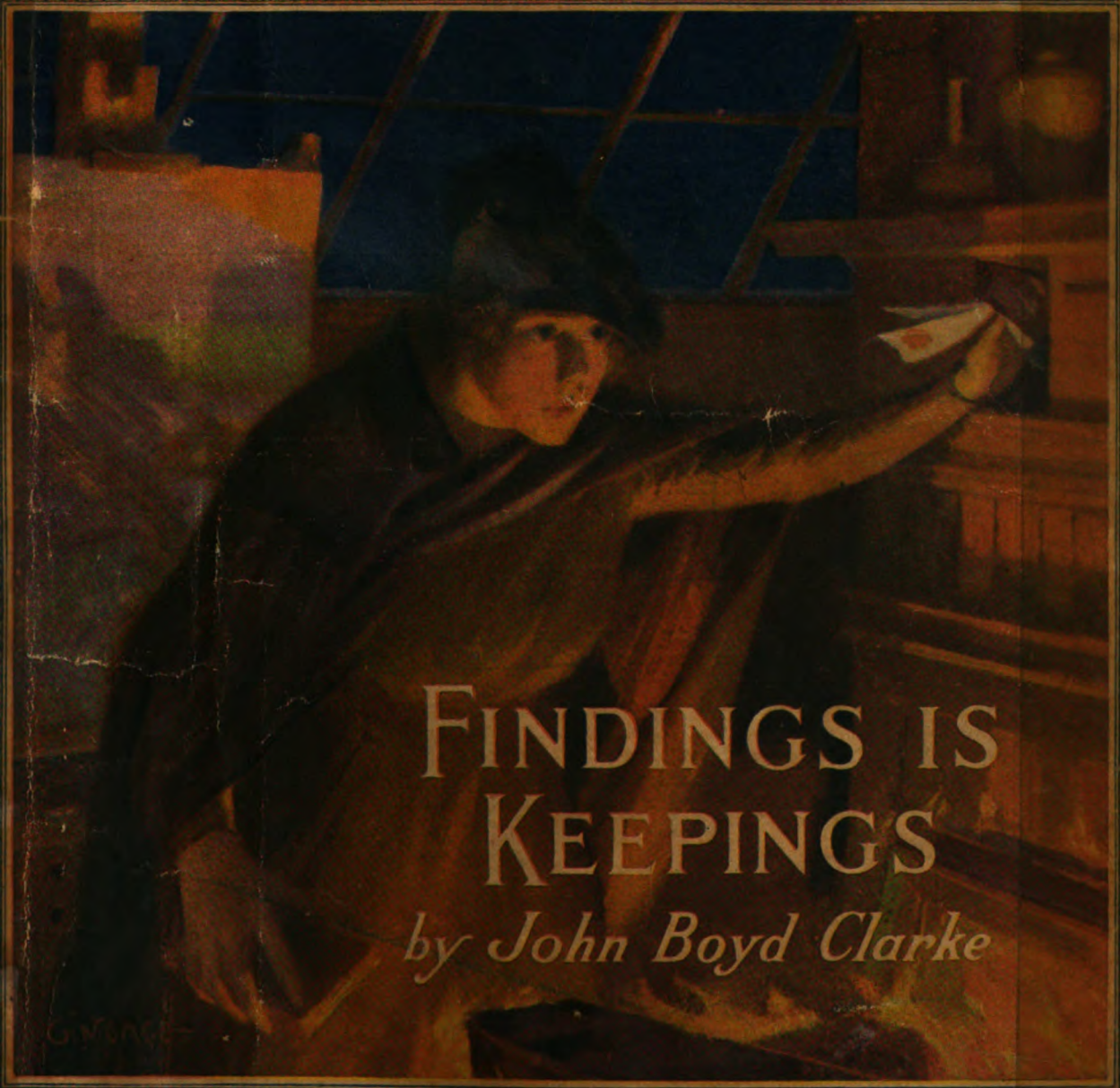
ARGOSY

Issued Weekly



FINDINGS IS KEEPINGS

by John Boyd Clarke

10¢ JUNE 5 $4.00

This is the sign that identifies dealers showing the Eveready Daylo $10,000 Contest Picture. Look for this sign on dealers' windows

Three Thousand Dollars For Somebody. *YOU?*

another EVEREADY contest!

$10000.00 In Cash Prizes

THREE thousand dollars in cash for one person; a thousand dollars for another; five hundred for each of three other people and ninety-nine other cash prizes two hundred to ten dollars. *Ten thousand dollars* in all! How much for YOU?

This latest Eveready Daylo Contest will break all contest records. Anyone may enter—it costs nothing; there is no obligation of any kind. Men, women, boys and girls all have equal chances for any of the 104 cash prizes.

On June 1st, Daylo dealers throughout the United States and Canada will display the new Daylo contest Picture in their windows. Go to the store of a Daylo dealer and study the picture. Secure a contest blank, which the dealer will give you, and write on it what you think the letter says. Use 12 words or less. For the best answer that conforms to the contest rules, the winner will receive $3000.00 in cash.

Get an early look at the picture. Submit as many answers as you wish. Contest blanks are free at all Daylo dealers. All answers must be mailed before midnight, August 1st, 1920.

A3114

1	First Prize	$3000.00
1	Second Prize	1000.00
3	Prizes—$500.00 each	1500.00
4	Prizes—$250.00 each	1000.00
5	Prizes—$200.00 each	1000.00
10	Prizes—$100.00 each	1000.00
10	Prizes—$ 50.00 each	500.00
20	Prizes—$ 25.00 each	500.00
50	Prizes—$ 10.00 each	500.00
104	Prizes	Total $10,000.00

Answers will be judged by the editors of "LIFE" and contestants must abide by their judgment.

If two or more contestants submit the identical answer selected by the judges for any prize, the full amount of the prize will be paid to each.

Contest begins June 1, 1920, and ends Midnight, August 1, 1920. Postmarks on letters will determine if letter has been mailed before close of contest.

Answers must contain not more than 12 words. Hyphenated words count as one word.

Complete Contest Rules are printed on Contest Blank. Ask Daylo dealers for them.

THE ARGOSY

Vol. CXXI **ISSUED WEEKLY** Number 4

CONTENTS FOR JUNE 5, 1920

FOUR SERIAL STORIES

TWO COMPLETE NOVELETTES

FOUR SHORT STORIES

"The stars are setting and the caravan
Starts for the dawn of Nothing. O, make haste!"

"THE CARAVAN OF THE DEAD"

BY HAROLD LAMB

Author of "Marching Sands," etc.

BEGINS NEXT WEEK

THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY, 280 Broadway, New York; Temple House, Temple Avenue, E. C., London
FRANK A. MUNSEY, President RICHARD H. TITHERINGTON, [illegible] CHRISTOPHER H. POPE, Treasurer
Single copies, 10 cents. By the year, $4.00 in United States, its dependencies, Mexico and Cuba; $5.00 in 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
PUBLISHED WEEKLY BY THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY. COPYRIGHT, 1920.
Entered as second-class matter September 28, 1917, at the Post-Office at New York, under the Act of March [illegible]

Try This Magic-Like Machine 10 Days Free

Treat Yourself Right in Your Own Home

See for yourself how easily you can attain wonderful, sparkling health and radiant beauty through the magic of Violet Rays. Get this marvelous new machine for 10 days' free trial right in your own home. Learn how this wonderful scientific discovery has quickly brought health, new vitality and beauty to thousands of users. See why countless physicians now regularly use and endorse Vi-Rex Violet Rays. Without a penny of cost you can prove to your own satisfaction the magic-like powers of Violet Rays in building health, vitality and beauty.

Violet Rays penetrate to every cell in the body, imparting that stimulating vigor which brings the glow of health, tones up the entire system, putting life into overtaxed and sluggish tissues. As a quick relief from pain Vi-Rex has no equal. Its soothing rays quickly find the source of distress and afford speedy comfort. Headaches, nervousness, skin blemishes and many other complaints vanish as if by magic through this marvelous treatment.

VITALITY

The Violet Ray sends a spray of mild, tiny currents through every part and organ, vitalizing and invigorating every cell—leaving you with a delightful feeling of health and buoyant energy.

BEAUTY

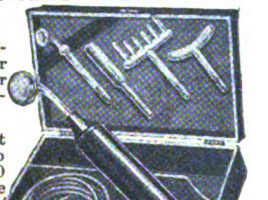
Violet Ray purifies the scalp and stimulates hair growth—a wonderful aid to beauty. Removes eczema, pimples, blackheads, obesity—giving the skin a smooth fine texture, free from blemishes and sallowness.

VIOLET RAYS

The Amazing New Source of Health, Energy and Beauty

Vi-Rex Violet Rays are effective for a host of disorders and ailments. Physicians in all parts of the country are adding this scientific outfit to their equipment and recommending its use to patients. Beauty specialists have long realized its efficiency for inducing a clear and healthful skin. Until recently expense prohibited the use of this remarkable health-building force in private homes. Now the practical inexpensive Vi-Rex Violet Ray Machine enables everyone to enjoy all the benefits of the marvelous treatment at home.

The operation of the outfit is simplicity itself. Current from your electric light socket is transformed into an effective healing agent as pleasant to the senses as a ray of spring sunshine. No shocks or jolts, just a soft steady ray of violet light filled with an abundance of health and energy. (Special equipment is supplied to you at trifling cost if electric current is not available.)



Not a Vibrator The Vi-Rex Violet Ray is essentially different from any other electrical treatment. It is not a vibrator—does not shock or jar the nerve ends. There is no feeling of soreness or exhaustion after use—only a comforting, agreeable sense of relief.

Try Violet Rays FREE You don't have to take any risks in giving Vi-Rex Violet Rays a trial. Take 20 treatments in your own home. Use this marvelous machine for ten days. If you do not feel quick relief, if you do not feel better, sleep better, look better, send it back and you will not be out one penny. This special offer is now open but it may be withdrawn at any time, so act quickly!

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Asthma	Goiter
Barber's Itch	Hay Fever
Boils	Headache
Blackheads	Insomnia
Bunions	Lumbago
Callous	Nervousness
Catarrh	Neuralgia
Chilblains	Neuritis
Colds	Obesity
Corns	Paralysis
Constipation	Piles
Dandruff	Pimples
Deafness	Pyorrhea
Earache	Rheumatism
Eczema	Sore Throat
Eye Disease	Sprains
Falling Hair	Tonsilitis
Whooping Cough	

This is only a partial list of the many ailments that can be treated successfully with Violet Rays right in your own home.

Write for Free Book and Trial Offer Write today for free booklet describing the wonderful Vi-Rex outfit in complete detail, and particulars of our liberal 10-day trial offer. Learn why it is the most economical and practical machine of its kind available. You may use it to gain health, vitality, beauty! Mail Coupon or send a postal.

DO IT NOW

VI-REX ELECTRIC CO.
DEPT. 96
326 W. Madison St., Chicago, Ill.

VI-REX ELECTRIC CO. Dept. 96
326 W. Madison St., Chicago, Illinois

Please send me without cost or obligation your free book describing your wonderful Violet Ray Machine.

Name.....

Address.....

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

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	Combination Line Rate $3.60, less 2% cash discount
Munsey's Magazine - $1.50		
THE ARGOSY COMB'N The Argosy . . . All-Story Weekly.	2.00	

July 10th Argosy Combination Forms Close June 10th.

AGENTS & SALESMEN WANTED

SELL SOFT DRINKS—Make $10 to $50 a day. Just add cold water to our soft drink preparations and you have the most delicious drinks you ever tasted. Ten kinds, Orangeade, Grape-Julep, Cherry-Julep, etc. Thirty big glasses, 25c, enough for 200 for $1. Eighty-five cents clear profit on every dollar selling these delicious drinks by the glass at ball games, fairs, dances, picnics, etc. Big money selling the small packages to families, stores, etc. Send 10c for enough for 10 large glasses and particulars postpaid. Morrisey Company, A 4417-20 Madison St., Chicago.

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SALESMEN—Side or Main Line—to sell low priced 6,000 mile guaranteed tires; 30x3½ non-skid sells for $[illegible]; other sizes in proportion. Good money making proposition for live wires. Master Tire Co., 618 So. Michigan, Chicago.

$10 WORTH OF FINEST TOILET SOAPS, perfumes, toilet waters, spices, etc., absolutely free to agents on our refund plan. Lacassian Co., Dept. 614, St. Louis, Mo.

$65.00 A WEEK AND YOUR SUIT FREE—If you take advantage of our startling offer. Write us at once, and we will send you a full line of samples and everything necessary to start at once, absolutely free, postage prepaid. Spencer Mead Company, Dept. 1195, Chicago.

Extraordinary Opportunity is offered ambitious men to become distributors for new product now being marketed. No competition; demand everywhere. Exclusive sales rights given. Complete sales helps and full co-operation assures success. Start small and grow. $1000 automobile given free. Opportunity to establish large business netting $10,000 yearly. Act immediately. Garfield Mfg. Co., Dept. A, Garfield Bldg., Brooklyn, N. Y.

SELL What Millions Want. New, wonderful Liberty Portraits. Creates tremendous interest. Absolutely different; unique; enormous demand—30 hours' service. Liberal credit. Outfit and catalogue Free. $100 weekly profit easy. Consolidated Portrait Co., Dept. 22, 1036 W. Adams Street, Chicago.

AGENTS: $100 weekly possible introducing new winter automobile fuel. Specially adapted to cold weather. Starts easy. Adds power, mileage and reduces operating expense. Endorsed by thousands. Territory going like wildfire. Act quick. $28 sample outfit free. L. Ballwey, Dept. 2, Louisville, Ky.

AGENTS: Reversible Raincoat. Two coats for the price of one. Something brand new. Not sold in stores. Latest style. Every man wants one. Binford sold 26 coats in five days. Write quick for sample and territory. Be first to introduce this big new seller. Thomas Raincoat Co., 1607 North St., Dayton, Ohio.

AMBITIOUS? We will establish you in business; manufacture article in demand everywhere, retailing $1.50, under your name, for 35c each; show you how to sell to agents, dealers and jobbers, personally and by mail; and advertise under your name free. Tremendous repeat business; one of our customers made $1000 one month. Write for proof. Scientific Lab., 17 Court Street, Brooklyn, N. Y.

AGENTS: BRAND NEW WIRELESS UMBRELLA. Two handles. Can be used by Lady or Gentleman. Only umbrella ever made without wires to hold stays in place. Handles collapse to fit suitcase. Not sold in stores. Popular price. Write quick for sample. Parker Mfg. Co., 406 Dike St., Dayton, Ohio.

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Landseekers. Good land opportunities in Antrim and Kalkaska Counties, Michigan. Big yields of grains, fruit, truck. No swamps or stones. $15 to $35 per acre. Easy terms. 10 to 160 acre tracts. Railroad, markets, schools, churches. Good fishing, hunting; fine climate. We help settlers. Largest company; 20 years' experience. Write for free booklet. Be independent. Swigart Land Company, Y1245 First National Bank Building, Chicago, Ill.

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PHOTOPLAYS WANTED BY 48 COMPANIES; $10 TO $500 EACH PAID FOR PLAYS. No correspondence course or experience needed; details sent free to beginners. Sell your ideas. Producers League, 388 Wainwright, St. Louis, Mo.

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AGENTS—MAKE A DOLLAR AN HOUR. SELL MENDETS, a patent patch for instantly mending leaks in all utensils. Sample package free. Collette Manufacturing Company, Dept. 306-B, Amsterdam, N. Y.

Mexican Diamonds Flash Like Genuine, fool experts, stand tests, yet sell for 1-50th the price. Few live Agents wanted to sell from handsome sample case. Big profits, pleasant work. Write today. Mexican Diamond Imptg. Co., Box 88, Las Cruces, N. Mexico.

SEND 2c POSTAGE for free sample with particulars. No splashing water strainers. Easy seller. Returns big. Experience unnecessary. Seed Filter Co., N 73 Franklin St., New York.

AGENTS—Your own clothes free and $60 a week. Start in your spare time. Tailoring business simply great this year. Write American Woolen Mills Company, Dept. 1433, Chicago, for cloth samples of 60 big sensational sellers.

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DROP Everything else. Sell Guaranteed Silk hosiery and underwear all or spare time, direct to consumer. Big money maker. Big commissions. Prompt deliveries. Samples now ready. C. & D. Company, Dept. E, Grand Rapids, Mich.

MIRACLE MOTOR-GAS AMAZES MOTORISTS. 3 cents worth equals gallon gasoline. Eliminates carbon. 300% profit. Isom, Idaho, wires: "Ship 500 packages. Made $70 yesterday." Investigate. Chas. H. Butler Co., Dept. 197, Toledo, Ohio.

DAVIS' LUCKY 'LEVEN selling better than ever. $3.35 value sells for $1.25. Mrs. Lewis sold 280 in 7½ days—profit $200. "37" varieties of other big winners—150%-250% profit. Great crew managers' proposition. E. M. Davis, Dept. 58, Chicago.

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AGENTS—Our Soap and Toilet Article Plan is a wonder. Get our Free Sample Case Offer. Ho-Ro-Co, 137 Locust, St. Louis, Mo.

SELL TIRES DIRECT to car owner. 30x3 non-skid $11.75. Tubes $2.25; other sizes in proportion. Guaranteed 6,000 miles on liberal adjustment basis. Big commissions paid weekly. Experience or capital unnecessary. Auto Tire Clearing House, 1531 West 15th, Chicago.

WE START YOU IN BUSINESS, furnishing everything. Men and women, $30.00 to $100.00 weekly operating our "New System Specialty Candy Factories" anywhere. Opportunity lifetime; booklet free. Ragsdale Co., Drawer 93, East Orange, N. J.

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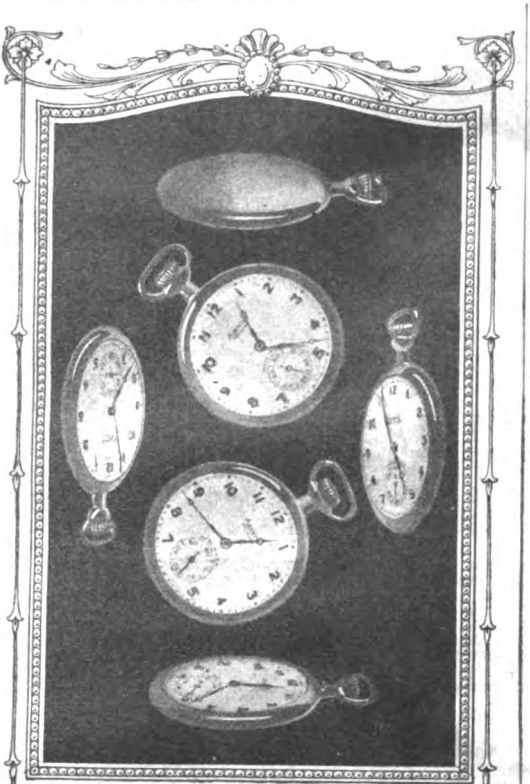
PATENTS. If you have an invention write for our Guide Book, "How To Get A Patent." Send model or sketch and description, and we will give our opinion as to its patentable nature. Randolph & Co., 630 F, Washington, D. C.

PATENTS. BOOKLET FREE. HIGHEST REFERENCES. BEST RESULTS. Promptness assured. Send drawing or model for examination and opinion as to patentability. Watson E. Coleman, 624 F Street, Washington, D. C.

PATENTS. Write for Free Illustrated Guide Book and Evidence of Invention Blank. Send model or sketch and description for our opinion as to patentable nature. Free. Highest References. Prompt Attention. Reasonable Terms. Victor J. Evans & Co., 762 Ninth, Washington, D. C.

Classified Advertising continued on page 8, back [illegible]



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EVERY Ingersoll Reliance is tested in six positions—12 days—2 days in each position—before it leaves the factory. These positions are illustrated above.

This test follows the 127 inspections that are made before the movement is completely assembled. Together they assure accuracy and reliability under all conditions.

The Reliance movement is 7-jewel and of the solid or "bridge" type of construction as employed in the Jurgenson and other fine watches.

Yet you can buy the Reliance in a solid nickel screw case for just $8.00, or in a gold filled case for $11.50. Canadian prices: In nickel case $8.75. In gold filled $13.00.

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Ingersoll Reliance

7-Jewel, Bridge Model

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ESTABLISHED 1895
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BROOKS' APPLIANCE, the modern scientific invention, the wonderful new discovery that relieves rupture will be sent on trial. No obnoxious springs or pads. Has automatic Air Cushions. Binds and draws the broken parts together as you would a broken limb. No salves. No lies. Durable, cheap. **Sent on trial to prove it.** Protected by U. S. patents. Catalogue and measure blanks mailed free. Send name and address today.

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Perfect hearing is now being restored in every condition of deafness or defective hearing from causes such as **Catarrhal Deafness, Relaxed or Sunken Drums, Thickened Drums, Roaring and Hissing Sounds, Perforated, Wholly or Partially Destroyed Drums, Discharge from Ears, etc.**

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"Little Wireless Phones for the Ears"—require no medicine but effectively replace what is lacking or defective in the natural ear drums. They are simple devices, which the wearer easily fits into the ears where they are invisible. Soft, safe and comfortable.

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and let me see what you can do with it. Many newspaper artists earning $30.00 to $125.00 or more per week were trained by my course of personal individual lessons by mail. PICTURE CHARTS make original drawing easy to learn. Send sketch of Uncle Sam with 6c in stamps for sample Picture Chart, list of successful students, examples of their work and evidence of what YOU can accomplish. *Please state your age.*

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If so, you are NOT wearing

Buchstein's Vulcanized Fiber Limb which is soothing to your stump, cool, neat, light, walls not much thicker than a silver dollar, strong.

Sold on easy payments to good people. Send for Catalog today.
C. Buchstein Co., 113 6th St., S. Minneapolis, Minn.

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W.L.Douglas shoes are sold in 107 of our own stores direct from factory to the wearer. All middlemen's profits are eliminated. W.L.Douglas $9.00 and $10.00 shoes are absolutely the best shoe values for the money in this country. W. L. Douglas name and the retail price stamped on the bottom guarantees the best shoes in style, comfort and service that can be produced for the price.

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The quality of W.L.Douglas product is guaranteed by more than 40 years experience in making fine shoes. The smart styles are the leaders in the fashion centers of America. They are made in a well-equipped factory at Brockton, Mass., by the highest paid, skilled shoemakers, under the direction and supervision of experienced men, all working with an honest determination to make the best shoes for the price that money can buy. The retail prices are the same everywhere. They cost no more in San Francisco than they do in New York.

W. L. Douglas shoes are for sale by over 9000 shoe dealers besides our own stores. If your local dealer cannot supply you, take no other make. Order direct from the factory. Send for booklet telling how to order shoes by mail, postage free.

CAUTION.—Insist upon having W. L. Douglas shoes. The name and price is plainly stamped on the sole. If it has been changed or mutilated, BEWARE OF FRAUD.

W.L.Douglas

President
W.L.Douglas Shoe Co.,
140 Spark Street,
Brockton, Mass.

THE ARGOSY

Vol. CXXI SATURDAY, JUNE 5, 1920 No. 4

Findings Is Keepings

by John Boyd Clarke

Author of "A Challenge to Romance," "Broadname Whispers," etc.

CHAPTER I.

HARRY VALE IS PUZZLED.

HARRY VALE was about to slam his locust on the curb in greeting to the man on next post when he marked a jumbled shadow beside a tree-box halfway through the block on Trevorth Street. There was somebody standing close beside the tree.

He was due to walk through Trevorth Street, anyway. It was lined on either side with the residences of wealthy people. Fresh from the rookie school, Vale had impressed upon his mind above most things the importance of investigating the character of any lurker near such dwellings.

He allowed the stick to swing idly from his hand instead of rapping it on the granite, and started for that tree-box. A cop does not have to wear sneakers to tread quietly. That was another thing he had learned at school.

He glanced shrewdly from side to side at the brownstone and brick dwellings. The fronts of most of them were dark, or showed but dim illumination through the fanlights over the front doors. Almost opposite to the tree-box where he had spied the moving figure, one house was brilliantly lighted.

He had noted this, as well as the motors arriving and discharging their passengers, on the first round of his tour. There were no cars parked in the street now; but the party was at its height.

As Vale quietly approached the spot indicated, he heard the faint sound of iron scraping on iron. He quickened his step, glancing sharply at the dark front of the Maywell house on his right. There was no light visible there—not a glimmer even shining through the fanlight.

Colonel Hardy Maywell had died the day before. He would be buried on the morrow. The tree-box with the queer shadow beside it was directly before the Maywell front door.

As he stepped briskly to the spot he saw that a slight figure in a long rain-coat and a voluminous cap leaned a shoulder against the tree-box. This person was watching the front of the lighted house across the street.

"What's the idea, fella?" Vale asked. "Got to keep the tree from falling down?"

The stranger turned swiftly. It was too dark for Vale to see his face clearly. But he knew that he was young and that he smiled. Vale saw the flash of white teeth and heard merriment in the voice that replied to his query:

"Good evening, officer. I'm waiting for a little jane to show at the area gate across there. I had a date with her for the evening, but her folks are giving a party and she'll only have a minute or so by and by to give me."

The explanation came naturally enough, and the young fellow chuckled as he completed it. He had been fumbling in a cigarette case, and now he produced a tag and scratched a lucifer. Vale got a good view of his face as he cupped his hands to hold the light.

It was an oval face, very pale, but not with the pallor of ill health. The eyes were black, the nose well formed, the chin full and rather delicately turned, the policeman thought, for a man's. But it was no crook's face, that was sure.

Vale knew his *Lombroso*, and he was positive that this young fellow displayed none of the marked and characteristic features of the criminal, first catalogued by that famous Italian student of criminology.

"All right," the policeman observed, turning cheerfully to walk on. "But you are due to get wet standing here, fella. It's going to shower."

"Oh! I'm neither sugar nor salt," laughed the Romeo.

Harry Vale walked on. He thought the fellow in the shadow of the tree-box stepped aside. Again he heard the clang of iron on iron. But at that moment Vale was not at all puzzled by these incidents. A chap waiting for a housemaid to run out to the area gate for a moment's confab was too common an occurrence to disturb the placid pool of his thought.

Had he been able just then to see into the interior of the Maywell house, it would have been with an entirely different eye that he viewed the matter.

Colonel Hardy Maywell lay in his crape-draped coffin in the middle of the front parlor. In the rear parlor, furnished as a library, burned a green-shaded reading-lamp on the baize-covered table, which illumined the room but poorly.

It gave sufficient light, however, to reveal the faces if not the figures of two men who sat there. One lay back in an easy chair. The other sat forward in his seat, his hands on his knees, his pale blue eyes fixed upon the countenance of the man speaking.

"*That* is why I have brought you here, Pelley. I know well enough what your trade was before you squared things and set up that corner cigar-stand. A crook doesn't pass that way even now, after all these years, without giving you the office. And remember, *I* know that you have not kept straight in every particular since you did your last stretch."

"You would not care to tell 'em at headquarters about *that*," muttered the other, his predatory face viciously clouding.

"But I would tell if it came to a point of necessity," the man in the lounging-chair said quietly. "You confessed to me as a client, you know. My hands are clean."

The other muttered an oath. "They always have been clean of everything you ever got a piece of coin out of."

His *vis-à-vis* nodded complacently. "I have told you before," he said, quite unmoved, "that had you begun as I did, you could have made your living by crime without fear of arrest. The criminal lawyer who must naturally fatten on the proceeds of the brains and fingers of you crooks is immune from punishment."

The speaker was a well-groomed, keen-faced man not far above forty, but with hair whitening at the temples. He was smoothly shaven, pink-cheeked, well-dressed. Indeed, Andrew Maywell, nephew of the dead man lying in the casket in the next room, might be called handsome by those who did not look deeper than the texture of the skin and the facial angle.

"Now," he said, utterly without emotion, "I have planned everything for this 'break.' And when *I* lay plans, as you very well know, they do not fail. The necessary tools are here."

He motioned to a clumsy bundle reposing on the rug at their feet.

"Your getaway is a simple matter—

through that window." He gestured again. "Even your alibi is arranged for, if by any possibility the police should wish to check you up."

"Uhuh!" grunted the other. "I don't need a whole machine-shop such as you seem to have here for to open that tin box," and his eyes twinkled.

He licked his lips, too. Andrew Maywell laughed shortly. "I see the old ambition stirs in you, Pelley," he said.

"Uhuh!"

"I saw from fifteen hundred to two thousand dollars locked into that wall-safe not an hour before the old man died. That shall be yours—all the cash, in fact, that you find in the safe. You may rumple things up as much as you like and leave the tools here to make it appear you were frightened away before completing the job.

"But only one paper are you to remove from the safe. Understand? Just one. Double-cross me in this, and I'll find a way to get you," said the lawyer, in a suddenly rasping tone that went ill with his placid manner, and was all the more impressive therefore. "The document I speak of is in the upper left-hand pigeonhole of the upper compartment of the safe."

"How'll I know what paper you mean?" questioned Pelley hoarsely.

"It is docketed across the end of the envelope containing it. The envelope has old George Wilmot's card printed in the corner. I saw Wilmot put the envelope in the safe myself. The docketing reads like *this*."

He drew from an inner pocket a long envelope and thrust it into Pelley's hand, pointing to the lines written across one end of its face.

"Hey!" muttered Pelley. "This has got Wilmot's card on it, too."

"Exactly. And that is George Wilmot's handwriting on the end. He would not deny it," Andrew Maywell chuckled. "In all appearances it is the same envelope he put into that safe after our conversation with the old colonel an hour before he died. All *you* are to do, Pelley, is to exchange this envelope for the one you will find in that pigeonhole. Understand?"

"What am I to do with the one I take from the safe, Mr. Maywell?" Pelley asked softly.

"Keep it until I call for it. Keep it safe. That is all. I am going to leave you now to your job. See that you make no bungle of it—*what's that?*"

He came to his feet with the exclamation, pointing across the table at the heavy curtains between the two rooms. One of them had stirred—rippling as though a moving body had touched it.

Pelley was even quicker to apprehend danger. He glided off his chair and in a stooping posture swung around the end of the table and darted to the archway in which the curtains hung. Something shone dully in his right hand and was thrust forward menacingly,

As Pelley jerked the curtain aside Maywell reached and turned the white-lined porcelain lamp-shade so that the light was reflected into that front parlor where the dead man lay.

For fully a minute they both stood motionless, devouring with their suspicious gaze the grim room. The light was strong enough to reveal all—the chairs arranged against the side walls, with the draped coffin in the middle.

There was naught there but the corpse, composed in the casket. Surely *that* had not come to stir the curtain and listen to the plot here hatching to thwart that which in life it had determined!

Perhaps, for an instant, Andrew Maywell's mind was barbed by such thought. Then he denied the gruesome imagining. He was an eminently practical man, was the criminal lawyer.

Pelley looked back at him, his own narrow face working viciously. Then he emitted a sigh and pointed with his gun at the open window behind Maywell, where the shade moved slightly.

"Draft," he said. "Hell! How you scared me. I got the jumps to-night, I guess. I ain't been doing anything like this for some years, Mr. Maywell—honest."

The latter chuckled and replaced the lamp-shade. But he did not sit down again. Instead he picked his hat and gloves from the end of the table.

"It is beginning to rain, isn't it? I've

only to walk to the corner for a car." He pointed to the envelope lying under the reflection of the lamp. "Make no mistake about that whatever else you do, Pelley."

He walked out of the house, clanging the heavy front door behind him, making sure that it locked. It *was* raining—a sudden summer downpour.

Three blocks away Harry Vale shrugged into his rubber-coat just in time to shed the hard shower. He had met his boss and was returning to the other end of his beat, through Trevorth Street.

The rain stopped as suddenly as it had begun, as Vale came within sight of the Maywell house. There was that Romeo still standing in the shadow of the tree-box.

"You have a heart for a better fate," chuckled the policeman when he came to the spot again. "You may not be sugar nor salt, but she is trying you sorely."

"I'll wait if she can't get out till the party is over. She'll come then," the other said with seeming cheerfulness.

Harry Vale moved on, chuckling. He wasn't much for the janes himself, as he expressed it. But this fellow evidently had a bad case.

He laughed again when he considered the patient waiter, as he turned at the head of his beat once more, for it again began to shower.

"And I bet he don't feel none too good about it, down in his soul," murmured the patrolman. "He's a real pretty boy—he is that. And why should he be waiting there to talk sweet nothings to a housemaid? Uncle Dan McKane says it's the little things count. That's how he got to be inspector and head of the Detective Bureau—counting little things. Yet why should that Willy-boy's love affairs mean anything in *my* young life?

"Sure," he added, "a lad of his breed ought not to be chasing housemaids in the first place. And him standing there in the rain—"

Puzzled—growing half suspicious after all—Vale quickened his step until he reached the front of the darkened Maywell house. But the stranger was gone. The music of violins was still wafted from the lighted house across the street. Either the "Willy-boy" had accomplished the object of his waiting, or the rain had finally driven him to cover.

"Now, I wonder what Uncle Dan would do under the circumstances?" muttered Harry Vale. "Keep his mouth shut, 'tis likely, and mind his own concerns. I'll do just that, myself!" and he marched on.

CHAPTER II.

THE CRACK ON TREVORTH STREET.

THE next forenoon when Harry Vale came on duty he discovered that he had overlooked a bet. Uncle Dan McKane was perfectly right—it was the little things that counted. Perhaps certain small incidents of his previous eight-to-twelve tour should have loomed more importantly in the rookie cop's mind at the moment.

The skipper called Vale into his room. The skipper was a raspy voiced, harsh-faced, steely eyed man who always had the appearance of believing that every flatty who came before him was trying to lie. And most of them did try to in all probability, for Buffalo Griggs (he was called that more often than he was called Captain Micah Griggs) had most of his men scared.

Perhaps Vale was too young in the business to be frightened by any bullying tactics.

At least he was only thirty days or so at the Tenth Precinct Station and the skipper had nothing on him. In addition, it would take more than a miner's pick and pan to find a streak of yellow in the rookie cop.

He came to attention before old Buffalo's desk. If he quailed at all inwardly he did not display this emotion on the surface.

"Officer Vale, your beat is along Trevorth Street, the block between Woodworth Avenue and Barrows Place. Is that so?" barked the skipper.

"It is, sir."

"Number ninety-seven is in that block?"

"It is, sir. The Maywell house," said Harry, with a sudden spasm in his memory which he was glad the skipper could not observe.

"A safe was cracked in that house sometime last night. It was reported two hours ago by Mr. George Wilmot, who was Colonel Maywell's lawyer and has charge of the estate now that the colonel is dead.

"The servants sleep on the top floor. There was nobody down-stairs—not even to watch beside the coffin—after ten fifteen. You must have passed the house four times during your tour. Did you see anything?"

"I did not see anything wrong about the house. Nobody was going in or out when I was by. Number ninety-seven was dark as a pocket, sir."

"It ain't likely that the safe-cracker went in and out by the front door," scoffed the skipper. "In fact, he pried bars apart at a back window and got into the library by that means."

"I wouldn't have seen him, then," Vale said cheerfully. "There's an alley back there that runs into Hubbard Street."

"And Ginness has the beat on Hubbard Street at that hour, eh? Trying to pass the buck, are you?" barked old Buffalo.

"I've no reason to, sir," said Harry. "There was nothing doing on that block excepting a party at number hundred-and-two."

"The street was full of cars and chauffeurs, then?" suggested the skipper.

"No, sir. The cars came and went away, instead of parking on the block. The party had not broken up when I came off tour, sir."

But he was thinking—he was hesitating. There was something gnawing at his memory. The keen-eyed skipper saw this.

"What do you *know?* Out with it, Officer Vale," he commanded.

"If I knew, it would be different, sir. But I don't really know a thing. Give me time to think—"

"You're not supposed to think," interrupted the skipper roughly. "You're a cop—not a detective."

"Isn't a cop the egg a detective breaks out of?" demanded the young man, yet grinning.

"They don't break out of any rookie egg," barked the skipper. "You don't seem to really *know* anything, Vale. I didn't s'pose you would. But they want a cop over there at ninety-seven Trevorth to stand around while the funeral is going on. That's about *your* kind of a job," sneered old Buffalo. "You can spend your relief tour that way. Be off with you!"

That was punishment for being "fresh." Harry Vale realized that well enough. But he thought he had easily got out of a rather tight corner.

He went back into the reserve room. The bunch on reserve was gassing about this crack on Trevorth Street.

"What did Buffalo give you, Harry?" asked one curious man.

"Not much. He was mild with me—considerative of my youth."

"No? But he gave Maddock, who had the tour after you, particular hell. They think the crack was made after midnight. Mr. Andrew Maywell was in the library where that wall-pocket is until ten fifteen.

"What kind of a lookin' lad is *he?*" Vale asked with sudden interest.

"Don't you know who Andrew Maywell is? Criminal lawyer—one of the niftiest. I hate to take the stand with him for the prisoner. He pounds a witness—'specially a cop—to a jelly."

"Ha! *That's* not the one, then," commented Harry Vale, and got his white gloves and put the varnished stick in his belt socket before marching out.

He did not much mind this extra detail. In fact as he walked toward Trevorth Street he began to wonder if he did not want very much to look at the house that had been robbed.

There was something odd about the happenings of the previous evening in the street before the Maywell house. That fellow who stood there by the tree-box watching the lighted windows of number one-hundred-and-two—was there something wrong with him, after all?

Vale recalled carefully now the appearance of the stranger. Oval, pale face and black eyes; aquiline nose and rather feminine chin; long lashes, and well marked black brows. A sort of transparency to the skin which, come to think of it, seemed rather girlish.

"And it looked like it would be a long time before he needed a shave," muttered

Harry, rubbing his own smoothly shaven chin thoughtfully with his gloved hand. "A pretty boy—"

He came in sight of the Maywell house. Already a dozen cars were parked on the block. Before the door stood the great motor catafalque upon which Colonel Hardy Maywell would be borne to the cemetery. A heavy black carpet was laid down the brownstone steps and across the sidewalk to the curb. A curious crowd was beginning to gather.

Vale reached the spot. Here was the tree-box beside which the young fellow had stood.

"Sure," muttered the police officer, "a fellow like him might have twenty girls after him, instead of his hanging around here waiting for a housemaid. I wonder where my wits were straying last night?"

He caught sight of a trim figure at the area gate of number one hundred and two. Her back was toward Vale. He crossed the street diagonally and strolled along to the gate. The girl flashed around when she heard his step, displaying an ebon face, the whites of shining eyes, and a perfect set of teeth!

"Your folks here are Southerners, aren't they?" he asked the girl casually.

"Yes, sah!"

"All colored help, I suppose?"

"Yes, sah," declared the waitress, with a toss of her white-capped head. "Misssus wouldn't have no othah."

Vale walked on to the corner of Barrows Place. He wanted to kick himself!

"It's the little things that count, as my Uncle Dan says," he muttered. "I ought to have known that there were only colored help in that house. I'd caught that fellow faking. Now! What the divil, I wonder, did he have to do with that crack?"

Thus grumbling, he returned to the Maywell house. Beside the tree-box where the black-eyed young fellow had stood — not two feet from it, in fact—was a manhole. Undoubtedly a coal-chute leading to the subcellar.

Vale regretfully remembered now the noise of iron scraping on iron that he had twice heard here the previous evening. "Little things" again! He disgustedly stooped, removing his glove as he did so, and tried to raise the lid of the chute. It was well secured. He could not shift it a fraction of an inch. Be sure, it had been loosened when he passed on his tour the night before.

While he thus stooped three men came out of the open door of the Maywell house and descended the steps. Harry got up swiftly, dusted off his hand, and drew on the glove. He stood at attention as the men came down to the sidewalk. One was in police uniform—a gray man with close-trimmed mustache and weather-beaten face. His eyes twinkled behind glasses.

"You would think the fellow who cracked that box knew just what to take and what to let alone," this man was saying. "You say he got every scrap of coin?"

"It looks so, inspector. I cannot tell just how much was in the safe until I look over Colonel Maywell's household accounts. But there is no money in the cash drawer, while the papers in the upper part of the safe seem to be intact—most of them still in their pigeonholes."

"Looks as though he was scared off," the gray inspector said. "Doesn't it seem so to you, Mr. Maywell?" he asked the second and younger man.

"It would seem so, McKane."

"And yet he took his time in making his way into the house," ruminated Inspector McKane.

"How are you so sure of that?" asked the elder man, whose bushy hair and white mustache distinguished him.

"Because those bars outside the library window were forced apart by a screw-jack. You saw it there among the tools he left. And old-fashioned tool that. Few of those tools are up to date, by the way. Looks like the trick was pulled by an old-timer. Maybe he has just finished a stretch and had these tools cached. We'll look into *that*.

"However, it took much time to use that screw-jack instead of tapping an electric cable to melt the bars, as an up-to-date cracksman would do. Then, he only half-cleaned the box, as you point out, Mr. Wilmot, and lammed it out of here. The servants seem to have heard nothing."

"Not a thing," sighed the bushy haired man.

"*I* should be grilled, not the servants," put in Lawyer Maywell. "I was here late, as I tell you. Until ten fifteen. The place was as quiet as the grave then."

"If the fellow waited for you to get out before beginning on those bars he must have been until one o'clock or so before making his entrance—let alone cracking the box," reflected Inspector McKane. "The showers would have drowned what little noise he made—even the snapping of the window lock. The box was opened by wedges. That, too, is old-fashioned. We've got to look for an old-timer, I guess. Hello, Harry!"

Vale saluted. He had been drinking in this brief conversation.

"Good day to you, Uncle Dan," the young patrolman said.

"Reserve tour, eh?" said the inspector. Then he flashed his nephew a humorous glance. "I didn't know but your skipper had sent you over here to give us the benefit of your expayrience in sleuthing."

"Not yet, sir. But maybe soon. Who knows?" rejoined Vale steadily, but with an answering twinkle in his own gray eyes.

The three others laughed. Lawyer Maywell stared at Vale with good-humored cynicism.

"Who is the bright young rookie, inspector?" he asked.

"My own sister's boy. And fresh he sure is—right out of the rook's nest. Now, this here break, gentleman: I reckon we can find the fellow who pulled it, all right. It was too easy," shaking his head. "Only two servants in the house—the old woman and the girl; and the old woman as deaf as an adder while the young one slept like a post. He could have cracked that box with a dose of soup without rousing either of them, belike."

He waved his hand in salute and strode away. The two lawyers returned, side by side, up the steps. Other people began to arrive. The street became rather crowded with cars, for Colonel Hardy Maywell had been a well-liked citizen despite his marked eccentricities, and many came to show respect to his memory.

Vale had something to do in parking the cars and keeping traffic open through the block. He heard enough from Uncle Dan and the two lawyers to set his wits to working.

He firmly believed now that the slim young fellow who had stood beside the tree-box in front of the house the night before had had something to do with cracking the safe in the Maywell library. But, what had he to do with it?

Had he been a principal, or merely the lookout? Inspector McKane spoke as though he thought it was a "lone wolf" trick that had been pulled off here. Vale, however, believed more than one man must have been interested in the burglary. He had hold of the tail, so he thought, of the mystery. Could he drag the varmint out of its hole?

And again, was he "holding out" on information that he should confide to his skipper? Duty was just as big a word to Harry Vale as to any other man on the force. But the rookie cop, like any other, hated to make a fool of himself.

He had been advised to eschew thinking. That, the skipper had told him, was not part of his job. When he had faced old Buffalo Griggs just now, Vale had really developed small suspicion in his mind regarding this crack on Trevorth Street. And that Willy-boy who had stood out front here—

Inspector McKane seemed to consider it settled beyond peradventure that the break was made from the rear, by the library window. Then what had Harry Vale's suspicions to do with it? Surely there could not have been two sets of burglars at work here the night before—one in front and the other in the rear of the house?

He tried to put these puzzling thoughts aside. There was a bustle at last at the top of the steps. The undertaker's men and the pallbearers were bringing out the heavy casket. After the hearse had rolled on for a few yards, the limousines devoted to the members of the family and close friends would come one by one to the curb before the door.

The patrolman waved the curious aside.

He saw to it that there was left free a space the width of the black carpet to the curb.

The first group to descend were the two lawyers—Andrew Maywell, the nephew of the dead man, and George Wilmot, the family attorney—and between them a slim figure in black to which Vale's gaze was immediately attracted.

She wore a close-fitting toque of crape from under the edge of which her black hair curled. Her lashes were long and her eyebrows well defined. And the eyes themselves!

She flashed Harry Vale a glance that all but stunned the policeman. Nor was it an idle glance. There was something as good to look upon in Vale's countenance and figure, in its way, as there was in her own. The rookie cop thought he apprehended in her look an interest in him personally that equalled his concern for her. And never had such a charming creature entered his vision before!

She crossed the carpet daintily, a faint tinge of color flooding into her throat and face. She stepped into the limousine. Her two escorts followed. The car moved on to give place to another.

"What a girl!" murmured Harry Vale. "And—and she looked at me as though she knew me. *Did* I ever see her before, I wonder? Somehow there's something familiar about her. Something in her face—well! It's a beauty she is, and no mistake!"

CHAPTER III.

THE WILLS OF COLONEL HARDY MAYWELL.

"IT is too bad that your brother has not arrived in time for the funeral, Allaine," George Wilmot said as they settled themselves in the first car behind the hearse.

"I feared Allan would not be here in season," the girl sighed regretfully. "I telegraphed him as soon as I heard from Mrs. Callahan that Uncle Hardy was dead. But Hallingham is a tedious railroad journey from here, you know."

"I know," agreed the attorney. "And a more tedious and devious route by automobile. I suffered it once. And you say Allan has been doing well at Hallingham?"

"Dun and Bradstreet rate his firm A-1," put in Andrew Maywell, chuckling.

It was noticeable that Allaine sat beside Mr. Wilmot and even cuddled up to him as though she trusted and liked the elderly attorney. But she looked askance at her father's cousin, Andrew Maywell, and kept away from him.

"Allan will not feel as peeved as he did when Uncle Hardy declared he would cut him off with a small legacy," the criminal lawyer continued, with a smile that never reached his eyes. A smile to Andrew Maywell was merely a facial grimace. "Allan was pretty hard hit at the time."

"I presume any young man would feel 'hard hit,' as you call it, Andrew, having been brought up to believe himself heir to half a million, finally to be denied any proper share in such estate," George Wilmot said with gravity. "I cannot say that my client, Colonel Maywell, was either a wise or a kindly man. But he did the right thing at last—as I am sure even you, Andrew, must confess."

"Undoubtedly! Undoubtedly!" agreed the criminal lawyer, smiling again foxily at Allaine.

"As we three are here alone, I need make no mystery of your great-uncle's final will, Allaine. I had worked with him for a long time to make him see his duty to you two children. At least, to *you*. If his original will leaving the bulk of the estate to Allan had stood, all well and good. We know your brother would have been generous with you, Allaine."

"Oh! What was Allan's was always mine," the girl agreed.

"In his anger at Allan," pursued Mr. Wilmot, "he made me write an entirely new instrument making Andrew, here, the principal legatee."

The girl glanced sharply again at the still smiling criminal lawyer. Nothing could be more bland than Andrew Maywell's full and rosy countenance. But she drew her skirt away from contact with his knee. Mr. Wilmot failed to note Allaine's dislike for her cousin whether the latter saw it or not.

"Now," continued the family attorney in his precise way, "Andrew does not need the Hardy Maywell fortune. He has plenty

of money of his own, and his profession makes him a very prosperous man. I did not think that Andrew—with his assured place in society—would feel at all angry with me because I begged the old colonel to write a new will."

"Most certainly not! Most certainly not!" said the other lawyer.

The girl stared at him in something like wonder. She did not consider Mr. Wilmot's statement at all out of character. She knew the old man, astute as he might be in legal affairs, was a most simple individual with an unshaken belief in his fellowmen.

"At last, Allaine, I managed to make an impression on the old man's obstinate mind. He really seemed pleased to learn that Allan was doing so well for himself. 'I never thought it was in him,' he said to me the last day of his life. 'That is what he needed—to find out that he could not live like a hermit crab all his life, in somebody else's shell."

"Those were the colonel's own words, Allaine. You will pardon them," said George Wilmot, noting the girl's sudden flush.

"But Allan had to give up his career—all his hopes," murmured Allaine. "Oh! Uncle Hardy might have been kinder."

"Yes. Perhaps," the old attorney agreed. "But it is not too late now. If Allan is still desirous of painting pictures instead of selling hardware, it lies with you, my dear."

"With me?" in wonder.

The old man cleared his throat before he spoke with a certain satisfaction and pride:

"In his third and last will—the document now in that safe which was robbed so strangely last night — that will which Mrs. Callahan, the housekeeper, and your Cousin Andrew, here, witnessed only an hour or so before your Uncle Hardy died, he made you, Allaine, his chief legatee, leaving five hundred dollars to Allan for a memory ring. Your brother's future is in your hands."

The girl fell back against the cushions, her eyes widening. Indeed, she seemed to shrink from the old attorney, and the emotion which prompted this neither of her companions understood. It could not be horror; why should it be? Yet—

"Gad, Andrew! She's going to faint!" gasped the elderly attorney.

But Allaine Maywell had recovered a great measure of her composure before the funeral procession reached the cemetery. She did not get out of the car, however, but sat close to the door looking out at the group around the open grave. Her veil was thrown back from a face as pale as ivory, and she kept her little, black-bordered handkerchief pressed to her lips all through the service.

The clods fell on the coffin of the old man who for ten years had treated her twin brother and herself with a free-handed if eccentric generosity. For more than two years, now, Colonel Hardy Maywell had been estranged from his great-nephew and niece. But, in the end, he had done the surprising thing—the amazing thing!

They rode back to ninety-seven Trevorth Street almost in silence. The cheerful-looking young policeman who had attracted Allaine's keen attention as she had come out of the house was no longer in sight.

In fact, the block as well as the house-front, had recovered from the appearance of respect due the memory of the man who had lived here for more than forty years. Already Mrs. Callahan, or the housemaid, had raised the shades at the front windows. The undertaker's men had removed the chairs, the carpet, and the crape and lilies from the door-bell.

Allaine got out of the car after Mr. Wilmot and Andrew. She ignored the offered assistance of the latter's hand. But she rested one gloved hand upon the old attorney's arm as she mounted the broad steps to the house—to *her* house, Mr. Wilmot had assured her. A half million of her own in money and securities, and this fine house! She breathed more deeply as she crossed the threshold of the Maywell residence.

She and her brother had lived here after their parents died. From their tenth year until Uncle Hardy's harshness had driven Allan away at twenty, they had considered this their rightful home.

Allaine had seen and read the colonel's first will, which gave the bulk of his property to Allan, the consideration of her own financial affairs being left to her brother's

generosity. She had quite concurred in this direction, for Allan and she were the very closest of kin, and devoted to each other.

Indeed, when Colonel Maywell had found fault with the way Allan spent his time (egged on, she still believed, by this sleek and foxily smiling Cousin Andrew) and had finally quarreled with her brother and cast him out, Allaine had left the Maywell house, too.

She could not remain under the roof of the man who had so cruelly treated Allan. She had a small annuity from her mother's estate. Allaine had lived independently since the break with Colonel Maywell.

She knew that the old man, at the time of his fiercest anger at Allan, had made a second will leaving the property to this same Andrew. No matter what Mr. Wilmot might say, or however much Andrew might appear to agree with the colonel's final testament, Allaine was confident that the criminal lawyer had not given up without bitterness all hope of obtaining that half million dollar estate that the colonel had accumulated.

That the chance of getting Colonel Hardy Maywell's fortune never should have been Andrew's—that his evil tongue had brought Allan into ill-repute with the old man—were tenets of Allaine's belief that nothing could shake.

With the information that Colonel Maywell had died so suddenly had likewise come to Allaine the knowledge that the old man had made a third will the very day he died. Its contents Mrs. Callahan, who had been a witness to it, did not know.

But as the colonel had died all alone in his library only an hour after signing this new will, it might be presumed that it *was* the last testament of the crotchetty old man, and would stand in law.

Until Mr. Wilmot had assured her of the fact that she was the principal legatee under this new instrument, Allaine Maywell had not imagined such a thing. She had not even dared hope that the colonel had done justice to Allan and herself. Little wonder that she now entered the house which was to be hers, feeling that she walked in a dream. Mrs. Callahan met and kissed her.

"My deary dear! Mr. Wilmot says you are to live here. You don't know how glad I am your uncle did right by you at last," the old woman whispered.

Allaine smiled at her, and at Maggy, who stood in the background bobbing little courtesies like an automaton.

"I've scarce been out of this room, Mr. Wilmot," Mrs. Callahan said to the family lawyer as they all entered the library, "since the police left. Everything is untouched," and she pointed to the wall-safe, the forced door of which hung an inch or so ajar.

"The police took away the tools," Mr. Wilmot said, going at once to the safe. "Inspector McKane thinks something may be learned from them. Finger-prints, perhaps. Sit down, folks."

Andrew Maywell chuckled as he spread the tails of his frock coat and took a chair by the table—by chance the very chair he had sat in the previous evening while he interviewed Grif Pelley.

"Trust a modern safe-breaker to use gloves when he is at work. McKane will find no finger-prints on those tools."

"Well, perhaps not. The estate may easily lose two thousand dollars, or so," Mr. Wilmot observed carelessly. "As long as the fellow did not carry off anything of greater importance. There are sixty-thousand dollars' worth of securities in these pigeonholes that the old colonel expected to use in an investment shortly."

"Of course the burglar did not get anything but the money?" said Andrew, drawlingly. "The will Uncle Hardy made the day before yesterday is safe?"

"I had the envelope in my hand this morning," Mr. Wilmot replied. "Here it is, all right."

He reached into the upper compartment of the safe and drew forth the indicated document-envelope from the upper left-hand pigeonhole. He read aloud from the docketing:

"'Last will and testament of Colonel Hardy Maywell, dictamen.' Yes. Here we have it."

He drew the document from the unsealed envelope, returning to the table. Allaine had sunk into a chair across from him. As the old attorney unfolded the stiff paper a

little, puzzled frown appeared between his grizzled eyebrows.

"Why—h-m!— This is odd. Very odd," he slowly muttered. "This—this does not seem to be the instrument the colonel subscribed to in our presence the other day," and he glanced from the placid Andrew to the flushed Mrs. Callahan, who sat forward in her chair with her hand behind her ear to listen.

The attorney glanced hastily through the stiff pages. "Why!" he next cried aloud. "I shut that will—in this envelope—into that safe, myself! You saw me, Andrew. I put away the cash I had brought Colonel Maywell, too, at the same time. You witnessed it, Andrew."

"I remember, perfectly," said the other lawyer, quite unruffled. "What seems to be the matter, Brother Wilmot?"

Wilmot turned a puzzled visage toward him. "The old colonel remained here alone after we both left the house," he said hoarsely, the document shaking in his hand. "He might have done it within that hour before his death. God knows what was in his mind. He was eccentric if ever a man was. But to make a third will, have it sealed and witnessed, and then—"

"What *is* the matter?" gasped Allaine, her handkerchief again to her lips.

"Tell us what it is, Brother Wilmot," demanded Andrew, rising from his chair.

"The—the last will is not here. *This* is not the one you and Mrs. Callahan witnessed so short a time before Colonel Maywell died."

"Oh!" The smothered shriek came from Allaine's lips. She sank against the back of her chair.

"What do you mean?" exclaimed Andrew. "Isn't that in your hand Uncle Hardy's last will and testament?"

"It may be. Unless another is found, it is."

"What's that?" barked Andrew, and he now stood up. "If that is not the new will in your hand, what is it?"

"This—*this*," said the old attorney, "is the first will I ever drew for him, and which the colonel signed and sealed more than five years ago. It is the instrument leaving the bulk of his property to Allan."

"Look out for Miss Allaine, Maggy!"

The housemaid caught the girl as she toppled from her chair. Cousin Andrew appeared to need somebody, too, to ease him into his seat. He fell back into it as though his limbs were suddenly become powerless.

CHAPTER IV.

ENTER ALLAN.

THE mental shock Allaine Maywell sustained must have been no light one; yet she was too healthy and normal a young creature really to give way to it for more than a moment.

The old attorney's remembrance of young women of the mid-Victorian era (he was of that generation himself) had not prepared him for the girl's almost immediate self-control. She put the startled Maggy aside.

"Do — do I understand, Mr. Wilmot, that a will has been substituted for the one expressing Uncle Hardy's last wishes? Has a crime been committed?"

"'Crime'? Why, child, how can that be?" was the attorney's response. "This is truly the colonel's will. I drew it for him. He signed and sealed it before two witnesses."

"Then—"

"The wonder of it is that this document, giving most of the property to your brother, was preserved. I presumed the colonel had long since destroyed it."

"Oh!"

"It may be," went on George Wilmot, though hesitatingly, "that Colonel Maywell had intended doing just this thing all the time. Why, otherwise, should he have kept this first will? The second intrument I wrote for him precluded Allan's enjoying any part of the estate at the colonel's death. The third one, made only day before yesterday, left the bulk of the fortune to you.

"I do not understand this substitution," admitted the old attorney. "He may have had this, and even the second will, among his private papers here. I never saw either after they were sealed until this moment," and he shook the paper in his hand dramat-

ically as he spoke. "All I know is that I placed the new and last will—the third instrument—in that pigeonhole. Andrew saw me do it."

Andrew Maywell nodded his head. Ordinarily the criminal lawyer's self-control was ample. Andrew, however, was quite as stricken by the older attorney's discovery as was Allaine herself.

"It is unnecessary for me to point out," pursued Wilmot, "that Colonel Maywell was eccentric. He was of sound mind and perfectly sane in all that he said or did; but he had his whimsies—he had his whimsies."

"'Whimsies'!" blurted out Andrew, in a half-stifled shout.

"I would call them that—yes," said the older attorney gently. "He often led one to believe that he was determined on a course when, the point of action arising, he would do exactly the opposite from what he had led one to expect. Nor was it a spur-of-the-moment decision he made. Merely, he had kept his real intention secret all the time."

"But in this case?" breathed Allaine.

Suddenly Andrew came to his feet. His voice was harsh and his face had become an impenetrable mask. Here was the man who forced respect from juries and shivering witnesses alike, and even browbeat the judge on the bench!

"There is something queer here, Wilmot—something crooked," he exploded, "and you know it as well as I do."

The bushy-haired attorney grew pink with sudden anger.

"Do you mean to intimate, sir—"

"I am neither intimating or insinuating," broke in Andrew Maywell in his overriding way. "I am merely making a statement of the obvious. I say, the substitution of this old will, that should long since have been destroyed, for the new one, smacks of crookedness. I do not suggest for a moment that you, Brother Wilmot, are a party to the outrage, or have knowledge of how it was done or who did it. But I can smell crime here! There is something queer—"

"Just what do you mean, Andrew?" asked Wilmot, while Allaine looked at the criminal lawyer fearfully and Mrs. Callahan and Maggy gazed with open wonder.

For a moment Andrew Maywell hesitated, and he was not ordinarily of a hesitating nature. He flashed a glance at the two serving women and made them a gesture of dismissal.

"I suggest that you postpone the reading of any will at the moment, Brother Wilmot," he said. "Meanwhile I would ask Mrs. Callahan and the maid to retire. I have something to say that should not be said—for the present at least—outside the family."

Allaine flushed and paled. The older attorney looked a good deal mystified. But he asked the housekeeper and Maggy to withdraw.

"We will, as Andrew suggests, postpone the reading of the colonel's testament," Wilmot said. "But I can tell you, Maggy, that whichever will finally proves to be valid, you are generously remembered by your old master. As for Mrs. Callahan, the colonel long since provided for her comfort, and she has no actual interest in either document."

The two women went out and closed the door. Wilmot turned to Andrew with a question on his lips. The other forestalled it by bursting into energetic speech:

"I tell you I smell crime here. As you say yourself, Brother Wilmot, Uncle Hardy was perfectly sane. With all his crotchets and whimsies, he was one of the sanest men I ever knew.

"If he deliberately caused that last will to be made for the purpose of fooling us, I should deny his sanity. Such an act would savor of monkeylike mischievousness.

"No! That was not at all like Uncle Hardy. Somebody else substituted this old will for the new one."

"To whom do you refer?" cried Wilmot. "To the man who opened that safe in the night?"

"Yes," said Andrew boldly.

"A burglar! And for what reason, pray? Why should a burglar make such substitution? And where would such a person obtain *this* will? Preposterous!"

Allaine had cried out again at Andrew's declaration and huddled back into her chair. She had continued all this time to gaze upon her cousin with apprehension. The

latter now flashed her a glance, but made a wide gesture with his open hands as he spoke to Wilmot:

"I might easily put a name to the robber. I will not do so. But I ask you who would be benefited most if this old will stands?"

"As far as Allaine's rights are concerned —and she was the principal beneficiary of the final will—I fancy they will be quite conserved under this first instrument," and Wilmot rattled the paper in his hand.

Allaine bowed her head as though in agreement; but she did not speak.

"Under *this* will, Andrew, the brother is left to care for the sister's rights. Under the will which we saw sealed the other day, the sister was to care for the brother's rights. That is all the difference between the two testaments—"

"But," interrupted Andrew sternly, "there is a third will."

"Oh! Well—now— You mean the one making you the chief beneficiary?"

"I do," said the younger lawyer, calmly. "That document is dated later than the one you hold in your hand, Brother Wilmot. If it comes to a matter of precedence—"

"But—but," murmured the older man, wasn't that will destroyed?"

"It seems *this* one was not. Why should the second one, the will favoring me, have been done away with? It seems that Uncle Hardy had a habit of making 'last wills and testaments,'" and Andrew laughed harshly.

"I do not understand it," said Wilmot rather weakly. "If, as I suggest, the colonel was intending to hoodwink us all the time—if he kept this old will favoring Allan because he could not bear, after all, to disown the boy—"

"Ha! I prefer," interrupted Andrew, "not to consider Uncle Hardy so weak—so close to senility, indeed. In such case his acts might show him to be, after all, in no mental state to make a legal disposal of his property."

"Andrew!" shouted the older man, his face ablaze.

"I am speaking as one on the outside, looking in," the other said coolly.

But George Wilmot was no fool. "You are speaking like a shrewd and unscrupulous man, willing to take advantage of the colonel's idiosyncrasies. I do not believe Hardy Maywell kept the will favoring you, Andrew, when he proposed having his last will drawn."

"I do not say that he did," Andrew calmly rejoined. "In fact I know he did not keep it."

"Then you know that second will to be destroyed? This old will, then, can be probated if the final intrument does not come to light."

"Not so fast, Brother Wilmot," sneered Andrew. "I am confident that Uncle Hardy did not destroy the will I speak of, for he handed it to me soon after he had you draw it. Oh, yes! As I was the person most interested in the document, he said, I would better keep it."

"Do—do you mean to say that second will is in existence *now?*" gasped the family attorney.

Andrew nodded, pursing his lips. The old attorney turned slowly to the girl and wagged his bushy head as he said:

"Then, Allaine, unless the colonel's third will comes to light, neither you nor Allan have much interest in your great-uncle's estate. If he intended at the last to make all as he originally planned and wished to restore Allan to full heirship, he overlooked the existence of the second will of which your Cousin Andrew speaks. That is all there is to it."

Allaine made no rejoinder. Her great black eyes seemed filmed, either with fear or by some other emotion that the others did not understand. However, Andrew continued in the cold tone he had finally assumed:

"I deny the possibility, Brother Wilmot, of such a ridiculous suggestion as you have made. I think I know my uncle's character quite as well as any of you. He was peculiar, I grant; but he was a good business man and eminently sane in everything he did or said. No! I deny that he would play such a silly trick. It would not be like him.

"Had he intended to substitute that will in your hand for the one leaving his property to my cousin Allaine," and he bowed

to the girl with his usual smirk, "he most certainly would have asked me for the document he gave me to keep in my safe, two years ago. I deny such intent upon Uncle Hardy's part—I deny it in toto!

"But I *do* repeat that I clearly see a crime has been committed here—a crime more than the mere burglarizing of that safe. The burglar—whoever he was—had another reason for opening the box beside getting what money there was in it. The robbery was a blind."

"Andrew!"

"I mean just that. You say yourself there were sixty thousand dollars' worth of securities there, and they are untouched. If the burglary was an ordinary break, why did the thief not take those documents?"

"He was frightened away before finishing the job. So Inspector McKane assumes."

"Perhaps. Perhaps not. One thing I *am* sure of: He was not here solely to get the cash. Whoever opened that wall-safe exchanged that will in your hand for the one sealed day before yesterday."

"Andrew!" cried Wilmot again.

Allaine stood up. It was an effort for her to speak and her voice sounded hoarse and dry.

"It is plain that your accusation is aimed at my brother. You are a coward to say such a thing when Allan is in Hallingham and not here to defend himself."

A tap upon the door punctuated the girl's speech. Mrs. Callahan turned the knob and looked in.

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Wilmot," the housekeeper said. "Mr. Allan has come home. Shall I send him in?"

CHAPTER V.

ALLAN'S ALIBI.

ANDREW MAYWELL flashed the girl another keen and suspicious glance. But the intermittent pallor and fire in her cheeks should have convinced him that her brother's arrival at this particular juncture was quite as unexpected by her as by himself.

George Wilmot turned to face the door that was pushed open as he nodded to Mrs. Callahan. It was the old attorney's outstretched hand that met Allaine's twin as he entered, and his cordial voice that first greeted the young man:

"My boy! I am glad to see you. You have come at an unfortunate hour—there is a weight of loss on all our hearts. Nevertheless, whatever cause brings you back to us, you are welcome."

"Thank you, Mr. Wilmot!" The boyish-looking Allan—he seemed the replica of his sister in man's dress—met the attorney's hand with a grip quite as cordial.

He dropped his bag and swept the room with a quick glance. He merely nodded to Andrew Maywell. His lips curved in a half-doubtful smile when his gaze reached his sister. Allaine was holding to the back of the chair she had been sitting in as though unable to stand without support. She was visibly trembling. She seemed unable—or she did not desire—to approach her brother.

Andrew's suspicious eyes noted all. But his face remained a mask. Allan immediately dropped George Wilmot's hand and took a step toward his sister. Andrew's harsh voice put a question:

"You have just arrived Allan?"

The young fellow halted, threw up his head like a spurred horse, and glared at the criminal lawyer.

"Yes."

"You have just come here from the railroad station?"

"I arrived from Hallingham on the train that gets in at twelve forty-three."

"Which leaves Hallingham at what hour?"

"Four twenty-eight this morning. Why?"

"It may be necessary for you to establish that fact," sneered the criminal lawyer.

"Indeed? By chance I can prove it to your entire satisfaction," rejoined Allan. "I presume you would accept Mr. Jim Dunbar's word, 'Drew?"

"In any material matter—yes," was the sour reply.

"Mr. Dunbar was on the train when I boarded it at Hallingham," said Allan, "and I sat beside him all the way."

"Gad! That's your answer, Andrew," ejaculated George Wilmot, with high satisfaction. "It takes the train more than eight hours between the two towns. This safe, you say yourself, was broken into after ten o'clock last night. The police say it was probably not opened until after midnight. Allan could certainly have nothing to do with it. His alibi is perfect."

"What is all this?" asked Allan, eying Andrew with an expression of wrathful satisfaction. "What is 'Drew trying to hang on me? He was tale-bearer enough before I left home. Is he still past master in that 'indoor sport'?"

"Something more despicable than tale-bearing, even," George Wilmot said, likewise looking with disfavor on the other lawyer. "He has hinted very strongly that you were party particip in this crime. But you have answered him, unwittingly and completely, before he could put the accusation into words."

"I do not know that," snapped Andrew, for the moment spurred by his vexation to say more than he otherwise might. "He would not have to be on the ground to have had guilty knowledge of this robbery."

"What do you mean?" demanded Allan, taking a single stride toward Andrew.

"Let me explain," exclaimed the older lawyer, stepping between the belligerents. "We must not disgrace ourselves. And remember, Allaine is present. Be quiet, Allan —and you, too, Andrew."

He swiftly put into words the mystery of the forced wall-safe and the apparent fact that Colonel Maywell had changed his mind during the last hour of his life and substituted the first will he had made for his last one, or somebody interested had deliberately committed the crime of substitution.

"The last will and testament, Allan, left practically everything to your sister," concluded Wilmot.

"To Allaine?" repeated the young man, flashing the girl a glance that was almost fearful.

"Yes. It seems to me that your uncle must have thought over the matter and decided that, after all, he was doing you a grave wrong, in the eyes of the world at least. So he put *this* will—"

"What will is that?" demanded Allan sharply.

"His first one. The one making you his heir, Allan. He put it into the safe in place of the new one and—presumably—destroyed that giving the estate to your sister."

"Bah!" shouted Andrew. "He never did anything of the kind."

Allan looked at his cousin with something akin to triumph in his glance. His satisfaction at the criminal lawyer's discomfiture was not in the least disguised.

"This is the only will you have found, Mr. Wilmot? And it gives the property to me? It will stand in law?"

Andrew burst into a shout of coarse laughter; but his face blazed. Allaine looked from him to her brother. He countenance betrayed unhappiness and—yes—doubt of both her relatives. She seemed as unable to understand Allan's confidence as Andrew's sneering enmity.

George Wilmot answered slowly: "It—it might be valid, Allan, if it were not for the fact that the colonel wrote a second will—one in between this one and the instrument giving the estate to your sister. That second will made Andrew the principal legatee. And Andrew tells us he has that will in his office safe."

"So you have possession of that will, have you?" Allan demanded of his cousin. "And it invalidates this old will, does it? *Then produce it!*"

His defiance was too positive. His lips were twisted into a grim smile that gave an entirely new and unpleasant cast to his countenance. Wilmot interrupted:

"Wait, now. This thing must be done properly. I shall keep this will and make a thorough search for the last testament of your uncle. If Andrew offers his will for probate before I have made an exhaustive search of Colonel Maywell's papers, I shall be obliged to go to the surrogate, explain the matter, and ask for a stay. And, really, we do not want family matters such as these aired in court, do we?"

"It is immaterial to me," said Allan lightly. "*That is the will.*"

"Oh, Allan!" murmured his sister, for the first time directly addressing him.

But he did not reply to her. He glared hatefully at the criminal lawyer. The latter picked up his hat and stick and moved toward the door.

"Have a care, Brother Wilmot," he said hoarsely. "I know you are honest; therefore you can be the more easily bamboozled. I will give you a certain length of time to make your search for the last will. But I am determined now to put that young cock-of-the-walk in his place. It does not matter what Uncle Hardy intended. It looks to me as though he had left a pretty mess for the courts to clean up."

He passed out, receiving no reply from the others. Andrew Maywell was not a man who often publicly displayed his inner feelings in his face. His countenance had become perfectly composed when he descended the steps of the house.

Strolling toward him from the direction of Barrows Place was a trim figure in blue. Expectant gray eyes flashed into Andrew Maywell's own as the policeman touched his cap.

"Ah—Harry, is it?" said the criminal lawyer, unctuously. "I did not get your last name."

"Vale, sir."

"Ah! Officer Vale. You have sharp eyes, I see. Did you happen by chance to be on this beat last night?"

"I had the eight to twelve tour, sir."

"Did you see anything suspicious around here? Queer—how that safe was robbed. I only left the house myself at a quarter after ten."

"I was along here just before that time and just after," Vale said promptly.

"Indeed? Of course the inspector says the break was from the rear. But did you observe anything suspicious out front here?"

"Nothing that I thought suspicious at the time, sir," Vale declared earnestly. "And I don't know *now* whether it was anything really queer, or not. But I'm puzzled-like, Mr. Maywell."

"Puzzled about what?"

"Why, sir, there was a fellow standing out in front here both those times I speak of when I passed. A slim young fellow he was—a good-looking lad."

"Yes," murmured Andrew, his eyes beginning to glow.

"And just now, sir, as I came along—maybe fifteen or twenty minutes ago—I saw somebody that looked a deal like him, back to, going up the steps of the Maywell house."

"Ah!" murmured Andrew.

"He carried a bag. He rang the bell, and was admitted," said Vale, keenly eying the lawyer sidewise.

"Allan!" burst forth the latter, with uncontrollable satisfaction. "Damn him! I knew that alibi was phony."

CHAPTER VI.

"LITTLE THINGS."

JUST at this particular moment Harry Vale was not missing a thing. Although he had said nothing to his skipper about the young man he had seen lingering before the Maywell house, he had reason to believe even before the criminal lawyer spoke so excitedly, that the incident of the previous evening had some connection with the safe burglary. Vale knew nothing at this time, of course, about the dead man's three wills.

"Little things," he determined, were not, in the future, to get away from him. When Mr. Andrew Maywell uttered his bitter ejaculation the policeman caught the fleeting expression of hatred on his face and the ugly note of satisfaction in his voice:

"Damn him! I knew that alibi was phony."

He demanded of Harry Vale with more calmness:

"At what time last night did you see this young fellow you speak of? The one you just now saw enter the house, I mean?"

"Hold on!" urged Vale, smiling, but with narrow gaze. "I didn't say this *was* the fellow I saw last night. You're a sharp cross-examiner, they tell me, Mr. Maywell. I've got to watch out for you. I only said this fellow just now *looked* like the lad hanging around here last night."

"Well, can't you be sure of it?"

"No, sir. I did not see his face just now. And last night he wore a long raincoat. There is, just the same, a swing to

his shoulders and a tilt to the head of him that seemed familiar to me."

"Tell me all about it," said Andrew Maywell, quite in control of himself again.

Vale repeated—and in detail—his conversation with the fellow who claimed to be waiting to see the housemaid at No. 102.

"You see," he concluded, hooking his gloved thumbs into his belt as he stood before Maywell, "I wasn't really puzzled in my mind about it at all until I heard of the 'break' this morning when I came on duty."

"I see," the lawyer said thoughtfully.

"And then I got wise to the fact that the folks at No. 102 hire only negro help. So *that*, of course, queered the story the lad told me last night."

"You would know the fellow if you saw him again?"

"I think I would," replied Vale with some confidence.

"I may give you a chance to look at a suspect," Andrew Maywell observed, eying Vale narrowly as he drew a folded bank-note from his pocket. He slipped it through his fingers lengthwise so that the policeman saw the "V" in the corner. "You won't forget what that fellow looked like?"

"I think not, sir," Vale repeated more stiffly.

The lawyer advanced the bill tentatively. The other kept his thumbs in his belt. He did not even flush as he said:

"You'll be able to change that bill, sir, at the corner yonder. A good cigar costs only fifteen cents."

"Ha!" exploded the lawyer, but with a certain appreciation of the policeman's wisdom. He put away the bank-note and drew out his cigar-case. "Try one of these," he said with cordiality. "You seem to be a very sensible young chap. And you are treading in your uncle's footsteps."

"At any rate," said Harry Vale, selecting a cigar and tucking it carefully away, "I believe in an old saying of Uncle Dan's: 'It's the little things that count.' Thank you, sir."

He watched the rather stately back of the criminal lawyer as he marched down the avenue.

"He's a smart man—and a wicked one to have on your trail, I don't doubt. Now, what's he got on this 'Allan' he spit out about? And is Allan the Willy-boy I saw holding up the tree-box last night? And was it him I just saw going into the Maywell house? Huh! 'Little things,' too; but I wonder—"

Andrew Maywell stopped at the cigar-store on the next corner, but not to change the five-dollar bill that he had been almost unwise enough to offer the policeman. Cynical as the criminal lawyer was, he knew there were only a few patrolmen on the force who accepted petty graft. But the one rotten apple on the top of the barrel spoils the sale.

There was a girl behind the counter remarkable for the way she had pulled her blond hair into two "buns" over her ears, and for the size of the wad of gum she manipulated in her mouth while she talked. She was alone.

"How-do!" she said, giving the lawyer her best business smile.

"Pelley in, my dear?"

"Oh, no. Ain't you heard?" said the girl at once animated. "And you a reg'lar customer, too?"

"What has happened?"

"They took him away last night."

"'Took him away'?"

"Yes, sir. Amb'lance. Private hospital. 'Pendicitis. They'll cut into him to-day if he's all right. Didn't you hear nothin' about it?"

"Not a thing," said Andrew Maywell. "I did not know that he was ill."

"He'd been grouching for a day or two. Then he called in a new doc yesterday. One of these snap-judgment guys, you know. Said Mr. Pelley 'd hafter be op'rated on right away."

"I see."

"Gee!" said the girl with a shudder, and shifting her gum. "That sawbones would think it a pleasure to cut into his grandmother. Take it from me! Amb'lance came at six, an' they carried him out. I was busy here and couldn't even say good-by to him. Doc says Mr. Pelley wouldn't be back for three weeks—if he got back at all."

She took out a handful of the cigars Maywell pointed to.

"Can you tell me to what hospital he was taken?" he asked.

"Doc Skeen's on Eighth Street. And won't they soak him, though!" said the girl. "First of all they operate on your pocketbook at that place. Mr. Pelley ain't any too lib'ral with money, and it 'll hurt him worse to pay the bill than it does to lose his appendix, believe me! Thank you, sir."

Andrew Maywell went out. He knew no more than he did when he entered the corner cigar-store. Grif Pelley had followed his directions to the letter, and made his alibi sure. There was no flaw in *that*.

There was, however, one point that had been overlooked. Indeed, until the astounding mystery of the appearance of Colonel Maywell's first will had arisen, it had never crossed the shrewd lawyer's mind that he should want to see Grif Pelley at all until it was time for that individual to return from the hospital.

That was a "little thing" that Andrew Maywell had not considered.

In the Maywell library, where the criminal lawyer had left the brother and sister with the family attorney, there was a strained silence following Andrew's departure. The twins did not look at each other. Mr. Wilmot seated himself slowly at the table.

"I would never have thought it of your Uncle Hardy," he sighed. "He really was such a good business man that it never for a moment entered my mind that he had not destroyed both his old wills.

"Under ordinary circumstances, it is true, it would seem that he need not fear either this will, or Andrew's, bobbing up to make trouble. The third instrument which he so recently signed made invalid both of these. I wish very much that I had advised his giving *me* the last will to take care of. Nothing like this could have happened then. But you know he always liked to have his business and legal papers right at hand. He considered that wall-safe ample protection from both fire and burglars."

"But suppose you cannot find the third will at all?" said Allan tentatively.

"Then Andrew's will—the second one I drew for your uncle—will stand in law," said Mr. Wilmot, wagging his head.

"But suppose 'Drew cannot produce that?" urged Allan.

"Oh, but my boy! Of course he will. I know he will, if he can. After all, Andrew is that kind," admitted Wilmot sadly. "I hoped he would consider your rights and Allaine's when the third instrument was made. But—"

"Yes. He's that kind," sneered Allan. "He's the kind to do anything mean to benefit himself. I've seen a lot of his kind since I went to Hallingham. The world is full of such."

"Oh, Allan," murmured his sister.

Allan's black brows were drawn into a deeper scowl. He paid the girl no attention.

"I know my Cousin 'Drew now, all right," he pursued, speaking to Wilmot. "See how quick he is to try to connect me with this safe robbery."

"But he cannot do that," Wilmot said soothingly.

"Only by good luck he can't," the young man said bitterly. "He'd queer me if he could. But I'll fix him—"

"Oh, Allan," begged his sister, for the second time.

He wheeled on her then with passion in both face and gesture. "Now, don't you take that tone with me, Allaine," he cried. "I am not the same meek fellow who went out of this house two years ago like a beaten cur. I've learned a lot. One thing, I've learned to fight fire with fire."

"Just what do you mean by that?" Mr. Wilmot intervened with cold curiosity. "And don't forget that you are speaking to your sister."

"I mean," Allan rejoined, flushing at the merited rebuke, "that if that slimy serpent, 'Drew Maywell, tries to put anything over on me I'll give him as good as he sends."

"Just what do you think he is trying to put over?" asked the attorney with suavity.

"You can see he tried to fix the crime of burglary on me," cried Allan. "Throws doubt upon my having been in Hallingham at the time this safe was robbed. The fact is, I was *not* in Hallingham at ten o'clock

last night. But no train could have got me from here to Hallingham after that time in season to take the four twenty-eight from that burg this morning."

"Most certainly not," agreed the attorney.

"I was out of town when Allaine's wire reached my boarding-place. I did not get her message that Uncle Hardy was dead, therefore, until I reached home late last night. The four twenty-eight, as I say, was the first train I could get down here," explained the young man, as though he thought he must convince his hearers.

"Lucky Mr. Jim Dunbar was on that train. If 'Drew ever cast any reflection on Dunbar's testimony in court, Dunbar would kill him."

"Hush!" warned Wilmot. "That is no way to talk. You are excited."

"Why shouldn't I be excited?" still complained Allan. "Look at this 'Drew has tried to put on me! If anybody had a chance to break into that safe and substitute one will for another, it was 'Drew himself. He admits he was alone here last evening after all the servants had gone to bed."

"Foolish, Allan! Foolish!" advised George Wilmot. "One accusation does not sound any more reasonable than the other. Remember that Andrew would have no reason for putting *this* will, giving you the estate, in the place of Colonel Maywell's third will, which benefited your sister."

"Why not?" demanded the younger man, leaning both fists upon the table and looking down at the old attorney. "You fail to take into consideration 'Drew's foxy nature, do you not? Would it not occur to him to do that very thing?"

"How's that?" was Wilmot's startled question.

"Knowing that he had the second will safely cached—the one benefiting himself—why shouldn't he destroy the final will and substitute that one in your hand, which he may have found among Uncle Hardy's papers, *knowing all the time that the will he claims to possess would invalidate this one?*"

"Oh, Allan," gasped his sister again.

"You accuse your Cousin Andrew of a most sinister design," said Wilmot.

"I would not put anything past him," declared Allan boldly. "If he knew both old wills were in existence, why wouldn't just what I propose occur to his mind?"

"Wait!" said the attorney thoughtfully. "It would not be necessary for him to make any substitution at all. If we are to consider Andrew a criminal, then why, upon opening the safe, did he not destroy Colonel Maywell's last testament, and so calmly wait till the proper time to produce his own document leaving the estate to him?"

Allan hesitated. His blazing countenance paled slowly.

"Yes," he muttered. "That is a little thing that I overlooked, it is true."

(To be continued NEXT WEEK.)

GRAY DAYS AND GOLD

WHEN gray days come and clouds (and doubts) hang low,
My spirit, like a plaintive wood-dove grieves,
Restless I count the leaden hours go.
The swallow, prisoned 'neath the dripping eaves,
The lily, drooping under beating rain,
But echo, like my heart, the sobbing leaves.

When smiles the conquering sun (and faith) again,
Filled are the skies with song and fluttering wings!
Lifted the lily's head—and mine!—and then
Filled is my heart with cheer, and fluttering, sings
Of love triumphant, hope revived, and faith!—
Flung to the winds all thoughts of troublous things!

Paula Revere.

Folks That Love Each Other

by William Merriam Rouse

ANNE NICHOLS was, and always had been, a woman to love. Many men had loved her; but not one of these men, good and evil as men are, had stirred her heart or had the sweetness of her lips for his own until Jim Nichols sought her with a combined worship and mastery that made her his wife. With this belief fixed like a star in his mind, he kissed her with the same feeling he would have had in prayer, if he had been a praying man; and never did his hand touch her without reverence.

Perhaps Anne and Jim had drawn something from the nobility of the mountains that lifted heavenward on all sides of the rather rocky farm. There were many people in the scattered farms and villages who did that, and there were others who never had looked upon the mountains with seeing eyes. Certainly to neighbors the Nichols marriage was perfect; so also it was perfect to Jim, and he believed that to Anne it was the same.

Nichols still held this belief five years after his marriage; and yet there was growing in the back of his mind, unacknowledged by him, the first shadow of a black thought. It had to do with Emery Smith, who lived in Sussex, the nearest village, and hunted or fished when he was not fiddling for dances.

Emery Smith had never been known to do any evil or much good; if he had any distinction at all it was that he was a favorite with women and welcome in every kitchen in the township. He could sing, and run errands, and was not above helping to wash dishes. Of late he had been going often to the Nichols's home, and Jim had tolerated him as an amusing and harmless diversion.

But the frequency of these visits had cast lately a little shadow in the mind of Nichols. He was hardly conscious of it, and yet it was there—a mild irritation that the man should hang around so much. However, there was no thought of this insignificant matter as Jim walked home through the north meadow one bright September day.

If he could have expressed himself fluently he would have said that all the world sang with happiness. He had been out all that morning shooting woodchucks, and now his steps were eager and his eyes fond as he looked at the weathered old house that held his world: always his steps were more eager when he went toward that house where Anne, fresh and sweet, waited to give him the kiss of greeting that had not failed once in five years.

As he went up the path toward the back door, in his old and noiseless shoes, he swung the rifle down from his shoulder—swung it down that he might set it against the door-casing and have his arms free for the greeting. Then he stopped, with one

foot lifted for the steps, and stood as motionless as one of the woodchucks he had been hunting.

Through the little, seven-by-nine panes of the window he saw his wife. He saw also Emery Smith, and Smith was standing very near to her, with his long nose and his waving hair bent close. His face was earnest with pleading—wrung by some strong emotion. Ann shook her head regretfully—she sighed—and her voice came out distinctly through the open door.

"Emery! I can't!"

He seized one of her hands between both of his and whispered some words so low that Nichols could not hear them.

"Even if a woman loves a man she's got to do what's right—what she thinks is right!" Anne replied.

"Give him up?" demanded Smith hoarsely.

"Yes!" She drew her hand away; and it was very plain that she was suffering.

"And he ought to give her up—not try to see her?"

"If"—she looked at the floor, fighting some inward battle—"if she asks him to!"

Emery Smith swallowed hard; tried to speak and gave it up.

"But," continued Anne, suddenly sparkling with a smile, "she might not ask him to!"

"Say!" Smith straightened up with new life. "You going to be home this afternoon?"

"I guess so," replied Anne. She set a kettle back on the stove and both of them walked out of the area commanded by the vision of Nichols. Rage had set him trembling and had dimmed his eyes, but he thought he saw a movement of Smith toward her. Certainly their shadows became one on the floor.

"Jim going to be here?" asked Emery.

"I don't know, but—" The rest of it was lost as they moved farther away.

Nichols brought his rifle butt down with a thump and cleared the threshold with one stride. But they were standing at least a yard apart. With a great effort he held in his anger — searching Smith's eyes, where he fancied he saw a sudden fear. Anne ran to him as always.

"Oh, Jim!" she cried. "I'm so glad you've come! I saw a rattlesnake in the yard this morning—he went under the steps and I've felt uneasy ever since!"

"Rattlesnake?" he repeated, rubbing a hand over his forehead. For the first time in his life he kissed her coldly, and with a little movement put her away from him. "You look out you don't let any snakes get into the house!"

There was the flicker of a question in her glance for an instant, and then she went about the business of putting dinner on the table. Nichols remained where he stood. He was looking at the stovepipe, because that happened to be directly in front of him, but he saw a picture of the face of Emery Smith crushed under his fists. He saw that; and then put it out of his mind, for after all, he did not have solid ground for an immediate attack on the man.

"Want to stay to dinner, Emery?" asked Anne as she placed the chairs. Smith cast an uneasy look at Nichols and shook his head.

"Got to be getting along. I forgot to feed my dogs this morning."

He went out, whistling. Anne was taking the tea from the stove. Nichols moved over to her side and touched her arm with his forefinger.

"I don't want that cur around here!" he said in a too-loud, strangled voice.

"Why, Jim!" Then her surprise turned to caution. "Don't talk so loud. Lize Phelps is sitting in the other room—it's one of her bad days when she cries and talks about her husband, but she might hear."

At that instant Eliza Phelps appeared in the doorway that led to the sitting-room. She was of a generation that had for the most part gone; and from her strength of mind and body had departed until she was a husk of a woman. Lately she had begun to mourn aloud for old Bill Phelps, her husband, who had been dead fifteen odd years.

"Lize!" called Anne. "Don't you want some dinner?"

"Nope." The old woman turned her bright black eyes toward Mrs. Nichols. "I ain't hungry, but I'm much obliged. I'll bring them herbs I promised sooner or later —mebbe sooner."

Jim Nichols, twisting around in his chair, waited until she had disappeared down the path. Then, with his brows drawn to a black welt across his forehead, he spoke:

"Anne," he said, "do you care anything about Emery Smith?"

"You must be crazy!" she cried.

"I saw you and him just as I came in to dinner—couldn't help it—and"—he hesitated; struggling against desire to hurl at her the words he had overheard—"and you looked too friendly to suit me!"

Was it relief that he saw in her face? Did her laugh have the ring of guilt as she replied with an attempt at lightness:

"All the women are friendly with Emery! He—"

"Not my woman!" roared Nichols, unable longer to hold himself. His food choked him, and he pushed back from the table. "I won't have him here!"

Anne's mouth grew firm, although there was no anger in face or voice as she replied.

"He's nothing to me—but why won't you have him here?"

"It's enough that I won't! And the next time he puts his nose in the door I'll tell him to get out—or I'll kick him out!"

"Jim! Stop and think a minute! You must be crazy jealous! You know better than to think there's any reason why you should be jealous of Emery Smith!"

No reason? After what he had heard and her defense of the hound? Jim Nichols was now a person unpleasant to look upon. Blood suffused the little veins of his eyes, and his big hands trembled to the verge of action—against whom he himself could not have told. Through his being went wave after wave of sudden heat. He knew that a killing rage filled him to suffocation—knew it both because of his own feelings and because of the look that he saw in Anne's eyes.

They changed. A vision of distance came into them, so that while she still sat at the table she seemed to be far away, like the stars. He had seen that look before, although rarely; and he now felt that behind it some danger to both of them threatened. But he had let his wrath settle its hold upon him, and even while his heart protested he yielded to it utterly.

"How do I know what's going on here while I'm away at work?"

"I can't explain to you," she said slowly, "because—because—"

"You're trying to lie yourself out!"

Anne Nichols rose to her feet. Her face grew scarlet and then became whiter and whiter until it seemed that there was no blood left in it. He interpreted this as guilt, or fear, or both.

"I've seen you like this a dozen times," she said. "You killed your dog in a fit of rage the first year we were married; and I know what you suffered afterward. There have been other things, but the worst was when you knocked old man Persons down because he cheated you in a trade. You struck me that time, because I ran between you. You felt sorry, but the harm to you had been done—you'd gone a little bit farther. Jim, you've got to pull up short or you'll go straight to hell, and I don't mean to swear, either. You've got to cure whatever is the matter with you. You can lick other men, and you made one woman love you, but you can't handle yourself!"

It is probable that anything she might have said would have fed the flame at this time, but certainly what she did say sent a red mist before his eyes and swept away all thought of anything but his sense of outrage. Literally he did not care what he said or did.

"Love me!" he snarled. "And love a shiftless hound when I ain't here!"

He took a step forward, and lifted his fist as though he would drive her to the floor. She did not move. For a few seconds he stood thus, seeing her hazily, and then his arm dropped; but it was no return of sanity that changed his intention. It was the beginning of a plan for a more satisfying revenge. For the poison in his mind had worked fast, and he felt sure now that his suspicion about Emery Smith had been correct. As he stepped away from her she spoke.

"You wanted to strike me, Jim, and I can tell, somehow, that you didn't stop because you wanted to stop. I wouldn't care so much about that, but you said something to me a woman can't very well stand. I guess I better go to Brother Frank for a

while, anyway. I don't feel like staying with you just now."

Her words were mild enough, but there was a coldness in her tone that he had never heard before. He didn't care about that, and in the moment while he hesitated as to how most bitterly to answer another step in his plan outlined itself to him.

"You stay here to-day!" he commanded thickly. "I'll take you to Frank's to-night. I'm going over the mountain to Granville this afternoon and find out something about the law!"

He saw the surprise in her face. It was not like Jim Nichols to appeal to the law, and both of them knew it. Then she smiled—a twisted smile.

"You want to take the meanest kind of revenge, Jim?" she asked. "You want to ruin my reputation?"

"I don't give a damn what I do!"

"All right." And there was a hint of a sob in her voice. "But I pray God Jim Nichols will come back into you before it's too late!"

"Trying to play baby?" He turned in the doorway and sneered at her. "That won't do you any good!"

He went, then; eager to be able to do the thing he had in mind—a thing which had nothing whatever to do with Granville, the county seat. But it did have to do with the law, for he intended to kill.

That was it! Kill! He wanted to see the blood of both of them, and then send himself into the same unknown country to which they had gone. Yes, he wanted to follow them there and, if any power of the devil could help him, make them suffer more.

This was by far the worst of his rages. They had been growing a little more violent, a little more protracted and harder to get over, but never before had he settled into a cold anger that drove him with steady determination to the end. Always the flare had passed, with the darkness of remorse after it. No doubt this was so tremendously more powerful because it touched Anne. That fact had tapped the deepest reservoir of his passion, and there was no material of restraint in him with which to stop the flow.

His furious energy had driven him halfway to Granville before he had the details of his plan worked out. At last they became clear in his mind—a complete outline of the means by which he could get satisfaction to the utmost. When this happened he turned at once and walked with the same tense haste until he came to his own farm. From that point it was necessary to proceed cautiously.

He worked along through a ravine, among the trees of a wood lot, until he came within a few hundred yards of the house. There he knelt and crawled through the tall grass and brush until he reached the dooryard fence.

He had arrived at a point where a thick growth of lilacs ran down from the house. They had not been trimmed for a long time, and he was able to hide himself completely in the young shoots.

Progress here was slow and painful, but it brought him at length under a bedroom window—a bedroom on the ground floor, opening into the sitting-room. There was a stovepipe hole in the wall of that room which would enable him to see and hear all that went on when Emery Smith arrived.

Nichols raised up and peered over the sill. The door into the sitting-room was closed, according to custom. He pushed up the sash noiselessly and climbed into the room, drawing his rifle in after him. He took off his shoes. Then he placed a chair under the stovepipe hole. A piece of wall-paper had been pasted over it for the summer, but with his knife, and slow, steady care, he cut out a small section.

With his first glimpse into the room he very nearly swore aloud. He had known that Anne would probably be there at this hour of the day, whether or not Smith had come; but he had not thought of the possible presence of any one else. Lize Phelps had come to pay another call.

Anne sat darning a pair of his socks with fingers that were now and then uncertain in their movements. Lize rocked opposite her in a characteristic attitude, bent forward with her elbows on her knees, her hands clasped and her gaze directed at the floor. There was a paper bag beside her

chair, and Nichols understood—she had remembered the herbs and had come back with them.

At first he was baffled. But he could wait—they would manage to get rid of her. Anyway, what did he care for a helpless old woman? She could do nothing—before she could get to the house of the nearest neighbor he would have done what he had come to do. Thus he waited grimly, still completely the creature of that which he had permitted to grow within him, for Emery Smith to appear. His one fear had been that Anne would go to meet Emery, and yet that was baseless inasmuch as she believed her husband to be in Granville.

Several minutes passed in a silence broken only by the rustle of Anne's garments as she reached for another sock. At length Lize raised her time-battered face. Nichols saw the gleam of a tear.

"Mis' Nichols," she snuffled, "my man Bill was a mighty good feller!"

Anne looked up at her and smiled—a smile of sympathy and sadness.

"Yes, Lize, he was."

"We allus had a barrel of flour in the pantry and pertaters down cellar when he was alive."

"He worked hard," assented Anne.

"He was a good pervider, Bill was."

"And a good hunter, wasn't he?"

The old woman did not answer, for her attention was suddenly caught by the sound of a step on the front porch. Anne's head lifted, and her breath drew in quickly. Jim Nichols, waiting on his chair, shut his fists with a sudden excess of fury that nearly made him sway to a fall.

Emery Smith came in the instant after he had knocked, with all the assurance of a privileged visitor. He capered in, as he always did, a rocking-horse kind of man.

"Hello!" he said, looking down at Anne. "Hello, Lize! How're you these days? You look younger every time I see you!"

A slow grin spread her toothless mouth.

"You get out, Emery Smith! You're allus saying them things to women!"

"Sit down, Emery," invited Anne; and he chose a chair near enough to hers to make the hand of Jim Nichols reach down for his rifle.

Why wait for them to get rid of old Lize? Damn them! He brought the weapon up and realized that he could not shoot from his present position; so he got silently down from the chair, moved it back a short distance from the wall, and remounted. That was it. Now he could rest the muzzle of the rifle in the stovepipe hole, with the butt against his shoulder.

He took the gun down as soon as he found that he could draw a bead on either Smith or Anne, for he did not want to make his hand unsteady by maintaining a tiresome position. He was not quite ready for the end.

In its completeness his intention was this—to kill first the man whom he believed to be the lover of his wife. Nichols hoped that he would pitch out of his chair and lie at her feet so that she would be touched by the tragedy of death before it overtook her. After that her had determined to walk into the room and stand in front of her—doubted that the courage and pride of his wife would permit her to run or scream or beg—and look at her. He wanted to look at the beauty of her tall and slender body before he destroyed it, to see the agony in her wide eyes, to watch the beauty of the lips he had kissed with such reverence grow pale. That was his mind during the few seconds through which he made his arrangements for the end. After it was over he would, of course, send himself to join them.

Meanwhile Emery Smith had complacently lighted one of the village store's best five-cent cigars. His long legs thrust themselves out across the floor and he appeared content—much too content. Lize Phelps sank back for the moment into her impenetrable welter of thought. The needle of Anne went up and down, up and down.

"Jim ain't around, is he?" asked Smith.

"No," from Anne.

"Out working somewhere near?"

"He went to Granville right after dinner."

"Gosh!" And Nichols thought he distinguished pleasure in that exclamation. "That's a long tramp—he can't get back till late."

"Not before supper."

So they were planning just how long

they would have together—although naturally with restraint before Lize Phelps' for there was no way of telling what her mind would or would not retain. Jim knew that Anne pitied the old woman and would hesitate to tell her to go.

"Bill allus had the best hound dog in these parts," said Lize, suddenly lifting her head and swinging that peculiar bright gaze of hers from Anne to Smith.

"You bet!" agreed Emery, listlessly.

Nichol chafed at this sort of thing. As a matter of fact his mind had shifted and he was holding back a little in the hope that the old woman would go and that some word or movement of the others would set his finger against the trigger of his rifle. He was sick of her everlasting talk of Bill Phelps. She never had talked like that before her mind began to yield up its secrets. No one had supposed there was any love lost between them. They lived together, it was true, but there had been hectic incidents in connection with other men and women. At least so people said.

"He was an awful smart man." Lize rubbed a leathery hand against her eyes. "Him and another feller picked a barrel of blueberries once from daylight to dark."

No one said anything to that. Nichols sighted his rifle between the eyes of Smith, hesitated, and decided to wait a few minutes longer. The might of his wrath made him as firm as a rock physically, but accordingly as it was like fire or ice he felt moved to strike or to wait and gloat a little longer. Lize began to talk again.

"The night Bill died I had a feeling he wa'n't going to last, and it didn't seem as though I could stand it!" She stared at the wall, wisps of hair drabbled about her face; an unlovely thing to talk of love. "I went into his room and I says 'Bill, be you dying?' He nodded. And he was." She paused a moment, as though to conquer something that threatened her from within. "After that I used to lay awake nights a-thinking about him, and sometimes it was jest as if he was right there in the room with me!" Her face hid itself and she wept noisily.

The patience of Nichols gave way again. With a hand made sure by the tension of his black anger he lifted the gun and took aim. Then Emery Smith turned his head carelessly to look at Anne; and Nichols, inwardly raging, had to wait.

"Don't let it make you feel so badly, Lize!" Anne's face was drawn with the suffering of sympathy as she leaned forward. "Perhaps he's waiting for you—"

"Him and me had fights," sobbed Lize, "but folks that love each other don't stay mad!"

Anne Nichols leaned back with the lines about her mouth grown suddenly firm. The long legs of Emery Smith wriggled uneasily and he tried to hide himself from the emotional strain of Lize Phelps's presence in a cloud of smoke. Not to the nature of Emery were serious things agreeable.

Up on the chair in the bedroom Jim Nichols cocked his weapon, with the faintest possible click. He had been waiting only for the head of Smith to turn, for Anne to lean back out of the line of fire. His trigger finger drew in with that preliminary pull that good marksmen use.

A little sound, something like the whirl of a child's rattle, stayed his finger. His quick, hunter's ear knew and located that sound instantly—his eye caught a smoothly-rolling length, dark and sinister, under the chair of Anne—a rattlesnake! It stopped in its wandering, with lifted head. If the chair moved, one of the rockers would graze the snake. It was frightened and suspicious now; it coiled silently, ready to meet danger in that unfamiliar environment.

Of the three persons in the sitting-room only one had recognized the presence of death. That was Smith. He sat goggle-eyed now, his hands closed upon the arms of his chair so that the knuckles were white. If he moved the snake might strike Anne: if he spoke to her and she moved at the sound of his voice the effect would be the same. At the moment she was motionless, gazing at the sewing idle in her lap and apparently thinking deeply. Lize Phelps, buried in her own misery, had heard and seen nothing as yet.

Jim Nichols understood the situation perfectly. He saw how a much more terrible revenge than that which he had planned was his for the taking. If he were to shoot

Emery the snake would undoubtedly strike Anne, and she would die not too swiftly. Without prompt and efficient aid she would surely die.

A familiar thought, certainly. Didn't he intend to torture her and then kill her with the bullet from his own rifle? Of course! And yet the picture of what would happen to Anne after that rattlesnake struck brought no satisfaction to his mind. He saw her sudden look of horror, the hands clasped about the ankle, the grotesquely horrible swelling as the poison mounted.

He sickened, as from a blow in the stomach. Good Heaven! it was Anne that was going to die! His wife! For the instant he forgot Emery Smith. His red anger left him as air goes from a toy balloon for, once shocked into the path toward sanity, his thoughts leaped with great bounds. His life and happiness must be saved. It was Anne Nichols, whom he loved, who sat out there with death a few inches away.

He shifted a little, called upon the power within him to steady hands that threatened to fail, and drew a deep breath. The tip of the sight covered an eye in the lifted head of the snake; then the sitting-room roared with sound and a haze of smoke hung in front of the stove-pipe hole. Nichols found himself tearing at the knob of the bedroom door.

When Nichols flung himself through the doorway the others remained still in the positions they had taken at the shot. Anne was standing, her hands put up uncertainly as though to shield her eyes from the sight of the headless, writhing snake. Emery was leaning forward, agape. Only the eyes of old Lize Phelps sparkled with the triumph of the killing.

"Bill Phelps his own self couldn't made a neater shot!" she exulted, as she got creakingly to her feet. "If you don't want the critter, Mis' Nichols, I'll take it home and skin it?"

With a gesture Anne bade her take the snake; and she went with what haste she could make, according to her custom of never allowing a giver to change his mind.

Anne Nichols sank into the big chair Lize had left and her body relaxed utterly, as though each fiber of it were tired. Smith straightened up and drew a long breath. He pulled out a red-and-yellow handkerchief and wiped his face.

"By Godfrey!" he whispered. "That was a dummed close call!"

"I was just a coming back for—for something I forget," began Jim, suddenly struck with the necessity for explaining how it was that he had been in the bedroom, and at the stove-pipe hole. "Something I forgot—and I saw the rattler crawling—"

"Just a minute, Jim!" His wife stopped him with a look of such earnestness that he grew apprehensive. "Emery, I want to have you tell Jim what it was you came to see me about!"

"Well—well—" He took out the handkerchief again and blew his nose. "You see, Jim, I didn't do—right by her brother Frank's girl. I want to marry her, and we think a lot of each other, but the family's been—kind of holding out against me. That's all."

Jim Nichols struggled to speak but before he could master himself Anne's calm voice came through the conflict of his emotions.

"Lize Phelps said 'Folks that love each other don't stay mad.' I don't know how that fits your case, Emery, but it somehow made me feel different—different about a lot of things. You run right along to Frank's and tell him I said everything was all right, and you and Bess can get married to-day if you want to!"

Emery Smith got up, with a face transfigured by his joy. Then he was gone, on winged feet.

Folks that love each other don't stay mad. The words ran in letters of fire in the mind of Jim. What was love? He had loved Anne because she had made him happy, but what had he done to make her happy? What of his black, groundless rage—and the death in his heart? He seized her hands and knelt, as before a shrine, and looked through a blur in her face.

"Anne!" he cried. "My wife! I was going to kill you!"

She drew his head down to her lap.

"It's all right now, Jim. I love you!"

"And I love you," he said, through sobs, "for the first time!"

An Idyll of Grass Valley

by Norman Springer

COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE.

PROLOGUE

I FIRST noticed him in the chair car. The girl who snuggled against him was so very pretty, so obviously a bride, and so obviously delighted with her state, that she drew all idle eyes first to herself and then to the object of her adoration. He was not pretty—at least to the unprejudiced eye—but he was obviously happy; and he positively shone by contrast with the fresh-faced lass who shared with him the red-plush seat.

He was undeniably a "hard graft" man. His square-featured face was burned red with the sun, and its whole surface was thickly pocked with blue powder-marks. Half an eyebrow was missing. His nose had been broken, and had grown together crooked. He was not exceptionally big-bodied, but one got from him the impression of physical bigness. His white collar made a raw-looking ring upon the flesh of his neck, and from time to time he plucked at it with a thick, petulant forefinger.

I catalogued him—correctly, as I was to discover—as a miner and a honeymooner.

Later, as I sat in the smoker, watching the fruitful acres of the Sacramento Valley slip by the window, he came in and sat beside me. He unbuttoned his collar, and, leaning back with the white wings of starched linen tickling his ears, filled and lighted a well-seasoned pipe. Presently he drew a newspaper from his pocket and fell to studying its front page. I heard him mutter distinctly: "Another one."

I had been looking at his big, capable, calloused hands, but at the words I glanced to the paper they held. It was the semiweekly sheet of the last town at which the train had stopped, and its first page was embellished with a portrait of a young army officer in full oversea regalia. Beneath the picture was the caption: "Hero Returns from Active Service Overseas."

"Ain't the hero crop the limit?" said my neighbor. "Here's just one of fifty thousand heroes coming home to little burgs all over the country—and every last mother's son of them is a looey. Ain't it fine the way the shavetails and looeys won the war? They wasn't no buck private heroes, according to the papers!"

I shifted my gaze from the newspaper to his face, and in doing so noticed for the first time the service button in his coat-lapel. Naturally, I jumped to a conclusion.

"You're coming home from France, too, aren't you?"

"Uhuh," he said, without enthusiasm.

"See active service?"

"Argonne," was the succinct reply.

"Exciting?"

"Well, you might call it that. I'll say it was mud and misery."

"Wounded, weren't you?" I demanded admiringly. I thought I had solved the powder-marks. The chap was undoubtedly a real and neglected hero just itching to be honored and sung.

"Only wounds I got was seven corns on my toes," he informed me. He interpreted my gaze, and his fingers lightly brushed his cheek. "You're referring to these beauty specks of mine, ain't you?" he inquired. "Nope, I didn't get them in active service; I got them right here in the U. S. A. when I was doing what I guess you'd call 'inactive service.' It was pretty hard graft, too. And I got a closer shave when this powder blew into my mug than any I got during the fighting."

"Yes?" I said encouragingly.

He regarded me quizzically out of the corner of his eye. "I seen you watching us in the other car," he said suddenly. "That lady is Addie, my—my wife." He spoke the mystic words diffidently, lingeringly; I think it was the first time he had used them in conversation. "We got spliced yesterday. She came down to the city to meet the troop-train, and then, as soon as I got my discharge, we had it over with. We'd been engaged since I got these powder-scars." He puffed at his pipe for a moment. "She's helping the lady in there what has twins," he added.

"Is that so?" I commented.

He took the pipe out of his mouth, and turned squarely toward me, "If I don't tell somebody I'll bust!" he said.

"I'd like to hear about it," I responded.

CHAPTER I.

AT FIRST SIGHT.

WELL, it's this way: Addie and me are from Grass Valley, and we're going back there man and wife, which is more surprising than it sounds, because every one in Grass Valley, including Addie's father, who keeps the hay and feed store, figured that Addie was all cut out to be spliced to Harold, who is the only boy, and the pride and hope of old man Beebe, who owns controlling interest in the Consolidated, and about everything else in Grass Valley that isn't nailed down tight. And everybody figured that Jim McNeil (that's me) was a no-account hoodlum who'd never come to no good, and a decent girl had better fight shy of him, and it was a blessing the war come along and took him out of town.

I was born and flourished in Grass Valley, and left school and went to work in the mines at a tender age, as the books say; and a mine ain't no place in which to learn nice manners and how to always be a perfect gentleman. Besides, I'll admit I liked a bit of a time, along with the other fellows, on pay-day night.

But all this and more, didn't make me solid with the best people in town, with the Prices, who are Addie's folks, or with old man Beebe, who wouldn't let me work for him any more after the time I got the Dry lecturer from Sacramento drunk on apricot brandy, which he thought was a soft drink. I didn't care a hang, until I fell in love with Addie.

You know, that was a funny thing for me to do. I'd known Addie all her life; she was a little girl when I was a big boy, and after I went to work and grew hair on my chest she was still a little girl. I never thought of her in any other way. A friendly, pretty little kid.

One night I went to a dance the Feed the Belgian Babies ladies was giving, because they'd stuck me for a ticket, and I thought

I might as well drop in and waltz a couple for my money. Addie and her chum, Aggie Post, were there. I asked Addie for a dance, not because I wanted especially to step with her, but because I liked to see Addie's Aunt May bristle up and look down her nose when I spoke to the girl. I wouldn't have been surprised or put out much if Addie had turned me down, but she liked to get a raise out of Aunt May, too.

Well, it happened just like that. As soon as I got out on the floor with my arm around Addie I found out she wasn't a little girl any more, but a grown-up woman, and the prettiest, sweetest woman—oh, well, I guess you know how it is yourself. Ain't it a strange thing to suddenly see a different person in some one you've known a long time? Why, I couldn't keep my eyes off her! We had five dances together, and just the feel and smell of her made me drunker than the bottle ever had. Before Addie went home, I had her dated up to go to the movies with me next evening.

The next night, when I dropped around to her house to get her, I found her Aunt May was ready to go out too. Aunt May give me a look about as pleasant as a swig of vinegar, and she says to me: "I've decided to go to the movies with you." I said: "Sure, I'm delighted," but I was wishing all the time she'd break a leg, or have one of her sudden asthma attacks. Addie didn't say anything, just smiled, and I guessed right away from her subdued air that the old girl had been climbing her about being friendly with me.

Before we got out of the house, Aggie Post and Harold Beebe dropped in. Harold flopped himself down on the sofa beside Addie, just as if he belonged there; and then he gave me one of those top-lofty once over's that sets a fellow's teeth on edge. I felt like chucking him out of the window.

"We were just going to the movies with Mr. McNeil," said Aunt May.

"Fine—we'll go along with you," said Harold.

Aunt May smiled all over. She was just like honey to Harold. Addie cheered up, too, and Aggie clapped her hands. So I said: "Sure, I'm delighted."

Well, I didn't intend to be euchred out of the whole evening, so, when we got down to the Picture Palace, and found out we couldn't all get seats together, I said: "I'm delighted," again, and rushed Addie down the aisle, and we flopped into the only two empty seats in that side of the house. Aggie and Harold faded away somewhere behind us, and Aunt May, mad as a wet hen, had to squeeze into a single, two rows ahead of us. It made Addie and me giggle just to look at her back.

I don't know to this day what was the name of that picture, or what it was all about, except that the end of it had a nice, long kissing scene. A big fat man had the seat just in front of Addie, and she had to lean a little sidewise to see the screen; and that made her head touch my shoulder, and every now and then her hair would brush my cheek.

It made me dippy. It was nice and dark in the theater, and I got her hand, and she let me hold it. We didn't say a word to each other—but say, I was interested!

When the lights went on, she tried to draw her hand away. I held on to it for a moment and said: "Will you let me take you out again, Addie?"

She smiled and kind of nodded.

"Alone," I said. "No Aunt May—no Harold."

She smiled again, but she said: "I don't know if I can, Jim. Father and Aunt May would be awful mad, and Harold—"

But she didn't have a chance to tell me where Harold came in, because just then Aunt May stopped in the aisle beside the row we were in and said in a sugar-and-tabasco voice that made every one look around: "Are you two children going to sit there all night?"

Harold and Aggie were waiting for us outside, and on the way home Harold cut me out and walked ahead with Addie. I trailed along behind, walking between Aunt May and Aggie Post, and wishing that assault and battery and kidnaping was still fashionable. Aunt May didn't lose no time; just as soon as Addie was out of earshot, she began to tell me just where to get off—not talking to me directly, but across my face, to Aggie.

"Don't they look nice together?" she says, referring to the two ahead.

"They make a darling couple," said Aggie.

"Yes; they just seem cut out for each other," went on Aunt May. "So congenial, you know, and that means so much when young people set up for good together. And it's such a blessing they are so crazy about each other, because nothing could really come between them now. It's such a fortunate affair—Harold's father and her father being such good friends and members of the same church and everything—seems like it was arranged by Providence, don't you think?"

"Oh, yes, it's just perfectly lovely," said Aggie. "Have you decided to announce it?"

"Well—not just yet," said Aunt May. "If it was me alone, I'd announce it and have it over with right away. But Addie, you know, is giddy, and thinks of nothing but a good time, and her father indulges her. I don't approve of long engagements, or of this continual gadding about to picture shows and dances. But Addie is so headstrong, even though she is a good girl. And Harold isn't finished with college yet, you know; he still has his last term. When he gets his diploma and comes home and takes over the mine, as his father has promised he shall, it will be announced, and take place right away, I dare say.

"Any way, there's no real need to announce it, because every one in our set knows. Such a fortunate affair! Don't you thing so, Mr. McNeil?"

"Oh, yes; they make a darling couple," said I.

CHAPTER II.

ROUGH WATER.

I WENT home with a flea in my ear which Aunt May had put there. I knew just where I stood with the Price family, all right, and not even the memory of that little extra squeeze Addie gave my hand when she said good night could help me get that flea out. Harold was holding her other hand when she said good night!

I was beginning to feel sort of jealous of Harold. Funny feeling that—I lay awake imagining Harold sitting on the sofa with her, holding her hand, after I left; and, say—if thoughts could have done anything I'd have been jailed for murder next morning. Crazy? I was sure. There wasn't no reason to it. Here Aunt May had gone to the trouble to let me know how things was between Harold and Addie; and here was I, who had just butted in and taken her out once in my life, already looking upon Harold as a guy who was trying to steal my girl. *My* girl—get it? I couldn't think of Addie any other way.

It wasn't very cheerful thinking. I wasn't so crazy I couldn't see just how little a common roughneck like Jim McNeil was likely to stack up against Harold Beebe in Addie's eyes. As for Aunt May and Addie's dad—well, I knew they didn't think I lived in the same world as Harold.

For that matter, I didn't. I was just a common mine hand, working underground in the Imperial for four and a half a day, and spending it all the same night. Some day, if I mended my ways, I might be a foreman.

But Harold—why, he was the luckiest stiff in California! His old man had more rocks than he could count, and Harold, after they finished showing him how to be a mining engineer down at Berkeley, was going to be superintendent of the Consolidated and learn how not to do the things they told him to do in school.

Besides, Harold was a nice Christian boy who had never done nothing in his life that would make his ma feel bad; while I—well, one Monday morning old Judge Proud fined me ten and costs and told me it was a mercy my folks died young, or I'd have broke their hearts. I couldn't blame Aunt May for shying some hints as soft as brickbats in my direction.

It didn't help me any to realize how fine and worth while Harold was and how bad and no-account I was. I was hit hard, and I knew it. There wasn't much sense to it, I knew, but still, Addie was my girl, and I wanted her. I made up my mind I mustn't bother Addie no more. And then, before I went to work next morning, I

hocked my motor bike, and ordered a new suit and a silk shirt at Jake Rauer's Emporium.

That night was Wednesday, and Addie and Harold and Aggie went to meeting and choir practise. I dressed up and met them accidental-like when they started home. It worked fine. Aggie didn't like me much and she froze onto Harold and he had to see her home. I walked with Addie, and cracked some jokes, and she laughed, and we had a fine time.

When we got to her house we stood outside and talked until Aunt May stuck her head out of the door and wanted to know for pity's sake what was we acting like Comanche Indians for? Then when she saw me she said in a different voice: "It's time you came in, Addie! Good night, Mr. McNeil!"

Thursday night I dressed up and went down to the Prices' after supper. Addie came out and sat on the porch with me. Pretty soon Harold came over, and then Aggie. Aunt May took a seat in the front window behind me, and I could feel her eyes burning a hole in my back.

Harold began to talk about college and San Francisco, and nobody could get a word in edgewise. I didn't stay very late. When I left, Addie shook hands and said: "Be sure and come again, Jim," and I heard Aun May snort like a steam engine.

Friday night I dressed up and went down to the Prices'. Addie's old man met me on the corner, and he said: "Look here, young feller, I want you to cut it out! Understand! You quit hanging around my Addie, and you needn't visit my house quite so frequent! It wouldn't be a bad idea if you turned around and went home now!"

Well, there didn't seem anything else to do except turn around and beat it like the old man said, and that's what I done. But I didn't go home; I was too blamed sore for that. I drifted into Gus Martin's pool hall, feeling just about as friendly toward the world as a rattlesnake in August.

Soon as I got inside Gus's place I found out my luck had turned for fair. The whole place lit on me with both feet. It seemed that Tony Pastori, who drove the wagon for old man Price, had been in there ahead of me, and he had told the gang everything about me that Addie's dad had told him. It was plenty; it seemed that old man Price had been relieving his mind all day about the infernal impudence of me thinking I was good enough to keep company with his Addie. It was all just pie to that gang in the pool hall, and they ragged me hard.

I didn't mind the ragging much, but when a big cousin-Jack I didn't like very well anyhow, said something nasty about Addie, I waded into him without notice. I just couldn't help it. It would have been all right, because I had him on the run, if his friends hadn't taken a hand. When they jumped me, my friends backed me up, and before the shindy ended we had moved Gus's place out in the middle of Mill Street, and the marshal and three deputies was trying to read the riot act.

The next morning when the *Weekly News* came out it had a long story of the fight. It mentioned me by name, and said I had been in trouble before, as the town would remember. It said I should have been pinched for starting the row, and panned the marshal for not locking me up.

And it said that the worst thing about me, perhaps, was the fact I was a cad and a skunk and a coward, because I had brought into a public fracas the name of a young lady who belonged to one of Grass Valley's most prominent and respected families, and that said young lady's father had given out the statement that I had pestered his daughter with unwelcome attentions, and if I showed up around his house any more I would be welcomed with a sawed-off shotgun, and I had better hereby take notice.

Well, I took notice, all right. I wasn't blind, or deaf either. I was so bunged up that day I couldn't go to work, so I hung around Padden's drug-store until Addie came by.

I tried to talk to her, and explain how it all was. I could see she was mad, because she came down the street with her head up, looking over my head, and plunking her feet down hard and fast. I called to her, and when she didn't stop, I stepped in front of her. Then she had to stop.

"Mr. McNeil," she said, "you have disgraced me, and I hate you, and I don't never want to see you, or talk to you, no more!"

With that she shoved past me, and flounced into the store; and I went home and laid on the bed and swore at myself for the rest of the day. I said that if Addie Price thought she could bawl me out that way in front of people and get away with it she was mistaken. I said, who does she think she is, anyway? The Prices ain't a bit better than the McNeils, and why should I worry about a little snob who thought she was so much better than her neighbors? I said there were plenty of girls besides Addie Price in the world!

But there weren't. Not for me. And way down in my heart I knew it. But I didn't let on. I went to work Monday morning, and laughed and carried on with the crowd just as if I was happy. Nearly every day I passed Addie on the street—I just couldn't help going the way I knew I'd be likely to see her—but she never recognized me, and I never let on I seen her. It was just like we were strangers. But it hurt to see her going into the picture show with Harold and Aggie, her hanging on Harold's arm, and like as not laughing up into his face. I felt so miserable that I wanted to fight all the time.

Then, to make matters worse, Harold began to be friendly to me. He'd see me on the street, and he'd come up and shake my hand, and ask how was things, and offer me his fancy cigarettes. It made me wild. I didn't want anybody's pity, least of all his. That's what I felt his friendliness was; he'd won out with Addie and felt sorry for me.

The only reason I didn't tear loose and muss him up was because I couldn't bear to hurt Addie. Oh, I could have done it easy enough! Harold wasn't what you'd call a "he-man" in looks—he was a little, reedy, girly sort of fellow. Well, imagine! His ma made him wear long curls until he was nearly ten years old, and he hadn't never played with no rough boys in his life. When we were kids we all called him "sister."

One morning—it was a Sunday morning—a couple of weeks after the fight, Harold called on me at my boarding-house. I said to myself: "Well, he's got his old man's gall all right!" and I didn't meet him exactly cordial-like. But my manner didn't feaze him any; he was just bubbling over, and he plumped himself down in a chair and began to lay out my future life for me.

"I'm going back to the university tomorrow, Jim," says he, "but that won't make any difference because I got it all fixed. I won my father over, and he's willing. On the first of the month you go back to work in the Consolidated as shift boss, taking Aggie's father's job, who has been promoted to be assistant to the superintendent. You'll get along fine, and make good, I know, only you'd better cut out running with the drinking gang."

"Will you please tell me, Mr. Beebe," says I, speaking cold and calm, "who in hell give you permission to tell me what I was to do and what I wasn't?"

"Oh, that's all right, Jim," he says, speaking quick and pleasant. "I know you don't like me, but that's all a mistake. I like you, and Addie likes you, too—only, of course, they've made it pretty hard for her at home ever since that unfortunate occurrence. And Aggie likes you, really she does, only your ways are so—so sort of rough. But we all want you to get ahead, and so, as I said, I got the job all lined up for you, and I know you'll get along fine. When I take over the mine, maybe there 'll be another step up the ladder for you."

"Mr. Beebe, if the Consolidated was the last mine in the world," I told him, "I'd go digging ditches or making hay for a living! Thank you for your kind offer, but I don't need your help to get along. Good morning!"

But, do you know, I couldn't get that guy's goat. He went away smiling, and the last thing he said was: "Well, Jim, if you change your mind just let me know. It's all a mistake, your not liking me."

All a mistake! And me with my fingers just itching to fasten upon the shrimp's neck! You know, it hurt as much as anything else just to think that Addie could prefer such a sawed-off, pale little runt

above me. Of course, he was pretty, and had schooling, and rocks, but I could break him in two with one hand. Well, women are queer!

Well, Harold went away, and I didn't wish him any worse luck than he'd break his neck on the trip down to Berkeley. I didn't go to work in the Consolidated on the first of the month, and I didn't cut out the drinking gang. In fact, I helled around more than ever. I had a sneaking hope that with Harold out of the way Addie would kind of loosen up and be friendly with me again.

But the very day after he left, she left, too, for Sacramento, to pay a long visit to her Aunt Edith. Aggie told me this, coming up to me on the street, and talking real nice. She gave me Addie's address in Sacramento, and suggested I might write a line to her if I felt like it.

I was very much surprised at Aggie's kindness, and I couldn't help noticing she was prettier than I had thought, and not nearly so stuck-up. But she wasn't Addie. I went home and wrote that very hour, and told Addie how sorry I was, and just how the fight in the pool-hall started, and would she please forgive me and be friends again?

The very next day I got an answer. It was a post-card, and all it said was: "I think you treated Harold shamefully!" Just that. No signature, no "Write again," no nothing.

Well, skipping over much what happened, the weeks went by, and I stayed with my old job at the Imperial, and chased with the gang, and tried to forget and couldn't. Addie stayed in Sacramento, and she didn't write no more, and I wouldn't. I said: "Let her have her Harold; I wouldn't bust it up between them for the world!"

Then, just because I was so mad and so miserable I started to flirt with a kid from the box-factory who the whole town knew was a live-wire. I took her around to shows and dances, and all the nice people wrinkled up their noses and looked cross-eyed at us. A lot I cared! Then, one day, Aggie Post stopped me on the street. Say, she was mad!

"Jim McNeil, you're no good, you're a bad egg!" she says. "I wash my hands of you!"

"I never knew you had your hands on me," I says, mean and sarcastic. "But if you had, you'd better use lye, or you won't get 'em clean!"

"Oh, you big, stupid fool!" she says. "You haven't written to Addie, and now she'll hear about that—that creature, and it 'll be too late!"

"Too late for what?" I asked. "Addie Price don't want me to write to her. She ain't worrying any about me; she's worrying about Harold."

I fished Addie's post-card out of my pocket and handed it to Aggie. She took a look at it, and then at me, and handed it back. And then what do you suppose she done? She started to bawl, right there on the street. Busted right out crying, and put an arm across her face, and beat it down the street as fast as her legs would carry her. It got my goat. I couldn't understand it. I stood there for half an hour trying to figure it out, and then I says to myself: "Women are sure queer," and went home to supper.

But Aggie had started me to thinking, and it made me feel rotten to think what Addie was probably hearing about me. I took a tumble to myself, and when the box-factory dame rang me up and wanted me to go to a road-house dance, I says: "Nothing doing, kid; I'm off that stuff for good!"

About a half-hour later I saw her climbing into the stage with the steam-shovel fireman who was her heavy man before I cut him out, so I knew I had ended that affair all right. I went home and wrote a post-card to Addie. I said: "How are you, Addie? I hope you are well, and I am the same. Would like to hear from you."

CHAPTER III.

"GOOD-BY, JIM!"

I WAITED two weeks, and didn't get no answer.

Then the war happened, and things in Grass Valley was changed overnight, so to speak. The war always seemed a long way off, like it was in another world, and here,

all at once, it was right on our door-step. Things began to hum, I want to tell you!

The very first week there was six petitions before the Superior Court to change names to something that sounded American, and the organizer who come up from San Francisco to organize the box-factory was run out of town because old man Beebe said he was a pro-German, and Gus Schoeffler started the Home Guard for married men who couldn't get away, and the *News* came out and said it had reliable information that the Hun secret service was planning to use the hills back of the town for a signal base, and would everybody please watch out for strangers who didn't have round heads? Nearly everybody in town camped at the depot every day until the train came in with the Sacramento and San Francisco papers, and we found out how the war was going.

Then recruiting began. I was watching for it. I made up my mind to go the day war was declared, and before I ever heard of the draft. When the newspapers said the government was raising some regiments of engineers who would be first in France, I says to myself: "That's your chance. You'll get over there before it's ended, and you'll show the Prices and the Beebes and this town that you ain't such a bum after all!"

The papers said the ranks was rapidly filling up, and any one who wanted to be one of these engineers would have to act quickly, so I decided I wouldn't lose no time about it. Especially since Addie had come home, and passed me on the street and never said hello or nothing. I wanted to get out of town.

So I sounded some of the fellows at the mine, and found out how they felt, and then I went down and had a talk with Mayor Schultz. He shook my hand and said: "My boy, Grass Valley is proud of you!" and dictated a call to mass meeting for all the citizens in the big hall over the postoffice for that very night. Then he phoned to Lou Parton, of the *News*, and Parton come up to my house and borrowed a picture of me which was took when I was seventeen, and said he was going to get out a special edition.

That night everybody in town was at the meeting, and Mayor Schultz made a sizzling speech and called on the youth of America to go and help bleeding France drive the beast of a Hun back beyond Berlin, because the Hun was a leopard which never washed his spots and the world must be saved for democracy, and who was there to say Grass Valley would not do her share in the mighty task, and, in conclusion, this meeting was called at the instance of one of our bravest youths, whose noble and sterling qualities are known to all of us, and who is to-night emulating himself on the altar of his country and invites others to do the same, so that his native heath will be ably represented in the vanguard of the mighty hosts which will rescue the tortured world from the hydrant-headed monster of militarism, and Major Marshall, from Sacramento, had made a special trip to be present and assist in the ceremony, and again in conclusion he called upon the brave youth of Grass Valley to follow the example of our esteemed fellow-townsman, Mr. James Aloysius McNeil, and volunteer for the engineering forces which would be first in France!

Well, twenty-seven of us put our John Henrys on the roster, and held up our hands before the major. The crowd was wild, and nearly mobbed us, and the Methodist minister wife, who had said I was a contaminating influence upon the youth of the town, put her arms around my neck and kissed me, and said I was her hero. But Addie wasn't there, on account of Aunt May's asthma, and I couldn't help feeling the fuss wasn't worth while. I don't like this hero stuff, anyway.

Next morning the depot was, as the *News* had it, the scene of indescribable enthusiasm. Grass Valley was bidding its noble youth good-by. There was the Moose band, and the Eagles drum corps, and some bawling from the women and girls, and handshaking all around, and lots of singing and cheering. We had a special car to take us down to Sacramento, and I sneaked away from the mob and boarded the train and sat down by myself. Every fellow in the bunch save me had a girl to say good-by to. Say—I did feel lonely! Addie was

there, with Aggie, but she stayed at the other end of the platform, and after what had happened I wouldn't go seeking her out.

Just as the train was pulling out, I heard my name called out above the noise—and there, running beside the car, was Addie!

"Jim, Jim, good-by, Jim!" she called out. "Good-by!"

The train went on, with me hanging half out the window to get her words. The last I saw of her she was standing on the edge of the platform—and she blew me a kiss!

CHAPTER IV.

NO WORD.

WELL, when we got to the Oakland Mole, on our way to Berlin, they herded us all on a government tug, and started us in the direction of Japan. But we didn't quite get there. We stopped off at a big island in San Francisco Bay called Angel Island, where the army had a casual camp. I don't know why they call that place "Angel Island," unless it's because it's the last place on earth an angel would pick out to visit, but the "casual" part of it is all right. They sure treat a guy in a casual sort of way. They give him a number, and then forget it. Why, I was lost on that island for months.

First thing they did, next morning, was to line us up and enlist us all over again; and they tagged, and measured, and mugged us, and took our family histories from the year one. That's how they shanghaied me; because I told them the truth. Because a couple of mornings later, and before I'd finished trying on all my new clothes, the top sergeant come in and bawled out: Who's McNeil, J. A., around here? Well, detailed for garrison—report to Captain Steele!" I didn't know what he meant, and reported with a whoop, thinking maybe I'd be starting for the front that afternoon.

This Captain Steele was sitting in his office with my pedigree spread out in front of him. He looked like a good scout.

"*Humph*—McNeil—oh, yes!" says he, giving me the once-over. "Miner—eh?"

"Yes, sir," says I.

"Familiar with explosives?"

"I had a stick of dynamite for a baby-rattle!" I tells him.

"Now, young feller, don't wax facetious," says he, "and stand at attention, or I'll know the reason why!"

"Yes, sir, beg pardon," says I, "and please when do I leave?"

"You don't leave," he remarked. "You are detailed for special duty on the island."

"Look here, I joined to fight the beast of a Hun," says I.

"Listen to me, young man, and let me give you some military advice," says he. And he did. Oh, he did! When he got through I was feeling about as big as one of the fifty million fleas on the island. And then he says: "And now, Private McNeil, you are about to salute me, which you didn't do when you came in, and then the orderly will escort you down to the blacksmith-shop, where you will meet four men, and you will take these four men and report to Lieutenant Beebe, and do as he tells you. And remember, I've got my eye on you! Now, then, sir!"

I got out of that room in a sort of a daze. The orderly had me by the elbow, but he wasn't rubbing it in at all. "Never mind, fellow, the skipper ain't such a bad one," says he. "His bark is worse than his bite, and you didn't know the difference." But it wasn't Captain Steele I was worrying about!

At the blacksmith-shop there were the four men, in dungarees, sitting in the shade, with a pile of sharpened steels and some single jacks by their side. The orderly marched me up to them, and he says: "Here's your new boss, fellows! Where's the looey?"

"Inside," answered one man.

We peeked in the door, and there was an officer talking to a man at the forge. "That's him," says the orderly. "Now, don't spill the beans again. You go up to him and salute, see? And then you say: 'Sir, Private Whateveryournameis, and detail of four men, report for duty to Lieutenant Beebe.' Go to it!"

Well, I had been hoping it was some other Beebe, but it wasn't. It was Harold all right, all rigged out in a first loot's uniform.

Mad? Say, I was so mad I couldn't see straight! As if it wasn't hard luck enough being put to work on the island, here I had to work under Harold!

I was leery about pulling any rough stuff, though; that Captain Steele had me bluffed. So I marched up to Harold. I was right behind him before he turned and saw me; and he was so surprised he just gaped. I did just what the orderly told me to do.

"Why, Jim!" says Harold, shoving out his hand. "I'm certainly glad to see you!"

I never batted an eye—just saluted again, and went through the same rigamarole. He looked at me hard, and then he caught on. He saw he couldn't soft-soap me that way. So he stiffened, and returned my salute, and says: "Very good, Private McNeil. Get your men and follow me."

Well, he led us up on top of a big, brown hill in back of the camp, we carrying the tools, and him strutting on ahead and kicking up the dust like we was beasts of burden—which we was—which he didn't have to take no account of. Oh, but I'd have liked to have bounced one of the single-jacks on his knob! Just to take the stiffness out of him!

There was a hole in the ground on top of the hill, a shaft six by eight feet and about fifteen feet down in the solid rock. At the shaft edge was a dolly, or hand, windlass—and all the layout for well-digging. Harold turned to me, and, pointing to the hole, said:

"There's your job, and I know you know how to do it. You are in charge, and responsible for the progress of the work. The powder-magazine will honor your requisitions. Find water."

With that he turned and beat it down the hill, and I had to get the details from the fellows who were on the job with me.

They told me they had been on the job for three weeks already, doing everything by hand, after the fashion of the first well-diggers mentioned in the Bible; and yesterday their powder-monkey had his foot crushed by a bucket which fell back into the hole, and that's how I happened to get the job.

They told me that Lieutenant Beebe was a pretty good scout who didn't bother us much so long as we did a little work; and Captain Steele was all right, and didn't bother us at all; and the job was a fluke which was wished on our officers by some of the high-rank fatheads at the Presidio, and that our officers didn't really think we'd strike water—which I could believe, for a less likely place to sink a well I never saw in my life.

They told me the island was without water, and the army had to keep two water-boats on the job supplying the garrison, which was the reason we were up on the hill. They said it was a damn shame to join the army to go overseas, and then be put to work on Angel Island, and we was as lost to the world as if we was shot dead in France, because we'd be digging this damn well when we was old and gray-headed, and it was all enough to make a guy go over the hill even if it was war time.

And they said it wasn't worth while starting in this morning, because the looey wouldn't be back until afternoon, and any, way the mess call was going to blow pretty soon. I agreed with them.

But after dinner I started to drill a set of holes, for I knew I had to make a showing. I didn't care what Harold thought, you know—but that Captain Steele was a bad man to monkey with, I knew from his face. Anyway, I don't like loafing much.

Well, about the middle of the afternoon Harold showed up. I was down in the shaft myself, alone, and he swung himself down beside me.

"Hello, and what are indications?" he says, cheerily.

"Sir, Private McNeil reports he thinks he'll hit water, or China, in this hole about the 4th of July, 1998," says I, in a loud voice, so the boys on top would hear me.

"Well, I don't think you're far off the date at that," says Harold. "But orders is orders in the army, and we'll have to keep on." Then he lowered his voice and stepped closer, and I could see he was trying to soft-soap me: "I'm sorry you were unlucky enough to be detailed for this work, Jim. It's a shame, when I know you are just as eager as I am to get away from this place. I got my commission through the university

in April, and I've been here ever since. Expect I'll have to stay here. But perhaps you will get away. How did you leave the folks in Grass Valley, Jim?"

I thought I had the little runt. I straightened up and looked right at him so I could enjoy it to the full. "Left the whole town at the depot," I said. "Addie was there, to say good-by—she threw me a kiss!"

Well, he stiffened, all right, and got kind of red in the face, and gave me a peculiar sort of eye. Then he says, rather short and sharp: "Yes, she wrote me all about it. I hear from her rather often, you know!" And with that he beat it.

He left me so mad I worked like a slave the whole afternoon, just to work off steam. So he heard from her often, and she wrote him all about it! It set my teeth on edge to think about it! To think I'd been such a rummy as to give him such a chance at me! Of course, she wrote to him often—wasn't he her Harold? But she had blown that kiss to me—or was it my kiss?

I started to think about it that way, and I had to admit it might not have been my kiss at all. Very likely it was a kiss for the whole car—she knew us all. Anyway, I had been a big fathead for thinking it showed she had changed her feelings toward me very much, and had come to care for me. Blow me a kiss! Why, come to think of it, she very likely did more than blow Harold a kiss; she very likely smacked him right on the lips, as often as he wanted! Say, that thought made me wild!

I had sent Addie a post-card from Oakland Mole saying we had arrived that far and expected to go to France next day, and winding up with: "I am thinking of you, your soldier boy, Jim." So far I hadn't got no answer, and that kind of convinced me I had been banking too much on that kiss. Harold was getting answers!

That night after supper I sat down and wrote a long, warm letter to Addie, and told her just how I felt. It was some love-letter, believe me! I said to myself: "Now, you put your pride in your pocket, and get it all off your chest!" And I did. Why, in that letter I just crawled before her.

When it was done I asked a corporal where to mail it.

"Just take it over to the looey's tent, unsealed, and leave it there," says he. "It's got to be censored, you know."

"You mean—Beebe?" I asked.

"Sure—he's first loot of this outfit. He has to read everything that goes out of this company."

"Well, he don't read this!" says I, and I tore it up then and there. Was I sore? I sure was! But I'd sooner never have got a word from home than to have it go under his eyes—the grinning little beast! And after I went to bed, and thought it over, I was kind of glad I hadn't sent such a begging letter. After all, it was up to Addie to write; she knew where I was, and she had the post-card. It was her turn.

But she didn't write. Not a word. They had a post-office in a little shack down near the wharf, and for a while I went down there twice a day, when the mail tug came in. That was at noon and sunset, and it didn't interfere with well-digging in any way; and after I got acquainted with the guys in the office I helped them sort the letters. I was that eager! There was mail from Grass Valley, all right, plenty of it, but it wasn't addressed to me.

Nearly every day Harold got a nice fat letter, with the stamp upside down, and I knew it was from Addie, because the return address was Box 105, Grass Valley, which was the Prices' box. But no letter ever came from Box 105 to Jim McNeil!

Was I sore? Say—one of the chief reasons I was so eager to lick the beast of a Hun was to get away some place where I could forget Addie and Harold, and here was their love affair right under my eyes again, and I was thinking of the girl and wishing for her more than ever.

Harold tried to rub it in, but he didn't succeed very well. One day he says to me: "Don't you ever write home, Jim? Both Addie and Aggie are asking after you, and they send you their best wishes." He grinned one of his superior, patronizing grins, and I nearly forgot he was an officer, and almost swung on him where he stood.

I gave him one of those one-hundred-per-cent salutes, that tells an officer you are inviting him to go to hell, and I says: "Sir, Private McNeil thanks Lieutenant Beebe

kindly, but Private McNeil didn't know that the army required him to write back to his home town unless he wanted to!"

That got him. He turned red, and looked mad, and snapped out: "Jim McNeil, you are the most impossible person I know!" He beat it, and from that day on he never tried to get too familiar again; in fact, he never spoke to me except very formal like about the work.

CHAPTER V.

THE MISFIRE.

ALL this while the work was going on steadily. I soon saw that the only way I'd ever get out of the well detail and into one of the drafts that left every day or so for the Presidio and France, was to finish the well, or else get the shaft down so deep that even headquarters would see it wasn't no use going deeper. So I plugged away like a good fellow, and got kind of unpopular with my helpers, because I kept them so well exercised.

It was slow work at the best. The rock was hard, and everything had to be done by hand. Uncle Sam was too poor to afford a donkey-engine for the hoist, and after a shot the muck had to be hauled up by hand, and this was a day's work, pretty near, by itself. Uncle was too poor even to afford a battery, by means of which I could shoot my holes from the top; I had to go down and light the fuses with matches, and rely on the man-power hoist to get me out before the rock began to fly.

When I had been on the job two months, I was down to sixty-five feet below the ground, with no water or indications of it. Some staff officers come over from the Presidio and looked down the hole—they had nice new uniforms on, so they didn't leave the ground—and said: "Keep on, by all means, keep on!" and Captain Steele grunted kind of sour, and said: "Yes, sir," and Lieutenant Beebe grunted kind of sour and said: "Yes, sir," and when the bunch had got a little way down the hill, me and my helpers give them all a piece of our minds which I wonder didn't burn them up as they walked.

Well, I went down to the sixty-five-foot level and drilled eight holes, and loaded each hole with two sticks of fifty-per-cent giant. Then I touched off my fuses, and was hauled to the top by my helpers, and sat on the ground by the shaft and counted the shots as they went off. There were only seven explosions.

"Misfire," said the boys.

I waited a little while and decided I did have a mishole. So I had the boys collect all the used steels, and sent them down to the blacksmith-shop to sharpen them. I planned to stay alone at the shaft, and have a quiet smoke, until they got back; then I would go down and see what was wrong at the bottom.

But pretty soon I saw Harold coming hot-foot up the hill. It made me swear. I knew he must have been in the blacksmith-shop when the boys got there, and now the nosey little runt was coming up to spoil my smoke and give me advice on how to proceed—me, who had handled powder since I was in knee-pants!

Well, I determined not to wait for his advice. I couldn't talk to him two minutes without wanting to land on him, anyway. So I quickly lowered a sharp steel, and single-jack, and spoon to the bottom, and was leaning over the edge, ready to slide down the bucket-rope when he came over the brow of the hill.

"What's the matter?" says he.

"Mishole, sir," I answered.

"Where you going?"

"Down to clear it away," says I.

"But—alone? It's dangerous," says he. "Hadn't you better wait until your men get back, so they will be standing by at the windlass?"

"Sir, Private McNeil ain't afraid of a mishole," says I, "because, not having been to college, his experience with them is practical!"

He stood there biting his lips, and before he found words, I slid down the rope. I was feeling pretty good. Wasn't often I got as good a shot as that at the sissified stiff.

The bottom of the shaft was a litter of big and little boulders and smashed rock from the blast. But after looking around a while I found the hole that hadn't gone off.

The fuse and packing had blown out, and the hole was filled with dirt. I naturally concluded the powder had blown out, too. I had had experience with dozens of misshots like this, and always when the fuse and packing was gone the powder was also gone.

So I sat down comfortably upon a boulder and began to single-jack and spoon the dirt out of the hole, intending to get it clear and reload and shoot it. Of course, I worked carefully because I knew there was a slim chance the dynamite was still in the hole; but it was such a slim chance I wasn't worrying about it.

Well, I should have been worrying about it, because this was the one time when appearances were deceiving. The first thing I knew, all at once all the air went out of the world for an instant—then me and my boulder were in the middle of a pillar of flame, going up. We went up a long, long way, pretty near the top of the shaft it seemed to me, and came down a little faster. Rocks and tools went up and came down, too, and pretty nearly buried me. I remember wondering: "Is this the hospital, or a coffin?"

I got out from underneath the pile and sat down again on another boulder and tried to think. I didn't seem to be dead, or even much hurt. I couldn't see at first, and thought my eyes had got it, but after I wiped the blood off my face, I saw it was the smoke and dust and not my eyesight that kept me from seeing.

Gosh, that was a relief! I felt myself all over, and I felt all right—my bones were safe, and the bruises hadn't had time to get sore. There was a great buzzing in my ears, but after a while I heard a voice coming through the buzz.

"Jim, are you dead?" Harold was crying.

I spit a dozen pebbles and a bunch of dust out of my mouth and hollered up: "Not on your life, I ain't!"

"Can you hold on? I'll haul you up!" he sang out.

I looked around. The bucket was gone, but the rope hung with the noose into which the bucket hooked just by my knee. I stepped into the noose, and give a signal jerk on the line; but I thought to myself: "Like fun you'll haul me up! You ain't got backbone enough!" Hauling me up from the bottom was a job that made two of my huskies grunt hard. I yelled: "You had best go for help; I'm too heavy!"

Just then I started to go up, by jerks. If I hadn't been so dazed and shaken, I'd have jumped off, for I was sure Harold couldn't get me to the top. But before it got into my mind to jump I was a couple of dozen feet in the air, and I was afraid of a broken leg or two upon the ragged bottom. So I held on, and swabbed my face with my sleeve.

That was an awful trip. It was worse than a dozen explosions because it never seemed to end. If I hadn't been so stupid from being blown up I think I'd have jumped and chanced it, because I knew it was a physical impossibility for that little skinny runt to hoist me sixty-five feet with that old hand-windlass. And I knew that when he got tired and let go I'd come back with a run, for there were no pawls to check a drop on the windlass.

What I didn't savvy was that a physical impossibility might be a nervous possibility. Because I tell you that guy hoisted me with his nerve, and nothing else, after his body gave out. And it gave out when I was about half-way to the top. I stopped going up by jerks then and just crawled upward by inches. It was a nice goofy feeling, believe me; I could imagine Harold playing out altogether the very next second and me busting the wind apart on my way to the bottom.

When my head got within a few feet of the top we could see each other. I saw him first, and he sure looked like he was at his very last notch. He was bending over the handle shoving it around, with his eyes shut and his mouth open, and his face red as fire, and big, knotted cords sticking out on his forehead. I was already reaching out for the edge, to grab it as soon as it came within reach, and lift the terrible strain from him.

When it was just a few inches from my finger-tips he opened his eyes and looked at me. Well, his face went from red to a dead-white, and his eyes seemed to pop out. He stopped hoisting. I thought: "It's all off

now!" I had a picture in my mind of something that happened when we were kids—a horse had run away and impaled itself on a hitching-post in front of the Argonaut House, and the blood ran all over the street, and little Harold got sick and had a fit and had to be carried home.

That was what was the matter now, I knew. He was staring at my face, and my face, I guess, looked like I had been taking a bath in a slaughter-house. The blood made him sick.

Well, it was near sixty-five feet to that jagged bottom, and I yelled out: "For God's sake, don't drop me! Just another foot!"

But he couldn't do it. The windlass handle began to creep back, although he was leaning against it, and I began to sink down in the hole. I couldn't do a thing—the sides were slick rock. I sank down out of sight, and the last thing I saw was his staring, sick, white face. I thought: "Here goes nothing!"

Then I dropped toward that death beneath me—dropped fast for ten feet or so, and brought up with a squashy jolt that nearly jerked me from my grip and foothold. Same instant I heard Harold's voice give a sharp, unearthly scream overhead.

CHAPTER VI.

ALL A MISTAKE.

I HUNG there. The rope was fast. I yelled: "Harold, Harold!" but there wasn't no answer. I tried the rope, and it held. So I lifted my foot from the noose, and began to swarm up the fifteen feet or so to the top. Say, that was some climb—my bruises were hurting then! But I made it.

I reached out and caught the edge of the shaft, and pulled myself out of the hole. First thing I saw was Harold collapsed over the windlass crank. But his body was turned around so it faced the other way.

At first I couldn't see what had saved me; but when I got to Harold's side I saw. His leg was holding up the windlass, his flesh and bone. There was a big block of wood spiked down to the windlass platform, which the boys used to set the buckets on when they unhooked them. The windlass crank cleared it by four or five inches.

Well, when Harold knew he was going to keel over, he let go the crank, and I dropped. Then he shoved his leg against the block, and the crank came around and hit it, and I stopped dropping, and he screamed. Good Lord, he had a right to scream!

I lifted him out of there, and laid him down and took a look at him. He had a broken leg, I saw plain, and he was unconscious and didn't show any signs of coming around. I couldn't see anything else wrong with him—but then I couldn't see very well, because I was bleeding so freely myself. So I hoisted him on my shoulder, and started down the hill.

About half-way down I met my gang coming up. They took charge, and had us down to the hospital in jig time. There they carried Harold away through one door, and led me away through another one, and that was the last I saw of him that day.

They took me into an operating-room, and two doctors and a hospital steward had the times of their lives digging the rocks and dirt and powder out of my head and face. Barring the loss of my winkers my eyes were all right, which was a blessing. But the rest of my mug, as the tall doctor said, "was in a shocking state." Well, they did the best they could—I'll say that for them—but you can see for yourself their best wasn't a whole lot. That blast tattooed me for life.

They wouldn't let me get out of bed for a couple of days, though I was fit as a fiddle, so I didn't see Harold. But the nurse told me, whenever I asked, that he was getting on as well as could be expected—which didn't cheer me much, because I didn't know what their expectations were. It sounded serious.

The second night I found out from an orderly where his room was, and when everything was quiet for the night I slipped out into the hall in my pajamas. A light was burning outside of Harold's room, and while I stood there trying to screw up nerve to open the door and peek in, the door opened from the inside and the tall doctor

who had messed with my face stood looking at me.

"Hello, what's this?" he says.

"Please, sir, tell me how he is," says I.

"Oh—you're the chap whose life he saved," he says. "Well, well—he's all right. Go back to bed. You are breaking rules."

"Yes, sir—but it ain't just that he saved my life," I told him. "Lieutenant Beebe and me are from the same town, and we been bosom friends all our lives."

"That so?" said he. "I didn't know that. Same town, eh? Come in."

Harold was lying in a little white bed, with a nurse bending over him. The doctor and I walked to his side, and I took a good look at him. Say—I wanted to cry! The poor devil sure looked like a sick man. His eyes were closed, and I thought he was asleep.

"Not his leg," says the doctor. "It will be all right. His heart—overexertion. But he will be all right. Nervy youngster. You'll be able to thank him in a day or two."

Harold opened his eyes, and looked right at me, and through me. He began to talk in a low voice. I heard the words.

"He is talking about the girl again, sir," says the nurse.

"Yes. Touch of fever. All right in the morning," says the doctor. "Now, young man—back to bed with you. You are disobeying orders—mind to report you. Back to your ward you go. Run along!"

I saluted and beat it, and got back to my bed without any one seeing me. Then I lay awake for a long time trying to figure things out.

Next morning, early, I squared the ward orderly by slipping him a bag of makings, and he smuggled me down-stairs to the telephone-booth. I rang up the Western Union in San Francisco and dictated a telegram to Grass Valley. I says: "Harold in hospital, hurt. Telegraph him love. Jim." Then I went back to bed feeling a little better. I wanted to show the two of them that I wasn't such a bad loser.

When the doctor came through on his morning round he let me get up and dress. Said if I took care not to excite myself I might sit out on the porch in the sun during the afternoon. That was pie to me. As soon as I got out on the porch I beat it down the road to the wharf and sat down there and waited for the mail tug. I was sure there would be a message for Harold, and I wanted to carry it to him.

The mail tug was due at four o'clock, and about a half-hour before that time the passenger launch came in from Oakland Mole. I didn't pay any attention to it until it was tying up to the dock just beneath where I was sitting. Then—say, I nearly keeled over in a faint—for there was Addie herself just climbing out of it. Aggie Post was with her. It knocked me all in a heap. I hadn't supposed she'd rush down to Harold's bedside in that way.

I was by her side by the time she got on the wharf. "Hello, Addie—he's all right!" says I.

She looked at me kind of blank and startled. Then I realized that maybe she couldn't know me. I was in uniform, and all of my face that showed through the bandages was my eyes and mouth. Guess I looked pretty horrible.

"It's me—Jim. I sent you the telegram, Addie," I says.

"Jim!" she cried. And she just looked at me for a minute, her eyes getting bigger and bigger. Then she grabbed me by both arms, and said: "Jim, are you hurt, too?"

"Oh, nothing serious," says I. "I'll be all right in a day or two."

Well, sir, she just put her arms around me and hugged me, and put her head on my shirt and bawled. Yes, she did! I thought she was just overwrought, and I patted her on the shoulder like I would any frightened kid, and I says: "Now, now, don't carry on like that, Addie. Harold's all right." Then I bowed to Aggie, who was standing there quiet, and saying nothing, and twisting a little handkerchief in her hands. "Aggie's a brick to have come down with you," I says.

"She didn't come down with me—I came down with her!" said Addie.

I didn't get it at all. I looked at Aggie again. She spoke up, stuttering her words like I'd never heard her do before:

"Is—is—is he hurt—hurt bad?" she asked.

"Just a busted leg," I told her. "He'll dance a jig on it just as soon as he sees Addie."

Addie broke away from me, and stamped her foot, and said: "Oh, you big stupid—*won't* you understand?"

"Understand what?" I asked.

"It isn't *me* Harold wants to see. It's Aggie!"

I just wiggled my hands. I couldn't talk.

"They've been in love and engaged for three years," went on Addie. "I just helped them. It had to be that way because of Harold's father. Now, don't you understand?"

I shook my head, hopelesslike. It was too much for me.

Then Addie softened all at once, and hugged me again, and looked up in my face, and says: "Oh, Jim, did it change your face very much?"

Well, what could a guy do? I was just dizzy with the feel of her, and the sight of her. And I couldn't mistake that look on her face. It was meant for me. Say—talk about glory! There were fellows standing all round looking at us, and a sentry standing three feet away, grinning like a Chinatown idol—I just turned my back on the sentry, and kissed Addie as well as I could through the bandages.

We all went up to the hospital, and I went in alone and braced the tall doctor in his office.

"Sir, Lieutenant Beebe's girl is here," says I, "and would like awfully well to see him."

He looked at me most severe. "How did she get here?" he asked.

"Train from Grass Valley, boat from the Mole, sir," I said. "She's most anxious, sir."

"Seems to me," says he, "that some men around here think that rules are made to be broken."

"Then she can see him, sir?" says I.

"Yes, yes — temperature down — great improvement," he remarked. "Where is she?"

He followed me outside, and bowed to the girls. "Which lady is it?" he asked.

Well, I hadn't caught my breath yet, and I couldn't answer for the life of me. But Addie nodded to Aggie, who stood there very pale, saying nothing, and twisting her handkerchief. The doctor shook hands with her, and told her in that way of his that made you believe him that Harold was all right, and that she mustn't excite him.

Then Addie said to him: "And Jim—er—Mr. McNeil—he'll be all right?"

The doctor looked at us and laughed, and said: "Miss, I am of the opinion that the only thing that will ever seriously disturb Private McNeil is discipline—or marriage. Dynamite can't do it. We'll leave you to talk it over." With that he took Aggie up-stairs with him, chuckling like he'd pulled a good joke.

By and-by a nurse came out on the porch where Addie and me were sitting in an inglenook and says that we were wanted in Lieutenant Beebe's room. So we went up there, hand-in-hand.

Aggie was sitting beside the bed, and Harold was propped up on the pillows. Addie ran to him, and kissed him, just like a sister might. "Oh, Harold, I'm so happy!" she says. "Jim understands. Oh, Aggie, aren't you happy?" And she kissed Aggie, and came over and snuggled up against me.

Harold looked sort of hard at me for an instant; then he smiled, and put out his hand, and covered Aggie's hand, which was on the bed-spread.

"I told Jim his not liking me was all a mistake," says he.

(The End.)

Vials of Hate

by George C. Shedd

Author of "The Red Road," "Cold Steel," etc.

WHAT HAS ALREADY HAPPENED

PENNILESS and starving, Jerry Moffat, after an encounter with two beautiful girls, apparently of foreign birth, came to the assistance of Louis Gaillard, who had been the victim of a mysterious attack. In a pocket of one of the assailants, however, whom Jerry had knocked out, they found a note informing the man where he would find Gaillard, and signed: "E."

Thereafter, accepting Gaillard's offer of assistance, and attired in one of the latter's suits, Jerry dined with his benefactor at the Giltmore, observing there a meeting between Gaillard and the same two girls, whom he heard his new employer address as "Zorrilla." Jerry gathered that there was some sort of a feud between the families, and later he was certain of it when, overhearing a conversation between the girls and a man known as Emilio Barbanera.

Set to watch and trail this individual by Gaillard, Jerry, while at the hotel, saw Gaillard leave with a blond woman whom he had previously seen in intimate talk with Barbanera. And when the woman, Anita Carley by name, had decoyed Gaillard to a noisome tenement, where he was bound to a chair and drugged, Jerry, trailing Barbanera, rescued his new-found friend, carrying him, chair and all, into the first doorway that offered.

There he found a small girl, who, at Jerry's promise of a dollar, suggested his escape through the window. Borrowing a knife from the girl, Jerry cut Gaillard's bonds, carried him to the window and the fire-escape. Sounds of a commotion arose from without. A fist hammered on the door.

Jerry raised his burden and pushed it through the window. Then he crawled after it.

"Hurry!" the child whispered.

CHAPTER VI.

A MESSAGE FROM THE SOUTH.

A HOARSE voice, as well as the banging fist, was demanding entrance.

"You're a game kid. Here's another dollar; you've earned it," were Jerry's parting words, spoken from without.

The girl snatched the money and began to pull at the sash, which came down with a screech. Next Jerry heard her shrilly asking who knocked.

He slung Gaillard across his shoulder, grasped the iron rail with his free hand, went down, step by step, in the darkness. At length his groping foot found no rest. Thereupon he lowered his friend by the wrist and let him drop, for the distance to earth could not be far. Afterward he swung down himself, exercising what care he could to avoid the unconscious man.

As he again shouldered his friend, the window above was flung up and a head thrust out. Jerry stood unmoving. Then the head was withdrawn, but a voice came down to him clearly:

"Don't lie and tell me you've seen nobody."

The response was quick, given in an angry, piping treble:

"Get outa here, you big stiff, or my ma will beat you up with a mop till you won't know yourself."

Jerry chuckled in the darkness. And he continued to chuckle as he stumbled along the alley, until that shrill child's voice, keeping up an incessant fire of threats, no longer reached him. When he arrived near the street he halted for a precautionary scrutiny.

But here all was quiet.

"This is twice in one evening that supper is squared, Mr. Gaillard," he said aloud to himself with satisfaction.

Then he strode forth and up to the dark shape of the taxicab reposing by the corner.

This story began in The Argosy for May 29.

Opening its door, he deposited his charge in a corner of the seat, after which he stood back to search for his package of cigarettes. When he had one going, he shook the fur-muffled chauffeur awake.

"All right; I'm back," he said. "Uptown again." And Jerry entered the car.

"Where—where the devil am I?" came from Gaillard in a thick mutter as the taxicab moved away.

"With your friend Jerry. Just sit tight if you feel sick; we'll be home soon."

"Jerry? What Jer—oh, Jeremiah. I'm beginning to recall things. A little hazy yet. We were dining—and—"

"I went to learn something of a man named Emilio."

"Yes."

"Well, I learned it," said Jerry in a pleased tone.

He had not acquired all the knowledge concerning the little, mustache-twirling gentleman, Emilio Barbanera, that he could have wished, but he had done very well, very well indeed, considering everything. And, besides, he had "gummed" the little devil's game.

During the rest of the ride Gaillard spoke no more. He reclined against the cushions with every evidence of suffering the ill after-effects to be expected from a severe subjection of his nervous system to the stupefying drug. Doubtless it was the purpose of the conspirators to keep him in a comatose condition until Barbanera had returned and got him aboard the vessel engaged to carry him away.

As to the main circumstances of the hostility between Gaillard and the Zorrillas, Jerry Moffat was yet pretty much in the dark. The two attempts against Louis Gaillard showed only that the existing animosity was real, that his enemies were in motion, that his life was in danger. Beyond that Jerry's mind came full against a dark mystery. Who were the Zorrillas? Who, indeed, was this new friend, Gaillard?

That all of the chief actors in the strange affair were from the South, he already had decided. The soft and liquid speech of those whose utterances he had heard—of Gaillard, of Emilio Barbanera, of the two girls, Isabel and Felipa Zorrilla—with a characteristic slurring of r's and a broadening of vowels, readily supported that inference.

It was "down South" enunciation, as Jerry would have put it. But from what particular part of the South these extraordinary people had come he could not for the life of him determine.

While the taxicab was rapidly speeding northward he busied himself with these speculations. The region in which French and Spanish blood, and especially from colonial times, predominated, was not great. It embraced the stretch of Gulf Coast from Florida to Texas. Somewhere here, likely, the Gaillards and Zorrillas were rooted. Well, doubtless he would know in time.

He was to know sooner than he had anticipated. On reaching their destination he assisted Gaillard into the elevator and up to his apartment.

"A caller has been here twice to see you, Mr. Gaillard," the elevator-boy stated before closing his door. "He said he would return again."

"Very well, let him telephone first when he comes." And to Jerry he added: "I scarcely feel up to entertaining visitors to-night."

His face retained a grayish tinge, as his companion noted; his eyes had lost their luster; his movements were languid. But at the end of half an hour, when he had had a cold shower and a glass of brandy, he manifested a revived interest in his adventure.

He came forth from his bedroom, wearing a dressing-gown and smoking a cigarette, while his bearing revealed its former alertness.

"This chloroform spree is about over, except a slight queasiness in the pit of my stomach," he remarked. "Now, my boy, I didn't blunder into that place alone. There was a young lady with me. Did you see anything of her?"

"Yes," said Jerry in an odd tone. "No harm came to her; I imagine she's at her home now."

"Good news. I half fancied it would be necessary to return there and look for her. On the ride here my brain was too dizzy

from the fumes of that miserable anesthetic to recall anything clearly. I should have been broken-hearted if those scoundrels had misused her." He sat down at the table. "I'll see if I can get her on the phone."

In this he was successful, as his pleased utterance presently indicated. While a conversation consisting of mutual inquiries and answers ensued, Jerry rose and thoughtfully paced to and fro at the end of the room. His fists were thrust into his trouser pockets, his chin was pressed down hard upon his collar. This angle was the most difficult of all.

Gaillard was strongly taken with, if not actually in love with the blue-eyed, innocent-faced girl, Anita Carley, who had decoyed him by some means or other into the hands of Emilio Barbanera. Probably he would disbelieve any word spoken against her. Jerry's problem was whether or not to reveal her duplicity at all.

"They released her after they had chloroformed me," Gaillard said, after hanging up the receiver. "Their plan, apparently, was to remove me to some other place and keep me prisoner until I had paid what they demanded, by what she gathered from the men's scraps of talk. And they wanted to be rid of her. So she was released, with threats to kill her if she informed my friends or the police."

"Ah," said Jerry, as if impressed.

Gaillard crossed over to where the youth stood to place his hand on Jerry's shoulder.

"Now that my mind's relieved in respect to her, it's time I expressed my gratitude to you," he said, fixing his eyes on the other's. "I don't know how you happened to show up, but you did, and my debt to you is very heavy. You've already proved your value to me, and your friendship. This evening you said you wanted a job. Do you still want one?"

"Yes."

"After your experiences in my company so far, how do you like them?"

"Fine!"

"Association with me will probably grow more dangerous rather than less as time goes on."

"That doesn't scare me."

"I don't believe it does," said Gaillard smiling. "Are you foot-loose? Does it make any difference where you go?"

"Not a particle," said Jerry airily.

"Then consider yourself engaged. We'll arrange the emolument later." Gaillard dropped his hand from Jerry's shoulder, turned and walked back to the table.

"Engaged to do what?"

"That will be arranged according to circumstances," was the reply. "But you're on salary from this date."

Jerry's lips puckered as if he were giving a silent whistle, then he grinned. That queer, off-hand way of settling the matter was quite what he might have expected from Gaillard. To be employed at something of which neither of them yet knew was in line with all the rest of the occurrences of the evening.

Gaillard was lighting a fresh cigarette.

"Tell me about getting me away from that gang," he said, throwing himself upon a divan.

Jerry thereupon briefly related the successive stages of the rescue, all exact except that portion dealing with Anita Carley. She was altogether omitted from the recital. When he had finished, Gaillard smoked and meditated for several minutes.

"Then those in the room were this Emilio Barbanera's men," he stated. "And I was to have been taken to sea and scuttled, as it were. My dear Jerry, you've either told me too much or too little."

The youth felt his face turning red. Evidently his narrative had not been as cunningly composed as he had imagined it to be, for the other found in it flaws.

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"Just this. Miss Carley said that it was about eleven o'clock when she was released, and by your calculations it was scarcely that hour when you followed Barbanera into the house. I believe, when I asked before telephoning, that you replied you had seen her, though you made no explanations as to the circumstances under which you did see the young lady. Nor in your account did you clear up that point. That's an obscurity I'll be pleased to have you remove."

Jerry was in quandary. He decided to give the truth, whatever its effect.

"What are your relations with this girl?" he demanded bluntly.

"She's a very good friend."

"What do you know of her?"

"Not a great deal, and all of that's to her credit."

Jerry hunted for his cigarettes and began to smoke, too.

"Well, I know perhaps less and perhaps more of her than you do," he stated, "and all to her discredit. How did you happen to be with her down in that part of town and in that old, ramshackle building, if you'll pardon the question?"

Gaillard smiled at this interrogation.

"Miss Carley has a scapegrace of a brother, who was there ill, and a note from him apprised her of the fact. She besought my company in making a visit to him."

"And you didn't find him," said Jerry with a nod.

"No, we didn't get that far."

"You went as far as it had been planned for you to go, Mr. Gaillard. The men in the room were waiting for you. When the attack on the street failed, my opinion is that Barbanera's pair of scoundrels informed him of the fact at once, and he immediately concocted a new scheme to bring you into his power. You will remember that while we were here earlier in the evening you had a telephone call from this girl asking for an appointment? Well, there you are. Two and two make four."

No response came from the other. He sat weighing Jerry's words with every appearance of the gravity they deserved. From his expression, however, the youth was unable to determine whether or not he was displeased. Jerry plunged ahead, with a rising tide of feeling:

"You're right; I didn't tell you all that I saw. I hesitated because I feared—well, I thought you might be very fond of her."

The smile that Gaillard now showed was amused.

"My feeling doesn't go quite that far," he remarked. "I have it well in hand. We are friends, but no more than that—yet."

"She's no friend of yours; I overheard enough spoken to learn that. She came out of the room where I afterward found you, and talked with this Barbanera; I was hiding on the staircase just above them. She's a 'plant,' that's all. The man hired her to trick you; set her up in the rooms where she's living, and gives her orders; he's been laying the groundwork of his plans for some time, I'd say; and to-day's happenings are the culmination of his schemes. When they left the house, they went together in a cab to her rooms, where she was to receive the balance of the money due her.

"You were led into a trap by this girl, and that's the plain fact of the case. Sick brother! I tell you, Mr. Gaillard, any person who would accept money and agree to do what she did is a crook at heart. She's just starting, but she'll follow a bad trail before she's done, or I miss my guess. Though she was scared, and hates Barbanera, yet she went home and took the rest of the money owing her—or at least I think so. And she lied to you just now."

Then he added: "I would have no object in distorting the truth of this, would I? You've known me but a few hours; still, you ought to be able, from what I've done, to judge of my veracity."

"To be sure," said Gaillard. "I remember one of the four men in the room was the fellow you knocked insensible on the step. That puzzled me."

"So he was there."

"Yes; but I didn't connect him with Miss Carley. Several minor points confirm your words. For one, she insisted on our trying the room we entered, instead of another farther along the hall, which I imagined to be the place we sought. And her manner, both during our ride thither and when we were on the stair, was peculiar."

"She's as pretty and smooth a decoy as Barbanera could have found in all New York. I have not told you, moreover, that she met the man for a moment in the hotel vestibule near where I sat while you were writing your letter. When your appointment after dinner turned out to be with her, my wonder was aroused, and my suspicion also, since you had set me to watch Barbanera."

"She's a very plausible young person, with an excellent ability for acting, it ap-

pears," said Gaillard. "But what I should like to know above all else—"

He did not conclude his sentence, for the telephone, rang and he turned to answer. He listened, gave a start. "Pacheteau!" he cried. "Come up, come up instantly."

As he paced to and fro, his hands in the pockets of his dressing-gown, while awaiting his visitor, he seemed to have forgotten Jerry Moffat. His face was more perturbed, more anxious, more a playground for flickering emotions than the youth had yet seen it. Indeed, Gaillard was vastly more moved for some reason than he had been by either the attack on the street or his imprisonment in the old tenement.

At last he strode out of the room into the passageway leading to the elevator. A moment passed. Jerry heard the steel door of the car open and again close. Excited voices came to his ear. Then Gaillard returned, leading a little, round-shouldered old man, exceedingly brown of face, with a white mustache and goatee, whose head was covered with a wide-brimmed hat and who carried a small, worn valise.

The newcomer was talking and gesticulating in great agitation—talking in French, which Jerry could not understand, while Gaillard continually patted him on the back and uttered assuring expressions.

But at sight of the youth the stranger stopped both his voluble outpouring of words and his gestures.

"My good Pacheteau, allow me to present to you my friend, Mr. Jerry Moffat; and to you, Jerry, an old friend and confidant of my family," Gaillard said.

The little old man removed his wide-brimmed hat with his left hand, while still grasping his valise with his right, and bowed with a certain ancient punctilio, a dignified decorum. Then, in English marked by a strong French accent, he addressed Moffat with two or three graceful and polite phrases, to which Jerry did his best to respond in kind.

"You will remove your hat and coat, and give me your bag, and say not another word of this matter until you have a glass of wine," Gaillard declared, politely.

When he was finally well settled and had swallowed a portion of his glass of Burgundy, he resumed, with a word of apology to the youth, his rapid, impassioned recital in French to which Gaillard listened with keen attention, an occasional question, and a face growing ever darker.

At last he made an end of his story—an end punctuated by a fierce uplift of his white mustache, a shaking of both clenched hands in the air, and hissed words like imprecations.

Gaillard faced Moffat.

"You may as well know this," he exclaimed. "My old and trusted plantation superintendent has vanished, my workmen are being frightened away, and a property belonging to me, but whose title has long been disputed by the Zorrillas, has been seized."

He got suddenly to his feet and cried in a bitter voice: "They would destroy the last Gaillard; they would wipe out my race. May the curse of hell fall on each and every Zorrilla, that family of Spanish vipers, those living and those dead."

Jerry's face became sober. He was beginning only now to realize the depth of hatred lying between these two ancient families, the full measure of it, as if it were the only reason for existence. And the prospect of a job with "the last Gaillard" looked at the moment rather more lurid than alluring.

"Well, he might not last long, but he would have good meals and plenty of excitement while he did last, at any rate. Then a thought occurred to him.

"Does that benediction of yours include the two young ladies we saw this evening at the hotel, Miss Isabel and Miss Felipa?" he inquired.

Gaillard's eyes flashed.

"They are Zorrillas," he said.

CHAPTER VII.

BLACK WATER.

EIGHTEEN hours later Gaillard, Jerry Moffat, and Pacheteau were flying southward from New York on a fast New Orleans train. The news brought by the

little man with the white imperial had set Gaillard stirring. He had secured Pullman space, hastily arranged his New York business affairs against his absence, and the three men had departed.

During that journey Jerry Moffat became conscious of a change in his new friend, as they drew farther and farther off from the metropolis and nearer the scene of the Gaillard and Zorrilla strife. He was like a man revealing a new and different character. His smile took on a sharper edge; his eyes showed dark and enigmatical gleams; and at times he fell into a reserve of manner at once cold, absorbed, impenetrable.

And, indeed, in the very lines of his face itself there appeared an alteration; they were deeper, firmer, more striking, as if the blood of his race, the spirit of all Gaillards before him, asserted their power.

Under the suddenly revived attacks of the Zorrillas he was becoming a Gaillard, proud, fierce, self-contained; doubtless, with the passing of time he would disclose himself as bold, as reckless, as crafty, and as handsome an enemy as his family had produced, or the Zorrillas ever met.

At New Orleans the party immediately went aboard another train, from which, after a short ride, they alighted. The village was but a collection of weather-beaten, dingy houses and negro cabins in a heavy pine timber. The hour was late in the afternoon, with the quick dusk of the south just beginning.

To Jerry there was in the spot an air of isolation, of abandonment, of being leagues away from civilization, which even the iron railroad-track failed to banish, and which the long beards of moss hanging from an occasional live-oak tree increased. It was as if they were buried in a trackless region.

When he expressed this feeling to Gaillard, the latter gave a quiet laugh, saying: "You think so? Just wait until you're at the end of the journey."

"Then this isn't the end?"

"By no means, my dear Jerry. Yonder, behind that dense mass of vegetation you see in the twilight, is a bayou, and by it we proceed by boat for some hours."

"To-night? In the darkness?"

"The boatmen know their way as well as they know the palms of their black hands," said Louis Gaillard. "We start at once. Pacheteau has gone to find the man. Ah, there he comes now, I think. The boys with him are from my plantation, and have been awaiting our arrival."

The boys, so-called, were two stalwart, muscular negroes, who grinned a welcome at Gaillard, and removing their shabby hats, made scrapes and obsequious bows. Gaillard smiled, patted them on the shoulder, and addressed them in French, at which their white teeth gleamed delightedly.

"Come, Jerry," he said at length, turning about. "They will bring our traps. Pacheteau is already impatient. Put on your overcoat before entering the boat, for the nights are chill at this season of the year. Because we're near the Gulf, don't imagine that the air is balmy in winter, for it's not. You can be very cold here at times." And he set off along a path leading past the village into the wood.

Presently they penetrated a heavy growth of underbrush and came out on the bank of a stream, where was moored a small motor-boat. Into this they stepped, the bags were stowed away, and the negroes untied the rope. Then the water journey was begun.

Of that long and devious passage Jerry retained but confused recollections. Night fell almost immediately after their start, so that all he saw was gained by aid of the search-light in the bow of the boat—limited views of the dark, almost currentless stream, glimpses of overhanging trees heavy with moss, and gleams from tributary creeks that were repellent in aspect and mysterious in origin.

He never before had been in a region of the kind. It both astonished and oppressed him, as if he sensed in it something infernal as well as solitary. No wonder men who lived in such surroundings held strange ideas and pursued primitive hates, thought Jerry. He had not a doubt but that there were sections of this wilderness where no human foot had stepped, for immense expanses of it he

saw were no better than marsh, with the water-courses the only possible ways of passage.

Bred as he had been in a northern State, with all of a Northerner's habits and prejudices; educated in an Ohio college; accustomed to a fertile country and thriving towns; he found himself here in an environment that had never been conjured up even in his wildest dreams.

Now and again the gaunt, gray specter of a fallen tree thrust itself into the water, or the wriggle of a water-snake stirred the stream, or from the mud-banks at some bend came a glint of basilisklike orbs above a long snout. Yet over all reigned a profound silence so heavy that the low pulsations of the motor seemed to move it only in slow, viscous waves. It was the silence of stagnant air, of wet, miasmatic woods, of inert life.

Once they glided by an immense canebrake, the tall, slender, jointed canes glistening in the rays cast by the boat's light. The thought of a man lost in such a place sent a shiver along Jerry's spine; he would never have a chance. He would struggle hopelessly, sink in the morass, vanish. To him it seemed even that the men who first had followed the waterways through this region had an intrepidity of spirit far beyond common. Imagine it! And of such had been the early Gaillards.

Thus, hour after hour, along streams, along bayous, across wide pools, through swamps, the boat pursued its course, steadily, surely, winding and twisting and threading its way under the steering hand of one of the negroes. Except that he knew the general direction to be southerly, Jerry was wholly lost as to the points of the compass taken.

"If it entered your head to keep me in here for life," he said to Gaillard, "you could easily do so. For I myself could never find the way out."

"Oh, it's not as bad as that. We finish not far from the sea; you can smell its brine now."

Jerry sniffed.

"All I can smell is mud," said he. "How do you walk around your plantation? On stilts? Or are you all web-footed?"

"You'll discover yourself on solid ground when we land," Gaillard assured him.

Such proved to be the case. When toward midnight the boat, all at once, and at a small pier, he saw that the latter extended from a bank of firm earth lying some feet above the water.

"What is this, an island?" he asked.

"One can call it that—an island in a marsh, and not exactly a small island, either," was the reply. "By day you'll be able to gain a good notion of its nature and extent. Well, here are the steps; let us go up."

"But you're miles and miles from any one."

"If it were only that, all would be well, Jerry. But, unfortunately, I'm not alone; you forget the Zorrillas."

"Then they are here also."

"Very much so. We divide the 'island' between us, and fight very prettily over it, as from the first day a Gaillard and a Zorrilla pressed foot on the soil."

A servant with a lantern came toward the pier, and after giving his master greeting conducted the two men forward under some enormous live-oaks. They walked on a path of crushed shell, gleaming whitely in front of them. On either side was a row of young plants.

After a five-minute advance they came into an open space where loomed a large structure which Gaillard announced to be the house. Except for white columns in front, and a door of noble proportions, Jerry Moffat saw little of it, but when he had passed into the wide hall he realized that the building must be of good size.

They came into a long room paneled in some dark wood, with a lofty ceiling and lighted by candles burning in a candlestick of three branches, which stood on a table. On the table, too, an old, withered Frenchwoman was placing a plate of sandwiches and a decanter of wine, who ran to Louis Gaillard and embraced him and kissed him on both cheeks.

"See, she doesn't forget me," Gaillard exclaimed to his companion.

"Forget you! Ah, M. Louis, is it likely, I, who nursed you when an infant?" she

cried. "And you've not yet brought home a bride?"

"She won't be happy until she sees me handing a bride into this room, Jerry."

"But you wait and wait and wait, my lazy Louis." The old woman spread her hands in a gesture of despair. "Long ago the house should have had a mistress. Were your parents alive, you would have had a thousand scoldings; and were your grandfather sitting yonder—e-euh, how fiercely he would frown."

Louis Gaillard laughed and kissed her on the brow, and with a signal to Jerry seated himself at the table.

"The first glass I drink shall be to you, *maman*—to you, the only woman I love," said he. And when presently she had withdrawn, he remarked to his companion: "My old nurse. A heart of gold."

He finished the sandwich he was eating and swallowed the rest of his wine and rose. "Are you weary? Will you retire now? Or do you prefer to smoke and wait for my return? I must consult one or two persons without delay to learn if anything harmful to my interests has happened since Pacheteau departed to bring me warning."

"I'll wait," said Jerry.

"Very well. There are cigars, cigarettes, pipes in that cabinet, and here is the decanter. Make yourself comfortable. Or if you wish, there's a stretch of turf before the door where you can take the stiffness out of your legs."

"The latter will suit me."

"Let us go out, then," said Gaillard.

Outside the house, when his host had gone off, Jerry began to pace up and down on the grass. Betimes a waning moon arose in the east, which gave the youth his bearings and a view of the place where he stood.

Gaillard's dwelling was a handsome white structure, he perceived, doubtless of great age, but, being built of some enduring wood, possibly live-oak, was in an excellent state of preservation and well kept. Six columns, widely spaced, and supporting the projection of the room, as well as a second-story "gallery," marked the front. On one side, toward the rear, there extended a considerable wing. And behind the house itself, at some distance, glimmering among trees, he could see small, white dwellings that were servants' quarters.

In front the ground had evidently long ago been cleared and planted to turf, flowers, and ornamental palms that now had grown to huge, spreading masses of fronds sixty or seventy feet high. This open space was perhaps a hundred yards wide, with dense growths of trees on either side, and ran eastward for perhaps three hundred paces to a body of water.

Jerry noted that the air was milder here than when he had left the train, and he could smell the sea. He began to stroll forward. The calm, the moonlit beauty of the grounds, the night peace, charmed him. This was Gaillard's domain, and a splendid one, though buried in marshes.

He found himself at length upon the edge of the water he had seen from the house. He looked southward where at a distance it seemed to expand, and he fancied that he could behold there a shimmer like that of the Gulf. Then he gazed across the bayou at the opposite bank, where trees, grounds, and another great white house showed themselves. Thus but fifty yards of water separated the two places.

Jerry stared at that other house. For he knew who dwelt there, knew without being told. And all at once it appeared to take on a sinister aspect, as if at its windows fierce, malevolent eyes were posted. It was the house of the Zorrillas.

This narrow bayou of black water divided the island, if it could be called that, and formed the boundary line between the properties of the two families. It seemed a clear boundary, a natural boundary.

Jerry was perplexed why two houses, two lines, each with several thousand rich acres in cultivation, by what his friend had revealed, should not have lived in peace at this spot. That portion of ground owned by Gaillard lay to the westward, while Zorrilla's spread east of the bayou. No cause for dispute there.

He gazed at the water, as if perhaps it might afford an answer to his question. Under the moon it stretched like a black mirror, apparently bottomless, at the mo-

ment without a ripple. By it the boat in which he had come had made the final part of the journey, and on its bank some distance northward he had landed. Its water possessed an inky quality, or thus it seemed to the youth; a blackness that eminently fitted the hatred lying between the two houses. It was as if that hatred had poured out here and filled the channel.

He shivered slightly in the humid air. Then he pulled himself together with a start, for he found himself staring at that black water in a sort of fascination, an unpleasant self-hypnosis. Next instant he stood as if congealed to ice, unable to move, unable to utter a sound. For rising in that water before his eyes was a face, pale, ghastly, fixed in a horrible grimace—the face of a dead man.

Slowly it arose, as if to leer at Jerry Moffat, and as slowly sank again. With a shudder he continued to stare for a time at the place where it had vanished. After that he gulped, breathed hard for a minute or so, then wheeling, he ran for the house as if all the Zorrillas were at his heels.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE BONE OF CONTENTION.

IN this state of alarm Moffat arrived at the dwelling and came into the room where burned the candles. Standing there by the table, he harkened for a time with the strained expectation something more would happen, pale, nerves on edge, ready to start at the sound. But the house was still.

At last he poured himself a glass of wine from the decanter, swallowing it avidly, and sank into a cane chair. He should have the devil's own dreams this night when he got to bed, what with the Stygian boat ride hither, and now what with that dead man in the black water—that is, if he slept at all, which he doubted.

Gaillard, on his return half an hour later, marked the youth's changed manner.

"What's wrong, Moffat?" he questioned.

With what calm he could command Jerry narrated his shocking experience, to which the other listened with close attention.

"That would make one's flesh crawl, I confess," said he.

"Mine did, at any rate."

"The movement of the body was caused by the current," said Gaillard, "or rather tide, which reaches up into the bayou; and the dead man would be going out with its ebb."

"Which saves you and the Zorrillas the trouble of disposing of corpses," Jerry remarked, dryly.

"It might be considered a convenience," Gaillard stated, with a shadowy smile. "It was reported to me, further, that a spy from over yonder was discovered landing and was knocked into the water by one of my men, shortly before we arrived. What his fate was remained unknown; but your discovery clears it up. The blow he received evidently killed him outright or rendered him unconscious so that he drowned. One of the laws of this place is that a man's life is forfeit on hostile ground, except when the visit is open, arranged beforehand, and, as it were, official."

"Then you do observe laws here?" said Jerry, ironically.

"A number of unwritten laws, yes—and they're observed very punctiliously."

"It's a wonder you trust each other a particle."

"In matters of honor as they interpret them, no one is more fastidious than Gaillards and Zorillas. These laws of which I speak are, I may say, rather understandings running back to the beginning of the quarrel. I can see how they would strike you as old. And they are few; you could write them all down on a single sheet of paper. There are certain mutual advantages to both sides in such an arrangement, which it's not necessary to go into now."

"And what are some of these understandings besides the one you mention?"

"Well, the bayou is neutral water, for instance," Gaillard stated. "Women are never molested, for another thing. I'll enumerate them all for your benefit some time soon, so that you will not ignorantly run your neck into danger."

"It's a wonder," said Jerry, "that in all the time the two families have lived here some sons and daughters of the Gaillards

and Zorrillas haven't thickened the plot by falling in love with each other."

His host laughed.

"Oh, that has occurred about every alternate generation," said he. "One pair eloped to Havana, another to New Orleans, and others elsewhere, so that there are collateral lines of Gaillards and Zorrillas. They were not always successful in their flights, for the girl's family, in each particular instance, went in pursuit and sometimes overtook the pair, ending the affair abruptly by a sword-thrust or a bullet in the body of the youth responsible for the elopement. I think the score is about even between our two houses, in the number of daughters thus gained, in the gallants slain, and in the count of escapes. But these episodes haven't lessened the feeling between us; indeed, only given it a keener edge."

"And does this feeling extend to your people?"

"Not entirely. Among the negroes there's always more or less secret visiting back and forth, which we shut our eyes to on both sides of the bayou. No harm comes of it; on occasion it is useful. Usually, you should know, we live in a state of armed neutrality, as it were; and it's only at some overt act or fancied grievance that our hatred flames forth.

"For five years past there has been quiet, while we each grew our sugar and cotton and rice. Why the Zorrillas have suddenly taken up the sword is unknown to me, unless that old scoundrel of a Hernando, the head of the house, has been peaceful as long as it is possible for one of his nature to be."

"In New York Pacheteau spoke of his having seized a part of your property."

"Yes, I'll show it to you to-morrow."

"Well, who is Barbanera, and where does he come into the game?" Jerry inquired.

"That I've yet to learn."

"And the two young ladies? What were they doing there?"

"The Zorrillas go traveling at times, as do I." Then he added: "They weren't there alone, of course. Some aunt or other accompanied them." He remained in thought for a little, pursing his lips. "That Isabel, now! She had the face and violet eyes of a true Zorrilla. They come down in the line as straight as a die.

"She wasn't wanting in spirit, either."

"That accompanies the face and eyes," said Gaillard, with his tight-lipped smile. "But come, my boy, we should be abed. Take one of these candles and follow me; I'll show you your chamber." And he likewise lifted a light from its socket.

In the room to which his host led him on the floor above Jerry found his bags, containing the clothes with which he had outfitted himself before leaving New York. The room was large, lofty, furnished with huge old mahogany pieces that undoubtedly had been in the house from the beginning.

His windows gave upon the gallery, affording a view of the grounds down to the bayou; and when Gaillard had left him he took a long look thither before blowing out his candle, climbing into the great bed, and pulling the mosquito netting shut after him. And quite as he expected, his dreams were a medley of horrible marshes, dead men, and desperate struggles.

When he awoke next morning, breakfasted with Gaillard, and went forth from the house in his company, it seemed that all which had happened could be but the figments of a disordered imagination. The sun shone brightly, mocking birds were singing in the trees, a balmy breeze was blowing from the south, which Louis Gaillard announced as the forerunner of spring, and the world wore an aspect altogether fair and harmonious.

In their walk they came, after traversing the wood at the rear of the house—a thick growth of live-oaks, magnolias and cypress trees, attesting by their great trunks their extreme age— to a street of small, white-painted houses in gardens where flowers were already beginning to bloom. The neatness and the somewhat foreign character of the dwellings caught Moffat's fancy.

"Here are where the white families live," said Gaillard. "The men are my plantation and mill overseers; I've a cotton-gin, a sugar-mill, and a machine-shop. They direct the blacks, who do the manual labor."

"And these white people are French?"

"Of French descent, that is. Some of the families have been here from the first; take Pacheteau, for example. There's been a Pacheteau in this place since the first Gaillard. Other of the families came later, from New Orleans or its neighborhood. We're all Creole people, you see. We all speak English, to be sure, but French is the common tongue west of the bayou, as is Spanish east of it."

"And the negroes?"

"French, too. Like the whites, they've been here pretty much from the beginning, being originally from New Orleans and a few even from Martinique. Came as slaves, of course. Most of them have never been away from the spot, and will live and die here. They're satisfied, they're happy, they receive good wages and good care; why shouldn't they be? Their village is a quarter of a mile off behind that clump of trees. Counting the women and children, there are some two hundred of them."

"The Zorrilla plantation is similar, I suppose."

"Yes."

"How do you market your stuff?"

"Easily, my boy. I've a fair-sized schooner, which carries my bales of cotton and bags of rice and hogsheads of sugar, and such other stuff as I have to sell—moss, pigs, yams, and so on, around to the Mississippi and up to New Orleans. It's usually sailing back and forth most of the time."

"The Zorrillas have a vessel, too, then."

"Naturally."

Jerry regarded the other with somewhat deepened respect. In all essentials his host was a feudal lord, despite the age in which he lived—wealthy, independent, and in his own particular realm powerful. Isolation, tradition, and a fierce conflict of interests with a haughty neighbor tended to keep him so.

Little wonder, thought the young fellow, that Gaillard's character had seemed to change during the ride hither, as he came nearer and nearer the spot, as it more and more asserted its influence and aroused his spirit of pride.

"Do your vassals address you as Sieur Gaillard?" Jerry asked, with a trace of irony.

"I could claim the title," was the answer. "The first of my race were so called. But pshaw, I'm an American; this is the twentieth century!"

"Except in your fight with your neighbors."

Gaillard's smile returned, and his eyes was a sort of sour amusement.

"True. In respect to that we're not exactly modern. I suppose we'll continue to quarrel in the fashion we have until some day the state takes notice and charge of us both, putting us under bond to keep the peace. Fortunately for our row, we're in a great parish where no one pays attention to us politically; we never have visitors, except relations who grow curious to know what's going on here and come to see me or old Hernando, as the case may be; and as he and I are magistrates for our respective plantations, and no news or accounts of our lawless proceedings go forth to the world, the courts don't know we exist; and there you are!

"I fear it would be damnably dull if anyone or anything should abolish this quarrel. We've lived on it for centuries, and it sustains us like food. The thought of yawning through the months every year without the knowledge of it would drive me to cut my own throat, really."

"You said nothing had occurred during the past five years."

"Ah, but there was always the possibility, which is next to the fact."

"Excuse me from that sort of a life," said Jerry.

"Why, you're in it now up to your neck," Gaillard cried. "And after we've walked round the fields, so you'll have an idea of the plantation, we'll see where you best fit into things."

The youth who listened to these words had a growing doubt as to his adequacy in any direction in the life of the place. Of raising rice, cotton, and sugar-cane he knew nothing, nor of the processes by which they were prepared for market. The fixed and alien habits of the people, too, would be strange. But of this he kept silent; he would await Gaillard's suggestions and advice.

In the course of the morning they sur-

veyed field after field, some flooded and diked for rice, others with young cane sending forth its green shoots, yet others being planted to cotton, sweet potatoes, and even grain.

They visited the sugar-mill and cotton-gin, both idle at this season. They inspected the gangs of negroes, who labored under the superintendence of white foremen. And Jerry Moffat began to gain a fair idea of the extent of Gaillard's property, in area something over five thousand acres, and of its richness, the black soil being an " island " deposit such as are built by the Mississippi from sediment in its waters.

At last when they had nearly made a circuit of the plantation, and the hour of noon was well passed, they came out upon the bayou a half a mile south of the point, Gaillard stated, where the dwelling stood, which however could not be seen for the intervening trees.

Here, as Moffat discovered, the bayou divided to form an island of some hundred acres or less, after which its branches reunited, and the channel ran through a great tract of marsh, where grew only a thick, coarse grass, toward dim blue sea at the horizon, the Gulf of Mexico.

Over that marsh gulls and other water-birds where wheeling and whirling, making in the sunlight flashes of light, while their piping came to the ears of the men in a continual, distant sound. In contrast to the dark foliage of the trees nearby that marsh appeared brown, flat, featureless; but the young fellow knew it was as deadly as a quicksand and surrounded Gaillard and the Zorrillas, and all their lands with a Tophet of mud and water.

" Yonder," said Gaillard, pointing with a stick he carried, " is where the first Gaillard and the first Zorrilla landed after sailing up the bayou. They were friends; they were exploring the coast together; and both were captivated by the spot, with its great trees and rich earth. Indeed, it was the trees, which one can behold from the sea, that drew them in. Yonder on that little island in the bayou they first trod ground and built them a house—it still stands—and brought servants and settled down to live.

" Both were youthful, but unmarried, both high-spirited. On one of their journeys to New Orleans they met the daughter of a gentleman living there, fell in love with her, and quarreled. My ancestor won the lady, and Zorrilla went to Spain and brought him thence a wife.

" Then they built the two houses you've seen confronting each other across the bayou, because they could no longer live together, and neither would surrender the house over there. That was the beginning of the quarrel, which has descended from generation to generation; and sometimes Gaillards have held the little island there and sometimes Zorrillas. But it rightfully belongs to me and mine."

" Why?"

" Because the first Gaillard took and held it against the first Zorrilla, though the house continued to stand empty."

" That is scarcely a sound title. Why don't you and the Zorillas divide it equally, and you have the rest of the land, and then bury your quarrel? That would seem the easiest way."

Gaillard beat his leg impatiently with his stick.

" What, make a division with the Zorrillas! I'd cut off my hand before I would. My dead ancestors would rise from their graves to hunt me down if I proposed such a thing to Hernando, the *vaurien,* the old *Lazarillo de Tormes!*"

" But it would be the wise course," said Jerry.

Gaillard cast his stick carelessly away.

" Neither the folk on that side of the bayou nor those on this ever let wisdom give counsel to their hate, and never will," he announced.

" Well, you're holding the island, then?"

Gaillard frowned.

" No," said he. " Until just lately, yes; but they have seized it while I was absent. To that I referred when I stated they had grasped a property of mine."

" It doesn't appear to be cultivated or used."

" Nor is an acre of it."

" After all, then, it's merely a matter of sentiment, holding it."

" Exactly," Gaillard replied with a nod.

"And men have been cutting each other's hearts out for a sentiment ever since they quit flints and took to steel. And mark my word, you'll be shouting for the Gaillards and trying to murder Zorrillas as heartily as any of us, and for that reason alone, before you've been here a month."

"Like as not, if it's the fashion," said Jerry, grinning.

CHAPTER IX.

A SECRET CONFERENCE.

MOFFAT had displayed qualities of alertness and courage that highly pleased Louis Gaillard; if he correspondingly had intelligence and industry, he should prove with training a man of great usefulness to the planter. For the latter had need of an assistant who could bring modern energy and skill into the business. The methods of his overseers, and, for that matter, perhaps of himself, as he was ready to admit, were somewhat antiquated and outworn, at once too rigid and too easy. He had been giving the subject consideration for some time.

The interest which Jerry showed from the first when Gaillard had explained what he had in mind more than counterbalanced his lack of knowledge along the lines of cotton and sugar culture. His college education, and a year's experience in the accounting department of a large mercantile establishment in the city of Detroit before his unlucky venture into New York City, gave him a good groundwork on which to build.

And in consequence of this, Gaillard set him to work on the plantation account-books for a definite occupation while he was learning French and Spanish under the tutelage of Jean Pacheteau, and gaining an understanding of crop culture in company of field overseers.

Thus a month passed without event. Jerry had moved into one of the houses in the village, with an aged Frenchwoman for housekeeper, but on two or three evenings a week went to dine with Gaillard. On one of these occasions the latter remarked, as they smoked cigars after the meal:

"The young ladies you saw in New York have returned. I perceived them walking on the lawn across the bayou. And they have guests, which fact should interest you."

"That depends upon the guests."

"Truly. But judge for yourself. One is no other than our friend Barbanera, who, by the way, has a brother here also, a tall, gaunt, unsmiling gentleman, utterly unlike little Emilio. And the other guest, can you imagine? Why, the lady of our comedy in the tenement."

"That Carley girl!"

"In the very flesh. I shouldn't be surprised if we might expect something to occur now."

"Being with the Zorrillas," said Jerry, "gives her dead away. Surely she'll not have the nerve to seek you out on the old footing."

"Don't be too sure of that. She's not aware I know her connection with Barbanera," Gaillard replied, extending his legs and blowing a cloud of smoke upward. "She's adroit. Barbanera and old Hernando, in connivance, probably will force her to do their bidding. Her mistake is in coming to this spot."

"Barbanera dragged her here," Jerry stated with conviction. "But the other pair of girls must think it queer."

"Not if they believe her presence to the advantage of the Zorrillas."

"What can they hope to accomplish?"

"Something is brewing—and that is what I must learn, Moffat. I haven't a clue to my superintendent, who disappeared, a trusted and valuable man; and even the negroes on the other side are in ignorance concerning him, as I've discovered by having my own questioned. It's over a month now since Pierre Careval, the superintendent, vanished.

"Though I've quietly made every effort to trace him, he might have evaporated in thin air, for all that I can find; and I'm no wiser to-day as to his whereabouts than I was the night of my arrival. The only conclusion left is that he was murdered, his body secretly disposed of, and the fact sealed from general knowledge of either Zorrilla's people or my own."

"Where was he last seen?"

"Near one of the warehouses at dusk."

Jerry digested the circumstances in silence, then remarked:

"When a man doesn't show up after a month in a place like this, he surely must be dead. He wouldn't have crossed the bayou and fallen into Zorrilla's hands?"

"Careval was too prudent to take such a risk."

They rose from the table to go and stroll before the house and enjoy the evening air. If Jerry had needed confirmation of Gaillard's news, he could not more directly have obtained it than when they strolled near the bayou, for a small sailboat was just departing from the opposite side, headed southward, in which sat Isabel and Felipa Zorrilla in the bow.

A negro in the stern manned the rudder and handled the sail. And one other occupant there was, perching on the prow—a gaudily colored, huge-billed bird, which Jerry immediately recognized for the toucan of the New York bird-shop.

He related for Gaillard's entertainment his encounter with the two girls before the shop window.

"Then the toucan is really responsible for your introduction to the Zorrillas," his employer jested. "But I wonder where the fair Anita is? She's not with them."

"Perhaps conspiring with Barbanera," said Jerry.

And presently he went off to the pier for a skiff in which to fish, leaving Gaillard to sit on a bench and smoke another cigar.

Jerry had been some time upon the bayou when he perceived his friend enter the motor-boat and set off alone in the direction the sailing craft had taken. The latter was not in sight, having disappeared toward the Gulf. As Gaillard passed him, he directed a hand toward the sky, pale in the twilight; there in the south a black cloud was rolling up with the rapidity that marked equinoctial storms along the coast.

Jerry watched the motor-boat grow smaller and smaller as it sped southward, until at length it was lost in the marshes. His attention was restored to his own business when a jerking of his line announced a hooked fish; and when he had released his catch and cast it in the bottom of the skiff with the others he had taken, he became aware that in his absorption his craft had drifted up the bayou on the flooding tide and near to the Zorrilla bank.

It was very nearly under the overhanging bows of the bordering trees, in fact. But the dusk had grown thicker and, besides, the bayou was neutral from bank to bank. Then all at once a white figure appeared, not ten paces off, standing by a tree-trunk and beckoning to him—Anita Carley!

"Come nearer," she said in a low voice, which nevertheless carried clearly.

"This is near enough," said Jerry.

"You're the friend staying with Gaillard?"

"Yes."

"I've information of importance that should reach him."

"Tell it to me; I'll deliver it."

He saw her glance anxiously along the bank.

"I can't stand here shouting it at you," she exclaimed in an impatient tone. "Take me into your boat."

For a moment Jerry hesitated, but the desire to learn if possible the rôle played by the girl in this new scene allured him. He brought the skiff by the stern to the edge of the sloping bank, holding his oars ready for a speedy departure if he discovered treachery. Lifting her skirts daintily, Anita Carley stepped in.

"Pull out upon the water a little way," said she, when seated. But Jerry had already begun to row.

"What is it you wish to say?" he asked.

"Speak low," she warned. "Sound travels far on this water, and if any one in the house should discover me talking with you it might prove serious."

"You're a guest there?" Jerry whispered.

"Yes. I made the acquaintance of Miss Isabel and Miss Felipa Zorrilla in New York, and they invited me to come south with them. To my astonishment I find that Mr. Gaillard, a very good friend, resides here also. But he and my host are enemies. Can you imagine a more painful situation for me?"

"Gaillard will find it difficult to call upon you, if that's what you mean."

"I do mean that, for he was one of my kindest acquaintances. And I find it very strange, too, in the house where I'm staying, so strange I should never have come if I had known. It's gloomy in many ways. And I begin to feel that I'm in danger, just what I can't define, for it's vague, but nevertheless in peril."

"Shall I carry you off?" Jerry questioned lightly.

"Please be serious, Mr.—Mr.—"

"Jerry."

"Well, Mr. Jerry, then. I'm really in earnest in what I say." She paused suddenly, and strained to observe his face through the increasing darkness. "Would you actually aid me if the need arose?" she asked.

"Of course—if the need were real." And Jerry felt that by such a reservation he eliminated any possibility of having to make good his word.

She leaned toward him.

"I may want you and your boat sooner than you guess; yes, sooner than you guess. There's a man—indeed, two men—in that house who're annoying me with undesired attentions, and if the thing goes on it will become unbearable."

"Can't you prevail upon your host, the excellent Hernando Zorrilla, to keep them within the bounds of civility?"

The girl made a disconsolate gesture.

"He's old and indifferent, while they're crafty, so that I can't accuse them of anything directly."

"What are the names of these admirers? And, by the way, you might tell me yours, also," Jerry stated, with pretended ignorance.

"I'm Anita Carley. The men are, one, Emilio Barbanera, and the other, José Barbanera, his brother. I dislike them, yes; I hate them both—and I fear them both."

"A very interesting triangle, Miss Carley. And are the two brothers jealous of each other? Perhaps they'll solve your difficulty by killing each other."

"I wish they would, Mr. Jerry," came in a voice of repressed feeling, so natural that the youth stared in surprise.

Then he remembered what he had overheard between the girl and Emilio Barbanera in the old tenement in New York, when her loathing of the man was only too plainly manifest. Very likely in this utterance now she was absolutely sincere.

He could not see her face distinctly, and, indeed, in the darkness descending like a pall with the northward-rushing tempest her dress was the only thing he could see. It made a whiteness in the gloom.

Of all that she had spoken what most interested him was her talk of rivalry between the two Barbaneras, the little one, and the tall, gaunt creature with the stalking stride. Evidently the latter, on learning exactly how she stood in Zorilla affairs, had, as well as Emilio, resolved to make her his prey.

With her honor corrupted in one direction, why should it not be corrupted in another? Her beauty, Jerry concluded, of a blond type, would be the very kind to excite and drive to extremes the passions of hot-blooded Spaniards.

But the storm, imminent as it was, cut short the youth's reflections.

"Where do these Barbaneras come from? Who are they?" he asked, getting down to business.

"From Cuba, I think. They're relations of Miss Isabel's grandfather, though not near relations. They seem, however, to have won his confidence."

"Well, so much for them. Now, Miss Carley, what's the information you wish me to convey to Mr. Gaillard?"

"Lean closer." And when her lips were near his ear, she continued: "I've learned one of Mr. Gaillard's valued employees is held a prisoner in a building on the Zorrilla estate. I overheard the Barbaneras discussing him between them, and whether or not they should kill the man. That would be horrible! I feel, whatever the two girls here are, that I'm in a house of brigands and cutthroats."

"What building is the man kept in?" Jerry asked eagerly.

"That I didn't learn, but I'll try to do so, though it will be difficult. And now promise me again that if I must escape, you will help me. Oh, my Heavens, some one must help me—and there's only you and Louis Gaillard!"

Jerry smiled to himself. With such a

consummate actress, however honest she might be in her dislike of the Barbaneras, he intended to take no chances.

"I'll help, but you'll have to get across the bayou yourself," said he grimly.

"And will Mr. Gaillard receive and protect me?"

"I can't say as to that."

Her silence was prolonged, as if she were debating what she should do did she flee and find herself unwelcome.

"I'll come to you, then, Mr. Jerry."

"Fine!" he exclaimed. From his hearty tone she would never have guessed at his amusement and disbelief in her words.

"I must go back now," said she.

With a vigorous pull at the ears he sent the skiff toward the bank, and when it struck he sprang out and helped her forth.

"I can't see my hand before my face among these trees," she said, dismayed.

Jerry groaned.

"Can't you find your way to the house grounds? It's not more than a hundred yards there. And there are all those shouts to guide you; I'd not be surprised if the noise is an alarm over the failure of the young ladies to get home before the storm."

"Maybe it is. But it won't help me. You'll have to take me through these trees, Mr. Jerry."

The young fellow hesitated.

"And if I'm caught I'll be killed on the spot, in all probability," he protested.

"Pooh! Not if you're with me. Besides, who would see you?"

That was true; and it may be that the temptation of treading Zorrilla ground was too great for him. He tied the painter of the boat to a sapling, grasped Anita Carley's hand, and enjoining silence, began to grope a way forward.

After several minutes they reached the edge of the wood, where she murmured a word of thanks and gave his fingers a gentle pressure, then was gone toward the lights of the house.

"Well, well, walking like lovers in the dark," Jerry thought, grinning to himself.

He found his way back to where he had left the skiff, located its rope, and was about to return across the bayou when he took new thought. The night promised to be very dark and stormy. Doubtless, too, Gaillard had magnified the danger to be risked in invading the Zorrillas' lands.

So far as Jerry could see, it was a very simple matter, attended on an evening like this by no hazard whatever. His walk with the girl across the wood, and back again, filled his breast with confidence, daring, and an exultant desire to penetrate farther into the enemy's mysterious domain—mysterious for him, at any rate.

And there was the information given him concerning the superintendent, who was not dead, but a captive. If Jerry could find the man's prison, release him, and carry him off to safety, what a feather in his cap! It might be searching for a needle in a haystack to seek the man in rain and darkness and on unfamiliar ground, but should he fail to find, no harm would be done beyond a wetting.

He bent over and retied the painter of the boat. Overhead the first clouds were beginning to blot out the stars, while from the south came a sound like the distant rushing of wind. But the trees above Jerry's head were motionless, with heavy leaves, without the lightest sough or sigh, with a perfect calm that was a little uncanny in the presence of the streaks of lightning in the south stabbing at the marsh.

CHAPTER X.

GAILLARD ENTERTAINS ENEMIES.

WHEN observing the storm rising in the south, Gaillard had realized the danger threatening the sailboat which had gone toward the Gulf. He glanced toward the Zorrilla house; either it was not known there that the two girls had gone down the bayou or the approach of the storm had passed unnoticed. The little sailing craft itself was becalmed somewhere along the channel, for the wind had dropped before the advancing hurricane.

In his breast there was not the heart of a monster, however much he might hate the race that opposed him; and as he conceived of the two young ladies at the mercy of the storm, with only the wide reaches

of the marsh about them, his uneasiness increased, until at length he betook himself to the motor-boat. Had those in danger been men, he would have left them with a shrug of his shoulders to make the best of the fight alone. But the distress of women had always made a strong bid for Gaillard's sympathy.

While he raced southward in the late evening light he measured the mass of dark, copper-colored clouds, piling ever higher toward the zenith, with an anxious eye. The speed with which storms at this season of the year burst from the Gulf was only too well known to him, as well as the destruction they sometimes left in their track. The barometer had been low for some days, the air sultry, and the actions of the sea-birds restless. It was hurricane weather.

Presently he perceived the tip of the boat's sail far before him sticking up above the marsh, for a bend of the bayou hid the boat itself. What folly that they should go forth on the water when such weather conditions prevailed! Surely they had departed on a whim, and without the knowledge of old Hernando, who, though a white-bearded old pirate, yet was weather-wise.

By the time he had come in sight of the craft itself the light was vanishing, to be replaced by the thick and oppressive darkness ushering forward the tempest. In the distance one could see the incessant play of lightning and the gray haze that was a torrent of rain. Wind was there, too; a queer, sighing noise for which one could not account was rising from the marsh. Like a black blanket the night shut down, hiding the sailboat, the marsh, the bayou itself.

He snapped on the search-light in the bow and picked up with its beam the figures of the two girls, the negro, and the toucan, of which Jerry Moffat had spoken. A glad cry came across the water at the appearance of the light. Sweeping round in a broad cicle, he raced up to the becalmed craft, where he slackened speed until at rest alongside. Gaillard himself sat in darkness.

"Make haste and get on board at once," he said in Spanish.

The words were scarcely necessary, for Isabel Zorrilla, clasping the huge-billed toucan to her breast, and her cousin, were climbing into the motor-boat with all agility, the bow of which the negro gripped with a steadying hand. When they had dropped upon a seat, exclaiming their relief, the servant himself stepped in. And Gaillard set off on his race for home.

"Who is it?" Isabel Zorrilla inquired. "Who is it grandfather sent?"

"Unfortunately I hadn't the honor of being despatched by your worthy grandfather," was the answer. "It's I, Gaillard."

"You!" came in a shriek.

"Yes, I."

"This is infamous!"

"Infamous, perhaps, but timely, I'd say, my dear *señorita* of the violet eyes. I guessed your predicament, and was presumptuous enough to act upon my guess. We shall do well if we escape with only a drenching."

"Better to have drowned than to be saved by a Gaillard!" she cried fiercely.

"Alas, alas!" said her savior.

"If my grandfather were here you would not mock me with an 'Alas!'"

"He isn't with us, happily. Bow your heads, ladies, for wind is coming." And as he spoke a gust smote the marsh that drove the boat forward at double speed.

It was rather a precursor than the first of the hurricane as a lull of some minutes' duration followed; but the forces in the sky were gathering themselves above the fleeing party. Lightning quivered in lurid flames over the surface of the black clouds or struck the marsh with deafening reports.

The little boat raced onward with its search-light marking the dark path of the bayou when for an instant the gloom shut down. All talk between Gaillard and his companion ceased, since on the one hand steering the craft required all of his attention, and on the other the terrifying grandeur of the threatening tempest held the two girls spellbound.

At the moment the boat reached the small island in the bayou the roar of the full storm coming behind struck the ears of all. Gaillard cast a rapid glance over his shoulder, then turned the rudder so as

to strike the bank of the bayou on the west side the boat taking an oblique course. As it touched land he shouted to the negro to leap out and hold the bow, which the fellow obediently did; he followed, crying to the two girls to spring forth; and catching them as they jumped, one after the other, he helped them to mount the sloping bank.

Nor was he an instant too soon. He had no more than ordered the servant to let the boat go and to seek safety than the tempest burst with a mad turmoil of wind and thunder that seemed to drown their senses. Gaillard had grasped an arm of each girl; and the three of them were blown forward like dry leaves.

They were at the edge of a seeded cotton field, as he knew, with no obstruction in front for half a mile, and with smooth footing; and by aid of lightning flashes he was able to mark their wild advance, until breathless, beaten by the terrific blasts, half-stunned by noise, they staggered into the woods, south of the house.

Here the roar in the tree-tops was, if possible, even more savage and furious, but the timber broke the force of the hurricane. Struggling through the woods, dragging his exhausted charges with him with no show of pity, he came at last into the open grounds and succeeded in reaching his house before the cataracts of rain which always followed the first rush of wind should be loosed from the heavens.

In the long room he found his housekeeper and servants gathered apprehensively, but on his entrance they at once withdrew. He conducted Isabel Zorilla, still clasping the toucan, and her cousin Felipa to seats by the table, trimmed the wicks of the candles, and glanced at the girls' blown hair and pale faces. Then he went out, presently to return with a tray bearing wine and glasses.

Outside the wind now blew in a steady force like the pressure of a moving mountain. The house shook, groaned, and a hundred times seemed about to fly away, but, as in previous hurricanes, withstood the gale, thanks to its sound timbers and solid construction.

The roar was persistent, terrifying. Gusts eddied through the room and started the candle-flames. And the floods began to fall, adding a deeper note to the tumult.

Gaillard poured the wine and with a courteous bow presented the glasses. The young ladies drank, and sorely they needed the stimulant, while their host stood, glass in hand. Then when they had finished, he drank alone. Even in the midst of a hurricane it could not be forgotten that a Zorrilla and a Gaillard never lifted glasses together.

Afterward he crossed to the wall and pulled the silken bell cord. When the old Frenchwoman answered, he said:

"*Maman,* lead these ladies to an upper chamber where they may have water if they wish. You will assist them in dressing their hair and in such other respects as they desire, until they are ready to return." He again bowed to his guests. "I make free to give this order, as I imagine it to be your wish. You, *señorita,* can leave your pet here in my charge if it be your pleasure."

Isabel Zorilla placed the bird upon the back of a cane chair, then she and her cousin bowed ceremoniously, received another polite bow from Gaillard in return, and accompanied the old woman from the room.

Gaillard lighted a cigarette, drank another glass of wine, flung himself upon a seat. He and the toucan eyed each other, the one with an amused face, the other with the pomposity its great beak supplied; and from the expression of either one would have gained no notion that without the house the elements raged like demons of destruction.

Once the man elevated his eyebrows and directed a whimsical smile at the fowl.

"Well, what do you think of this bit of comedy, my Mardi Gras buffoon?" he questioned. But the toucan maintained its air of vain solemnity and its silence.

At the end of half an hour the two young ladies reappeared, their disarray of hair and of dress corrected, and the color once more in their cheeks. In the eyes of both, too, was the fire of the Zorrilla spirit.

"Permit me to offer you thanks for our rescue," said Isabel, with head high.

Gaillard smiled.

"The service was too slight to notice or to remember," he rejoined, inviting them to seats.

Never, so far as he could remember, had a Gaillard entertained thus ladies of the Zorrilla household as guests. The situation was novel, unprecedented, diverting. For a moment he and the two girls regarded each other with interest; for though they were neighbors, though being members of opposing parties, they were naturally in each other's thoughts, no persons could have been more widely separated or greater strangers. The occasion afforded Gaillard and Isabel Zorrilla a chance for a mutual scrutiny both had secretly desired for long.

"Are we to consider ourselves your prisoners?" the girl demanded at last.

In the candle-light Gaillard's black eyes grew luminous and his face more handsome than ever, while his brilliant smile flashed back at her.

"I might consider that if it's your wish," he replied. "This old house needs brightening up. I had even thought it would be better for a mistress, and I for a wife. The Gaillards, some of them, have taken wives with the famous Zorrilla blue eyes before this day."

"They will never take another!" she cried out. And her own blue eyes flamed hotly.

"But it was never against their will," said he.

"I think they had no will, those who went."

"What of the Zorrilla men who eloped with Gaillard daughters?" he asked with a laugh.

"The Zorrillas take what they want," she said.

"Aye, when they can. And so do the Gaillards. So if it entered my mind to fall in love with you, my sweet Isabel, and win your heart and run off with you—"

"Never, never!"

"Which as yet, let me assure you, hasn't happened," he continued calmly, "why, I should very likely do it."

A sudden color rose in her cheeks.

"You've never seen me except in New York since I was fifteen, so you can't tell whether you might love me or not," was her spirited response.

From Gaillard came a mocking smile and a headshake.

"I never particularly fancied violet eyes myself. Now, Señorita Felipa's dark ones, for example—"

Isabel bit her lip, while she gazed at him darkly.

"My eyes are Zorrilla eyes, and there are no better. But if Felipa—"

"I prefer brown eyes for mine," said Felipa demurely, lowering her long lashes. She was finding the situation amusing if extraordinary; she usually found amusement in everything she beheld or in the people she met, even though the person might be an enemy like this.

"Ah me!" Gaillard murmured. "Not having brown eyes, I fail to please you, Señorita Felipa. I'm finding this a sad evening for my self-esteem."

He rose to set one of the candles straight that burned imperfectly in the candelabra. As his fingers put it aright, he cast a sidewise glance at Isabel Zorrilla. Their looks met. In her face the color leaped up anew unaccountably, while his expression became enigmatical.

"Who knows!" he ejaculated.

"Knows what, sir?" she asked in a displeased tone.

"What might happen if I should change my opinion of eyes."

Her bosom rose and fell more quickly to her breathing. But her look never wavered.

"No Zorrilla girl would ever enter this house as its mistress," she declared.

"A Gaillard takes what he wants," said he carelessly.

At least such appeared to be his tone as he spoke, and his manner as he took his hand from the candle. That was what amused Felipa, that demeanor of easy assurance; and that was what on the contrary secretly set Isabel on fire, that and his handsome face, so that she wished him to die dreadfully somehow.

"Violet isn't an inelegant color, after all," he granted magnanimously, with a lift of brows and a mild look at Isabel Zorrilla.

"And I detest black eyes—in Gaillards," she broke forth passionately.

The man bent his slender figure in a bow.

"That's all that's needed to make me adore yours. So to-morrow I'll sharpen a sword for a visit to your revered grandsire," he said.

"There's a man in our house who'll stretch you on the floor in an instant if you do come—José Barbanera."

"Is that the fellow I've seen stalking about over yonder like an undertaker?"

"He'll undertake to dispose of you at swords," said she.

"Is that the reason for his presence, my dear Isabel?" Gaillard inquired, regarding her steadily.

She dropped her eyes.

"The man's not a *bravo*, if you mean that, sir."

"Well, whether he is or not, he may find the opportunity he seeks to cross blades with me," was the calm statement.

Suddenly the expression of her face underwent a change, as if momentarily softened, as if moved by a hidden current of feeling. She rose to her feet, gazing at the speaker earnestly.

"You saved my cousin's life and mine this evening," said she, "and on that account, Mr. Gaillard, a return is owing. Therefore I tell you, beware—beware, how you're led into a duel with José Barbanera, beware lest you cross blades with him! The Gaillards, like the Zorrillas, have ever been swordsmen, priding themselves upon their skill, as I know; but I say—beware, beware of José Barbanera!"

The smile had not left Gaillard's lips while she spoke, though his eyes had narrowed a trifle.

"You honor me with your confidence," said he; "but now, in all surety, I must find occasion to meet the fellow."

A flame of red leaped into her face.

"What I might have expected! What I might have expected for trying to do you a kindness!" she cried. "And I hope he runs you through for your arrogance!" Tears of anger shone in her eyes.

"Fie, my adorable Isabel, the thing isn't possible," said he. "I challenge the devil himself to do it."

She dropped into her chair again. His eyes were dancing with a gay light. His dark, thin, handsome face was as confident as ever any gallant's. And this look of him, with his words, made her angrier than ever, so angry, indeed, that further speech choked in her white throat.

At that moment she would have been quite happy to see the tall and somber swordsman of Cuba, José Barbanera, stretch this hateful boaster dead at her feet.

"I always did like a bit of temper in a woman," Gaillard remarked, as if speaking at large, eyes fixed on the ceiling.

That, truly, added the final drop to her rage. Now she did not wish him killed by a sword; she wanted him to die slowly over a fire, or in a vat of boiling oil, or on a rack.

(To be continued NEXT WEEK.)

WOULD YOU?

IF you were a zephyr and I were a rose
Beside some cottage-door,
Would you know me while in thick hedgerows
Grew a thousand roses more?

If I were a daisy and you were the sun,
Unfurling the dawn's sweet light,
Would you kiss me, and me alone,
When my sisters were all in sight?

If I were a clover and you were a bee,
Out seeking for honey-dew,
Would you seek me when over the lea
Myriads beckoned to you?

J. W. Walsh.

The Eyes of Ya Long

by Harold Lamb

IT was at the crossroads just below Liang-chowfu, sometimes called the Western Gate, that Alfred McKinnon met the camel-man.

He was standing in the full glare of the midday sun, staring along the sandy track that is the caravan route leading to the plain of the Gobi. McKinnon was and is near-sighted; but he could hear the rusty *tink-tank* of camel bells sounding from the cloud of dust that moved away from him on the trail and he knew that one of the great trade caravans was departing for Urumtsi in the Celestial Mountains across the desert, or perhaps Khotan.

"Are you sick?" he asked the man, speaking in the Tangut dialect of the western frontier of China.

The camel-man understood. A brief flash of his black eyes showed that. He wore the garb of a Tangut desert-man—sheepskin coat, bandaged legs, brown yak-hide boots and the conical black cap of his race. But he did not wish to answer.

McKinnon had ransacked the valleys of Kansu, the western province, in his search for religious and flora and fauna curiosities long enough to cease to be curious. Things out of the usual no longer surprised him. Still, there was something provoking in this sight of a *maa sui*—an animal follower—as undoubtedly a cameleer as the white man was a naturalist, staring after the dust of a caravan to which he must have been attached.

With a shrug he had turned to watch his own cavalcade of pack animals laden with heads of game, pelts, stuffed birds and photographic apparatus as it threaded down from a ravine into the eastward track. Then the camel-man spoke.

"Honorable uncle," he observed—McKinnon being gray haired, bearded, spectacled and shrunken of figure, was plainly his elder, and so deserving of a respectful title—"do you follow the way to Ya Long?"

"Yes, I am going there."

The camel-man considered this impassively, and nodded.

"May I walk in your shadow?"

"Company upon the road is always desirable, my nephew."

It was not, always. Experience of many years had taught the white man that the Tanguts were lawless, prone to excitement, and, unlike the Chinese of the villages, apt to use their weapons readily. The camel-man, however, was unarmed and he was young.

He was a sinewy figure, poised on powerful legs. He stood with the assurance of strength and the calm of one who knew how to husband that strength. His broad, Mongol face was fearless and the eyes were not slanted as much as in the Tatar type.

McKinnon understand the Tangut men. They followed the paths of the long, white mountains on their shaggy ponies, hunted or hired themselves out as cameleers. Prob-

ably the father and the grandfather of this man had walked beside the caravans, to the dry cough of the beasts and the sound of the bells, until their eyes had narrowed to slits under the Gobi sun and their heads had bent forward between their bony shoulders. They had crawled at nightfall into their sheepskin robes while the drowsy Mohammedan Kirghiz prayed or the gray, western lamas rattled their hand prayer wheels. They knew the bite of frost that dropped from the vast summits above them, and the never-ending toil of the road. Also the secret of tracing the desert paths by the bleached bones of dead beasts of burden.

"What is your name?" he asked.

The camel-man walked beside McKinnon's pony oblivious of the other coolies, who betrayed all the clanlike disgust of a flock of sheep joined by a vagabond goat or even a wayward jackal. He was quite respectful, but life had fastened upon him a shell of silence.

His name was Chagan. He had not accompanied the trade caravan because he did not wish to. Instead, he was going to a village, a temple village in the Kansu hills. Why?

Tales of the beauties and mysteries of Ya Long, the village of the Sleeping Heron and of the Temple of the Five Virtues had come to his ears. So, he was bound for Ya Long.

"After all, Chagan," mused McKinnon wisely to himself, "you are just a boy curious after new sights."

That night he offered Chagan the unusual privilege of food from his own supper. The Tangut declined abruptly, as he did everything, and made the Chinese headman give him some mutton and rice from the coolies' mess. McKinnon's respect for the camel-man rose higher. He knew that headman.

He observed that Chagan left the fire to make a bed of his sheepskin in the declivity of a near-by, dried watercourse.

Late the next day they came to an itinerant astrologer seated by a rickety bridge over a gorge. This individual, scenting a rare windfall, announced:

"Go to Ya Long, excellency, to Ya Long the beautiful, Ya Long of good omen. Auspicious are the hills about Ya Long, honorable elder."

McKinnon dropped a copper coin on the mat, and the spectacled beggar kotowed abjectly as he caught the chink of silver in the white man's pocket, casting at the same time a vindictive glance at Chagan, who was watching him mildly. Since the early ages of man the village-dwelling Chinese and the plains-dwelling Tanguts have been enemies.

"Is there a temple?" asked Chagan.

The astrologer spat.

"Not for such as reek of camels."

At this Chagan turned to McKinnon. "Go not to Ya Long, my uncle," he warned.

Now to McKinnon, who also had heard tales of Ya Long, this Temple of the Five Virtues was a matter of some professional interest. It was not a temple of the Buddhists of the orthodox sect; nor one devoted to the Tsong Khapa, of Tibet. Sometimes, it was called the place of the Black Hats—as distinguished from the Yellow Hats of Lassa—and at other times, the abode of Bon.

The monasteries of the bonpas, the priests of Bon, were few and still fewer had had their interiors protographed, owing to the animal-like treachery of the black hats. McKinnon, after assaying the stories of his Kansu bearers for the problematic grain of truth, had concluded that the deity of Ya Long with its multitudinous arms and spirit wives had never been photographed. As a divinity of the devil-worshiping bonpas it would be worth a film or two.

The desert-man pointed to where the road twisted around the shoulder of a hill, deep in a shadow of the cool gorge.

"Always, honorable uncle," he said, "the road turns and never do the mountain turn."

"Most true," assented McKinnon. "Likewise, the evil spirits that live upon hilltops can not go around corners." Experience had taught him to match proverb with proverb as well as any native wiseacre. "Have you no fear of the evil spirits of Ya Long?"

Now superstition is the core of a Chinaman's mentality. He will not marry unless the astrologers predict a favorable time; nor will his children permit him to be buried until—sometimes after months—the omens are right.

Chagan did not look up. His black eyes glowed as if at a curious inward thought, and he glanced casually at a muscular hand. Then he laughed.

McKinnon took out his note-book and neatly sharpened pencil. He wrote down, from habit: "Some Tanguts exhibit unusual freedom of thought; their courage is more active than the passive endurance of the Chinese; they are not hidebound, and in an emergency they may be expected to act as they see fit. They are born bandits and fighters, of course, which is probably a result of hereditary environment and their life on the barren steppe."

The soft haze of evening fell upon the hills, and the outlines of the trees became blurred. Presently a curiously booming sound reached the ears of the white man. It was not the note of stone temple drums. But McKinnon knew the sound of the giant horn trumpets of the western monasteries.

He saw that the coolies stared at Chagan vindictively.

The Tangut seemed indifferent. Nor did he betray any interest when they rounded the hill and saw the vague shapes of sunset clouds etched in the purple of the lake of the Sleeping Heron, below the village. They saw the thatched roofs of the village perched on the steep mountainside, and above them the pagoda roof of the temple poised in mid air like some somniferous stone giant watching its brood.

Behind them on the bridge the astrologer-beggar gathered up his mat and laughed to himself as at something very mirth-provoking in the vista of dust raised by the trotting animals. Then, folding his mat and tossing it into the bushes, he ran to the path that led up to the temple of Ya Long. At the entrance to the shrine he paused, veiling his eyes.

"T'ien Tao-ling!" he called. "Great T'ien Tao-ling—I have news. The barbarian for whom we waited, and in whose ears my men have whispered tales, has come at last to Ya Long."

II.

McKinnon's headman, being an individual of loud and persuasive tongue, had secured the cleanest corner of the inn for his patron, whom he announced as the All-Wise Barbarian Physician and Distinguished Official of Benevolent Aspect.

Outside, the red glow of a fire shone upon a ring of faces. Sparks swept up against the panoply of stars, spread over the dark outlines of the hills. In the corners of the inn yard animals slept, heedless of the dew.

McKinnon recognized Chagan and his own followers among the figures that squatted by the fire; also many men, sloe-eyed and full fed who wore silk in spite of apparent poverty. Some nodded sleepily, others looked from their neighbors' faces back into the glowing wood. One lounged by the wide gateway of the courtyard that gave upon the highroad passing through the village of Ya Long. Dice rattled somewhere in a bowl, and from the inn came the strident cry of a one-stringed instrument.

This after-dinner scene was quite familiar to McKinnon. What attracted his attention was a palanquin that had halted upon the road opposite the gate. Two barefoot bearers, each with a paper lantern, had chosen this spot to rest their load on the earth. Their gray robes and hair knotted in a curious fashion identified them as temple attendants; also their pinched, sullen faces were those of the bestial followers of Bon.

So McKinnon strolled out, to ask questions. He knew that every pair of eyes in the group by the fire followed him. He was a trifle surprised that a crowd did not collect wherever he went. A barbarian visitor in Ya Long must be an epoch-making event. But the men of Ya Long had garbed themselves in an indefinable air of secrecy.

Some one rose from the fire and followed him. Seeing that it was Chagan, McKinnon went on. He knew that only officials, and certain of the higher priesthood, were entitled to own sedans. So he asked the bearers the title of the person in the palanquin. They did not answer.

But at his voice the curtain of the lacquered box was drawn back slightly. He could make out a delicate head and dark eyes peering at him.

Surprised that it should be a woman, McKinnon stepped back. But Chagan's

curiosity had been aroused. Taking the lantern from one shaft, he held it to the palanquin shutters and drew the curtain. Whereupon the two attendants muttered angrily.

Chagan stood as if turned to stone, the muscles of his powerful body tense.

McKinnon surveyed the face that looked out at them—fragile, startlingly white with crimson cheeks and tiny mouth. The latter was like a cherry blossom. The brows over the slant eyes were sharply black. The naturalist reflected that charcoal had traced the outline of the brows, and that alabaster paint overlaid with red had tinged the cheeks.

It was the eyes, however, that held his gaze, mild as dark flowers, vagrant as a spring breeze. Their long lashes fluttered and fell. Chagan drew a deep breath.

Experience whispered to the naturalist that it would not be wise—such is the Chinese fear of the evil eye—for him to address a child of Ya Long. And the woman in the sedan was no more than a child; frightened, at that. Interest prompted him to inquire why she rode in the palanquin of an official. He compromised by taking off his spectacles before speaking.

"This is the chair of T'ien Tao-ling, the abbot of the temple," a low voice answered him. "I am his servant, Min Tsi."

"Hardly that," thought the white man, "or you wouldn't be in the ceremonial chair. But that's none of my affair."

Chagan was staring at the vision of the woman's face. Probably he had never seen a fair woman before—certainly not one made up with all the arts of charcoal pencil and brush.

"You are from the Temple of the Five Virtues," observed McKinnon, blinking near-sighted eyes. "Will you bear to the abbot of venerated sanctity this message: a traveling physician begs the privilege of a visit to the temple?"

Min Tsi looked up with childlike interest.

"Are you truly the Distinguished Demon of Benevolent Aspect?"

McKinnon grinned under his mustache, thankful, however, that the spellbinding work of his headman had at least cleared him of the suspicion of the evil eye. The word "demon," he reflected, had been used as naturally as he himself would have said "doctor" or "clergyman."

"Say to the abbot, your master," he instructed, "that I have a memorandum written by the thrice-happy governor of Kansu, to show to him."

Min Tsi ducked her dark head in embarrassed acknowledgment. Then her eyes met those of the boy. They held for a long second, and the eyes of the girl glowed—so thought McKinnon—like flecks of amber.

She began to speak quickly, anxiously, like a youthful student repeating a nearly forgotten lesson. Her voice, to Chagan, was like the murmur of fallen leaves moving over the sand. The spell of it fastened upon the keen senses of the Tangut and his pulses throbbed.

A faint odor of jasmine and—perhaps—of poppies emanated from the palanquin. McKinnon listened curiously, fancying that he caught a light hiss that accompanied the girl's voice.

"O *kha rakcha,* barbarian devil, wanderer in the western plain, you have come to Ya Long and its shrine. With your slave, the *ki-li-ti-ki* the tent dweller and desertman, you have come to the Five Virtues which is the abode of Bon—of Bon the destroyer who has breathed upon blood and who is worshiped—"

As if to make certain of her words or to listen to something else, Min Tsi broke off, continuing with more assurance but in the same parrotlike tone:

"—who is worshiped by death. Come to the shrine of Bon and you will see the god. Through my mouth the *chutuktu,* the abbot of the lamasery bids you come. He alone has the right to enter the shrine; only accompanied by him may others enter."

McKinnon gnawed at his mustache. Chagan's eyes probed the interior of the palanquin, and narrowed. Other eyes watched the two, sidewise, from the fire in the courtyard.

"Ya Long, in the hills is sacred. Here sits Bon. It is a place of mystery."

Chagan reached out a scarred hand slowly, as if to touch the white hand of Min

Tsi. At this she drew back and the curtain fell into place. The bearers caught up the poles and trudged forward.

"Very nicely done," meditated McKinnon. "She had her lesson by heart. But why did she try out the rigmarole on me, of her own accord?"

He glanced at Chagan, putting on his spectacles. The Tangut was staring after the palanquin intently, his dark eyes flickering in the fading light of the lanterns. He touched the naturalist on the arm.

"Who was the man in the chair, honorable uncle? You, who are all-wise, should know. There was a man sitting in the shadow beside Min Tsi."

McKinnon rubbed his stubby chin reflectively.

"I saw no one, nephew."

"My eyes are quick in the dark. I saw."

"H-m." The white man meditated, remembering the hissing sound that had accompanied the girl's voice. "Perhaps the abbot, T'ien Tao-ling, was in his chair."

Returning to his corner of the inn, he left Chagan seated by the fire. The desert-man squatted on his quilt, gazing into the embers. The image of Min Tsi stayed in the mind's vision of the boy, and the thought of her was like scented wine in his body.

Behind his screening wall of canvas that divided him from the other occupants of the inn McKinnon sat in his camp chair beside a candle lantern and meditated, stroking his bald forehead, for the night—in midsummer—was warm.

Outside the canvas, voices shrilled and a dog yelped mournfully. The rattle of dice ran on. Footsteps padded from courtyard to inn and occasionally a pony or donkey moved restlessly. Long familiar with such sounds and with the habit of the Chinese of going without sleep, McKinnon glanced over his note-book and his treasured heap of specimen boxes carefully assembled near his cot. These boxes with their accompanying notes and photographs represented the labors of six or seven years, now nearly complete.

The pencil of the naturalist hovered over a blank page.

"Just why did Tien Tao-ling want to look me over?" he wondered. "Of course that was why the *chutuktu* came here with the girl. It seems that Ya Long hides its curiosity under a bushel basket. Chagan was certainly taken with Min Tsi's get-up, which looked to me much like a courtezan's—"

He frowned momentarily over this, and then smiled, reflecting that one thing the girl said, at least, had been true. T'ien Tao-ling *had* welcomed him to Ya Long through the mouth of the child.

So McKinnon, the unimaginative naturalist, instead of writing down details of skull measurement, or tribal characteristics or Latin names of ferns, grass flowers or curious, stunted trees, jotted on the blank page the following idle thought in very neat handwriting:

"Time? What is time but the passage of events? And by this measure, there is not time in Ya Long. Kansu itself is only the ancient kingdom of Shule, and before that, when Babylon had not yet built its walls, Kansu was the kingdom of Pa. When you enter Ya Long, you step into the abyss of the past. Yes, it's a funny sensation."

III.

It was noon next day when McKinnon left off measuring the dimensions of a fine *ovis poli* head, took up his camera and went to the lamasery. Chagan fell in behind him as the naturalist climbed the winding road to the mountain shrine. They passed many *gylongs*—disciples—in gray woolen robes on the way and also some women.

Their coming was expected, for T'ien Tao-ling himself met them at the portal of the covered way that ran from lamasery to the stone shrine built into the cliff. The abbot was a very tall man, with pocked face and beadlike eyes deep-sunk in his head under the black hat. Although his name was Chinese, his thin features were Tibetan. He received McKinnon's visiting card—presented in accordance with the best official etiquette—indifferently.

The memorandum, which was really an elaborate passport, T'ien Tao-ling accepted with gravity and scanned, holding it carefully upside down the while. His sharp eyes did not lose the opportunity of scru-

tinizing McKinnon, when the naturalist was not looking at him.

To McKinnon's suggestion that they visit the shrine, he offered no objection. Only he hinted at a present. The naturalist was prepared, and tendered several ounces of silver. These the abbot of the Five Virtues readily thrust into the wide sleeves of his robe, while his black eyes snapped avariciously.

Contrary to general belief among Europeans and readers of fiction who have not entered the borders of the Celestial Kingdom, it is not difficult to enter any Buddhist shrine—as long as no local superstition is violated, and the barbarian visitor has a sufficient fee in hand.

McKinnon scrutinized with near-sighted eyes the stone figure of Bon, hideous and black with age. It stood under a round opening in the roof, against the wall of the cliff, and the light was bad. The god itself was grotesque in aspect, with several pairs of arms clasped about a miniature woman —a symbol of erotic worship, soulless and cruel as the mind of an evil man. And this was the symbol that had shaped the mind of the priests. Tawdry curtains that might once have been cloth-of-gold hung behind it, and various figures of lesser demons occupied niches in the cliff wall—each grinning and ugly as their parent, Bon.

When McKinnon unshipped his camera, however, T'ien Tao-ling became restless. And to the request of the zealous scientist that he stand beside the image of the god, he returned a surly negative.

McKinnon's precise mind desired a human figure in the photograph, to establish the relative size of Bon, the Destroyer. He preferred the abbot, in his robe, of course, to Chagan who was not in character with the setting. But when he reconciled himself to the Tangut and looked around for him, Chagan had disappeared. Only a moment before he had stood behind McKinnon.

"Where is the desertman?" he asked.

"I do not know." T'ien Tao-ling seemed ill-pleased. McKinnon had no means of knowing whether he lied or not.

"You need not be afraid to stand beside the shrine," he pointed out, fingering his camera reluctantly. He had journeyed a week to take the photograph.

"There is an eye in the box," evaded T'ien Tao-ling.

McKinnon sighed, realizing that he was confronted with an old superstition. He would have attempted a time exposure of the god alone, but here T'ien Tao-ling intervened.

"O One of Benevolent Aspect," he objected, "you have seen the shrine. It is enough."

"I want to make a picture of it."

The abbot gnawed his thin lip, glancing sidewise at his visitor.

"Then come to-morrow," he announced, apparently anxious all at once to end the interview. McKinnon wondered whether greed for more silver, or mere superstition connected with the eye in the box belonging to the barbarian had impelled this suggestion. Hoping for better light and better results on the morrow, he left the abode of Bon.

At once T'ien Tao-ling hurried into the passage leading to the lamasery, his slippered feet moving silently over the stone floor. Through the portal leading into the main hall where the massive stone prayer-wheel stood he passed and up the steps that ran into the labyrinth corridors of the monastery. He entered his own cell, which was empty.

Scarcely pausing, the master of the lamasery drew back the curtains dividing this cell from another chamber, more richly furnished in teakwood and ebony, where incense made the air pungent. Here Min Tsi lay passively on a wall settee, watching him.

Satisfied, T'ien Tao-ling let the curtain fall, at a voice from the outer corridor. Two temple attendants ushered a reluctant Chinaman into the cell of the abbot.

T'ien Tao-ling shook his sleeve, dismissing the two.

"See that the Tangut dog is not within the lamasery," he ordered. "He has wandered from the shrine."

Then he seated himself on an ebony stool, eying his visitor in silence for a long time. "You are the headman of the barbarian," he observed, in his sibilant voice. "And you will answer a few questions it is

my wish to ask. Is your master a friend of the governor of Kansu?"

Now the headman was an individual of quick wits—wits confused, however, by excitement. He knew that if harm had been meant, he would not have been brought openly to the lamasery. The bonpas were only furtive in their cruelty and oppression.

"He is honored by the governor, worthy *chutuktu.*"

"That is well. Is not a wise man deserving of honor? But the barbarian physician is old. Soon, because of ripe years, he must die. What will then become of his wisdom?"

The headman pondered this, and although he suspected a meaning behind the words of the abbot, he found it not.

"The one of Benevolent Aspect has provided for that," he answered. "If he should die the wisdom that he has stored in boxes and written upon paper will be carried by me and the coolies to the governor, who will send it across the great ocean—"

"Doubtless such an eminent man must carry much wealth."

"That is true, worthy *chutuktu.*" The headman saw a chance to boast and thereby increase his own importance. "He has whole boxes of silver *sycees* and pounds of *taels* that weigh down two or three bearers."

Now in saying this the headman lied greatly, after his kind. For McKinnon had most of his funds in drafts on local officials. But the eye of the abbot glistened.

"Did the barbarian order this wealth to be carried to his excellency, the governor?"

"Not so. In his mind the boxes of bugs and dried flowers are a greater wealth. He did not speak of the silver and the *taels.*"

The abbot of the bonpas stroked his shaven forehead with a clawlike hand. The brains in that forehead were crafty beyond telling, and they were a prey to the demon of lust—for gold.

"I have heard," he muttered, "that it is the custom of these barbarians to carry always a short gun in their pockets—one with many bullets."

"No, my master is a man of peace. He has only the long guns, to shoot game."

The abbot nodded after the manner of a man who has satisfied himself concerning many doubtful points. He shook his sleeve, dismissing the coolie with the remark that silence is a virtue in a servant, especially silence as to conversation in the lamasery. He did not fear that the headman would repeat what he had heard, so long as he was within the limits of Ya Long, where the bonpas were absolute masters.

When the man had gone, he called in a low voice, "Min Tsi—Min Tsi!"

The girl appeared between the curtains and T'ien Tao-ling scanned her shrewdly, his pale eyes emotionless as those of a basilisk. Those eyes could read the face of the child like a page from an open book.

"So," he murmured, "you have seen the desertman who came to your chamber not long ago. You talked to him gently in your soft voice that is like the sound of moving water. And you asked him to come tonight in the second hour after nightfall, to meet you at the water gate of Ya Long."

Min Tsi waited passively, her tiny hands tucked into the long sleeves. All the lessons of her life had been summed up in the word—obedience. First to her father, then to the master of the lamasery.

"Because one of my men, the beggar who is an astrologer, said to the fool who is Chagan that you desired to speak with him, the desertman followed, to your room," continued T'ien Tao-ling. "And because I had ordered it—as I did your words from the palaquin—you repeated the message, I know," he nodded sagely, "because the astrologer listened. He would not dare to lie to me."

The brown eyes of the girl looked up at him. Somehow, T'ien Tao-ling did not care to meet the glance. It was like looking into a clear pool of water, he thought, upon which the sunlight flickered vagrantly. Into his sharp features as he surveyed Min Tsi there crept a lust that was not of gold.

"You will go to the water gate," he observed, watching her without seeming to do so.

"If you wish it." Min Tsi spoke mildly.

"I do wish it." He nodded. "And since you have asked Chagan to bring the barbarian with him, that also will be done. For you said—as I bade you—that the

stone of grief was heavy on your heart and you would like to consult the Physician of Benevolent Aspect. O Min Tsi, you are a child and you do not know. But I have seen. The desertman desires you. He thinks of you, and cannot sleep. He will come to the water gate."

At this the girl cast down her eyes. Perhaps her intuition was not as dull as the abbot suspected. But the thought of being loved by a man troubled her strangely.

T'ien Tao-ling sent her to her room and stepped out into the corridor, closing the heavy door of the cell carefully behind him. He did not want the girl to hear what he said to the three men, one of them the astrologer, who squatted in the gloom near by.

He spoke to them in his sibilant voice and they listened intently until the long moaning of the horn trumpets sounded from without, calling the bonpas to their prayers.

"So you see," concluded T'ien Tao-ling, "the barbarian is no longer a man of Benevolent Aspect. He has tried to place a charm upon Bon, of the shrine, by means of the eye in the box he carries. Ill fate may come upon him because of this. Should he walk upon the rocks by the lake, he may fall and die." The abbot paused. "You," he observed to the astrologer, "will go to the bridge and wait, while these two will come with me and watch the barbarian fall into the lake."

The astrologer peered up at his master, from bleared eyes, and waited expectantly.

"In that case," murmured T'ien Tao-ling, "some of the boxes at the inn belonging to the barbarian must be taken, to pay for his burial and the search for his body."

"That is true—most true," nodded the astrologer. "And the desertman?"

"He has an evil thought. I have seen. He would seize Min Tsi, who belongs to me. The barbarian physician will not approve of this evil thought. If harm should come to the barbarian, at the lake, who but the desertman would be to blame?"

"Who?" echoed the astrologer. And laughed.

"The eyes of the barbarian are dim; they see only the things that are near, in daylight. He cannot see where to walk, after nightfall. And the man who is called Chagan will not dare to carry a lantern, nor is he armed with a weapon."

"That is well," nodded the astrologer. "For he is a strong man."

"Aye, a strong man can be sent to the governor as the slayer of the barbarian."

Whereupon T'ien Tao-ling departed to turn the great stone prayer wheel in the hall where his disciples were already gathered and waiting for him to lead them to the shrine.

IV.

"I DO not know."

The voice of Min Tsi was soft, as mild as the murmur of the black water of the lake that lapped against the rocks several feet below her. The surface of the Lake of the Sleeping Heron was tranquil and dark under the stars, and against those stars rose the cedar arch that was the water-gate of Ya Long.

"You do not know?" Chagan's deep voice was resonant with repressed feeling. "But you told me to come, Min Tsi, and to bring my reverend uncle, who is allwise. We are here."

The child, her face half visible in the gloom, hung her head. Although neither McKinnon nor Chagan were tall, they towered over her slight figure.

"Why did you send for us, Min Tsi?" asked McKinnon gently. "Are you sick?"

She answered in the same parrotlike voice: "The demon of sickness has not entered me, O One of Benevolent Aspect."

Chagan tried to peer into her averted face.

"You are sad." The desertman touched the silk robe on her shoulder. She had drawn back from the arch toward the thickets that lined the rocky shore. A mild, summer wind stirred the bushes, bringing with it the scent of jasmine and aloes.

"Because you are going from Ya Long," said the girl. "I will grieve when you go to the desert."

At this Chagan was silent, seeking for words to express what was in his mind. McKinnon blinked at him in the darkness, not altogether easy in his mind. He had accompanied the Tangut for two reasons;

Chagan had asked it, on behalf of Min Tsi, and McKinnon feared that the young native might get into trouble. It was not advisable to talk to any woman of the temple. And he did not want to lose his photograph of Bon, through any chance quarrel.

He stepped forward to speak, but Chagan straightened suddenly and folded his arms.

"Min Tsi," he said, "you have put a spell upon me. It is a strange magic. No woman of my people could weave such a spell. I do not understand. But I cannot sleep, and your face is like a flower in my thoughts."

McKinnon chewed at his mustache, more than a little surprised by the rush of words that came to the native's lips.

"You are a lotus flower, Min Tsi. I shall take you. I shall take your hand and you will come with me, away from Ya Long. We will go along the path that leads to the open plain. I will bring you a horse, and you will ride as swiftly as the young wind."

Min Tsi gave a faint cry. A rustle in the bushes answered it, as if the breeze had freshened. But Chagan heeded only the bent head of the girl, shadowed by its coils of dark hair.

"You are beautiful, Min Tsi," he cried. "Your face shines like the evening star. Your body is slender as a young tree. Come with me and you will ride in the caravans and see the sun rise over the plains. I will guard you from the sun, like a flower. I will bow my head at your knees. I have no wife. You will become my wife—"

He laughed deeply and his muscular hands bent her head back.

"Beside the caravan track I have a *yurt*, a tent. I have three horses and a goat. But I will get more for you. You will be Chagan's wife."

Min Tsi touched his hands with her own, which were trembling.

"I am afraid."

"You must not fear me. Did you not lay a spell upon me?"

"It is forbidden to leave the temple."

Chagan laughed again and his hands slipped to her throat, the fingers tightening slowly. The girl gave a sigh of distress, but her eyes clung to his. Her heart was laboring. Her thoughts fluttered vainly, like the pinions of a captive wild bird. No man had ever spoken to her of love before.

"Min Tsi!" whispered Chagan harshly. "You are mine. I have not loved a woman before. But this is not only a spell. Nay—it is a cord that binds and hurts. I hold you in my hands—thus—and your life is mine. Do not fear the evil one who is T'ien Tao-ling."

Startled, the girl placed her hand on his lips. But he tossed his head.

"Ya Long, Min Tsi," he said, "is unclean—unclean. Instead of hands, the bonpas have claws that clutch for silver. Their eyes are jewels of evil omen that lust for women. Oh, I have heard the tales of the caravans. The voice of the bonpa is like the hiss of a snake, crawling over the sand. Thus"—he stamped angrily—"I will set my foot on the snake if it strikes. Because of the tales that were told me by the camel-men, who said there were women of surpassing beauty in Ya Long, I came hither to see. And you have caught me in your spell."

McKinnon reflected that the Tangut nature was deeper than surface sight. He felt mechanically for his note-book; then checked himself, ashamed. The strained voice of Chagan had broken boyishly.

"Yet your aspect is mild as a bright star, Min Tsi. You are not like the bonpas and their women. How came you to Ya Long?"

McKinnon felt it was time to intervene.

"Chagan," he remarked, "you should not try to take this woman. She is no more than a child and she belongs to T'ien Tao-ling."

"I hear the sage words of my venerated uncle," replied the boy. "Yet I must also hear the words of the beautiful Min Tsi."

McKinnon tried another tack, seeking to turn the Tangut away from what he felt was real danger.

"Remember, my nephew," he urged, "that I must make the picture of the god Bon in the morning, at the shrine. If you stir up the anger of the bonpas, it will fall upon my head. Recall the proverb: 'Tie not the knot of hatred.'"

But now the girl spoke, swiftly, anxiously. And as she did so she drew farther away from the thicket. She felt impelled to speak to the Tangut, who had stirred the depths of her spirit with his words.

"Harken, desert-man," she whispered. "Hapless Min Tsi is unworthy. I have no honored father. Because I was a girl-child my family in the Kansu village did not wish me to worship at the ancestral tablets. My father brought me to the temple of Ya Long where the priests have great wealth and sold me to T'ien Tao-ling, who paid the price of a good cow in silver because I was fair of face."

"*Hai!*" grunted Chagan.

"The women of the temple put red and white on my cheeks and bound up my hair, when I would have let it fall over my face, sorrowing. Yet I am the slave of T'ien Tao-ling, who is waiting until the next moon when I shall be a woman in age and not a child. He has other women, but he gives me the most presents."

McKinnon turned on his heel and strode away, to lean against the post of the water-gate from which steep steps led down to the lake, a dozen feet below. He was no longer willing to oppose Chagan, because he fancied he had read a message in the words of the girl. As lonely men sometimes do, he cherished certain ideals and was far from convinced that romance was dead.

Meanwhile Min Tsi hurried on, breathless with suspense and a growing fear for Chagan:

"T'ien Tao-ling said that he was the true god of Ya Long because only he could tend the shrine, except when he admitted the disciples to worship Bon. I do not know. I am sad. Sometimes I have come to the Lake of the Sleeping Heron, to climb down into the water, so I could sleep. But I was afraid. I do not want to be a water-ghost. Once the spy who wears the dress of an astrologer at the bridge saw me—"

"*Hai!* So he is a spy? This is verily an evil place. Say on, Min Tsi!"

But the girl tried to peer up into his face. She lowered her voice so that he had to bend close to catch the faint whisper.

"Is it true that you love me, Chagan?"

"Aye."

"Never has a man asked me for wife. And T'ien Tao-ling will not sell me."

Chagan laughed.

"You are very strong, desert-man," she sighed. I would like to ride on a horse and sit in a tent. I would not be afraid, then. It is joyful—when you tell me to come with you—"

"Come, then."

"Nay, how can it be? But now, when my heart is trembling with joy, I must tell you what you should know."

She glanced behind her, at the shadows, her quick ears aware of sounds in the thicket. A struggle had torn her breast. Now she had decided that she would warn Chagan, who loved her, of the peril from T'ien Tao-ling.

"T'ien Tao-ling plots," she whispered, quivering as she did so. "He sent the man who brought you to me at the lamasery. He sent me here. I think he followed, with two men. I can read evil in his face, yet what he plots I know not. Several times he has taken the money of the travelers by his tricks. And he has been talking to the spy and his two men who carried me and T'ien Tao-ling to the inn—"

"T'ien Tao-ling sent you here?"

She hung her head, still keeping his hand in hers. Then, all at once, she fell on her knees, weeping. Chagan stood as if turned to stone. But in moments of danger the mind of a Tangut, who rides with peril behind his saddle, works quickly. He knew the trickery of the bonpas.

"He does not seek me," mused Chagan readily. "It must be my venerated uncle, who is a barbarian of great wealth."

"Evil was in the eyes of T'ien Tao-ling."

Chagan, his senses now alert, caught the murmur of a voice in the darkness near by. Slippered feet moved somewhere over the stones. The breeze, sweeping the willows fitfully, veiled the sounds. And a cloud-bank rising against the stars had made the night very dark. Chagan regretted that the benevolent barbarian who had adopted him as a friend on the road had not carried his gun.

He pressed Min Tsi down to the ground, leaning close to her.

"Crawl to the posts of the water-gate,

and wait," he whispered; " do not rise from the ground, or they will see you, against the lake. Men have truly followed you. I must warn my uncle, who is a righteous man and has offered me shelter and food."

Chagan understood that he might have escaped from the men in the thicket, with Min Tsi to guide him away from Ya Long. Better than McKinnon he knew the covert hostility of the bonpas. But he would not leave McKinnon. He darted to the water-gate. The naturalist peered at him uncertainly in the gloom.

" Sit down, honored uncle," whispered the boy, " against the great post. Enemies have followed you from the village. Do not move until I call you—"

" Nonsense!" McKinnon was not easily disturbed. But Chagan had stepped toward the willows. That naturalist would have followed, except that he heard the rush of hurrying feet and an angry exclamation.

So he halted, realizing that if the Tangut were involved in a fight, it would be better to remain where he was. Besides, his bad sight confused him. Vaguely he could make out dark forms moving over the rocks.

Out of the darkness came a snarling grunt of pain. A heavy body thumped on the stones. McKinnon started forward, but this time a hand caught his ankle, startling him.

" Do not move from the water-gate, O very wise barbarian," pleaded the voice of Min Tsi from the earth. " Two men are fighting with Chagan and I am very frightened. He said we must remain here."

" If he is attacked—" McKinnon began, wondering what had caused the affray.

" In this matter, his wisdom is greater even than yours, venerated uncle," rejoined Min Tsi, clinging fast to his foot. Perforce, the white man remained passive, trying to make out what was happening.

He saw a black bulk moved into the water-gate. There was a grunt, as of a strong man exerting his full strength. This was followed by a heavy splash from below.

Silence fell, to be broken by a sibilant voice not far away in the direction of the willows.

" Throw rocks upon the head of the barbarian, fools! He must not swim to shore. Destroy the evil physician and it will be a deed grateful to Bon. I, T'ien Tao-ling, promise it—"

The voice broke off, at a second splash resembling, to McKinnon's ears, a man's body falling into the lake. He drew a quick breath, peering for T'ien Tao-ling, who must still be near the willows, but who no longer spoke.

He fancied he heard Chagan laugh, near by, and breathe deeply as if tired. Min Tsi did not stir, nor did she release his foot. Chagan was moving back, away from the lake.

" Fools!" The cry of T'ien Tao-ling was uncertain, almost frightened. " Have you slain the Tangut, or—"

Abruptly he squealed. Then came a scurrying of feet, followed by a moan. Then silence again. Min Tsi relaxed her hold on the foot of the naturalist and stood up.

McKinnon was more than a little perplexed. He knew that Chagan had been attacked, unsuccessfully. Quite evidently two men had been thrown into the lake. He stepped to the brink of the stone stairs.

There was no sound or movement in the water below. McKinnon sighed, and shook his head. He greatly feared that two bodies lay under the surface of the Lake of the Sleeping Heron and that Chagan had cast them there. But what of T'ien Tao-ling?

" Chagan," he called, " what have you done?"

After an interval, the Tangut spoke from the darkness.

" Venerated uncle, I have untied the knot of hatred."

Min Tsi whispered something, and Chagan added. " O, One of Benevolent Aspect, it would be wise to depart from Ya Long. The bonpas meditated evil, and T'ien Tao-ling set a trap for you. Come."

Guided by Min Tsi, McKinnon walked up the path that led, where it crossed the village highway, to the temple, and—by the highway—to the inn. He heard Chagan moving heavily ahead, as if the Tangut carried a burden. But it was not Min Tsi, for the girl had McKinnon by the hand. At the crossroads he paused.

"Chagan," he observed, "I don't believe the bonpas would attack me. I came to Ya Long for the picture of the shrine. I am going to make the picture the first thing in the morning."

The Tangut did not answer for a space.

"So be it, my uncle," he said. "Yet, when you make the picture you will believe there is danger."

Struck by his tone, McKinnon approached the boy and stretched out his hand. On the Tangut's cheek he felt the sticky moisture of drying blood.

"You are hurt, my nephew," he exclaimed. "Come to the inn and I will bind your wounds—"

"Nay, Benevolent One, it is only the slashes from the knives of the evil."

"I will tend the wounds," cried Min Tsi softly. "That will be my task, for I am going with Chagan to his tent before dawn when the astrologer sits on the bridge. When you go to the temple, go early before the assembly of the priests and carry your long gun. Now, I humbly say farewell to the Benevolent One."

"And I, too," echoed Chagan's deep voice, "to my venerated uncle."

"Farewell, my nephew," said McKinnon.

He watched the two forms move away up the dark path to the temple, and noticed that Chagan seemed to be carrying a burden. As he walked along the road to the inn, he muttered.

"Good luck to the lover and his lass. Well, I don't quite know what to make of it all—"

V.

McKinnon decided, after a brief sleep, that, all things considered, it might be best to leave Ya Long; and so he instructed his headman, following a daybreak breakfast. While the pack animals were being loaded McKinnon slung a rifle on his back, picked up his camera and sought the shrine.

Around the temple some gray forms of bonpas were stirring. But the entrance to the shrine was deserted, and he thought the shrine itself was empty until he came face to face with T'ien Tao-ling, poised beside the image of Bon.

Another man would have reached for his rifle. McKinnon raised his camera. A strong ray of sunlight pierced the opening overhead and the light was good enough for a brief time-exposure. The aspect of the abbot was vaguely disturbing to the naturalist, but he was not easily alarmed and knew that composure was always his best weapon.

"Stay still, T'ien Tao-ling," he said evenly, "until I make the picture."

Quickly he focused the camera, opened the shutter, timed the exposure and snapped the catch with an exclamation of satisfaction. He had an excellent photograph of Bon and the priest of the god. Then he stepped closer, to peer from near-sighted eyes, surprised by the rigid silence of T'ien Tao-ling.

Thus it was that McKinnon made out for the first time that T'ien Tao-ling was not standing. The dangling bare feet of the bonpa scarcely touched the stone floor of the shrine; he hung suspended by the silk girdle about his neck, which was tied to an arm of Bon.

McKinnon sighed, reflecting on the curious contrast between the natures of Tangut and bonpa. Then, before departing for the inn and his men, he wrote carefully in his note-book the following detail:

"Photograph of Bon, taken at Ya Long shrine, Kansu. Figure of priest at side." Reading this over, moved by his painstaking accuracy, he jotted down before the "priest" the word "dead."

In the Midst of Life

by Ferdinand Grahame

COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE.

There was an old woman who lived in a shoe—
She had so many children she didn't know what to do!

MRS. MARTHA NELKINS manufactured the patent Nelkins shoe. She was an old woman who lived on a shoe; she hadn't any children and still she didn't know what to do—for her pet parrot had been stolen, and how to find him was the serious thing she didn't know. Besides, her time on earth was short.

Not so very old—Mrs. Martha Nelkins was only fifty-four. Yet she was going to die. Widow Nelkins every one called her, purely by habit, since any remembrance of the husband had grown as thin as she herself and the wedding-ring she constantly wore, and she never spoke of the deceased. She was due to pass away in three days now, next Friday, the fifteenth; she would have been fifty-five on that day, and the fortune-teller had read it that she could not live past her fifty-fifth birthday.

There wasn't a bit of doubt in the matter. Everything else the local soothsayer had predicted always came out perfectly true. Widow Nelkins had foreseen her own death, long ago, as occurring at or around fifty-five; countless warnings had persistently established this time limit, and now the loss of her parrot was a broad hint that mundane affairs were winding up.

She missed Pat terribly, busy as she was with planning her funeral and burial; of her actual demise she thought but little. Widow Nelkins needed no solace in the incident of dying. Hard as nails herself, she was no stubborner than the place where she built her shoe to live on.

Dent was its name, a town of about five thousand, and situated in a northern middle State. To see Dent for the first time was to be introduced to the widow, for no two substantialities were ever more alike. Martha's three-sided countenance resembled nothing so much as that triangular open space in Dent's business section, geometrically exaggerated with the title of square, and unalterable for ages. The austere display in a store-window made one think of her scant, straight-combed, center-parted iron-gray hair—"Mustn't touch!" both seemed to say, and her style of dress was just as old-fashioned as the groceries' fronts and as rigidly clean.

So it wasn't hard to die in Dent after hovering long on the brink—not mentally difficult, at least. Physically, nobody seemed ever to die in Dent; they merely prolonged it. You could go down-town for an hour and come back three hours older, but you lived to try it again. The people were so healthy themselves that they started doctoring trees.

With half a dozen railroads running through the town, some with depots and stopping, Dent got along with only two or three small factories. Further industry

was discouraged by the monument, an immense six-story plant on the river-shore, built in Civil War years, and empty fifty-nine of the sixty since. Occasionally an ambitious enterprise would lease the monument and move in, and sometimes get to running for a whole week before the town council could get around to making some new rules for it that would move it out. Politics were supposed to be hereditary in Dent, yet this same council had held its job all of the present century; its sons had been walking out of town to stay as soon as they'd learned how.

This particular old widow wouldn't have been possible in any other town; but in Dent, as she herself sagely considered, her coming death was sure to arrive a matter of vast importance.

Now, had she lived in the rival town of Rowenna next door, her decease would be merely a daily casualty. People died most every week in Rowenna; they even had a large hearse factory conveniently located there—not even an undertaker in Dent. And much jealous hatred existed between the two towns, Rowenna being the county-seat, with farm trade and all trains stopping.

Rowenna and Dent lying six miles apart, their balancing medium was a sylvan spot called Shady Lake, three miles from either, and where nature mingled with civic enmity and appeased it, temporarily.

One of the small factories in Dent made shoes, the "Nelkins Patent Sole-Curer," the shoe which Martha worked over, and fussed about sleeping or waking, and lived on.

When a young woman, Martha's feet had insisted on callousing in very painful places; her husband, an erratic shoemaker, had contrived a special insole for his wife's footwear so successfully that his widow had been building shoes to order for similarly afflicted sisters ever since.

Several cobblers were employed in the long, low shed adjoining her dwelling at the back, the number of workmen varying with the amount of weary women who came in uncomfortably and went out on air, so to speak. Widow Nelkins charged a healthy price, and she had amassed money. But her interest began and ended with her fellow women's feet—the female intellect was to her a hopeless quantity; men she noticed not at all—most of 'em had hard-boiled brains, she said. And if, perhaps, not justly entitled to her frequent caustic opinions, she nevertheless saw that everybody respected them, and her.

Indurate as a shoe-peg, not known to have ever shed a tear, hating children to the extent of refusing to wait on a hobbling woman who might bring her kiddie into the shop, declining flatly to make a pair of sole-curers for the feet of any crippled child, this old widow had lived grimly on her shoe. She did happen to have an adopted daughter, Naomi, whom she appeared merely to tolerate. But she loved her parrot, Pat.

Mrs. Martha had taken Naomi, a seven-year-old then, under her legal protection; nobody knew why. She had raised the girl properly and had given her a good education, just terminated with graduation from the Dent High School. The town was to have a normal school in the near future, but the old lady had declared against that for Naomi; the girl was already normal, she said. So, beginning with commencement the past May, little Naomi had been the patient all-day victim of Widow Nelkins's outpourings of small wrath—and yet the widow didn't talk very many words at that; having every acerbity at her tongue's end left no room there for needless conversation.

Sometimes it got too hot, and Naomi would have to escape. For an hour's rest from the only mother she had ever known, she would board the trolley-car and visit Shady Lake. It was there she had first met Clay Wallace. She'd not have dared even to recognize his smile had Clay offered it in town, for he lived in Rowenna. A month of occasional meeting and increasing interest in each other, and the young man rebelled one day.

"This looks like sneaking," he said.

On her return home Naomi put the case very honestly up to her adopted mother.

"No good can come out of Rowenna," said the mother.

"He is," the girl insisted. "Clay's eyes are good and blue, his hair is the color of

brown you've always liked, and doesn't curl, and he's tall—six feet—not one of the kind you call shrimps."

"How old are you?" the widow asked.

"Nearly twenty-one."

"For goodness sake! How time beats us. Um—you're sure you're not fixing up a big disappointment for yourself, young lady? Eh? Yes, I shook my head like that once, and I had the disappointment afterward just the same; couple of sad disappointments."

"Then I may keep on meeting him at Shady?"

"No."

"Oh—"

"Tell him to come over some evening. I'll see if I can make him fit."

Naomi was positively staggered. In her remembrance, no one had ever been invited to their scrupulously guarded home.

"When?" she managed to ask.

"Right off. Get it over with," her adopted mother replied, moving away to feed a titbit to the parrot on his perch, then to brush an imaginary fleck of dust from the window-ledge.

Pat was a South American green parrot, splashed with a vivid red, high-crested and bobtailed, and of a species noted for volubility and longevity.

Pat and the widow had honored their Rowenna caller by receiving him in the best room, Mrs. Nelkins's thin hand indicating that Clay Wallace might sit down, and probably spoon a bit later, on the davenport by day that was also her couch at night. And near which bed the parrot was customarily chained.

Fastened always to his perch when his mistress was absent, at times when she was in the room Pat was often given liberty to fly about at sweet bird-will. His wings had never been clipped; such an act was cruel in the widow's mind. But the windows were kept closed in winter and the screens in summer.

Naomi's adopted mother had wasted fewer words than usual in approving of young Clay Wallace.

"Looks honest enough," she said.

"Damn fine boy," Pat added, and every one pretended they hadn't heard.

"Now I'll go," Widow Nelkins continued, "but I'll leave Pat here in my place—to hold you both down."

"Oh!" said Naomi and Clay together.

"You can't fool him, either. He's too wide-awake."

"I never sleep," declared Pat, blinking his eyes rapidly.

His blinking was a habit the parrot had acquired with age; also by compulsion. In the memory of the oldest inhabitant Widow Nelkins had burned lights brightly all night long in her best room. Afraid of the dark, some said; guilty high-price conscience, said others. Dislike of darkness was her strongest peculiarity.

"But, mother—your parrot for a chaperon?" Naomi had objected on this auspicious occasion.

"Why not?"

"He knows too much, Pat does. And he's such a liar!"

"For goodness sake!" exclaimed the widow. "Well, then, I'll listen only to what truth he tells me afterwards. Pat stays here when I go; and I'm boss, am I not?"

Naomi tried to face Mrs. Nelkins with due bravery.

"Ye-es, mother," she wilted. "You are the boss."

Not so subdued was the lad from Rowenna.

"Oh, Mrs. Nelkins—a parrot! That looks—he, the bird, I mean—looks queer to me, and—"

"I was taught when a girl that if anything looked queer I mustn't look at it," said the widow.

"But—" remonstrated Clay.

"I have passed up your being from Rowenna, sir," the widow told him severely; "also the fact that you are only twenty-two, so long as you keep on keeping your neck clean. I've passed up my distrust of young people generally. Still, I was young once myself, even if it's back pretty dim; that's why Pat stays."

It was considerable of a speech for Martha Nelkins.

"I've had football coaches over me," said Clay, "and a floor walker once. But that parrot is—"

"Is a bird that 'll do his duty."

"I'm a wonderful bir-r-rd!" stated Pat.

"Is there any—any one else's consent to ask?" Clay inquired fearfully.

"Naomi hasn't had father or mother since she was seven."

"I thought I might be expected to get the parrot's sanction next," Clay explained, he hoped, sarcastically.

"You might do worse," said the widow. "Pat is over twenty-five years old, and he knows a heap more than most people from Rowenna." She moved to the door, humming:

"By the side of a grave, that was newly made—"

Then she punctuated her favorite "Old Sexton" with a final admonition: "And you are not to marry for a year after I am dead. It wouldn't be respectful."

"A year—" began Naomi.

"Oh, I think you'll last till the snow flies, Mrs. Nelkins," said Clay, in ill-concealed impatience.

"It 'll have to snow between now and the 15th of August, next week, then," answered the widow, smiling hopelessly as she picked up her humming:

"Leaned a sexton old, on his earth-worn spade
A relic of by-gone days am I!"

Pat sang harshly, in perfect tune with his egotistical version of the classic.

"Therefore I'll arrange to have Pat watch over you for the first year after I am departed."

And Widow Nelkins left the room, something suspiciously like a twinkle in the corners of her old eyes.

The door closed and Clay Wallace heaved a mighty sigh. Naomi looked at him quickly.

"The widow's a powerful old lady," he hastened to remark.

"There isn't another woman like her in all the world," said Naomi earnestly.

"That's true," he assented. "Heaven made only one mother from that pattern, and you got her."

"I adopted her."

"Damn good woman," said Pat.

"You think a lot of her, Naomi?"

"Everything—and she of me, if she doesn't always show it. But she thinks even a little bit more of the parrot."

"Wonderful bir-r-rd!"

II.

YOUNG Clay Wallace, excessively modern, bright and alert and assertive of a lover's rights, stood for Pat three successive nights. On the fourth, just as he was about to embrace his sweetheart, he was asked:

"What's your hurry?"

On his attempt to kiss her:

"Watch your instep."

With which wise caution Pat, free of chain this eyening, half hopped and half flew to the wide window-ledge and blinked out at the blackness; and Clay glared at the parrot.

A moment later, the widow having called Naomi out of the room, young Wallace, still staring at Patrick, was lugubriously meditating:

"Now, if the old lady *should* die this week"—for Widow Nelkins had made her superstition impressive—"if she should, is that confounded bird to be hung over me as my guardian for the next year to come?"

"See you next year," agreed the parrot.

"Darn you!" Clay whispered fervently.

"Damn you!" responded Pat cordially.

Then Clay tiptoed to the window and slid back the screen, just an inch or two or three. Then he turned his back, so he couldn't possibly see the parrot go. Then he closed the screen again.

When Naomi appeared he cut their goodbyes short and took her with him to the street door. So much in love, she failed to miss the bird.

A green spot on top of the gate-post gave the young man an unholy joy in passing by. He laughed as he shook his fist at it. Pat replied in language Clay ignored.

Of course young Wallace wouldn't have been cruel enough to wilfully steal the bird, although it wasn't any terrible crime to steal from people living in Dent. He had merely slid back the screen for air; he had done it premeditatedly, however, being from Rowenna.

Besides, the parrot surely must have craved freedom. Also, it was wrong that an old woman should be permitted to love a

measly bird more than her own adopted daughter. Oh, there were countless excuses handy as Clay Wallace tramped along.

Since being accepted and approved as Naomi Nelkins's future husband, he had always walked home to Rowenna nights. Clay was a husky youth and liked the exercise that kept him so. He usually did the lonely six miles in ninety minutes flat, and in the clouds most of the way.

But on this particular night, in the moonlight, he was not so completely alone. Behind him trailed a spot of green, flitting from tree to tree, hopping at intervals, but in unerring pursuit, timing its arrival finally to the exact minute with Clay's at the Wallace front door.

"Well, what do you know about that?" Clay asked softly.

"I'm a wonderful bir-r-rd," said Pat, blinking up at him under the moon.

"You sure are."

Pat had evidently accepted him as one of the Nelkins family. And so the lover's crime had followed him to his own home.

Clay decided to smuggle the bird into his room for the present, until he could make further disposal of it. If he left it now the wise parrot would undoubtedly freeze to the front porch to stamp him as a thief in the morning. He gathered it up.

"What's your hurry?" Pat complained.

And all the way up-stairs, buried under Clay's coat, that infernal feathered demon indulged in personal remarks, partly unintelligible, but plainly those of no gentleman.

Which puts Clay and the self-purloincd parrot in the young lover's bedroom, he thinking blissfully of his sweetheart, six miles distant, and shivering at occasional thoughts of the old woman who lived on a shoe.

III.

"For goodness sake!" observed Widow Nelkins when she missed her parrot, less than half an hour after Clay's departure.

Old Martha immediately stepped to the windows, to find one of the screens left unsnapped. A new hardness was in the angular face she turned to her adopted daughter.

"I knew it; trusting a sprout of his age in my house!"

"Oh, mother, you don't mean—"

"I mean he's let Pat out or stolen him; and nobody'd do such a thing but a—a Rowenna heel!"

The two women looked for the parrot in vain. Widow Nelkins would have searched outside, but that the darkness seemed to hold peculiar terrors for her. She called and Naomi whistled, with no result.

"Such a hullaballoo," the old lady grumbled, "only three days before my death!"

She went grimly to the long table she used for a business desk, sat and wrote out a bank-check. Rising and still silently, she held the check up to girlish eyes that grew rounder.

"Now go to bed," the widow ordered, "and think it over."

Naomi obeyed, and cried herself to sleep, but not a single one of her tears was shed because of the bank-check. Her adopted mother lay awake all night long, staring now at the empty perch and now at the electric-light blazing over her head, listening always for the scratch of a parrot's claw on the wire-screen.

At breakfast Widow Nelkins delivered her ultimatum.

"You'll have no more to do with that fellow in Rowenna!"

"Oh, mother! You've never let me do the things I've wanted to do—"

"If I had, you wouldn't have wanted to do 'em," interrupted the widow crisply. "This is settled. Don't talk."

"I will talk!"

Martha Nelkins caught the daughter sidewise, in the corners of her eyes, but could not hold her the old way any more, it seemed.

Naomi rose, her childish face flushing with anger.

"You accused my Clay of an awful deed last night, and I see you think the same this morning. My answer is that I'm going to marry him right off!"

The widow was shocked into attempting parley; new tactics for her.

"You—you promised to wait a year."

"You told us we had to wait, but we didn't promise to. I'm going to marry Clay Wallace to prove I don't think him a thief. I'll marry him this week yet—or next

Monday! Monday's one of the lucky days."

"That is to be the day of my funeral," said the widow gravely. "Monday, the eighteenth."

"Oh—foolishness!"

"Then I—I am no longer boss in my own house, eh?"

Naomi Nelkins shook her head.

The old woman gazed somberly at the girl, at the one living being who had ever dared to oppose her, even with tiny bits of challenges, and that very seldom in the past fifteen years. Came a memory of a cloth-covered school-book dashed to the floor, only to be picked up again and borne away to durance in company with a chastened spirit. She could see the picture plainly—the sobbing little figure in an apron of that same gingham as the book-cover, made by the same hands. And to-day this one child she had tolerated in all these years again stood defiant before her; and now she was too old to whip.

Then the old eyes turned on that empty parrot-perch and its dangling chain, and straightway she proved a hardness of spirit not to be shaken by sentimental feeling. She pointed to the open door.

Naomi paled a trifle in understanding. But her head went high instead of drooping as she moved to obey.

"Wait."

Widow Nelkins sat and scratched a line on her note-paper; she placed it in an envelope with the bank-check drawn the night before, sealed and addressed it, and handed it without rising.

"Drop that in the post-office as you go past."

Tired eyes followed the girl through the door and down the short walk.

"Nearly fifty-five and only two disappointments," the widow muttered. "It's good I'm to die before the third one can sink in very deep."

And the old and sleep-weary eyes narrowed and tightened, as if to lock even the gates of recollection.

IV.

Naomi went direct to Rowenna and her promised husband.

Clay Wallace had foreseen just this possibility, and he had already taken strategic care of Pat. During the night the green parrot had taken care of him in his room, making the hours sleepless and the darkness lurid. Now Patrick had been smuggled into an old and unused garage, and deposited under an overturned garbage-can. Clay had snapped the padlock tight on the garage doors, and the only key was buried in his pocket; and he was blandly awaiting Naomi on the porch when the girl arrived.

She recited her troubles briefly, showed her lover the unmailed and unopened envelope, and told him its contents.

"A check for all her thousands to the city of Dent for new sidewalks, dated the day after her funeral's to be; so they'll respect her by not cashing it till she's in her grave. Oh, I know mother!"

"Well?"

"I don't care about the miserable money myself; it's for her. What will she do? She's old and can't work much longer, and the city of Dent 'll never give that money back once it gets the check cashed. I know Dent, too. Mother 'll be broke!"

"Sure!"

"And her Pat disappeared." Clay winced. "It 'll kill her in reality, coming all at once. What can be done about it?"

"Darned if I know," said the lover.

"I'm a wonderful bir-r-rd!" declared Pat to the inside of his garbage-can, far away in the locked garage.

"The money, you see—she wouldn't even ask it back when she doesn't die. She'd be too proud."

"Sure."

"And I helped to make things worse," wailed Naomi. "I told her we were going to be married right away!"

"What's your hurry?" asked a wise parrot in fetters.

V.

The Widow Nelkins had just got her breath after some scathing talk over her telephone to the Dent newspaper that had accepted her cash shoe-advertisements for years, and now had no room, they regretted, for the prior announcement of her death

and funeral—Friday, fifteenth, and Monday, eighteenth. Besides, they 'd been fooled before, they said; and she had started drawing up a card to be done in a black border by a rival printer not so squeamish, when Clay Wallace called at the little leathery house.

Brave in his guilt, the young lover had intruded his six feet of manhood into the ogre's very den of protest. Going to try and do something; probably an unhappy job.

"Well, sir," said the widow first, "you've got my girl, and my parrot is gone. Look around and—" Her suggested tone left the sentence better unfinished.

"I—"

"Needn't deny it. I wouldn't believe you."

"Mrs. Nelkins, I'm not a—"

"I didn't say what. Put on any shoe that fits you."

"I'm here to ask you to take Naomi back."

"Bring Pat back."

"Yes?" eagerly. "And then, assuming that I might find him for you, then—"

"Then you go to jail."

Not a little confused, Clay tried his utmost to keep a balance.

"See here, Mrs. Nelkins," he began soberly, "let me take care of all this worry for you. Now, I'll move in here, and run your business for you—learning it first, naturally—and that will let you retire. Why, Naomi and I will live right here with you, her mother—"

"Yes, that's what most young husbands count on doing."

Still more difficult to get her meaning, Clay meditated, particularly as the elder Mr. Wallace owned about two hundred thousand dollars' worth of Rowenna houses and real estate.

"Oh, I don't mean the money part so much, Mrs. Nelkins," he tried next. "That big check of yours, for instance. Give all you've got to Dent for all we care. Actual money is only dross."

"Fourth Reader, eleventh page."

Clay had no answer convenient; she'd been darned right as to where his quotation had come from, too.

"I have no confidence whatever in the younger generation," the widow told him acidly. "I sent one out once with a twenty-dollar bill to get changed, and he never came back."

"Ah! Rather unfortunate, wasn't it?"

"So you go ahead. Get married to Naomi on my funeral day, and see which of us gets the crowd."

"Oh, yes; I know just how you feel about that dying thing, Mrs. Nelkins," said the visitor, deciding now to humor her. "I used to make my father sick that way when he wasn't, by telling him what might be down in our well."

Clay's reward was a stony stare.

"Of course, for any one else to die in this town wouldn't make much difference," he persevered riskily. "But you've always been known as the widest-awake person in all Dent."

"Every town needs one," she answered. "I've even thought of moving to Rowenna, if I had lived."

Which tried Rowenna patience sorely.

"Do you—ah—look for a violent death next Friday, Mrs. Nelkins?" he asked, with youthful irony pardonable under the circumstances.

"A peaceful ending has been foretold for me."

"Yes, sure—for yourself; but with what ailment? You're not going to be the starter of any epidemic, I hope?"

"Leave my house!"

Clay went precipitately, to report to Naomi a call in Dent markedly unsuccessful.

VI.

During the three days following Widow Nelkins utilized every means of search for her parrot, except going out herself. For many years she had not left her shop and her workmen in daylight, and old rules may not easily be broken; and it was impossible for her, it seemed, to go anywhere at night. When she returned the factory might be gone, too, since everything else was disappearing.

But she sprinkled crushed crackers and sunflower seeds outside on all the window-ledges, even while hoping against hope, with August so green and edible. She sent her

gossipy old foreman out to hunt and to spread the news, at his regular wage and double overtime—pie for him. She suggested his going to Shady Lake for one place; she had heard of escaped parrots making for the forest, and all the trees in town had been so doctored that no intelligent bird would recognize them.

After the foreman's first day of publicity work, a bright-eyed urchin came to the Nelkins window.

"Wot 'll yuh gimme if I find yer parrit fur yuh?" The widow drove the boy away with a sharp command. The chance to recover her lost bird was not enough, it seemed, to overcome her hatred for children. It was her strongest peculiarity.

Those three days were hard days, and Martha Nelkins became harder with each day. Not a tear did she shed in her loneliness, as she set about putting her shoe in order.

The end was to occur some time between midnight of Thursday and midnight of Friday, according to that especial soothsayer, who had never said it wrong; and while death itself remained only a detail to the widow, even *after-death-what?* being regarded as inconsequential, the immediate before death was giving her plenty to do.

One solitary hope lay in another promise of the fortune-teller, that some great blessing was to come to Martha just prior to the passing out. Naomi might return, contrite; it was a possibility; but the old woman preferred to think it meant she was to see her loved parrot once again. Two thoughts of the missing bird to one of her banished girl.

The funeral invitation had been printed promptly and mailed to Dentites exclusively. The black-bordered card mentioned the dates, fifteenth and eighteenth, and named the Nelkins cemetery lot as the place of interment, adding a line about death putting the family back together. Very pretty, too; yet it was the first time the widow had been known to refer to her husband, at least in print.

Her ebony-hued last home had been selected, by bargaining over the phone, and an order given to the hearse firm—it was a shame for all that money to go to the rival town of Rowenna. Her minister, after attempting good-humoredly to talk her out of such morbid ideas, finally agreed with some hesitation to preach the sermon. He'd often needed her in the past. One stipulation she made: there were to be no children allowed at her funeral. Since life for the widow had been a perpetual rainy day, she proposed to do without sunshine clear to the finish, and for several days afterward.

She hummed "Old Sexton" as she phoned him, her deep sincerity seeing nothing incongruous in this, or in whatever else she was doing. She was obliged to make all these necessary arrangements; there was nobody left to do things but herself. Others in Dent, however, had waited long for just a chance like this to get back at the testy widow. The old foreman had spread a little gossip on his own hook, and the telephone soon became busy.

"An embalmy afternoon, widow," said one. "I hear you've caught the churchyard cough," consoled another. The town-clown called up to ask if she could use his patent compressed death-rattle.

"For goodness' sake!" the widow complained. "This isn't the peaceful passing away I was promised!"

And from that on she refused to answer her telephone. The people of Dent had respected her through life—she had made them—and she would enforce silent respect now at the end.

No news of the parrot coming on the second day, she grimly mailed a black-bordered card to Clay Wallace—the last card that was left, and the only one sent to Rowenna.

No Pat materializing on the third day, she telephoned the traffic-cop, he being the sole member of Dent's police force she knew through intimate dealings.

Mail matter often delays itself purposely between rival towns. Clay Wallace did not receive his black-bordered card until the evening of Friday, the fifteenth. It came to bring a new gloom to a spirit already downcast, made weary by keeping a hidden parrot secret from a sweetheart—for even Naomi wouldn't believe that a parrot could follow like a dog. And Clay was sincerely

sorry for that deluded old Dent woman, too, which fact depressed him some more.

He thought matters over. Then he determined to smuggle Pat to Shady Lake on the evening train, one that stopped at Rowenna and Shady, and snubbed Dent, as usual. He would contrive to lose the parrot in one of those trees bordering the lake, hoping that the park's genial proprietor would discover the bird in the morning and restore it to its rightful owner. If not, well, life would be happier for Pat out there, much happier than in Dent or under a garbage-can.

Clay conceived his idea just before train-time. He unlocked the garage, seized the parrot, and departed on a run.

"What's your hurry?" scolded Pat, blinking industriously.

Not a soul did Clay meet on the streets, eight-o'clock curfew having sounded; but a small crowd was to be seen on the platform when he neared the station.

"I never sleep," reminded the green bird as he was impatiently shoved beneath the young man's coat.

Conversation with anybody was successfully avoided at the depot; Clay imagined once that a fat stranger was eying him with a penetrative look, but he was too busy holding a medley of invective behind a tightly closed beak to pay much attention. The train pulled in, an inconspicuous seat was found in the smoker, and they were on their way.

Then the platform stranger came along, and sat down beside him, when there were plenty of other seats. Clay couldn't be expected to recognize the man, all Dent being stranger to Rowenna; but he did notice that the fat intruder's air was unmistakably Dentian authority, the fresh kind.

"It's a nice evening," said the fat man blandly. "What are you hiding there under your coat?"

"I have nothing to conceal, sir," answered Clay, in the heat of revived confusion and wishing he had an extra hand to hit the fellow with.

"Liar-liar-liar!" said the nothing under the coat. Also said various additional things.

The stranger grinned.

"Where you bound for?" he inquired.

"Shady Lake."

"No, you're not. We'll go through to Dent—"

"Well, I'll be—"

"And see what the judge may have to say to-morrow concerning the capture of wild birds."

"It's a tame bird—and this train doesn't stop."

"No bird who talks like that 'll ever be tame. And the train will stop for me."

"Who—who're you?"

"S. P. C. A.—showing Clay a tiny gold badge.

VII.

No visitors had made appearance at the Widow Nelkins's in these three days, merely a customer limping in now and then. And finally dawned the morning of fatal Friday, the fifteenth.

Early in the forenoon Martha had got phone connection with the florist out near Shady Lake, the only one convenient to the rival towns: Surprising information resulted—that nothing but foliage was purchasable for the next Monday, every flower in the greenhouse and gardens having been already bought up for the Wallace-Nelkins wedding which was scheduled to occur on the same day.

The widow gasped but once before she dispatched a workman down-town to get a Rowenna newspaper of the previous evening—no easy task, since the paper of each town was poison to the other one. The man was fortunate in finding a solitary copy; on its second page was the unfortunate news. Naomi had made good her threat; not alone the same day, but the identical hour of 3 P.M. had been set for the wedding. And in the editorial column her black-bordered card was reproduced, the Rowenna paper's proprietor not being so particular—she had heard that paper printed some awful things sometimes—together with ironical comment on the double announcements, and a joyous suggestion that the two ceremonies be combined into one and held at Shady, the half-way point.

For a moment the widow was furious,

righteously so; not at what the newspaper said, but because these counter wedding-preparations had been going on for three days, while she was making ready to meet death. But soon she calmed down; her final hours on earth must be spent quietly, in a satisfaction few may enjoy, the state of knowing those hours to be the very last.

Yet dusk approached—the dusk of her dying day, she thought—and not even the minister had come to sit by her side. Well, she could manage to do without the preacher, if only she had her parrot.

With the darkness grew the old woman's fear of it, and she quickly lighted the electrics. Her bony fingers dropped wistfully over the deserted perch and followed the hanging chain. Then she sat herself in the old rocker, to watch the clock on the mantel and wait for the end; but the clock-hands moved so slowly, and in the night the old shoe of a house was so very still. This waiting was hardest of all.

Her weary eyes, roaming for an instant, fell on the Rowenna paper on the floor, on a back-page head-line. It told of a crippled baby in the rival town. In self-penance for the many mean things she remembered saying to many children, she forced herself to read of a pair of year-old little feet pronounced hopelessly deformed—a local doctor had said it, the sort of physician to whom so much suffering is hopeless.

Widow Martha Nelkins studied while the clock was chiming nine. In the stillness that followed she rose and brought from an adjoining room a square pasteboard box—the kind large millinery-shapes by the dozen come in—its top yellow and dust-covered, its corded knots tight with age. She placed the box on her davenport and slowly, laboriously opened it.

And with the lifting of its lid her hatred for children fell from her as a cloak.

The box was packed full of folded clothing, on the top a wreath of dried flowers, wild roses and daisies all twigged together, brittle and rattly with time. She took out the wreath and laid it tenderly aside, a relic of another life's disappointment. Lying flatly next was a kiddie's jumper, then a pair of overalls, both garments worn pale in spots and mended at elbows and knees—both of a smallish ten-year-old size, or maybe an overgrown eight.

"Oh, why did he have to go the way he did?" she whispered, and then she set her teeth against whispering more.

Baby clothes in a sequence of diminishing ages were grimly gone through, clear to the bottom of the pasteboard box—a yearling's blue denim romper was the last—and Martha wasn't humming "Old Sexton" now. She found herself crying instead—crying a little harshly, perhaps, for she wasn't used to it—her first tears in twenty years, since she had packed that box away.

She gravely replaced all the clothes exactly as they'd been, and retied the box. She penned a message, to put with a bill of large denomination from her wallet, both in an envelope, and addressed to the crippled baby in Rowenna, while she despised every letter she wrote into that rival town's name. The envelope was slipped under the cord of the box; she didn't know why she was doing all this, only maybe for goodness' sake. Hungry for love, though she would not have admitted it, the poor old soul crept further back into her shoe and watched the clock climb to eleven.

Once she rose and felt of the parrot's perch, unbelievingly, once again. But as she sank back into her rocker, she still knew her pet would be with her before twelve; for the soothsayer had said—

"May we come in"—Naomi's brown head intruded itself inquisitively with the words—"just for the last farewell, you know, mother?"

"Sure, mother," added Clay Wallace, the whole six-foot length of him appearing behind the girl. "We've just sort of come to your death-bed, you know."

And with the young man was the great Patrick Nelkins, riding serenely in a brand-new gilt cage.

"I knew you stole him," was what Clay expected the old lady to say.

But she didn't. Instead, she said, very low and in a voice that hurt, her withered hands stretching toward the bird:

"I knew it! I knew I'd get him back before I died."

"Oh, but you're not going to die, mother," Naomi declared.

"Three-quarters of an hour," answered her adopted mother, one eye on the clock, t'other on the cage. "My fortune-teller said—"

"Sit down, mother dear," ordered the girl gently.

"And I'll plank Pat down here right in front of you," continued Clay, doing it.

The widow obeyed, sitting so she could still see the mantel.

"Now, how old are you, mother, anyway?"

"Fifty-four," replied Widow Nelkins promptly.

"In what year were you born?"

"Born? Me?" With a look of blank amazement. "I—I don't know."

"You mean you've forgotten; but never mind counting back. But wasn't there some way your husband used to tell without counting," Naomi was asking eagerly, "since there weren't any records of births or deaths kept in those old days?"

"Eh?"

"Think—some old song, twenty-five years ago; or a piece of poetry, maybe," suggested Clay, somewhat blunt and helpful.

"Why, yes!" cried the widow suddenly. "Poetry! He—Abner, my husband—he taught Pat there a piece to speak; our births and everything were written in the big Bible, but then the Bible was always contradicting itself, Abner used to say. And"—the old face lighted up beautifully as memory struggled back—"and then, after he taught it to Pat, Pat got stubborn sometimes and wouldn't speak it, and then Abner used to cover his cage up with a cloth—"

"Like this?" Naomi interrupted excitedly, snatching off the white table-cover.

"Careful, now, and keep that clean; the minister may be here yet, and—"

"Oh, don't bother with the clock, mother!" The girl was fairly dancing, table-cloth in hand. "Go on; what did your husband do?"

"He kept Pat covered up in the dark till he'd say his lesson," replied Martha Nelkins. "But I haven't heard that poetry now in so many years. The parrot has forgot there is such a thing as darkness; I guess that must be it; for he got so, Pat did, I recollect, that he wouldn't ever speak his piece in the light—only swear awful when you asked him to."

"But what was the poetry—how did it go?"

"Seems I ought to remember it, though I wasn't ever any hand for such truck, and then the old Bible went in the fire soon after; it was the same year my little boy—" but the hard voice choked and could do no more of that. "Talk fast! I got less 'n twenty minutes now," said Martha, sternly abrupt.

"Was the poem anything like this?" assisted Clay.

"Martha Williams, born in—"

"That's the way it started," the widow exclaimed. "'Martha Williams,'—my name before I married—'born in—born in—' Oh, I can't remember!"

"Listen," commanded Naomi solemnly, dropping the table-cloth over the new cage.

They listened, in a portentous hush.

"Polly wants a cracker!" said Pat distinctly.

"Oh, I've forgot to feed it—him—for three days now," confessed Clay Wallace abjectly.

The widow troubled with no reproaches. She whisked off the cloth, flicked open the cage door, and presented crushed crackers and sunflower seeds to a voracious beak and an empty maw. One bit of cracker the hungry but irrepressible bird picked daintily from out of the thin lips of his mistress.

Every one waited while the clock ticked, till at last Pat hopped obligingly back inside his new home, climbed up into his swing and hung a moment head downward, then righted, rocked himself madly, blinked a few times, preened himself once, and remarked:

"I'm a wonderful bir-r-rd!"

"Now, Pat," ordered Naomi, again dropping the cloth completely over the cage.

"What's your hurry?" came first in a

best parrot voice, even if muffled. A br-r-rh or two, and finally:

"Martha Williams, born in sixty-three—
One year later she than he.
Abner Nelkins, wed in eighty-seven—
So was she! She and he!"

"He was fine on poetry—Abner," mused the widow. "'Twas all he ever could do steady."

"Now lemme out!" desired Pat.

"So you see, mother, you're fifty-six to-morrow, instead of only fifty-five," said Naomi.

"Or else you've been dead a year, Mrs. Nelkins," added Clay, "if that fortune-teller was right about your not living past your fifty-fifth birthday."

"Fifty-six years old?" quavered the widow.

"To-day," said Naomi, pointing.

"Seems longer 'n that even," muttered the old lady. Then she listened heroically to the midnight chime of the clock, her whole attitude fearsomely expectant at first; but gradually her body straightened, and by the twelfth stroke she seemed to be again looking ahead at life. She almost smiled.

"I can watch over you two the next year myself," she said grimly.

"For many, many years, mother dear," replied Naomi with a caress.

"Sure," agreed Clay, "we're in no rush to get married—not till you say so. Naomi and I put that notice in the newspaper just to help you catch up to nineteen-nineteen."

"Damn dark in here," observed Pat.

The widow, full of silent emotion because of her renewed life, took up the table-cover; yet once more she dropped it to hear:

"Br-r-rh! 'Martha Williams, born in—'"

"'Sixty-three,'" she was taking up the rime. "'One year later she than he—'" But she paused short in the middle of the room in deep thought. The young folks respected her silence—every one had always respected the widow. Noiselessly they took Pat from the cage and restored him to his perch; again they waited patiently, until at last old Martha began to speak, haltingly:

"There was only one soul"—she was whispering it for fear the rest might hear—"only one soul in all this world who knew—"

The fat stranger came in the door; came in with that masterful air common only to Dentites born and bred.

"For goodness sa— Oh—oh, my little—my little boy!"

Nor was there anything ludicrous in it—the heart-call of thin and angular fifty-six to a grown fat man of thirty. People in small towns like Dent have all got human feelings buried somewhere. Nor did son and mother rush into each other's arms. They simply stood, and looked.

"Same old room as when I dressed up and skipped out—eh, ma?" remarked the stranger in a funny tone.

"Why—why did you go, Jimmie?"

"Too many lickin's," said James Nelkins, and a fat man can look the sheepishest. Then he remembered deserving some of them, and he grinned—the grin Clay had seen on the train. "Why, I couldn't pass a house they were building when I was a kid, ma, without stopping to count the lickin's in every bunch of shingles."

The prodigal started toward his mother, as if wanting to get hold of her, but a bit afraid of her yet. The widow's gaunt hand, uplifted, caused him to pause him in his tracks.

"Why did you steal it, then, Jimmie?"

"Steal—it?"

"The twenty-dollar bill I sent you down street with to get changed when you never came back?" said his mother, tinges of hardness doing their best to stay out of her cracked old voice.

"Steal, ma? Me? Why, guess folks are telling me right—you've gone plumb—" No, he couldn't say that. James removed his hat—had forgotten to take it off up to now—and plowed one fat hand through hair already thinning. That's how he dug out the explanation.

"Oh, you poor, dear old mother," he said softly. "Why, listen, ma, I left it in my old clothes, the change; I folded 'em up like you made me do at night, and put 'em on top of my baby duds in my pasteboard box. And then, just to tell you I was going away from the lickin's for good, I made a wreath out in the woods and

sneaked it in on top of 'em—like father'd had on him when they took him away to stay. I—I was too little then to realize, like I do this minute," gulping out the words, "how cruel it must have been to you when you found— Hell! There's my box now!"

Clay's pocket-knife leaped out.

"Don't you waste that good cord," the widow cautioned. "I've had that same piece of cord since—" But she had to stop talking, for her son was grinningly offering the loose money he had just dug out of those old mended kiddie overalls.

"Pat there—the parrot—he told me you took it," said the mother feebly.

"Pat's a liar," said James.

"Liar-liar-liar!" coincided Patsy cheerfully.

"And I'd paid so much for Abner, your father, like that; and I couldn't find you, and I seemed to know you had it born in you—"

"All I took, ma, was a dollar that I'd saved myself. I walked to the big city and started myself selling papers, and—and now I'm back, and Dent don't seem such a worse place after all."

"I—I've missed you most at night, for Naomi couldn't ever take your place, Jimmie," the mother was wandering on brokenly. "Why, I haven't slept with the light out once since you've been away. And—but why didn't you come back after you'd got too old to be spanked?"

"I saw in the papers that you were dead, ma, nearly twenty years ago."

"Oh, that was the other fortune-teller's fault; she never did know her business." A mechanical glance at the clock—she had been watching it so faithfully all that day—brought sad reality home to the mistaken old lady. "You've come back to be broke, Jimmie," she said. "You'll have to learn to make my sole-curers now or starve."

Jimmie's laugh was a roar.

"I don't need your bum old shoe factory, ma. I'm live-stock freight-inspector now at five thousand a year, and we'll both stand on my feet, you and me. Besides"—he pulled out a familiar envelope, its seal still unbroken—"this is yours. Little new sister here gave it to new hubby; he gave it to new brother-'n-law; runaway son gives it back to— Say! I'm going to kiss you, ma!"

Clay was observing, through swimming eyes, how a fat man hugs his mother.

"Damn fine reunion, isn't it, old fellow?" he asked, stroking the parrot like a friend.

"Quit your swearing," said Pat.

(The End.)

FORGOTTEN? NO!

HERE once a cabin in the wilderness
Stood where now brambles and the ivy grow;
Life coped with nature's chaos, conquering stress,
Dreamed, did and died, for this was long ago.

Now, where the log walls stood, is only green
Of tree and brush that have reclaimed their own,
And o'er the force that once subdued the scene
The sepulture of shrub and vine is grown.

Forgotten then, and useless were those lives
Which toiled and dwindled on this frontier grim?—
No!—Listen to vague humming in the hives
Of new-born cities past the forest's rim!

The river's harnessed power, thrumming rails,
The golden promise of the coming years,
Are men's to-day through grace of rusting nails
Now deep in sod won by the pioneers!

Paul Steele.

The House of Fraud

by Jack Bechdolt

Author of "Resurrection Day," "The Torch," etc.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"DO SOMETHING!"

DIANA THAWN had been assisting at the royal bath of King Harvey the Second. In other words, she and Jean Temple had spent several hours tending and coddling the heir to the house of fraud. Finally they had tucked him into his crib, paused for one final outburst of admiration, and rejoined Harvey Temple before the hearth of the living-room.

The winter afternoon was dying, and as yet no lights had been kindled. The snow light from outside was an intense, rich, twilight-blue, and the fire within picked out various objects of the room in a rose glow. There were frost etchings on the panes and fantastic icicles pendant from the sashes.

In such a kindly illumination the shabby, warping shell of a house looked its loveliest. Its fine proportions were visible, and its stains and blemishes obliterated. Veneered surfaces glowed richly. What was false seemed real. The room was like some noble antique, polished by use and the hand of time to a richer glow.

Temple had retired from the conversation. His big body was stretched luxuriously along the depths of a big chair, legs extended toward the flame. He propped his big head with a hand on either cheek and fixed his blind gaze on the ruddy coals, luxuriating in the warmth, the beauty of his own imagining, and the sense of companionship with the two women, chatting industriously over their own affairs.

The group in the firelight glow was charming: Temple sunk in the luxury of contemplation; Jean on a low seat close to his chair, and near her Diana, leaning forward alertly, her crisp beauty and quick, graceful movements lost and found in the mystery of the flickering ruddy light.

The women's voices were pleasant music. About the hour there was a sense of physical well-being, of rest and content—the luxury of companionship. They were cosy and there was a faint odor of toast and tea in preparation.

Temple, whose hearing had become extraordinarily acute since his blindness, spoke suddenly: "I am inspired to prophesy," he announced, with heavy solemnity. "The gift of heavy sight has descended upon me, and I see behind the veil. A man is coming to this house, nearer, nearer. He is a handsome stranger, tall and dark, and he wears glasses, Diana—"

"Not—" Diana exchanged a quick glance with Jean.

"Gordon Devree, yes," Jean smiled. "I asked him to tea particularly on your account."

"Thank you," said Diana, doubtfully. She had been avoiding Devree since the day of the great revolt. She could not reconcile Devree with her policy of placating La Salle, so she had kept him out of her sight and memory as far as possible.

"Now he's coming up the path," Temple announced.

"I'll meet him," Diana volunteered. Jean Temple caught her arm. In dumb

This story began in The Argosy for May 15.

show she asked a question to which Diana nodded reassurance. "I won't forget," she murmured mysteriously.

While Devree laid aside his coat in the entrance hall Diana counseled him in a conspiratorial whisper: "Gordon, listen to what I tell, and be sure to do as I say—"

"Of course, anything you say—"

"Now so loud!"

"All right," in a hoarse whisper. "'S'matter, they all asleep? Shall we steal the royal infant and beat it till they ransom him?"

"Don't try to be funny. This is serious, deadly serious."

Devree stared hard. "Shoot," he commanded. "Whatever it is you may count on me."

"Well—it's Jean's new dress."

"What!"

"Jean Temple—has—a—new—dress!"

"All right."

"I want you to notice it."

"Probably would, anyhow. I'm not blind—"

"And comment on it. Tell her how lovely it is—"

"Look here, Diana. I'm not so bad as all that, am I? Of course, I'll compliment her. Can't you trust me?"

"Oh, you don't understand. There isn't any dress, really—"

Devree blinked rapidly. "Will you say that again—slow?"

"Jean hasn't a new dress—not really. That's clear enough, isn't it?"

"Oh, yes, certainly. She has a dress—only she hasn't! I must be sure to notice it—only it doesn't exist—clear as mud, that is!"

"She's *pretending* she has a new dress. You must make believe—"

"Ah, I see! It's a game!"

"Yes—sort of a game. Listen now, and pay attention while I tell you what this dress looks like. Gordon, you *must* remember and say something intelligent about it!"

"That's easy; go ahead—"

"Well, it's made of dark-blue kittens' ear *crêpe* with the sleeves and panniers embroidered in gold. It has the new *bouffant* lines at the hips—Gordon, are you listening? The short sleeves have bands of self-material and are turned back and trimmed with buttons of brilliant green and gold. It is cut with the new round neck, and Jean is wearing—I mean you're to pretend she's wearing—new slippers of bronze kid with cut steel buckles and bronze silk stockings. And she has a new hat, a hat of *taupe* beaver cloth with crown of blue velvet—"

"Diana!" Devree clutched her arm hysterically, his other hand pressed to his head. "I—I—holy cats!—have I got to say all that?"

"You've got to remember all that," Diana warned grimly.

"Oh, oh! Well, say it again, please!"

Hastily Diana repeated, with Devree checking off the points on his fingers. "Now," she commanded, without mercy, "we can't stay out here a second longer. They'll begin to wonder. Come in—"

"Help, help! Just a second, Diana—"

"No, sir. In you go." Diana ushered him, sore harassed, into the big room. After he had been welcomed and made one of the group beside the fire, Devree fell silent. He might have been seen, in the dusk, anxiously counting over the fingers of his two hands and muttering to himself. Diana gave him a peremptory glance and he burst out:

"Why, hello—uh—got a new dress, Jean?"

"Do you like it?" Jean rose and revolved slowly in the fire glow.

"Huh—y-yes—I—I think it's bully!"

"Let me turn on a light," said Diana. "You must see it. It's wonderful!"

"Yes," Temple chuckled, "by all means let him see it. I've heard of nothing else all afternoon!"

"It's—it's a kind of—uh—blue, isn't it," Devree stammered, and immediately turned a frightened glance on Diana to see if he had blundered. Diana smiled reassurance, and he plucked up heart. "Yes, kind of blue. Funny-looking stuff—say, that must be what they call, now, cat's tail?"

"It's kittens' *ear*," said Diana severely.

"Well — well, anyhow — it's mighty pretty. Of course, any kind of dress would look pretty on you, Jean—"

"What I always tell her," cried Temple. "But then, of course, this one is—well, it's a gorgeous dress, Harvey."

As he spoke Devree stared curiously at Jean Temple. He saw plainly enough that her dress was not new at all. It was the same simple, becoming, and rather shabby little dress he had always seen on Jean.

She read his thoughts and blushed painfully, and Devree felt curiously uneasy. Beneath this frivolous lie there was a suggestion of something deadly serious. He read a hint of tears in the grateful look Jean Temple gave him.

"Vanity, idle vanity," Temple scoffed. Then added impulsively: "Ah no, it's not either, dear. Come here and let me tell you how much I admire you in your fine feathers."

Jean drew back, a frightened look on her face, and Devree guessed she was afraid that Temple's intelligent fingers would discover the lie.

"What d'you think of this wife of mine, Gordon?" Temple burst out, proudly. "She's been deceiving me—"

"I'm astonished."

"Yes, sir, deceiving me. It's not enough that she should tire herself with the care of this house and two infants, one of 'em big enough to know better; it's not enough that she act as my secretary besides. No! On the sly it seems she has been accepting employment at typewriting, earning money of her own, and concealing it from me!"

"Jean!" Devree's mock reproach met a warning look from Jean.

"Yes, sir," Temple expounded. "Been earning money on the sly to buy herself pretty clothes. Gordon, I think she's planning to run away from us, the heir and me."

"Be careful she doesn't, Harvey. She's a home-wrecker in that gown!"

"Harvey, don't you dare say any more." Jean meant it. Not even in play could she bear the accusation. Seeing her love for the blind man written so plainly on her face, Devree wondered all the more at the curious deception of the mythical dress. Not until some time later in the evening did he come to the explanation.

In a moment when Temple was absent from the room, Jean began bravely: "Gordon I want to thank you for—about—my new dress. You were very clever—and very kind to pretend for me—"

"Yes, Gordon, you lied like a gentleman," Diana applauded.

"Who—I? Nonsense—it was nothing."

"Yes, but it was something. It meant a great deal, that foolish little deception. It was very important—and now you deserve to know what it all meant—"

"Not necessary to tell me," Devree protested. I'll admit I'm curious, but really Jean, it's your own affair. Only glad I could help along—"

"Ah, but you deserve to know. Your loyalty has earned you that much reward. The dress, of course, is a lie. It is my excuse for doing this extra work Harvey spoke of. You see—I needed some money—"

"Now please, Jean! This distresses you—"

"No, it was something I did gladly—and will always do gladly. It concerns Harvey's happiness, and you ought to know. Gordon, you must have wondered at this house we live in; at this funny, shabby, beautiful and pathetic house—this grotesque house—"

"That is unjust. I think it the loveliest home I ever have seen!"

"Do you think that?" Jean exclaimed wistfully, smiling again. "Sometimes I think that, too, and I wonder if after all, the house that seemed to me such a tragic lie isn't just a little lovelier than I thought it. Truly, Gordon, we have been very happy in this house— But you understand, I know Diana has told you, of what I have kept from Harvey, how he has never guessed the black, shameful truth about this man who called himself a *friend!*"

"Yes, yes; I know that you—you never told Harvey—that you let him think, well, that La Salle was all right."

"Most people would think me a fool, I suppose. Perhaps I have been a fool to keep up this—lie. But, Gordon—Diana—I don't dare tell him now—I don't *dare*."

From Jean Temple's dark, tragic eyes and her whole attitude of terrible indecision they guessed something of what she had suffered since Temple had brought her to the sham home that La Salle built.

"At first," she exclaimed eagerly, "in the first few days when Harvey was wild with delight at the thought of a home of his own—when he was like some crazy boy hugging his happiness so close, I knew I dared not tell. Then I think the shock would have killed him—yes, killed him. Later, I thought, I will speak of it. There will come a time when he is calmer, when the first glamour is worn off, a time when the truth must be told.

"I waited for that time—and while I waited the habit of lying grew. I became cowardly. I put it off, from day to day. I was afraid to speak; I am still afraid to tell him. In his fancy he has built up a delusion so fine—so lovely I haven't the heart to destroy it. If he were to discover now that Frank La Salle, the friend he admires so and trusts is—what he is, the shock would be worse than blindness—a hundred times worse. It would almost kill him! It would break his heart—his spirit. It would wreck all his life!"

"Perhaps you are right, Jean," Devree admitted, half convinced.

"It has not always been so easy, keeping up this elaborate lie. Harvey's income is enough for us, but little better than that. This—this extraordinary hovel Frank La Salle made, has crumbled from the first. It has leaked rain and let in the weather; it has cracked and racked and fallen apart as fast as I could keep it together—yes, faster. Perhaps in my obsession—I have become rather careless of other things, even shabby—"

"Jean, you are lovely." Devree said it well, but Diana's shining eyes said it more eloquently still.

"At least I've gotten something more precious than fine clothes for my trouble. But the last expense was that tax matter, the claim of the Gloria Investment Company. That threatened to take our home, pitiful as it is, away from us. That was why I needed money, and had to earn money, and why I had to lie to Harvey again—"

"Oh!" Devree exclaimed, horrified as the thing became clear to him. "You have slaved—slaved for that rotten, grafting tax fraud—that Gloria company!"

"What, it is a fraud?"

"I don't know that, no. I do know it is a cruel, inhuman extortion, that trades on the ignorance and credulity of the poor. And I know this, that it is a peculiar thing: the Gloria company fattens only off the unfortunates who deal with Frank La Salle. That's the rottenest thing about it—"

"La Salle? Gordon, do you mean to say that the Gloria company is—La Salle?"

"I could not prove that," said Devree gloomily.

"But you think it!"

"Yes, I have my suspicions. It was because of that—because I would not be a party to that clever, crafty, sleek bit of crookedness that I quit Barr. And I'm glad I quit him!"

"La Salle." Jean spoke the name as if it were unclean. "Oh, he is—Diana, if I am giving you offense—"

"Offend me?" Diana exclaimed. "Not in a thousand years. Say what you want of my respected employer. I can easily believe it."

"He is everything that's rotten," Devree agreed darkly.

"Then why don't you do something about it?"

Jean's exclamation made them both start.

"Who—I?" Devree blinked.

"You, of course! You are a lawyer—"

"I was," Devree nodded bitterly. "At present I'm a very indifferent salesman of Dorgan's writing inks—"

"But you are a lawyer, nevertheless. Have you forgotten what you said one night before this very fire? Have you forgotten that, Gordon?"

"I—I'm not sure—"

"Ah, but you were sure then. You were going out to crusade against the rottenness you hated so. You were going to do great things, Gordon Devree!"

"Why, Jean! Jean, what—do—you—mean?"

"I mean—*do something*." Jean was afire now, glowing with an enthusiasm, a fighting spirit that thrilled them. Her lithe figure was drawn up tense, and her voice, low and sweet, had the stirring note of a bugle. "Do something!" she repeated. "Fight! Fight this nastiness that robs the

poor and ignorant, that fattens off their misery—that trades on their love of home. You know it's here. You must have seen it all about you since you have come here to live. Are you a lawyer, and can find no way to stop this La Salle, to punish him, to put an end to him and his work for all time? If I were a man, and knew the law—"

"Oh, oh! Well, by heaven, I see! But Jean, I wonder—"

"Don't wonder, find out. Investigate! There are plenty of Frank La Salle's victims about you here. You hear talk everywhere, complaints. Do you think there is no truth in what they say? You were ambitious, Gordon, you talked of decency; was all that only talk? If you believe what you say, there is no opportunity for you here—and now. The man who can down La Salle is no small man—and I think if he succeeded in bringing La Salle down he would have no need to worry about his future."

Now Devree had caught the fire. He began to pace up and down the room, beating his hands together and muttering. The women watched him with an eager interest—a wide-eyed hope.

"I see, I see," he murmured. "Yes, yes, yes. It could be done, perhaps—and the opportunity is there—if a man put that over! Jean, Diana, that's a wonderful idea. You—you have shown me a chance—maybe a greater chance than you think. There are possibilities in this thing, big possibilities.

"I—I'm going to try. I'm going to take my time—all the time I can spare—and look into this. I'm going to see what kind of a case there is against Frank La Salle. And if there is a case—if there is—I—am—going—to—fight!"

Jean grasped his hand in both her own. Her eyes were wet with unshed tears. "I knew you would do it!" she exclaimed softly. "I know you can do it. Gordon, I'm almost—superstitious about you. You see, I have—prayed, prayed often and hard for a—a man big enough, brave enough, clever enough to bring La Salle to justice. I almost believe you are an answer to those prayers. Gordon, if you win—"

"Now, don't—don't hope too much," Devree pleaded anxiously. "I will try—I'll try my—damnedest. And if I find one sound peg on which to hang a criminal prosecution; if he has left one step uncovered; if only once he has blundered, I'll get that crook—"

"Who's a crook?"

Temple walked in on them, beaming amiably.

"Who's a crook?" he repeated. "Not anybody I know, I hope!"

Devree was bubbling with excitement as he walked beside Diana toward her home. Rosier and rosier glowed the possibilities of the crusade against Frank La Salle.

"It may lead to something—something good," he kept predicting. "If only I could down La Salle, if I could put that skunk where he belongs—behind the bars—I'd have done something worth while. Furthermore, it would establish me as a lawyer. It's the only chance I can see now. Barr has shut me out in the cold. So far as getting a start in another office is concerned I might as well be peddling ice to the Eskimos. And only a fool or a millionaire would try to establish a practise of his own at the present time in this city full of lawyers. But this thing—"

"It would be a wonderful thing to do," Diana sighed wistfully.

"Wouldn't it! Hang the chance of making something out of it! I'd do it anyway, and gladly—"

"I know you would, Gordon. I think you would always do what seemed decent—without hope of reward. That's one reason I—like—you."

"Look here, Diana—" He stopped abruptly, facing her. The moonlight, pouring down from above, welling up from every plane of the mirrorlike drifts, made a cool, splendid radiance that bathed them. It showed Diana's slender, straight figure very black against the glistening white snow, and the rose and cream of her face half masked by the fur she wore.

Under her dark, close-fitting little hat, with its fur band, her gold-colored hair glistened like real gold. Devree, fumbling

for words, had never seen her so desirable. His confusion grew.

"Suppose," he began hurriedly, "suppose I can make a go of this thing? Suppose I organize a prosecution that will bring La Salle to justice—and perhaps should also establish myself in the law? Suppose all that—and it might happen—if I did that, Diana, would you—could you—oh, my dear, you know what I want to say—"

"I know," she nodded earnestly, "and, please don't say it!"

"You—don't want me—to say it?" They stood very close, their eyes challenging. Devree's hand had almost touched her sleeve. Now he drew it back.

"No." She shook her head with a mournful smile. "I would rather you didn't—say it. Yes, I know what you want to say—I would be foolish to pretend I haven't known, or that I don't care for you—"

"Diana!"

"You must listen! Gordon, I have no business letting you—commit—yourself. I have no business giving you any—encouragement—"

"Then there's somebody else? I knew it!"

"No, there is nobody else—of the sort you think. But there are reasons, very good reasons. For one thing, my father's affairs; for another, myself. You see, I know myself much better than you can. I like you, yes, but I'm afraid I like Diana Thawn even better — and the things Diana Thawn values."

"You mean, I couldn't give you the—the sort of life you want! But Diana, if I do succeed—"

"Gordon, suppose we try to be very brave and—sensible—about this? Suppose we wait until you've had a chance? And meantime—"

"Meantime," Devree exclaimed with a loyalty that touched her, "we'll say nothing more about it. Good; I'm well satisfied."

He kept his word strictly, but she knew by the very touch of his gloved hand on her sleeve what he thought and what he felt. She knew he left her filled with extravagant hopes, and she knew she had no business to let him hope like that. Her own weakness disgusted her.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE ENTERING WEDGE.

DEVREE knew enough of the law to understand that he was undertaking a heroic task in seeking a flaw in La Salle's legal armor. He was pitting his theoretical knowledge and inexperience against the brains of Thurston Barr, admittedly one of the shrewdest legal advisers practising. Though he went at the work with high hopes he was not greatly surprised that weeks slipped by without any definite accomplishment.

But beside enthusiasm the young man had a certain dogged stubbornness that makes a splendid ally with courage. All the time he could spare from his efforts to earn a living he devoted to the affairs of La Salle.

By that winter there were a number of homes—unpretentious homes as bleak and pitiful as the land itself—on the Saltmarsh tract. And La Salle continued to market the property. Some of the lots he sold a half-dozen times over, taking advantage of his time-payment contracts to regain title.

What Devree hoped to do was catch La Salle in a criminal transaction, subject to proof. He realized the difference between his moral certainty of the man's crookedness and legal certainty. Even the instance of Harvey Temple, flagrant as it was, was legally safe. Supposing that Jean had allowed it—and he knew Jane would never risk letting her husband know the truth—the fraud that had been practised on Temple could never be proved to the satisfaction of a jury. But he felt that surely, somewhere, La Salle's boldness would overreach itself; that somewhere he would grow careless of the criminal law. He made it his concern to investigate as many of La Salle's transactions as he could discover. He interviewed scores of those who had dealt with the promoter.

Here and there, in numerous cases, were grounds for civil suits. But civil suits cost money, and there was no money to press

them. La Salle and Barr understood that thoroughly. They traded on the inability of the poor man to purchase justice.

Following his molelike course, Devree came one winter afternoon to the little shop of Nick Wally. Nick Wally was a barber. He had grown gray in that profession, passing his life amid scents of pomade, bay-rum, and tar soap. His shop was a cubby-hole not far from Hudson Street, in the section known as Greenwich.

There was one old-fashioned walnut chair and an old-fashioned walnut-framed mirror. A wash-stand in the corner, and beneath it a little gas hot-water heater. Most of the bottles arrayed on a marble slab before the mirror, promising hair-restorers and cure-alls, were empty; the chair was usually empty; and except for Nick, the shop was empty.

Nick huddled beside the tiny oil-stove that warmed the place, studying a sensational evening paper a day old. He wore old-fashioned spectacles that gave him a look of benevolent melancholy. He was a slight, little figure of a man with a real barber's spotlessness, and his fluffy, gray mane lent to his face the dignity of a saddened poet or philosopher—a look that concealed much of the real Nick.

Devree had little trouble getting at the story of Nick Wally. The barber had been one of the original clients of Frank La Salle. He had bought one of the first Saltmarsh lots, and the price was a thousand dollars. More than a year it had taken him to pay up, using the nest-egg he and his wife had accumulated, and all that he could squeeze out of his meager living.

"Me and the old woman did it," said Nick. "We got it all paid for, because we thought maybe we could live out in the country and raise chickens and garden truck, and I'd keep the shop till my hand got too bad; then we'd settle down on our land.

"Mister, I tell you, it was a tough job paying up them lots! There's just me and the old lady. My son, he went out West and got married, and he don't never help the old man any—not him. Business is rotten, too, on account I haven't got the right location.

"So we had to dig up the coin out of ourselves, and I tell you, mister, there was a lot of days we lived on bread and boiled spuds to find the money. Then what d'you think that robber done?"

"What did he do?"

"He never give me no deed! I had a chance to sell the land, too; I could of made money off it—and he wouldn't give me a deed, and he never will because he don't own it. No, sir, there's a mortgage on it that has been foreclosed, and he can't give no title. I been to him I bet as many as a hundred times, and I don't get no deed. Now, he won't even talk to me no more—"

"But what did La Salle say to you?"

"He just kept on promising, that was all. Said he was getting a deed fixed up. Then I got it from a fellow about that mortgage being foreclosed, and I asked him how about it—" Nick paused and sighed.

"Well?"

"Well, he threw me out. He's got a big fellow works for him, like the bouncer they used to have at Kelly's—when Kelly's was running before this prohibition stuff come in. He says to this guy: 'See this man don't never come in to annoy me again.'

"I was sore, but what could I do? 'I'll sue you,' I says. 'I'll have the law on you.' He just laughed. Hell, he knew he had me there! There ain't no law for a poor man. Well, mister, he's a slick one, all right!"

"He got your thousand dollars—"

"Yeah, that's right. He got it. He's a crook, that's what he is—a slick crook."

"Now, listen," Devree began earnestly, light of battle in his eye. "If La Salle did what you say we can send him to jail for it. I'm going to check up your story, and if it's all straight I want you to come with me to the prosecuting attorney and make complaint—"

Nick's eye brightened. "Say," he interrupted eagerly, do I get my thousand dollars back?"

"No—I'm afraid not. Not that way. But if we send La Salle up the river you could sue against his estate for your money—"

"Huh, a lawsuit! I ain't got money for lawyers—"

"I'm a lawyer. I'll undertake the suit

for you myself—it won't cost you anything," Devree promised.

But Nick shook his gray head. "No, no lawsuits," he muttered. "What's the use of lawsuits? Why, a poor man ain't got a chance against these money guys. You're a lawyer, you oughta know that."

"But, look here," Devree argued earnestly, "anyhow, we'll see that La Salle gets punished. We'll go to the prosecutor—"

"Uhuh, not me!" Nick shook his head with new vigor. "I'm not monkeying with that crook. He's too slick, I tell you. Next thing I know somebody'd be around setting fire to my shop—or maybe slipping me a bomb in a box of candy. Young fellow, I lived around Hudson Street too damn long to go messing in where it don't concern me—"

"Listen to me"—Devree was growing angry—"this is your duty, I tell you. This La Salle cheated you. You owe it to the public to see he doesn't cheat somebody else—"

"I don't owe nothing," Nick protested. "Huh, how d'you get that way? What's the public ever done for me?"

"Just the same, you listen," Devree ordered. He proceeded to lecture Nick Wally on the duties of a citizen. He spoke with all the eloquence he could command. Now that he was on the track of what he sought he had no intention of letting Nick's indifference interfere with justice.

Before he had done instructing the barber in the law Devree was red of face. But he left with his gray eyes gleaming, for Nick, half terrorized, half persuaded, had: "Guessed he'd have to go through with it.

"Only," the barber had added, "I don't see what's the use stirring up all this trouble if it don't get me my money back. Yeah, he's a slick one!"

"*A slick one!*" Devree repeated, annoyed by the barber's constant tribute to La Salle. "I believe you admire him for it. I believe you'd like to do the same trick if you had the chance!"

"Huh! Wouldn't you?"

Next day Frank La Salle had a visitor. It was Nick Wally. After Devree left him Nick had sat in his shop until late, thinking—and this was the result of his thought.

It cost Nick little or nothing to close his shop for the day. Sometimes he felt he could have made a better profit by closing it for good—and to-day he had higher stakes to play for. By his insistence on seeing La Salle personally he got past the usual office boy, and laid his case before Diana Thawn.

"It's something that concerns your boss," Nick explained to Diana. "You tell him I don't mind telling what it is half as much as he'd mind my telling it. You just say that to him, miss, and if he don't want to see me, all right—I'll go away like a little lamb."

Nick resumed his chair with an air of mystery.

La Salle hesitated when he heard the message. Finally he nodded. "Send him in, and come back yourself if I sound the buzzer. The man always looked to me like a dangerous crank."

Nick Wally nodded importantly to La Salle, sitting in his great carved chair. He drew another chair close to La Salle's desk and sat himself in it. His feet just touched the floor. He was dressed in old-fashioned Sunday black, and bore tenderly an old-fashioned high silk hat. He wore a flaming-red tie, one of the ready-made four-in-hand variety popular twenty years ago.

La Salle said nothing at all on his entrance. He waited for the visitor to do the talking and his finger hovered above the electric call-button that would summon Diana.

When Nick spoke there was a curious mixture of tremulous uncertainty and braggadocio in his voice. "I bought a lot from you one time, Mr. La Salle—"

No answer. Nick hesitated a moment, then finished his message in a rush: "I'm here to sell it back!"

"Don't want it," said La Salle briefly. His finger barely touched the button.

"Yes, you do," said Nick, bold with desperation. "When you hear how much it's worth I guess you'll want it—"

"What do you mean by that?"

"I'll tell you what I mean: I been talking to a lawyer about that deed you never gave me; that's what I mean. I found out some things."

"Well?"

"Well, look here, you ever been up at Ossining, where the prison is? Up the river?"

"Are you trying to threaten me!" La Sall's finger pressed, and in Diana's outer office the buzzer sounded.

"I'm not trying to threaten nobody," Nick snarled, both frightened and angry. "But if you want some good advice, you'd better listen to me!"

In a few seconds the door opened and Diana looked in. La Salle glanced up hurriedly and shook his head. "Nothing, Miss Thawn. Now you—go on."

Presently Thurston Barr was sent for and came in a hurry. Nick Wally was made at home in a comfortable chair in the outer office, handed the last noon extra to read, and presented with a cigar to smoke while La Salle closeted himself with Barr.

"Can he make that stick?" La Salle demanded when he had given Barr the details of the case. "Can they get me for that?"

Barr looked profoundly grave. He shook his head slowly; clucked with his tongue.

"What do you mean?"

"Well," said Barr, judicially, "I'd say they could make out a charge of false pretenses against you—and probably make it stick—"

"Umpf! That's criminal stuff, isn't it?"

"Good for a term up the river—few months—or maybe a year or so."

La Salle stared fixedly at his counselor, and Barr stared back composedly. Barr was eager to read his client's thoughts. "Ever visit a jail?" he asked suddenly.

La Salle smile grimly, but his eyes had widened at the query. "No, and I don't intend to."

"Of course I don't say that I couldn't get you off—"

"You are comforting, aren't you! I suppose you'd try?"

"Certainly I'd try—"

"Never mind. We won't run that risk. We'll square this little runt. Anyway, it's cheaper."

"Leave it all to me," Barr promised. I'll talk to him. It will probably cost you his money back—maybe a couple hundred more. That's cheaper than the pen, eh?"

La Salle nodded. Barr thought he winced again at the thrust.

"Look here, Frank," he exclaimed, turning back as he was about to leave, "I hope you didn't pull any more raw deals like that when you were starting. You haven't got any more of those things buried in your dark past where I don't know about 'em?"

"Only what I did on your advice."

"You're dead sure?"

"Why? You're driving at something; what is it?"

"Well, I was just thinking," said Barr slowly. "You know, this looks sort of funny in a way. This barber showing up all loaded for us—"

"Said he'd been talking to a lawyer."

"Humph! More likely some lawyer's been talking to him. If this Nick Wally was sucker enough to fall for your raw deal it's a cinch he never had sense enough or nerve enough to go out and get posted on the law. No, sir; somebody's been talking to him—some sharp lawyer."

"What of it?" La Salle looked uneasy.

"Well, it might be nothing but circumstance—and again it might be; it just *might* be that somebody's on your trail, Frank."

La Salle had no answer, but he rose and took a nervous turn about the room. Finally he paused before the window, his back to Barr. "Why should anybody do that?" he asked finally. His voice lacked its usual firmness.

Barr allowed a smile to flicker along his thick lips. "Oh," he said casually, "sometimes a prosecuting attorney will get ambitious to make a record and start out to put a lot of you fellows behind the bars." This time he saw La Salle wince, and smiled again.

"Do you honestly think that's it—on the level, do you?" La Salle demanded eagerly.

"Haven't the slightest idea. But I tell you I'll find out. I'll pump this barber-friend of yours—and have one of the boys in my office look around a little. Yes, we'd better find out."

"You're right, dead right, Thurston. Find out—as quick as you can."

"All right, I will. Best be sure because—well, civil law is safe enough, Frank, but look out for the criminal law. That's where many a wise bird gets his fingers burned. I know! I've seen 'em come and go."

Barr left his client deeply preoccupied. He had a well-founded fancy that he had discovered a way to touch La Salle in a sensitive spot. He was pleased with the discovery, and made a note of it for future reference.

CHAPTER XX.

"SOME LITTLE FIXER!"

GLORIA LA SALLE spent some days considering Barr's advice, days during which she maintained terms of armed neutrality with her husband.

She was convinced that Barr was a very clever fellow. She considered him a far smarter man than La Salle, a man who played a deeper game. "He's safe as a national bank," she thought. "Where Frank's got bluff, he's got brains."

The judgment was not fair to La Salle, but Gloria let personal feelings color her judgments, and Barr's personality was the sort that made the greater appeal to her.

Gloria had her own hand to play in this chancy game of men's affections. It was a hand that needed a great deal of study. She understood that her hold on La Salle was slight. She had attracted La Salle when both were young by her flaming good looks and restless discontent with life about her.

As La Salle bettered himself she realized that his interest in her was due to the notion that she would eventually aid him in establishing social relations. He often told her that her good looks and expensive clothes were "good advertising." But hold on his affections she had none. Long ago she was convinced he had no affections. He was an iceberg, and she hated ice.

Barr was the sort of man she liked. He had coarse good looks, a hearty manner, and more than the normal share of human failings, both good and bad. Added to that the discovery that Barr, too, could accumulate money—and her mind was made up.

Gloria knew she had nothing to offer either man save the attraction of radiant good looks. Shrewd enough to realize that, she tried to play her cards carefully. She resolved to wait until Barr was ready to strike—and meant meantime to placate La Salle.

Since it was one of La Salle's chief concerns to reconcile the two women who bulked so large in his social affairs, Gloria's task should have been easy. But it wasn't. La Salle's cool certainty that she would do as he told her made her furious. Several times she brought up the subject of Diana Thawn, intending to present her capitulation, only to be diverted by her passion into another defiance.

In one of these fiery scenes she declared: "I won't stand it. I'm done with you; done, you hear me? Right here's where I quit."

"Quit?" La Salle smiled. "You don't dare; but be careful I don't take you at your word."

"Don't dare, eh? You think I can't take care of myself? Think I don't know my rights? Wait till I talk to a lawyer."

"Any lawyer you please."

"All right, I'll see Barr!"

Gloria expected this announcement to affect her husband, and she was not altogether disappointed. La Salle expressed indifference, but he showed uneasiness. He assured himself Barr would not dare encourage Gloria, for Barr had too much to gain from his patronage. But he mistrusted Barr. The lawyer's shrewdness matched his own, and he didn't like that.

But the very next morning Gloria assured him she had made a mistake. "Fix it up with the Thawns any way you like," she said sulkily. "I guess you know best about that. Maybe I did say too much, Frank, but that girl makes me sore—good and sore. Never mind, I'll play the game, if it's going to help any."

It needed all of La Salle's nerve to conceal his astonishment. He was tremendously elated to find that Barr had seconded his own efforts. That was really more than he expected from Barr. But

he managed to conceal his surprise and gratification with the usual air of indifference.

"See that you do play the game," he said briefly. "And try to play your hand a little better—this time."

"Yes, I will," Gloria answered humbly. "Suppose we give a little party this week-end, Frank, and try to square things?"

"Go ahead. That's all up to you."

The "little party" consisted of a dinner, and following that, several tables of bridge. Diana and her father were among the guests. Gloria sent a car for them, and Gloria greeted them with a special effort to please.

They found the big house in Renfrew Gardens blazing with light and color. Again they were impressed by the irreproachable good taste and beauty of La Salle's home. Its rooms were not ostentatiously too large, and the decorator who had done them had used a color scheme of the new school that is not afraid of gaiety. They were the sort of chambers that look their best under the bright lights, and filled with well-dressed guests. Sociability was their theme.

They were impressed again by the smooth-running machine that was La Salle's household. Shrewd judgment in spending had given the realty man a background suggestive of wealth and cultivated leisure. Diana found all her senses pleased by the brilliant table at which La Salle presided.

Certainly, in every outward appearance, the dinner was a great success. La Salle's guests talked and ate and drank with evident enjoyment. But the one thing lacking—Diana realized it with a start—was cordiality, spontaneity, life.

The guests talked, mostly in pairs and threes. On her right two of La Salle's business acquaintances were murmuring praise of the house. She caught a scattered phrase or two: "Decorations alone must have set him back thousands; and the marbles, you know marbles *cost* these days." On her left another was singing the praise of Frank La Salle: "Smart! I'll say he's smart. The way he makes it you'd think he owned his own mint."

She saw Thurston Barr whispering into Gloria's ear. She saw her own father in debate with a banker over the reasons for the sharp decline in foreign exchange. She saw that everybody discussed something—mostly money—all except La Salle. Nobody talked to La Salle. He sat faultless, calm, smiling a little, alone in a crowd.

A sense of duty urged Diana to engage her host. She made several clever efforts at topics of general interest. To each of them La Salle responded with a perfectly proper counter—and there the talk died. When he spoke, talk all about them seemed to die.

Diana conceived the grotesque notion that she was as conspicuous as the interlocutor of a minstrel show. She gave it up. La Salle lapsed into his own satisfied silence, and the table-talk again took its natural course—and money was its subject.

And so, after dinner, when she played bridge, she noted that La Salle neither took a hand at cards nor conversation. Some way, host that he was, he seemed ignored by all who came under his roof. He strolled. He spoke to one and another, and always he was listened to, and answered—but never did he seem tempted to linger. With his passing always came that sense of relief.

Finally she saw him gravitate to Barr, and the two men stood with their heads together. She was glad, for La Salle, in a subtle way, had worried her. Even in his own home the man seemed out of the main current—a bit of drift that repelled everything which approached it.

La Salle and Barr were deep in talk of business.

"Couldn't get a thing out of him," Barr was saying. "He's a close-mouthed little devil, that Nick Wally. But he won't bother us any more; I saw to that."

"But this—this idea you had, Thurston—this notion that somebody was watching on my trail."

Barr shook his head. "Guess there's nothing to it. Can't find anything, anyhow. No report of anything going on. I had a man round to the district-attorney's office—a man who hears most of the office gossip."

La Salle sighed with evident relief.

"I'm glad to hear it," he admitted.

"Yes, that's all right, I guess." Barr

smiled over his own thoughts. "Great party, Frank," he exclaimed with sudden cordiality. "By gad, you do it well, I'll say it. You're a wonder at doing things; and your wife, look at her! Notice how she handles the Thawns? Clever."

"By the way, there's something I was going to mention," La Salle said, hesitating. "Understand Gloria came to see you—pretty sore about this Thawn business?"

"Oh, that! Guess it came out all right, eh?"

"Yes, it did. I'm obliged to you, Barr. You're some fixer."

"Yeah, some little fixer," Barr chuckled throatily. His face reddened with his mirth. "Some little fixer," he repeated. "All right, Frank, you're welcome."

"Yes, that was good work, Barr. How you do it I don't know. She was sore; I couldn't handle her with a ten-foot pole."

"'S all right, Frank, quite all right. Glad to do it any time. Any time you want a fixer that way, give me a call. Glad any time at all."

Barr moved away, still chuckling.

La Salle drew a deep breath of satisfaction. Things were running well again. Barr's news reassured him there was no further danger of investigation of his past. Criminal law did not threaten. Gloria had been made to see common sense. The evening was a brilliant success.

His black eyes glinted with pride, for, turn them where he would, they saw a bright house, a splendid house, filled with smartly dressed people impressed by the power of Frank La Salle, making merry by his permission.

They saw Diana Thawn and her aristocratic father, two people who could help him to higher social levels. They saw his wife, a figure of flaming, costly beauty, fit to represent his name. That was the way he liked to see things.

Barr managed soon to gain a few minutes with Gloria. The little alcove where they met was shadowy, yet gave them a plain view of the two joining drawing-rooms. They sat down in the shadow.

"I hope you're satisfied," Gloria sighed. "Am I working like a horse to please him, or am I not?"

"You're a wonder, Gloria. How you do it is a marvel to me."

"Ah! Maybe you think I like to make a fool of myself keeping him good-natured."

"Maybe you think I like to see you do it," Barr retorted. "Maybe you think I'm not crazy to take you away from that human refrigerator out there. What right's he got to you? You're alive—alive all over, you beauty!"

Barr laid a warm hand on Gloria's shoulder.

"Don't do that," she warned sharply. "If Frank should see you—"

"He won't see me. And, anyhow, we should worry about Frank now," Barr chuckled richly.

"Now?" Gloria caught at the words. "You mean that you've found out something?"

"Yes, I think I have."

"What is it?"

"That's my secret; but I begin to see a way, Gloria—a way to keep our goose laying golden eggs for us—to keep him in a nice little cage."

"When?"

"Not so very long. As soon as I'm dead sure. I'll keep my word. If nothing happens to him meantime, I'll make it happen. Remember."

Gloria laid her hand on his sleeve. Leaning closer, she returned the hungry stare of his brown eyes with a look that said volumes. "Don't let it be long," she whispered.

La Salle saw the lawyer with his wife.

"Clever fellow, that Barr," he thought, glorying in the notion that Barr's cleverness was in his employ.

Searching the records, Devree verified the story of Nick Wally. When he had done his heart swelled with triumph. At last he had something tangible to go on. He had caught La Salle in a criminal act.

It seemed almost too good to be true. Now he was in position to go to the prosecuting attorney with a definite complaint, a verified story. He had grounds on which

to start the law's machinery after La Salle. With this start he felt sure he could enlist official aid to investigate other of La Salle's transactions. With that help he could weave a net about the realty man, a net strong enough to bring him to justice.

In his elation he was greatly tempted to tell the good news to Diana and Jean Temple. He wanted to share his happiness. But he deferred the pleasure until he had again seen Nick Wally and made sure of his testimony. He hurried to Nick Wally's shop.

He found Nick in the shop. The barber started at sight of him. He looked very much like a man who wished himself elsewhere.

"Can't talk to you to-night, mister," he greeted. "Got to go right out—see a man on business."

"Oh, yes, you can, Wally. I won't take long."

"No, mister; no, no. I tell you, the party is waiting. It's business I got to see about."

Nick had seized his coat and was struggling into it. He jammed his hat over his ears and advanced on the visitor impatiently, as if he would shoo him out.

"Now, look here," said Devree firmly, seizing the barber by the arm. "You listen. To-morrow I want you to go with me to the district-attorney's office, you understand?"

"Sure, mister, sure. That's all right, but to-night I got to see this man. Right now I got to go. He's waiting."

"All right, I'll walk along with you. We can talk on the way."

"But I got to take a subway, mister, clear over to Astoria. I got a chance to maybe sell my business. Would you take bread out of my mouth?"

Devree was surprised to find that Nick trembled in his earnestness. His sympathy was touched. He compromised by seeing the barber to the subway. When he left, Nick had promised to do all that was necessary. They made an engagement to meet the following morning. And that was the last Devree saw of Nick Wally.

Good as his word, Nick had sold the shop. With his wife he had disappeared from their flat. Where he had gone nobody knew, and Devree never learned.

But of one thing he was now certain: Nick was gone, and with him the case against Frank La Salle.

The weeks passed, and the legal knight errant grew discouraged. La Salle was snugly intrenched. On the ignorance, cupidity, and carelessness of others he fattened, and always Barr was at his elbow, guiding him safely through the maze.

One young lawyer, without practise or standing, hampered by the necessity of selling Dorgan's writing inks to earn a living, was so negligible a menace to the safety of that great conspiracy that, even had the conspirators understood his activity, they could well afford to laugh.

CHAPTER XXI.

LA SALLE LAUGHS.

ON a biting February day Jean Temple fought her way against the wind, down lower Broadway. The shabby blue-gray suit with worn fur-trimming was pitifully inadequate protection against the cold. Jean's face was pinched and white and the thinly gloved hand that clutched her purse so tightly was numb. Though there was money in the purse, she walked, for the money was her final tribute to the Gloria Investment Company.

Lowering clouds made the city dull; a vast confusion of frigid, half-empty streets; a monochrome of gray snow, slate-gray sky, and blackly silhouetted buildings.

The news-vendors at the corners had built little fires in tin buckets and shuffled their grotesquely wrapped figures above them, like witches watching their caldrons.

From these flares the black ashes rose swirling to mingle with the grit of frozen snow.

To Jean life seemed harsh and hopeless and drab.

The steam-heated warmth of the office building, finally gained, smote her in a great, engulfing wave that changed her numbness to a strange, sleepy bewilderment.. Electric-lights in the great marble

corridor glowed with an overpowering brilliance. The clangor and confusion of many elevators dazed her.

Between the state of freeze and thaw she came to Thurston Barr's offices in a state of semi-consciousness that made her movements automatic, but left her brain slow to act. She sat down in Barr's ornate, imposing reception-room to wait the convenience of the clerk who had succeeded Devree in handling the affairs of the Gloria Company.

While she waited the door of Barr's private office opened, and Barr and La Salle started out. La Salle had finished a very satisfactory conference with his lawyer. He was wrapping himself in a heavy, fur-lined coat and was in what, for him, passed as high spirits.

The sight of Jean Temple's shabby little figure, waiting patiently for attention, stopped him in his tracks. He pulled Barr back within the office in exaggerated haste.

"Barr, what the devil is she doing there?"

"She? Who?"

"Mrs. Temple."

"Why, damned if I know. I'd forgotten there was a Mrs. Temple. Wait—find out." Barr picked up the interoffice telephone and asked some questions. "It's the Gloria Investment Company; she deals with them," he told La Salle.

"The Gloria? She's paying into the Gloria?"

"Anything wrong about it, eh? Anything—"

"What? No, no; nothing wrong. No; I was just thinking. So she got caught, too? Well, I'm damned!"

"Sure there's nothing wrong?" Barr insisted anxiously.

"Lord, no! Just—just a little joke of my own. A damned funny little joke."

Then, to Barr's amazement, La Salle actually chuckled, three short, mirthless syllables. He was still smiling when he went across the waiting-room. Before Jean Temple he paused deliberately, and his smile became malicious.

"Good evening, Mrs. Temple," he bowed gravely.

Surprised, Jean had answered with a smile before she realized who this was. Then her expression froze, and her dark eyes looked deliberately around and through La Salle. She shook with a helpless rage.

But La Salle passed out, well pleased. All the way to the street, where a closed car awaited him, he continued to smile. He smiled all the way home to Renfrew Park, for he was picturing to himself the moment when Jean had defied him, when she had flared into a righteous anger that had something thrilling in it as she denounced his double-dealing—that moment and the present one, the contrast in Barr's office, with Jean the shabby victim of his own pet Gloria Investment swindle. He could not recall, in all his life, a richer, more satisfactory joke.

Victim of a futile rage Jean made a final settlement with the mysterious Gloria Company and hurried away from Barr's office with the grim satisfaction of being quit, at last, of that obligation. The very quality of La Salle's malicious smile told her he knew why she was in the office—that he knew how she had been sacrificing to keep the home intact—knew and rejoiced in her humiliating poverty.

She felt she cheerfully could have struck La Salle for his insult. It added to her fury that he had caught her off guard; that she had answered his salutation with a smile before she realized fully who it was who spoke.

Bitterness was succeeded by a terrible depression. Always La Salle seemed to win, to ride the wave untouched. She felt her helplessness before his calculating cunning. She wondered if her threat to bring this crook to justice was only an empty boast. She wondered bitterly if there remained in the world such a thing as justice.

Then, on the ferry, she encountered Devree, and the sight of him made her hope again. But Devree could offer no encouragement.

"Looks as if we were up against something unbeatable," he confided gloomily. "I've tried—God knows I've tried everywhere to hang something on La Salle. The

prosecuting attorney's office is reasonable enough. If I can show them any proof to act on they'll start something, but it's up to me to do the pioneering. He covers his tracks well, damn him!"

"And yet so many complain about him," Jean marveled. "I have heard people who are bitter—"

"And so have I! But Jean, talk is the cheapest thing in the world. La Salle's victims will talk—talk in plenty, but they are afraid—afraid to act. If they would make complaint, if they would even furnish me the evidence, if only a half-dozen of them could be combined to move against the man, we could overturn him.

"It's their ignorance, their prejudice, their foolish fears—well, I suppose if they were fearless, intelligent people they wouldn't deal with him in the first place. Only—I don't know what to do. I feel as if I'd reached the end of my string—"

"Gordon, you're not giving up?"

Devree flushed uneasily, but she saw his jaw set. "No, I won't quit—only—I'm afraid we'll have to wait. It may be a long time, Jean—a long, long time. I—sometimes I wonder if there is a chance to beat a crook like that. There seems to be a special dispensation for La Salle and his kind. The very law protects them. Jean, I begin to understand what makes anarchists of honest men. There is so much law there seems to be no justice left!"

Jean looked at him sharply. Strangely enough, his thought almost matched her own discouragement. She saw that Devree was very tired. He was also becoming shabby. He had neglected his own affairs to crusade against La Salle. His overcoat was wearing shiny, his shoes were scuffed, and there was a hole in the finger of his glove. He sagged wearily in his seat, staring with bitter eyes at the floor.

The immediate effect of his despair was to send her own spirits down to zero.

"There was a time," Devree went on moodily, "when I was on the other side—and the war was going on—and everybody I met was breaking his heart to win it, when I used to think we Americans were the greatest folks on earth, fighting our heads off to maintain the principle of justice. I used to get all stirred up with that idea! It seemed, somehow, as if the world was a great place when men fought and got blown to pieces for the sake of an ideal. But now—war's over, and there seem to be just as many crooks and as much successful crookedness in the world as there ever was. I don't know—"

"Gordon, you're wrong. You know you're wrong! The world isn't rotten—the crooks don't succeed!"

Jean's weary figure straightened from its droop. Her eyes began to shine again. Her faith was everlasting. It returned to her at this zero hour, renewing its life in the ashes of defeat.

"There is such a thing as justice, Gordon Devree. There was never a crooked thought or act but eventually went to smash against the overpowering majority of decency that's running this world. Long ago I told La Salle he'd come to an accounting, and he laughed at me. He's still laughing—I saw him laugh to-day. But—I have not quit believing! He'll pay for his rottenness as sure as the sun rises—and you—you can make him pay. Only you must keep on—*Gordon, you won't quit now!*"

As she spoke she stirred him from his lethargy. So compelling was her own belief he could not have resisted its infection had he tried. Before they parted he had promised eagerly to keep up the fight. He knew he would keep the promise to her, and the knowledge heartened him wonderfully.

He walked briskly home across the snow to the house of the Garfields. And there he found, as if it were an answer to Jean Temple's prophecy, the very thing he had sought so long.

CHAPTER XXII.

INDICTED!

THE Garfields were in trouble, and sorely perplexed.

Since the night he had learned to his horror that they had bought a home from La Salle, Devree had watched the transaction like a cat at a mouse hole. Strange-

ly enough, he could find no indication of double-dealing about it. Title to the land and house was free of encumbrance except Dad's own mortgage, and this, by an unexpected stroke of luck, he had settled.

One of the defunct corporations Dad had promoted in his enthusiasm had finally come to settle its affairs, and he received in payment for an old and almost forgotten claim enough to gain title to his property.

The deed was without reproach. Such as it was, the land and house were their own, and they were well content. Marveling, Devree had to admit the transaction seemed to shine with honesty.

But this evening Dad and Mother had a story to tell, and they told it with a mingling of perplexity and indignation.

Suddenly surveyors had appeared on the very lot where Dad was planning, in the spring, to lay out a splendid vegetable garden. They had worked all day, sighting and staking and making notes in their books, and from them Dad learned astonishing news.

"Gordon, he—he claims that's his land, La Salle does!"

"Yes, and Gordon," Mother chimed in, "he's already sold the land to another man—"

"And he's going to build a house there. Just as quick as the thaw comes a gang will start digging foundations—"

"Right in our garden!"

"Why, I went to La Salle myself, as soon as I heard about it. I asked him what he meant—" Dad paused, so choked was he by indignation that he could find no words.

"Well?" Devree urged, his eyes beginning to shine.

"Well, sir—I can't make head or tail of it, I declare I can't. Why, he just smiled—and—and showed me his plat. And, by thunder, Gordon, he's got that land mapped out as his own. My piece is only half what we thought it was—on his map."

"But you have a deed!"

"Sure. I showed him that. He said I didn't know how to read the metes and bounds, that's what he told me! Kind of laughed, and said I'd made a mistake. Well, it is sort of confusing, it's so technical, but I thought I was right. Now—I don't seem to know, exactly—"

"Why, the young man that brought us out here deliberately told me that was part of the land!" Mother exclaimed.

"Yes, and he paced it off, Gordon! And the deed seemed to be all right. But La Salle said—well, he said if I liked I could sue him in court. He wasn't going to change his plans on my say-so. Gordon, we can't afford to go to court and fight a lawsuit for maybe a year or so. We can't afford that—"

"Why, Gordon, you don't even look sorry for us!" Mother interrupted reproachfully.

"Huh? Oh, I'm sorry for you—no, I don't know as I am, either! Let me see that deed."

For several days Devree delved among the land records, and when he had finished he was smiling with a grim satisfaction. "Leave it to me," he advised the Garfields; "just leave it all to me."

The thaw came with unexpected suddenness. A gang of men showed up to dig on the disputed property.

"Let 'em dig," Devree advised. "Let 'em dig all they want to."

"Eh, right in my garden?" cried Dad.

"In your garden or any other place they like—"

"But that foundation cuts right across our road. They're making a hole across our road, right where the plat shows a street! How we going to get in supplies?"

"Never mind, Dad. Let them do any blame thing they please. The deeper La Salle digs the deeper he's going to bury himself. You wait! I'll put that crook where he belongs before I'm done with him."

"Some way I just can't understand it," Mother mourned. "He looked such a nice man—"

"He'll look a whole lot nicer behind the bars," Devree promised.

Thawn Manor plans were making rapid progress. Surveyors worked busily over the last of the Thawn realty, and plats were prepared. With the first thaw other men came, the advance-guard of the land-

scape architect, and drove stakes and stretched mysterious lines from point to point. An advertising agency was employed, and sketches of display announcements, cards, and booklets came to La Salle for consideration.

What was much more important to Geoffrey Thawn, La Salle aided him in establishing a credit. He was able to borrow enough to dispose of his most pressing debts. The faded aristocrat decided that finally the tide had turned in his favor. He began to take a new interest in life and to consider himself a man of business. Diana was both amused and shocked to find her father gradually assuming a new manner which was a gross caricature of the manner of that genius of all business men, Frank La Salle.

On a March evening they were at dinner when the melancholy drudge who served both as maid and cook to their establishment brought word that Mr. Gordon Devree waited in the library to speak with Diana.

"Look here, Di," Thawn protested uneasily. "You see too much of that young fellow."

"Indeed? I've seen very little of him."

"Even a little's too much. What has he to offer in return for the time he takes up? A lawyer without a practise."

"He is a very amusing and a very loyal friend," Diana exclaimed earnestly. "I think I have the right—"

"My dear girl, I'm not questioning your right! I also admire your loyalty to an old acquaintance, but consider your own future."

"Don't worry. Gordon Devree isn't interfering with my future! Besides—"

"Besides," her father interrupted, "we have an engagement this evening to meet the La Salles at the theater. We're going to try to atone for your former rudeness. You haven't forgotten that?"

"No, I've not forgotten."

"You don't seem very pleased about it, Di!"

"Pleased? How can I be pleased? How can I pretend to like people like that—people who swallow an—an insult—a deliberate insult because of their greed to get on? All in the world the La Salles are doing this for is to curry our favor, so that we will introduce them to our friends and they can climb—climb—climb—"

"You act as if that was a disgrace. Naturally, La Salle would like influential friends, and naturally enough, since we are doing business together, he looks to me to introduce him. Yet you act as if we were doing something dishonorable."

"I'm not sure but we are," Diana murmured bitterly.

"Eh! You say that? By gad, Di, let me tell you this man La Salle is a pretty decent sort—a lot more worth considering than—well—than some others we know. He's a business man, a shrewd chap, a man of affairs. He's sound and substantial, and we need more just like that in America to-day. It's got to be too much the fashion to cry down a man because he succeeds. It's altogether too popular to assail a man because he makes money. Why, La Salle's the sort of man I'm proud to know—proud to be associated with. Yes, and I'm only too proud to claim him as my friend."

But here there came a knocking at the door that halted him, and on the heels of the knocking the door was pushed open and Devree showed his face.

"Sorry to disturb you," he said, a little breathlessly. "Good evening, Mr. Thawn—evening, Diana. I couldn't stay. Just stopped a minute to see if you'd heard the news."

"News," frowned Thawn. "No, sir, I've heard no news. Been too busy."

But Diana saw in Devree's shining eyes something that roused her curiosity.

"Gordon! You look so—happy. What is the news?"

"Why, about La Salle."

"La Salle!" Father and daughter chorussed the name.

"Yes, La Salle. Indicted, indicted by the grand jury this afternoon on six counts—six charges of fraud. Warrant's issued for him—he may be arrested by now. That's the news; Frank La Salle arrested for fraud!"

(To be concluded NEXT WEEK.)

Sentenced to Live

by Albert William Stone

WHEN the sickly editor came to Pilsenburg, three days after Christmas, and without preliminary began a methodical bombardment of Jeff Neary, the sheriff, that burly individual at first merely snapped his big teeth together and prepared to make the newcomer a visit. He came back from the interview wearing an expression which was a cross between puzzlement and apprehension. For a full hour he sat in his office alone and glared at his desk telephone. Then he took down the receiver and called a number.

"Come over here," he ordered gruffly. "I want to talk with you."

In five minutes Dr. Wayne Joyce, the youngest and handsomest physician in town, was sitting opposite the sheriff. He was palpably expectant and correspondingly eager. Neary plunged into the object of the summons without wasting time. It was his way.

"Wayne," he said abruptly, "you'd like to marry Leila, wouldn't you?"

"Yes."

Dr. Joyce replied without the slightest hesitancy, although his face flushed. The other grunted.

"I thought so. Asked her yet?"

"I have—several times." The youth smiled ruefully. "To date she hasn't accepted me."

"Well, she will—if I say so. And it may be that I'll say so. All depends."

The sheriff pulled two long cigars from his vest-pocket, tossing one across the desk at the visitor. The other he decapitated by the simple process of biting off the end, scratching a match across the surface of the desk.

"You know what they call me in this county, don't you?" he resumed.

"They honor you with the title of 'king,' if that's what you mean."

"That's it. They call me the king, and that's what I am. I didn't deny it when the Congressional committee called me before it, you remember. I told 'em, flat, that I was too good a politician for my enemies. But"—the sheriff brought his big fist down on the desk top and glared at his visitor—"king or no king, I've got friends. Get that?"

The doctor nodded, waiting.

"And I've got friends because I never forget 'em. That's the secret of political success, Wayne—don't forget your friends, and don't show any mercy to your enemies. Understand me?"

He received no answer, evidently expecting none. For the next two minutes he was silent, taking long puffs at his cigar. His hard eyes were on the ceiling, filmed with thought. Dr. Joyce did not break the silence.

"I've just been over to have a talk with that new editor, Rand," pursued the sheriff finally. "Been reading the things he says about me, I suppose?"

Joyce nodded.

"Well, I told him he'd have to cut it out. He grinned in my face. Then I began to put on the screws. I know how. I convinced him that I could have anything done to him I wanted to, from breaking him financially to having him put in jail. He just laughed at me. What do you know about that?"

Righteous indignation lent eloquence to the sheriff's tone.

"He must be unusually nervy," remarked the doctor. "Where ignorance is bliss—"

"It ain't ignorance," interrupted the sheriff, puffing furiously on his cigar. "He knows all about what's happened to other newspaper cubs that tried what he's trying. I told him, and I've had others tell him. And he says he hasn't the least doubt as to my power around this neck of the woods. Just the same, he laughed at me."

Sheriff Neary leaned across the desk, the cigar held between his short, thick fingers.

"Will you do something for me?" he suddenly demanded.

"Anything I could, of course."

"It's right in your line." There was the suggestion of a leer in the sheriff's eyes as he grinned across at his vis-à-vis. "It 'll be a big favor for me, Wayne. And, don't forget, I always remember my friends. Get me?"

"Not entirely," the puzzled youth responded. "I'm pretty dense, I guess. You'll have to explain more fully."

"All right. I'll put it plainly, then. I want you to get acquainted with this young Rand. He came to Colorado for his health, you see. He's a lunger. As a doctor, you ought to be able to give him some good advice. See?"

The big man leaned back in his chair and surveyed the ceiling.

"You might manage things so as to give him the once-over physically," he said softly. "And then you might tell him something that 'll take his attention off me for a while. I ain't saying—"

The young physician, suddenly illuminated, sprang to his feet.

"You mean that I'm to give him a false report about his condition!" he exclaimed. "Mr. Neary, I could never do that! I—"

The sheriff stayed him with upraised hand. "I'll bet a nickel," he said humorously, "you think I want you to tell Rand he's going to die, don't you? Isn't that just what jumped into your mind Wayne?"

"Why, something like that," said Dr. Joyce, staring.

"Well, I didn't mean that at all. Not at all. That's the trouble with most folks, Wayne—they jump at conclusions." The sheriff shook his big head sorrowfully. He took the cigar from his mouth and waved it before him, much as another man would have wagged an admonitory finger. "Now, ain't that so?"

The other approached the desk and rested his fingers on the edge of it.

"Then, just what do you mean?" he demanded, looking straight into the sheriff's eyes.

"I don't want you to tell the young scribbler he's going to die," repeated the sheriff, the smile fading from his face. "That wouldn't dovetail with my plans, you see."

His voice took on a steel edge.

"What I want him to think," he snapped, "is that he's going to *live!*"

There is perhaps no bravery so intense as that superinduced by absolute, complete despair.

Phineas Rand, the attenuated young owner of the Pilsenburg *Herald*, was of this type. He had come to Colorado for his health, in a sense; but not in the expectation of finding a cure for the terrible malady which possessed him.

For there was absolutely no hope of that, specialists of the East had assured him. Tuberculosis had seized upon him with such avidity that his lungs were practically gone before he realized that he was seriously ill. The Centennial State might prolong life for a year or so, the physicians had agreed; that was all he might reasonably expect. Their verdict had been as unanimous as it was final.

He had liquidated his scanty assets and taken train for Pilsenburg, where he had heard there was a newspaper property for sale. The owner, a lanky individual with a scrawny mustache and an air of perpetual

trepidation, appeared to be glad to get away.

"I'm giving it to you straight," he said before the deal was closed. "This would be a crackerjack of a town for the newspaper business if it wasn't for Jeff Neary. He owns the whole county, body and soul. He's been sheriff for twenty years; but he holds that office merely because it gives him the opportunity to exercise his power more ruthlessly. His real income comes in other ways."

"Grafter, I suppose?" Rand's tone was emotionless.

"Worst you ever saw."

"Is it generally known?"

For answer, the other pulled out a drawer and exhibited a sheaf of typewritten documents.

"If we make a deal, this stuff goes with the plant," he stated. "It contains enough evidence against Jeff Neary to have him indicted by the grand jury."

Rand's dead eyes glinted for an instant in surprise.

"Then, for Heaven's sake, why don't you act on it?"

"Because we can't get a grand jury in this county, or in this part of the State, that he won't control," was the answer.

"How about the district attorney?"

"Elected by Neary's crowd. Neary can break him any time he takes the notion."

"What is to stop this paper from publishing the whole facts, then?"

"The editor's regard for his skin, I guess." The owner laughed ruefully. "I tried it—just once. The next day Neary got out an injunction against me and tied me up so tight I couldn't wiggle. He agreed to call off his dogs if I'd promise to confine myself to news thereafter. I promised." The owner threw up his hands. "I tell you, he *owns* this whole district!" he repeated.

"What could he do, aside from cutting off your revenue by injunction process?"

"Well"—the other enumerated on his fingers—"he can scare off the advertisers, throttle the banks, get your electric power and heating gas stopped, take your printers away from you, blow up your plant, or have you assassinated. He—"

"Is that all?"

"Is that all!" the owner echoed. "Say, what are you trying to hand me? Isn't that enough?"

"Not enough to stop me?" was Rand's calm rejoinder. "Make out your bill of sale. You've made a trade."

Events followed in rapid succession.

Without even publishing the usual salutatory, the new editor came out with an entire front page devoted to an exposé of the sheriff. He finished up with a demand that the Federal government make an investigation.

The sheriff immediately paid the editor the visit cited at the beginning of this story. His subsequent interview with Dr. Wayne Joyce followed.

"That's the situation in a nutshell," he was saying to the young physician. Now that he had eased his mind by vociferous recounting of his grievance, the sheriff relaxed into a sort of grim humor. "When I told him I'd tie him and his paper into knots, what do you suppose he said?

"'My friend,' he said, 'your threats don't scare me worth a damn. Go ahead and do your worst.'

"'All right,' I said. 'By the time I start in you'll sing a different tune. This rag won't come out to-morrow, if I give the word.'

"'What 'll you do?' he sneered.

"'I haven't exactly made up my mind. But before I get through with you, you'll be broke; I'll tell you that.'

"He flipped out a bank-book and showed me the entries.

"'There's six thousand dollars in that,' he said. 'I wasn't fool enough to deposit it in any bank in this town, either. You can't touch it, and you can't stop my spending it.'

"'I guess by the time you lose a few thousand iron men you'll be ready to quit,' I told him. But he just grinned.

"'Guess again,' he said. 'I'm in this game to lose money. I don't want to make it.'

"That staggered me for a minute. 'I'll take your help away from you,' I said.

"'I'm a practical printer myself, and I'll

get out the paper without any help,' he flashed. 'If you cut off my power I'll set it up by hand and print it on the hand-press.'

"'Well,' I said, 'I'll have you thrown in jail and held incommunicado.'

"He laughed louder than ever at that. I never saw such a defiant chap.

"'I have a legal friend in Denver who is watching this game,' he said. 'The minute the *Herald* quits coming out he will investigate to find out why. And I guess there are judges in Colorado that you don't control—judges before whom a writ of habeas corpus will have some weight. Go to it!'

"Wayne, there was just one more shot in my locker, as it looked to me then. I pulled it out, in the shape of my check-book.

"'What 'll you take to shut up?' I asked.

"'Not a cent,' he replied. 'I told you I don't want to make money, didn't I? What use has a dead man for the coin of this world?'

"He talked with a lot of bitterness. I tumbled, then. He's going to die any way you figure it. The only use he has for money is to spend it, and to get as much fun out of spending it as possible. See?"

The sheriff wiped his face with his handkerchief. Agitation shone upon his countenance.

"And I reckon a dyed-in-the-wool newspaperman can't imagine a bigger rip-tearing time than printing just anything he feels like," he added.

The recital had brought the flush of keen interest to the face of the auditor. As the sheriff paused he seized the opportunity to make comment.

"By George, I like the fellow's spunk!" he cried impulsively.

"So do I," admitted Sheriff Neary, with a grin. "But he's got to be put down; and there's just one way to do it, I figger. He's nervy because he thinks he hasn't anything to lose—see? That's where you come in, Wayne. Look him over and tell him the Eastern doctors were off their base; tell him he's got a chance. With something to look forward to besides an undertaker and a tombstone, he'll lose his sand in a hurry."

Dr. Joyce appeared to consider.

"It wouldn't be exactly ethical," he said.

"Why not? If the poor devil thinks he may live, after all, where's the harm? You fellows pull that stunt many a time," said the sheriff shrewdly.

"This is different, however." Young Joyce studied the floor. "I'll be doing it for a selfish purpose—"

"All's fair in love and war, ain't it?"

The sophistry apparently made an impression. The sheriff did not break the pause which followed. Presently the physician rose to his feet and turned to the door.

"I'll call on Mr. Rand to-morrow morning," he announced.

"Fine!" The sheriff came around the desk and accompanied the other to the threshold, his pudgy hand on the youth's shoulder. "And keep in mind—Jeff Neary never forgets his friends!"

He returned to his desk after his guest had departed.

"I'll bet a nickel," he said aloud, "that the next time I call on young Mr. Rand he'll be ready to listen to reason!"

Within a week Dr. Joyce and the new editor were fast friends, on the surface of things.

With characteristic shrewdness of perception the former divined that Rand was anything but an altruist. He attacked Neary merely because the game promised sensationalism, and because he felt immune from consequences. His articles made spicy reading, and his circulation jumped. Since no pressure was brought to bear on the advertisers, there was no diminution of the patronage; rather an increase, in fact. He was getting rare enjoyment out of his short remaining span of life. And to the young physician he made no bones of the fact.

"Reform!" he sneered, snapping his lean fingers. They were seated in the editorial sanctum, which was also the entire *Herald* office and was divided from the printing department by a low partition. "I don't care that for it, between you and me. But I've always wanted to dip into the game. I never dared before. Now"—he waved his bony hand in a gesture of recklessness—"well, I calculate I've got the greatest

chance in the world to enjoy some real life before—"

He paused.

"This Jeff Neary, now," he pursued. "He's carried things off with a high hand for years, I guess. He's a grafter of the first water. But, between you and me, I don't give a hang about his rascality. He can steal all he wants to, and welcome. Only, I reserve the privilege of making him squirm a little in the spotlight of publicity." The editor's tone was pregnant with cynical malice. "The people might as well know about it—"

"They've known it for years," interrupted Dr. Joyce musingly. "Yet they go on electing him, year after year."

"You're not defending him, are you?"

"Not at all," hastily. "Merely stating a fact."

"Well, he can't touch *me*. I suppose I'm the first man he ever ran up against that was absolutely not afraid." Rand laughed. "Numbered days have their good points, after all," he declared bitterly. "I can claim utter fearlessness and get away with it."

"You may be too sure."

"Of what?"

"The hopelessness of your physical condition."

The editor crossed his lean legs.

"My friend," he said slowly, "I have a right to be sure. Don't suppose I covered the ground thoroughly before I gave up? World-famous specialists, and all that?" He snapped his fingers again.

"But—you don't look like—er—an absolutely lost case—if you don't mind my saying so."

The long legs were uncrossed. The editor's foot dropped to the floor. He was staring.

"See here, doctor," he snapped, "just what do you mean?"

"Well," stammered the other, "I—don't you think you ought to submit to—another examination? Colorado air, you know—"

"I've been here about two weeks."

"I know." The doctor was openly floundering now. "I am just suggesting that—you ought to—well—"

"If I didn't know better, doctor, I'd suspect you were after a fee," remarked Rand. He grinned contradictorily, however. "Don't, for Heaven's sake, try to give me any hope of this world again. I'm dead, I tell you—just as dead as though the undertaker were measuring me for my casket. I'm just being rendered the privilege of lingering here a little while, in order that my friend Jeff Neary may enjoy my presence."

The physician, confused, did not press his suggestion. But the editor, cynical as are all of his kind, laughed.

"Tell you what I'll do," he said. "I'll submit to an examination any time you say, provided you let me make a wager with you."

"All right," said the doctor, relieved. "Name it."

"I'll wager you a box of good cigars that you'll agree with my medical judges in the East. What do you say?"

"Done. You see, don't you, that I now have an incentive for bringing in a favorable verdict?" Dr. Joyce smiled nervously.

"I do," replied the editor. "You'll be tempted, I know, for the sake of the cigars. But I'll trust you, anyhow."

"I'll be in my office at three this afternoon."

"I'll be there."

At half past three he emerged from Dr. Joyce's office, in the King Block, his sunken eyes sparkling with a forgotten fire.

"My God!" he muttered. "Can it be possible?"

Another week went by.

Miss Leila Neary, pride of her extraordinary father's heart, and of the fluffy style of beauty which is not by any means confined to the effete East, ran her fingers through his curly hair one evening preparatory to pointed conversation.

"Dr. Joyce wants to marry me," she remarked.

Like her father, she was given to sudden speech without diplomatic jockeying.

He chuckled.

"Well, why don't you marry him?"

"For a very good reason. Maybe—I don't love him."

"Marry somebody else, then," he grunted. "Marry the newspaper editor."

"I don't like him," she rejoined soberly. "He says horrid things about my daddy in his paper."

"Not any more he don't."

"I wonder why?" she mused. "For a while he was awfully vitriolic. Then, all of a sudden, he quit printing attacks on you."

"You don't suppose your daddy would let anything like that go on very long, do you?"

"Why, how could you stop it?" The girl's round eyes indicated the truth—that she believed implicitly in her father.

"I can stop anything in this town. By the way, you say young Joyce has asked you—"

"For the seventh time," she said demurely. "I told him he'd have to wait until I made up my mind."

The sheriff cleared his throat and removed his spectacles.

"Better marry him," he suggested.

"Maybe I will, and maybe I won't," she retorted, tossing her head.

"But—maybe your daddy wants you to."

She stared at him, her even teeth gleaming behind her parted lips.

"Why?" she demanded.

"Well, I sort of told him you would," he blurted.

The sheriff was not used to diplomacy, even with his daughter. The instant he made the assertion he regretted it; but it was too late. She seized upon it.

"Why should you tell him anything like that?" she cried. "Did—did he come to you after I had refused him?"

He floundered worse than ever.

"I went to him," he said. "I needed a favor done, and I asked him to do it."

Still she did not comprehend.

"Favor?" she echoed. "What favor?"

"Never mind. No use of going into details. He did me a favor; that's all you need to know."

"It *isn't* all I need to know, if I am to be the price of the favor," she replied, strangely calm. "I didn't think you'd bargain over your daughter like this, anyway." She smiled slightly. "If you don't tell me all about it, I'll *never* marry him," she threatened.

Then she waited, moving around to a position directly before his chair. He pulled out his handkerchief and began to polish his spectacles, as near to exhibiting nervousness as he ever came.

"All right," he growled finally. "You say you noticed how that editor chap stopped maligning me in his paper. Well, Dr. Joyce was the cause of it. I asked him to—do something, and he did it. Rand is leaving me alone, you see. Now, all you need to do is to tell Wayne it's all right. He's wanted you a long time, I reckon. I haven't got any objection. He's a nice young fellow—"

"What did Dr. Joyce do to induce Mr. Rand to stop printing those articles?" She was obdurate.

The sheriff found himself strangely reluctant to reveal the details of the plan. But, having gone this far, he was confronted with the necessity of going the balance of the way. He told her.

For a space she was silent. It was the silence of horror, had the sheriff been able to fathom it. Then, without a word, she turned and went to her room.

Leila Neary's code of morals did not resemble that of her father, except in certain remote particulars.

The next morning she made an early call at the office of Dr. Joyce. He flushed with pleasure at the visit and hastened to offer her a chair. Then he noted the extraordinary paleness of her face. His own blanched.

"What is the matter?" he begged.

She did not take the proffered chair.

"I have learned of what you did to Mr. Rand," she said icily. "I have called to tell you that I know, and to convey, if possible, a small measure of my contempt for such an action. That is all."

She was gone. The physician, stunned, made a move as if to intercept her. But he fell back.

"What, after all, can I do?" he groaned under his breath.

Presently he put on his hat and repaired to the court-house. Sheriff Neary was in

his office. He greeted the caller with a troubled air.

"My daughter's kicked over the traces, looks like," he began. "I was just going to call you when you came in."

Dr. Joyce looked the other squarely in the eye.

"Sheriff," he said, "I don't hold this against you, because I believe you don't know any better." The sheriff started, turning an angry red. "Miss Neary has just been to my office. She"—he choked. "Before this she at least respected me," he continued in a strained voice. "Now she holds me in contempt. I am going—"

"Well, where are you going?"

The sheriff was crouched across his desk, cigar gripped tight in his teeth, and a fighting expression in his bulging eyes. "Don't forget, young man, my power in this place. I can make or break you."

"There are some things worse than being broken—in the way you mean. I have just undergone one of them." Dr. Joyce spoke quietly, as one whose mind is unalterably made up. "I am going down to see Mr. Rand."

"You're—what?" shouted the sheriff. "By—"

"I am going down to see Mr. Rand," repeated the other firmly. "In self-respect it is all I can do."

"And what you goin' to do when you get there?" In his excitement the sheriff was falling back into vernacular.

"I shall reveal to him the whole damnable plot!"

"You will, huh? Goin' to tell him what a cold-blooded liar you are, I s'pose!" Neary was stuttering in his anger and trepidation. He resorted to scorn. "Nice sort of a youngster you are, ain't you? After givin' a sick man a new holt on life, you'll take it away from him—just because your own carcass is gettin' pinched a little. You're—"

"I shall—"

"You'll tell him what a liar you was when you told him he had a chance to live, I reckon!" the sheriff jeered, his voice cracking in falsetto. "Put him right in the hospital, 'n' maybe in the undertaker's morgue. That's what you'll do. Tell him he ain't got a whole lung left, 'n' that you only told him different in order to corral the sheriff's pretty daughter for your wife. Nice story that 'll be to reel off to a lunger, won't it? Huh?"

The physician, face deathly pale, faced the irate official. The hand which held his hat trembled visibly.

"Mr. Neary, the fact that you are the father of the girl I love is all that saves you from answering for this," he said in a low, palpably restrained tone.

"That's good!" Neary chortled. "Father of the girl he loves! Why, you white-livered—"

The epithet had scarcely left his tongue before the other was upon him. Dr. Joyce was a college athlete; but the older man was no stripling. Muscled like a prize-fighter, he had in his younger days fought many a rough-and-tumble battle to victory. More than once in the course of his strenuous political career he had been called upon to defend himself from onslaught. He met the attack of the youth sturdily, therefore. The two bodies came together with a considerable shock, the desk being partly overturned with a resounding crash.

"I don't wanna hurt you!" panted the sheriff. "But I ain't goin' to let you go to that editor, either." He held the young physician in a viselike grip. They were locked in tight embrace when the door opened and a third person entered.

It was Phineas Rand, the editor.

He stared at the combatants, a sardonic grin on his thin face. Then he spoke.

"No use of you gentlemen fighting over it," he drawled. "I've been standing just outside the door for the last five minutes, and I heard most of what you've been talking about."

He had left the door slightly ajar. None noticed the advent of Miss Neary, who paused in the doorway and stood fascinated.

"Luckily," the editor went on, "I know considerable of the disappointments of life. This doesn't hurt me, I'll wager, half as much as it does my friend, the sheriff." He bowed toward that puffing individual. "Perhaps, after all, I wasn't as credulous as you thought I'd be."

Dr. Joyce dusted off his knees. He turned to the editor.

"Mr. Rand," he said quietly, "you are entitled to an explanation—"

"Not at all. I have it, fully. You were to receive the hand of Miss Neary in marriage, in return for performing a false diagnosis upon my carcass. Is that right?"

"That's right," growled the sheriff.

"Not entirely." It was the physician speaking tonelessly. "It is true that Mr. Neary promised me—certain things if I induced you to cease your attacks upon him. I made no agreement with him—"

"What's that?" shouted the sheriff.

"I made no agreement with him, I repeat. I merely said that I would call on you."

"Why, I reckon that's right, too," acknowledged Sheriff Neary. "But you meant—"

"I meant merely to call," Dr. Joyce rejoined sharply. "I did not have the slightest intention of—"

He caught himself and flushed. "I am not here to make excuses for myself," he went on.

"Then—what in blazes were you aiming to tell Rand when you saw him?"

The sheriff turned to seat himself, dusting off his pudgy hands. At that instant he caught sight of his daughter standing in the doorway. She placed a finger on her lips.

"I intended to tell him—and I tell him now—the truth regarding the entire miserable transaction: that I listened to your suggestion, and that I am ashamed of it; that I have been placed in a position of seeming intrigue, because I was too much in love to understand fully what I was doing; that the diagnosis was your suggestion—"

"And that you—er—were mistaken when you said I had a chance for life?" interrupted the editor.

"No!"

The physician fairly exploded the word of denial. "*That* part, at least, was true!" he exclaimed. "Your lungs, Mr. Rand, are healing remarkably. With reasonable care you should be entirely recovered within six months."

The girl stepped forward, her lips trembling.

"Then—Mr. Rand will get well?" she asked.

Dr. Joyce bowed. The editor approached the bewildered sheriff.

"He's right, at that," he remarked. "I have just got back from Denver, where I was examined by the biggest lung specialist in the West. He corroborated Dr. Joyce's diagnosis in every particular. Didn't think your little scheme was going to produce results like that, did you?" Suddenly he held out his hand.

"I'm broad enough to believe that you're a victim of circumstances," he went on with vast kindliness. "Maybe a lot of the rest of us would be grafters if we had the chance. Anyhow, the reform game has lost its charms for me. If I stick around in Pilsenburg I'll just naturally have to expose you. I've sold the *Herald*, and I'm leaving to-night. In short"—the editor winked—"I've made up my mind to reform myself."

The sheriff solemnly grasped the extended hand, nodding in the direction of his daughter and prospective son-in-law, who were standing close together. He spoke with conviction, according to his lights.

"'Tisn't grafting," he averred. "It's just plain business—in this county. So you're going to reform, are you?" The editor nodded. "Well, I've got a notion to do the same thing, young man!"

The Yellow Fetish

by J. Allan Dunn

Author of "A Man To His Mate," "Isle of Drums," etc.

CHAPTER IX.

LADY MINE.

THE recovery of Driver Fenn was far from instantaneous. The exposure and the strain, mental and physical, had brought on a stroke that had left an anemic brain and softened muscles as their main symptoms. Against these his physique fought. Clear blood finally won the day, backed with a will that, if dormant, nevertheless persisted while vitality lasted, as the coiled mainspring, once wound, will automatically press the clockwork to its duty.

Strength and memory came back by fits and starts. It was as if his brains and nerves were short-circuited in their coordination. Like a child, he had to be shown how to eat, to walk, almost to talk. But there came a day when rested Nature took a spurt. Energy flooded him, his eyes grew clear, his flaccid muscles responded to his will, and his sister heard him walking across the floor, and flew up the stairs to find him gazing toward the Golden Gate.

He was troubled. His eyes announced that, for all their light of sanity and purpose. His brain had registered nothing since he had sat in the stern of the open boat and watched Bowers dragged over by the sharks, and Rice tumbling down between the two *kanakas*. To his inquiry: "What has happened?" His sister brought the papers she had laid aside for this moment.

"So it was sunstroke! I remember a splitting headache that I stood for days. And a collier picked us up. We were fairly in its lane. But what is this about Bowers and Brown? Bowers was pulled out of the boat by sharks before my eyes! Brown was in the first mate's boat! That capsized!"

The pictures puzzled him. Leary's beard was a good disguise, and Rice had sported a mustache. Then the scattered, shattered bits of his recollection fell together into pattern as the scraps of glass in a kaleidoscope.

"Leary and Rice!" he almost shouted. "Passing themselves off as Bowers and Brown with me crazed from sunstroke and letting them go free. Where are they? Katherine, have you seen anything of these men?"

He groaned as he noted the date of the paper. It was three weeks old. His sister saw the flush on his face, and feared for excitement.

"You must not worry about them now, dear," she said.

But the excitement was a stimulant to Fenn.

"Worry!" he roared. "The dirty murderers! Katherine, those two blackguards killed Herring. Killed him in cold blood. I swore I would bring them back to justice, and now they have slipped me. I made them dig poor Sam's grave on the beach, and I swore then that I would see them swing for his death! What do you know of them? I must find out. There is nothing in these accounts about Herring being killed. Does his sister know?"

This story began in The Argosy for May 22.

He commenced to walk about though he was palpably still weak, and she coaxed him back to a chair by promising to tell him all she knew. When he heard of the visit and the request of Leary, acting as Bowers, his frown was so black and his eyes so fierce that she shrank from him.

"Where is my log?" he demanded. She gave it to him, and he laid it on his lap. "Send for Sam Herring's sister," was his next request. "At once. She must leave the office," he thundered, when his sister reminded him the girl was working. "This is no time for shilly shallying," he went on. "I have broken my oath. I must repair that. I must find these men. They shall be punished. This is a case of death and fortune. Of justice and of gold. They have murdered the dead; they shall not rob the living! Will you get in touch with that girl, or do I have to do it myself? Twenty one days' start, and I weak as a stranded dogfish! When was that man here?"

His sister turned from the telephone.

"The 23rd of June," she said.

"And to-day is?"

"The 7th of July."

Fenn groaned again.

"Elizabeth will be here in about twenty minutes," said his sister.

"Any one call up while I was sick, or drop in to see me?" asked the skipper. "They might have seen about my being ill in the papers, though there's few comes to see a stranded man. I suppose we're broke, Katherine. I had a fine cargo of pelts that should have set us up, but there's no use in whining about that."

"I have a little in the bank," she said. "The interest and taxes are paid. Don't worry about money, George. I can always get enough to keep us going."

"You!" barked her brother, not unkindly. "And me sitting up to take it like a blind beggar with a tin can. But we'll soon fix that. You didn't say who asked after me."

"Mr. Jennings rang up two or three times and came up once in his car. He was very nice. Anything that he could do, he—"

"Jennings!" Fenn fairly whooped the name. "He's in town? We've got to get hold of him. I can borrow his schooner, borrow anything Tom's got, I reckon, in reason. Did he leave his address?"

"I've got it somewhere. He's leased a place down the Peninsula. I'll look it up. What do you want his schooner for, George?"

"To go down to the South Seas and bring back enough gold to put us all on Easy Street for the rest of our days, old girl! That's what Leary was after when he wanted a peep at the log-book. If you'd shown it to him you'd have given away a fortune, Katherine, part of it yours, part of it belonging to Elizabeth Herring."

"George, you are not to excite yourself."

Fenn laughed out loud.

"Don't look at me as if I was ripe for the lunatic asylum, old girl. It's you who are excited—not me. I'll spin you the whole yarn as soon as Elizabeth Herring comes. You see, Sam found the gold—or rather, I sent him to look for it where I expected it was to be found. Then those two skunks killed him.

"I feel as if it was my fault, in a way. That's the first thing to do, to find out what happened to Leary and Rice. They may have stayed around San Francisco, thinking me still out of my head. Ring up the Sailors' Home, lass, and see if they know anything of them. We'll get 'em, and avenge poor Sam, and then we'll go and get the gold."

"You said 'we,' George, don't forget that," said his sister, half-way to the phone. "But you're in no condition to take charge of a schooner."

"I'll get well quicker aboard of one than anywhere else," retorted Fenn. "There's no argument to that. I said we off-handed. Jennings may want to go along. Don't forget to look for his address as soon as you get the home. Got it? Good. Tell 'em who you are; that you're talking for me."

He got up again and strode up and down the room as if he was on the after deck of his schooner, frowning out at the Golden Gate and the blue waters of the bay in deep thought.

"They left on the third day they were

there," reported his sister. "Broke the regulations of the home. They have not been back after their belongings. They do not know at the home where they are."

"H-m! We'll have to comb the waterfront. They've not gone far, I hope. Still they had some gold, it's likely. It was a foolish move of mine not to search them, but it seemed best at the time."

Katherine Fenn went down for Jenning's address. Jennings had once been a supercargo for Fenn, and had later found a fortune in California oil-fields. He was under indebtedness to Fenn from the skipper having gone overboard in a nasty sea, plus the risk of sharks, to rescue the supercargo, washed overboard in a squall.

When Katherine returned she saw her brother standing against the east window, his hands clasped behind his back, his legs braced, his feet seeming to grip the planks with a suggestion of his old force. And his face was set in determination, its wasted flesh revealing more plainly the taut muscles, the outthrust of the jaw, the nose like a prow. It was the fighting face of Driver Fenn.

She got her connection with the suburbs, only to learn that Jennings had driven into town. Fenn received the news with a brisk nod.

"Can't expect everything to break right all at once," he said. "Wait till we get well launched. I'll have to go down to the Barbary Coast to-night. Don't try to coddle me, Katherine," he barked, in answer to her look of deprecation. "I'm going. Your job is to fill me up with nourishing stuff, keep the galley going."

"That is exactly what I am going to do," she returned, her face a curious copy of his own, "ashore and afloat."

"What do you mean?"

"If you're bent on going down to the South Seas—I suppose you'll explain what you mean by all that gold presently—I'm going with you."

"You? Why, Kathy," his voice grew tender, "you'll do nothing of the kind. You hate the sea. It makes you ill. You're afraid of it."

"I may be afraid of it, but I'm lots more afraid of you going down there in your condition," she said. "I'm going with you, George Fenn, and there's an end of it." She stood defiant to his grimness. Then Fenn's face creased in a smile and he caught her to him.

"Kathy," he said, "you're the best sister and the best scout in the world. But don't you worry about me. The best tonic for me is work and sea air. We'll talk about your going later."

Argument threatened, but was shattered by the door-bell. It was Elizabeth Herring. She came running up the stairs and stood looking at the skipper with a flush on her face that made her for the moment supremely beautiful and womanly. Fenn gazed at her as if he did not recognize her.

"You're up!" she cried. "You're up? I was afraid—why, it's wonderful!"

Fenn saw two tears hanging in the dark blue crystal of her eyes, and it gave him a curious sensation. He had an impulse to gather the girl into his arms, to comfort her. Wonderful? It was she who was wonderful. This Sam Herring's sister? This the same quiet girl he had spoken to occasionally. Why, she was—"

The girl had crossed to him with both hands out.

"I am so glad—so glad," she said, as the tears ran down her cheeks and she stood between laughing and crying, her hands in his. "The doctors said—if you didn't take a turn soon you—you couldn't get well."

"And you—you cared?" he asked. "A wave of red over the soft creaminess of her neck and face answered him and embarrassed him.

"Katherine tells me you know that Sam was not drowned," he said, after she had sat down. "I'm a bad hand at telling things, my dear, but you've got to stand a shock, I'm afraid. Kathy, you tell her; it isn't a man's job. Take her down-stairs a while and tell her about Leary and Rice. Then I'll take up my end of it, if she ain't too upset."

The two women went down together, the elder's arm about the younger, the latter wondering, casting a look back at the skipper that made him pound fist on palm when they disappeared.

"I'll get those skunks," he said. "I'll

rout 'em out. I'll swab the whole water-front to get trail of them. That sort of vermin leaves a strong scent."

He heard the sound of subdued sobbing and went to the window again. He hardly realized that his avenging of Herring's death had taken on new impulse, since, for the first time, he had really seen the girl.

"She—she cared whether I was going to pull through," he muttered. "Now, why?" He shook his head at the puzzle and dismissed it, setting his thoughts, as he gazed over the water-front, to following out possible clues of finding the two men.

He was so engrossed he did not notice the two women mount the stairs. Then his heart gave a tug as he saw the tear-stained face of the girl.

"Thank you," she said. It was kind of you to let Katherine tell me, though you would have been gentle, too, I am sure. You see, I did not see very much of Sam. He was my step-brother, and sometimes—I do not mean that the thing is less horrible because he was not my brother—I mean that if I seem to lack emotion, it was only because he and I—"

"I understand," said the skipper. "I know that you and Sam was mostly strangers. He had a good many faults, had Sam, but he had the makings of a man in him, and he was coming through. Or I wouldn't have made him my second mate. He cut out the booze, for one thing. And that wasn't easy for the Sam you knew. He was my shipmate and my officer, and I'll see justice done him. Now the next thing is the big reason I brought you up here, Miss Elizabeth. Here's something I didn't tell Katherine yet.

"Your step-brother was killed on account of his finding some gold. When we sighted this island, with its peak mitered like a bishop on a chess-board, and the smoke coming out of the split, I was mighty glad to see it. It meant fresh water and fresh fruit, and we were all in need of it. I didn't go ashore for two or three reasons. I didn't like the look of the weather, for one thing. I was holding up better than the rest, and I sent those ashore that seemed to need the change most. Green grass helps a whole lot to a sick seaman. He picks the fruit off the trees, and feels the scurvy dwindle with every bite.

Now, off and on, there's been more or less talk about an island with a split-peak and a smoking shaft lying down in the uncharted sea, that had gold on it. There's always more or less rumors of that sort below Capricorn. I'd heard some of 'em. They tied up in a way, but to go after those things without positive directions is a wild goose chase.

"But this island answered the description. I'll wager Jennings 'll remember some of that talk along the Apia water-front and at Papeete and Levuka. I tipped Sam Herring off to take a look. He could get away better than the first mate, far better than I could. Of course, Sam would have had his fair share as discoverer. That share goes to you. I'd have let all the crew in on it eventually, but I didn't mean to spill the news right then. There was dirty weather hanging around and the schooner had been nipped in the floes down South. The men were half of 'em sick. To talk gold would have stampeded 'em. And the gale that came up would have settled the schooner. It did as it was, but she'd have piled up on the shoals thick about the island in jigtime.

"Well, Sam found the gold, and these skunks came across him. There was words; Rice practically mutinied. Poor Sam couldn't tell me much after we found him. They took what gold he had found and went after more before they came to their senses. Wanted to keep the find to themselves, of course.

"They said nothing about the gold after we caught them. I said nothing about it, and they figured that Sam hadn't had time to mention it before he passed. I said nothing for some of the reasons already told. You see, my seal-hunters ain't regular seamen. They're independent, hired for shooting seals on good wages. If I'd said 'Gold' they'd have started the whole racket. If we strike it their relatives 'll get a share of it with the wages that was coming to them. A good deal more than their shares of the pelts.

"And the island had been undiscovered for years. It wasn't likely that some one 'ud follow us up and be blown into it. If

they did they mightn't have heard about the gold. Now, then: If Leary had got hold of that log-book the afternoon you came in and found him with Katherine, he'd be after that gold now. They figured on some way of using it after they got through the trial—or before. They'd have pleaded self-defence, of course, though they ought to swing for it. But with me having the stroke, the way was clear. And you, Miss Elizabeth, happened along in the nick of time to prevent it.

"First we'll start the chase after them. Then we'll borrow Jennings's schooner and go down after that gold. If you like—he hesitated—" if you like, we can bring back Sam." The girl's eyes filled again.

"That was thoughtful of you," she said softly.

"The main trouble is," said the skipper, "that I'm broke. Flat. And there's one plaster on this house already against my last trip. I've been a mite unlucky up-to-date. Now, I could borrow money from Jennings, but I hate to. I've no security to give him. He'll trust me with his schooner, but that isn't putting up cash. Cash is different. I could offer him a share in the gold, but I'll have to do that, anyhow, for the loan of the schooner. My own credit for findings will be a bit weak after this last loss. But we'll get over that."

"Captain Fenn," said the girl. "I don't see that I have any real claim on the gold, or that Sam did. But, if you think so, let me be a partner in the enterprise in which I have already an interest. You provide the ship and the information, let me provide the money for the findings. I suppose you mean by that the provisions and wages."

"You? I didn't know you were an heiress. I beg your pardon, but—"

"I'm not. But I've had a good salary, and I've saved some money. I put it into the lots of a new tract our company opened some time ago. They cost me five hundred dollars on easy payments. The other day the senior partner told me I could sell them for five times that amount if I wanted to. Several purchasers fancied their location. Would that be enough?

"Please, please Captain Fenn, forget that I am a girl. Sex doesn't, shouldn't make any difference in business. Katherine tells me that Mr. Jennings, who owns this schooner, is in your debt, which gives you a credit, outside of the fact that you were the one to think of looking for the gold, to offset my little two thousand five hundred dollars as my stake in whatever my share should be. Please—treat me as if I were another man."

She stood there pleading and glowing with enthusiasm, a personality hard to resist. Fenn made the first directly gallant speech in his life.

"I couldn't treat you like another man," he said bluntly, his own face getting crimson under its tan, subdued by his illness, "but you couldn't be any fairer, being a woman."

It was involved, and he knew it. He knew, too, that the speech pleased her, and felt unaccountably glad about it. He caught sight of Katherine beaming on the pair of them and, strangely, did not resent it.

"You'll take it?" she asked. "We'll be partners?"

"There's nothing certain about it," he said. "I don't know how much gold is there. I'd hate to see you lose your land."

"I always heard from Katherine that you were a sport," she said. "Won't you?"

Fenn hesitated, caught his sister's eyes and her nod. Looked at the girl and held her gaze for a brief moment while something seemed to form a bridge between them across which something advanced from either, met, and passed on.

"Partners!" he said, and gripped her hand. She covered a wince with a laugh.

"I'm off," she said. "Off to sell my lots and hand in my resignation. How soon do you expect we sail, captain?"

"We? It was the second time the word had staggered him.

"Katherine is going," said the girl. "So I can go, too. You didn't expect me to be a silent partner, did you? Katherine and I have settled that. You won't disappoint us."

"But you haven't talked it over yet, you two." The pair laughed at him.

"We have a wordless language," mocked the girl. "It is quite arranged, I assure you, unless you can advance some weighty

reason. I'll be back in half an hour," she ended as Fenn said nothing.

After she had left Fenn turned to talk it out with his sister. He had been swept off his feet and he was not quite sure whether he liked it. But there was a distinct joy in the thought that the girl was going with them. She couldn't go without Katherine as chaperon. Katherine had already stated her determination of going, and Fenn knew that his sister's will was a good deal like his own, once established.

"I am going to get you some of that nourishing stuff you spoke of," she said, and, to his amazement, made up a little face at him and went down-stairs.

"When Katherine begins to act kittenish," said the skipper to himself, "things are topsyturvey. I'm being bossed on my own quarter-deck."

The thought of the girl usurped for the time even his schemes for finding Leary and Rice. How plucky she was, he thought, and what—to use her own phrase—a sport! "*Partners!*" He made up his mind to swear that Sam Herring was entitled to a full half share.

"And she'll take it," he said, aloud—"she'll take it—if I have to marry her." The thought had outjumped the usual channel, it had come from him unawares, and he gasped at the second, soberer contemplation of it. "And why not," he said presently. "Why not? She said she cared."

There came the purr of a powerful car up the steep hill. Fenn looked out from his eyrie and saw a small man step out from the tonneau and come swiftly up the garden. It was Jennings. The skipper met him down-stairs.

"They told me you were on the shelf, skipper," said Jennings, shrewd-looking, prosperous, crisp of manner. Wealth had made a first-class financier out of a supercargo always noted for his cleverness at bargains and fair-dealing toward the natives. "It's good to see you again. You're thin, but I'm hanged if you don't look fit. Eyes are bully. Now, you've had hard luck. What can I do for you?"

"There's a long yarn to spin," said Fenn. "I've two dirty murderers to run down first of all, but I'll tell you what I want from you—I want the loan of the Lady Mine."

"Anything I've got," said Jennings quietly. "I've haven't forgotten that squall off Viti Levu. I think the memory of those sharks' fins was what made me quit the sea. I've had luck; you haven't—so far. The schooner is yours as long as you want her. Came off the ways last month. Won the honors in the 4th of July regatta, though she's more ship than yacht. But she beat all the fancy-lined ones. And I sailed her. That is, I steered her. Pedersen really won the race. He's my sailing-master. Do you want the crew? They're all blue water men. Think they'd like a cruise. How about cash? Need a loan? How much?"

"I don't need the cash, thanks, Jennings. And that's a part of my yarn. But wait till I'm through. I've got a streak of luck in sight. You're in on it for the use of the Lady Mine. Look here, why don't you come with us?"

"Start in at the beginning and include where you are going and for how long," said Jennings with a laugh. "Something's happened to you, skipper. You're different, somehow. For all your sickness I'm hanged if you're not younger."

"I'm feeling fit and fine. Here's the yarn, all of it. And try and make up your mind to come along."

Katherine presently literally forced food on Fenn while he talked. Then the three of them discussed the trip, and Katherine added her persuasion to her brother's. She liked the little supercargo millionaire. And she wanted some one to stand by if her brother overtaxed his strength.

"It sounds fine," said Jennings at last, but I don't see how I can make it, possibly. You see—" He never finished that sentence. His eyes became riveted on the door through which Elizabeth came in a rush, waving a check.

"I've got the money, partner," she exclaimed. "Make up your lists of what—" She saw the stranger and halted, a little confused.

"I beg your pardon," she said. "I found the door on the latch. I might have

known by the car outside that there was some one calling."

"No apologies are necessary, partner," said Fenn. "Miss Herring, this is Mr. Jennings, who is going to lend us the Lady Mine. This is the backer I was telling you of, Jennings. I was just trying to persuade Jennings to make a cruise on his own boat. But he says he can't."

"I was trying to make excuses to my financial conscience," said Jennings. "But I hadn't got them all lined up. After all, they're only excuses. I've quite made up my mind to go."

"That will be splendid," said the girl.

"Bully!" said Fenn, but he didn't put all his heart into it. He felt that he knew the reason why Jennings had changed his mind so swiftly. He remembered, too, that Jennings, even as supercargo, had always been very popular with the fairer sex. Now that he was a millionaire to boot? But in a way, he was the host of his host, and Jennings was a good man.

"The only thing you haven't told us," said Jennings, later, "is the most important. The position of the island."

"It's in the log," said Fenn. I left the book on the table with the newspapers."

He got up a little heavily and the girl intercepted him.

"Let me," she said. And ran up the stairs, returning swiftly with the book.

"Leary almost got this," said Fenn and opened the book. He turned the leaves unbelievingly.

"By God, they've got it after all!" he shouted. "Look at the torn page. Got at it, somehow! Stolen it while I slept! Through the open window, I'll be bound. I had it under my mattress. I somehow knew it was vital, through my sickness. This is Leary's work. Rice hasn't the brains of a starfish.

"And they're off for the island. That's where they are. They've got some blackguard to fit 'em out with a ship. Gone for the gold back to the place where they killed Herring. And where we'll run 'em down. They've got a start, but we'll overhaul 'em. The Lady Mine's a racer, and she's clean. Jennings, we'll run 'em down."

He wheeled to the telephone extension in the room and called up the Merchant's Exchange, calling the secretary.

"Captain Fenn talking," he said, and his voice was resonant as a drumstroke. "Yes, Captain Fenn of the Spume. What vessel has cleared within the last two weeks for the South Seas? She'll be a schooner or a barkentine, I reckon."

He stood for a moment erect while they waited for the man to look up his records. Then Fenn listened and at last hung up the hook.

"We'll do two jobs in one," he said. "The Pearl barkentine cleared ten days ago for Tahiti and Island Ports. Tahiti's a bluff. Who do you think took her out, Jennings? Slocum — 'Shanghai-Slocum'! Chartered her from a Jew who had her in Oakland Creek. Put his whole boarding-house on as crew."

"But how do you know that Leary and Rice were with him?" asked Jennings.

"Know? Look at this." And he waved the open log-book. "I *know*. Why should Slocum suddenly go off South with his whole scum of the seas. I *know*. Give me ten minutes on the water-front, and I'll prove it. Ten days' start they've got, with a foul bottom. They won't average a hundred and fifty a day, and we'll crack on to better than two hundred."

"But they've stolen the position," suggested Elizabeth.

Fenn laughed.

"Oh, no, they haven't partner," he said. "They're not so smart as they imagine they are. They were in a hurry when they took this. They forgot to look at the back of the book, or they didn't know about log-books."

He showed them the last twenty pages at the back—marked "Special Memoranda."

"There isn't always space enough under the day for anything out of the ordinary," he explained. After I'd entered that position I made a special memo. I didn't mention the gold because I wasn't certain of it at that time. The main thing was to identify the island and see it got on the Admiralty Charts and in the Directory of the Pacific.

"I wrote it while we were sailing on and off, and the men ashore. It's a description

of the looks of the place, the harborage, shoals, currents, and so on. I gave it the name of Miter Island, and wrote it had been previously reported in current rumors among the islands. I added a little sketch of it."

He held up the page for their inspection, nearly filled with bold handwriting and the sketch at the bottom.

"The meat of it all is in the fact that I repeated the latitude and longitude," he said. Slocum may know it, and Leary and the rest, but we'll be close on their heels." And he read out the precious figures.

162° 4′ West; 44° 16′ South.

"Neither of you women can go," he followed.

"Why not?"

"Because there's likely to be a fight if they get there first, if they're there when we arrive or come up while we're there."

"Do you think I'm afraid of a fight against robbers and murderers?" asked the girl.

Fenn looked at her and shook his head.

"That isn't the point," he said. "Katherine—"

"I happen to be your sister," said Katherine Fenn. "If you are going to run into any more danger I am going to be on hand. I imagine they are a pack of cowards."

"I'm not so sure about that," said Fenn.

"Well it doesn't make the slightest difference, anyway," said his sister, and she never looked more like her brother than then. "We are going."

Fenn started for the hall.

"Where are you going?" asked Jennings.

"Out. To avoid arguments. And to cruise round Slocum's infernal Snug Harbor. If Leary has been there, and Rice, it will be fairly easy to find out. Slocum is pretty well watched by his rivals."

"I can do that just as well as you can," said Jennings. "I haven't forgotten the ropes. There's no sense in your trying to do everything at once."

"Please," said the girl, her hand on his arm. "I'm sure Mr. Jennings can handle that. Besides, I want you to make out the lists."

Fenn sat down. For the first time in his life he was not doing all the driving. But the fact did not seem especially to anger him.

CHAPTER X.

TURNING TABLES.

THE crew of the Pearl were a rotten lot, as might have been expected. Leary looked them over with a growing disgust as they handled the gear of the barkentine in the early morning, after the Pearl had gone through the Golden Gate on the flood, disdaining a tug, and headed south.

Hardly one of the men appeared under forty. They were derelicts, slaves of the sea, men never of any initiative, men who had never looked forward to anything but being ordered, badly fed and underpaid, to long stretches of work afloat and short times of rest ashore when, as long as their money and credit lasted, they lived in a world evoked by liquor, and imagined themselves content.

There was hardly one of them, thought Leary, who knew anything about why this yard was braced, that sheet altered, who could have given an intelligent command, who understood or attempted to understand the theory of wind and sail.

They hauled when they were shouted at, knowing the ropes automatically, through long years of handling. So it seemed to the seal-hunter at first as, in the raw air and tumbling sea, the bullied creatures of Snug Harbor crept about, shuffling, devoid of jump or anticipation, shouted at by Slocum, herded by the big Norwegian who had first helped the hunch-back to carry Rice to a bed.

The hunch-back had brains. But they had a malevolent twist to them. His deformity, and the jibes and indignities it had cost him had warped the man's mind to universal hatred of everybody. He acted as steward, and served with a snarl. Slocum, as skipper, who had a master's certificate, though this was the first time he had commanded, was the only one the hunch-back would willing obey.

The Pearl had been a good boat in her day. She was well-lined, with a clean entry

and sweet run. Slocum had practical seamanship at his fingers'-ends, his old buckomate days came back to him, and, with the big square-head as his underbully he blackguarded and cursed and threatened his men into action until the canvas was set to his liking and the Pearl running before a fair wind on a southwesterly course, her nose poking for Honolulu.

They were to stop at no port on their way down and back. That was agreed between Slocum and Chung and Leary and Rice. Rice had little to say in the matter. He was an underling as regards force, and he accepted that position. Leary and he shared one of the little staterooms, of which there were four. Chung had one, Slocum another, and the Norwegian the last. Chung had a helper to prepare his vegetables and wash his pots and pans. For the crew he prepared crude dishes that were nearer swill, but styled hash and stew.

"It don't do to overfeed 'em," Slocum declared with a grin. "Makes 'em too cocky. Figger out the amount of work you want out of 'em, an' put the equal of that into their bellies. They work better for it, and sleep better. And, take it from me, Chung's a pastmaster at figgerin' that kind of rations."

Leary had hoped to find some among the crew whom he could bring over to his side. That there would be sides taken before they got back safe with the treasure he was certain. And he did not mean to find himself and Rice backing up against the odds of all the rest.

He had his automatic. Slocum had brought along a shotgun. Slocum rather fancied himself as a shot, and spoke of bringing down doves and plover on the island. But he carefully kept the cartridges to himself, though he let Leary handle the weapon, which was a good one.

Leary set down both Slocum and Chung as having pistols. If it came to a showdown he was generally at a disadvantage. His own nature was too sinister for him to believe for one moment that Slocum and Chung intended to play fair and square. Rice did. There was enough gold for all, Rice insisted. And Leary sneered at him.

Any real trouble, Leary imagined, would not be likely to start until they had started in to collect the gold, had diverted the flow of the top waterfall, and perhaps had reaped all the golden harvest in sight. It would be like Slocum and Chung, he fancied, to take a sardonic pleasure in letting Leary and Rice do their full share of the work before they marooned them. That was the fate that Leary persuaded himself was in store for him and Rice unless he worked out some way of preventing it.

And, as he appraised the miserable specimens of manhood that Slocum drove into some show of efficiency, like a man sweeping furiously with an ill-made, worn broom, Leary began to realize that he was up against it. A mutiny, to take place in his favor as soon as signs of trouble arose, had been his general plan. The hitch had lain in the fact that Slocum was the only navigator aboard. The big Norwegian knew nothing more complicated than the points of the compass. Rice was hopeless.

Leary cursed himself for never having picked up navigation during the many opportunities he had been given on sealing trips. But he started in to curry favor with the crew as best he might.

It did not work very well. They were suspicious of any sign of friendship. Why a man who ate and lived in the cabin should want anything to do with them was interpreted only in one way—there was something wrong with him, of he would be content with the company of his equals.

They were a dull lot. Just animals of inferior grade. They did not respond to a jest, and there was never a laugh nor a word of song among them. They had been pawns all their working life, and they were still in pawn to Slocum.

Leary almost despaired. He knew that Chung had an eye on him as the fair weather days went by—Chung smoking his little pipe and seeing everything. Leary imagined he saw a mocking smile on Chung's emotionless face as he watched Leary pass a word with some sailor. Slocum twitted him about it.

"They're a bright lot, ain't they, Leary?" said Slocum over the table, where Chung, having cooked the meal, sat down with the others and let his helper serve. "A rare lot

of jolly old sea-dogs, full of pep an' ginger. Many a rare yarn you're gettin' from 'em, I'll wager. Why don't you hand 'em on to us? What are you tryin' to do? Kid 'em along? Better let me and Swansen handle 'em, Leary." There was a note of warning in the last words, but Leary chose to ignore them.

There was a man named Hastings in the crew, gray, broken, smitten with a sort of palsy, a silent man who could not put much strength into his labor, yet who was apparently active by his aptness for his work.

Leary noticed him idly at first, wondering how such a wreck hung on to life. The man's face was seamed by wretchedness and dissipation, yet it was different from the rest. The watery, washed-out eyes held a different quality of lighting than the others. Sometimes he looked wistfully at Leary, or smiled furtively.

Then Leary noticed that the man was always first to the task, that he alone anticipated an order, that he saved his mates many a rowing by quietly telling or showing what to do, that he had a trick of looking at the sails and at the sea and sky that none of the others had.

There was plenty of liquor aboard. Leary took three-quarters of a bottle into their room one night after a lengthy drinking, stealing out to get it when the rest had turned in. This he saved and surreptitiously fed to the ancient mariner. The man's gratitude was effusive, and Leary was forced to threaten to cut off all his future tipple if he did not smother it. His name was Hastings, he told Leary, whining out a long list of misfortunes that spelled drunkenness. But, among them, the thing that Leary had vaguely hoped for same out:

Hastings had been a skipper once, long ago, so long he could not place the year of his breaking, and only half remembered the grades down which he had come to his present rating. But he was a navigator, and Leary hugged his secret to his breast.

He left Hastings alone after that, watchful of Chung, only putting a little whisky now and then in places agreed upon, not enough to make the man show signs of it, but enough to keep him in the position of a half-starved performing dog, eager to attempt any tricks for the sake of the titbit to follow.

Leary was not drugged again, but his clothes were thoroughly searched more than once. So deftly was this done that he could hardly be certain of it, save once, when Rice announced that some one had been in their room overnight. There was a bolt on the door, and Leary could have sworn that he had turned down the knob of the plunger after sliding it. In the morning it was turned up.

But all this rather amused him. They left him his gun, and that was his main hold. He felt sure that, compared with Chung or Slocum, he could handle his weapon as a writing master uses a pen against a scholar making pothooks. Once or twice he deliberately exhibited his prowess, tossing empty bottles overboard and shattering them, sometimes in mid air, sometimes as they bobbed and floated aft.

He never missed. It had its effect on the crew, for he saw them discussing his marksmanship and he knew that Chung or Slocum did not overlook a shot. But his cartridges began to get low in the box, and he stopped his targetry. Slocum tried to coax him into showing off once or twice until Leary said meaningly:

"You can't buy cartridges on the high seas. Give me a chance with your shotgun, and I'll show you some fancy shooting. Slocum laughed.

"I'm shy on cartridges myself," he said.

The good weather continued with them, a spanking breeze sending them along steadily, though the bottom had got foul in the tidal waters of Oakland Creek. Day after day the canvas stayed practically unchanged; full-bellied, while the barkentine logged an average of a hundred and seventy-five miles in the twenty-four hours. The sun shone, and the running seas were blue. The air was warm as they worked south, and some signs of animation began to be manifest among the crew. They were no longer silent for long intervals, but called to each other with pitiful, uncouth attempts at joking familiarity.

Slocum kept them busy. He boasted that he could keep a crew of twenty steadily at work aboard a twenty by twenty raft. The

canvas was patched where it showed signs of wear and tear, new clews put in, reinforcements for the reef-points, ropes were overhauled and rerove end for end, decks scraped, slush and paint-bucket brought out, but these were easy tasks, and most of them let the men sit basking in the sun.

The sight of half a dozen of them in a little group, working amidships, gave Leary his first idea. There was nothing to stop the carrying of his normal voice to these six from where he stood at the rail, with Slocum at his own wheel. The gentle hum of the wind through the rigging and the regular swash of the sea along the run made small disturbance.

Chung was seated on the cabin skylight, peacocky in blue silk blouse and trousers—he exchanged these for others more fitted to the galley when he worked, but he had a love of fine clothes—looking a good deal like a pirate, puffing at his pipe. Rice was aft, tending a fishing-line. They were well among the *bonito* and *albicore* schools, and the fresh meat that Rice supplied by his almost constant angling was welcome.

"I've been thinking, Slocum," said Leary, careful to talk distinctly, but not too loud, "that we ought to do the square thing by everybody. There's *gold* enough on the island for all. Why not let the crew in on it? Chop the whole thing up into a hundred shares, and give 'em a share a piece."

The work on polishing brass, with the sail-needle and palm, on seizing rope-ends, stopped stealthily. For a moment Slocum glared at Leary as if he thought he had suddenly gone mad. And Leary felt that he had scored. Clung's head moved ever so slightly on his neck, just enough to let Leary see the tail of his eyes in a glance like a basilisk's. But the puffs of his pipe kept regular.

As for the crew, their mouths were open and their ears drank in unbelieveable music. *gold!* It was the one thing that could give motion to the sluggish dregs of their imaginations. Their lips shaped it. *Gold!* Their eyes shifted one to the other. From forward, others were sidling up, scenting something favorable in the wind, piecing together what words they had caught.

Suddenly Slocum laughed.

"Tryin' to steal our thunder, eh?" he said good-humoredly, though the glare in his eyes had not died out. "You must have overheard Chung an' me chewing about that in my room last night. Left the door open, it was so hot. But it wasn't fair to swipe our idea. Only you got it wrong. Chung said, and I agreed with him—that the crew ought to have *two* shares apiece. We'll expect 'em to work ashore gettin' at the gold, and that ain't what they're shipped for or are paid their wages for. Give 'em two shares, says Chung, an' so say I. We were just waitin' to talk it over with you before we called 'em all aft and sprang it on 'em. Seein' you've spilled the beans, we may as well serve 'em while they're hot."

Slocum had capped his trick. Leary chewed his lips in silence as Slocum called Swansen, and the whole crew was mustered in the shadow of the mainsail, fidgeting uneasily, wondering, more than half incredulous, whispering to each other about the *gold*.

"Men," said Slocum, glancing at Leary with a malicious twinkle in his eyes, "we may as well let you in on this trip right away. We're after gold. On an island that ain't down on the charts. Mr. Leary knows where it is, but he won't tell us only the general direction until he sees fit an' ready. There's gold there, he says. Heaps of it! Enough for all of us to chuck about like corn to the chickens.

"Now there's ten of you, outside Mr. Swansen and the stooard. We're goin' to gather in this haul an' split it a hundred ways. Each of you gets two parts—that's twenty. The stooard gets two—same as the rest of you, an' Swansen gets three, bein' an officer. That leaves seventy-five to split into two parts between Chung an' myself, who find the ship, an' Leary an' Rice, who find the gold.

"Now, seventy-five don't divvy nicely. Mr. Leary proposes to give you men one share apiece, he ain't said yet he's willing for you to have two, but I don't imagine he has any objection. An', while we're at it, I suggest we chuck out those extra five shares and put 'em in the general pot. Make a lottery of 'em if you like—three shares for the grand prize, two for the second. And

all hands draw chances. That leaves thirty-five shares each for my share of the expedition and thirty-five for Mr. Leary's, with every one happy an' satisfied. That is, if he agrees to it. How about it, Mr. Leary?"

Leary knew himself the target of all eyes, brightened by hope of treasure. To dull those eyes was to damn himself thoroughly. Slocum had made him look the churl already. There was nothing to do but grin and back the suggestion. That Slocum had any idea of handing out the shares he promised so glibly, Leary had firm doubt. Somehow he would chisel them out of most of it, if not all. To divide profits with a crew would be to Slocum preposterous.

As he cleared his throat to speak heartily he saw Chung's glance again. It was that of a grinning devil. Swansen stepped forward. The elevation of the man to matedom, nominal as the post was, had given the big Norseman a false sense of his own importance. Talk of three shares inflated him beyond caution. Perhaps he scented guesses which way the wind blew toward Leary. He addressed himself to Slocum, touching his forelock clumsily.

"Beggin' yore pardon, skipper," he said. "But, if we're all in on this, an' aboard, an' bound, with nothin' but sea atween us an' the place where the gold is; why don't Mr. Leary tell us just where the island lies? I don't see no reason for hiding it?"

He glanced round at the crew with the look of a successful orator; and the crew shuffled their feet and made some sort of a murmur, waiting first to know how Slocum was going to take Swansen's speech.

"Why," said Slocum cheerfully, "I'll leave it to Mr. Leary to tell you, seein' as he ain't given his opinion yet about the shares. I don't know why he don't tell us, unless it's his idea of a joke. He's give me his word he will tell us, though," he added, "and I've a notion he'll come through for the good of every one concerned."

The men essayed a laugh, and then shifted, like two well-oiled weather-cocks, anxious to get the wind of the skipper, scenting a jest that was grim in his final sentence. Leary spoke up quickly, before the situation he had brought on himself became too awkward to handle:

"As to the shares, men," he said, "I'll stand back of anything Captain Slocum proposes. I'm just as eager and just as glad to give you all a divvy as he is. In every way. As to the position? As the skipper says, it's my idea of a joke, of a game the skipper and Chung and me have been playing. I told 'em I had the figures written down, because they were afraid I might forget 'em, which would be serious—and expensive."

He paused for the slow grins to come to the surface. "I told Chung and the skipper, I say, that the figures was in my head, well fixed. Also that they was written down. And we made up a little bet that they couldn't guess where those figures were. Though I'd told 'em, mind you, fair and square.

"They've been trying to answer that riddle since the day I told 'em, two days before we sailed. They've done their damnedest, Chung and the skipper, to find out those figures. I gave 'em free leave to go over all my duds while I was asleep—and, believe me, they have. But I win the bet. Chung's foxy, and the skipper is a wise bird, but I leave it to you if I'm not foxier. Skipper, I'm betting you an' Chung five shares you haven't got an idea where I've got those figures. You've just said you hadn't. Now then, as Swansen says, it's no sense to keep 'em any longer. I just wanted to give you all the chance in the world to find out, that's all."

One of the men chuckled. Slocum marked him with blazing eyes. The others kept quiet, but this was a jest they could understand. Chung and the skipper going through Leary to find out the figures! They knew, every one on the water-front knew, the expertness of Chung and the keeper of Snug Harbor at "going through" a victim. And Leary had been laughing at them all this time. The vanes of their stuffy minds began to swing in his direction.

"The figures," said Leary, "take 'em down, skipper, or somebody, are:

"162° 44'' West; 44° 16'' South.

"Swansen, hand me the glasses."

The Norwegian took the binoculars from their hook at the head of the companionway

and gave them to Leary, looking at him as he might have regarded a conjuror. Leary unscrewed a lens that magnified.

"Now then," he said. "I told 'em the figures was in my head, well fixed, and written down. And they never tumbled. Take a look, skipper, but don't drop my teeth, because I need 'em. I had the figures engraved on the gold back of 'em."

He had flipped out two front teeth of artificial porcelain, kept in place by a suction bridge. They were backed with gold and, scored in the metal, small, but plain, done with the skill of an engraving jeweler, were the figures of longitude and latitude. Leary held the two teeth in his palm and offered the lens to the skipper with his other hand. At the same time he burst into a guffaw in which the men joined faintly.

"Look at Chung!" said Leary. "Chung, you old fox, that's one on you!"

The Chinaman's face was a mask of chagrin. The titter of the men died abruptly as he turned on them with a scowl. Slocum peered through the lens, checking off the figures aloud.

"The joke's on me an' Chung this time," he said quietly. "But you don't want to let that wisdom of yours swell your head too much, Leary." And he handed Leary back his teeth. The hunter set them in place with a click.

"Now, then," the skipper shouted, with a swift change of voice and manner. "There's been enough of jokes and shares. Get busy, all of ye. You know what's ahead of you now. Let it brace up every mother's son of you. The man who loafs keeps us all waiting. Hop to it!"

It was the middle of the seventh week when at last the mitered peak with its plume of smoke rose out of the sea. For two days the crew had been looking for it, and it was one of them, perched in the foremast crosstree at dawn, who yelled down the news.

The thought of gold had proven the metal a touchstone with the crew. They went at their work with a will, but they were more independent. There were even some feeble signs that they considered themselves on an equality with every one. And these signs swelled when at last the barkentine dropped anchor where the Spume had been moored.

This was at sunset, with the dark rapidly falling down and a heavy surf breaking. The Pearl tugged at her two cables while the men hung over the rail and watched the island vanish in the night, blending into the sky, and at last resolving itself to a mighty cone that shaped itself by cutting off segments of the stars, while, from the split, the under surface of the volcano gloomed and glowed with rosy light. They had to wait for daylight for a landing, and there was no sleep aboard that night.

Leary and Rice drank heavily. They had seen, in the last of the light, the cairn they had been forced to raise above the body of their victim and, with the rattle of the chain to the bottom and the shouts of the men, birds had shot up from the tree-tops where they had settled for the night, protesting against the invasion.

One bird had flown wheeling out toward the ship shrieking its Ya-hoo! There were thousands of such birds on the island, yet even Leary felt a tinge of the presentiment that made Rice cower as the thing winged through the dusk.

"You don't suppose—that's *him*, do you?" Rice had asked. And Leary had told him to shut up.

Slocum served grog that night. Even the hunch-back seemed in less surly mood. In the gray of the morning the boats went out and the men tumbled into them. The ship was deserted at her mooring. Slocum's bully, Swansen, was bitten as the rest, and Slocum saw that neither protest nor actual force would do anything but stir up a discontent that Leary might take advantage of. Not one was willing to remain aboard so, perforce, he let them land and, following Leary and Rice, scramble madly up the valley above the mangroves, climb the cliff over which Herring had been hurled, and halt, irresolute of what to do, on the margin of the pool. Leary pointed to where the upper fall spouted.

"It gushed out of a tunnel in the solid rock," he explained. "Like a tube or pipe in the lava. Divert its flow and get this

pool emptied, and you'll find the gold lying on its sides like butter in a churn."

He spoke with a certain exaltation, knowing that they hung on his words and that he was never closer to being a leader.

"It shouldn't be much of a trick," he said.

"I guess we can manage it, Leary," said Slocum. "And without your help, thanking you just the same for helpin' us get here an' tellin' us what to do."

"What's the idea?" asked Leary. He saw that the time for a showdown had come, and he was cool enough. He set his right hand on his hip, just above the butt of his automatic. Slocum had brought his shotgun ashore, but it was leaning against a rock.

Cold rage possessed Leary, deadly, merciless. If Slocum started anything he would finish it. He even marked the spot on Slocum's forehead where he would flip his bullet. Chung should go next—and then Swansen, if he tried to interfere. He or the hunch-back.

The rest he could handle. They could get out the gold and sail back with it. Hastings could navigate. Why, it was easy, now that it came to the issue! He smiled as he repeated his question. With one gun and his capacity to handle it, he held them all. And Slocum was thinking that he was running things. "What's the idea?"

"Well," said Slocum. "It's this way, lads. I wouldn't cheat a man out of his fair share of wealth lying there in the pool, but there's a difference between a man and a murderer. I'm no saint, but murderers are a step beyond me. None of this gold belongs to Leary, or Rice. It belongs to the man lying under a heap of stones down on the beach, that they killed. You didn't know it was a grave, so you didn't notice it. But there's a dead man in it. Now, it's up to you," he went on, pointing his forefinger first at Leary and then at Rice," to say whether you want to stand even with these sort of men."

Leary sensed the men edging away from him with sidelong looks. There was little short of murder that any one of them had not committed. It was very doubtful whether the hands of Chung and Slocum were entirely clean of such a crime. But the crew shrank from the story of the man lying in his lonely grave on the beach below them.

"One of these Jonahs held him," said Slocum, "t'other pole-axed him with a rock. Then they chucked him over that cliff back of ye to make sure. All to do him out of his share of the gold. *Get that one!*"

Leary had been looking for Rice. Now he saw him slinking toward the bush. Swansen made a rush after him and collared him, howling for mercy. Leary's lips compressed and his eyes narrowed to slits as he snapped out his automatic, cuddled to his palm.

"You will have it, then," he said, as he swung up the barrel and brought it down, squeezing the butt and trigger as it leveled. There was a click, a slight explosion of the fulminate. The cartridge in the breech refused to explode. If it had been a revolver he might have swung the cylinder to a second attempt. To get out the faulty shell meant precious time in pulling back the slide, and—

Slocum was laughing at him.

"We didn't find the figures you were so smart with," he said, "but Chung drew the powder out of every one of your cartridges. Nothing left but the primers and the bullets with some filings for weight and filling. Who's the fox now?"

He reached for his shotgun. Chung's pistol was out. Swansen was dragging Rice over the ground, squealing and kicking. The crew hung back. With an oath Leary flung his useless gun at Slocum's head, grazing it, bowing double as the Chinaman fired—and missed—scooping up a rock and hurling it at Chung; whirling, smashing one man who stood athwart him a blow that sent him to the ground, whimpering and dazed; then leaping zigzag as Chung's pistol barked again and Slocum's shotgun roared, with the charge hissing past him, gaining the wall of the bush at last and leaping into its screen of living green that swallowed him, wavered, sprang back into place, and hid him.

Rice, in the grasp of Swansen, bleeding at the mouth and nose, begged hard for his life. "He did not want a share of the

gold," he pleaded. He would fetch and carry for them, be their dog, be grateful for scraps. He could show them where the gold lay. It was he who knew about the deep part of the pool, he who had thought first of changing the course of the fall. Only let him live!"

He groveled until even the crew turned from him in disgust, and Slocum, coming back from the futile chase, kicked him as he sprawled.

"Get up," he said. "You haven't the guts of a split herring! We'll let you live, if that's all you want. Live till we get ready to leave, and then, if you've worked hard and faithful"—he paused, grinning in anticipation of his own wit—"hard and faithful," he repeated.

"I'll do that," said Rice.

"Why—then, we'll leave you to keep your dead man company. With Leary, alive or dead. You can have what gold we leave."

Rice looked at him with dull eyes, half-crazed, knowing only that he was to live. For that he was thankful.

"Wait," he said. "Wait, and I'll get you something." He waded out into the pool, shading his eyes, then plunging under water. They watched him while he worked and came back like a fearful retriever with half a dozen nuggets in his palm.

"There're bigger in the deeper water," he said.

To most of them it was the first tangible evidence of wealth. They crowded round and passed the nuggets about. Rice was forgotten, slapped on the back in friendly fashion with the rest as the one who had shown them their good fortune. Finally Slocum pocketed the gold.

"Come on," he said. "Get up to the fall and see what can be done with it. Swansen, did you bring that dynamite ashore?"

By nightfall they had blown up and blocked and dammed the lava-tube until the spouting water found some other temporary channel. The level of the pool fell rapidly at first, and, after it had reached the common level of the stream, continued to diminish slowly with a stealthy whirling movement that indicated some subaqueous opening in its bed.

After dark they grouped about the borders of the slippery pit that slowly developed, a rock-walled funnel, looking with torches for the first specks of gold to show. Leary's simile of butter round the churn held them.

The black water, with its crimson reflections, gurgled as it swirled and slowly, slowly, lowered. It was evident that until some shelf or bottom showed there was no place on which golden nuggets could have rested. And, in the minds of Slocum and Chung, trouble grew. What if this funnel sloped down to the crevice through which the water sucked away, through which the heavy gold had gone?

Slocum squatted on the brink with the rest, blackbirds of the pit. At midnight the water ceased to fall. Perhaps the crevice was choked. They could see no opening, though they flung down torches and lowered burning boughs. To descend the slippery sides in the blackness was folly. Once more they had to wait until morning, and they flung themselves, exhausted, utterly tired out, upon the turf beside the basin to uneasy dreams.

A loud report wakened some of them. And they roused the rest. A moon was showing, dull, glazed with crimson as with blood. But it cast light enough to show Slocum on the ground with his head blown off. His shotgun was gone. Leary had snaked out from the bush and filched it. Chung, creviced between boulders, he had not found, and he had gone back content with the consternation he must cause, the part of his revenge sweet, one cartridge meant for Chung, still in the breach.

While they looked from the shattered carcass of Slocum to the ghastly moon they saw a veil that stretched from it to the split peaks and there again were bloody, lurid lights that flashed and grew more constant, more livid.

A dull rumbling sounded, the ground heaved and fell beneath them. The two portions of the peak seemed to open and shut like the jaws of some horrible monster. There was a rending explosion that deafened them and a dazzling glare of sizzling, molten lava began to stream down one side of the cone. The wind brought to them a

frightful blast and, between them and the pool, the ground began to open.

Between the bursting roars, above the steady rumbling and the sound of the steady draft of that infernal chimney, Chung's shrill voice rang out in command:

"Down to the ship! *Down to the ship!*"

After him they raced, flung to the ground by a second shock. They fell over the cliff rather than climbed it, clinging to vines, crashing down, while above them the sky throbbed in crimson and under them the earth trembled. A tidal wave ran up the creek, forcing them to higher ground which not all of them reached.

Then the mass of water surged back and, when they reached the beach, their boats were gone, the lagoon a welter of wild waves and, borne over the reef like a chip in a milldam, they beheld the Pearl tossed beyond the coral, her foremast broken, her cables snapped like pack-threads; dragged in some current that juggled with the ship and carried it off in a smother of foam under the livid pulsing clouds that reflected the unloosed fires of the volcano that had simmered so long.

Presently ashes began to sift down upon them and, as they turned, the red lip of a lava flow showed pendulous over the edge of the cliff.

CHAPTER XI.

FENN'S FORTUNE.

THE Lady Mine slashed through the seas at clipper gait, her copper sheathing burnished in the sun as she flung herself along under the whip of the wind on her curving canvas and her bending masts. Driver Fenn, recovering every hour, sailed her as no regatta had ever seen her sailed. Pedersen, still sailing-master by courtesy, sometimes shook his head at topsails standing where they almost would have suggested a reef, but Fenn carried on.

"You can never tell when we'll meet up with calms," he said. "It's getting on toward monsoon time—we may run into shifting winds, and we don't want to ever forget they are ten days ahead of us, though we're cutting that lead down fast."

Watch and watch, sometimes forgetting the one off duty, Fenn stayed on deck, trimming his sheets, humoring the helm, hoisting the last inch of canvas between risk and danger night and day, speeding the fast schooner to her best endeavor.

It had not been hard to trail Leary and Rice, once they had Snug Harbor as clew. Its shutting up unloosed a current of small talk among the inhabitants of the Barbary Coast that ordinarily would not have been vented, and Jennings soon picked up the fact that Leary and Rice were aboard, despite Leary's shaving of his beard.

Now they were after them, and the gold, with a picked crew, a fast schooner, running down their longitude like a hound with a scent fresh and strong. If there was to be a fight, they had arms aboard, but Fenn, in his own mind, minimized that danger. He knew the sort of cattle Slocum had as crew, and Rice and Leary he held at a correct estimate. Leary, if he had a gun, was the dangerous man. Slocum, he fancied, could be dickered with, without much trouble, once he saw himself against a better outfit than his own.

Only one thing disturbed Fenn's equanimity as he grew stronger and began to glory in his ability to do his work perfectly. One thing at a time had been his motto, so far. The one thing now was to get all the speed he could out of the Lady Mine, and to this he attended. But he could not dismiss the thoughts of the girl. He thought of her at night, when he took the wheel, because he believed he could get a quarter of a knot more out of the schooner than any one else, remembering what she had said and done and how she looked all through the day. And he came to know that he desired her above all other desires.

With the growth of his love his confidence decreased. He felt himself awkward in her company while Jennings was always ready with the right thing to say or do. Jennings, as a guest aboard his own yacht, was in a position to play gallant to the girl while Fenn worked the ship. Jennings made her laugh, told her things of the sea that Fenn could have taught her much better could he have found his tongue or the time. Jennings spun her yarns of the

South Seas, and Jennings was evidently a favorite.

Katherine Fenn, after a desperate fight with sea-sickness, found that her fear of the ocean was largely imaginary, and when she regained the deck, well enough to enjoy the breeze and the buoyant bound of the vessel, she found matters so advanced that they disconcerted her. But she found solace in telling Jennings's fortune in his palm, proving conclusively that he was to marry a dark woman of an entirely different type from Elizabeth Herring, much to the latter's amusement, and Jennings's annoyance.

Fenn speedily tuned his mind to the fact that he was no courtier. Such things did not come to him of instinct, and it was too late to acquire them. Neither, in this case, was there time. Besides, Fenn had a newborn theory about love, evolved out of his inner consciousness. It was this:

That, if a woman loved a man and a man a woman, truly, as mate calls to mate, while the woman might like gallantries and have a natural appetite for compliments and attentions that told her she was desirable, such things would not weigh against her ultimate choice.

He recalled a few times when he was sure she had revealed herself. She had cared whether he got well, and said so. He remembered the flush on her face, the tears that had hung in her eyes. He remembered the sturdy grip of her soft hand as they had cemented their partnership. And he was very sure that there would never be any other woman for him.

Jennings had his advantages, and he seemed to be making use of them. But, if Elizabeth Herring was the type to be won by such pleasantries, if she preferred Jennings as a man, time would tell, and in such a contest Fenn could not compete. And he had made up his mind to say nothing until the gold was found, and he was no longer a penniless man, with a mortgage on his only, none too elaborate house, sailing a borrowed yacht.

In his heart he staked everything on the bridge that their glances had once built up, and the mutual transfer of something intangible, invisible, but part of the very spirit of each.

In the mean time he was far too wise to sulk or appear jealous. There were glances from the girl that he sometimes caught that kept his love flourishing.

They ran into a calm, working through it. Once Fenn ordered out the boats and had the schooner towed toward a squall that persistently seemed to hover within a mile of them. From this gusty place he glided to another, and at last, by sheer persistence, got fair wind again, and once more they sped at top speed.

They were thirty days out when Fenn announced that he believed they had nearly made up their handicap.

"Four days more like this," he declared, "and we'll sight the island. I'll wager a fair amount of my share that they have not been there more than forty-eight hours."

That same night the sunset seemed to hang in the sky with strange persistence. In west and south the sky pulsed crimson, from sea-rim almost to zenith, and did not fade until five hours after sundown.

"A big blow-off somewhere," said Fenn. "That's volcanic ash afloat, lit up by the sun as it rides high in the air, trailing round the earth. I saw much the same thing when Krakatoa exploded."

"You don't think your island has gone up, do you?" asked Jennings.

"No. It isn't big enough to make all that fuss. We'll hear later that this is from over Java way, I fancy. But it'll start things firing up all along the line. Our island is a safety valve, always simmering. This may stir it up a bit. It shows two or three lava flows of different periods. Just the same," he added, "we'll work up to wind'ard of it. Some shoals may have shifted higher. There's a lot of 'em close to the surface on the lee side, as it is. Best to go a bit cautious."

The strange glow was with them every night after that, strongest in the west, gleaming until midnight, and then, as Fenn pointed out, dying away as the sun got round the curve of the earth.

"So it can't be our islet," he said. "Or it would be more persistent and last till morning. I am making westing, besides, and it would show in the east."

On the morning of the fourth day they

sighted the island and bore down upon it with the wind. A heavy volume of smoke was pouring from the split, but this diminished as the day wore on, and they carefully worked into the lee of the land.

The eruption had been but a flash in the pan, as volcanoes go. Rounding a headland, with a man sounding in the bows, another conning from the spreader of the fore, making for the harborage of the departed Spume, they saw, stranded on a submerged reef, the wreck of a vessel. It appeared to have been flung there by some mighty wave, lying with its foremast gone by the board, its back broken. There was a deep channel between her and the land and through this the Lady Mine made way. The bonoculars showed the name carved in the counter of the wreck.

THE PEARL OF TAHITI

"Blown off the land," said Fenn. "Then they're stranded ashore, in all probability, unless the volcano got them. See where the lava has gone down through the forest and over the cliff. They probably lost their shore boats at the same time. Land lifted and made a tidal wave."

They anchored, looking curiously at the still blazing patches of forest, the steam rising from the lava flow, smoke here and there from piles of cinders and ash, and the plume of smoke forming above the crater like a mammoth cauliflower. The island showed no sign of life, save for the querulous birds.

"Seems as if they might have been caught, all right," said Jennings, "otherwise our schooner would look pretty good to them. Even to Leary and Rice. Besides, they wouldn't know you were aboard, Fenn."

Fenn did not answer, but pointed to a miserable figure that crawled out of the bush and essayed to come down the beach on all fours like a damaged crab. He focused his glasses on the object.

"It's Rice," he said. "And in bad shape. Hardly recognized him. Mr. Pedersen, will you please order the boat away? Jennings, you'll come. He may be all that's left of them. But we'll get *him*," he added with an outthrust of his jaw.

"Hope your gold mine isn't all stuck up with lava," said Jennings as he went below for his rifle. Fenn preemptorily forbade his sister or Elizabeth going ashore until he and Jennings had reconnoitered. They rowed off, the arm of Rice feebly waving to them. With guns ready for a surprise they walked up the beach toward him. He did not know Fenn in the least. He was quite mad and horribly burned.

"They're all there under the ashes," he said. "But I got out. I kept in the water. It boiled. Look at my flesh. Cooked like beef. But Chung and all those devils—under the ashes. The lava cut them off. They yelled when it reached them. And Slocum with his head blown off. That was funny. The fox with no head. I'm left, and the gold's all mine. Mine and Herring's. And Herring's dead. He's under the ashes, too, the lava covered his grave. Gold. *Gold!* Hear that damned bird. It's Herring, I tell you. But they're all dead now but me."

They bent to pick him up and he fainted. He had told the truth about his flesh. It was cooked, scaling and peeling from the bone.

"We can't save that chap," said Jennings. "Too late for even skin grafting if we could do it. Blood poisoning will get him before midnight. He's cheated the gallows, Fenn. Let's go over where he pointed."

"It was not a pleasant sight. The lava flow had thinned out as it flowed like so much treacle, and over it the ashes had fallen. Where the molten stuff had met the sea it must have steamed and smouldered the men it had trapped on the beach like flies on tanglefoot. It was to be hoped so. That some had struggled to the verge of escape, as Rice had managed, only to lose in the end, was attested by a charred bone protruding here and there, with twisted pieces of crisped leather that had once been shoes.

"We'll get these out of the way before the ladies come ashore," said Fenn. "Curious—the flow should have caught them right where Herring was buried. All practically in the same grave."

"Just judgment," said Jennings shortly.

"Let's go up the valley to your stream while the men clean up this mess."

"Bury what you take out, boys," added Fenn as they made their way with some difficulty up the dry course of the stream, now merely a pool or two filmed with ash.

They found the ravine rent on both levels and across the face of both cliffs. The water had ceased, the pool below the upper fall was a great pit. And, not far from it, they found the headless horror of Slocum. It they cast into the newly-made rift.

"A clean sweep of some rascals and a few devils of seamen," said Fenn soberly. "And I fear it has been a wild-goose chase after all, Jennings."

Jennings was poking about in the gravel shallows of the bed of the vanished stream.

"I don't know," he answered. "Looks like a pretty good placer to me. Come over here on Tom Tiddler's ground, Fenn. There's some pretty fair pickings."

Fenn had advanced to where the pool had deepened to the great bowl. He kneeled and looked down, stretching far over the gulf only to jump up and yell excitedly to Jennings, who ran up to him, imbued with the conviction that some important discovery had been made:

"Get down on your belly, man!" said Fenn. "Now look down there at that ledge running all round the place."

The basin was absolutely empty of water and, at the bottom, there showed the crack of the outlet where it had drained, after its supply had been cut off in the shifting of *strata* by the outbreak. But their gaze halted and concentrated three-quarters of the way down, where there ran a broad shelf of rock laid with a coarse gravel of lava fragments, black as coal. And, amid the blackness, showed specs and lumps of yellow, thickly larding the lava gravel.

"Gold!" said Fenn. "Look at it, man. It's like a counter in a bank. A mint. We've only to help ourselves."

Jennings, projected over space, like a gargoyle on an ancient cathedral, whistled. They he spoke in an awed tone:

"Gold, all right. Hunks of it. Like butter in a churn." And never dreamed that he was echoing another man's words. "How are you going to get hold of it?"

"Easy enough," said Fenn. "Get tackle from the schooner, rig up a whip or two, and scoup it all clean. Easy as scaling the side of a ship. Let's go."

They stopped on their eager way back long enough to see what could be done with Rice. It was impossible to move the poor devil, and his madness seemed to possess a certain anethesia for his pain. To insure him against it Jennings took back some *morphia* from the medicine chest of the Lady Mine.

"We've struck it, Kathy," Fern announced to his sister, whom he found in the cabin. "You and Elizabeth and Jennings and me. We've made it at last. You can come ashore now and look for yourself. It's safe enough. The volcano did away with all of them but Rice, and he'll cash-in before nightfall. Where's Elizabeth? Tell her to get ready. We're just leading some tackle in the boat. She's an heiress, and you're a rich woman, and I'm—" He stopped.

"You're what?" asked his sister. "You're contented, ain't you, now that you've struck it rich?" Brother and sister looked into each others' eyes steadily, and Fenn's returned tan deepened to crimson.

"No," he answered slowly. "I'm not contented, Kathy. I ain't struck it quite rich enough to suit me. I don't know as I ever will. But I'm going to find out mighty soon, one way or another."

Katherine Fenn nodded shrewdly, looking affectionately at him.

"You will," she said confidently. "The cards say so, and the stars confirm it. Jupiter conquers Saturn and wins Venus. I've tried it our hundreds of times, and it always turns out the same. Only," she went on, half to herself, "there's the death card. It don't seem as how it's exactly shown up—not while George was about."

But her brother had gone on deck and she called the girl from her cabin to tell her of the discovery and the trip ashore. They had few preparations to make and soon they stepped out on the beach. The horrors of the lava flow were hidden by this time, and neither Fenn nor Jennings referred to them.

Jennings walked with Elizabeth, telling her of the golden butter in the big churn. He and Fenn had discarded their rifles. With all dead, there was no thought of danger. The sailors carrying the ropes and blocks and spars joked as if on a picnic. At Fenn's orders they laid down the stuff at a little distance to the pool while he decided just how to go about the work.

With the two women and Jennings, Fenn led the way to their private mint. Katherine Fenn, finding trouble with the lace of her shoe, lagged behind a little to fix it. As she raised up she shrieked:

"George! George! *It's Saturn!*"

From behind the clump of rock a wild figure had suddenly leaped, shotgun in hand, poised ready for the aim that swiftly covered Fenn. It was Leary, the beard he had shaved off once more sprouted, his clothing torn and scorched, his face bruised and bloody and blackened, but recognizable to the seeress as the man who had wanted to see her brother's log on Russian hill; his eyes shining like those of a devil, bloodshot between raw, hairless rims. He shot one sidelong, triumphing glance at her and laughed.

"Hands up, Driver Fenn!" he shouted. "Up with 'em, damn your soul! Or try to settle it with a prayer before I settle with you. Come back, did you, to get me and the gold? And then spend the gold after you had me hanged. Well, I'm going to spatter that rock with your brains like they was so much scrambled eggs. I've got just one cartridge left—and it's for you—Driver Fenn. I meant it for Chung, but the devil took him his own way. Now you've come along, right on time.

"If one of you as much as twitches," he called out of the side of his mouth at the rest of them," I'll pull the trigger. Maybe you'll get me afterwards, if you can, but Fenn 'll go first of all, and you can lay to that."

Driver Fenn faced Leary steadily, striving to chain the hunter's mad gaze with his own gray orbs, gleaming like steel.

"I've come for you all right, Leary," he said quietly." Come to get you, as you knew I would, and I'm going to take you. Put down that gun."

He did not actually advance, but he toed-up on the balls of his feet, watching Leary like a cat. The hunter sensed the imminent advance, felt the will of Fenn fighting his own, fighting, beginning to dominate it.

"Stop," he shouted." Damn you, I blew off Slocum's head. And now—!"

Fenn saw the blazing frenzy in the man's eyes and knew that he was not to be stopped. At the close range he could not hope to escape the pattern of the shot. Leary's finger curled about the trigger as Fenn stared into the tube that was for him the gate of death. The head of driver Fenn went back and his jaw shot out.

"Damn you, then, *shoot,*" he said.

With a cry Elizabeth Herring sprang between them, clutching at the gun barrel, deflecting it, swinging herself for one second clear of the ground. She had leaped from her stance, where she had been temporarily frozen by the horror of the sudden apparition of Leary, without a preliminary motion and her bound took the hunter by total surprise.

As he swung before her force and weight, the barrel of the gun depressed, the charge exploded, tearing through her skirt, scattering the grit, leaving her clothes charred and smoldering. Through the smoke, the acrid fumes biting his eyes and nostrils, Fenn saw her fall as Leary struck at her.

Even as the girl had leaped, so Driver Fenn sprang, bending slightly at the hips, and then hurling his whole body at Leary. The hunter swung the shotgun like a club, and Fenn caught it descending, twisting away the weapon, flinging it to one side, eager to kill and avenge with his naked hands.

Before that charge, before the implacable desire in Fenn's eyes, Leary shrieked as Fenn grappled with him. His scorched clothes broke away from the skipper's grasp, and he turned and ran, naked from the waist, leaping the prostrate figure of the girl, sprinting desperately ,and managing with desperate efforts to keep just ahead of Fenn, running for the pit of the pool.

Fenn's fingers grazed his belt and he shot forward with a wild scream, springing high up, far out, while Fenn barely prevented

his own catastrophe and flung himself on the ground at the brink as Leary fell, striking the sloping sides of the great funnel, rebounding, clawing at the gold-laden shelf before he shot down straight for the yawning crevice at the bottom, reaching it a mass of broken bone and flesh, stunned, almost lifeless, sliding into the outlet like so much refuse down a drain.

Fenn stared down and then rolled over, covering his eyes, not at the recollections of Leary's grim exit, but at the memory of the girl falling amid a belch of shot and flame. And Leary, whom he would have shredded for the deed, had escaped him. He groaned aloud and then, his head on his arms, his massive shoulders shaking, began to sob. A touch on his shoulder checked him.

"Miss Herring is asking for you, Fenn," said the ex-supercargo.

Fenn looked at him in incredulous silence.

"She is not badly hurt?" he queried.

"Superficially and physically, no," said Jennings with the ghost of a grin. "She seems to be suffering somewhat—but—"

The grin broke into a subdued laugh as Fenn strode away, and Jennings looked down into the bowl where the only trace of Leary was a fragment of cloth hanging from a sharp spur of rock.

Fenn's sister met him.

"Saturn—" she commenced.

"Where is she?" demanded Fenn.

"Gone back to the schooner. The clothes were half burned off from her. See, there's the boat coming back now. They've left her on board."

"Why didn't you go with her? Wasn't she burned or wounded? How could you let her go alone?"

"She wanted to," said Katherine. "She wasn't burned or wounded. I didn't go with her because I was plainly asked not to. She has quite a mind of her own. And I have some idea," she added, softening a little as she regarded her brother's baffled, bewildered anxious face—"some idea that she thought you might want to go off to the ship yourself to inquire, seeing she saved your life. That is, if the gold—"

But Fenn was plunging down the beach, sending the sailors back to their fellows to take orders from Jennings. He jumped into the boat and finned it off to the schooner where his sister saw him board and disappear down the companionway.

"The cards said it and the stars confirmed it," she said, half aloud, as she turned away, her eyes wet. "Jupiter and Venus. And the real gold in the hearts of both of them!"

(The End.)

ON A TENEMENT ROOF

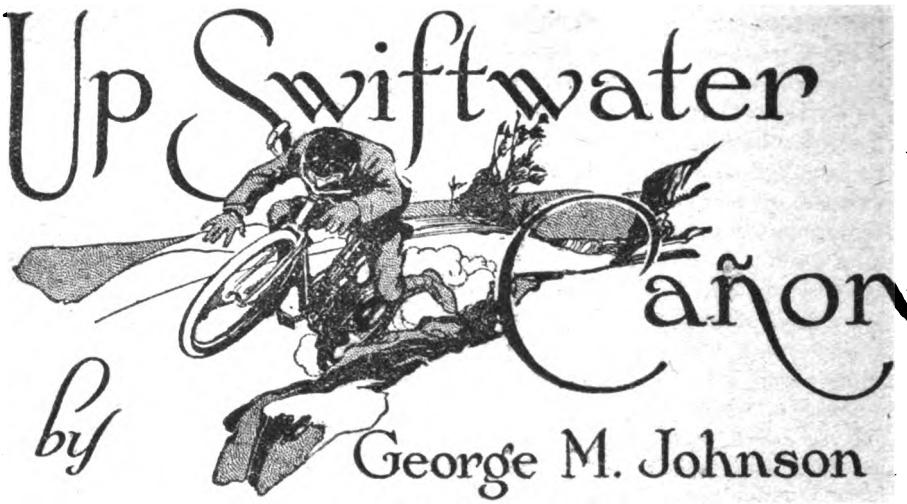
CHIMNEY-POTS and water-tanks;
Lines of clothes in straggling ranks;
Vasty spaces, where the foot
Softly treads a rug of soot;
Yet the air is sweet and clear,
And the sky looks very near.

There, away from glaring light,
Steals the mystic painter, night;
Makes each shape a fairy thing;
Paints a setting for a king;
While the softened city roar
Sounds like waves upon a shore.

Now across the fairy field
Two young lovers stand revealed;
Friendly heaven presses near,
And the stars swing low, to hear!—
Strange, that stars, so wise and cold,
Should care to hear that story old!

Mella Russell McCallum.

Up Swiftwater Cañon



by George M. Johnson

SATURDAY morning at ten thirty, Jasper Frank, special messenger between the Cañon City Bank and the Hidden Fortune, started on his weekly trip by motorcycle to carry the ten thousand-dollar payroll to the mine, some thirty miles distant up Swiftwater Cañon. The money was in gold, packed in a beltlike carrying case around the rider's waist.

Neither messenger nor payroll reached their destination.

I learned of this that evening as I sat smoking a cigar in the office of my friend, Tim Danville, sheriff of Sage County. Tim and I were laying plans for an angling excursion the next day, and we had just decided that the sheriff should stop for me in his automobile at five when the telephone rang. It was one of the bank officials—considerably worried — notifying Tim of their agent's disappearance. My friend asked a few questions, and then hung up the receiver with a grunt of disgust.

"Bunch of fatheads!" he muttered disrespectfully after telling me the news. "Kept it dark all this time, thinking that Jasper might show up. Ought to have let me know right away! Well, Tim, the trouting trip is off. Want to trail along and watch how the bloodhound noses out his prey?"

"Sure thing!" I cried. "That is, if I won't be in the way. Sounds more exciting than a fishing trip, anyhow. What have you got to start on?"

"Absolutely nothing, so far," he rejoined simply. "Only this: I know Jasper Frank pretty well, and I'll stake my own reputation on his honesty. I feel positive that he never would be tempted by money not belonging to him. But wasn't there a famous detective—though he may have been a character of fiction—whose advice was: 'Suspect everybody'?"

"Which means that you'll suspect Jasper of stealing the payroll until you prove him innocent?"

"I'm afraid I'll have to—after a fashion, for it won't do to tackle a proposition of this sort with anything but an open mind. Yet we'll start on the *supposition*—and it is merely a supposition, mind—that he is the victim, not the criminal. Granting for the moment that Jasper was held up along the way — you're familiar with the road up Swiftwater Cañon—where would be the ideal place?"

"There's one spot that would be a corker," I replied. "That cut about half a mile above the reclamation dam."

This was a very lonely place where the road wound through a narrow break in the rocks, made gloomy by the shadows of overhanging pines.

"Right you are," agreed Tim heartily. "It's really about the only favorable location for an ambush anywhere along the Swiftwater road. First, we want to make sure that Jasper actually entered the cañon. Guess I'll call up Fred Joyce and

find out whether any one on his place noticed the motorcycle go past this morning. That 'll be the first definite thing we have to work on."

Joyce owned a large irrigated farm near the mouth of Swiftwater Cañon, and Tim lost no time in getting his house on the wire. The conversation was brief. He learned that the motorcyclist had stopped there at shortly before eleven for a drink of water, and had then ridden on up the cañon. There was no doubt about this, for Mrs. Joyce herself had given the rider his drink of water.

"That being the case," mused the sheriff, "he ought to have reached the Hidden Fortune mine by noon easy, judging from the way I've seen Jasper travel. There was nothing slow about him. Whatever happened to him then occurred in the cañon. We'll run up there in the morning and see what a little sleuth work can turn out."

Five of the following morning found Tim's flivver, with me as passenger, bowling over the road that led toward the precipitous cañon of the Swiftwater. The sheriff had learned few new facts overnight, and was more than ever put out because the bank people had been so dilatory about informing him of the messenger's disappearance.

The Hidden Fortune paymaster had waited until three before telephoning the bank, and then an automobile had been despatched from the mine to see if the delay had not been caused by a breakdown of Jasper Frank's motorcycle. No trace of rider or machine had been discovered.

We proceeded slowly after entering the cañon, scanning both sides of the road closely for signs of violence. On nearing the cut already referred to, however, Tim stopped his machine and we got out. It seemed worth while to give this suspicious spot a more thorough examination.

At first nothing was to be seen. We walked along the road on foot, and presently, just beyond a sharp bend, Tim darted to one side with an exclamation of triumph. Against the abrupt wall of rock which bordered the road was a not very conspicuous red spot.

"Blood!" I exclaimed in keen interest, but at once perceived my mistake. The mark was not blood; in fact, the rock seemed scratched, almost dented, as by a hard blow. A few feet ahead was a greasy blotch in the road bed, which was solid rock, with no dust to show footprints or other marks.

"Can you see it?" cried Tim excitedly. "Jasper's motorcycle was enameled red. It crashed into the rocks here, scraping off a bit of the color, and the blotch is oil where it lay for a while after it fell. Almost always when a motorcycle spills over on its side there is an oil spot made by lubricating oil draining from the crankcase or tank.

"Now if Jasper had been wrecked merely through losing control of his machine—because of a skid, for instance—both he and the motor would have been found here by the first persons who came along, probably that auto party sent down from the mine. The road is not traveled very often since the new one was built, although Jasper always came this way."

"So your theory is—"

"That Frank was shot from ambush right here in the cut."

"But there ought to be some blood if he was shot!" I objected.

"Not necessarily," said Tim decidedly. "If he were shot in the face, yes; but if a bullet went into his body, the blood would be soaked up by his clothes at first. We'll find some, though, if we search long enough."

To tell the truth, I was not very heavily impressed by Tim's reasoning; it looked a good deal like a long shot, but he insisted that we make a detailed search for further evidence, and naturally he was in command of the party. Besides which I was under obligation to do all I could to assist him.

Developments proved the wisdom of his course, though it was I who happened to find the next bit of evidence—a blood-spot no bigger than a silver quarter, and fully two hundred feet further along. The blood-splash was on a rock a few feet above the road.

There was no reason to doubt that the body had been carried that way. The walls

of the cut were too steep for it to be moved directly up or down.

The person or persons who had waylaid the motorcycle rider appeared to have taken great pains not to leave blood-traces when they set about concealing the corpse of their victim, and Tim and I spent fully half an hour scrambling around on the slope above the road before either of us struck anything else. In general, the ground was quite rocky, so that it was easily possible to travel without leaving any footprints. But Tim at last found an unmistakable trail of blood—a drop here, a drop there—that eventually led us to a rude cairn high up on the cañon slope, and in there, covered with loose rocks, was Jasper Frank's body. Lying beside it was the leather-carrying case which had held the ten thousand-dollar payroll.

"Poor fellow!" muttered Tim as we gently hoisted the body out of its resting place. "I was positive he didn't take the money, but if his body had never been found some people would always have insisted that he was guilty."

Together we tenderly carried the pitiful remains down to Tim's car. A brief examination showed that Jasper had been shot clear through the body by a large caliber bullet, certainly as big as a .45.

"The fact that his body failed to stop the bullet would seem to indicate that the assassin used a rifle," mused Tim; "but, of course, it *might* have been a heavy revolver. We ought to find where that bullet hit after going through Jasper. He was likely shot exactly at the bend, and after he lost control of the motorcycle it went straight on until it smashed into the rocks.

"Now, if the bullet met him about here"—Tim stood to the left of the road center, as a speeding motorcyclist would naturally shave off a bit of the corner—"and it came from straight ahead, it ought to have struck the wall of the cut near the bottom and about thirty feet behind where I am standing."

A big caliber lead bullet fired against fairly smooth rock leaves a mark that one could hardly miss. We found the "splash" it made about eight feet from the place where Tim's reasoning had said that it should be. The bullet itself, of course, was utterly demolished, spattered into a thousand tiny bits of metal.

"If we only had that bullet!" I mourned, "it would tell us quite a lot, I reckon."

Tim scarcely heard me. He had instantly realized that the bullet-evidence was gone past recovery, and wasted no breath bemoaning the fact. He was already off on another idea.

"Line up this lead mark and the bend in the road where Jasper was probably shot," he muttered to himself. "Continue that to the side of the road up ahead, and we've pinned down the place where the bullet came from. Let's take a look up there. Then we ought to start back to Cañon City and turn poor Jasper Frank over to the coroner."

Near the place roughly pointed out by Tim's imaginary line was a little recess in the rocks which formed an absolutely perfect observation point. It was about eighty feet from the bend in the road where, supposedly, Jasper Frank had met his death. From it one had a splendid view of the road, yet was himself entirely concealed. Furthermore, a slit in the rock formed a sort of natural loop-hole through which a rifle-barrel could be aimed.

Tim began looking around, and presently emitted a grunt of satisfaction as he poked a small object out from behind a loose chunk of rock over in a corner.

"That's a pure streak of luck!" he exulted as he showed me his find. "I certainly didn't expect as much evidence as that!"

It was an empty cartridge case, a Sharp's .50 caliber. The Sharp's was a great rifle in its day, a prime favorite with the early frontiersmen and buffalo hunters, but you don't find them much used at the present time. The shell had been recently fired, for the burned powder stain inside was fresh and black, and the copper showed no trace of corrosion, as it would have done if long exposed to the elements.

"The bullet that killed Jasper Frank came from that cartridge," Tim stated positively as he looked at the shell in his hand. "We've evidence enough to hang somebody right here."

"Whoever it was must have been an amateur at this business," I put in, "or he'd never used a Sharp's rifle and then left the exploded cartridge where it could be found."

"Yes, he was an amateur, all right," Tim agreed. "Lucky for us! But I suspect there was more than one involved. A single man would have had considerable trouble carrying the body way up there where we found it. Jasper Frank was no lightweight."

An hour later found us back in Cañon City, where Tim turned the body of the murdered messenger over to the coroner. No one else was told of it, for as soon as the finding of the body became generally known the persons responsible would be put doubly on their guard.

That unpleasant duty attended to, Tim drove around to his office, where he called up Jim Watson on the telephone. Watson ran a sporting goods store, doing a big business in guns and ammunition.

"Hello, Jim!" he said when the connection had been made. "Sheriff Danville talking. You know anybody in this section who owns a Sharp's rifle?"

For a moment he listened attentively, and then, with a "Much obliged, Jim!" hung up.

"Luke Peabody up White Gulch has one," Tim explained to me. "That's the only one Jim knows of, and he's pretty sure that it's the only one in the county. These Sharp's rifles are getting to be pretty rare birds. That's not very good evidence at the best, and I'd hate to think old Luke would shoot anybody."

"Do you know him?" I asked.

"Not very well; a little. He's an old-time desert rat—regular grizzled, old-fashioned prospector—harmless old nut. Most of the time he's off in the mountains or desert-hunting for gold, but he was knocking around town a few days ago, trying to get a grubstake. Think I'll try a bluff on Luke, anyway, and see where it gets me. Nothing to lose whatever—happens. Care to be along?"

"Naturally! When do you start?"

"This afternoon. As soon as we can get some dinner."

The road up White Gulch was poor, even for a county where poor roads are more common than good ones, and it was late in the afternoon before we got as near to Luke's cabin as the little car could take us. The last mile we had to do on foot. A thin wreath of smoke, curling out of the ramshackle chimney, showed that the occupant of the cabin was at home. Tim walked directly up to the open door.

"Luke Peabody," he cried authoritatively, "I arrest you for the murder of Jasper Frank."

The old prospector showed no surprise nor resentment at this abrupt greeting.

"Come in," he invited sociably, in spite of the fact that Tim's big revolver was very much in evidence. "Set down—talk things over."

We both—I, at least—were somewhat taken back by his nonchalant acceptance of the accusation, but nevertheless entered the cabin at his suggestion, sitting down on a couple of boxes that had once held canned tomatoes. I noticed an ancient Sharp's leaning in one corner. Old Luke's next remark was still more startling.

"Yes, I shot Jasper," he admitted regretfully, "but I didn't go t' do it, an' 'twan't my fault, anyhow." Then he broke off abruptly, his little black eyes glaring at us suspiciously. "How'd yuh git on my trail?" he demanded.

"That's all right," said the sheriff. "We've got you; that's enough."

"Aw, I know how," grumbled the prospecter, "thet there pizen cat, Holy Smoke Randall, give me away."

I could imagine how Tim was chuckling to himself as the old desert rat betrayed his accomplice, under the belief that he himself had been betrayed. "Holy Smoke" Randall was another old-timer, well known in the region, with rather a shady reputation. Tim's bluff was indeed working far better than he had dared to hope.

"I'll tell yuh fellers how it was," said Luke in his high-pitched voice. "Mebby yuh know an' mebby yuh don't know who diskivered the Hidden Fortune mine? Well, it was me! *Me!* Old Luke Peabody, thet has t' beg him a grubstake now, an' lucky when he gits it.

"Yes, sir, gentlemen all, I diskivered thet there mine, an' I was buncoed out o' it. All I ever gits is a dummed measley hundred dollars! A hundred cart wheels fer a mine thet turns out seventy-five er eighty thousand in bullion every month regular, like clockwork!

"Well, Holy Smoke Randall, he says why don't I help myself t' a week's payroll thet the bank sends up t' the mine. He says it's my money, anyway, an' I sure oughta take it. Says he'll help me stick up the messenger on his motersickle ef I split the coin, givin' him half. Says we'll shoot Jasper Frank as he rides by.

"I says no, they'll be no killin'; we'll jest shoot a tire o' the motersickle so Jasper will have t' stop, an' not harm him none. Holy Smoke agrees to thet finally, and so we hide ourselves away in the rocks along the Swiftwater road Sat'day mornin', me with my old Sharp's ready.

"We hear the motersickle comin', an', gentlemen all, she sure is foggin' it right along. I aim my old rifle at the place where she'll come in sight around the bend. I know I kin hit a tire, fer the old Sharp's allus plants the lead right where Luke Peabody wants it.

"'Shoot *him,* yuh old fool!' snarls Holy Smoke in my ear as my finger rests light on the trigger.

"'No, sir! Front tire,' I says, but jest as I pull the trigger, what does thet ornery snake-in-the-grass do but jog up the muzzle o' my rifle about a inch. Thet ain't much, but she's enough t' throw the bullet up so it don't hit the front tire; it hits Jasper Frank in the breast, and the motersickle goes slam-bang int' the rocks, with pore Jasper stone daid, all in a minute.

"Believe me, gentlemen all, I was jest as sorry as a buddy could be, but yuh kin see plain enough 'twan't my fault. Thet low-down tarantuler, Holy Smoke Randall, really shot him."

"But what became of the ten thousand dollars in gold?" asked Tim. "How about that payroll?"

"Now thet's durned funny about thet there gold. They warn't none!"

"What!" exclaimed Tim and I in chorus.

"Correct, gentlemen all. Jasper's money-belt was empty, plumb empty. He didn't have hide ner hair o' a gold coin on his person. We left the belt where the buddy's hid, up in the rocks."

This *was* a new development with a vengeance. It was obvious that Luke Peabody did not realize that we had already discovered Jasper's body, and it was equally apparent that the simple-minded old man, who had been prompt to admit firing the bullet that killed Jasper, was also telling the truth about the gold. At least it seemed so to us.

The same suspicion occurred to Tim and me the same instant; it was the sheriff who put this into words.

"Don't you reckon Holy Smoke Randall double-crossed you about the gold?" he asked. "He might have taken it for himself, leaving you to think there was none."

"No, sir!" was the emphatic rejoinder. "Ain't nobuddy goin' t' fool Luke Peabody like thet there! When I see thet Jasper's daid, an' thet Holy Smoke hain't played fair, I watch *him,* believe me, gentlemen all. I'm right there when the money belt comes off, fer I want what's mine, whether Jasper's daid er not, but they wan't no money. We searched him, clean down t' the inside o' his boots. Yuh want ter know what I think?"—the old man lowered his voice craftily. "I think he hid thet money out fer hisself somewhere, an' was goin' t' tell 'em up t' the Hidden Fortune thet he was stuck up along the road. Thet's what *I* think, ef anybuddy wants t' ask *me.*"

Tim looked at me, and I looked at Tim. Neither of us doubted the truth of old Luke's story, and under the circumstances there was certainly an ugly ring of truth to his accusation. Jasper had started from the bank with ten thousand dollars in gold, and when murdered in the cut, he did not have it in his possession. The supposition that he had been held up and robbed in a previous place was too ridiculous to merit a second's consideration. If he had not taken the gold, then, *where was it?*

Tim and I still looked at each other, completely baffled. Luke's cracked old voice broke in upon our meditations.

"Ef yuh'll kindly drop thet gun o' yours on the floor, Mister Sheriff," he calmly suggested. "I'd thank yuh kindly!"

We hastily glanced up, to see him covering us with a six-shooter as big as a gatling gun. He had caught Tim off guard, temporarily asleep. The simple old miner was not so simple, it developed, as he seemed. There was nothing else for it, and Tim's pistol clattered to the floor of the shack. I had a gun in my pocket, but the practiced way old Luke twirled his hand cannon convinced me that said pocket was a fine place to let it stay.

"What I tol' yuh fellers was the gospel truth," Peabody went on. "I shot Jasper Frank, but as I says before, it ain't my fault at all. I know plenty what the law would do t' me, though, fer what it'd call murderin' pore Jasper Frank, when I never done a murder in my life. Takes more'n killin' t' make murder. The law'd shet me up in jail, an' mebby hang me. I don't approve o' that way o' doin' business, none whatever; so I'm goin' t' shove fer the desert. I got a lot o' good grub an' stuff packed on my little old burro all ready.

"I'm goin' t' fasten yuh two up in the shack so it'll take yuh a couple o' hours to git loose. I'll take yer guns along with me, an' drop 'em in yer ottermobile when I go by. All I need is a few hours' start. They ain't a sheriff's posse in this yere United States kin ketch Luke Peabody after he hits the desert."

Luke was as good as his word. He left us tied up in the cabin with nothing but our finger nails to use in digging out, so that it was dark by the time we were back at the flivver, where we found our guns, just as he had promised.

"I wonder if the old rat *was* telling the truth," I mused as Tim gave the starting crank a more than necessary violent yank.

"Don't be a chump!" rejoined the sheriff of Sage County, who was perhaps justified at feeling a trifle testy over the way simple old Luke Peabody had outwitted him. "You know he was."

"Yes," I added, "and down in your heart *you* know you're glad he got away. The poor chap is a bit cracked anyway, and morally he's just as innocent of the murder of Jasper Frank as you are."

"All right," admitted Tim with a laugh. "I guess that's so. I'll have to make a bluff at catching the old fellow, but this section's seen the last of him. He's gone for good."

Then the sheriff sighed.

"That ten thousand sure gets me," he muttered. "I can't believe Jasper did it, but—"

About noon of the following day Randall was apprehended, and shortly afterward put through a pretty strenuous third degree by Tim and his principal deputy. The fellow finally broke down and told a story which agreed in its essential particulars with what Peabody had said. Randall himself was a vicious character, not at all bright; the worst that could happen to him was imprisonment, probably in an asylum.

Up to a certain point he spoke freely, but when questioned as to what they did with the motorcycle he shut up like a clam—would say absolutely nothing. It was clear that his distorted mental state perceived a greater danger in disposing of the machine than in killing its rider.

"I was a loon not to ask Luke Peabody what they did with Jasper's motor," Tim conceded to me. "He would have told us in a minute. I don't know as it makes any big difference, though."

The announcement that Jasper Frank's body had been found by the sheriff created quite a stir in town, vastly increased by the arrest and confession of Holy Smoke Randall.

Tim Danville received many congratulations for his work, but he disclaimed credit, attributing the success he had so far achieved largely to luck. Besides, he was worried about not unearthing the small fortune which so far had eluded him.

The sheriff was a big enough man to make no secret of his entire experience with Luke Peabody—two deputies were even now on the old desert rat's trail, though with small chance of apprehending him—and as a result the town was divided in its opinion. Some believed that the prospector had lied about not finding the gold on Jasper's body;

others that Jasper had met a swift and deserved retribution for his own guilt.

Still others—and these were they who best knew the young motor-cycle rider, including Sheriff Danville—thought they recognized a deeper mystery than was apparent on the surface.

If this were true, the lips of the only person who knew the answer were sealed by death; *he* could never speak to clear his name of the shadow that hung over it.

Tuesday morning Tim called for me and asked if I cared to drive out to Joyce's ranch.

He wanted to question the person who had last talked with the messenger. I accepted the invitation with alacrity, for the mystery of that missing ten thousand dollars had a firm grip upon my imagination.

Mrs. Joyce greeted us at the ranch.

"Did Jasper Frank say anything to you except to ask for the drink of water, Mrs. Joyce?" Tim asked, after the usual salutations had been exchanged.

"No, not to me," she returned, "but as he went out I heard him speak to one of Mr. Joyce's help, Bill Jennings, I think."

"Where can I find this Jennings?"

"Mowing alfalfa on the north field."

"Thank you," said the sheriff. "We'll go and have a word with Bill."

We located the man without much difficulty.

"Did you have any conversation with Jasper Frank the day he was murdered?" Tim asked. "I understood from Mrs. Joyce that he spoke to you."

"Yes; he wanted to borrow a monkey wrench."

"Um—" mused Tim. "Did he say what he wanted of it?"

"Yes, he did. Said his steering head was loose, so it bothered him on a rough road. I went out to the machine with him and watched him tighten up the head bearings and set the lock nut. Then I brought the wrench back to the barn."

"That's all."

"Every bit," and the rattle of the mower began again as we turned away.

"I was talking with young Reynolds this morning," said Tim. "He was a close friend of Jasper's—used to ride behind him on the motorcycle now and then. He told me that Friday night Jasper said he had a hunch some one was going to try and hold him up the next day.

"The dickens he did!" I exclaimed. "That's another black mark against Jasper. Getting ready to be held up, or at least, getting ready to explain being held up."

"Looks that way, I'm afraid," muttered my friend, as he pointed the Lizzie's nose back toward the city, "but I'm far from ready to admit he was the thief. There's one more place in town I want to look into; beginning to get a suspicion of something new."

I threw out several feelers in the hope of discovering what this new suspicion might be, but Tim had ceased to be as communicative as a few days previous. He was apparently unwilling to commit himself before his theories had been given a chance to develop.

He drove up to the little home-made garage where Jasper Frank had kept his motorcycle, in a vacant lot next to the house where he boarded. Tim secured a key to the garage and entered, coming out immediately.

"Can you go up Swiftwater Canyon on a motorcycle hunt?" he asked.

"If you can put it off a few hours, I can," I rejoined. "Just now it's impossible. I have a business engagement this noon that cannot be broken."

"Don't want to wait, Joe," he said. "Sorry! I'll let you know how I make out. So long!"

I didn't see the sheriff again that day, but the following morning he called me early on the telephone.

"I've located the missing motorcycle," were his first words.

"The deuce you have!" I cried. "That's great! Where and how?"

"Up the canyon. I'll need some help to get it. How about this morning. If you can't go I'll take Williams along."

"I'm with you, Tim!" I exclaimed, eagerly.

I certainly would not have missed the chance for a good deal, for something seemed to tell me that the whole mystery was soon to be cleared up.

On the trip to the canyon, Tim told me of the several attempts he made to locate the machine.

"I figured they'd want to put it in a place where it would probably never be discovered," he began, "and the big reclamation lake was the one best bet. There are any number of places where the water is fifty feet deep close to shore, and so I doped it out that they'd wheel the motorcycle—for neither of those two knew how to run it—along the road until they were close to a likely spot. Then they'd carry it between them and dump it over into the water. There were so many suitable places, however, for such a program that at first it didn't seem especially easy to locate the one they'd pick out, as they would be extremely careful not to leave traces of their work. Some ways those old desert rats are none too bright, but others they're as keen as a razor blade.

"But there was one thing they didn't know anything about and never once thought of—the tank full of oil. The tank, like all oil and gasolene tanks, has an air vent at the top, and since oil is decidedly lighter than water, it would begin to work to the surface as displaced in the tank by the heavier liquid. Following this idea I trailed along the rocky shore of the irrigation lake, and finally found traces of oil, not very much, to be sure, for it would be drifted away by wind-made currents, but all I needed. To make absolutely sure I spent a lot of time watching, and at last was rewarded by seeing a tiny bubble of oil come bobbing up through the clear water."

"And these grappling hooks and rope are to be used in hoisting the motor-cycle, I suppose," I said. "Your work is mighty clever, Tim, old top, but how about the missing ten thousand dollars?"

"Oh, I'll be on the trail of that before I get through; don't worry," said Tim, and that was all he would say.

He stopped the flivver some little distance beyond the cut where poor Jasper Frank had been shot, and conducted me down the rocky slope to the beautiful body of water that completely filled the bottom of Swiftwater Cañon, a monument to Uncle Sam's indefatigable reclamation engineers. This lake had created a former desert into a veritable garden.

"Here's the spot," said he, as we came down to the precipitous edge of the lake. An occasional splotch of heavy oil was floating on the water, but certainly not enough to have aroused suspicions as to their origin. I did not see a bubble of oil rise up from the clear depths of the lake as Tim had done. This was not likely to happen oftener than once an hour, he had explained.

We promptly got busy with our grappling hooks, and after several failures—the water was forty feet deep directly off shore—succeeded in getting a firm hold on the object of our search. Together we hauled the weighty machine to the surface, and a minute or two later had dragged out on the rocks the battered motorcycle that had carried Jasper Frank to his death.

Tim looked at me in a peculiar way.

"Do you remember what Bill Jennings told us yesterday?" he asked.

"Sure. Said that Jasper borrowed a wrench from him."

"Why?"

"To tighten the head bearings of the motorcycle, or something like that."

"Your brains are certainly hog-tied! I don't mean that kind of a *why* at all. Isn't there anything remarkable about a motorcyclist borrowing a wrench?"

"Yes, come to think of it. I thought they carried tools, same as automobiles."

"They do. But Jasper Frank didn't have any tools with him. Why? Because he had left all of them back home in his garage. Why again? Because he wanted to use the tool box for something else. *He told his best friend that he had a hunch he was going to be held up the next trip.*"

The tool box of Jasper Frank's motorcycle was a solid metal affair, securely bolted to the top of the gasolene tank. It was locked, of course.

Tim struck the hinged lid a smart blow with the sharp point of one of his heavy grappling hooks, bursting off the cover.

Inside the box, carefully packed with bits of cloth and cotton waste, was the gold which Jasper Frank had given his life in order to deliver safely!

The Log-Book

By the Editor

IN the Log for April 3 I asked for experiences of readers with respect to the power of an odor to carry their memories back over a lapse of years. Personally, I believe it to be the most potent of the senses in this respect, and my opinion is evidently shared by the first answer to my request, which comes from Will Ferguson, of Long Pine, Nebraska, who writes:

Concerning the sensation caused by different odors, whenever I get the first whiff from swamp lands, perhaps miasmic, but with its peculiar dank twang, I am transported back nearly thirty years to my boyhood days when a cousin and myself accompanied two of our uncles on a camping and fishing trip to "Flea Grove" on the upper stretches of the Nishna Botna Creek in western Iowa. This was among the most enjoyable experiences of my life. We swam, caught great strings of fish, ate them and turtle eggs, got smoke in our eyes, bit by mosquitoes, and finally survived the night, sleeping on the ground, lulled to slumber by croaking frogs and squawking night birds.

The whiff of swamp air brings back all this to me, as well as a mental picture of my seventeen small fish, and my cousin getting a fish-hook in his hand, which had to be cut out. In the background I can see the bluff, not very high, but still a real bluff, with the small "grove" and tangled rushes, bushes and vines. I have since been on many an outing that was more elaborate, and in which I encountered the same odors, but none of them comes before my mind's eye with the vividness of the scene above portrayed.

* * *

Who were the Sayaks, and why were they held in bitter enmity by Tartar, Mongol, Turk, and Alaman? And the iron-throated trumpets, for whom they call?

"THE CARAVAN OF THE DEAD"

BY HAROLD LAMB

Author of "Marching Sands," "The Sunwise Turn," etc.

answers these questions in a fashion to keep you in spell to the thrall of as strange and fascinating a story as I ever published. It is a far cry from Quebec, with its sweet-toned thunder of Sabbath bells, to Yahka Arik, the unknown, the mysterious, the very name of which bespoke a fear and a menace to the dwellers in Kashgar and Kashmir, themselves remote, indeed, even from India, as we know it to-day. And Dono-van Khan, what was his mission—why did he follow in the wake of that dread caravan, which proceeded no man knew whither, and came no man knew whence? You can begin this engrossing six-part serial in THE ARGOSY for June 12.

* * *

Do you know Fabre? Or are you on speaking terms with Agassiz, for instance? Neither, however, could interest you in greater degree than our novelette unusual for next week:

"THE MAD PLANET"

BY MURRAY LEINSTER

Author of "The Runaway Skyscraper," etc.

For here imagination is at its fullest, and yet an imagination based upon reason and logic. The horrors of an existence thirty thousand years in the future, perhaps your

can visualize it as an era of superdevelopment, incredibly further advanced than our own—but you would be wide of the mark. *Gulliver's* nor *Munchausen's* wildest flights of fancy never even approximated the weird wonders of an age unthinkable, and yet these marvels, as recorded by the clever pen of this master of suspense and word-picturing, are reasonable because—they are happening all around us even now. Set sail with *Burl* down the river of a million perils, and earn a more than vicarious thrill in the company of a man whose life was just one adventure after another.

Not all of our soldiers who served in France got to Paris, but it is safe to say all of them hoped to see the world's most beautiful city. My readers will get real Paris atmosphere next week in Robert Sneddon's story, "THE BANK OF LOVE"—and something more as well—a capitally told tale that will make them wish for another along the same lines. A study in selfishness might well be the alternate title of "THE MARRIAGE OF WILLIAM DURRANT," by Ray Cummings. Here is a piece of fiction written from a new view-point, and its subtlety is only equaled by the eagerness infused in the reader to reach the climax. The above are only two out of an exceptionally clever assortment of attractions booked for June 12.

BRAND WROTE "SWORD LOVER" FOR ARGOSY

Carnegie, Pennsylvania.

I think THE ARGOSY is the best on the market. The stories I like best are: "Square Deal Sanderson," "Forbidden Trails," "Beau Rand," "Drag Harlan," "A Miracle of Faith," "Islands of Stone," "Cold Steel," "Whispering Footsteps," "The Mating of the Blades," "Bully Bess," "Tracing the Shadow," "Luck," and numerous others.

Say, here's a question I would like answered: Do Max Brand and George Allan England write for THE ARGOSY? ROBERT K. HARTZ.

"BLACK SANDER," APRIL 20 TO JUNE 1, 1918, 20 CTS. EACH

Simpson, Kansas.

I notice you are giving us some notes on the life of some of your authors. Give us some of Loring Brent (George Worts). Is he young or old, tall or short? Was he raised in California? He is my favorite writer. When did the story by him, "The Black Sander," appear in THE ARGOSY? How much a copy? Have written to the Log once before, and you were good enough to print it. You may do as you wish with this. THE ARGOSY can't be beat. MRS. GRACE HELM.

Mr. Worts is tall, young, and not a Californian.

"NOT ONE OF THE BEST, BUT THE BEST"

Windom, Texas.

I have been taking THE ARGOSY only a short time, but have been reading it for over two years. I can't say enough for THE ARGOSY. It's not one of the best, but *the* best. I have just been reading the numbers for February 28 and March 6, and am hoping to see a new number in a few days.

I think "Crossroads," by John Frederick, is a good serial, and the new serials "Claimed," by Francis Stevens, and "The Big Boss in Bronze," by Holman Day, are the best stories I ever read. I liked "Peter the Brazen" and "Between Worlds." I say "Hurrah!" for Charles Alden Seltzer, and I really think Bruce McAllister was knocking a little too hard. Come on, Charles. I'm for you. Here's luck to THE ARGOSY and the Log-Book.

(MISS) ANNIE MAYE TAYLOR.

A WIRELESS MAN WHO APPRECIATES WORTS

Norfolk, Virginia.

This is my first letter to THE ARGOSY, although I have been a reader for over two years, and I hope it does not see the waste-basket. I read "The Golden Cat," by George F. Worts, and I think it is one of the best stories I have ever read. Believe me, Mr. Worts sure does know something about wireless, for when he says the other "sparks" (which is wireless operator) I know he knew what he was talking about, or at least I think I do, for I expect to finish a course in wireless radio school in a few months, and I know I sure can tell when certain men are sending to me.

I am reading "The Trail Horde," by Charles Alden Seltzer, and I sure think it is fine; I like all Western stories.

If there are any of the readers who would like to read of some of the other adventures of *Peter Moore*, there is a book called "Peter the Brazen," by George F. Worts, which can be bought at most any of the bookstores. Here's hoping we have some more stories about *Peter Moore*.

MELVIN GARLAND.

A SERIAL BY GOLDMAN COMING

Dallas, Texas.

Though not a subscriber, I am an ardent reader of THE ARGOSY, and I enjoy the stories immensely. I always read the praises and criticisms in the Log-Book, and cannot resist adding an opinion of my own. I want to tell you how very much

I enjoyed a recent story in the February 4 issue. It was "The Fourth Degree," by Raymond Leslie Goldman. I believe I can say with all sincerity that it is one of the finest stories I have ever had the pleasure of reading in either THE ARGOSY or any other magazine. How is it we haven't read more from his pen? Is he a new writer? If so he has hidden his ability too long. Come to think of it I believe I have occasionally seen his name in other magazines; perhaps yours. But I'm sure not often enough to suit me, if this above-mentioned story is a sample of his work. Let us have more of him! Wishing your magazine continued success, (MRS.) RANDALL PORTER.

GREAT VALUE FOR LITTLE MONEY

Newark, New Jersey.

I thought I ought to tell you that I think your magazine is the best in the country for the price at which it sells. Why, if you were to try and buy all the stories that are printed in THE ARGOSY in book form it would cost about five dollars.

My favorite author is Garret Smith. I think his stories are the most intensely interesting that were or are or ever will be written. Would it be too much trouble to ask you to give me a list of Garret Smith's stories, and also when they were printed?

Thanking you in advance,

CHARLES HERRICK.

Serials of Garret Smith's in stock: "After a Million Years," January 18 to February 22, 1919; "Between Worlds," October 11 to November 8, 1919. Novelettes: "The Blizzard Wolf," April 19, 1919, and "A Letter of Discredit," August 9, 1919.

ONE WHO ANALYZES THE STORIES

St. Petersburg, Florida.

Just a few words in praise of THE ARGOSY. I have been reading for quite a while, and am always glad when Saturday comes so I can go on with the next instalment of the best serials ever published in any magazine.

I am not a kicker. Like some one else, I don't think kicks look very good in print. If I happen to find a story I think isn't to my especial liking, I just pass it on and think some one else will think it is the best ever. For I have come to find that every one doesn't have tastes exactly my own. I think our editor does exceptionally well to print a magazine that pleases everybody so well as THE ARGOSY does.

There are so many stories that I liked best that I will name only a few. Among them are "Drag Harlan," "The Golden Cat," "Which of These Two?" and "A Man to His Mate." The only objection to the latter, *Lund* was pictured to be so much the better man than *Rainy*, when he really wasn't. Even at that I wouldn't have had it end any other way than it did. "Claimed" promises to be a corker. And I am looking forward to "The Trail Horde" with great expectations.

I like good short stories as well as serials. Among them is the "Red Road," and countless others.

I bet Kathryn Huck, with all her great fund of common horse-sense, liked "Pa's Pants" and "Mauds of Mulesfoot." Tell the truth now, didn't you? No? Well, I did.

"Crossroads", was fine. If *Onate* hasn't killed himself, he is right where *Van Dyck* left him—in hell. NORMAN T. CLARK.

MORE INTERESTING THAN ANY TIGER

Winterburn, Alberta, Canada.

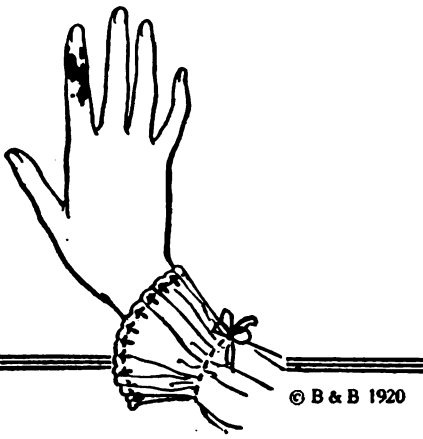
Billy Sawyer's letter put me in a reminiscent mood, and I felt that I must write and tell you of the pleasure THE ARGOSY has given me, in all sorts of places, and under all sorts of conditions during the past twenty-three or twenty-four years.

It was in 1896 or 1897 that my folks first took THE ARGOSY, and I soon became an ARGOSY fan; that was down in the eastern townships, Province of Quebec. In July, 1899, I decided that life on the farm was too tame, and started off looking for adventure, and a month later I was reading a copy of THE ARGOSY in the castle barracks, Enniskillen, Ireland, having become in the mean time "a soldier of the queen." My people sent THE ARGOSY to me regularly all the years I was away, and it was but very few copies that failed to reach me, so I have read THE ARGOSY in many places. Dublin, Belfast, The Curragh, Ireland; Birmingham, London, Netley, Liverpool, England; Glasgow and Dundee, Scotland; East London, Queenstown, De Aar, Germiston, Pretoria, Standerton, Newcastle, Ingagane, Ladysmith, and Durban, South Africa; Rangoon, Mandalay, Prome, Calcutta, Poone-na-ba, Bombay, India; Port Blair in the Andaman Islands; Port Said, Cairo, and Khartum, Egypt, and many other places.

I remember once when in South Africa we captured a party of Boers, who had just recently blown up a train, and in one of their wagons we found a large quantity of mail, among it three copies of THE ARGOSY. There was nearly a fight to see who should have the pleasure of reading them first. Many a weary mile has my copy of THE ARGOSY traveled in my horse's nose-bag, along with his day's rations of oats, tins of bully beef, and sundry other articles.

Once, while in charge of the magazine guard in Rangoon, I lay on a cot on the veranda of the guard-room, which is quite close to the wall of the Golden Shoe Dragon Pagoda, in the early morning reading THE ARGOSY which had arrived by mail the night before, when an excited Burmese appeared on the top of the pagoda wall, told me there was a tiger in the temple, and asked me to go and shoot it. After getting permission I took a few of the guard, and we mounted that multitude of stone steps, worn as smooth as glass by countless bare feet, up into the temple courtyard. We found Mr. Tiger and emptied a couple of volleys into him. Before the echoes of the rifle-shots had died away, the natives had fallen upon him tooth and nail, and in three minutes there was nothing left of the tiger but a blotch of blood on the stone flags of the courtyard. We marched back to the guard-room, and I returned to my ARGOSY. It was more interesting than any tiger could be.

In addition to the places mentioned above, I have read THE ARGOSY in nine States of the Union, and in every province in Canada except Prince Edward Isle. W. F. BROADSTOCK.



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So with corns

A spot on your hand is ended with a touch of soap. You don't cover it and keep it.

A touch of Blue-jay ends a corn, as easily and surely. Then why pare and coddle corns, and let them stay for years?

Millions of people nowadays end all corns in this way.

They drop on liquid Blue-jay or apply a Blue-jay plaster.

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The method was perfected in this world-famed laboratory. It is gentle, scientific, sure. It is now the recognized, the model way of dealing with a corn.

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H. P. FRENCH, the veteran Santa Fe engineer, who heartily recommends the Santa Fe Special Watch.

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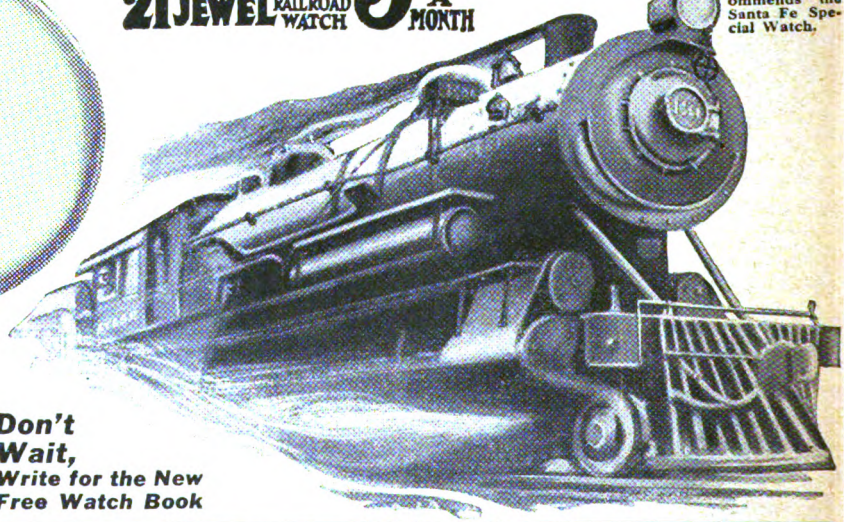

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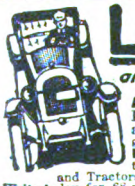

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☐ MINE FOREMAN OR ENGINEER	☐ Cert. Public Accountant
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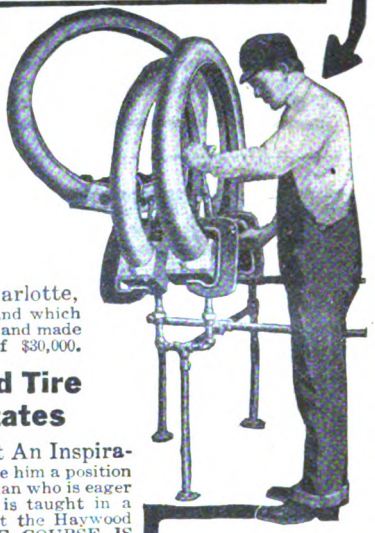

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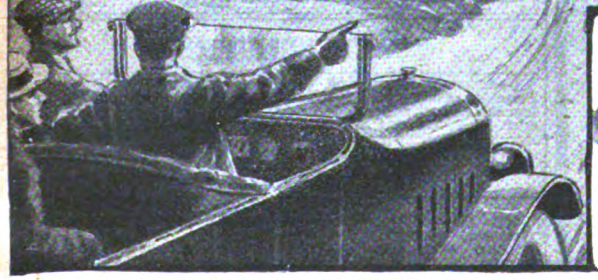
Haywood Tire & Equipment Company

826 Capitol Avenue **Indianapolis, Ind.**



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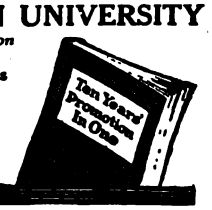

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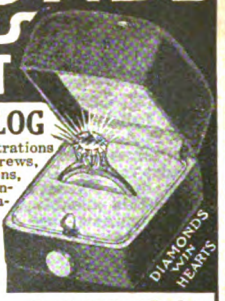

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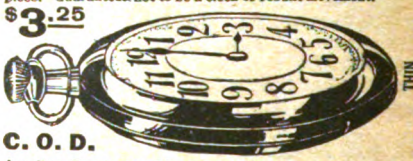

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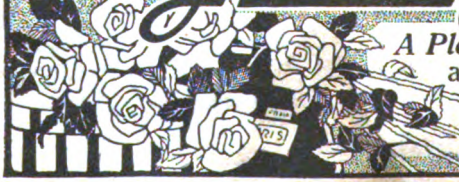

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