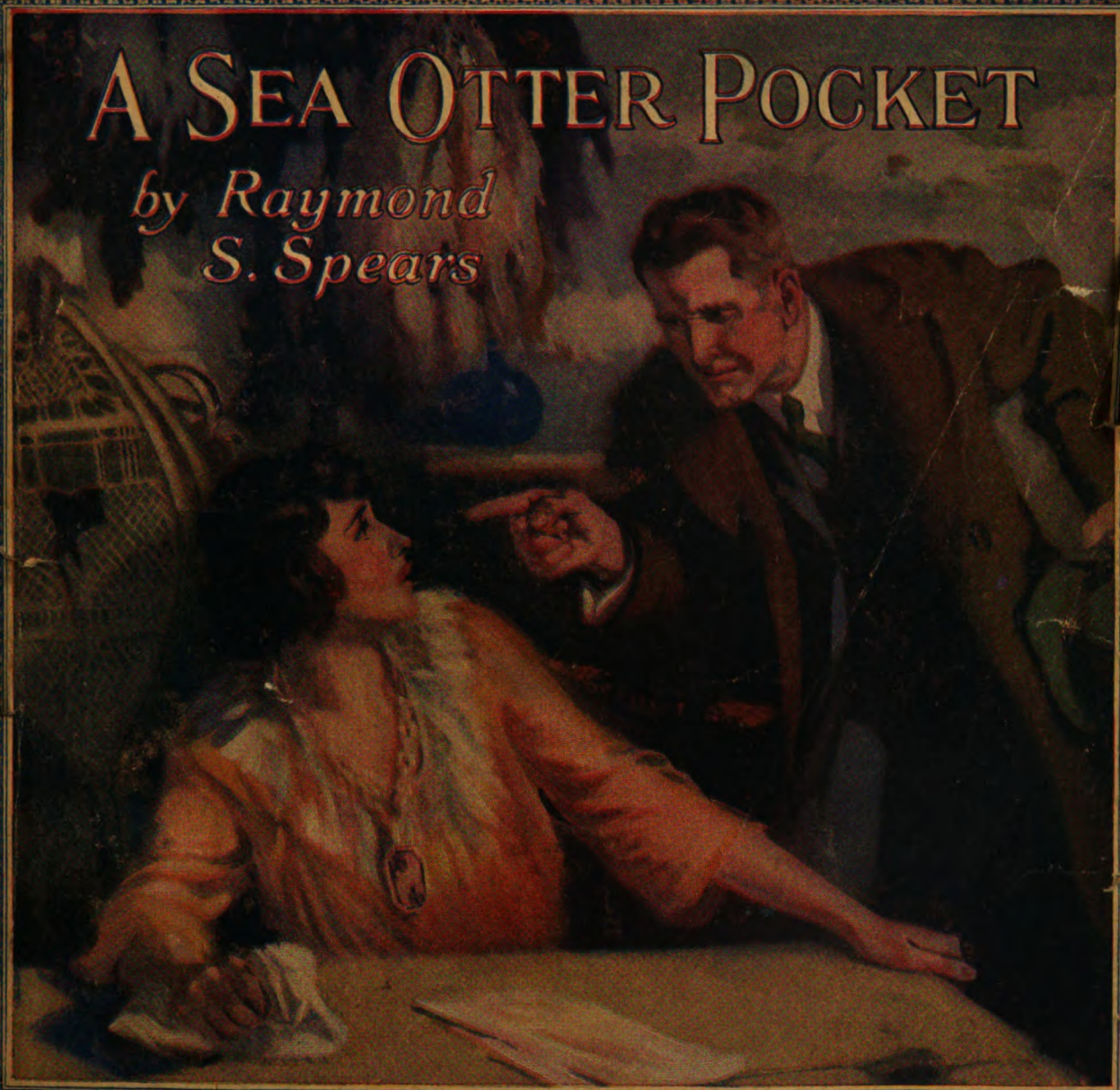
ARGOSY

Issued Weekly



10¢ JUNE 26 $4.00

The Modern Scales of Justice

"Toledo—No Springs—Honest Weight"

THE modern Scales of Justice have a name and a message that have been heard round the earth—"Toledo—No Springs—Honest Weight."

In nearly every country and in every industry and trade where weighing is done, the Toledo Springless Automatic Scale is known and respected.

An Exactly Measured Square Deal

YOU cannot measure gravity with springs—not with Exact Justice—they do not conform to the same laws.

There is just one exact measure of gravity—*and that is gravity itself.*

The Toledo Pendulum Principle, measuring gravity with gravity, is never-failing in its exactness and is not affected, as spring scales are, by changes in temperature.

Toledo Springless Automatic Scales, displaying the slogan "No Springs—Honest Weight," answer that instinctive demand of Civilization for Exact Justice.

Their powerful influence for good is immediately felt in every store where they are used.

Giving honest weight and automatically calculating and displaying exact value, Toledo Scales bring together on common ground those who seek neither advantage nor disadvantage, but an exactly measured square deal on both sides of the counter.

There are more than one hundred styles and sizes of Toledo Scales, to weigh everything from an ounce of spice to thirty tons of steel—scales for stores, offices, shipping rooms, warehouses, mills and factories.

Toledo Scale Company, Toledo, Ohio

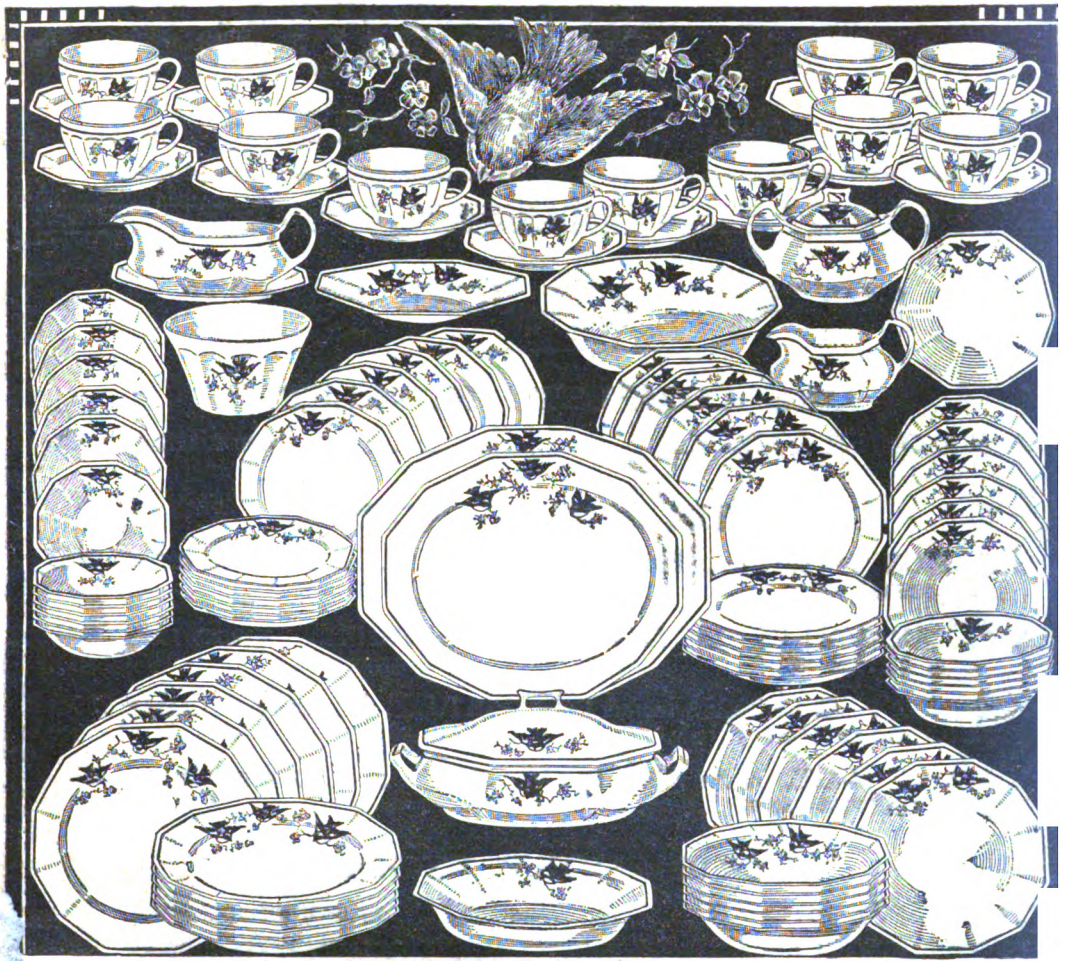
Largest Automatic Scale Manufacturers in the World

Canadian Factory, Windsor, Ontario

Branch Offices and Service Stations in Sixty-nine Cities in the United States and Canada. Others in thirty-four foreign countries.

TOLEDO SCALES

NO SPRINGS HONEST WEIGHT



110-Piece Dinner Set

Famous Bluebird Design

$1 Down Amazing value. Record-breaking offer. In each piece the highest type of color harmony and exquisite design has been attained. Set is in popular Colonial shape, decorated with Bluebird design, blending perfectly with the pink, lavender and green flowers. Lovely blue bordering on each piece. Each piece is fired in the glaze *and guaranteed not to check or craze.* That splendid Old English finish is applied in the clay before firing, giving each piece the finish of rich snowflake white. This wonderful set can be yours for only $1.00 down and then $2.70 monthly. Price in all $29.95. Complete satisfaction guaranteed.

Small amount down, easy payments on all articles in our big bargain catalog. 30 days' trial — money back if not satisfied. No discount for cash; no C. O. D.

A Complete Service—110 Pieces

This splendid set consists of 12 dinner plates, 9 inches; 12 breakfast plates, 7 1-2 inches; 12 coupe soups, 7 1-2 inches; 12 fruit saucers, 5 1-2 inches; 12 cups; 12 saucers; 12 oatmeal dishes, 6 inches, 12 bread and butter plates, 6 inches; 1 platter, 11 1-2 inches; 1 platter, 12 3-4 inches, 1 covered vegetable dish, (2 pieces); 1 oval open vegetable dish, 9 1-2 inches; 1 round vegetable dish, 8 1-2 inches, 1 gravy boat; 1 gravy boat stand; 1 bowl, 1 pint; 1 sugar bowl and cover, (2 pieces); 1 cream pitcher; 1 pickle dish; 1 butter dish, 7 1-2 inches. This set is one that will add tone and beauty to any dining room. With ordinary care it will last a lifetime. Weight shipped, about 100 pounds.

Order by No. G5979A. Send $1 with order, $2.70 monthly. Price of 110 pieces $29.95. No C. O. D.—no discount for cash.

Send the Coupon

along with $1.00 to us now. Have this 110-piece dinner set shipped on 30 days trial. We will also send our big Bargain Catalog listing thousands of amazing bargains. Only a small first payment and balance in monthly payments for anything you want. Send coupon below

Straus & Schram, Dept. A107 West 35th Street, Chicago, Ill.

Straus & Schram, Dept. A107 W. 35th St., Chica

Enclosed find $1.00. Ship special advertised 110-piece Bluet Dinner Set. I am to have 30 days' free trial. If I keep the se will pay you $2.70 monthly. If not satisfied, I am to return set within 30 days and you are to refund my money and freight or express charges I paid.

☐ 110-Piece Bluebird Dinner Set No. G5979A, $29.95

Name.....

Street, R.F.D. or Box No.....

Shipping Point.....

Post Office.....*State*.....

If you want only the catalog, put X in the proper box belo

☐ Furniture, Rugs, Stoves, Jewelry ☐ Men's, Women's, Children's Clot

THE ARGOSY

Vol. CXXII **ISSUED WEEKLY** Number 3

CONTENTS FOR JUNE 26, 1920

ONE COMPLETE NOVELETTE

FOUR SERIAL STORIES

FOUR SHORT STORIES

THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY, 280 Broadway, New York, and Temple House, Temple Avenue, E. C., London
FRANK A. MUNSEY, President RICHARD H. TITHERINGTON, Secretary CHRISTOPHER H. POPE, Treasurer

Single copies, 10 cents. By the year, $4.00 in United States, its dependencies, Mexico and Cuba; $6.00 to Canada, and $7.00 to Foreign Countries. Remittances should be made by check, express money order or postal money order. Currency should not be sent unless registered.

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 3, 1879.

These are the Hours that Count-

MOST of your time is mortgaged to work, meals and sleep. But the hours after supper are *yours*, and your whole future depends on how you spend them. You can fritter them away on profitless pleasure, or you can make those hours bring you position, money, power, *real success* in life.

Thousands of splendid, good-paying positions are waiting in every field of work for men *trained to fill them*. There's a big job waiting for *you*—in your present work or any line you choose. Get ready for it! You can do it without losing a minute from work, or a wink of sleep, without hurrying a single meal, and with plenty of time left for recreation. You can do it in one hour after supper each night, right at home, through the International Correspondence Schools.

Yes, you can win success in an hour a day. Hundreds of thousands have proved it. The designer of the Packard "Twin-Six," and hundreds of other Engineers, climbed to success through I. C. S. help. The builder of the great Equitable Building and hundreds of Architects and Contractors won their way to the top through I. C. S. spare-time study. Many of this country's foremost Advertising and Sales Managers prepared for their present positions in spare hours under I. C. S. instruction.

For 29 years men in offices, stores, shops, factories, mines, railroads—in every line of technical and commercial work—have been winning promotion and increased salaries through the I. C. S. Over 110,000 men are getting ready *right now* in the I. C. S. way for the bigger jobs ahead.

No matter where you live, the I. C. S. will come to *you*. No matter what your handicaps or how small your means, we have a plan to meet your circumstances. No matter how *limited* your previous education, the simply written, wonderfully illustrated I. C. S. textbooks make

it easy to learn. No matter what career you may choose, some one of the 280 I. C. S. Courses will surely suit your needs.

When everything has been made easy for you—when one hour a day spent with the I. C. S., in the quiet of your own home, will bring you a bigger income, more comforts, more pleasures, all that success means—can you afford to let another single priceless hour of spare time go to waste? Make your start right now! This is all we ask: Without cost, without obligating yourself in any way, put it up to us to prove how we can help you. Just mark and mail this coupon.

TEAR OUT HERE

INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOLS
BOX 2153-B, SCRANTON, PA.

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

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

Name_____
Present Occupation_____
Street and No._____
City_____ State_____

Canadians may send this coupon to International Correspondence Schools, Montreal, Canada 7-20-09

Classified Advertising

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

Classified Advertising Rates in The Munsey Magazines:

	LINE RATE	
Munsey's Magazine	$1.50	Combination line rate $4.00 less 2 per cent cash discount.
The Argosy Combination	2.50	
The Argosy		
All-Story Weekly		

Minimum space four lines.

July 31st Argosy Combination Forms Close July 1st.

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.

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: $200.00 MONTHLY. Best article on the market for Hotels, Restaurants, and Household Use; once used, always used. Sample by mail 50 cents, with full particulars for selling wholesale and retail. Diamond Brand Exterminator Co., Norfolk Co., Expo. P. O., Va.

Agents—Big Summer Seller. Something new; concentrated soft drinks. Just add water; delicious drinks in a jiffy—any time, anywhere. Big sellers for home, picnics, parties, socials, etc. Guaranteed under pure food laws. Carry in pocket. Agents coining money—$6 to $12 a day. Write for free outfit offer today. American Products Co., 2425 American Bldg., Cincinnati, Ohio.

NEWSOM VALVE DOUBLES TIRE MILEAGE. Biggest seller out; motorists buy on sight. Make $20.00 daily; pocket sample. Write for territory at once. R. T. Sales Company, Dept. A, 3847 W. Madison Street, Chicago.

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

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

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 TIRES DIRECT to car owner. 30x3 non-skid $11.75. Tubes $2.25; other sizes in proportion. Guaranteed 5,000 miles on liberal adjustment basis. Big commissions paid weekly. Experience or capital unnecessary. Auto Tire Clearing House, 1531 West 15th, Chicago.

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.

$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.

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.

SALESMEN—CITY OR TRAVELING. Experience unnecessary. Send for list of lines and full particulars. Prepare in spare time to earn the big salaries—$2,500 to $10,000 a year. Employment services rendered Members. National Salesmen's Training Association, Dept. 133-G, Chicago, Ill.

AGENTS—YOU CAN GET A BEAUTIFUL FAST COLOR ALL WOOL "MADE-TO-MEASURE" SUIT without a cent of expense. Write Lincoln Woolen Mills Company, Dept. 25, Chicago, Ill., for their liberal suit offer.

AGENTS—LARGE MANUFACTURER WANTS AGENTS to sell hosiery, underwear, shirts, dresses, skirts, waists, shoes, clothing, etc. Write for free samples. Madison Mills, 503 Broadway, New York.

MICHIGAN FARM LANDS FOR SALE

GOOD LAND ON CREDIT. BIG OPPORTUNITIES for you in Kalkaska and Antrim counties, Michigan. Make a home on hardwood land growing big crops of clover, alfalfa, grains, potatoes, etc. $15 to $35 per acre. Easy terms. 10 to 160 acres. Schools, churches, railroads, markets. Own your own home. Booklet free. Swigart Land Company, Y1245 First National Bank Building, Chicago, Ill.

AGENTS & SALESMEN WANTED

BIGGEST MONEY-MAKER IN AMERICA. I want 100 men and women quick to take orders for raincoats, raincapes and waterproof aprons. Thousands of orders waiting for you. $2.00 an hour for spare time. McDonough made $813.00 in one month; Nissen $19.00 in three hours; Purviance $207.00 in seven days. $5,000 a year profit for eight average orders a day. No delivering or collecting. Beautiful coat free. No experience or capital required. Write quick for information. Comer Mfg. Co., Dept. Y126, Dayton, Ohio.

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.

PANTS $1.00, SUIT $3.75, MADE TO MEASURE. For even a better offer than this write and ask for free samples and new styles. Knickerbocker Tailoring Co., Department 540, Chicago, Ill.

AGENTS: A Brand New Hosiery Proposition for men, women and children. Must wear 12 months or replaced free. All styles, colors and fancy stripes. You can sell at less than store prices. Every home a prospect. Write for samples. Thomas Hosiery Co., 3307 North St., Dayton, Ohio.

WOULD YOU LIKE TO WEAR A BEAUTIFUL NEW SUIT made to your own measure Free, and make $35 to $50 every week? You can be the best dressed man in your town and earn a lot of extra money if you write at once for our beautiful samples and wonderful offer. The Progress Tailoring Co., Dept. 285, Chicago.

SALESMEN—Side or Main Line—to sell low priced 6,000 mile guaranteed tires; 30x3½ non-skid sells for $13.95; other sizes in proportion. Good money making proposition for live wires. Master Tire Co., 1414 So. Michigan, Chicago.

AGENTS—$40 TO $100 A WEEK. FREE SAMPLES. Gold and silver Sign Letters for stores and office windows. Anyone can put them on. Big Demand. Liberal offer to general agents. Metallic Letter Co., 431-H N. Clark, Chicago.

AGENTS: SELL NEVERFAIL IRON RUST AND STAIN REMOVER. Huge profits. Big line. Sample. Write today. Sanford-Beal Co., Inc., Dept. A, Newark, N. Y.

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

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

HELP WANTED

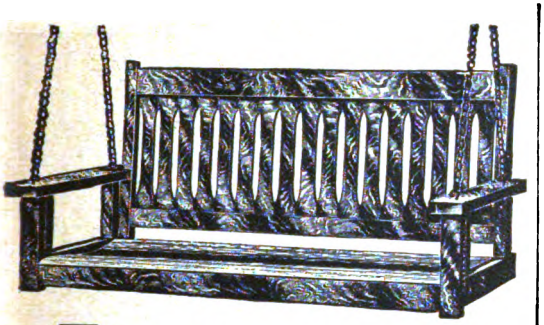
RAILWAY TRAFFIC INSPECTORS EARN FROM $110 TO $200 PER MONTH and expenses. Travel if desired. Unlimited advancement. No age limit. We train you. Positions furnished under guarantee. Write for Booklet CM 30. Standard Business Training Institute, Buffalo, N. Y.

MEN—AGE 17 TO 45. EXPERIENCE UNNECESSARY. Travel; make secret investigations, reports. Salaries; expenses. American Foreign Detective Agency, 320, St. Louis, Mo.

WRITE NEWS ITEMS AND SHORT STORIES for pay in spare time. Copyright book and plans free. Press Reporting Syndicate, 433, St. Louis, Mo.

DO YOU want to earn $3,000 to $5,000 a year? You can do it easily. See Anderson Steam Vulcanizer Display Ad in this issue.

Classified Advertising continued on page 7.



$1 Brings This Handsome Solid Oak PORCH SWING

Only $1 brings this splendidly made, attractive and serviceable **Porch Swing** for 30 days' trial. A genuine bargain at the low **Hartman** price, as you will realize when you see and test it. Made throughout of **solid oak**, and is full 4 feet (48 inches) wide. Has full rod and bolt construction; supporting chains attached direct to iron rods which carry entire weight of swing. Comfortable, shaped seat is 19 in. deep; height of back from seat, 21 in.; arms 8¼ in. above seat. Swing comes complete with heavy iron ceiling hooks and galvanized chain. Beautiful fumed finish.

TRY IT 30 DAYS!

Only $1 with the coupon brings this attractive Porch Swing for actual test. Use it 30 days. If not absolutely satisfactory, send it back and we will refund your $1 and pay transportation both ways. Shipped direct from our Chicago warehouse, carefully crated. Shipping weight, about 50 lbs. **Order by No. 346BMA10. Price $5.98. Terms, $1 with order; balance, $1 a month.**

FREE BARGAIN CATALOG

Send post card for this big book. Filled with thousands of bargains in furniture, carpets, rugs, stoves, jewelry, phonographs, sewing machines, farm equipment, etc. Anything sent on easy terms and 30 day trial.

HARTMAN
Furniture & Carpet Co.
3913 Wentworth Avenue
Dept. 2695 Chicago

HARTMAN Furniture & Carpet Co.
3913 Wentworth Ave., Dept. 2695 Chicago, Ill.

I enclose $1. Send me Porch Swing, No. 346BMA10. I am to have 30 days' trial. If not satisfied, will ship it back and you will refund my $1 and pay transportation both ways. If I keep it, I will pay $1 a month until the price, $5.98, is paid.

☐ **Send FREE Hartman Bargain Book** ☐ **Porch Swing, No. 346BMA10. Price $5.98. $1 down, $1 a month**

Name.....

Address.....

Occupation.....

City.....**State**.....

NEW WAY TO MAKE MONEY

We will help you start this Business

Start up in business as the owner of American Box Ball Alleys. Run the game in your town or neighborhood. Or at parks, resorts or fairs. You need very little cash. Use our money to start. Pay for the equipment out of the alleys' earnings.

Makes $100 a Week

That is what scores of Box Ball proprietors are making. Write us for amazing facts. Box Ball is 5c per player per game. And the game is more fun than bowling. Everybody loves it. Men and women become fans.

No Operating Expenses

No pin boys needed. Pins are reset and balls returned automatically. Another striking feature is the electric score board. Write for full description of the game and the equipment. See the money others are making. Write today.

AMERICAN BOX BALL CO.,
854 Van Buren St., Indianapolis, Ind.

"I MADE $34.00 LAST WEDNESDAY"

Writes Mrs. Betty Smith from Florida. **But it's not unusual, for our agents are knocking out big money every day.** Write today for special offer.

"Lucky 11" Combination in Display Case

100% to 200% Profit This is my "Lucky 11" outfit. Costs you only 65c—retails at $3.50—**you sell** for $1.25 to $1.75. Anyone can sell at that undercut price. And it is one great outfit, too. The box is 6x13¾ inches, containing 11 regular drug store articles that everybody wants. Write today for details.

It's a Gold Mine! Sells like hot cakes—men and women coining 50 to 100 dollars a day—a baby could sell "Lucky 11." Don't delay a minute. You're losing bank notes and hard silver while you wait.

Write Today for full details. Hurry, hurry, before it's too late. Act NOW.

E. M. Davis Products Co. Dept. A145 CHICAGO

Classified Advertising continued from page 4.

AUTHORS—MANUSCRIPTS

WRITERS: HAVE YOU A POEM, STORY OR PHOTOPLAY TO SELL? Submit MSS. at once to Music Sales Company, Dept. 60, St. Louis, Mo.

STORIES, POEMS, PLAYS, ETC., ARE WANTED FOR PUBLICATION. Good ideas bring big money. Submit Mss. or write Literary Bureau, 110, Hannibal, Mo.

FREE TO WRITERS—a wonderful little book of money-making hints, suggestions, ideas; the A B C of successful Story and Movie-Play writing. Absolutely free. Send for your copy now! Just address Authors' Press, Dept. 19, Auburn, N. Y.

WANTED: COMPOSERS OF VERSE OR MUSIC to write at once. Brilliant opportunity for good talent. Address, Burrell Van Buren, L19 Grand Opera House, Chicago.

WANTED—Poems for publication for magazine of Inspiration and Practical Help to young writers. Send Mss. to the Poet's Magazine, Room 101, 916 S. Michigan Avenue, Chicago.

AUTOMOBILE SCHOOLS

BE AN AUTO OR TRACTOR EXPERT. Unlimited opportunity for civil and Government Work. 5000 successful graduates. Write at once for our big free catalog. Cleveland Auto School, 1819 E. 24th Street, Cleveland, Ohio.

MOTION PICTURE PLAYS

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.

PATENT ATTORNEYS

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—Write for Free Illustrated Guide Book and Evidence of Conception Blank. Send model or sketch and description for our opinion of its patentable nature. Free. Highest References. Prompt Attention. Reasonable Terms. Victor J. Evans & Co., 762 Ninth, 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.

INVENTIONS WANTED. CASH OR ROYALTY for ideas. Adam Fisher Mfg. Co., 181A, St. Louis, Mo.

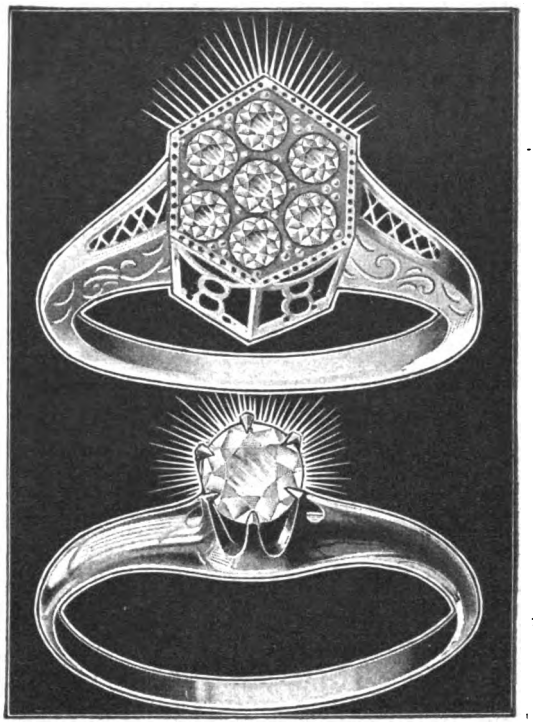
PATENTS PROCURED—TRADE MARKS REGISTERED—A comprehensive, experienced, prompt service for the protection and development of your ideas. Preliminary advice gladly furnished without charge. Booklet of information and form for disclosing idea free on request. Richard B. Owen, 68 Owen Bldg., Washington, D. C., or 2278J Woolworth Bldg., New York.

WANTED TO BUY

MAIL DIRECT TO THE REFINERS ANY OLD GOLD, silver, magneto points, old watches, diamonds, platinum, old or broken jewelry, false teeth, gold or silver ores or nuggets, War Bonds and Stamps. Send them to us to-day. Highest prices paid in cash by return mail. Goods returned in 10 days if you're not satisfied. The Ohio Smelting & Refining Co., 254 Lennox Building, Cleveland, Ohio.

CASH FOR OLD FALSE TEETH. We pay up to $35.00 per set (broken or not). Also buy discarded gold jewelry, gold crowns, bridges, platinum, diamonds, watches and silver, gold or silver ore or nuggets. Send now. Cash by return mail. Package held five to ten days for sender's approval of our offer. United States Smelting Works, Dept. 26, Chicago, Ill.

YOU read these little advertisements. Perhaps you obtain through them things you want; things you might never have known about if you had not looked here. Did it ever strike you other people would read your message—that they would buy what you have to sell; whether it is a bicycle you no longer need, a patented novelty you desire to push, or maybe your own services? Our Classified Service Bureau will *gladly* show you how to use this section most profitably *and* at the least cost. Write to-day to the Classified Manager, The Argosy Combination, 280 B'way, N. Y.



Diamond Bargains

Just Released

Unusual conditions force us to offer many great bargains in diamonds. Through owners failure to pay money loaned, we are offering values to the public so low that no retailer can match them even at 40 per cent more Send the coupon at once for our great bargain bulletin free.

Send Coupon Now for Great Diamond Loan Bulletin — Free

Send the coupon right away for our splendid bargain bulletin of marvelous diamond values We have loaned money on valuable diamonds for more than one-third of a century. See for yourself how much cheaper you can buy from us. Send coupon today. Don't wait.

Send your name only for the latest bargain bulletin. Lists newest bargains in diamonds. Fresh from the press. Great values just released. But only a few Write in now before you are too late Hurry

L. Goldman's Sons
Goldman Building
Dept. A145
Kansas City, Mo.

L. Goldman's Sons
Goldman Building
Dept. A145
Kansas City, Mo.

Please send me at once without any obligation to me your catalog and latest Diamond Loan Bulletin.

Name.....

Address.....

R. F. D.....

City..... *State*.....

THE ARGOSY

Vol. CXXII SATURDAY, JUNE 26, 1920 No. 3

by Raymond S. Spears

Author of "Framed," "The Way of the Green Timber," etc.

COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE.

CHAPTER I.

SANCTUARY.

TUNIS DRANE, in full flight, arrived at the Pacific Ocean, and jumped—nor did he care at all where he landed. It was his first experience in dodging the terrors of the law, and not even thousands of miles between him and the scene of his embarrassment released his mind. Rather, the uniform of a policeman in Seattle one day struck him with such terror that he slunk away in the dark night and struck a bargain, down on the water-front, before dawn, by which he obtained the privilege of owning an odd, efficient motorboat, the Nappo, with gasoline and oil, into which he dumped his outfit and continued on and on, until he found the amazing thing that bade him pause in his full flight.

Drane had reason to be afraid. Away down East there was a girl in the case. She was pretty, with two minds in a matter of great moment. Her name was Draya Prolone, a tall, supple maid, to whom Tunis Drane had come, in his ambition, on South Fifth Avenue, while looking for something quite different from maids.

Drane had been a trapper of varied experience, till his fur knowledge enabled him to become a fur buyer. His fall collection, the year before, had netted him $3,000, his winter collection $2700, and his plunge on spring hides had given him $5,000. For a winter's season, buying, he had come through with $10,700. Tunis Drane had done marvelously.

He was, on the strength of his success, entitled to become a fur company, with a street number, a wareroom, perhaps, and the earned right to go into the New York and St. Louis auctions and try his hand at bigger, even national, even international fur

business, next to the manufacturers in importance. He might even become a great fur house, and be mentioned with Hudson Bay, the Revillons, and Funstens, and all that kind of people.

But from commerce he fell upon adventure, and in that he feared, one might say better, and another might say worse, and in the end no one knows which would be right. It was such a simple little thing, too, that diverted him from Manhattan Island to a terrible Pacific island, with its kelp, moss, grass, and dwarfed green timber.

Draya Prolone was a blend, so to speak, of several races. There flowed in her veins a bit of the Orient, and certainly, when Tunis met her, he caught the faint, delicate, wisely used musk that had probably been stolen by brigands away up in that part of China, adjacent to Siberia, where the real and loveliest of musk is the prize of hunters and extractors, merchants and conveyers and traders and brigands, until the whole of every tavern and inn reeks with the odor of the priceless perfume—so strongly that there are people who would faint in such an atmosphere.

But Tunis, having been a trapper, loved musk and knew its qualities. And if Draya was a mixed blood of many far races, she was all American and metropolitan, and a stenographer and typewriter in the Jason Takrite Fur Company office, where Tunis saw her first, when he arrived with his list of furs, and talked the matter over regarding a sale; for Jason Takrite was dealer in certain scraggy lines and paid fair prices on low-grading pelts, if he had to.

Time and again Tunis arrived at that office, and longer and longer time elapsed on each occasion, before it was necessary to go in to see Takrite. Draya took her woodsman out of an evening, and they saw a real, regular theater play, and they had supper, and saw some cabaret dancing; and then, on the last occasion, when they were strolling homeward together, in a street that was dark and almost wholly deserted, there appeared the other man, who had divided Draya's mind with Tunis.

Tunis Drane did not recognize this other man at first; he had had no idea of contesting with him for Draya—not that he was unwilling to do that, now that he knew Draya. Out of that dark and deserted street had sprung up the sudden fierce lust of combat; that other man had suddenly jumped back, worsted in fair fist-fight, snatched an automatic from his pocket, and shot—once.

It was a poor shot, inexcusably inaccurate; Tunis had sprung upon the fellow, and wrestled for the weapon. It had gone off; the man had fallen, and choked in sobs upon the sidewalk.

"My God, you've killed him! Beat it!" Draya had gasped. "Beat it, Tunis! My God! What have I done? It's Takrite—Jason Takrite!"

He snatched one kiss from her and fled. That was all he knew about it. His business had been done. He had, that very night, the cash for the winter buy of furs, having sold his fall collection that day. He was no penniless beggar of a fugitive, but one with a money-belt well laden with hundred-dollar bills, and fifties, twenties, tens—some thousands of dollars. It hadn't been poverty that drove him, but fear of that terrible chair in Sing Sing.

Nor was his fear quite in vain, for the bulldog editions of the New York evening papers told about that shooting, a witness having seen all that happened, from but a few yards distant, in a shadow. This witness said that there had been a fight, and the shot man fell sobbing to the sidewalk, while the shooter, turning to the young woman, had kissed her—and fled. Then the woman had fled; then the crowd had come. The victim, the paper said, was unconscious at the hour of going to press, and his identity had not yet been established, but from papers in his pocket he was believed to be, Jason Takrite, of the Jason Takrite Fur Company, of South Fifth Avenue.

"He is not expected to live," the paper added, and Tunis passed Chicago the next day but one; and where he next found a newspaper it was in a district where a shooting on a New York street and the fate of the victim was of no news interest whatever.

Lacking information, his vision was of detectives lurking in every railroad station, and police carrying his picture in their

pockets, scanning every strange countenance. The shrewdness he had in trading for furs, and in trapping the wily fox, the cunning otter, and other Adirondack furs but increased his fears; for he knew by what narrow margins some animals were captured and taken to the sales of peltry.

Tunis Drane had a swimming deer's sensation of safety, when pursued by dogs, as he took to the waters of the Sound. He had no least idea of where he was going. He was at the Pacific, and he knew that somewhere to the northward there were islands, and Alaska, and far refuges for a desperate man in flight from involuntary murder.

Happily, he had water courage and wilderness craft. He undertook what might well have appalled a sailor of the west coast. Winter was at hand. The roaring blizzard gales must be upon him. The sweep of the deep-sea swells lifted and let fall the boat that he ventured in. Its climbing the side of a mountainous wave, its teetering on the boiling crest, and its sickening fall into the trough again would have terrorized a lesser man than Drane.

But his own fear, his only fear, was of being trapped, helplessly led away, and carried through that black Sing Sing hole into the abiding-place of death. Having witnessed the flash of lightning through the skies, he felt the shock coursing down his back-bone, burning the life out of him. Having killed so many head of fur in traps, and been witness to the helplessness of his own victims, his imagination could think of nothing so perfectly terrible and horrifying as being a trapped victim, led to the electric chair.

So he stood to his steering-wheel, looking with lowered brows into the white splash of the rocking seas, and felt the sting of frozen spume as it hurtled like shot into his face. That he was as helplessly trapped out there on the islanded seas, should he cross the storm whim, did not occur to him. It seemed instead, to him, as though here at least he had a fighting chance.

More he did not ask. By day and night he rocked along, farther and farther, into seas of which he had never seen the chart or map, save in some dimly recalled old school geography, and of which he remembered only a few stray and detached stories of adventure, hunting, trapping, and exploration in the trapping magazines that he had read while in his own lonely woods cabins in the tame and yet exacting Adirondacks, or tales fur buyers had told him in leisure minutes down in New York fur houses.

He regarded himself, now, with some satisfaction. He had "jumped into the Pacific." He was upon the seas, and his wake vanished a few yards astern. The bloodhounds of the law could not follow him.

All might have been well, but for one thing. His heart was bursting with emotion as he thought of the beautiful girl, Draya Prolone, about whom the whole difficulty had centered, and from whom he had been obliged to flee—who had sent him in full flight. That she was back in New York, all alone, probably out of a job, and probably wondering what had become of him, was a dreadful thought. But for her, he had been perfectly content.

As it was now, he remembered her; a vision of her supple figure and dark, lustrous eyes, in their wonderful setting, half blinded him by stormy day and made the night at once a hideous suffering and a recollection of his perfect happiness when she was by his side.

This country that he saw was more wonderful than any he had ever dreamed of seeing. Bleak mountains, higher than any he had seen in the Adirondacks, far and away vaster in their rugged, precipitous slopes—twice as high as old Tehawus itself—stood above the rim of bursting foam where the waves beat upon their narrow beaches, or slashed against the very perpendicular cliffs that extended down into the depths of valleys unimaginably vast beneath the sea. Green timber capped the peaks, and snow draped upon the backs, clung against the ledges and along the cracks in the stone.

It did not strike him as anomolous that he was in such a condition in so small a craft. He imagined that this tumult of seas and slashing of winds was some terrific gale that must abate in due course and

leave him in some fine calm, like that on an Adirondack pond. Had he realized that this fearsome "storm" was in fact fine and fair weather, and that even a moderate gale must have thrown his cockleshell of a motorboat end over end and sunk it half a thousand fathoms, his sublime ignorance had not been so full of contentment! As it was, he fancied himself a wonderful navigator, while yet his palms were soft and he was but enjoying the calm of sweet weather, his total inexperience taking him where and when the hardiest must have flinched as they faced what they knew was deadliest peril.

Going on, stopping in bays and channels where he rode in safety, and where his rifle skill enabled him to kill fresh meat—strange white partridges and rabbits and one gray wolf—he felt that at last he was beyond pursuit. He was away up in the midst of the Arctic, he was sure. He was beyond the patrol of police; he was in the midst of wilderness, and here he might live till the hue and cry of the pursuit for a murderer would die down.

He looked for an island that would enable him to pass the winter in wilderness peace and trapper comfort. He drew down, one day, upon a low and long island. It was different from many islands that he had left in the blue astern. It was without forest, without green timber. It was a considerable distance from other islands. He saw, as he ran along the shore, that there was a thickening of the mists at the horizon. He saw that the swell of the deep sea was heaving more violently. He felt a strange calm in the air, and then, his eyes grown a little more practised, he discovered that under that thickening mist the surface of the ocean was writhing, coiling white.

"It's a squall!" he gasped, and, looking ashore, he saw that there was a bay, or fjiord, or kind of a split in the island, and he steered into it. He arrived just in time. Down out of the sky fell the fine, stinging swirl of blizzard needle-flakes, and behind him the sea was cut off. It was a terrific blast, and the whistling of the wind became a roar that seemed to make the island tremble.

It had begun at midday. It continued into the night, and all that night into the next day. Instead of a mere squall, it was a long-drawn winter gale, and, whether he would or no, Tunis Drane found himself under the necessity of spending his winter there, on that least favored of islands. Being a woodsman, and having stocked his craft for a long cruise and a wintry bivouac, there were few terrors in a mere snowstorm for him.

He was lucky enough to slide his motorboat up out of the harbor onto shore, and to get the water drained out of the motor before he was frozen in. Then he dragged down some few small spruce trees that grew here and there in the valley of the harbor, and built himself a log cabin, which he chinked with boughs and roofed with trough-logs. Into this cabin he carried his camping outfit and set up his stove, which he supplied with fuel from an enormous pile of drift that succumbed to ax and one-man cross-cut saw.

In five days, in spite of storm and snow, and the bleakness of his little valley, he was snug; and he laughed at the predicament he might have been in had the storm struck him an hour sooner than it did. For now he knew what the storm was, and realized that he had been fortune-favored with blessed calm during those days when he supposed he was fronting the terror of the sea.

He went along the side hill to where he could see the sea breaking down the flanks of the island, the vast swells writhing along the broken shore and spurting up the stone slopes till the very crests spouted clouds of salt spray and snow, like frozen volcanoes. He found himself under the necessity of making snow-shoes, and when he went forth to explore his unselected abiding place he was dismayed by the bleak valleys, the black peaks, and the meager life to which he was now condemned.

All told, there was hardly the area of two or three square miles. He had, by strange good fortune, found the one boat-landing, but on all the other sides of the island there were narrow sand beaches, broken by points of stone, with rocky inlets and fresh-water springs that smoked in the zero air.

In his first walk abroad, with his 30-30 rifle, he met a monster bear, which he found under a rocky nub, where it had evidently settled down for a winter sleep. This huge brute was as big as the cabin Drane had built for the winter, and its head was as large as a beer keg. It was a beautiful black-brown color, and when it lumbered out of the den, its eyes blinking and its jaws champing, Drane saw that he must dispute with this huge brute the privilege of the island; and, with his heart thumping, he leveled his pitifully small carbine and began to pump in the bullets.

Small as the bullets were, they caused the huge brute to roar and tumble about, and at the fifth shot the hulk of flesh slumped down and sprawled out like a big fur bag. It was the most difficult job Drane had ever tackled when he came to skin the animal, which had to be done forthwith, else the freeze would bring ruin to that awful hide, with its fur like a section of grassy meadow.

By means of pulley-block and rope, Drane accomplished the task, and he stretched the hide between two trees, where it froze and served as a wind-break; but Drane, being a methodical trapper and hunter, spread canvas to protect the skin from the weather.

He had expected to camp out in a palm-grown jungle, with the thermometer at seventy degrees, for that was another of his impressions of the Pacific Ocean. The canvas, water-proof, was large enough for a pavilion, and it nicely covered this lone bear's skin. He rendered out a barrel of bear-oil and great masses of grease.

Small brooks from the warm springs smoked in deep, narrow valleys on the island; and along these streams Drane found mink tracks in regular runways; he saw the mink; he saw foxes; and he found that it was a regular fur pocket. He brought out his traps and set them, and caught a hundred mink. They were beautiful animals, and worth ten or twelve dollars each. He exercised his skill and caught foxes—beautiful red and cross foxes, and three black ones.

"Why, I'll probably make as much money here, trapping, as I'd made buying furs—and it's more fun!" Drane thought to himself; and then, by chance, he made the discovery of his life.

On a gray, stormy day he went down to the south end of his island, and following the west shore, which was in the wind, he saw, on rounding a point, a strange animal in the mass of kelp or seaweed that was along that side of the island, opposite his own little safe harbor.

The animal was about five feet long, and it was lying on its back, with all four paws aloft, tossing something into the air—a lump of something black—and it kept that ball going up and up a hundred times in succession, not letting it fall till a gust of wind seized and carried it out of reach.

Then the brute rolled over on its stomach and wriggled itself, held up its head, and looked about. The animal was black, white-streaked, and the wind playing along its back fluffed up the fur and made it shine, even in that dark gloom of low-flying clouds and dull murk of mist and snow. No homelier head was ever reared to look around than that brute's lumpy mug, and then, with a squirming, swimming twist the thing ducked into the mush of seaweed and foam, and dived out of sight.

Tunis Drane, Adirondack woodsman and fur buyer of skill and knowledge, lurked, gasping, in his ambush, ransacking the halls of his memory for proof of the idea that had come to his thought as he gazed at that seaweed living brute. It wasn't a fur seal; it wasn't a hair seal; it wasn't a salt-water beaver—there wasn't any such thing as that!

Drane knew what it did resemble. It looked something like one of those big old Adirondack otters. But this wasn't any otter, with its white muzzle and silver-gray hair. The motion of its getaway was the turn of a long, sleek otter—for the rest, the thing was an overgrown muskrat.

"But it's an otter!" he whispered. "It's a regular old otter—a sea otter—and a silver gray at that!"

He had seen a thousand black and silver silver foxes dangling from the beams in a fur warehouse, and he had turned from that fortune in furs to stand in awe before six skins that had greater charm and finer

lure than all those foxes had had. These six skins had been taken from sea otter, and one was a silver otter skin.

That silver otter skin was more wonderful than all the black and silver foxes had ever been. It was perfectly beautiful, the gem of all pelts. It had not occurred to Tunis Drane in those days that he would ever look with his own eyes upon one of those pelts, worn by its living owner, and sporting with a lump of weed in the midst of Pacific Ocean kelp. For that matter, he had never dreamed of any of the things that had befallen him the past few weeks; only two months before, he must have regarded any one who had promised him an island of his own on the rim of the Pacific deeps as the limit of the unbelievables. But here he was—and the sea otter had cavorted before his eyes.

And the hunter's lust now seized him.

CHAPTER II.

MRS. SHRONELY SEES A GHOST.

DRAYA PROLONE fled, too, from the man writhing on the cement walk where he had fallen. She escaped unseen to her home, which was but a room in a near-by boarding-house, and as she was part Oriental in her instincts she was not troubled by the problem of getting money from the bank for her own flight.

She had in a belt around her waist the hoard that is so attractive to certain types of people. It consisted of gems, of whose ownership none had ever suspected her; but there they were—perfect diamonds and rubies, which she had bought, one by one, with her savings. A most competent stenographer, she had made good wages; and with those wages she had been discreet and economical.

She, too, had ambitions and longings, and by good judgment she had discovered opportunities for a little side-line—and for her kind the side-line is the rare delight of living. She had bought and sold, and in selling added a bit to her profit. Perhaps it was only a dollar, but once she had made $200 on a speculation in one diamond. It was a wide-diamond, for the distance or depth from the table to the culet, and she had obtained it for $1300 and sold it for $1500 on the same day.

Now, with her own fear in her heart, she quickly brought together her perfectly practical wardrobe and packed it in the two substantial suit-cases which she found it convenient to move it. As she was paid up in advance, she walked forth in the morning, escaping police vigilance, and took a train to St. Louis. That was better than remaining in New York. The metropolis was now no place for her!

No, indeed! She had not stood by, wholly an innocent spectator, when the two men were fighting. She was all American, but with that strain of the Orient in her blood—the same strain that had led her irresistibly into the fur trade, since it was an inheritance out of the same vast region whence she obtained her genuine musk perfume, and which she used with such delicate taste that it blended with her grace, and fiery eyes, and mocking, inscrutable smile, and made her the more dangerous in her wilful Americanism.

It had been decided, while yet she was a very young girl, that she should marry one of her own family's people. Her father had so decided, and her mother had been perfectly acquiescent, according to the best usages of that Indo-Siberian-Russo land, from which they had migrated.

But Prolone sent his daughter to public school at four years of age, and for twelve years that young lady had imbibed the camaraderie, the spirit, the independence of the public schools, and then a course of two years in a business college, following which she had emerged into business, in the fur trade, as a stenographer.

When the time was at hand, when Draya Prolone was to be married to her lover, who was the son of fellow migrants of her parents, she just turned and said that she would not marry any foreigner, but would marry an American, since Americans were so much better to their women than were foreigners, and, besides, the hand-picked husband for her was but a fool, and stupid to look at and uninteresting to listen to, and she would not—not in a thousand years!

Could she be more plain? She expressed

her determination in two languages, and her parents, and his parents understood the one, while the unhappy, stupid swain, himself a maker of fine cigarettes, and not at all fluent of tongue, had a good knowledge, if not perfect, of the very tart street-English and high-school and business-college languages, combined with which Draya declared her will.

Then she took her father at his word, when he said it was a case of be married and be a respectable lady, or get out—and the devil take you for your sauciness. So she had gotten out, and with prescience enjoyed her freedom more than ever in her life before. Wholly free now, she kept her job, kept herself discreet, and made herself what she was—quite a most efficient secretary; and without really knowing it, a most efficient office manager in fur-trade surroundings.

That she was mixed up in that shooting in the street, in the small hour between midnight and one o'clock, horrified her, and drove her westward, so that she might escape the scandal and the disgrace, if possible. The fact that her fierce Oriental blood and spirit had for a moment overcome her American good sense terrified her, as she realified the consequences.

Unknown to Tunis Drane, she had reverted to her street-play days, taking therefrom the skill that had enabled her to discomfit the gamins of her childhood; she tripped the assailant of her escort, when she saw the pistol drawn, and that was why the first shot had missed. As the fellow stumbled back, she had recognized the thin countenance of her employer—and then saw him stricken with a bullet from his own weapon. Takrite had been no match in brawn or combat-skill for the trapper who had become a fur buyer.

She must flee, and so she did. She went to St. Louis, naturally, for that is, like New York, a center of the American fur trade. To that city, for a hundred years, the vast accumulations of furs out of the Rockies, and later from the Pacific shores, had come to St. Louis in bales and by the ton. It had seemed to the metropolitan girl as though St. Louis was away out at the brim of the world, on the frontier of the wilderness, and that there she would easily find a refuge.

Accordingly, when she had crossed the Merchants' Bridge, and was set down in the Union Station, she checked her two suit-cases and strolled forth to see what St. Louis had to offer for her. She wandered up and down. She ate in a restaurant that smelled like New York, and she gave the town a very practical once over. Here and there, one of the jay town men gave her a look and a hint, and to such she gave an impression at once wholly forbidding and at the same time one that was unforgetable.

She saw the fur buyer establishments. She knew them all by name, of course, but happily Takrite had been a buyer from collectors, and he had sold through private factory sales, and it had been very seldom, indeed, that any of the St. Louis people, or for that matter, other members of the fur trade had come to his place.

Every one knew Takrite, of course, for he was up and down getting what information he could, meeting all the other fur men, but his stenographer, there in the office, office boy and manager, too, though she was in practise, had little to fear of meeting people who would know her. Besides, her own office had been dark and dimly lighted, the typewriter light even not illuminating her countenance; trust this young woman now to consider all such things!

So now, in St. Louis, she went forthwith to the Y. W. C. A., and in terse and business-like terms, expressed her needs as regards a boarding-place. This matter was settled, to her satisfaction, in a private house, with a front yard and a back yard, and a fence on both sides and in front; she was astounded to know that there was a city in the world where land was wasted in that fashion. Introduced over the telephone, and arriving by jitney, she found herself swallowing hard at the fact of trees in sight, and not that grim, bare, stony environment of down-town New York.

That it was winter, and the trees were bare; that snow was in spots on the ground; that the land was sear and drear and bleak and cold did not occur to her; she was,

sure enough, out on the edge of the wilderness. And when she went down-town from her new home, and with brisk incisiveness introduced herself to Lison Blecker as Ella Shronely, and asked for a job, the gray fur-trade veteran asked her for her references.

"I have none," she replied. "I'm a widow. My husband was Dasper Shronely, who bought furs in northern New York. He died last spring—"

"Oh, certainly! Mrs. Shronely, I'm glad you came to me. He shipped to me, of course. I didn't know he was married I—"

"It was just before he died," she said, "that we were married."

"Too bad; when he died we lost a good man in the trade."

In five minutes she was sitting at a typewriter that had been built in 1902, and looked it. She dusted it off and went to work, billing. She carried the results of her work out to the wareroom, where the veteran fur trader was working over a morning's shipment.

"Look here, Mr. Blecker," she showed him the cheap stationery, the blurred writing, and the crooked alinement. "You can't afford to have your writing done like this; don't you see that's bum! You must get a new typewriter, and have some stationery printed. Look at the bond and engraving used by the Norings on this letter; you'd be ashamed to answer a letter like that on this newsprint stuff."

"I s'pose so," Blecker admitted, "but my other girls—they got along with it."

"Did they?" she shrugged her shoulders. "Well, I won't. Shall I buy the machine and order the printing, or will you go with me and see it done?"

"What!"

"I said shall I order the typewriter, or do you want to? Probably I can buy it and attend to the printing better than you can. You're a fur buyer, and I'm a secretary."

"Why—why, I think you'd better go!" Blecker exclaimed, and she went.

He turned with a sigh to his examination of fur shipments. For hours he worked there. He had hoped he would keep this typewriter girl, for she seemed real efficient, and had gone at things in a really business-like way, but at the same time, the idea of spending one hundred and two dollars and fifty cents for a typewriter, all at once, and probably five dollars for writing paper and envelopes—he couldn't stand that. That 'd take the profit on he couldn't tell how many bundles of furs that he was buying.

Late in the day, when the dusty electric-lights were turned on, and it was time to quit and go into the office to attend the correspondence, old Blecker shuffled wearily toward the office. He hadn't been able to keep up with anything, and since the last typist went he had been almost swamped with orders and with shipment letters.

He was surprised to see a bright light shining in the office—a waste of that precious electric fluid from the Keokuk dam. He stepped so quickly that he had a crick in his back, bent by long stooping over the tables of furs. He heard a click that was louder than any clicking he had ever heard before in his office, and opening the door he stepped into a scene of recently mopped floor, washed windows, and a big, new typewriter-desk, with a young woman who was just playing the keyboard like an acrobatic pianist.

There was a pile of letters with envelopes on each sheet, and there was a new envelope-file, open, with letters going into it—fur shippers' letters, and yellow carbons. He looked, his jaw dropping. Between the probable cost of the bright, new typewriter and the great oak desk, and that correspondence all caught up with, he was torn by emotions the like of which he had not endured in many a day.

He blinked, gulped, hemmed, and wet his lips. Mrs. Shronely turned and nodded to him as she snatched a letter from the platen and slipped in an envelope for addressing.

"I've ordered all the stationery," she told him, "and as I could get this stuff five off for cash, I paid for it."

"Wh-wh-where'd you get the money?" he demanded.

"There," she pointed to the safe: "here are the receipted bills. I knew you didn't want to be bothered, with shipments coming in. These are letters from manufacturers,

and you'll have to check them with me to find what you want to answer. But these incoming shippers I've answered, and told what you'd pay—"

"Why—how—you—"

"Your memoranda." She indicated his notations on the scratch lists, with their "To pay" at the top.

He picked up the letters one by one, and read them. No words were wasted, and as he read the beautifully typed bills, he saw that she had followed his copy. Not a cent too much; not a cent too little. She had indicated, too, the offers, and also the letters requiring checks, all in a wire basket by themselves.

"I'll sign those for you," she said, "but you'll have to sign the checks, of course."

"Of course," he admitted. "And—and you've made 'em out?"

"There they are, and the stubs filled in—and this loose-leaf index will keep track of everything."

"My—my!" he blinked, "and—and you was only the wife of Dasper Shronely? Why—why, you seem to understand the fur business."

"A wife should help her husband," she replied sharply, and the old man turned to signing checks. He found his desk—that morning a foot deep in papers and letters and accounts—clean and bare.

Thus Mrs. Ella Shronely established herself in the St. Louis fur trade.

Lison Blecker had traded in furs for many years, and he had customers far and wide. He could grade skins in the dark by the feel, people said. He knew furs with any one in the country, but there had been lack of system and lack of business in his efforts. He could buy, and he could sell, and he had made a comfortable fortune at the work. But the whole trade knew what was the matter with him that he did not do twice or ten times as much business.

In two weeks Mrs. Shronely had an assistant in the Blecker office, and she had steel filing-cases, stationery and electric heat instead of an old oil-stove. And there came to the office now men who had business with Lison Blecker.

The men all knew that old Blecker would be out in the fur shed, but they went straight to the office, and whatever their state of mind, or whatever their position in the trade, they never ducked a chance to meet Mrs. Shronely a second time, having met her once.

She had brought to the old concern more knowledge then she realized she had. She had seen furs, smelled furs, carried furs, and knew them by their feel. But she was, after all, a recorder of fur information—prices and quantities, market condition and outlook, and the trappers' magazines, the trade reviews, the commercial agencies all became aware of the fact that the old, weather-worn and faded Blecker business had suddenly become prime again. They knew, too, what had made it come prime.

From end to end of the trade, both the buying and manufacturing ends, it became known that old Blecker was suddenly a rejuvenated force to consider and reckon with. And old Blecker himself, shuffling up to the door of his offices, whose glass windows were now cleaned, whose floor was mopped and rugged, and whose whole list of furniture was new and bright, matched well the paint and the trimmings that had come into the place on the heels of Mrs. Shronely.

He bought a new suit of clothes. He arrived at the establishment in a new overcoat, wearing a new hat, and around his throat was a white collar and a neatly tied cravat. He even bought an office coat to keep his suit coat hanging on its hook on a spreader. He bought a pair of pinch-nose glasses, to take the place of his old steel bows.

From just an old codger he became a straighter, faster-stepping, up-to-date business man, and when he looked at the fine bond paper of his stationery, and looked at the two-color engraving of his letterheads, when he turned the sheets of his loose-leaf system, and saw the balance as drawn by a bookkeeper, introduced by Mrs. Shronely, he turned and looked past all these features to the straight, slim back of the young woman who was already manager of the establishment, wondering how on earth it had all happened.

But his own job was out in the ware-

house, sorting furs. His help out there was good help, and under his direction could do the work. But he must needs be there to throw the balances, and to make the final decisions.

He was out there one day when all the office force had gone home, sharp on the hour of five o'clock, picking up the fur odds and ends to put the shed in order. Time had been when he was careless of the débris, but now each day the floor was swept, and the wastes sorted and baled away. Mrs. Shronely was in the office putting the final touches on her day's work. She drew the typewriter down into its well and covered it over. She drew off her sleeve-protectors and bunched up her coiffure before the new bevel glass.

She put on her hat and cloak and turned, with one hand stretched to push out the electric office-lights at the button, when she found herself face to face with Jason Takrite, standing half through the glazed office doorway, and silhouetted in bright light against the black warehouse gloom beyond which, out front, was the silvery street-lamp glow.

"You—you—you ghost!" she whispered, backing away.

A grin crossed his thin, sharp, white face.

"So, now, I have found you again!" he said. "Somebody said you looked like you! Now, maybe, I let you go for getting me shot—if you treat me right, eh?"

CHAPTER III.

THE KILL.

"SEA otters! Silver sea otters!" Tunis Drane thought to himself, and he crouched low, to look across that coiling, writhing, salt-thawed mass of kelp where the animal had cavorted, playing with the lump of weed. As he looked, he saw another brute, perhaps the same animal, come squirming up onto the anchored flotsam, and turn its ugly mug about, snuffling the wind and searching the horizon with its keen eyes.

The ambushed hunter was no tenderfoot in the woods or at hunting. Lying there in the arctic shrub, he brought back to mind the stories he had heard about these amazing sea treasures. He had met an old hunter back in the Adirondacks one time, who told of chasing a sea otter about with a swift motor-boat, shooting a hundred, or a thousand shots at the head when it appeared, driving the animal under water so quickly that it had no time to breathe deep—and after hours of relentless pursuit, at last exhausting it, and finally driving home a slim 30-30 bullet, and dragging aboard a five hundred or a thousand-dollar hide.

But this was winter seas, and even had Drane's boat been a swift launch, adapted to that long chase, the swell and breaking waves would have made it an impracticable hunt. He must find his own plan, and that was not so obvious as it seemed. At least, he was unencumbered by other hunters, and he should have ample time to make his own raid, according to the opportunities presented.

Watching the acres of kelp, which were partly surrounded by reefs and gull rocks, but heaving under the swell of the restless seas, he grew accustomed to the points of foam, the chunks of ice, and his eyes fell upon such a spectacle as he had never heard tell of, for there was another head, a third, fourth, fifth sea otter with just their heads showing through the flotsam.

There were half a dozen in sight, and soon he saw a dozen of the brutes, and he drew down in an excitement he had never known in the woods or on the fur lines before.

Thousands of dollars, perhaps tens of thousands of dollars' worth of sea otter fur was there in that half-closed, half-open bay. The swell from five thousand miles of open sea rolled up to the barrier rocks, which were peaks of lesser mountains submerged in the deeps. They roared in white froth and writhing jets of gray sea against the points and sunken ledges. The spent waves crossed through the gaps and rolled and tossed in losing heave and waning backwash. To that place the sea otters had come, and there was no need to tell Tunis Drane what he had found there.

Trembling, he drew back behind the ridge point, and crouching low, crept over to the far side of the island, to go down

into his camp to think it over. One thing he knew for certain about these white-muzzled brutes of the kelp: they were sensitive to the presence of humans; hard experience and generations of persecution had given them inherited instinct against men. Smoke of fires would betray a human to them; and they would take flight, if they discovered that he was there.

Traditions of the fur trade had come to his ears, in the sheds of the fur companies. Around certain kinds of skins there clustered tales of many years' accumulation. Where a sea otter skin hung in lonely grandeur, there was certain to be some old fur-handler to stand beside it for a few minutes and tell of the days when Russia owned Alaska and trade princes took a thousand of the natives, the champion hunters of all those islands, and drove them into wintry seas, catching these wonderful sea otters—and perishing in the storm, and of the lung and other diseases which carried the natives away in gusts.

But the sea otter pelts, with purple-black fur more than an inch deep, protected by guard hairs, and beautiful to look at, were obtained and carried to the land where furs are loved better than anywhere else in the world, with the possible exception of certain far northern courts of China. Russia, for centuries, held the supreme fur-trade marts.

One look at the wind opening up that mass of fur on the quickly dried pelt of the playful otter had been enough to tell the trapper-furrier that here was a rare skin; he had but to take a second look, recall a Fuertes or Seton portrait of the brute, and think of the skins he had seen in warehouses, to recognize what creature it was he had witnessed at play. Having seen a dozen pelts, two or three pictures, and, being a woodsman of imagination, he was qualified.

Because he had still-hunted deer, trailed bears, hunted foxes in light snows, and was adept with his 22 bait rifle, his 25-20 small fur rifle, and his old stand-by, the 30-30 carbine for big game, he knew that he must take no chances with these sly, shrewd, extremely scarce brutes. The first thousand fur buyers of the world, the great companies, the famous handlers and speculators, the manufacturers for royalty and the wealthy, the purveyors for magnates and mandarins, rulers and trading potentates of the world—every who had come within the magic and mysticism of the fur trade would quicken with interest if it was known that one superb silver-otter skin had been brought into the market.

The price might be five hundred dollars; it might be a thousand dollars; a skin finer than any on the market might well bring two thousand dollars, or even five thousand dollars. Like the superb pelts of black foxes, there were no limits to be prescribed for the skin of a great, beautiful sea otter in its prime, and in the sleek, firm condition of the animals which had come, perhaps from all parts of the Alaskan and northern Pacific coast to this little harbor of refuge and ample food supply, unknown but dreamed of wherever furs are known.

The kelp must be alive with crustaceans, and fish probably schooled beneath its protection. The weed itself supplied the animals with more food. He was their lone enemy, probably. Creeping the next day to the crest of the knoll, Tunis Drane scrutinized the horizon, and as it was a fair, sunny noon—a short arctic day—he could see that he was in a lonely sea.

There was nothing west of him but the raw ocean. Away down in the southeast was a dim blue mass, half mirage, and to the eastward was a glisten, like the peak of a mountain, covered with snow. But on all sides to eastward were treacherous seas, with points of black-bread rocks, and deeps that rolled pale blue—where the bottom of a ship might easily be scraped off.

From the bucking up of the swells and the hateful knobs in the troughs, it was plain even to a landsman that no sailor in his senses would have chosen that for a cruising ground; but Tunis Drane had not been a sailor when he came to this island.

However, he was a sailor now. He had seen weather, and when one has seen the march of driving snow-squalls, six in sight at a time, with sun dogs shining among them; when one has listened to the grasping roar of a gale, ten days at a time, and felt the solid granite shake under the shocking pound of mere sea-waves; and when one has

heard the sing of frozen sea-spray whistling by like charges of shot, then one becomes a kind of a sailor, and he looks with astonishment at the craft that carried him into such spectacles, and is amazed to think that it brought him through alive. Drane knew, now, that he was a fool for luck. That consciousness was good for his soul.

Another thing was good for his soul, too. That was the memory of Draya Prolone, girl of city breeding and universal good sense—and he had a memento of her that she had let him have, laughing at his eagerness to possess it.

The thing was a little gold locket, with her picture in it. On the other side of the locket was a wisp of her hair, tied with a narrow little pink ribbon which he had stolen one evening when he saw a tiny end of the ribbon emerging from somewhere in her waist.

He had cut it off with a keen pocket-knife before she knew what he was doing, and at first she had flared up at him angrily, but she had assented at last to tying that bit of her locks with that bit of ribbon, laughing at him.

He speculated now as to what purpose that pink ribbon had served. It gave him something to think about and prevent him from going crazy there of loneliness.

That locket and lock and bit of ribbon, tangible proof that he had not dreamed that pretty girl—that she was real—gave him incentive to live the winter through; besides, there were the sea otter, the silver-pelts for his collection, if he were a good enough man to take them. One would be a fair winter's catch. Two would put him among the first-class trappers. Five or six would put him in the front of the fur hunters, among the best of them all. Beyond that he dared not think.

Two things a man needs when he stands on the threshold of the wilderness to keep his heart strong and his mind clear—something keen to do, and somewhere a pretty girl to inspire him with hope of rewarding her, for her good-nature, by laying at her feet his triumphs. These two things Tunis Drane had, and he rejoiced in the one helping him understand the other—clarifying his mind regarding his opportunity.

The otters were unsuspicious of his presence, he saw, that bright, sunny day. They tumbled about on the kelp, basked in the sunshine, roughed among themselves, and fed about on what they would. There were not a mere dozen there; he saw a score at once, and dared not believe that he saw two score, or fifty or more, from his hiding-place down the lee from them.

One romped within a hundred yards of where he was. He could have killed it easily. Instantly he fired, however, the report would strike their keen ears, and from that moment not one would cease to be alert. A few shots, perhaps three or four kills, and they would surely take flight to some other unknown hiding-place; they might go away out into the open sea, hidden from all, like the salmon that has schooled away under the salt water.

He went about trapping the land animals. They alone would have satisfied his trapping ambition of pre-fur buying days. Inbreeding had developed several black and cross foxes on the island, and he caught them in double-spring traps. He caught wonderful mink, too, big, black fellows, unlike his idea of small northern mink.

Getting three thousand dollars' worth of furs, however, lacked zest when in the very presence of the silver otter, wonderful black-pelted creatures, with their guard hairs like silver threads, and the under fur of their pelts showing the luster of pearl when the wind parted it, as he stared through his binoculars at the unsuspicious playing beasts.

He would lie there all during the short daylight, studying them and trying to figure out some way of getting them. If they only wouldn't go away at the first kill or two, he might get them one by one. The trouble was the first yelp of a hard-hit otter—if they should cry out—and all would understand. He could hear them barking and yelping as they played and fed about.

They were not unlike seals, of which he had seen many pictures. They were a happy tribe, but a suspicious one; frequently they would all sink into the weed, and with just their heads sticking out, like lumps of ice or froth, listen and look and

snuffle the air—some sound, some bit of alarm had touched them.

In them the habit of play was mingled at all times with the symptoms of fear. They looked like seals, except a curving, sliding, diving plunge when they entered the water.

Study of the lay of the land showed him other approaches, useful according to the wind. There was one place which he reached by crawling down a narrow valley, wind. There was one place which he could lie all day behind a mass of driftwood that had been washed in from the current out of southern seas. He spent a whole day behind it, when a wind was blowing in from over the water, watching the living treasure and planning to get it.

He dared not delay too long. They might at any time take it into their heads to scatter or to migrate to some other refuge. He even thought he saw signs of uneasiness among them, quicker alarm, longer periods of watchfulness, and less freedom in their coming out to play on the dense mass of seaweed.

"I'll have to make a break," he thought to himself, and accordingly he made preparations for the only feasible plan he could think of under the circumstances.

He had not long to wait for a whistling gale that roared and screamed down the line. From back among the heaped-up timbers and drift where he was hidden under the snow-hung branches of three evergreen dwarf trees, he leveled his 25-20, loaded with high velocity cartridges, and fired at the head of an otter about ninety yards distant. The animal collapsed.

Not another otter in sight moved in alarm. A second shot caused a great male to turn half-way around, and then sag into the weeds, a mere lump. A third, fourth, fifth shot followed. In cold blood, Tunis Drane was making his kill. With an on-shore gale blowing, a storm that brought down the crash of thousand-ton waves against the barrier reef outside, sounds that drowned the report of the little rifle, he could fire, shot by shot; and at each trigger pressure one of the brutes collapsed.

He had killed running deer in the timber, shot rabbits on the jump, killed a few partridges on the wing with his rifle, and he had killed scores of foxes with that same 25-20. That had been shooting six and eight-dollar pelts. Now every shot he fired meant sight on two hundred, five hundred, a thousand dollars.

He picked the nearest ones first; he took no chances of the scream of a bullet alarming the animals. With his binoculars he resolved each lump and knob into foam, weed, or the bright muzzle of his quarry. When he was shooting two hundred yards, he found the appreciable time between trigger pressure and the arrival of the bullet made a difference in his target work, and he began to miss an occasional shot. Then he took his 30-30, a heavier bullet, and, as the distance was greater, there was less chance of the louder report alarming his victims.

When he stopped firing his victims lay upon the seaweed, and he must get and bring them ashore. That was a contingency he had given only a little time to considering. He had broken up the sea otter colony. He had not killed all the animals. But when the short day ended he knew that out there was his fortune: thousands, tens of thousands of dollars in the pelts of sea otter skins.

To drag them ashore was the first necessity, and when he went back to the cabin and shivered while the new fire he built fought back the cold, he found that he was wet with sweat. He was tired with that day of tense excitement all suppressed into the mere decisive touch of his trigger finger.

Wearily he broiled bear steaks and ate the greasy meat with gusto. He drank coffee, and at last threw himself upon his bunk, in dry woolens, to doze and dream and ponder. With that storm raging he could not launch his motor-boat and go around the island to gather up his prey. In that terrific salted cold he could hope for no mercy if he attempted to swim out after the otter in the coiling kelp.

It began to look as though he might have killed all that wonderful collection of furs only to waste them. The thought was maddening, and he fed the fire all night long, while he racked his brain for the answer to the question of how to get them.

The answer was a grim one. It demanded of him a fortitude he had never tested before as this test would be measured. He could not tell, till he tried it, whether he would survive the thing demanded of him. At least he should not hesitate to try. And, having slept on his problem, in the morning he put onto the stove a big kettle full of the bear grease and fat, and when it was melted he clenched his teeth to adopt the only method of getting the otters ashore.

Only sheer desperation, sheer wilderness recklessness, could have led to his giving a second thought to the idea when it did come up out of his memory; and he wondered that he did recall it from the chance remarks of a man to whom he had once talked about the far-away land of Argentine Republic. It was but a chance phrase, a mere remark in passing about the Yahgan Indians of Tierra Del Fuego. Now he put his faith into a passing phrase.

"I can only die!" he shrugged his shoulders. "It 'll be a man's dying, and not a rat in the Sing Sing trap. Draya—I wonder if Draya 'll ever think? If I die, I'd like to go to her—to tell her that I was thinking about her."

CHAPTER IV.

SHANGHAIED!

FOR a minute the girl stared in terror at the apparition which had appeared to her, and Jason Takrite mistook her fear. He thought that it was fear of the man in the flesh and not of the man detached from his body and wandering around, a horror to the touch of superstition that had survived Draya Prolone's metropolitan girlhood and practical experience. Accordingly he began to press home his supposed advantage:

"It is so much better that you are Dasper Shronely's widow, eh?" he grinned. "I don't tell anybody—if you treat me right."

"Oh—I didn't know you were alive!" she replied slowly. "You startled me—but yes, it is better that I should treat you right."

"That will be fine," he nodded, and she shrugged her shoulders inimitably as she pressed the button that put all the lights out except the one that was over the big safe.

She walked to the safe and gave the combination a whirl. He watched her with glistening eyes. Quickly she glanced around to see that all was secure and then hurried away with this man whose presence she hated, and now had reason to fear.

He was hardly as large as she was, but was an alert, quick-stepping, wiry man. He had not hesitated to attack the heavier, stronger, but perhaps less quick and alert Tunis Drane. She knew his business as only a secretary-stenographer learns a business. She had obeyed orders as an employee must and should, while taking a man's money. But she had sometimes wondered about the things he did. Since coming to honest old Lison Blecker's establishment, she could remember comparisons of business standards; offers made for furs were followed by the return of the same furs to the shipper, if the shipper did not accept the offer in Blecker's warehouse.

But this man, Takrite had always paid good prices to the dealers who came to him, and when he could ship back a ten per cent grade down of furs to some unfortunate trapper, he did it. Always he had shaded the advantage his own way, regardless of fair play. He made cents where, in the long run, he might have made dollars. At that, being shrewd, he had made some money.

A month in the hospital had cost him heavily; going back to the work, he missed Draya Prolone's efficiency in managing the office details. He had been unable, for very weakness, to wage a good campaign that late fall and winter, and this was his first trip to St. Louis to get a line on the spring and winter sales. Also, he could use a few thousand of certain kinds of skins, and he had in mind a bit of speculation to stow away for another year, which would make up for his losing the cream of the annual buys.

And coming to St. Louis, he learned that a Mrs. Shronely was putting old Lison Blecker on his feet in the bookkeeping and office end of his business. A few remarks, a glimpse of the young woman at the noon hour, as she went to lunch, confirmed his quick suspicions, and now he had in mind a

chance to do some real business of a sort that he knew could be pulled off, if he got the opportunity.

"You see"—he plunged immediately into his scheme as he walked along with the young woman—"old Blecker has some correspondents in China. Nobody around knows what he does to hold that Chinese trade. I remember, maybe you do, too, one time he takes that eleven black-fox skins, better in price than any of us could see our way out of, and—not a word, ever from that day, what he did with those skins. You know now what I want; one thing I want, eh?"

"You want a list of his sales markets?"

"You are a very bright girl," he grinned at her, under the light of a street-lamp, adding: "And of course that is not all I want—from such a pretty widow as you are. Neither would cost you anything—it wouldn't."

She made no reply. The things the man proposed were both heinous. They unmasked him for what he was. At the same time he was holding over her the indictment charging her and Tunis Drane with attempted murder. Drane was gone; no word had come from him that she could discover by listening. The best she could hope for against the cunning testimony, half truth, half perjury of this wretch Takrite was conviction in the third degree, say, and perhaps a sentence of two years in prison.

In any event, no matter what happened, there must be the trial and newspaper notoriety—the things that she could little afford, at best. At worst, they would break her pitilessly, and her skilled experience in the fur business would all go to nothing. She could not tell what Blecker, suspicious, notional, quick-tempered old fellow that he was, would do.

"You must have some good skins you want to sell the Chinks." She turned to Takrite, smiling.

"What!" he exclaimed, with quick suspicion. "What you know about that?"

She laughed lightly. For a time she had been on the defensive. Now she was turning the tables. But she knew she must not let him know that she was gaining the upper hand.

"Not much," she admitted with frankness; "only you would not be seeking Chink markets unless you had something to sell there. Besides, you've a few such addresses of your own in your C file."

"Perhaps, maybe, you come back to work for me; I think that is best. You got to come back to work for me, if I say so."

"You'll not say so," she said. "You don't want me where I could sell out on you—tell others what you are up to?"

"That's right," he said, not quite quick-enough witted to connect the suggestion with its source, and view the probabilities of her motives. "Where is that d—d Drane?"

"He beat it," she said.

"He go by the name of Shronely?" he demanded.

"I'm a widow," she replied. "What 'd I do with a man?"

"We go have some dinner, eh?" he suggested. "A good, swell dinner?"

"I'm willing," she admitted, and he paid three dollars at least for their meal. Then he took her to the theater, and after that he remarked that he had only just begun to do things for her. But it was so late, now, she said, she must go home. And before he knew whither she would go, she was gone.

She vanished, and he did not know where she lived. But in the morning, when he went to Blecker's, she was in the office, and she welcomed him with a rare and whiplike smile. Blecker was there, too, with the other office help. To Blecker he was obliged to turn for entertainment and business. He would much rather have talked to the secretary; but that was not to be until luncheon, when he had grown glum and glowered from under his brows.

"You fool!" she told him. "How shall you explain to Blecker your hanging around for me? What is your game now? If you talk, you spoil everything, for you as for me. If you stand back and give somebody a chance, perhaps it will make something for you."

"That's right; but if you run around with that fool Drane, why not take on with me, too? I am a good sport, all right. You are a fine widow, all right. You dress

for it good, and when I heard you was around, I bet I know you, by the way they said you look. I have a little business to put across. I have some nice foxes I picked up—two black ones, I get cheap, but are good. If I export them right, to a reliable Chinaman—look what I make."

"A reliable Chinaman?" she mused. "All this for just two fox skins?"

"I bet one is five thousand dollars gold."

"And you paid—"

"I did not pay too much," he laughed lightly. "It's a good joke, that black skin. Somebody, maybe a farm boy, maybe somebody, send it to me, and say is this here a black fox, and is it worth one hundred dollars, like I hear about? So I write back, perhaps it would be worth one hundred dollars if handled right, but not this way, for it is green, and not spoiled, being as it was cold weather. I stretched it myself. Never such a beautiful black fox come to me before."

"You stand to make forty-five fifty by this deal?" she asked.

"Well, I paid the express, which is thirty-two cents."

"This afternoon I will give you an address, but not till to-night," she promised. "And keep away this afternoon, and you better beat it, with the address, at once."

"And not be right with you?" he demanded. "Don't you be a pretty widow for me? Think of me a month in the hospital, because—"

"Because you tried to shoot a better sport than you'll ever be in all your life, for one minute," she turned on him.

"What—what do you mean?" he demanded. "You lay down on me now?"

"I mean you are a fool, Takrite, but I am not going to take advantage of you this time."

"I have the detective agency on you in five minutes," he declared. Drane run away because he knows he is a crook. And you run away, too. If he was by you here we had had him. To-night I see you, the same as you said. Maybe to-morrow perhaps I am satisfied and go back to New York. But I will be treated right, for you can't bluff me for nothing. Give me the addresses. You are a bright girl, but not a widow. You come from New York, but I don't live in St. Louis, for I come from New York, too.

"So, tell me where to sell my fox skins, for if a Chink is right, and Blecker deals with him, I can send the skins on approval. Blecker knows all those fellows which is good, and which is in the skin game not for anybody else's health. I give you the commission, too, fair and square, on what I get, perhaps five per cent, or perhaps more, if it is a good sale.

"And to-night you and me shall be good sports, eh? We have a good time around St. Louis. I've been here before. If not, then I tip off the detective agency, and the next train, or but one over, you go back to New York, and what that means to you. Is it not so?"

"If you want to risk it," she said.

"And you think you can put something over on me!" he laughed.

"I'm from little old New York," she said, "and I've lived in St. Louis a while, but I did not expect you to come here."

"No; I make St. Louis perfect, eh?"

"Suppose I gave you the addresses now," she suggested.

"I would send the package this evening, and get it off my mind."

She laughed, and drew a slip of paper from her handbag. She looked at it a minute, while Takrite waited eagerly over their table.

"I hate to do it," she shook her head reluctantly; "if it was any one else in the world, I shouldn't. But you've got me dead to rights. I got to."

"That's right," he smiled, "you are a bright girl. You got a good job, and nobody would know about this but us."

She handed the slip to him. It was a card-index sheet, five and one-half by three and one-half, of twenty-pound folio. On it was written:

ONG LEONG TRONG,
Kohnlo, Alaskan,
Via Oang-ho, B-C Line,
Port Tientsin, China.

He read the thing and looked at her.

"Who is he?"

"He's the—you've heard of the musk trade away up in northern China?"

"Well, it's his business to look after that trade in the first collections. I didn't know that, only I happen to prefer musk perfume, and one time I got next to a perfumaire who put me wise about it, and I remembered Ong's name. Then, the other day, a letter came in, in that paper the Chinks use, and I smelled it—filled the whole shack with the smell of it—musk, strong enough to knock you down. Here's a piece the paper I tore off. It's good for a sachet for six months, just that piece. Then I saw the name, and I remembered."

"It's away back. Probably the skins will never get through," he suggested.

"Ong's man meets the B-C river steamerline at the top landing. It's all right to there."

"That looks good to me. Those Chinks, when they're reliable, treat you right. If he is one of Blecker's men, he is all right to ship to."

"He'll be glad to get the package," she said. "He'll know the real value of it. Perhaps you'd better put in a minimum price on it, though."

"Good idea, and if he won't pay it, he'll send the bundle back. That's right; and save time writing up and back."

She saw the two skins, both perfectly beautiful, wild pelts with the deep-green timber sheen luster and depth of fur.

"I paid twenty-five hundred dollars for this skin to go with that other one, to make a pair," he said. "I shall put a price of eighty-five hundred dollars on them. It will be enough."

"Six thousand profit on one trade of two hides!" she shook her head. "It seems too good to be true."

"You see me do the business," he winked. "Now I got that address, I know some other things, too. For three years I have tried for old Blecker's mailing list in China. And this—I bet I get some of his business away."

The package, insured, expressed, and on its way, she returned to the office and took up the afternoon's work. Her cheeks had a little color in them. In mid-afternoon she used the telephone a few minutes, and she met her tormenter in the dusk of late candle-light, as she had agreed.

First, they went to a restaurant and dined. Then they would have gone to a theater, on his advice, but on her suggestion they cut the theater out.

"A lot of fur dealers in town," she said; "somebody might see us, and it wouldn't do, to-night."

"Then we shall go—" he began.

"Go with me," she gave him an arch glance that made him tingle.

She knew St. Louis, and she took him away from the short, bright theater streets into streets of moonbeam lights and few people. It was a raw, wintry night, and having gone down a long street, they came to the bank of the Mississippi above the first but below the second bridge.

He stopped short at sight of the bleak river, which was reflecting a few East St. Louis lights from the far shore.

"Where are we going?" he demanded.

"Sporting, old boy," she told him. "St. Louis is a pretty small town for me to travel in, you know. I might meet somebody—and a widow can't afford to do that, sometimes, you know. But down on the river here you'll see no one who knows you and only a friend of mine. You've heard of house-boat parties?"

"In Florida, yes," he answered, following her lead.

"This beats Florida," she promised. "This is a regular old Mississippi River shanty-boat party. If you didn't have me right, I'd tell you to go straight to—Hoboken. But I know when I'm up against it."

"You don't want to be tried for trying to kill your employer," he chuckled. "It is all right; I like you; I'll do right by you—commissions, and so on. And this will be just a nice friendly party, eh?"

"The grandest little coming-out party you ever had," she laughed, and led him up the gang-plank onto a house-boat, which, when they entered it, revealed a cabin about twelve feet square and a kitchen galley of nearly equal size behind it.

A woman welcomed them; she was a rather handsome woman, with cool, gray eyes, strong shoulders, rather a substantial figure, and pretty hands. She wore a gray-blue silk gown, a necklace of irregular

pearls, and rings with stones that Takrite knew were genuine.

"Hello, Nattie!" she greeted Takrite's companion. "I wondered if you'd be down to-night with your friend. The boat's yours. Come here!"

The two went into the kitchen, and Takrite heard the river woman tell where things to eat were stored, and heard the chinking of bottles and glassware. His ideas expanded as never before. This was something new, something different, something like!

"You know how to do things right," he said admiringly to the girl. "If I had only known in New York what a sport you are, eh?"

"I had to learn—go to finishing school in St. Louis," she observed, with a glance at the other woman, who was putting on a muskrat-skin cloak. "She's going up-town, and will be back before 1 o'clock. The boat is ours!"

Mrs. Falone walked up the bank, and the trapped Mrs. Shonely threw her cloak over a chair, and went into the kitchen. She returned with a tray on which were two wine-glasses and a bottle that was dark green in color, and contained a wine.

She poured the glasses full, and they sat down at the ends of the table, Takrite with expectancy. Sport like this was beyond his hopes.

He drank his first glass quickly, and she sipped her glass slowly. He drank another glass full, and she finished her first. When the bottle was empty, she went for another, and brought it in. He talked and babbled about his business, about what a smart man he was, about how well he was going to treat her—and then he collapsed.

Within the hour, the shanty-boat woman and a man were on board the boat. The man was red-whiskered, thin haired, spatulate-fingered river rat, with fish eyes.

"It's a good thing the river's open, yet," he said. "Lucky you let us know. We'd dropped out to-day, only you said you wanted me to help you out of trouble. I don't forget anybody that's been a friend to me. That's why I said to you, that day, up-town, that I'd like to pay you back. I told the old girl here, how it was. I was down, and sick, and on account of your knowing my sister, you let me have that ten spot. I never did get to pay it back, but I pay money favors with favors like this.

"We won't kill this chappie. We'll give him something to get over, though. I don't never hold no woman up. I don't mind putting the screws to a man, but a lady's different. And this bloke thought he'd put one over on you—and you one of the lil ole New York gals, eh? Sho! We'll have to drap right down. There's ice on the eddies clear to Buffalo Island, now, and we got to trip a flyin' to beat the freeze in. And this gem'men's going to walk back to where he comes from—s'-long, Miss Prolone!"

He walked out onto the bank with her, and his wife drew down the gangplank while he cast the lines off the two stakes that held the shanty-boat to the bank. Draya saw the boat move out in the blackness and catch into the current, the ice crackling along the sides as the sweeps broke the thin crust on the surface. In a minute the shanty-boat, the last one out of St. Louis that winter, went down the current, and, after flickering a moment in the reflections of the Eads Bridge lights, disappeared.

"I never thought I'd see the day that man'd pay me back," Draya thought, "But now he's done it. The blackmailing scoundrel—and he had me right—and he knew he had me! And Red promised me, he'd never know what hit him!"

She returned up-town. She had had a practical training in life, and had fought her way up, by good luck and by good sense; she had learned the necessity of fighting enemies with their own weapons. Takrite was one of the meanest of them all.

"I'm a good kid!" she choked. "I don't aim to be crooked—I'm a good kid! I've a good job—and—and I don't know what to expect, now. When he comes back, he'll tip off the District Attorney—they'll nab me! But if I go to jail, it won't be for violating any Mann Law. That's right, I won't! It'll be for killing somebody!"

She knew too much, or not enough; she

had seen the penalties of wickedness visited upon the ignorant; she had seen those who did not protect themselves caught in the meshes of their own unresisting weakness.

"I'll fight!" she declared. "My—but they operated quick, those little drops Red gave me! I never saw them work before. Knockouts! Sure, a girl learns—if she keeps her eyes open, and makes friends—all kinds—the right kind of friends. I thought Red was no good—I never knew he'd do me a good turn. And he said he'd make Takrite walk back home. Next time he takes up with me, Jason'll go hungry and dry, before he'll feed out of my hand. I'm not much comfort to a man, if I'm not pleasant.

"I wish—I wish that old woodsman of mine'd show up! He said he'd come back—he'd find me. I like those fellows out the green timber! They don't know much, and they act like horses, but they got whites of eyes, instead of red eye-balls. And they have an innocent way of talking, that a girl knows is right. I pick Drane, for me. He's my man, if I can get my hands on him—watch me! I'm a good kid! I saved myself up for the likes of him—but I ain't too d—d good to look out for myself."

CHAPTER V.

SINGLE-HANDED.

A BOLD idea was to be tested by the Adirondack woodsman when he went forth to get his silver otters, or perish in the attempt. He had connected up many things in his memory, and presented them to himself in their final condition—the one chance that he had of getting the kill, now that he had made it. He stood by his big kettle of thawing grease and oil and when it was warmed through, and the last bit of grease vanished in golden yellow fluid, he brought out two suits of woolen underwear, three pairs of heavy, hand-knit socks, and dipped them into the mass, and wrung them in it, till every fiber was saturated.

Stripping down, having eaten a good breakfast before the faint, long dawn appeared, he covered himself from head to feet, his arms and torso, and all of him, with the grease, and let the weather in through the cabin door, so that it would congeal. Then he put on his soggy suits of wool and grease, and drew on his socks.

Over them he drew a tight, thin pair of trousers, and a light, woolen shirt which he had waterproofed. On his feet he drew a pair of light moccasins, and then he wiped some of the grease over his clothes and went out into the wind, to see whether or not it would feel warm. He felt as though he were sweating, and that was a satisfactory sensation, considering the madness that he had in mind.

He plugged his ears, drew on grease-sodden woolen gloves, and in the first dawn crossed over the island and went down to the shore of the bay, in which he could see, by this time, the victim's of his previous day's markmanship.

He was not without precedent for what he was doing. The year he worked on a log drive, coming down Black River, he had worn five suits of woolen underwear, and a suit of gray mackinaws over all. He had been in and out of the ice-water for days. He had slept on floors or open camps at night. He had not felt the sting of the cold water through those heavy woolens.

Another thing, the man who told him about the Indians of far away Cape Horn had declared that they dressed themselves in grease, and that the fat protected them from the wind and frost and spray. While white men, in their civilized garments, hovered, shivering over the fires, the Indians, sitting at ten or fifteen feet distance, has sweated profusely in the unaccustomed warmth—this in the open camp of a south Arctic shore.

Now Tunis Drane, holding his life cheap, and with some dim idea that with a fortune in sea otter skins he would somehow escape the penalty of fighting a man to the death in the streets of the American Metropolis, had adapted those little details and ideas that he had picked up in listening and from experience; and with the bold swagger of a backwoodsman crossing an Adirondack backwoods ballroom at a New Year's dance, he came down to the water's edge, while

the grease in his hair lumped in the cold, and the coating of grease all over him slicked and smoothed out, and made him impervious to the wind that was blowing.

He stopped in the water's edge, and for a minute his mind went back to his home woods, to the pretty girl for whose hand he had fought, and then, more strongly, to the wish that he knew that she was all right, and taken care of. He could not know; he could only struggle with his finite mind against the thousands of miles that were between him and the girl.

A thought made him cringe. He should not have left her. He should have remained with her, to face the music, or brought her away with him to enjoy his freedom, his escape and his perils. At the same time, he was glad that she was not there on the island, to face death alone, if he should fail in his enterprise.

He walked down into the water, and felt it washing up around his legs, not with the stinging cold of icy saltwater, but as though it was outside of the barrier, which it did not affect greatly. He carried with him a long, light pole that would help float him, and which would also help him bridge the unknown horrors and terrors of the soggy, coiling kelp, or sea weed.

He got out into it, and he struggled over it, and through it, and before he realized it, he had caught one of the victims by the slack of its strange, loose, oily skin. He slung it over his back, and got to another one, and slung that one, too, and then headed through the heaving mass toward shore.

He got ashore and stretched the two otter on the snow, and returned at once for another load. It was possible, but it was frightful toil. Only a man hardened to years of trap-line, years of woodcraft, years of plain, patient endurance through wilderness woods, going whether he was tired or fresh, the verb *to quit* unknown to him in any thought, could have done it.

He had the work to do, and he did it. He brought in the nearer of the carcasses first. Then he brought in further ones. He found that he could tow in four or five as easily, almost, as he could two. With a loop of rope, which he had, unhappily, not greased, he caught the brutes around the lower jaws or behind the ears, and towed them in.

The pile of his kill grew larger and larger on the beach. He could not believe his eyes, till he was too tired to think about it. All he could do was keep going, keep coming, keep bringing in the slain, and wonder at the endurance he was showing, in this strange, deadly effort to salvage the kill that he had made.

He cursed the last few animals that he had to get. He couldn't leave hundreds, thousands of dollars out there. That would be like passing a pocketbook, too lazy to pick it up. It would be like shooting a deer, wantonly to let it lie untouched.

He made his last trip in the gathering gloom of darkness, and he was so tired he could hardly lift one hand to pull himself toward the lumps that were outermost of all he had shot. He struggled out in the dusk, and he fell upon one of the brutes, where it lay, to rest, unable to rope it on the instant. He went from there to another one, and to a third, and to a fourth.

He was gasping for breath; he was stinging where the grease had worn from his face, above his whiskers. He was so exhausted that every motion of his arm, from the opening of his hand to the reaching with his arm, had to be done by conscious, driving, sheer will-power.

But he was out there in the kelp, and to remain there meant he would die, and he didn't want to die. He dragged the sleek creatures behind him, only half conscious of their terrific drag on his quivering frame. Under both arms the pound of the pole had bruised him beyond anything he had ever dreamed of enduring. He was growing numb, too, and the swelling waves through the seaweed and across the openings caught him unawares, and his open mouth was filled with salt water, half strangling him from time to time.

Any lesser man would have died there; a more sensible man would have abandoned the last of the otters, though they were worth thousands; the idea did not occur to the hunter. Years of killing deer, and saving them to the last meat scrap, years of toiling through loose snow on deep-sinking,

webbed shoes, with unskinned carcasses of fur in his pack, years of keeping faith with his instincts, had unfitted him for yielding any least thing that he had obtained, much less giving up the most precious pelts he had ever heard tell of, and so he went up the beach on his hands and knees, and, one by one, dragged the carcasses out of the low breakers, up over the mush ice, and to that heap that now was corded up before him waist high.

Yards and yards—rods long, it looked, in that black night, with the snow on the hills around, all a-glisten with the Aurora Borealis, which in purples, yellows, reds, oranges, and a thousand hues spread across the sky, the storm and driving snow having blown by, leaving a serene starry night to witness the final struggle of the man to overcome the distance up the island ridge and down to the cabin on the far side.

He was so exhausted that perhaps he could not have done what he must do to save his life in that silent cold, only now he opened up his shirt and scooped out handfuls of the grease with which he had covered himself, and ate it. He knew that he was a fool for not having had lumps of grease and a kettle of bear oil to eat and drink after each trip. Half his exhaustion was due to lack of fuel in his stomach.

Immediately he had eaten the grease, he felt the strength of calories and proteins and nitrogen—whatever one gets from food undiluted when hungry and exhausted—going out into his fibers, and when he started on again he walked, and did not crawl, as he had felt he must do.

In his years he had traversed long trails. Never, as long as he lived, would there be any one trip that would live in his memory, as its supreme nightmare, beside this one.

Step by step, and each step an agony of bruised body, misused muscles, and the deadweight of his own flesh upon his legs, and feet, he fell, and fought his way erect again. He stumbled, staggered, plunged, and at last crept through the split-board door of his cabin, and throwing half a cupful of kerosene over the kindling which he had left, all ready in his stove, he lit it.

The very light of the flames seemed to warm him. In a few minutes, the cabin was sweating, sweltering hot, and it was the most delicious feeling he had ever had. Foreseeing his return, perhaps frosted and maimed, he had left everything ready for a return. Soon he had something hot to eat, and then, having a little spring of water that boiled out of the foot of the rock where he had built his cabin, he made coffee, and sat down, at last to eat and drink, and because he was so tired, he pulled the blankets and skins off his bunk, and drew them over him on the floor, because he could not think of ascending all that thirty inches into the nest of evergreen boughs that comprised his bunk.

How long he slept, he could not tell. Perhaps one, two or three days. He was so stiff that every muscle, when he moved it at last, seemed like a lump of lacerated nerve. He emerged from his helplessness, and he worked himself into a kind of condition, and then betook himself to the job that must yet be done. His game must be skinned, and the pelts stretched.

This was no easy job, but it was one that pleased him to do. He need not hurry too much. He brought over two otters the first day, skinned them, and fitted the hides on stretchers that he had rived out of soft wood. He was amazed to see an animal with a body four feet long yield a skin that was seven feet long, and eleven or twelve inches wide at the shoulders—as large as a large wolf hide, from the carcass no larger than many a fox.

Day by day he worked, and soon he knew what number he had. There were sixty-three of the animals. The least of them was six feet long. There were four enormous skins eight feet long and of perfect pelage, uniform from end to end, black of surface, and the most delicate of pearl grays underneath, and the guard hairs like fine strips of silver wire.

He built a pole shed for the skins to cure in, and as he looked at the lines of boards, stood on end, or hanging by the nose from the pole rafters, he could not believe his luck was true. It was a fantastic dream of a trapper, one from which he could not awaken till he had seen it through to the impossible end.

These silver otters, with the other furs

he had taken, were without precedent in recent years of the fur trade. Men had found fur pockets, and made much of them. Lucky trappers had come down from interior Alaska, from valleys beyond the brim of exploration, from the edge of the Arctic plains, and from places near or far, where luck had favored them.

One had caught a bale of black foxes, and cunningly sold them, a few here, a few there, so that no one ever did know exactly how many he had obtained—but he had never run another line of traps, dying in the alcoholic ward of a hospital.

Other men had done better than that, and many a business, many a comfortable competence could be dated from some big catch of mink, martens, foxes, or other furs at an opportune moment.

These furs, however, had their rivals only in tales from that great shore line, from Kurile Islands around the north end of the Pacific down to the coasts of Oregon. Where one finds fur seal, twelve foot bears, gold in the beach sands, great foxes that are red, blue, white, cross, black, silver, and none knows how many variations, mink and beaver, fisher and land otter—there in that strange part of the world one may find anything, perhaps a fortune, perhaps death, perhaps a soul broken to perpetual vagabondage by one feat of endurance which, failing, leaves a heart crippled, and never again capable of enduring effort.

Tunis Drane knew this. He had staggered, balanced on the border-line, and the memory left him trembling. He did the work, but his very soul had been pressed to the limit, and he who had been afraid merely of a trap-like dungeon, where men were done to death with tame electricity, now entered upon another fear—the fear of the dark, fear of the Northern Lights, fear of the wind, fear of the cold—fear of his own shadow.

He went out and took up his own traps, and brought them all in. He could not tell whether he had lived through January or not. He hoped it was late March, but he did not know. He could merely wait for weather that would be of the spring, with the voice of birds in it, and perhaps flowers.

In all his life he had never missed flowers before. Now he longed for them. Now he dreamed of violets, roses, daisies, dandelions, and poseys whose names he did not know, but which he had seen in the woods, especially spring posies.

If swimming out and bringing in the sea otters had in a few frantic hours exhausted him, he now entered upon the monotony of doing nothing. He spent hours whittling sticks, and watched his knife nervously, lest it obey the impulse that he felt in his arm to jerk it up into his throat. He unloaded his fire arms, and tied them to their pegs, so if he got up in his sleep, and started to shoot himself, the cold and untying the knots would wake him up, and bring him back to his senses.

He went out and looked at the ocean. He tried to imagine how it would look in the summer, with gulls flying over it, and other sea fowl flocking about, little singing birds among the few trees, and building their nests in the low shrubs. He knew they came there. He had found their abandoned nests in the shrubs and evergreen trees. He found nests of grass, and he found some with tufts of hair and fur—shedder stuffs from the fur bearers.

He went over to look at the half bay in which he had made his kill, and from which he had rescued his furs. He did not think much about the matter till he was down by the shore, and then he saw the snow, ice, and black weeds. The terror of exhaustion, which he had subdued all that day as he struggled to salvage the furs, returned to him, and he staggered back to his camp, his imagination overwhelmed by the realities that were conjured up in his memory. He lived over the fear, that night, without the stimulus of the necessity to win through against the peril.

Then, one hour, he realized that the days were longer. There was a softness in the feel of the air. He heard a bird sing—perhaps an Arctic bird, but perhaps not a winter Arctic bird. The snow, he noticed, was cut through by the heat of ice-crystal lenses, by the evaporation under the wind, and a cloud brought sleet, instead of snow—sleet that turned to rain.

Bare ground patches appeared in the snow under the warmth of the sun, and

they did not have the polished sheen that bare rock, swept by zero gales, shows the eyes. One day he looked across the ocean, and he saw that it was flat-calm. There was no wind, no squall, no catspaw, even, as far as he could see. He rushed to his motorboat, and found that his little landing bay was full of ice, but there were signs of the breakup coming.

Slowly, spring revived his courage, and as he saw the steps of weather that released his environment from the black frosts, his heart grey buoyant, and he could think further than the mere desperate attempt to retain his sanity. Fogs and rains succeeded one another. He found himself sweating in the sunshine, as he stood in a lee out of the breeze.

"Now I'll go back," he thought to himself. "And going back, I'll have to be careful. I must get through, out of this mess—I must place these pelts, and make my getaway with the cash. Where'll I land? Where'll I ship from?"

He must be cautious, else some detective would recognize him. Besides, he must escape the consequences that might follow his discovery on this island. He did not know where it was; he presumed it was American, and perhaps it was preserved, or a fur refuge. He had not thought of that before, and it hastened his getaway.

He caulked his motorboat, and painted it with white lead along all the seams, took down his motor and cleaned it, and put it back into shape, ready to start, and when the day came that he could set a pry and start the boat down the two smooth spruce skids on which it rested, he was ready to start. The boat moved down to the water, and, the shore mush ice bridged, he carried on board the bales of his furs. The otter hides were heavy, and they half filled his cabin.

"I could sleep in the cockpit!" he assured himself, and when he was all loaded, he threw a kiss at the little log cabin, with its abandoned outfit of traps, one of his old axes, a saw greased with bear oil, and whatever other duffle he did not need, now that he was bound for civilization; he steered out into the wide water, and with the bow of his boat pointing toward the dim blue island that he had held astern when he ran out to his winter's refuge and bonanza, he returned upon his course.

Wild foul were in the air, flocks of ducks and geese were on the water. Gulls had come along, and there were sea birds whose names he did not know, but they had been gone all winter—at least most of them had. He went over the edge of the horizon, and ran in among the islands. He slipped along, stopping when the wind blew, and moving on when the day was fair. Fog stopped him, especially the low, dragging, racing mists that carried a gale in them.

Thus he went down, and when he saw steamers' smokes, he ran to shelter, and kept out of sight. He traveled nights, with no lights, and going by woodsman instinct, along unknown routes, he found his way at last into the mazes of Puget Sound, where in one place he picked up a lot of burlap bagging, and in another, some trunks, and in a third, he found a house to rent, and moved into it, and put his stuff in the garret, where he hung it from the room beams and rafters, wrapped up in paper, and pasted so that no least insect could get into it.

From there, he wrote letters to St. Louis fur buyers, and asked for quotations on furs, especially Alaskan and Northern Pacific Island grades. He was, he thought, cunning. He signed his name William Dasper, and waited for an answer, with considerable impatience.

CHAPTER VI.

THE CLOSING WEB.

THE disappearence of Jason Takrite made something of a stir in the speculative world of furs. He was of considerable importance in low grade fur lines, and not many dealers or manufacturers liked him, because of his efforts to get the trappers after sooners, or unprime pelts. In states that had laws forbidding trapping before November 1, or any other date he made buying campaigns weeks earlier, and thus drew the attention of the boys and men who made a practise of taking blue-hides.

The early, or unprime skins would bring only a quarter as much as the prime pelts. But Takrite made it an object for the trappers to get them. He said that if he didn't buy early, probably he wouldn't be able to buy any skins at all. That was the argument of the early trappers, who said if they didn't trap early skins, they wouldn't get any at all.

But Takrite had a financial reason, as well as a trade reason, for handling these early pelts. It was often as easy to get ten cents more for a line of early October skunk skins worth fifty cents each as it was to get a ten-cent increase on fifty early December skunk skins worth two dollars each. The ten cents profit meant twenty per cent profit on the one investment and five per cent profit on the other investment, and while prices for furs were settling toward the great sales period, Takrite took less risk, percentage, and stood a better chance, he thought, of skimming the market's speculative profits with his destructive and often illegitimate fur trade.

Now that he was gone, stories of his activities were printed far and wide, and the mysterious shooting affray in which he had fallen victim (he had sworn before the grand jury to the attack of his own stenographer and a woodsman field fur-buyer of the name of Tunis Drane) was recalled and commented upon again.

Since that shooting, Takrite had found difficulty in getting back into the swing of the trade. Out of it for a whole month, and unable to take good hold for weeks afterward, he had lost the very best period of the buying season in his own peculiar practise of getting the sooners, or blue hides of illegitimate, unprime skins.

Several states, taking note of the fact that the muskrat, skunk, mink, and other animals of the fields and woodlots and streams were growing scarce, and discovering that their protection added hundreds of thousands of dollars to the commercial value of a product that cost nothing to raise, but merely the efforts of boys and men and even some few women to capture and bring into commerce, were closing down upon the illegal capturing.

This very markedly reduced the possibility for the trade such as Jason Takrite followed, to the damage of the public's wild herds of fur-bearers. A very few unscrupulous fur-buyers easily disrupted the whole tenor of the market and lowered the standards of dealing from end to end of the country.

Therefore, if there was interest and gossip about the passing of Jason Takrite, there was little regret, and some little real exultation. There was a bit of genuine concern in the matter, too, for Jason Takrite was known to have had a windfall, a beautiful black fox skin having been picked up by him, somewhere, for almost nothing, and to match which he had paid $2,500 for a jewel skin of the same species. He had been up and down asking about the markets for such skins, but he had met little success.

He was reaping the reward of the cheap peltries man, who seeks to place some really fine skins. As he had dealt for years with the slovens and tricksters of the trade, when he became interested in the market for single skins, worth hundreds and thousands of dollars, he was nonplussed.

He would go to any of the great furriers, and frankly trade through them, on a commission basis. Having sold ten-cent muskrat kitts and broad stripe unprime skunks, he essayed, now, to learn where and how to sell a prime, beautiful highest-grade black fox.

He was in the condition of a jeweler who, having long sold diamonds for forty-eight dollars which were worth thirty-five dollars, finds himself in possession of a thirteen-carat Brazilian blue stone of the most exquisite color and the inspired cut of a lapidary genius.

There was a good deal of quiet amusement in certain fur circles, when it was learned that Takrite had paid $2,500 for a skin to match his even finer pelt, so that he might have a pair of them. Whoever had sold him that $2,500 pelt had assuredly put the price $500 higher than was really demanded in the present state of the market—but it was Takrite, and Takrite had long been a woolly spot on the back of the fur trade, who paid that high price. That was a good little joke on him. Now he had disappeared. Being shot, being stung,

and being lost—these, certainly, were indications of the troubles of a man of questionable habits in the fur business.

Inquiries from Takrite's establishment became more insistent. The home office wanted to know, insisted upon knowing, what had become of that head of the firm? He had gone to St. Louis with two black fox skins, and those pelts were worth thousands, $5,000 at least, and perhaps $8,000. Could it be that he had sold for cash, and then something happened?

Instantly definite and persistent inquiry was made, and a police alarm was sent out; then it developed that Jason Takrite had shipped an insured bundle of furs to Ong Leong Trong, and that fact made several wise old specialists in gem furs laugh. They wondered from whom Jason Takrite had obtained that name? Trong was not unknown to them. For his numerous fur-trade sins, it appeared Takrite was coming into his own.

One other thing was learned. Takrite had, by chance, been seen with a handsome young woman. Men who knew the man had now remembered seeing him. They had not recognized the woman with him, in the dusky gloom of a St. Louis evening, but they had wondered who found in him any reason for accompanying him.

Methodical inquiry, from fur man to fur man, was begun.

The detective, Volanes, assigned to the case by the local Carcajou Agency, asked at Blecker's whether or not Takrite had been there. He was referred to Mrs. Shronely, office manager, and she said he had been there two or three times, but she was uncertain what days. He had been making inquiries about black fox skins, and asking if there was any one looking for a high-grade buy in that line.

"You knew him by sight?" the detective asked.

"I think he introduced himself, didn't he?" She turned to one of the girls, who recalled that Takrite had given his name, but she could not tell on what day.

"Thursday?" the detective asked.

"Possibly—on Thursday or Wednesday," Mrs. Shronely replied.

"And was a young woman with him?"

"Was there?" she turned to another girl.

"Not inside with him," the girl answered.

"Tell me, Mrs. Shronely," the inquirer persisted, "did this man Takrite try to get you to give him confidential addresses of ultimate customers, who might perhaps purchase a very fine fur or two?"

"This establishment has confidential lists of customers, of course," she replied. "Takrite had that reputation in the trade, I believe. He hinted various things, while talking with me. I spoke to Mr. Blecker about it. We do not—cannot discuss some things of this kind. You understand that. If Mr. Blecker has any information to give, he would do so. You understand our position—hired workers."

The detective went to Blecker, and returned with him in a few minutes.

"That son of a gun come here, pestering around me," Blecker raged. "He tried to find out how much I paid this lady, here, for wages, and the best worker I ever had, he said was somebody to keep my eyes on, and she the best worker I ever had. I know, he hang around a whole lot, but I fixed him, good. Two-three fellows know about it. We had a good laugh!

"That trader in house-cats and broadstripes and kitten mushrats buying in the black fox business! I have a good laugh at him. I sold him a black fox—a mighty fine fox, too—$2,500 for a skin good for $1,865, and not a cent more. He wanted me to recommend him a good Chinaman by experience honest and truthful. I am only sorry I did not at that moment think of Ong, that Ong Leong Trong. If I had thought of him, maybe he had never heard of him, but the rest of us—we know!"

"Somebody else did tell of him; he shipped a bundle, value $8,500, to Ong Leong Trong!" the detective volunteered.

"What!" Blecker shouted, "He did—those furs to Ong? Say, if I know who give him that name, I bet I buy two bottles of wine over a table for that bright feller. By golly! Two black foxes to Ong! Two black fox to Ong! That is rich—for Takrite to do that. By golly, that cancels my loss by the same Chink—just to know Takrite is stung that way! By golly!"

He turned and looked at his secretary; his eyes twinkled, his ears wriggled, his bristling eyebrows waved, and he raised a long, slim forefinger.

"Ha!" he cried, after a minute of shaking laughter. "Ha! You—you—I bet, by golly, I take you out and buy you, perhaps not a bottle of wine, if you do not drink—but—but what shall it be? You—you—I remember I was telling you about Ong, just before that, and I know you do not forget any name, but remember it. Tell me, now, Ella Shronely, wasn't it you that gave that man the address of Ong, who has perhaps the finest collection of furs that anybody ever got without paying for them—wasn't it you, now?"

She laughed—lightly, and shrugged her shoulders. The detective stared. He was a good detective, familiar with trade practises and trade secrets in a hundred lines. Volanes could be depended upon to see through many things.

"I referred him to you, Mr. Blecker," she evaded.

"Yes—yes—about the names. But he went back to you, and when you look with your face like you did—ah! So you gave him the name, Ong Leong Trong. I know you did, and sometime, I look at my ideas, a little, and see what I give you instead of a bottle of wine, for getting rid of Takrite. His kind brings disrepute on the fur trade."

Takrite had stopped at the Golequin House, in St. Louis, and Volanes had found his luggage there; also a number of memoranda and papers. He went to the typewriter from which Mrs. Shronely had turned to receive the two. He took a blank card index and wrote on it:

ONG LEONG TRONG,
Kohnlo, Alaskan,
via Oang-ho, B-C line,
Port Tientsin, China.

When he left the chair, Mrs. Shronely, who had watched him, read his note, and divined his purpose, and finding herself caught in the meshes of the pursing web, laughed again, and said:

"That's the address I gave him, Mr. Volanes."

"Did he pay for it?" demanded the detective.

"Oh, no! He said I should have a commission on the sale."

"A commission on a sale to Ong!" Blecker shouted. "That is the limit of prospective poverty and lack of profit! Say! Mrs. Shronely, for years and years I have wished I could get a woman who could relieve me of pesterings and enjoy doing what I should do, if I had time with those sneaks who try to buy out secrets and who swindle shippers and customers any everybody, so that an honest man is by the people a suspect, if he is a fur man. You got a life job, already, with me; and with my heirs; I stand by you, but I suppose a young and pretty widow like you—get married—get married! They always do."

"Not widows," Mrs. Shronely remonstrated. "They've been married once!"

"Once! That's right—perhaps it is enough, for some. I don't know. I know pelts, I know furs, I know skins and hides. Perhaps I have some little judgment about such things—but never—never about women. I was married thirty years, and the last year I said to myself, if I had been with anything that long, I bet I know all about it. But my wife, by golly, she surprised me every week. And so do you!"

When Detective Volanes went away, he was more thoughtful than at any other time on the search for the lost fur dealer. He had found definite information of a kind that might or might not mean a good deal. He had something to work on. He was witness to a bit of fur trade customs and habits of thought heretofore more or less hidden from view. The incident of the office manager, tempted to betray confidential information of her employer, introducing her tempter to the certainty of a heavy and irretrievable loss was an odd phase new to his experience and observation.

At the same time there was something more for him to consider; there was Mrs. Shronely, who did not act exactly like a native of St. Louis, so to speak. There was something more to her than appeared on the surface. There was a slant to her eye-brows, there was a lurking smile in her lips, there was a depth in her eyes that

showed hidden fires of volcanic suggestion. Volanes was too experienced to miss seeing a hundred little inexplicable things, not one of which might mean something.

He had a chance—a long chance—of which he took advantage. A clerk in the Fur Trade Board had seen Takrite with a very handsome young woman, down in the theater and restaurant district—perhaps three blocks long. The clerk had been unable to give any description of the young woman, but when they stood in a hallway across the way and down the street from Blecker's establishment, and Mrs. Shronely clicked off on the far side, under an electric light, the clerk started. "Why—that's the girl, I'm sure!" he declared.

Thus another link was added to an oddly forged chain. Volanes immediately began to search the back trail of the young woman, and he ran into the blank wall of ignorance that surrounded her. The fur trade, never too communicative, seemed to have touched her with its shrouding mystery.

She was already noted for what she was doing to old Blecker's establishment. She had put him on a modern basis, and because he had brushed up and dressed up, there was a suspicion that he had realized that he was an eligible old widower, and she a decidedly interesting and attractive widow. At the same time, among his cronies, he declared his reluctance and his positive refusal to consider the idea of courting his office manager.

"Suppose, now, I should marry her!" he said. "What a fool I would be; I would lose her from the office, and I bet she would just want money for good clothes and hats, forty-dollar hats, and all my best pelts for cloaks and muffs. No, sir! I don't marry business for love; I don't fall in love and spoil my business. But, if some young fellow come along, by golly, I bet maybe I try to cut him out!"

Her efficiency, her fur trade knowledge, her thorough acquaintance with the commercial forms and trading conditions of the fur business had instantly made her a consequential member of the fur district of St. Louis. The local correspondent of the fur trade papers found the heretofore silent and morose Blecker establishment to be one of their best sources of legitimate and amusing information. Only one thing was rather odd. Mrs. Shronely positively refused them permission to use her name.

Much less would she permit them to use her photograph as the subject of a poem or a write-up that would assuredly have been of general fur trade interest, since the Blecker establishment was forging forward through the addition of office and correspondence management, coupled with the intimate and practised fur judgment and handling.

The blenders and matchers of furs, the manufacturers needing a certain shade or quality, whether of highest or medium or lowest qualities, in a dilemma, would come to Blecker, and he would, from a thousand pelts, select the three or four that were of exactly the same color, weight, grade, quality, sheen, character—whatever was desired.

Volanes, with his attention centered now on this young woman in this great house, followed back all the lines that he could discover. They all proved to lead to blind pockets. There was no record that she had ever come from anywhere, that she had been anywhere, that she had ever occupied any position in the trade other than office manager for Blecker, but it was a favorite tradition, a favorite story now over the tables, of how old Blecker had described his first experience with the young woman.

"I told her to go!" he had said. "And she went and bought $500 worth of new office furniture, cleaned out the office, and mopped it up, and washed the windows, and when I came in, to put on my coat and take my hat, there they were on the hook, untouched, and under it a black stain, but all the rest so cleaned up—and a typewriter and desk and everything, that cost $200, maybe, and new stationery all printed up, engraved, and costing like the devil, but with two colors of ink, and the swellest layout, so much so, that the next day I buy new pants, and new clothes, and hat, and another shirt, and pretty soon I was just as swell as my office, but nowhere near such a good-looking old fellow, as that new manager of mine is a swell-looking girl."

None knew who she was. Blecker had

asked no questions; he had had no time for them; she had done so well, now, that he didn't care who she was, or what had been her antecedents. She did her work so much better than any one else he had ever heard of that he refused to consider the question of where she had learned so much about the fur trade, that she could handle correspondence better, as regards purely fur trade questions, than a man who had been forty years in the business.

It was Volanes's business, now, to search out the woman's past. Her name, he knew, was Mrs. Ella Shronely. She was a widow, Blecker said. Another man recalled a fur-buyer of the name of Shronely in one of the small, down-east fur regions, the Adirondacks, he believed. Volanes asked the New York Office of Carcajou Investigations to look up Shronely, Dasper Shronely, an Adirondack woodsman, fur-buyer, trapper, or something of that sort.

Shronely was found; his grave was in Wilmurt, in the cemetery there. He had died the previous spring. He had been buried with his insurance money. He had left no relatives. He was a fur buyer.

"No relatives," Volanes grunted. "Wonder do they call a wife a relative in the Adirondacks?"

"Not married," the Utica detective agent declared, briefly.

The St. Louis detective had looked everywhere he could think, seen every one he could imagine. He had connected Mrs. Shronely with Takrite by a most meager recognition. He didn't know what next to do—slept on the matter. And the following morning, at his desk, pouring over his note books, he clutched out of the air a thing that made him feel silly.

"What a fool I am!" he charged himself. "Where's that Draya Prolone, who shot Takrite last fall?"

CHAPTER VII.

SIGNED "DASPER."

DRAYA PROLONE, alias Mrs. Ella Shronely, knew now that this is a very small world, and that the hardest thing to do is disappear. Relentlessly, there drew down around her the closing web of the purse-net of the law. Victim of a mean, crooked fur-trader, who had been shot—and deserved it—she found that she could not rid herself of him without leaving a trace behind.

Coming and going from her work, from remarks by the nice old lady with whom she boarded, from what her fellow-workers in Blecker's establishment said to her, she was conscious of surveillance. From that day when Volanes, the Carcajou agency detective had come to her openly, she found that on all sides there was watchfulness that kept her constantly in view.

At lunch, going to a store to purchase a ribbon, walking for exercise along interesting St. Louis streets, she learned to expect the lurking shadows that followed her wherever she went. She was not unprepared when a boarder, a Miss Emsworth, arrived at her own boarding-house, and began immediately, if covertly, to make her acquaintance. Draya laughed to herself at the ease with which she recognized the young woman's intentions.

The planted detective invaded Mrs. Shronely's room, and she knew the room had been ransacked—but neither laundry marks nor kept-over letters, papers or anything served to connect her with that girl who had fled from New York. The newcomer sought intimacy, sought friendship—and they went down to the theater or motion pictures together; they went to dinners, and they walked together.

Then came the inevitable "confession" by Miss Emsworth that she was in "trouble," and wondered where she could escape to, from the consequences of her crimes—which it appeared were crimes of violence. She hinted at a blood-curdling tragedy in her career, but Mrs. Shronely did not tell of any such crime in her own experience. Instead, she suggested that the best way, in such an event, was to go and face the music.

This suggestion was a little too much for the stranger, and she went down-town, and during her absence, Mrs. Shronely confirmed her acute suspicions by discovering in her luggage three photographs of Draya Prolone, with a pedigree pasted on the back

of one of them, telling all the known details of Draya Prolone's life and markings.

But they were pictures taken when she was under seventeen, and she had been a rather homely little street gamin till about that period. The photographs bore some resemblance, but hardly a definite likeness —for which Mrs. Shronely was not unduly grateful.

When Miss Emsworth returned, she had a new line of suggestions. She thought that it would be fun to have some friends, and go around and have a good time. The hints were covert and they were insistent, until the subject remarked, with a slight touch of asperity:

"Are you *that* kind of a girl?"

Miss Emsworth almost immediately disappeared. She had solved no secrets nor obtained any valuable information. But there was a day of real worry for the office manager of Blecker when Volanes came and asked her bluntly for a specimen of her penmanship.

She reached for a slip of paper, picked up a pen, and wrote across the page:

> I wonder, sometimes, if people don't grow very weary, very tired, of sneaking around after suspects, trying to convict them of things they never did, for motives that they never had. Not satisfied with following them up and down the earth, day and night, they must come pestering around with silly confessions of crimes they never had the nerve to commit, and with protestations of friendships they never made.

"Will that do?" she asked, gently.

Volanes picked up the straight, even, beautiful bit of penmanship, and before he read it through, his ears were red and he was red behind the ears.

"Yes, it's tough!" he ejaculated.

"What do you want to know about me?" she demanded.

"Why—we thought—perhaps—you see —Takrite!"

"Oh! That wretch? Tell your chief that I am not going to run away. Tell him that when they want me, I'll be right here. My name is Ella Shronely, and that is enough for the present. But when you get your case made out, and your identification certain, and you know what you are fussing around about—I'll be all ready to answer your summons. I'll come, if you'll call me on the telephone."

"Say—where's Tunis Drane?" Volanes blurted out.

"Drane?" she repeated, thoughtfully, "I've heard that name, somewhere—seems to me my husband used to—"

"Your husband?"

"Yes—Dasper Shronely. He's buried in Wilmurt, I believe. He was—bad. Drank himself to death—but he came of a good family, I think."

"Where did you meet him?"

"Oh—he came through, buying furs. You know, he was a wandering fur-buyer. He'd ship from Maine, New Hampshire, Michigan—all over. For two or three years he made a lot of money. He did well by me—but I couldn't stand him."

"He taught you the fur trade?"

"He had a lot of books, trade magazines, all kinds of such things. While he was out buying pelts, I'd read. He'd come back and talk shop. All he knew was furs. But he knew them—from white foxes of Canada to civets and alligator hides. I stood by when he graded, and studied the form letters—you see I was a good stenographer—"

"Graduate?"

"Yes."

"Where from?"

"Don't!" she choked, "Some questions hurt!"

"But why—you're so bright—"

"Oh, I know!" she exclaimed, "I was such a little girl, when I ran away—and my people—I could—I could tell them, now—daddy 'd be proud—now—but you—you've got me under a cloud! Suppose I said a word—and you've got it in for me. The Carcajous—oh, I know them!"

"From experience?" he shot at her.

"Yes," she replied. "From that day Mr. Blecker told you how I—how I drove away that beast Takrite."

"What became of him?"

"If I knew, I'd bring his black carcass and throw it in your face," she declared. "Coming to me, just when I was making good—trying to bribe me, trying to destroy me, where honor is the thing of first consideration! He followed me up and down—

if you were any good, you'd know that he chased girls around. You'd know what every one in the fur trade knows about him, that he was a wretch. I was a stranger here. I knew that he had a large business, but I didn't know, yet, that among decent fur traders he was regarded as no good. I was afraid he might say something to Mr. Blecker, who was so peculiar, people said. But he isn't. He's fine! I lost the first job I ever had because a scoundrel talked lies about me. And I was afraid. If I had no money—"

"No money!" Volanes exclaimed. "No diamonds—rubies?"

She was cornered, now, as she remembered Miss Emsworth, who had snooped around seeking information. If she knew about the belt of diamonds and rubies, what use to deny? But if the information was from the New York office—if they knew that Draya Prolone had put her savings into diamonds, had traded a little in diamonds and made money in that way? That was something else.

"Diamonds? Rubies?" she repeated, laughing.

"Or a wedding ring?" Volanes looked at the young woman's bare hands.

"How wonderfully shrewd you detectives are" she commented.

"We have to be damned shrewd!" he exclaimed tartly. "I've talked to you a dozen times, and you've talked to a—a bunch of people, and you've never told any one anything."

"Not you?" she asked. "After what I told you, just now, you say that?"

He flushed and stirred uneasily.

"You won't tell me anything I can prove," he said doggedly. "I'm talking plain to you; I've no right to do it, but I'm taking a chance; we sent a snapshot of you down East, and some said it was Draya Prolone, and some said not. We're working for the Jason Takrite Fur Company; Takrite's missing; they've carried his name over, but since he's gone there's been a reorganization; Takrite's out of it.

"But when they looked into the bag, there wasn't anything left, understand? There was a black fox skin, worth about five thousand, they claim, and that's gone. We know where that went to. It's gone to Ong, and that means gone for bad, and not forgotten. And Takrite carried cash with him—he always did, buying furs. You know the trade—more cash basis transfer than in any other business. Field buyers carry cash, nothing but cash. Trappers won't look at a check. He had fifteen or twenty thousand in his belt."

"Yes?"

"Then we got something else. He was mixed up, some, with a woman."

"She—she shot him?"

"No, not that one. The new company's short on cash. It's got a lot of old, moth-eaten skins and cotton mink. I 'low they thought they'd do big business, letting Takrite out in the cold. Now they're shouting: 'Robber! Robber!' This other woman—here in St. Louis."

"And—and the police want him?"

"Not exactly—not yet. If he's got the cash, he'll be welcome back. If not, they 'll bring him back. You see—well, there's been something funny about that company. When Takrite dropped out, being in the hospital, the silent partners didn't get any monthly dividends. They took hold, and there wasn't anything in the bag. They had a lot of carbon copies, and that sort of thing, but not knowing much about the fur business themselves, they waited for Takrite to get well, and he came back, being the manager, and they lighted on him, and demanded income from their investments.

"He promised, and showed them a big black fox skin, the way I said. But there's something—funny. They thought, probably, that—that Draya Prolone and he had a row on the dividends, and perhaps that was why he was shot, and not a fight between two men over her. I'm telling you, pretty frank. You know, that slip of writing—I had a hunch. We all had a hunch—perhaps you—"

"You know, Volanes," she said thoughtfully, "I know Mr. Blecker now, pretty well. I'm not so scared of my job—"

"You needn't be! If anybody knew what you were making here, you'd get an offer of fifty per cent increase before night."

"I'm satisfied," she said. "There's a

chance to get on in the world here. Blecker hasn't any idea a woman can't work as good as a man. After that first day, he's given me free hand—and I've made him money. He's shown his appreciation of it. But I'll tell you one other thing. I went to dinner with Takrite and to lunch with him. I think he'd been drinking."

"Ah! That's something."

"I got shut of him, as some would say. That was Thursday evening, about seven or seven-twenty o'clock. He had a bottle in his pocket."

"I'll bet he went into the river!" Volanes suggested.

"I don't know. I don't think you could kill him, and if he fell into the river, he'd probably stop breathing as long as he was under water, and then he'd come up with a story like a nightmare. If I hear anything, I'll tell you."

"You might hear something important. What 'd Takrite do to you, if he realized you steered him into Ong's sure-thing game?"

"I think he'd probably try to kill me," she declared. "That man 'd do anything—he'd do murder, if he thought he could get away with it!"

"If he thought he could get away with it."

Volanes took his departure. The woman had not fooled him. He wrote, that afternoon, to the New York Carcajou headquarters, and told them to investigate the details of the shooting of Takrite.

"Find out who owned the pistol," he suggested, and within ten days it was shown that the weapon was Takrite's own automatic, and that he had said, on the day of the purchase, that he was going to shoot a dog with it. The clerk remembered the incident, because the purchaser had slipped him a five-dollar bill and said:

"Forget if ever anybody asks you did you sell this gun to anybody."

The five-dollar bill was pinned to the page of the sales record, with the number of the weapon carefully recorded, and the bill of the numbers from the invoice was attached to it. It was plain, then, that Takrite had bought the gun to do a shooting with, and had himself been the victim. The flight and disappearance of the two, and the nerve of Jason Takrite in going before the grand jury had insured their indictment.

"You see how it is, Mrs. Shronely," Volanes said, when he had told her this latest development.

"Yes," she said. "Too bad they don't know about it, isn't it?"

"It is—probably they 'll scout around for ten years, having all kinds of hard luck—just because they were scared to face the music."

"They ought to have known better," Mrs. Shronely commended. "Poor children! It's too bad! What ought to happen to Takrite for his perjury?"

"He'd ought to be—dragged from St. Louis to Kansas City with a rope."

When she was alone, Mrs. Shronely asked herself what she could do? Her suggestion had sent Tunis Drane into flight; she had done the best she knew; Takrite at that time had been able to railroad a man to prison by the very importance of his business and position in the trade. The indictment, after a slack investigation by the police, proved that she had done the right thing. Sing Sing had been no remote possibility, even with the man living. But now, he was himself the hunted.

"And it was my work that gave him his eminence!" the girl suddenly realized. "I was handling the business—the way I'm doing here, for Blecker, in the office. And Blecker knows it—he's paying for expert work, here! What a fine old man he is!"

She looked at the stack of letters which had come in. Most of them were from buyers, who had picked up in the field specially select specimens of fur. They were men who knew their business, and who knew that Blecker would pay them extra prices for especially good pelts. But he wouldn't care to handle any cheap farm-handled, sun-blistered unprimes.

There were two letters from Canada, men who had spent their winters in the deep, green timber, and offered their catches for inspection. She took these letters to Blecker, and as they were from away back, and as they would grade No. 1 or extra, coming from that far wilderness, except a

few inevitable young skins and worn February fades, he invited shipment, and said that the letter should offer to turn the skins over to any other reliable dealer to save expressage in case offers on all or any of the skins did not meet the expectations of the trappers.

Rapidly Mrs. Shronely distributed the letters for the typewriters to answer, according to forms, or as suggested by the manager of the office. Then she found a page torn from an ink tablet, which asked:

LARK, WASH.,

Will you send me quotations on Alaskan winter-catch furs, foxes, sea otters, Kadiak bear, mink, etc.

And oblige,
WILLIAM DASPER.

"William Dasper?" she repeated, and turned to the index of trappers; there was no William Dasper listed. She turned to lists of fur buyers, and found none there. She looked through all the "D's" she had, from furriers and manufacturers to customers who bought fine pelts. She found no Dasper among them. She was sure that she recognized something in that letter—and wondered if it was because her fictitious name was "Mrs. Dasper Shronely."

"Sea otter?" she whispered. "Perhaps—he may have one or two. Foxes—bear and mink—Alaskan—"

She took the letter out into the fur shed, and showed it to Blecker. He read it, and looked at her.

"Well?"

"You know how trappers and fur hunters are," she said. "Kadiaks—and sea otter!"

"Perhaps you have a hunch?"

"Yes," she admitted. "Sea otter!"

"I tell you"—Blecker hesitated, and walked with her to the front of the establishment—"you have graded furs here—the ones that came by mail. Large mink, and dark, and for the lady who asked for a selection of red fox, you picked as close as I could. I am old; when I was younger, and I received a letter that made me feel like that letter makes you feel, I have gone a thousand, two thousand miles to see about it. And many, many times I came back with furs that are not yet forgotten where old men tell about what they have seen in our business. So now, I make you the offer. You go and see what you can do. I need somebody to go out for me."

"But it's sea otter—" she suggested.

"Ah! You are modest!" He smiled. "Come, and I will give you a little lesson in sea otter. Then you go, and if it is good peltry, buy for me."

He took her to the big vault, and showed her some sea otter skins.

"In all the country there are but sixteen sea otter skins now," he said. "Unless some boat brings some down from the Behring, or there is a shipment in from Cape Horn, these five skins are the only ones available. I have, as you are thinking, orders for that wedding of the Mandarin in China. He demands sixty sea otter skins, and that many are not on sale in all the world. He would pay sixty thousand, or, for superb skins, one hundred thousand dollars. For two good skins, perfects, large, and all like this part, not like this little woolly spot, he would pay five thousand dollars each, and—but it is not possible. Go and buy this man's sea otter. Take ten thousand dollars cash with you. If you need more, there is the telegraph—and, remember, what you purchase must be kept quiet."

"You trust me—sea otter!" she whispered. "And—and ten thousand dollars! Oh, Mr. Blecker—I thank you! I'll go—and you shall not lose anything!"

CHAPTER VIII.

CAUGHT.

JASON TAKRITE emerged from oblivion with scant memory and more sensation than he had ever had before. It seemed to him as though he had been in farther places than the world knew of, and when at last, having gone through a number of different existences, all of a bad-dream kind, he arrived at the knowledge that he was, indeed, Jason Takrite.

He sat up and looked around. He was in a cabin built of logs. There was no floor in it, but he was on a bunk, covered with corn shucks. Overhead, beyond some

rafters, was a peaked roof, with interstices through which he saw gleams of sky. He started to walk to the closed door, but fell on his hands and knees, through weakness.

His ears rang; his eyes blurred around the light that reached them from the outside through cracks and chinking; his stomach was like a great vacuum, and in his mouth was a combination of sand and decay. He harked back, as he rested wearily on the dirt floor, to a far city that he had known. That was New York, and he fancied seeing himself stepping cockily along the pavements. It was an odd fancy, considering what he was now.

He recalled some other places he had known, including Chicago, and a place where he had bought a lot of muskrats, and it was some time before he could tell whether the name of the place was Baltimore or Norfolk, and decided that very likely it was both.

Thinking of muskrats, he sniffed the air. There lingered in his mind the memory of a musk, not that of the rats, nor yet of beaver, nor synthetic musk. Attached to that memory were pleasing sensations, which were in violent contrast to his present sensations. It seemed to him as though it might have been some adventure in a foreign country, and he wondered if he could have been in Arabia, or Turkey, or some dreamland of joy unmarred by the reflection that it was wicked, or illicit, or would make talk in the trade.

By and by, he attained the doorway and looked out into a wilderness. His gaze fell upon a tupelo gum, and he stared at it wonderingly. He saw nearer at hand, beside the cabin, a cottonwood tree. Then he saw a cypress down where the tupelo was standing. Behind the cabin was a brake of green cane. He knew these things.

"'Coon country!" he murmured. "And 'possums. Some Southern mink down by that bayou, there, too—but what am I doing here? I was not down South, when I remember the last time—no! Let me see, where was I?"

By and by he remembered coming west, and he asked himself where he would be headed for, if he had gone west? In his business, the obvious answer was St. Louis, but on second thought he strove in vain to remember about St. Louis. Instead, he remembered New York, and his reflections were unpleasant. Business had not been good. He had undertaken some big speculations.

Having a sensation of cold, he examined his clothes, and they were none that he would have worn anywhere else in the world. There were holes in the pockets; they were a little too small for him, and they were old. Methodically he ransacked the pockets, and found in the bottom of the watch pocket of his trousers a one-dollar bill.

He unfolded it and spread it out, and smoothed it fondly.

"I am not broke!" he said. "I have some money."

He walked around the cabin, and found a footpathway that led along the side of the cane-brake ridge, which he followed weakly, stumbling along. In a hundred yards he emerged upon a stream that, having seen it, he would never forget it. This was the Mississippi River, a mile wide, with a caving bend at his feet, a wide sand-bar opposite him, and it was flowing from his right to his left as he stood facing it.

"I am on the east bank of the river," he told himself. "I wish I knew how I come to be here. I must have been drinking. And I—"

He felt of his lower ribs, and clear around himself.

"I had some money in my belt," he grumbled, "and the belt is gone. I know now. I have been robbed. If only I could remember—St. Louis—let me see—St. Louis!"

It was true that he had been in St. Louis about the last of his memories. He had gone there on fur business. He had spent some money to buy a good fox, a black fox. He had sent it, he could not recall just where. But probably his papers would show. If not—why, then—he shrugged his shoulders upon it.

Trouble had befallen him steadily for a long time. He had been shot, and business had been bad. He had lost something from his business. He could not tell, at this moment, what it was that had gone wrong.

It had been just bad luck, which strikes down the best of business men, sometimes, and they cannot help it, nor see from what comes the blow.

He abolished the thought that it might be he had lost help that he had needed. It could not be that. All he wanted, to be a success, was a girl to write what he said in letters, and all the rest he would do, except lift the bales of furs around.

He looked up and down-stream, and saw nothing in either direction to guide his footsteps. He turned to the right, up-stream, because he would have to go up-stream anyhow, to reach a place where he would start for home. His feet hurt, and he saw that he had on a pair of old, worn-out patent leather shoes. He had no hat. His face was covered with a short beard.

"Robbers!" he muttered. "Somebody has robbed me! Wait till I find out about it. Then I shall know what to do!"

Sick, weary, trembling with weakness, he forced himself up the river bank at a short, quick-stepping jog trot, and within a mile he saw a little shanty-boat moored to the bank. A man was splitting up a hardwood chunk for firewood. To him Takrite addressed himself.

"How far is it to the next landing?"

"You're about ten miles below Hickman, if that's what you mean."

"Ten miles below Hickman—Kentucky! Stranger, I have bought furs too often down this river, at towns and from store-boats, not to know with what suspicion you regard me. But would you give me a snack?"

"What happened to you?"

"Knockouts, I think; I arrived in St. Louis, and—here I am!"

"When was that?"

"In January, but after the January fur sales."

"You've been two weeks on your high-lonesome! Holy smoke—and you look it. It's the second of February."

"What! February! By gracious!"

"You look it, too. Come aboard. You're weak and sick, man."

The shanty-boater, keeping a wary eye on his visitor, fed him. He gave him coffee and meat soup, and Takrite ate in silent gratitude. He tried to tell the man his thanks, but as he rose to his feet the world turned black before him, and he fell in a faint upon the floor. The shanty-boater put him on a cot, and nursed him back into intelligence and something like normal health.

Takrite was helpless, obviously incapable of doing harm. The shanty-boater gave him shelter and table eatings, but it was ten days before the sick man could go on again. When he went on, he carried a mink skin the man had shot. He paid a dollar for it. The man wouldn't take the dollar for board, declaring:

"Some time, perhaps, I'll be down and sick and out, and then perhaps this 'll come back to me—the grub and cot you've had. I don't take pay for sheltering a man that's up against it."

Takrite took the mink skin into Hickman, and he went to a water-front store with it. He had smoothed it, combed it, and carried it wrapped in a piece of wrapping-paper he had picked up. He traded it for fourteen cheap pocket-knives, which he arranged in a pasteboard knife box the amused merchant gave him. He took this box of knives out into the town, and going along back streets he sold them, one by one, for thirty cents each—all but one. Out in the edge of town, he traded this for a 'possum skin that was on the side of a woodshed. He brought the skin back to the merchant, and sold it for sixty cents. He now had four dollars and a half, of which he spent forty cents in getting something to eat, and a shave.

He bought three dollars' worth of assorted knives at the wholesale store, and went by train up the line, and at a station stopped off and walked up the road toward Cairo. He stopped at every house, and he sold a knife in each of half the houses.

There was nothing funny in the matter for him. He was in grim earnest. But every sale filled him with satisfaction, and when he arrived in Cairo, he had seven dollars, a full stomach, and five skins—two coon, one possum, and two muskrats. He sold them to a Cairo dealer from whom he had bought three thousand dollars' worth of skins in one trade, but the dealer did not recognize him.

Takrite could not reveal his own identity. He would have had to make some explanation, and as his mind cleared, he realized that he could not make any explanation. He must arrive home with no need of making an explanation.

He went a thousand miles, from place to place. He dealt in anything his instinct suggested would be good to trade with. In Pittsburgh, he sold two hundred dollars' worth of skins, and when he arrived at Baltimore, he spread down nearly a thousand dollars' worth of pelts. There were reasons why he could not rush forthwith to South Fifth Avenue, to his own store.

Cautiously, shrewdly, having no name of his own, he had listened in on the gossip of the trade, and, sure enough, when he found fur men who shipped to New York, and went there with their own bales of furs, he learned that the mystery of Jason Takrite was unsolved, but there was a surmise that he had disappeared for reasons of his own.

When he arrived in New York, he went straight to the little apartment which he rented by the year. Having lost his key, he applied to the janitor, who stared at him as though he were a ghost. A ten-dollar bill insured silence, and he went to his rooms, and found that everything had been ransacked, from top to bottom. Papers had been gone through, and correspondence examined, and accounts turned over, page by page. He laughed to himself. He went over to a board in the wainscoting, and pried it up two inches. From the slot he drew two bundles, and opened them.

"It might have burned up," he admitted, "but it did not. They think they have stolen my business. They are welcome to the good-will"—he laughed at the thought of the good-will trappers who had shipped to his company would have toward the name—"I have the tangible property. This is what I came for. I go, now, a long ways. I bet by Seattle I shall yet find a good spring buy of furs, for business!"

He slipped away within an hour of his return. Only the janitor had seen him. Liberality to the janitor during other times insured him against discovery. Search for him was being made, he had learned; now, with a clear head, he knew well enough what to expect from his late "silent" partners.

They were not silent, now. They were screaming their wrath from ocean to ocean, and they did not know whether to change the company's name, or whether to try and live down the evil reports concerning it, for sake of its certain repute in the trade for supplying certain grades of furs which could not be had to such good advantage anywhere else; the dilemma of the partners in a wrecked business was theirs, and the crooked associate left them to solve their own difficulties.

For his part, with the cash and with his thorough knowledge of certain features of the fur trade, his unscrupulous seeking and taking of advantage without regard for any other consideration than his own business safety and immediate profit, insured him opportunities and further profits. The hoard of thousands of dollars, which he had taken good care to abstract from his company's surplus, bit by bit, covering it with "desk buys," and other items, had been missed, and the expert accountants had shown the method of operating.

All corners of the trade knew the facts, and Takrite, friendless, hidden, with his sharp mind planning a new campaign, his first having netted him eighteen thousand dollars in five years, headed straight across the continent, his peaked, smooth face covered by a black beard and a black mustache—certainly, only a most intimate associate could recognize him in that disguise!

He went, of course, by way of St. Louis. When a fur man must cross the continent, he goes through that ancient fur town, where for a hundred years the furs of all the Indian country west of the Mississippi came in for rebaling and shipping by river steamer to New Orleans, and thence to the old fur centers of Europe, where they were resold, for manufacture.

His name did not matter. The first period of his life he had passed, and made the first fortune of eighteen thousand dollars, which was a very nice sum to flee with. In Seattle, he should be able to operate in real estate, a little, and he should branch out, some, and in a few years, having taken due advantage of his opportunities, be

should pass one hundred thousand dollars and be a rich man. No doubt, by his shrewdness, he should, in a very short time, be a millionaire, and then he could marry some girl with a lot of money coming to her, or in her own right, and if not a girl, then a good widow, and everybody would say when they saw him go by: "That's him! He's got a million—Mr.—Mr.—"

He wondered what name would be best to have, for convenience, advertising and making an impression? A good name, the right kind of a name, would just exactly fit his condition, and so from New York to Cleveland, and from Cleveland down across Indiana and Illinois into St. Louis, he pored over the names that would best suit his coming wealth and importance in the great community of Seattle. He picked, at last, Barney MacClews, which sounded all right.

He went to a quick-order printing house, and had cards engraved:

BARNEY MacCLEWS

FURS SEATTLE

Then he registered in the Golequin House, where the fur traders met. He was soon talking furs in the lobby, gossiping along in a casual sort of way, but eagerly alert, as always, with men in the trade among their own kind. He found himself listening to Parwite, whose stories had been famous for twenty years, and who, somehow, seemed always to know the gossip of the trade.

"What do you think?" he laughed. "Takrite Fur Company have heard from the two black foxes Jason Takrite sent on memorandum to Ong Leong Trong. Ong has written them, on the most beautiful silk paper, that he has welcomed with the spring sunshine of his heart the gift—what do you know about that—the gift of the magnificent black foxes! Eh! If Jason were alive, he'd fall dead to think that any one ever suspected him of making a gift, especially six or seven thousand dollars' worth of black foxes."

"Speaking of black foxes," a London buyer remarked, "they say there are covert inquiries about sea otter quotations going around. Some one near Seattle."

"I'd heard that," another man replied.

"A few good sea otters in the market just now—wow!" Parwite exclaimed. "Why, if there were twenty skins in Seattle, it'd take a special train to hold the fur buyers, and they'd have to work even the leased wires to carry the night messages. There aren't more than sixteen sea otter in the country!"

Within the hour Takrite, alias MacClews, knew that the gem-fur men were standing on tiptoes trying to penetrate the secret of the rumor that some hunter or trapper had brought down a line of sea otters. Rumor said that the man was on Puget Sound. The inquiries had come by mail, but telegrams were clicking westward answering the inquiries.

"It may be my good luck," Barney MacClews studied. "I got a hunch; it is for this that I stopped over here. Perhaps I go by the train to-morrow morning—no! A man never did big business going by the second train out. I go by the first train."

He drew his hand around his waist, where in a horsehide belt reposed eighteen thousand dollars in cash. Unobtrusively, he faded from the lobby. He boarded the next train, within the hour, starting on his way to Seattle. It was night, and a seat-mate in the sleeper told how the last time over that road, hold-ups came through the train, and robbed everybody and a safe full of express packages.

Barney MacClews did not sleep that night. He was thinking what might happen to him, all at once. He drew six hundred dollars from his belt and put it into a wallet, to hand out, and he rehearsed his lamentations over that six hundred dollars like and actor his first star part. Thus he planned to escape with most of his money—but there was no hold-up of that train.

He arrived in Seattle, and soon he was ferreting through the fur trade, along the water-front among the Islanders come to town, for a hint of the whereabouts of that treasure in sea otter skins of which Seattle had heard, and gossip and rumors of which

could be had wherever one went in the outdoor crowd, whether among the habitués of the gun stores, or on a bench beside a watchman's hut at a pier or dock.

MacClews, alias Takrite, was unresting. He went up and down, like a hound seeking a trail—a cold trail, any least sign. He knew something of the ways of seafarers, and he went among the fishermen, the seamen, the sailors of the bay and the deep-water men, log rafters, and all kinds of watermen, and he ransacked their memories, till one day he heard something.

"Yes, matey, I saw the old cruiser, the Nappo, that Tarpan built, along in 1907 or 1908, but which had a new motor into her in 1912, or thereabouts, and you never saw the likes of that man steering her. He was a fair-sized man, I should judge, but he had light hair that hung down his back, and he had kind of dark, reddish whiskers down his front, and his boat was down by the head, as though his cabin was loaded with somepin. An' as I crossed his stern, I see he had a load of furs—a one-man haul. But where he was bound I don't know."

In thirty-six hours MacClews had made this discovery. He had a boat to ask for—Tarpan's old cruiser, the Nappo. Within another twelve hours he learned that the Nappo was at Lark, and he arrived in Lark by a fish tug that evening. There was the Nappo.

"Oh, yes!" he learned. "Feller name of Dasper come in here two weeks ago, and he had most a ton of furs, baled. He rented that cabin up there, and he writ a lot of letters, saying he wanted quotations, he said. Some thought he'd been sealing, and there's a United States deputy marshal around looking for him, too. He sold the Nappo, there, to me. Lucky boat, that Nappo. Never made a trip she didn't bring home the goods. Tarpan built her, and went away. He come back with six thousand ounces of thirteen-dollar gold. Yes, sir! And now this feller Dasper comes in, with hair a foot long an' whiskers the same, an' a Kadiak bear hide with hay a foot long on it. An' he gets shaved, he gets a hair cut, an' he's as nice a lookin' young feller as ever you did get to see."

"But—but where is he?"

"He pulled his freight, stranger."

"Gone!" the fur seeker repeated, shocked by the set-back.

"Yep—gone! Seems like you're all too late. There's three-four more up to the hotel—Deputy U. S. marshal, an' fur men, an' I don't know what all!"

"U. S. marshal!"

"Yes, sir, count of the report around he had been sealing in forbidden waters. They are standing in line, waiting turns at the telephone. You'll see 'em when you get up to the hotel."

There they were, four men and a woman, when Takrite rushed in on them. The woman turned, and on the instant their eyes met. Takrite's face flushed angrily; his lips parted, showing his pearl-white teeth; his eyes glistened. He opened his mouth to speak, but the girl turned to a slouch-hatted man who had been talking to her:

"Excuse me, marshal; that man is Jason Takrite, who is wanted in an absconding and embezzling case in New York—Jason Takrite Fur Company wants him."

Takrite heard her. He uttered a shriek, turned, and would have fled, but he was dealing with a man appointed out of the Walla Walla district.

CHAPTER IX.

THE BACKWARD TRAIL.

TELEGRAPHED and letter quotations on fur seal showed Tunis Drane, alias William Dasper, that he had arrived at an opportune moment. He had once written for quotations on a five-foot fisher, or pekan skin, and had received telegraph quotations offering three times first prime prices for it. He had happened along just when a great fisher skin was needed. Now they wanted sea otter, and the telegrams showed the market was stripped.

He waited a little while, thinking it over, and then he made a short jump into Seattle. It did not occur to him that he would be sought out in that obscure settlement, on the hunch that he had sea otter skins.

He left the train with his furs, which he had packed in three trunks, and hiring a passing automobile truck, went to the

boarding-house where he had stopped on his way through to the islands.

Thus he broke his trail in two, and faulted it so that even the U. S. marshal's office, which was doing the revenue service a good turn, having a man at Lark on another matter, could not immediately locate him.

Dasper read in one of the papers that night an item from Lark that told of four men, including a Deputy U. S. marshal and a woman trying to locate "William Dasper." Instantly, he saw visions of detectives hunting him, and the little dark door in the Sing Sing death-house. For a minute, he was in a blue funk, and then he borrowed the shore geography of Mrs. Marlin's boy, where he boarded.

He knew the ocean, now, and loved its tracklessness. Having seen the lay of the shores, he went down to the water-front, and found a tramp steamer whose captain was loading a miscellaneous cargo of old iron, old brass, and other junk for California foundries. He was glad to have a passenger, if the passenger would come aboard within an hour. Also, a ton of freight would not be objectionable.

The backwoods boy, in flight, had learned fast, and he was on board within the hour, and when he landed in San Francisco, he picked up a number of commercial papers, including a weekly trade review printed on the Coast. When he opened this one he found himself confronted by a spectacular page article that told of the capture of the fugitive absconder, Jason Takrite, alias Barney MacClews, of New York, and the arrest of Draya Prolone, alias Mrs. Ella Shronely, on a charge of attempted murder.

The two had identified each other, it appeared, and they were going to be sent East without formality of requisition papers, in charge of the U. S. marshal's staff. There were brief accounts of the crimes alleged, and the information that—

> The whereabouts of Tunis Drane is still a mystery, though it is surmised that if Draya Prolone, alias Mrs. Ella Shronely, would talk, she would be able to reveal his whereabouts. She came to Seattle and Lark representing the Blecker fur establishment of St. Louis, seeking a reported catch of sea otter pelts which has stirred the fur trade throughout America, in view of the fact that Chinese offers for silver otter skins have boosted the prices beyond anything ever known before, for immediate shipment. But alas, there are no silver otter skins to be had. The mysterious William Dasper, who disappeared from Lark, via Seattle, is supposed to have a number of these skins. But there is no definite information.

"That's the case, is it?" Drane said. "I'm too late to go to Seattle, but here's where I head for St. Louis. I've got the skins—they're mine. And Draya doesn't face this thing alone—nor without funds."

He thought, now, only of Draya Prolone. She was in trouble, on his account, and though it made his heart ache to read that alias, *Mrs. Ella Shronely*, he would see it through. While he shipped his furs to St. Louis, and while he rode the train in which the furs were stowed in an express car, he saw the miles go by with laggard tardiness.

When he coasted down out of the Rockies and across the endless miles of plains and prairies, into the hills of Missouri, at last, he was breathless with expectation. When he raced down the steps of the Union Station, he headed straight for the Blecker establishment. Ella Shronely had represented that business; Ella Shronely was Draya Prolone. If they wanted those skins for one hundred dollars each, for her account, they should have them.

He walked into the big, dingy building, and turned into the bright, clean office, with its new furniture, its clean windows, its pretty girls at their machines. He strode up to the rail, and sniffed.

There, faintly but unmistakably, he caught the odor of that true musk from far away, near the northern border of China. He knew it well, and he had whiffed it in his dreams—only to have it turn to some rank wolf or violent decay. He stared, almost unseeing, and brought himself back to the present with a start.

"Was—did Mrs. Shronely work here?" he asked.

"Yes, sir. But she's—she's—"

"She's not here!" he filled her hesitating sentence, and the tears in the girl's eyes made him want to hug her.

"Tell Mr. Blecker—he's here?"

"Yes—in his private office. I'll bring him."

Blecker walked out. He was a glum, indignant man. He glared at the stranger.

"You knew Mrs. Shronely?" Blecker demanded.

"Yes, sir; you sent her, I think, to Seattle to buy some sea otters."

"Yes; and now I lost my office manager! By golly, she shall have money to fight this case outrage through all the courts!"

"Just what I was thinking, Mr. Blecker! Shake! We'll see it through. I've some skins out here—"

"I don't want to bother with any skins to-day."

"These are the ones that Mrs. Shronely had me bring—"

"Oh! So! She—she did not say that she had ordered—bought any!"

"It was enough for me to know that she had come to buy them," the man declared, recklessly, for he might by his carelessness cheapen the offer to be made.

The trunks were run in on the automobile truck, and they were thrown down on the landing in the big warehouse. Then, when the truck had departed, the young man opened up the first trunk, and dragged out bales of mink, foxes, and other lesser furs. Blecker picked them up, cut the cords, and shook out the fur. The shrewd old buyer said, as he worked them over:

"These are good ones—Alaskan, but not Alaska, either. They have been in salt water—ah! Islands, eh? Good cold islands, but not starved animals. Lots of food, eh? Oh, I know these skins—yes! Very good, prime Pacific Island skins. That's a nice fox, a big one, eh? But those are inbred foxes. Those dark ones, those freak colors—they have inbred a good deal. That's a nice Kadiak—eh? God in Heaven! A sea otter—Lord love me! I never saw such a skin, such a pelt in my life before—you—you—what! What!"

The old fur dealer pranced along from trunk to trunk as the stranger threw up the covers. There they were, folded down, not too tightly, and there they were, so that when old Bleecker lifted the pelts out by the nose, and shook out the fur, and ran his hands up and down through it, he saw them in their full glory of pelage.

"How many sea otter, Mr. Man?" He turned. "This—this—all these?"

"Sixty-three, Mr. Blecker."

"Sixty-three—and there is not ten square inches of woolly in the whole lot?"

"Not a square inch, Mr. Blecker."

"I must examine them, sir!" The old man turned. "I see that they are the most beautiful of all I have ever seen. Such a shipment! It comes to me, like a reward; I feel repaid that I have, for all my life, paid fair prices, and given my best to be honest. When I make you an offer, perhaps somebody else bid higher. I have no doubt they will. The advertisement would be so great, it is of inestimable worth, handling these skins.

"But I thank you for letting me see them. I say now, though, not less than sixty thousand dollars is my bid. I may, perhaps, give you more. Or, if you wish, I shall sell them on fifteen per cent commission, and give you the name of Lison Blecker, his unqualified approval. I should say, too, I shall pay Mrs. Shronely her commission out of this fifteen per cent—if you wish it so."

"You say—sixty thousand?" the man whispered.

"Yes, sir; cash, the minute the bank opens to-morrow morning. My check, to-night. But—take my advice. Accept the fifteen per cent offer; you are a young man; when I was young, I speculated, too."

"Yes; I'll take the fifteen per cent, Mr. Blecker. I'd rather—that's an awful price, one thousand dollars a skin, as they run!"

"Leave it to me, and I give you a receipt for these, and—and—come into the office, Mr. Man!"

They went into the private office and they sat down while Blecker dipped a pen.

"Make it to William Dasper, alias Tunis Drane!" the seller said.

"Tunis Drane? You—you—"

"Yes, sir," Drane's face flamed with shame, "I'm the man who ran away. But I'm going back, now."

"She will be in New York, shortly. Yes, you go—by the night train. Just a minute."

He turned to his safe, and opened it. He drew out bricks of currency, and he turned to Drane:

"I pay you this, ten thousand dollars on account, Mr. Drane. Please go, and at once present yourself in New York, so that everything may be cleared up, at once. There is a man, here in St. Louis, I wish—if you would—I wish you would talk to him. He is a detective; he has been investigating this whole matter of that scoundrel Takrite, and my office manager, Mrs. Shronely. It would be for me a favor. And for him some little credit. I do not know—perhaps it would not be to your advantage to be—to be—"

"Caught here?" Drane laughed. "Send for him. You are Mrs. Shronely's friend and it is her interests I must think about, even if—even if—"

"If what?" the old man asked shrewdly.

"Nothing," Drane replied shortly, and Blecker turned to the telephone.

So Volanes of the Carcajou detective agency, came down to the fur establishment, and Blecker introduced him to Drane. The two young men looked at each other, and Drane reached to shake the detective's hand, saying:

"I believe I'm wanted in New York, Mr. Volanes. The charge is attempted murder, and I'll waive extradition papers."

"Mr. Blecker—I thank you!" Volanes turned, and then to Drane. "You're all right, old man. Don't you worry. Takrite's a crook, anyhow. I'm not sure of everything else, however, so I won't say anything. When you get ready to start—"

"The next train, Mr. Volanes."

"He's a friend of Mrs. Shronely," Blecker observed, and Volanes bit his lip, and then smiled. There was a little flutter in his heart when he heard that name.

"Come out into the shed," Blecker invited Volanes. "See what our friend here has brought me! Look!"

"Sea otter!" breathed Volanes. "Lord—what a string!"

He counted them—sixty-three from that one long wire, and when he stroked a pelt he saw the black surface open up and disclose the velvet pearl beneath. Then, going in a taxi to get Volanes's suit-case, which he had always ready for instant departure, the two men caught the next train for New York.

It was no easy ride of twenty-four hours or so. It was long and tedious, but it ended at last, and at the district attorney's office they found the assistant who was in charge of the Takrite-Drane-Prolone matter. He welcomed them.

"I'm glad you showed up when you did," the attorney said. "Tell me about what happened that night Takrite was shot?"

"I was walking home with Miss Prolone, when as we were about four or five rods from her steps, a man came out of the shadow of a doorway, and clawed at me. I hit him two or three times, and he went back. I saw him draw a gun, and reached for him, on the jump. He tripped, and the gun went off."

"His gun?"

"Yes, sir; I never owned a pocket gun in my life; I carried a 22 pistol on the trap line, but that's all."

"That's what your report showed, didn't it?" the attorney turned to Volanes.

"Yes, sir; the Carcajous traced the pistol back to the clerk who sold it. Takrite said he wanted it to shoot a dog—same night he was shot."

"Well, what 'd you run away for, Drane?"

"Because I'm a—I'm a—"

"That's right; face the music, and nine times out of ten you'll be better off, especially if you're on the level, and the other fellow isn't. I'll bet she told you to beat it?"

Drane made no comment.

"Where is she?" Volanes asked.

"Out on nominal bail. Takrite committed perjury in the case. We've got him right. You'll be a witness against him, Drane. We'll have your papers straightened out to-morrow. Takrite sure is a nervy gamester—and his company was so glad to see him come back, they put their arms around my neck, and wanted to kiss me, when they found he had eighteen thousand dollars cash! It just saves them, getting that money back. You'll be in Volanes's custody, Drane, till we straighten this thing out, the way it stands now."

Drane turned to go, but waited at the door for Volanes, who took a slip of paper from the attorney, and then the two went into the corridor and out into Center Street. At the sidewalk level Volanes turned to Drane and handed him the slip of paper.

"That's her address; be at his office at ten o'clock to-morrow morning," and with that he ran across the street, and jumped onto an up-town car.

CHAPTER X.

RUN TO EARTH.

"HER address!" Drane looked at it for minutes. He put it into his pocket and started up-town, walking.

He walked clear to Forty-second Street, and every step of the way he cursed himself for a fool. He suffered more agonies than all the rest of his life put together. He had run away, instead of facing the music—and now she, that beautiful Draya Prolone, bright, vivacious, holding his love, was Mrs. Shronely.

He wiped the sweat from his forehead, and at every crowded crossing escaped with his life only by the combined efforts of chauffeurs, drivers, and shrieking bystanders. Their concern made hardly any impression on him, as he shuffled along, in his twelve-dollar suit. He knew his loneliness, now, and he understood the folly of his flight.

"But she told me to go—and I went!" he repeated. "I'd 'a' gone to the ends of the world for her—and I did! She said go, and I went three thousand—four—five thousand miles! Could a man obey better than that?"

He bit his tongue at his own grim humor. Taking his suit-case out of check he walked on again. He thought of going first to one hotel, then to another, and finally picked a Lexington Avenue place, and found a room. Then he went tramping again, till, suddenly, he looked up and saw that right there was where he had fought Takrite. Right there he had seen Draya for the last time —right there—

He looked at the slip of paper. It was her old address. Right there—just three or four rods distant—was the front door. He swallowed—and swallowed again. He stopped and looked up at the doorway, then went on to the end of the block, and returned. "Probably he's there—with her," he thought. "But—but I'd like to see her again! Gosh, I would!"

He went up to the other corner, and stopped. "Gosh, I would!" he repeated. Then, with sudden desperate decision, he declared: "Gosh! I shall!"

He strode back, and up the nine steps, into the entrance of the old red brick, four-story building. He rang the bell. A large lady of much dignity looked at his negligee collar, his ill-tied cravat, and his general unkemptness, and demanded:

"Well, sir?"

"I'd like to see Mrs. Shronely, for a minute," he replied, apologetically.

"Mrs. Shronely? I don't—oh! Yes—um-m. Who'll I say's here, young man?"

"Drane—Tunis Drane."

The woman started, stared, gazed sharply, and gave him another over-all.

"Come in," she said. "Sit there!"

He sat on a little chair, about as comfortable as an iron mowing-machine seat. In a minute, down the stairway came a slender figure, and he could not look up. He caught the odor of musk, and he raised his eyes, as though to an executioner. It was Draya.

He stood up, clutching his soft felt hat in both hands.

"I came—I came to beg your pardon," he blinked. "I'd come before, if I'd—if I hadn't run so far and so fast, when you told me to beat it."

"And is that the way you greet me?" she demanded severely, for she had raised her face to him, and was trying to look him in his evasive eyes.

"I took them sea otters to Blecker," he added. "If I'd known you were coming to —to Lark, I'd waited. I didn't know, but I read you were with Blecker. I took them there."

"You—you really had sea otters?" she asked. "How many?"

"Sixty-three!"

"Wha—what! And—and—oh! You poor simp!"

She threw her arms around his neck, and kissed him. He stood with his arms straight down his side, in helpless resignation. She sprang back, and glared at him.

"What do you mean?" she demanded angrily.

"I mean! I mean—" he repeated, blinking, and wiping his forehead.

"Sure! Is that the way you act when—when—" She blushed, and could not speak in words the thing she had done.

Somehow, a merciful subconsciousness gave him a glimmering. He blurted out: "You see—I—I kinda hate to—to—you see—a married woman! I—"

For a moment, she gazed at him with incredulous fascination.

"A married woman?" she repeated. "Even if I was married, I'd expect—um-m."

She gazed at him, with increasing understanding, now. The more she understood, the more radiant her countenance became. She smiled as she had never smiled in his presence before.

In dumb misery he stood there. If he had suffered while thinking about her, now in her presence he reached the limit of his misery. Never had she seemed so beautiful—never so lovely—never so almost, but not quite, irresistible.

"And you wouldn't kiss a married woman?" she asked.

"Not—not *much*." He shook his head.

She looked at him, laughing.

"A widow is lots safer, because she knows more," she remarked, with the utmost of apparent irrelevancy possible. He looked at her, to see what she meant. She waited patiently. By and by he began to show some signs of awakening intelligence, almost human in its development.

"You—you didn't—aren't married?" he gasped. "It was just—just—"

"You were William Dasper?" she mocked him.

"And you—you were Mrs. Ella Shronely! Just—"

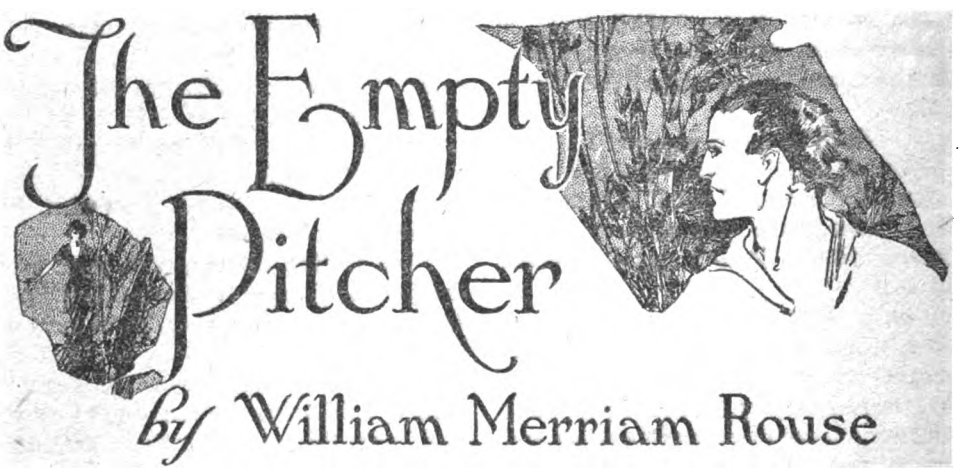
"If I'd been married, and not a widow, I'd been Mrs. Dasper Shronely, wouldn't I?" she asked. "And I'm a widow—if I'm not Draya Prolone, the same as always. Wouldn't you kiss a widow, even?"

He gave one wild look of comprehension, and then he said:

"Maid or widow! Course I'd—I'll—"

Then, to her satisfaction, he demonstrated.

(The End.)



NO one ever said that Dirk Parker was a fool, or even half-witted. They called him queer, and accepted him as they had accepted his father, the hermit, partly because neither one had been known to do harm to man or beast, and partly because it is the way of people in the mountains to accept that which is permanent. If a thing is not dangerous they let it have its own way under the sun and stars. And Dirk Parker was no more dangerous than Coon Mountain, where he

lived in a house of hewn logs with his dog, Tip.

Dirk was as like as man can be to the gods. The long, smooth muscles rose and fell under a skin as tough as leather and as soft as velvet. His head was of the contour that the Greeks idealized, except that the jaw and chin were heavier, and underneath a crown of waving, sun-scorched hair his blue eyes flamed unafraid upon the world that he knew. When he rolled in his blankets at night it was not because he was tired, but because he knew the deliciousness of rest; and at gray dawn he awoke without that moment of dull heart-sickness that men know so well.

So he might have lived and died but for the immemorial thing. She came, in his case, gloriously; out of another life, and with the beauty of things he did not understand making rare and delicate her being. Parker saw her from a spot of bald rock on one of the half-dozen peaks of Coon Mountain. He had gone there because it was part of his happiness to see the beginning and the end of day from a high place, and at first her silhouette against the rose and silver-gray of the sunset was like a leaf upon the perfection of a blue pool.

Then Tip, rising from his master's feet, growled uncertainly. She moved. Dirk saw her, with the caressing shadows across the loveliness of her face. He knew that something had happened to him and to the serenity of the mountain, but he did not care; and he stepped to meet the unknown joyously, and like a youth going into battle for the first time, he walked toward the woman. Tip whined: and she smiled at both of them.

Tip whined again, and the muscle-knotted hind quarters of his hard little body cringed; but the man went toward her with a swinging step and wonder in his heart that anything so nearly kin to the beauty of his forests could be in the form of woman. He had seen summer visitors to the mountains, and talked with some of them, and he knew more or less well the strong-limbed girls who grew there; but in his experience there had been no such creature as this. Straight and graceful, with soft, red lips.

"You are the hermit!" she announced, in a voice that was not out of place there upon the mountaintop.

"No," replied Dirk, and his own smile broke and died. "My father is dead."

"But"—she stared, for he enunciated vowel and consonant with almost startling correctness—"but you are the man who lives alone here?"

"Alone?" He raised his brown-shirted arm in an inclusive but half-arrested gesture which would have indicated Tip and the mountains and the darkening heavens. He stopped it because he did not know whether the girl would understand: people often did not understand the things he said and did, and that was one of the reasons why he kept so much to himself. He had no feeling of aloofness from mankind; merely a preference for the companionships of the forest.

He knew that the girl got the meaning of his word and gesture—he realized this a moment after he had spoken. Her swift look of appraisal held an added interest, and Parker was as keen as his dog to read the movement of facial muscles or the inflection of a voice. If she had been one of those who stupidly grinned at him he would have stood in quiet dignity until she went away; instead he now gave her that measure of whole-hearted welcome which Tip gave to those humans whom he accepted on first sight.

"I will show you anything you want to see," he said. "I will get you anything you want to have."

She drew in her breath quickly, and he felt a little wave of fear from her, notwithstanding the low exclamation of pleasure that she gave.

"They said you'd do that, if you liked me," she murmured; "but to-night—"

"I know!" he smiled. "Women do not like the mountains after dark—and many men are the same. To-morrow—any day—and to-night I will take you down the mountain when you wish. You are one who comes from the hotel. They look and talk differently—I know."

The puzzled look upon her face he had seen before upon other faces. It did not trouble him. He knew that there was

something about himself which they found strange, these people from far places. Was it not the same when Tip saw a new kind of animal?

"You speak such perfect English!" she exclaimed, but as though she were talking to herself.

"English?" he echoed. This was vague to him, and so was her last sentence. "I speak well because my father read to me out of a book that had wisdom in it."

"A book? What book?"

"I don't know." He knew very well that it was a black book, but she had not asked the color. "Do not tell that I have told you about the book—a fool's mouth is his destruction. The people who live here come and ask questions. I can't make them go away without hurting them, and I can't hurt them."

"Are you afraid?" Her eyes sparkled and danced in the last light of the sunset.

He shook his head, searching her face. He knew that word just as he knew hundreds of sentences from the book, and he knew that it was the thing that made a rabbit run from Tip; but so far as his own experience was concerned it did not exist. Nor did Tip know anything about it.

"You *could* hurt them!" She stepped forward tentatively, with her eyes watchfully upon his face, and touched with slender, delicate fingers the hard, broad surface of his shoulder muscles. The fingers drew back as though from hot iron.

"I could break them in pieces," he said, indifferently. He shrugged. "They'd suffer—they'd die."

"But rabbits? And—and game?" He knew that she was probing him, and from her, strangely, he liked it. He liked to have her take interest in the things he did just as he would ask to know about the things she did when the time came. She had jumped a wide break, from men and women to the creatures who lived in the woods. No one had even done that before.

"I do not kill," he said, "but sometimes Tip does. We agree about everything but that."

"Why don't you?"

"It hurts." For the first time a little shadow of coldness fell across his heart.

"You are the most wonderful man I've ever seen!" she breathed, and all the sheen of that sunset hour came back to him. He lifted his head and laughed.

"The others say that I'm queer," he said, "and you say I'm wonderful!"

"Show me the way down to the hotel!" she demanded suddenly. "I must get there before dark—and I have to dress for dinner."

Through this little maze of words Parker saw and absorbed the truth, although he did not quite clearly understand the literal meaning of what she said. Dressing for dinner was to him only a little more comprehensible than the square root of minus one, but he knew that she wanted to end their talk and so he conducted her swiftly and surely down from that peak, by ways known only to himself and Tip, to a point from which she could see the lighted blur of the hotel. Then he sank back into the bosom of his mountain.

Dirk Parker and Tip moved over ledges and across ravines as lightly as the summer breeze that stirred maple and oak and fir until they came to the cabin. It lay in the cleft in the highest of Coon Mountain's four peaks—a spot well chosen by the father of Parker for shelter in winter and for seclusion from interruption. No native ever went there because there was nothing to go for; and no visitor, except the few who climbed for the sake of climbing, mounted that far.

The hermit's son was to be met with lower down among the gray granite shoulders, and why should they climb so far to see a bare log house? Dirk was more than glad that they did not find his house worth visiting. He was willing to talk with them, himself, but it made him feel muddied to have strangers come tramping over his threshold.

The house itself was distinguished only by its bare neatness. There was one room; very snug and warm. At the north end sat the stove, capacious and built both for cooking and heat. At the south end were two bunks, the upper one now unused, although it was filled with fine balsam branches. A rough table and two backless benches completed the furniture. There

was a cupboard for provisions, and some shelves filled with dishes which Dirk dusted carefully as time required. An old-fashioned zinc trunk held the changes of clothing made necessary by the changing seasons.

It was supper time when Dirk and Tip entered the house. From the stove, which had been filled with hickory chunks, Parker took a kettle. In it was a stew of seasoned vegetables that would have tempted a man more strong than Esau. He filled two bowls, one of about a quart and the other proportioned to a man whose body was in movement during all of the daylight hours.

Together they sat down upon the floor, and together they ate from their dishes—Dirk lifting up gracefully the solid morsels with his fingers, and when they were all gone drinking the liquor as though it had been water.

Tip took his food after the manner of all dogs; white in the lamplight, licking his chops, and wagging his tail in satisfaction after the meal was finished. He was a breed of mixtures and sagacity—part fox, part bull-terrier, and with spots reminiscent of coach ancestry. He knew many things that are not within the range of dogs house trained and pedigreed. Parker had found him abandoned, the undesired of a litter of pups.

Darkness had come, even to the mountaintop, and it was Dirk Parker's bedtime; but on this night he did not lie down to sleep with Tip at his feet and the night wind blowing through his house. Instead he sat upon the floor, with his legs crossed under him, and stared out into the starlit spaces. Tip lay in front of him, his soft brown eyes fastened upon his master's face with a wrinkle of worry between them.

Parker knew that something had happened to him since he went to stand upon that bald cheek of granite and watch the sun go down. Specifically, he knew that he had seen a woman and desired her for his own. This was the woman he wanted—he had never looked upon another with the same eyes.

Although he knew little of the experience of other men with which to compare his own, he understood that this feeling was love. It was two-edged — terrible and beautiful. Without having been told in so many words, he knew it was the thing that had sent his father to seek this home in the shelter of Coon Mountain: it was mentioned in various ways in the black book which now lay hidden and useless under the balsam of the top bunk.

Dirk himself could not read the book, but from it, and from what his father had said he had learned that love bound man and man, and dog and man, and men and mountains, and so on, with an invisible web-work that included all things.

This was the woman he wanted, and, therefore, he would tell her so, and take her after a little time. A squirrel could not be touched at the first meeting. It was only after days of patient waiting that he was able to take a squirrel or a bird in his hands. It might even be more difficult with a woman. As to this he could not even speculate, for the human beings with whom he had come in contact through the twenty-five years of his life, except only his father, had been brothers of less kin than the trees.

The woman would come back. He would give her all that he had. He would show himself to her as he felt himself to be—clean and friendly and brave. When she knew these things about him, particularly that he could lift a dead weight greater than any man in that country, then she would become his woman, and he could put his hands upon her. He believed this without any rift of doubt.

For Dirk Parker, out of either the wisdom or the folly of his father, had been brought up with his soul in the tender light of daybreak. He was neither man nor child—more dog than either. He thought as a dog thinks. He felt as a dog feels. There were things in the book that he could not understand because of this, and he, groping for more light, did not even know that he had not yet come to the full stature of manhood.

He slept that night with a half smile upon his firm lips. The days that had been so fair were now to be gilded for him, and he awoke with the impression of joy

still in his mind. He made breakfast of salted corn-meal mush, and ate it with Tip upon the floor, but for this meal he used a spoon.

He used the spoon well, holding it poised lightly in his fingers so that no hostess could have complained, for his father had taught him how. But he considered that spoon folly, and he had taken it from the shelf only as a concession to the woman whom he desired.

That these unimportant things interested them he knew very well from what he had seen. And who was he to pass judgment? To him the sheen of his knife-blade was more important than a cloudburst, and yet he knew that its cutting edge was not affected by a spot of rust.

That day he met the girl at the edge of the pine woods near the hotel. He had gone there instinctively, and she had come forth from their trimmed and pampered lawns just as he had expected that she would.

He stood waiting, with a hand upon the swelling throat of Tip, until she entered the woods and was screened from the vision of those who sat upon the hotel porch or knocked little balls about upon the lawn. Then he met her, making his presence known in advance by a careless footstep so that she would not be frightened. He saw the light of interest spring into her dark eyes.

"Come with me!" he invited, smiling. "I have got something to give you to-day."

Her lips drew apart, showing teeth more white and even than any he had ever seen in any countrywoman's mouth. He knew she had started out to find him and yet was startled at the meeting. Thus it was sometimes with other things he had tamed. He turned with a swing of indifference and led the way upward.

"Come," he repeated. "You will want what I am going to give you."

She followed. He had known that she would. Thus it was with deer. In a little while she drew up beside him, for he walked instead of bounding, as was his custom, and her lips were within a yard of his face when she spoke.

"What are you going to give me?" she asked, and then drew back quickly.

He understood that drawing back perfectly, or thought he did. Thus all the lesser souls in the forest had drawn back at first—but inevitably they came again when they felt the feel of kindness such as he knew went out from him to them.

"I am going to give you to-day all those things that can be held in the hands, and looked at and tasted and smelled," he said. "It is too soon for the precious things."

She lifted her head and laughed. He saw her throat against the collar of a silk-lined jacket, round and fair in the calm sunlight. He was not in the least hurt that she did not believe him, for he had learned that suspicion and disbelief were an inherent part of those who lived in valleys and in villages.

Dirk led her that day over a long road—rather over a long way that was marked by no road. He fed her once with corn bread from his pockets and raspberries and spring water. They did not talk much, partly because of his occupation in making a careful way for her through undergrowth and places impassable to her feet. What was said was not with reference to themselves, but to things of the woods, and when they came at last to the spot he had had in mind from the beginning, she was as ignorant of its nature as she had been from the beginning.

It was a mountainside of perpendicular cliffs, streaked with red rust here and there in titanic markings. Parker had chosen his approach so that they stood face to face with the terraced height, looking across a wedge-shaped valley from another and lower peak. Unconsciously dramatic in making his great gift, he turned and looked at her and lifted an arm toward the rust-streaked mountain.

"There!" he said quietly. "Do you know what this is?"

In her face the interest that had held her to the hard trip flickered and died. He saw the same look that he had seen in other eyes—a questioning. Her beautifully curved lower lip hung just a trifle loose as she gazed on that to her unlovely sight.

"Well?"

The tone chilled him; but he smiled in the confidence of his own knowledge as he bent down and almost without searching found a dark, rusty lump that he held up for her to see. He took out his knife and held the two objects side by side.

"They are the same," he said triumphantly. "One is iron and the other steel. I don't know how to make iron into steel, but men do it, and this mountain on which we stand is full of iron!"

He watched varying emotions chase themselves across her face. She looked from his face to the red streaks on the opposite mountain and back again to his anxious gaze.

"Iron ore," she murmured. "Still, I don't understand just what you are trying to do."

"That mountain there is full of iron," he replied, quivering with the joy of the announcement he had to make. "Years ago men found that it could not be made into steel because it cost too much money—there is something in it besides iron. My father knew. He explained it to me. He gave me this mountain here. And the iron here is fit for the swords of angels. That is what he said.

"That lump is a piece we dug up. We worked a week here. He said that if ever I needed money I was to buy this land and sell the iron. I have some money hidden under the floor. It is very simple, but it is a secret, and I have never told any one but you. Now I give it to you. Go and buy the land. Then you will be rich enough so that you can get anything, no matter what it is."

"But—" He read doubt and hope and wonder as she hesitated. "But why do you give this to me?"

"I shall give you everything," he said. "This is enough for to-day. We will go back. A man named Ephraim Shattuck owns five hundred acres here. Buy it. Then come back. Do you want my money?"

"Yes." She reached out and took hold of a sapling for support, and he longed to put his thick arm behind her shoulders. "I am using my last money this—this summer. I—but you can't understand—"

"You are very happy," he laughed. "Come."

He started off briskly, but not too fast for her slower feet, and he did not look back except when he held branches out of her path, until they stood in the little clearing that surrounded his log house.

"Wait here," he commanded gently. "I will bring the money. You must not cross the threshold until I carry you over. My father said it should be like that."

He went to the house without waiting for a reply, and found the little tin box that had lain undisturbed for ten years. underneath a board in the floor. He did not know how much money was in it; he knew only that it contained a thick roll of green paper that his father had said would buy old Shattuck's land if ever the desire came to him.

He gave it to the woman as he would have given food from his mouth to Tip; knowing that it was valuable, but moved by the essence of love, which is giving. She took it. Her lips, grown moist, parted in wonder.

"Tell me your name," he said. "I must know that so I can say it over to myself when you are not here."

"Evelyn," she whispered. Then she turned and hurried away into the woods. He stood motionless, smiling tolerantly. The sound of her going came back for minutes. He thought it was because of approaching darkness that she hurried, and, after he had shut Tip in the house, he went along a course parallel to hers to make sure that she found the way down to the hotel without trouble.

Not the next day did he see the girl Evelyn, nor for many days after that. For weeks he went to the edge of the pine woods and waited, calmly hoping, but she did not come forth, and he would not go down there after her to be stared at by the visitors and grinned at by the little jumping bugs that served them. He waited in the peace and dignity of his own, knowing that wild things were not tamed in a day, and believing that she would come to his hand in good time.

Men came to the mountain that he had given to Evelyn. They sank a shaft for

a few feet and carried away baskets of iron ore. This he saw from the screen of the woods, and was well satisfied. She was, undoubtedly, doing as he had told her to do, and she would have plenty of money to buy all things that her heart might desire.

His mind leaped ahead and saw her bringing silks and silver dishes to his cabin; saw her with a string of sparkling stones about her neck and more of them upon her fingers. He had learned that women liked these things.

It was early autumn when he saw her again. He had gone every day patiently to the edge of the pine woods to look across the pasture toward the trimmed neatness of the hotel grounds in the faith that at last she would come out as she had in the beginning, walking straight up toward the sharp heights of Coon Mountain.

And at last she came. He picked her instantly from the group about the hotel porch, and he waited through a long hour until her feet took their way toward the pasture.

There was a difference in her clothes, now. He could not have described it, but he knew that it must come from the money he had been able to place in her hands, and he was glad. She even walked with a new dignity, among the hummocks and boulders of the pastures. There were young cattle there, and he would have gone to meet her, but that she pleased him so well as she came gracefully toward the mountain. He waited.

It did not seem to surprise her, beyond a momentary start, that he should step out of a clump of young cedars. She smiled. Eyes and teeth and lips and hair were the same. But there was a new spirit behind them. And her gray suit was as tight fitting as the skin of a fox. Her flaring crimson cravat warmed it and made it seem almost a part of her body. Dirk Parker knew nothing of tailoring, but the mountains had taught him form and coloring, and he thrilled to the exquisiteness of her appearance.

"I want to thank you," she began. Her voice lingered—her gloved hand went out toward him.

He took that hand in both of his own long, hard, lean hands, and held it fast. He drew her to him, with a smile upon his lips and the flame of happiness in his heart.

"You've come back!" he cried softly. "I love you—and you've come back!"

It was long, as such spaces of time are measured, before he understood that she was trying to wrench away from him; before he knew that the movements of her body were not those of the willing female's false struggle. But at last he realized that she was pressing against his chest and striking at his face because she did not want her body to be close to his. And he let her go, instantly, so that she staggered back a few steps.

"I love you!" he cried, with a thickness upon his tongue. "I don't mean wrong—I love you!"

"But you!" She moved farther backward. "You're—common—you—"

He understood. Not the word that she said in the way that she used it, but the tone of her voice. From that he got all that he needed to know. He pointed toward the pasture.

"Go." It was as though a monarch of the East had said the word to one of his women. She went, and with her head lowered.

Mechanically Dirk walked to the edge of the woods; and Tip followed him, downcast. The dog whom he had neglected through these latter weeks was still to his hand. He realized this even as he let his feet take him after the woman. He saw her go out into the sunlight of the pasture. He knew that something was happening to him. The slow metamorphosis became complete in that moment, and the soul of Dirk Parker changed from that of dog to man.

He saw her turn, hesitatingly. She came toward him with her lips parted as though to speak many words, and with a light in her eyes. But to him nothing that she could say would make any difference now. In the splendor and honor of his manhood he waited until she was within reach of his voice, and then he spoke.

"I don't want you," he said. "You empty pitcher."

Serapion

by Francis Stevens

Author of "Citadel of Fear," "Claimed," "Avalon," etc.

WHAT HAS ALREADY HAPPENED

INTRODUCED by his friend Nils Berquist to Jimmy Moore and his strange wife, Alicia, Clayton Barbour, who tells the story, accepted from Moore an invitation to attend a mediumistic séance at the latter's house.

Despite Nils's threat to Moore, half serious, half earnest, that he would kill him before he would permit him to loose the dark forces lurking on the hinterland of the world of sight and sense, Barbour was unimpressed. So, also, Nils's warning prophesy of evil fell upon deaf ears.

Accompanied by his fiancée, Roberta Whitingfield, Barbour journeyed to the home of the Moores, which was the half of a double house, beautifully kept as to externals, whereas its twin was shabby, unkempt, a veritable beggar among dwellings. And on the roof, as it seemed to Barbour, the moonlight's flood lay like a drift of snow, startlingly real. This he was to remember.

Alicia Moore was the medium, a pale, incredibly thin woman, with eyes large, lustrous, burning as with an inward fire. And before the séance began she strove to warn Barbour. Then, following a number of demonstrations from various "spirits": "Maudie," "Horace," and "Jason Gibbs," who, Moore explained, was the real control, a great black hand materialized suddenly out of the air, touching Roberta's face.

This was too much for the girl, who, despite Moore's reassurances, rose to leave the room with Barbour. And then, without a warning flicker, the library-lamp went out, leaving the place in impenetrable darkness.

CHAPTER V.

THE FIFTH PRESENCE.

THE difference between light and the lack of it is the difference between freedom and captivity, and the real reason that we pity a blind man is because he is a prisoner. This is true under normal conditions. Add to darkness dread of the supernatural, and the inevitable sum is panic.

Till that moment I doubt if Roberta or I had believed the black hand which touched her to be of other than natural origin. Ingrained thought-habit had accused Moore of trickery, even while it condemned the trick as unpleasant.

That was while the light burned. One instant later we were trapped prisoners of the dark, and instincts centuries old flung off thought-habit like a tissue cloak.

What had been a quiet, modern room became, in that instant, the devil-haunted jungle of forebears infinitely remote.

And it didn't help matters that just then "Horace" elected to be heard again. Alicia visible, Horace had seemed a vocal feat on her part. Alicia unseen, Horace became a discarnate fiend. That he was a fiend, vulgar and incongruous, only made his fiendishness more intolerable.

"How's this for a joke?" it inquired sardonically. "I never did like that lamp! Let's give it away, Jimmy. Tell your young fool friend to take the lamp away with him."

Soundlessly, without warning, something hard and slightly warm touched my cheek. I struck out wildly. My fist crashed through glass, there was a great smash and clatter from the floor, and mingled it with shout upon shout of fairly maniacal mirth. Then Moore's voice, cool but irritated:

"You'll have to stop these tricks, Horace. I'm ashamed of you! Breaking a valuable lamp like that. Our guests will believe you a common spirit of poltergeist!"

"Moore, if you don't throw on the lights, I'll kill you for this!"

This story began in The Argosy for June 19.

My own voice shook with mingled rage and dread. Of course, it might be he who had brought the lamp and held it against my face, but the very senselessness of the trick made it terrible in a queer, unhuman way.

"Stand still!" he commanded sharply. "Barbour, Miss Whitingfield, you are not children! Nothing will harm you, if you keep quiet. It was your own yielding to anger and fear that brought this crude force into play. Did it actually hit you with the lamp, Barbour?"

"I hit the lamp, but—"

"Exactly! Now keep quiet. Horace, may I turn on the lights?"

"If you do, you'll be sorry, Jimmy! Call me poltergeist or plain Dutch, there's somebody worse than me here to-night."

"What do you mean, Horace?"

"Oh, somebody that came in along with your scared young friends. He's a joker, too, but I don't like him. He wants to get through the gates altogether, and stay through. If he does, a lot of people will be sorry. You say I'm rough, but say, Jimmy, this fellow is worse than rough. He's smooth! Get me? Too smooth. I'm keeping him back, and you know I'm stronger in the dark."

"Very well." I heard Moore laugh amusedly. His quiet matter-of-courseness should have deleted all terror from the affair. He was carrying on a conversation with a rather silly, rather vulgar man, of whom he was not afraid, but whose vagaries he indulged for reasons of expediency. That was the sound of it.

But the *sense* of it—there in the blackness—was such an indescribable horror to me as I cannot convey by words. There was more to this feeling than fear of Horace. I learned what nerves meant that night. If mine had all been on the outside of my skin, crowling, expectant of shock, I could have suffered no more keenly. Coward? Wait to judge that till you learn what the uncomprehended expectancy meant for me.

"Very well," laughed Moore. "But don't break any more lamps, Horace—please! Have some consideration for my pocketbook."

"Money! We haven't any pants-pockets my side of the line," Horace chuckled. "If I'm to keep the smooth fellow back, you must let me use my strength. Let me have my fun, Jimmy! What's a lamp or so between pals? And just to keep things interesting, *suppose we bring out the big fellow in the closet?*"

I heard a thud from the direction of the cabinet, a low chuckle, and then a huge panting sound. It sounded like an enormous animal. We had a sense of something living and enormous that had suddenly come out of nothing into the room.

"The hand!" screamed Roberta sharply. "It's the black-hand thing!"

I was hideously afraid that she was right. With her own clutching little hands on my arm, I sprang, dragging her with me. I didn't spring for where I thought Moore was, nor for where I supposed the door might be. There were only two thoughts in my head. One of a monstrous and wholly imaginary black giant; the other, a passionate desire for light.

By pure chance I brought up against the wall just beside a brass plate inset with two magical, blessed buttons. My fingers found them. Got the wrong button—the right one.

Flash! And we were out of demon-land and in a commonplace room again.

Not quite commonplace, though. True, no black, impossible giant inhabited it. The vast panting sound had passed, and though the lamp lay among the splinters of its wrecked shade and my hand was bleeding, a broken lamp and cut hand are possible incidentals of the ordinary.

But that woman in the chair was not!

Writhing, shrieking, foaming creatures like that have their place in a hospital—or a sick man's delirium—but not rightfully in an evening's entertainment for two unexpectant young people. Bert took one look and buried her face against my vest in an ecstasy of fear.

Moore was beside his wife, swiftly unclasping the steel manacles that held her, but finding time for a glaring side-glance at me which expressed white-hot and concentrated rage.

I didn't understand. Alicia's previous

spasms or seizures, though less violent than this, had been bad enough. Why should Moore eye me like that, when if any one had a right to be furious it was I?

"The lights!" moaned Bert against my vest. "You turned on the lights, and it hurt her. I've read that somewhere— Oh, Clay, why don't you do something to help her and make her stop that horrible screaming?"

Moore heard and turned again, snarling. "You get out of here, Barbour! You've done harm enough!"

"Sha'n't I—sha'n't we call a doctor?" I stammered.

He didn't answer. Released, Alicia had subsided limply, a black heap in the chair, face on knees. The gurgling shrieks had lowered to a series of long, agonizing moans. I thought she was dying, and in a confused way I felt that both Roberta and Moore blamed me.

The moans, too, had ceased. Was she dead?

Now Moore was trying to lift his wife out of the chair—and failing, for some reason. Instinctively I pushed Roberta aside and moved to help him.

And then, at last, that happened for which all the rest had been a prelude—for which my whole life had been a prelude, as I was to learn one day. There came—how can I phrase it?

It was not a darkness, for I saw. It was not a vacuum, for most certainly I—every one of us—continued to breathe. It was like—you know what happens sometimes in a thunderstorm? There is a hushed moment, when it is as if a mighty, invisible being had drawn in its breath—not breath of air, but of *force*. If you live in the suburbs and have alternating current, the lights go out—as if the current had been sucked back.

Static has the upper hand of kinetic. A moment, and kinetic will rebel in a blinding, crashing river of fire from sky to earth. But till then, between earth and clouds there is a tension so terrific that it gives the awful sense of a void.

That happened in the room where we stood, though the force involved was not the physical one of electricity. There was the hushed moment, the sense of awful tension—of void—of strength sucked back like the current—

Without knowing how, I became aware that all the life in the room was suddenly, dreadfully centralizing around one of us. That one was Alicia.

I saw Moore move back from her. He had gone ghastly pale, and he waved his hands queerly. The straining sense of void which was also centralization increased. A numbness crept over me.

The invisible had drawn in its breath of pure force, and my life was undoubtedly a part of it.

There came a stirring of the black heap in the chair. Inexplicably, I felt as well as saw it. As if, standing by the wall, I was also in the chair. Roberta shivered. She was out of my sight, standing slightly behind me, but I felt that, too. No two of us there were in physical contact, and yet some strange interfusion of consciousness was linking us more closely than the physical.

Again Alicia stirred. She cried out inarticulately. The centralization was around her, but not by her will. I felt a surge of resentment that was not mine, but Alicia's. Then I knew that there were more than four of us present in the room. A fifth was here—invisible, strong, unifying the strength of us all for its own purpose—for a leap across the intangible barriers and into the living world—

Numbness was on me, cold dread, and a sense of some danger peculiarly personal to myself.

It was coming—now—now—

With another cry, Alicia shot suddenly erect. Her arms went out in a wide sweep that seemed to be struggling in an attempt to push something from her.

"Serapion!" she cried, and: "You! Back! Go back—go back—go back— Oh, *you, Serapion!*"

When kinetic revolts against static, blinding fire results.

The tension in that room *let go* as suddenly as the lightning stroke, though I was the only one to feel it fully.

My body reeled against the wall. My spirit—I—the ego—reeled with it—beyond

it—down—down—into darkness absolute—and into a nullity deeper than darkness's self.

CHAPTER VI.

THE POWER OF A NAME.

SPEED. In outer space there is room for it, and necessity. Between our sun and the nearest star where one may grow warm again there is space that a light ray needs centuries to cross.

The cold is cruel, and a wind blows there more biting than the winds of earth. Little, cold stars rush by like far-separated lamps on a country road, and double meteors, twin blazing eyes, swing down through the long, black reaches. It is hard to avoid these, when they sweep so close, and one's hands are numb on the steering-wheel.

But one can't slow for that—nor even for a frightened voice at one's elbow, pleading, protesting, begging for the slowness that will let the cold overtake and annihilate us.

"The cold!" I shouted against the wind. "Cold!"

"Well, if you're cold," wailed the harassed voice, "why don't you slow down? Clay! Clayton Barbour! I'll never ride again in a car with you, Clayton, if you don't slow down!"

Another pair of twin meteors rushed curving toward us. We avoided them, kept our course by the fraction of a safe margin, and as we did so the limitless vistas of interstellar space seemed to close in sharply and solidify.

Infinite shrank to finite with the jolt of a collision—and it was almost a real one. I swung to the left and barely avoided the tail of a farmer's wagon, ambling sedately along the road ahead of us. Then I not only slowed, but stopped, while the wagon creaked prosaically by. I sat at the wheel of a motor-car—my own car—and that was Roberta Whitingfield beside me.

"Sixty miles an hour!" she was saying indignantly. "You haven't touched the siren once, and you are sitting so that I can't get at it. It's very fortunate that mother didn't come! She would never let me ride with you again!"

I said nothing. Desperately I was trying to adjust the unadjustable.

This road was real. The numbness and chill were passing, and the air of a summer night blew warm on my cheek. That wild rush of the spirit through space was already fading into place as a dream memory.

But there had been some kind of an hiatus in realities. My last definite memory was of—Alicia Moore. Alicia—upright—rebellious—crying out a name.

"*Serapion!*"

"Clay!" A note of concern had replaced Roberta's indignation. "Why do you sit there so still? Answer me! Are you ill? What is the matter?"

"Nothing."

That was a lie, of course, but instinctive as self-protection. I must get straight somehow, but I wouldn't confide the need even to Roberta. In the most ordinary tone I apologized for my reckless driving and started the car again. We were on a familiar road, outside the city, but one that would take us by roundabout ways to our home in the suburbs.

I drove slowly, for it was very necessary that Roberta should talk. By listening I might be able to get straight without betraying myself, and indeed, before we reached home, I had a fairly clear idea of what had happened in the blank interim.

A first wild surmise that the Moore episode had been a dream in its entirety was banished almost at once. As nearly as I could gather, without direct questioning, from the time when I reeled back against the wall until my return to self-consciousness some sixty minutes later, I had behaved so normally in outward appearance that not even Roberta had seen a difference.

My body had evidently not fallen to the floor, nor showed any signs of fainting or swoon. Alicia seemed to have returned to her senses at the same time that I lost mine, for Roberta spoke of her hostess's quiet air of indifference that amounted almost to scorn for the concern that we—Bert and *I*, mind you!—expressed for her.

Moore, for his part, it seemed, had re-

covered his temper and been rather apologetic and anxious that I, at least, should repeat my visit. I had been non-committal on the subject—for which Roberta now commended me—and then we had come away together.

After that, the hallucination I had suffered, of myself as a disembodied entity, careering from one planetary system to another, had synchronized with an actual career in the car where road-lamps simulated stars and occasional motors traveling in the opposite direction provided the stimuli for my dream-meteors.

A man hypnotized might have done what I did, and as successfully. To myself, then, I said that I had been hypnotized. That in a manner yet to be explained either Moore or his wife had hypnotized me and allowed me to leave their house under that influence. I tried to determine what reckoning I should have with them later. But it was a failure. I was frankly scared.

An hour had been jerked bodily out of my conscious life. If, in the ordinary and orthodox manner, I had lain insensible through that hour, it wouldn't have mattered so much. Instead of that, an I that was not I appeared to have taken charge of my affairs and in such a manner that a person very near and dear to me had perceived nothing wrong. It was that which frightened me.

As the last traces of daze and shock released my mind, the instinct to keep its lapse a secret only grew stronger. Fortunately I found concealment easy. Speeding was not so far from my occasional habit that Roberta had thought much of that part of the episode. Her vigorous protests had been largely on account of my failure to use the siren.

Dropping that subject with her usual quick good-nature, she talked of our remarkable first experience with a "real medium," and disclosed the fact—not surprising, perhaps—that she had been considerably less impressed than I. In retrospect she blamed her own nerves for most of the excitement.

"I may be unfair, Clay," she confided, "but truly, I can't help believing that Mrs. Moore is just a clever, hysterical woman who has deluded poor Mr. Moore into a faith in 'spirit voices.'"

"The black hand? The little flames?"

"Did we really see them? Don't you think the woman may have some kind of hypnotic power, like—oh, like the mango trick that everybody's heard they do in India? You know. A tree grows right up out of the ground while you watch; but it doesn't, really, of course. You're hypnotized, and only think you see it. Couldn't everything we saw and heard to-night have been a—a kind of hypnotic trick? And—now, with all the screaming and fuss she had made, Mrs. Moore was so calm and cool when we left! I think it was all put on, and the rest was hypnotism."

"You're a very clever little girl, Bobby," I commended, and meant it. If there was one thing I wished to believe, it was that Alicia Moore had faked.

We knew nearly as little about hypnotism as we did of psychic phenomena, real or so-called. But the word had a good sound to me. I had been hypnotized. Hypnotized! That Fifth Presence in the room had existed only in my own overborne imagination. The whole affair was—

"Berty," I said, "we've been through a highly unpleasant experience, and it's my fault. Nils warned me against those people, but I was stubborn mule enough to believe I wished to know more of them. I don't, and we don't—you and I. The truth is, girly, I feel pretty foolish over the whole business. Had no right to take you to such a place. Downright dangerous—queer, irresponsible people like that! Say, d'you mind not telling Cathy, for instance?"

"If you won't tell mother!"

She giggled. I could picture myself relating that weird and unconventional tale to the stately St. Cecilian! Up went my right hand.

"Hear me swear! I, Clayton S. Barbour, do solemnly vow silence—"

"Full name, or it isn't legal!" trilled the girl beside me.

"Oh, very well! I, Clayton Serapion Barbour, do—"

I stopped with a tightening of the throat. As the word "Serapion" passed my lips,

the Fifth Presence had shut down close about me.

Out of space—time—wrapped away in cloudy envelopes of oblivion—

"Clayton!" A clear young voice out of the clouds. They shriveled to nothing, and I was loosed to my world again. "Why, Clayton!" repeated Roberta. "How did that woman know your middle name?"

My right hand dropped to the wheel, and the car leaped forward.

"Did you tell her?" insisted Roberta.

"No," I answered shortly. "Berquist told Moore, I suppose. How do I know?"

"Some one must have told her," Bert agreed. "It isn't as if it were an ordinary name that she might have hit on by guesswork."

"Oh, it isn't so unusual. There have been Ser— There have been men of that name in my mother's family for generations. I was given the name in remembrance of my mother's brother. He died only a few months before I was born, and she had cared a lot for him. But don't let's talk of the name any more. I always hated it. Sounds silly—like a girl's name—I—I— Oh, forget the name! Here we are at home, and there's your mother in the window looking for us."

"We're awfully late!"

"Tell her the Moores were very interesting people," I suggested grimly.

That night, though I slept, Alicia Moore and the Fifth Presence—in various unpleasant shapes—haunted me through some exceedingly restless hours.

CHAPTER VII.

THE COMING OF THE FACE.

THAT a man may retire to his bed unknown and wake up famous is a truism of long standing. There is a parallel truth not half so pleasant. A man—a whole family—may retire wealthy and wake up paupers.

My father was the practically inactive senior member of his firm, and the reins had so far left his hands that when the blow fell it was hard for him to get a grasp on the situation or even credit it.

Rather shockingly, the first word we had of disaster came through the morning papers in a blare-headed column announcing the suicide of Frederic Hutchinson. Suicide without attempt at concealment. A scrubwoman, entering the private offices of Barbour & Hutchinson early that morning, had fairly trodden in the junior partner's scattered brains.

There followed a week of torment—of sordid revelations and ever increasing despair. A week that left dad a shaken, tremulous old man, and the firm of Barbour & Hutchinson, grain brokers, an unpleasant problem to be dealt with by the receivers.

Dad had known his partner for a clever man, and no doubt he was formerly a trustable one. But when the disease called speculation takes late root, its run is likely to be more virulent than in a younger victim. All Hutchinson's personal estate had been absorbed. His family were left in worse predicament than ours—or would have been, save that dad's peculiar sense of honor cast every cent he owned, independent of the firm, into the pit where that firm's honor had vanished.

Unfortunately he possessed not nearly enough to satisfy the creditors and reestablish the business. As my mother pointed out, the disgrace that had been all Fred Hutchinson's was now dad's for impoverishing his family when, under the terms of partnership and the law of our State, most of his personal investments and realty could have been held free from liability.

And to that dad had only one, and to my mind somewhat appalling, reply:

"Let Clay go to work in earnest, then. Perhaps some day my son will clear the slate of what scores I've failed to settle!"

Well, great God, can a young fellow carefully trained to have everything he wants without trying turn financial genius in a week?

If it hadn't been for Roberta, I think I should have thrown up the sponge and fairly run away from it all. Her faith, though, stirred a chord of ambition that those of my own blood failed to touch, and her stately Charlestonian mother emerged from stateliness into surprising sympathy.

Then Dick Vansittart, the unregenerate youngster who had been my dearest pal in college days, got me a job with the Colossus Trust Company, the bank of which his father was president and where he himself loafed about intermittently.

Even I knew that the salary offered was more commensurate with our needs than with what I was worth. Vansittart, Sr., a gruff old lion of a man, growled at me through a personal interview which ended in: "You won't earn your salt for six months, Barbour, but maybe Terne can put up with you. Try it, anyway!"

Terne was the second vice-president, whose assistant, or secretary, or general errand-boy, it was proposed that I become. I reached for my hat.

"Sorry to have bothered you, Mr. Vansittart! I would hardly care to receive pay except on the basis that it was earned."

The lion roared.

"Sit down! Don't you try Dick's high mannerisms with me! If I can tolerate Dick in this bank, I can tolerate you; but there's going to be one difference. You'll play the man and work till you do earn your wages, or you'll go out! Understand?"

"I merely meant—"

"Never mind that." The savage countenance before me softened to a leonine benevolence. "Clayton Barbour's son wants no charity, but, you young fool, don't I know that? Your father has swamped himself to pay debts that weren't his. Now I choose to pay a debt that isn't mine, but Dick's!"

I must have looked my bewilderment.

"I mean," he thundered, "that when my son was expelled from the college he disgraced he nearly took you with him! You cubs believe you carry your shame on your own shoulders. You never think of us. I've crossed the street three times to avoid meeting your father—I! Earn your wages here, so that I can shake hands with him next time. Here—take this note to Mr. Terne. His office is next the cashier's. Go to work!"

I went, but outside the door found Van waiting for me, smiling ironically.

"You heard?" I muttered.

"Not being stone deaf, yes. The governor doesn't mind publicity where I'm concerned, eh? Interested passers-by in the street might hear, for all he cares. Oh, well—truth is mighty and must prevail! Wish you luck, Clay, and there's Fatty Terne coming now. So-long!"

I was left to present my note to a dignified person who had just emerged from the cashier's office. "Fatty" was a merciless nickname for him, and unfair besides. The second vice-president's large figure suggested strength rather than overindulgence. Beneath his dignity he proved a kindly, not domineering man, much overworked himself, but patient with early mistakes from a new helper.

He shared one stenographer with another official, and seemed actually grateful when I offered to learn shorthand during spare hours in order to be of more use with the correspondence. I was quite infected with the work fever for a while, and saw little of Van, who let me severely alone from the first day I entered the bank.

His new standoffishness didn't please me exactly, but I was too busy to think much of him one way or the other. At home, however, things went not so well. Since the house had been sold over our heads, we were forced into painfully small quarters. There was a little place near by that belonged to my mother. It had stood empty for a year, and though not much better than a cottage, her ownership of it solved the rent problem, and, as she bitterly explained, we no longer needed servants' rooms nor space for the entertainment of guests.

Mother and Cathy undertook the housework, while dad fooled about with paint-pots and the like, trying to delude himself into the belief that paint, varnish, and a few new shelves here and there would make a real home for us out of this wretched shack; for that is what Cathy and I called it privately.

All the problems of home life had taken on new, ugly, uncomfortable angles, and I spent as little time among them as I decently could.

Roberta had no more complaints to make of "sixty miles an hour and never touched

the siren." My car had gone with the rest. We went on sedate little walks, like a country pair, tried to prefer movies to grand opera, and piled up heart-breaking dream-castles for consolation.

Two months slid by, and in that while our adventure at the "dead-alive house," as Roberta had named Moore's place, was hardly mentioned between us. Once or twice, indeed, she referred to it, but there was for me an oppressive distastefulness in the subject that made me lead our conversations elsewhere.

On the very heels of Barbour & Hutchinson's catastrophic passing I had received a brief note from Moore. He expressed concern and sympathy, adding in the same breath, as it were, that he hoped I had been "well enough interested the other evening to wish to walk farther along the path of psychical research."

I regarded his concern as impertinent and his hope as impudent, considering my unpleasant memories of the first visit. I tore the letter up without answering it. After that I heard no more from him, and it was not until the second month's ending that a thing occurred which forced the whole matter vividly upon my recollection.

"If dear Serapion had not been taken from us," said my mother, "we should be living in a civilized manner, and my children and I would not have been driven to actual labor with our hands!"

Dad kept his eyes on his plate, refraining from answer. He had been guilty of an ill-advised criticism on Cathy's cooking, and, from that, discussion had run through all the ramifications of domestic misery until I was tempted to leave dinner unfinished and escape to my usual refuge, the Whitingfields.

But the mention of my uncle's name had a peculiar effect on me. A slight swimming sensation behind the eyes, a gripping tightness at the back of my neck—*Serapion!*

The feeling passed, but left me trembling so that I remained in my place, fearing to rise lest I betray myself. As before, some deep-seated instinct fought that. The weakness was like a shameful wound, to be at all costs hidden.

"Had he lived," continued my mother, "he would have seen to it that we weren't brought to this. No one near poor Serapion was ever allowed to be uncomfortable!"

Dad's eyes flashed up with a glint of spirit that he had never before showed in this connection.

"Is that so? I know he kept remarkably comfortable himself, but I can't recall his feathering any one's nest but his own."

"Don't slander the dead!" came her sharp retort. "Why, you owe the very house over your head to him! And if it hadn't been that his thoughtfulness left it in my name you wouldn't have that. You would have robbed your children and me of even this pitiful shelter—"

"Evelyn—please!"

"It's true! And then you dare cast slurs and innuendoes at my dead brother!"

"I gave him the house in the first place," dad muttered.

She rose, eyes flashing and filled with tears. "Yes, you did! And this shameful little hole was all he had to live in—and die in! Serapion was a saint!" she declared. "A saint! He was—he was universally *loved!*"

And with that, my mother swept from the room. Cathy followed, though with a sneaking glance of sympathy for dad. Tempestuous exits on mother's part had been frequent as far back as I could remember, and as they were invariably followed by hours in which some one must bathe her head with cologne and the house be kept dead silent, we other three had the fellow-feeling of victims.

Dad eyed me across the table. "Son," he said, "what is your middle name?"

"Ser—Ser—Samuel!" I ended desperately. My heart, for no obvious reason, had begun a furious palpitation. Why couldn't they let that name alone?

He looked surprised, and then laughed.

"You are right, son! I was about to give you warning—to forbid your becoming such a saint as your esteemed namesake. But I guess that isn't needed. The Samuels of the world stand on their own feet, as you do now, thank God! A Samuel for the Serapion in you, then, and never forget it!"

"I won't sir."

He could not guess the frantic struggle going on beneath my calm exterior. There is, I believe, a psychopathic condition in which sound-waves produce visual sensations; a musical note, for example, being seen as a blob of scarlet, or the sustained blast of a bugle as a ribbony, orange-colored streak. Some such confusion of the senses seemed to have occurred in me, only in my case one single sound produced it, and the result was not color, but a feeling of pressure, dizziness, suffocation.

Fighting for control, I knew that another iteration of the sound in question would cost me the battle. Dad's mouth opened, and simultaneously I rose. Opinions on my uncle's character, pro or con, didn't interest me half so much as the problem of excusing myself in a steady voice, walking from table to doorway without a stagger, and finally escaping from that room before the fatal name could be spoken again.

These feats accomplished, I managed to get up the stairs and into my own room, where I locked the door and dropped, face downward, across the bed. Though the evening was cool, my whole body was drenched in sweat and my brain reeled sickeningly.

One may get help from queer sources. Van, in our gay junior year—his last at college—had initiated me into a device for keeping steady when the last drink has been one too many. You mentally recite a poem or speech or the multiplication table—any old thing will do. Fixing the mind in that way seems to soothe the gyrating interior and enables a fellow at least to fall asleep like a gentleman.

In my present distress that came back to me. Still fighting off the unknown with one-half of my mind, I scrabbled around in the other half for some definite memorization to take hold of.

There was none. The very multiplication table swam a jumble of numbers. Then I caught a rhyme beginning in the back of my head, and fixed my attention on it feverishly. Over and over the words said themselves, first haltingly, then with increasing certainty. It was a simple, jingling little prayer that every child in the English-speaking world, I suppose, has learned past forgetfulness.

Now I lay me down to sleep—

Again—again—by the tenth repetition of "I pray the Lord my soul to take," I had wrenched my mind away from—that other—and had its whole attention on the rhyme. At last, following a paroxysm of trembling, I knew myself the victor. Once more the Fifth Presence had released me.

Panting and weak from reaction, I sat up. What ailed me? How, in reason and common sense, could the sound of any man's name have this effect on me?

Hypnotism? Nearly two months had elapsed since my first trouble of this kind, and without recurrence in the interim. No, and come to think of it, I couldn't recall having heard the name spoken in that while, either. Serapion! It was only when uttered aloud that the word had power over me. I could think of it without any evil effect. And that name on Alicia's lips had been my last vivid impression before I lost self-consciousness and walked out of Moore's house, an intelligent automaton for sixty minutes after.

Scraps of psychology came back to me. Hypnotism—hypnotic suggestion. Could a man be shocked into hypnotic sleep, awaken, and weeks later be swayed by a sound that had accompanied the first lapse?

One way, I set myself very firmly. In cool judgment I was no believer in ghosts. Whatever the explanation, it had nothing to do with my uncle *in propria persona*. The very thought brought a smile to my lips. He had died before I was born; but, though dad had for some reason disliked him, by all accounts my namesake had been a genial, easy-going, agreeable gentleman, rather characterless, perhaps, and inclined to let the other fellow work, but not a man whose spirit could be imagined as a half-way efficient "haunt."

Serapion! No, and neither would he probably have flung away his own and his family's comfort for a point of fine-drawn honor. Was dad in the right? I had tried to reserve criticism there, and in action I had certainly backed him to the limit. In-

evitably, though from yet far-off, I could see the loss of Roberta grinding down upon me. She couldn't wait my convenience forever, you know. Some other fellow—some free, unburdened chap—

I buried my head in my hands.

Then I dropped them and sprang erect, every nerve alert.

I had closed my eyes, and in that instant *a face had leaped into being behind their shut lids.*

The face was not Roberta's, though I had been thinking of her. Moreover, it had lacked any dreamlike quality. It had come real—real as if the man had entered my bedroom and thrust his face close to mine.

As my eyes flicked open, it had vanished, leaving me quivering with a strange resentment—an anger, as if some intimate privacy had been invaded. I stood with clenched fists, more angry than amazed at first, but not daring to shut my eyes lest it return.

What had there been about the queer vision that was so loathsome?

The face of a man around forty years it had seemed, smooth-shaven, boyish in a manner, with a little inward twist at the mouth corners, an amused slyness to the clear, light-blue eyes. The face of an easy-going, take-life's-jokes-as-they-come sort of fellow, amiable, pleasant, and, in some indefinite fashion—horrible.

I was sure I had never seen the man in real life, though there had been a vague familiarity about him, too.

About *him!* A dream—a vision.

"Clayton Barbour," I muttered through shut teeth, "if it has reached the point where a word throws you into spasms and you are afraid to close your eyes, you'd better consult a doctor; and that is exactly what I shall do!"

CHAPTER VIII.

FOUR HUNDRED DOLLARS.

NILS BERQUIST had his own ways, and whether or not they were practical or customary to mankind at large influenced him in no degree. He called himself a socialist, but in pure fact he was one of those persons who require a cause to fight for and argue about, as a Hedonist craves his pleasures, or the average man an income.

Real socialism, with the communal interests it implies, was foreign to Berquist's very nature. He could get along, in a withdrawn kind of way, with almost any one. He would share what small possessions he had with literally any one. But his interest went to such abstractions of thought as were talked and written by men of his own kind, while himself—his mind—he kept for the very few. Those are the qualities of an aristocrat, not a socialist.

One result of his paradoxical attitude showed in the fact that when it came to current news, Nils was as ignorant a man as you could meet in a day's walk. My various troubles and activities had kept me from thinking of him, but when I again happened on Nils in town one evening it hurt my feelings to discover that the spectacular downfall of Barbour & Hutchinson might have occurred on another planet, so far as he was concerned.

News that had been blazoned in every paper was news to him all this time afterward. Even learning it from me in person, he said little, though this silence might have been caused by embarrassment. Roberta was with me, and to tie Nils's tongue you had only to lead him into the presence of femininity in the person of a young, pretty girl.

I at last recalled the fact, and because for a certain reason I wished a chance to talk with him where he would talk, I asked if he couldn't run out some night and have dinner with us. Cathy's cooking was nothing wonderful, but I knew Nils wouldn't mind that, nor the cramped quarters we had to live in. I reckoned on taking him up to my own room later for a private confab.

After a short hesitation he accepted.

"You take care of yourself, Clay," he added. "You're looking pale—run down. Don't tell me you've been laid up sick along with all this other trouble?"

"No, indeed, old man. Working rather harder than I used and—lately I haven't

slept very well. Bad dreams. But aside from that, nothing serious."

After a few more words, we parted, he striding off on his lonely way to some bourne unknown; Roberta and I proceeding toward the motion-picture theater that we tried to enjoy like a real playhouse. As if misery had altered the Charlestonian view-point, Mrs. Whitingfield had relaxed her chaperonage, and let us go alone almost wherever we liked—or where my diminished pocket-fund afforded to take us.

A fortnight had passed since the strange face had made its first appearance. If Nils thought I looked pale, there was reason for it. "Bad dreams," I had told him, but bad dreams were less than all.

My resolve to visit a doctor had come to nothing. I had called, indeed, upon our family physician, as I had meant. The moment I entered his presence, however, that instinct for concealment which had prevented me from confiding in Roberta or my family rose up full strength. The symptoms I actually laid before Dr. Lloyd produced a smile and a prescription that might as well have been the traditional bread pills—I didn't bother to have it filled. I went out as alone with my secret as when I entered.

A face—boyish in manner, pleasant, half-smiling usually; with an amused slyness to the clear, light-blue eyes; an agreeable inward quirk at the corners of the finely cut lips. I had come to know every lineament intimately well.

It had not returned again until some time after the first appearance. Then—at the bank, the afternoon following my futile conference with Dr. Lloyd—I happened to close my eyes, and *it* was there, behind the lids.

There was a table in Mr. Terne's office, over which he used to spread out his correspondence and papers. I was seated at one side of the table and he on the other, and I started so violently that he dropped his pen and made a straggling ink-feather across the schedule of securities he was verifying.

He patiently blotted it, and I made such a fuss over getting out the ink-eradicator and restoring the sheet of minutely figured ledger-paper to neatness, that he forgot to ask what had made me jump in the first place.

After that the face was with me so often that if I shut my eyes and saw nothing, its absence bothered me. I would feel then that the face had got behind me, perhaps, and acquired the bad habit of casting furtive glances over my shoulder.

You may think that if one must be burdened with a companion invisible to the world, such a good-humored countenance as I have described would be the least disagreeable. But that was not so.

There was to me a subtle hatefulness about it—like a thing beautiful and at the same time vile, which one hates in fear of coming to love it.

I never called the face "him," never thought of it as a man, nor gave it a man's name. I was afraid to! As if recognition would lend the vision power. I called it the Fifth Presence, and hated it.

As days of this passed, there came a time when the face began trying to talk to me. There, at least, I had the advantage. Though I could see the lips move, forming words, by merely opening my eyes I was able to banish it, and so avoid learning what it wished to say.

In bed, I used to lie with my eyes wide open sometimes for hours, waiting for sleep to come suddenly. When that happened I was safe, for though my dreams were often bad, the face never invaded them.

I discovered, too, that the name Serapion had in a measure lost power to throw me off balance, since the face had come. My mother continued to harp on the superiority of my dead uncle's character, and how he would have shielded us from the evils that had befallen, until dad acquiesced in sheer self-protection. But though I didn't like to hear her talk of him, and though the sound of the name invariably quickened my heart-beat, hearing neither increased nor diminished the vision's vividness.

It was with me, however, through most of my waking hours—waiting behind my lids—and if I looked pale, as Nils said, the wonder is that I was able to appear at all as usual. So I wished to talk with Nils, hoping that to the man who had

warned me against the Moores I could force myself to confide the distressing aftermath of my visit at the "dead-alive house."

He had promised to come out the next night but one, which was Wednesday. Unfortunately, however, I missed seeing him then, after all, and because of an incident whose climax was to give the Fifth Presence a new and unexpected significance.

About two thirty Wednesday afternoon I ran up the steps of the Colossus Trust, and at the top collided squarely with Van, Jr. By the slight reel with which he staggered against a pillar and caught hold of it, I knew that Van had been hitting the high spots again and hoped he had not been interviewing his father in that condition. On recovering his balance, Van stood up steady enough.

"Old scout Clay! Say, you look like a pale, pallid, piffling fresh-water clam, you do. 'Pon my word, I'm ashamed of the old Colossus. The old brass idol has sucked all the blood out of you. My fault, servin' up the best friend I ever had as a—a helpless sacrifice to the governor's old brass Colossus. Come on with me—you been good too long!"

He playfully pretended to tear off the brass-lettered name of the trust company, which adorned the wall beside him, cast it down and trample on it. When I tried to pass he caught my arm. "Come on!"

"Can't," I explained quietly. "Mr. Terne was the best man at a wedding today, but he left me a stack of work."

Van sniffed. "Huh! I know that wedding. I was invited to that wedding, but I wouldn't go. Measly old prohibition wedding! Just suits Fatty Terne. When you get married, Clay, I'll send along about eleven magnums for a wedding present, and then I'll come to *your* wedding!"

"You may—when it happens." Again I tried to pass him.

"Wait a minute. You poor, pallid workslave—you know what I'm going to do for you?"

"Get me fired, by present prospects. I must—"

"You must not. Just listen. You know Barney Finn?"

"Not personally. Let me go now, Van, and I'll see you later."

"Barney Finn," he persisted doggedly, "has got just the biggest lil engine that ever slid round a track. Now you wait a minute. Barney's another friend of mine. Told me all about it. Showed it to me. Showed me how it's going to make every other wagon at Fairview to-morrow look like a hand-pushed per-perambulator!"

"All right. Come around after the race and tell me how Finn made out. Please—"

"Wait. You're my friend, Clay, and I like you. You put a thousand bones on Finney's car, and say good-by to old Colossus. Start a bank of your own. How's that, huh?"

I laughed. "Bet on it yourself, Van, and let me alone. I've forgotten what a thousand dollars looks like."

"No place for you roun' old Colossus, then. Say, boy, if you think me too squiffy to wist whereof I speak, you misjudge me sadly—yes, indeed! Didn't I wrest one pitiful century from Colossus five minutes ago, and isn't that the last that stood between me an' starvation, and ain't I going right out an' plaster that century on Finn's car? Would I im-impoverish the Colossus and me, puttin' that last century on anything but a sure win? Come across, boy!"

Now, one might think that Van's invitation lacked attractiveness to a sober man. I happened to know, however, that drunk or sober, his judgment was good on one subject, the same being motor-cars. Barney Finn, moreover, was a speed-track veteran with a mighty reputation at his back. He had, in the previous year, met several defeats, due to bad luck, in my opinion, but they had brought up the odds. If he had something particularly good and new in his car for to-morrow's race at Fairview, there was a chance for somebody to make a killing, as Van said. "What odds?" I queried.

"For each lil bone you plant, twelve lil bones will blossom. Good enough? I could get better, but this will be off Jackie Rosenblatt, an' you know that lil Jew's a reg'lar old Colossus his own self. Solid an' square. Hock his old high silk hat before he'd welch."

"Yes, Rosie's square." I did some quick

mental figuring, and then pulled a thin sheaf of bills from an inner coat-pocket. Instantly, Van had snatched them out of my hand.

"Not all!" I exclaimed sharply. "Take fifty, but I brought that in to deposit—"

"Deposit it with Jackie! Why, you old miser with your bank account! Four entire centuries, and you weepin' over poverty! Say, Clay, how much is twelve times four?"

"Forty-eight, but—"

"Lightnin' calculator!" he admired. "Say, doesn't forty-eight hundred make a bigger noise in your delikite ear than four measly centuries? Come across!"

I don't think I nodded. I am almost sure that I had begun reaching my hand to take all, or most of those bills back. But Van thought otherwise. "Right, boy!"

With plunging abruptness he was off down the steps. I hesitated. Forty-four hundred. Then I caught myself and was after him, but too late. His speedy gray roadster was already nosing recklessly into the traffic. Before I reached the bottom step it had shot around the corner and was gone.

CHAPTER IX.

THE FACE SPEAKS.

OFF Mr. Terne's spacious office there was a little glass-enclosed, six-by-eight cubby-hole, which I called my own.

Ten o'clock Thursday morning found me seated in the one chair, staring at a pile of canceled notes on the desk before me. I had started to check them half an hour ago, but so far just one check-mark showed on the list beside them. I had something worse to think of than canceled notes.

As I sat, I could hear Mr. Terne fussing about the outer office. Then I heard him go out. About two minutes afterward the door banged open so forcibly that I half started up, conscience clamoring.

But it wasn't the second vice returning in a rage. It was Van. He fairly bolted into my cubby-hole, closed the door, pitched his hat in a corner, and swung himself to a seat on my desk-edge, scattering canceled notes right and left. There he sat, hands clasped, staring at me in a perfect stillness which contrasted dramatically with his violent entry. His eyes looked dark and sunken in a strained, white face. My nerves were inappreciative of drama.

"Where were you last night?" I demanded irritably. "I hunted for you around town till nearly midnight."

"What? Oh, I was way out in—I don't know exactly. Some dinky road-house. I pretty nearly missed the race and—and I wish to God I had, Clay!" He passed a shaking hand across his eyes.

"Did Finn lose?" I snapped. "But—why, the race can hardly be more than started yet!"

"Finn started!" he gulped.

"Ditched?" I gasped, a flash of inspiration warning me of what was coming.

He nodded. "Turned turtle on the second lap and—say, boy—I helped dig him out and carry him off—you know, I liked Barney. It was—bad. The mechanism broke his back clean—flung against a post—but Barney—say, what was left of him kind of—kind of came apart—when we—" He stopped short, gulped again, and: "Guess I'm in bad shape this morning," he said huskily. "Nerves all shot to pieces."

I should have imagined they would be. A man straight from an all-night debauch can't witness a racing-car accident, help handle the human wreckage afterward, and go whistling merrily to tell his friends the tale.

I expressed that, though in more kindly chosen words, and then we were both silent a minute. Barney Finn had not been my friend, or even acquaintance, and while I was vicariously touched by Van's grief and horror, my own dilemma wasn't simplified by this news. Yet I hated to fling sordidness in the face of tragedy by speaking of money.

"Afterward I didn't feel like watching the race out." As Van spoke, I heard the outer door open again. This time it really was Mr. Terne, for I recognized his step. "So I came straight here," Van continued.

My own door opened, and a kindly, dignified figure appeared there.

"Barbour," said the second vice, "have

you that—ah, good morning, Richard." He nodded rather coldly to Van, and went on to ask me for the list I was supposed to be at work on.

When I explained that the checking wasn't quite finished, he turned away; then glanced back.

"By the way, Barbour," he said, "Prang dropped me a line saying that when you were in his office yesterday he paid up four hundred he has owed me since last June. If you were too late to deposit yesterday afternoon, get it from my box and we'll put it in with this check from the United."

I felt myself going fiery-red. "Sorry," I said. "I'll let you have that money this afternoon, Mr. Terne. I—I—"

"He gave it to me to deposit for him, and I used it for something else," broke in Van with the utmost coolness.

On occasion Van's brain worked with flashlight rapidity. He had put the two and two of that four hundred together while another man might have been wondering about it. Terne stared, first at Van, then at me.

"You—you gave it—" he began slowly.

"He came here for your pass-book," ran Van's glib tongue. "I dropped in on him, and as I was going out past the tellers, I offered to put it in for him. Then I stuck it in my pocket, forgot it till too late, and needing some cash last night, I used that. Barbour has been throwing fits ever since I told him. I'll get it for you this afternoon."

Terne stared some more, and Van returned the look with cool insolence.

A brick-reddish color crept up the second v. p.'s cheeks, his mouth compressed to an unfamiliar straightness, and turning suddenly he walked out of not only my cubby-hole but his own office. The door shut with a rattle of jarred glazing.

"You shouldn't have done that!" I breathed.

"Oh, rats! Fatty Terne's gone to tell the governor what a naughty, bad boy I am. He'll get thrown out. No news to the governor, and he's sick of hearing it. Anyway, this is my fault, Clay, and I ought to stand the gaff. You've worked like the devil here, and then I come along and spoil everything. Drunken fool, me! Knew I'd queer you if we got together, and till yesterday I had sense enough to keep off. When I took those bills I knew there was something wrong, but I was too squiffy to have any sense about it. Plain highway robbery! Never mind, old pal, I'll bring you back the loot this afternoon if I have to bust open one of the old Colossus's vaults for it!"

At my elbow the house telephone jingled.

"Just a minute," I said. "No; wait, Van. Hello! Hel—oh, Mr. Vansittart? Yes, sir. Be over at once, sir. Yes, he's here. What? Yes—" The other receiver had clicked up.

"We're in for it," I muttered. "Apparently your esteemed governor hasn't thrown Terne out!"

Vansittart, Sr., the gruff old lion, granted lax discipline to no man under his control save one; and even Van, Jr., was, if not afraid, at least a bit wary of him. Though he had taken me on in the bank at a far higher wage than my services were worth, he had also made it very clear that so far as I was concerned, favoritism ended there. For me, I was sure the truth of the present affair would mean instant discharge.

"Shut that door!" the lion growled as we entered. "Now, Dick, I'll thank you to explain for exactly what weighty reason you stole Mr. Terne's four hundred."

"Stole!" Van's slim figure stiffened, and he went two shades whiter.

"Stole, yes! I said, stole. That is the usual term for appropriating money without the owner's consent."

"I don't accuse the boy of theft!" Terne's set face of anger relaxed suddenly. He didn't like Van, but he was a man who could not be unfair if he tried.

"Keep out of this, Terne—please. Dick, I am waiting."

"Well, really," Van drawled, "if you put it that way, I couldn't say what I did use the money for. There was a trifle of four hundred, owned, I believe, by F—by Mr. Terne, which I borrowed, intending to return it in a few hours—"

"From what fund?" The lion's mane was up now in earnest. I felt instinctively that this interview was a bit different from any that Van had been through heretofore.

"Are you aware that your account in this bank is already overdrawn to the sum of "—he consulted a slip before him—"of forty-nine dollars and sixty cents? You perhaps have reserve funds at your command elsewhere?"

Van looked his father in the eye. What he saw must have been unusual. His brows went up slightly and the same fighting look came into his face which I had seen there when he and I confronted the faculty together. On that occasion I had been genuinely inclined to meekness. I remained in college while Van was "sent down."

He laughed lightly. "Excuse me half an hour while I run out and sell the lil old roadster. Forty-nine sixty, you said? I'll pay you yours first, governor!".

"That's kind! After stealing one man's money you propose selling another man's car to replace it. Yes, my car, I said. What have you got in this world but your worthless brains and body to call your own? Wait! We'll go into this matter of ownership more deeply in a few minutes. Barbour," he whirled on me, "you allowed funds belonging to your superior to pass into unauthorized hands. That is not done in this bank. As things stand, I shall leave your case to Mr. Terne, but first you will make one direct statement. I wish it made so that no question may arise afterward. Did you or did you not hand four hundred dollars in bills, the property of Mr. Terne, to my—to my son, God help me!"

It was up to me in earnest. I was now sure beyond doubt of what Van had run against. His leonine parent had turned at last, and even the whole truth would barely suffice to save him. My lips opened. To blame though he was in a way, Van mustn't suffer seriously in my protection. I could not forget that momentary hesitation on my part, save for which I could easily have retrieved the bills before Van was out of reach.

"I gave it to him," I began.

And then, abruptly, silently, another face flashed in between me and the president. Instead of Vansittart's dark, angry eyes, I was staring into a pair of clear, amused, light-blue ones. A finely cut mouth half smiled at me with lips that moved.

Always theretofore the face had come only when my lids were closed. Its wish to communicate with me—and that it did wish to communicate I was sure as if the thing had been a living man, following me about and perpetually tugging at my sleeve—had been a continual menace, but one which I had grown to feel secure from because the thing's power seemed so limited.

Now, with my eyes wide open, there hung the face in mid air. It was not in the least transparent. That is, its intervening presence obscured Vansittart's countenance as completely as though the head of a real man had thrust in between us. And yet—it is hard to express, but there was that about it, a kind of flatness, a lack of the normal three-dimensional solidity, which gave it the look of a living portrait projected on the atmosphere.

I knew without even glancing toward them that Van and Mr. Terne did not see the thing as I did. It was there for me alone. At the moment, though I fought the belief again later, I knew beyond question that what I beheld was the projection of a powerful, external will, the same which, with Alicia's dynamic force to aid, had once actually taken possession of my body.

The finely cut lips moved. No audible sound came from them, but as they formed words, the speech was heard in my brain distinctly as if conveyed by normal sound-vibrations through the ear-drums. It was *silent* sound. The tone was deep, rather agreeable, amiably amused:

"You have said enough," the face observed pleasantly. "You have told the truth; now stop there. Your friend has a father to deal with, while you have an employer. He is willing to shoulder all the blame, and for you to expose your share in it will be a preposterous folly. Remember, that hard as you have worked, you are receiving here twice the money you are worth—three times what you can hope to begin on elsewhere. Remember the miserable consequences of your own father's needless sacrifice. Remember how often, and very justly, you have wished that he had thought less of a point of fine-drawn honor, and more of his family's happiness. Will you commit a like folly?"

I can't tell, so that any one will understand, what a wave of accumulated memories and secret revolts against fate overswept me as I stared hard into the smiling, light-blue eyes. But I fought.

Grimly I began again. "I gave it to him!" and then—stopped.

"That's enough." This time it was Vansittart speaking. "You may go, Barbour. Mr. Terne, I will ask you to leave us. You will receive my personal check for the amount you have lost."

"But—but—" I stammered desperately while those clear eyes grew more amused, more dominating.

The lion's hard-held calmness broke in a roar. "Get out! Out of here, both of you! Go!"

Mr. Terne laid his hand on my arm, and reluctantly I allowed myself to be steered toward the door. As I turned away the face did not float around with the turning of my eyes.

It hung in mid air, save for that odd, undimensional flatness real as any of the three other faces there. When my back was to the president, the—the Fifth Presence was behind me. On glancing back, it still hung there. Then it smiled at me—a beautiful, pleased, wholly approving smile—and faded to nothing.

I went out with Mr. Terne, and left Van alone with his father.

CHAPTER X.

THE BELOVED SERAPION.

ONE hour later I departed from the Colossus Trust Company with instructions not to return. Oh, no, I had not been ruthlessly discharged by the outraged second vice. The inhibition covered the balance of the day only, and, as Mr. Terne put it: "A few hours' quiet will give you a clearer view of the situation, Barbour. I honor you for feeling as you do. It was Richard, I believe, who obtained you a position here. Just for your consolation when Mr. Vansittart has—er—cooled off somewhat, I intend making a small plea in Richard's behalf. Now, go home and come back fresh in the morning. You look as though all the cares of the world had been dumped on your shoulders. Take an older man's advice and shake off those that aren't yours, boy!"

He was a kindly, good man, the second vice-president of the Colossus. But his kindliness didn't console me. In fact, I felt rather the worse for it. I went home, wishing that he had kicked me clean around the block instead of—of liking, and petting, and, by inference, praising me for being such a contrast in character to poor, reckless, loose-living, heroic Van!

When I left, the latter was still in his father's office. Though I might have waited for him outside, I didn't. He was not the kind to meet me with even a glance of reproach; but just the same I did not feel eager to meet him.

I had resolved, however, that unless Van pulled through scatheless, I would myself "make a small plea in Richard's behalf," and next time not all the smooth, smiling devils from the place-that's-no-longer-believed-in should persuade me to crumple.

On the train—I commuted, of course—I deliberately shut my eyes, and waited for the vision to appear. If it could talk to me by moving its lips, there must be some way in which I could express my opinion to it. I burned to do that! Like a sneak, it had taken me unawares in a crucial moment. I had a few thoughts of the Fifth Presence which should make even that smug vision curl up and die.

I closed my eyes—and was asleep in five minutes. I was tired, you see, and, now that I wanted it, the Fifth Presence kept discreetly invisible. The conductor, who knew me, called my station and me at the same time, and I blundered off the train, half awake, but thoroughly miserable.

There was no one at home but my mother. Of late dad's sight had failed till it was not safe for him to be on the street alone. As he liked to walk, however, Cathy had gone out with him.

I found mother, lying down in her darkened bedroom, in the preparatory stage of a headache. Having explained that Mr. Terne had given me an unexpected half-holiday, I turned to leave her, but checked on a sudden impulse.

"Mother," I said softly, "why did you name me Ser—why was I given my uncle's name instead of just dad's?"

"What an odd question!"

Mother sat up so energetically that two cushions fell off the couch. I picked them up and tried to reestablish her comfortably, but she wouldn't have it. "Tell me at once why you asked that extraordinary question, Clay!"

I said there was nothing extraordinary about it that I could see. My uncle's name itself was extraordinary, or at least unusual, and the question happened to come into my mind just then. Besides, she had spoken a good deal of him lately. Maybe that had made me think of it.

Mother drew a deep breath.

"He told me—can you believe this?—he told me that some day you would ask that question! This is too wonderful! And I've seemed to feel a protecting influence about us—this house that was his—and your good position in the bank!"

"Mother, will you kindly explain what you are talking about?"

My heart had begun a muffled throbbing.

"Be patient! I have a wonderful story to tell you. I've doubted, and hoped, and dared say nothing, but, Clayton dear, in these last miserable weeks I have felt his presence like the overshadowing wings of a protecting angel. If it is true—if it only could be true—"

"Mother—please!"

"Sit down, dear. Are my salts on the dresser? Yes, and the cologne, too, please. That's a dear boy. And now sit down. Your father never liked dear Serapion, and —why, how wonderful this all is! Your coming home early, I mean, and asking me the question just at the one time when your father, who disliked him, is away, and we have the whole house—his house!—to ourselves. Can't you feel his influence in that, dear?"

"What have you to tell me, mother?"

"I shall begin at the very first—"

"If you make the story too long," I objected craftily, "dad and Cathy will be back."

"That is true. Then I'll just tell the part he particularly wished you to know. Dear Serapion was universally loved, and I could go on by the hour about his friendships, and the faculty he had for making people happy. Physically, he had little strength, and your father was very unjust to him—"

"Can't we leave dad out of this, mother?"

"You are so like your uncle! Serapion could never bear to hear any one criticized, no matter how the person had treated him. 'My happiness,' he would say, 'is in living at harmony with all. Clayton,' your father, he meant, of course, 'Clayton is a splendid man, whom I admire. His own fine energy and capacities make him unduly hard, perhaps, toward those less gifted. I try to console myself with the thought that life has several sides. Love — kindliness — good humor—I am at least fortunate in rousing the gentlest qualities in most of those about me. Who knows? From the beginning, that may have been my mission in life, and I was given a delicate constitution that I might have leisure merely to live, love, and be loved in return!

"Of course, he wouldn't have expressed that beautiful thought to every one, but Serapion knew that I would understand—yes, dear, I shall come to your part in the story directly.

"Serapion passed to his reward before you were born, my son. He went from us in January, and you came into the world the April following. The doctors had told him that only a few hours were left him of life. When Serapion learned that he asked to be left alone with me for a little while. I remember every word of that beautiful conversation. I remember how he laid his hand on mine and pressed it feebly.

"'Do as I ask, Evelyn,' he said. 'If the child is a boy, give him my name. I only ask second place. Clayton has first right; but let the boy have my name, as well as his father's. I've been too happy in my life—too happy in my loves and friendships. I can't bear to die utterly out of this good old world. I haven't a child of my own, but if you'd just give your boy—my name. Some day he will ask why, and then you are to tell him that—it's because—I was so happy!'"

Mother was sobbing, but after a moment she regained self-control to continue. "You may think it weak in me to cry over my brother, who passed long ago. But he has lived in my memory. And he said: 'Some people only talk of life after death, but I believe in it. It is really true that we go out to go on. I know it. There is something bright and strong in me, Evelyn, that only grows stronger as I feel the body dying from about me. Bright, strong, and clear-sighted. I have never been quite like other men. Not even you have understood me, and perhaps that is for the best.'

"With his hand on mine he smiled, and, oh, Clayton, I have wondered many times since what that smile meant! It was so beautiful that—that it was almost terrible!

"'I love life,' he went on, 'and I shall live beyond this perishing clay. Soon or late, a day will come when you will feel my living presence in the house, and it will be in that time that your son will ask of me. Then you will tell him all I have said, and also this:

"'That I promised to return—to watch over him—to guard him.

"'Name him for me, that I may have the power. There's power in a name! And I am not as other men. Be very sure that—your son—Serapion—shall be—as happy—shall have all that I've had—of life. Believe—promise!' And I promised.

"The strangest look came into his eyes. A look of"—my mother's voice sank to a hushed whisper—"I can only describe it as holy exultation! It was too vivid and triumphant to have been of this world. And he died in my arms—Clayton, why do you look at me like that? What is the matter, child?"

"Nothing. You told the story so well that for a moment I seemed to—to see him—or something. Never mind me. Mother, haven't you any picture of my uncle?"

"Only one of him as he was in his latter years. I have kept it locked away, for fear it might be destroyed or injured. After Serapion was gone they had a fire at the photographer's"—mother had risen and was searching in a bureau-drawer—"a fire—where is that key?—the fire spoiled all the old negatives, the man said—I had that key here—though the studio only partly burned, and I always suspected he simply didn't take the trouble to hunt for the ones of your uncle—here it is! In my glove-box, of all places! I am so glad that you take this seriously, Clayton. You feel nearly as deeply about it as I, don't you, dear?"

"It's nothing to joke over," I said.

"No; but your father might have influenced you—"

"Let me unlock it!"

She was struggling with a small drawer in the side of the high, old-fashioned, carved walnut escritoire which she kept in her bedroom now, because our one living-room was small and crowded.

I made fussing over the refractory lock an excuse to hide my too-genuine emotion. I wished to see that picture. At the same time I dreaded unspeakably the moment when doubt might become certainty.

"It's open," I said at last, and stepped back.

My mother took out a flat package, wrapped in yellowed tissue-paper. She began to undo the silk cord tied around it. I turned my back suddenly. Then I felt something thrust into my hand. With all my will I forced myself to bring the thing around before my eyes.

What face would stare back at me, eye to eye, amused, pleasant—

The window-shades were still drawn, and the light dim. It was a moment before I realized that what I held was not a picture at all, but some kind of printed pamphlet.

"Raise the shade," said my mother. "I wish you to read that. It is a little memorial of your uncle, written by one of his friends, a Mr. Hazlett. The words are so touching! Almost as beautiful as the thoughts Serapion himself often expressed."

"Would you mind"—I controlled my voice by an effort—"would you mind letting me see the picture first?"

"Here it is."

This time she had handed me the unmistakable, polished, bescrolled oblong of an old-fashioned photographer's mounting.

Defiance, last resource of the hard-pressed, drove me in two bold strides to the window, where I jerked the shade up, rattling on its roller.

Daylight beat in. This was the middle of November and the light was gray, filtered through gray clouds. A few scattered particles of snow flickered past the window.

In my fingers the polished face of a cardboard mount felt smooth, almost soft to the touch. I watched the snow.

"Isn't his face beautiful, dear?" demanded a voice at my shoulder.

"I — I — yes, I'm afraid — of course, mother!"

"But you are not looking at it!"

"I did look," I lied. "I—this has all been a little too much for me. Take it—put it away. No, I'll read the memorial another time. Happy! Did he promise to—to come back and make me *happy?*"

"Practically that. How like him you are, dear son! He was sensitive, too; and your eyes! You have the Barbour nose and forehead, but your eyes—"

"Please, mother!"

She let me go at last, and in the quiet of refuge behind the locked door of my bedroom, I, who after all had not dared to look upon the picture of Serapion, scrutinized thoroughly every feature of my own face in the mirror.

Like him! She had often said so in the past, but the statement had failed to make any particular impression.

Yes, she was right about the eyes. They were the same clear, light-blue as his—what? Never! Not as *his*. For all I knew by actual observation, Serapion's eyes might have been sea-green or shell-pink. *I had never seen him.* Let me keep that fact firmly in mind.

(To be continued NEXT WEEK.)

In Twilight Land

by

Wolcott LeClear Beard

YOUNG Robert Howard had journeyed toward Twilight Land by way of hidden paths that entered the United States at San Francisco after wandering over something like two-thirds of the world. Gaunt, worn and haggard, looking just then far older than his six-and-twenty years, a train at length had carried him and his responsibilities across the continent to the Pennsylvania station in New York.

It was those responsibilities to which Bob's haggard appearance was due. They were heavier responsibilities than most men are called upon to bear, and Bob had been laboring under their weight for many months. Part of them were contained in a traveling-bag, the handle of which was gripped in Bob's left fist. The rest were incarnate in a small, olive-skinned boy, pitiably thin, who trotted, bravely but wearily, by his side.

The great station concourse must have seemed as illimitable as a prairie to that tired child. With a sigh, he took hold of Bob's coat to help him as he walked. The young man looked anxiously down at him.

"We haven't much farther to go," said Bob, reassuringly. "Somebody is due to

meet us, just over there in the arcade. You can make it all right—can't you, old chap?"

With a smile of beaming affection, the boy nodded assent. In silence the two gained the arcade and began walking slowly along its length. No one was waiting there. Nobody gave them more than a casual glance. As they neared the street Bob's spirits, already low, were sinking rapidly. The boy could not walk much farther, and where they were supposed to go Bob had no idea. To take a cab or go to a hotel were acts that he had been particularly warned against, but—

"Bob!"

It was a girl's voice—a decidedly fresh and attractive voice—and it came from behind. Stopping, Bob turned to see the girl herself hurrying toward him; and it struck him that she was exactly what he would expect the owner of such a voice to be.

"Uncle Pete couldn't come, so I came in his stead," the girl went on, while still some distance away. "I almost missed you—your telegram came only just now. But I'm *so* glad you're here at last."

Bob had sent no telegram, but the mention of one was in the nature of a password. He said nothing however. As a matter of fact he had not time. Before he had a chance to speak, the girl had slipped both arms around his neck and had kissed him. Then, very quickly, indeed, she stooped to embrace the boy. Her face was turned away now, but Bob could see a flush that had covered the small portion that still was visible.

"So this is Josie!" she cried. "My dear, you were very little when I saw you last—but don't you remember your Aunt Teddy, Joe?"

The little lad did not speak. Quickly and questioningly he glanced at Bob, who nodded. Not until then did the boy turn his dark eyes on the girl—"Aunt Teddy," as she called herself—and smiled up at her. It was a winning and trustful smile. The girl made a quick dab at her eyes with her handkerchief; then rose and her eyes, with a bit of moisture still remaining in them, looked squarely and with a trace of defiance into his.

Now, for the first time, Bob found an opportunity really to observe her face. He decided that it was more than merely pretty; that in its own peculiar way it was almost if not quite beautiful. That though it had a few freckles sprinkled upon its creamy skin, the freckles were so becoming that one would miss them greatly if they were gone. That it was like the face of a frank and amazingly handsome boy, with a girl's wholesome sweetness added.

"I don't know when we'll have another chance of talking without fear of being overheard; so listen!" she commanded. "My first name is Theodora—more commonly Teddy—and you'll have to call me by it for reasons that I'll explain. My last name is really Vasconselos, but my mother's name was the same as yours—Howard. Uncle Peter—he's my grand-uncle and only living relative—Uncle Peter and I are using that name at present. It's less conspicuous than our own, and therefore safer."

"Of course," agreed Bob. "And I've always known your people. Your mother and my father came from the same family, away back."

"Away back—yes. Two centuries back at the very least," she replied tartly. "Anyway, our relationship certainly isn't close enough to warrant my manner of greeting you. But it was thought best that I should receive you that way."

"I'm sorry that any particular reason was necessary, but I knew, of course, that there must be one," said Bob, simply.

She gave him a grateful glance, and the defensive attitude that she had assumed fell away, not to return.

"You see, Uncle Peter thought it best that you and I should appear to be brother and sister, if any question of our relationship should arise. This poor baby is to be the child of another and older sister, who married a foreigner. You are supposed to have gone abroad, in order to bring home your nephew after his mother's death. The rest of our plans you can learn later; but this much you had to know at once."

Bending down, she gathered the boy into her arms. His head fell upon her shoulders, and his eyes closed in blissful relief.

"Are you strong enough to carry him?" asked Bob, with concern.

"To carry this poor mite?" she returned scornfully. "Yes, indeed! By the way; he has been taught to call you 'uncle,' hasn't he?"

"Yes. Also that for the present his name is 'Josie Bragan.' That's easy for him to remember and to pronounce. He has stuck to it manfully—but he is manly, poor little chap! Throughout all these months, never a whine out of him—never a sign of fear. He runs true to form, all right!" There never was a gamer kid."

The girl nodded appreciatively. Together they emerged from the arcade into the muggy heat of a cloudy summer afternoon.

"We'll take a street-car," said Teddy, as they turned northward on Seventh Avenue. "A taxi would attract attention where we lived, and can be followed more easily without our knowing it. Do you think you're safe so far, Bob? You haven't been dogged by any one, have you?"

"I hope not," answered Bob. "We were followed from Europe to Chile, and an attempt to get hold of the boy was made in the hotel at Valparaiso. The man who made it is dead now, and we left Chile that night without being followed so far as I know. But one never can tell."

The girl shuddered a little. "One must watch," she said.

As they crossed Thirty-third Street a man passed them with a sidelong but noticeable glance. Half-way along the block he turned, stopped and waited for them to approach. He was a large man, burly and red of face, with resonant clothing that long since had lost its pristine freshness. As Teddy neared him, he looked down with a grin of sneering satisfaction at the sleeping child in her arms.

"So this is His Royal Joblots!" he exclaimed, triumphantly.

With a little gasp Teddy fell back for a pace or two, and Bob stepped between her and the stranger. The latter went on.

"You're the young fellow by the name of Howard," he went on, addressing Bob, with an air of bullying truculence. "If you wantter save trouble, you'd better come along quietly with me—the three of you!"

Bob's right hand, concealed in his coat pocket, was thrust forward in such a manner that a person experienced in such matters might have surmised—justly surmised—that it held an automatic pistol. This fact, however, was unnoted by the stranger. He was watching Teddy, who had hurried on, and was apparently seeking to overtake the tall, blue-coated figure of a policeman who strolled a little in advance. As she touched the officer's arm to attract his attention, the stranger turned and fled, losing himself in the crowd.

"I only asked him a silly question—just so that I could be seen talking with an officer of the law, and so frighten that horrible man away," she explained, when she and Bob were seated in an eastbound crosstown car a moment later. "It was just bluff, as you Americans say—my bluff against his. I'm glad it succeeded."

"It was a bit of mighty quick and clever thinking," said Bob, with conviction. "As for its success—I'm more thankful for that, I imagine, even than you are. I came very near losing my temper and making an ass of myself. It was when that beggar spoke of the boy here as 'His Royal Joblots.' It was such a beastly libel on the truth."

The girl understood. She reached over and gave Bob's hand an impulsive little pat to show that she did. Then she clasped the child closer in her arms and looked down at his sleeping face with a little laugh that was half hysterical.

"Poor little Royal Joblots!" she said.

Somehow the words sounded neither libelous nor beastly, as she spoke them, despite the truth they contained. For they did contain truth; there was no gainsaying that.

By birth the shabby child, sleeping in Teddy's arms—in the arms, that is, of Donna Theodora de Vasconselos—was a prince, the son of an ancient sovereign house. Moreover, since the abdication of his uncle, the erstwhile king, he was heir to a non-existent throne.

A non-existent throne because the country over which Josie's ancestors had ruled saw fit to repudiate alike its ancient rulers and its ancient faith. For the former it had substituted the amateurishly rapacious leaders of a radical republic; for the latter it offered no substitute.

Now, Bob's family always had held to that repudiated faith — never had relinquished it since the founder of that family was in very truth "hogwarden" to an ancient Saxon king; an office of honor and responsibility, from which their patronymic was derived. When England changed its faith some of the Howards took refuge in the land of Josie's ancestors. Never had their descendants—not even the branch to which Bob belonged, that for generations had been domiciled in the United States—entirely forsaken their sentimental allegiance to the dynasty and the land that had protected them in their time of need. The deposition of that dynasty had fanned their quiescent loyalty into fierce flame.

So it happened that Bob's father was among those who fell in a desperate attempt to overthrow this so-called republic and reestablish the monarchy. Bob himself had barely escaped a like fate. The attempt had ended in utter disaster. The contents of Bob's hand-bag and the child in Teddy's arms were all that was left.

Bob sighed as he thought of this. The girl, whose thoughts had evidently been running along different lines, also sighed.

"Bob, who was that man, do you suppose?" she asked.

"Just a human jackal—nothing more," answered Bob. "Probably a member of the semicriminal class of private detectives That sort would gladly sell the life of a helpless child like Josie, if it could be done with safety, but they lack the courage for the less despicable forms of felony, such as highway robbery or the like. The consulate of that damned republic have offered rewards that must have sent swarms of creatures like that one out to look for Josie and me."

"But this is the United States," she protested. "Even if you were found, what could these people do?"

"Do. They'd bring forward somebody, with proper credentials all in order, to pose as Josie's guardian. They'd have me arrested for stealing the junk I've got with me. Both Josie and I would be sent back where we escaped from and then—we'd vanish. 'For the good of the state,' as so many have been made to vanish before."

Once more the girl shuddered. She rose.

"They haven't got either of you yet!" said she, with a defiant thrust of her chin. "Come on, Bob; we change here."

So they changed; and, taking a southbound Third Avenue car, rode to the confines of Twilight Land.

Now, every large city has at least one "Thieves' Highway," where inhabitants of certain predatory substrata of society foregather for purposes of pleasure, as opposed to those of professional labors. Cheap, tawdry and commonplace, like most others of its sort, New York's principal Thieves' Highway lies along a portion of East Fourteenth Street. Not too far east, however; else it would collide with the shabby-genteel vicinage of Stuyvesant Square. And as every one knows, there is nothing in the world more militantly respectable than the shabby-genteel.

Between these two sections—between the land basking in the light of respectability and that where there is a reign of darkness caused by the absence of this light—there lies a tiny buffer state, Twilight Land. Because it is a compromise between the two, it is utterly unlike either. It is somewhat of a mystery to be feared and avoided, generally speaking, by the inhabitants of both. Visually this land is very inconspicuous. Socially and ethically it is one of the most picturesque spots on earth.

Alighting from the street-car, Teddy and Bob walked into the heart of Twilight Land. It was not a long walk. It ended in what might be called a backwater of the city's traffic; a sort of tiny plaza, made by the junction of two quiet, crooked streets.

"I don't believe that anybody's at home," remarked Teddy. "You see, we weren't sure at what station you'd arrive, so Uncle Peter and Maria—she's my old nurse—and I each went to a different one so we'd be as sure as possible of not missing you, and I don't believe they've returned yet. Here we are."

She had stopped at a house that once, in days long past, had been a mansion of opulent respectability. Now, though it had traveled far down the social scale, some vestiges of its former state seemed still to cling around it, as the rags of purple and fine

linen might have clung to the Prodigal Son. Over its drawing-room windows there appeared a sign, inscribed:

P. HOWARD

Fine Cabinet Work

Opening the door with a latch-key, Teddy led the way to a living-room in the rear of the house. There she laid the boy, still sleeping, on a couch. Taking off her hat, seated herself and began waving a fan before the face of the slumbering child. Bob settled himself in an easy chair, his bag between his feet, and found himself watching her. There followed a pause, which at length was ended by the girl.

"One reads in history," she said, thoughtfully, "about escapes sometimes like this one of yours and Josie's. There was one king or prince or something who got away hidden under the load of a cart, and another carried out of captivity on a man's back, bound up in a fagot. But somehow, those escapes seem so different from this one. There was romance about those."

"They seem romantic now, as we look back at them," replied Bob. "But that was because they occurred so long ago, when men wore picturesque clothing—clothing more often made by a blacksmith than by a tailor. I'd like to make a small bet that the chappies who were escaping didn't do much gloating over the romance of their positions."

"Perhaps they didn't," admitted Teddy, only half convinced.

"Take a case nearer our own times," Bob pursued. "Take that of the Empress Eugénie. Picture a scared, cantankerous, stingy, middle-aged woman, descended from a Spanish grandee and a Scotch saloonkeeper, skipping out of France between two days, chaperoned by her Yankee dentist. I can't see much romance about that. Can you?"

"I'm not so sure," returned the girl, doubtfully. "Eugénie maintained a brilliant little court in her exile, I believe. Josie's court at present is here—in almost a slum. It consists of you, me, a solitary maid-servant who was my nurse when I was little, and Uncle Peter. Uncle Peter, to whom the ancient state, hardly less than the ancient church, is a religion to which he devotes every thought and act—for which he would sacrifice his life, or yours, or mine, or anybody else's without a second thought, if he found it necessary—because, in his belief, church and state are indivisible. Uncle Peter, who is a duke, and a distant relative of Josie's father, who is also a cabinetmaker — an old, hard-working cabinetmaker. Does all that sound brilliant—or romantic?"

"I think it would sound all right to Josie," said Bob. "It would sound like a chance to rest for a while in reasonable security, which is what he most needs—poor little chap! He never was strong, and now he's thoroughly played out besides, so that—"

There was the rattle of a key in the front door. A man's footsteps could be heard as the door slammed. Teddy sprang to her feet.

"Is it the duke?" asked Bob, clutching his bag.

"Yes," she replied, "but you mustn't call him that. Remember that you and I are supposed to be brother and sister. So he must be 'Uncle Peter' to you as well as me. Come and meet him!"

She left the room and Bob followed her, to meet Uncle Peter in the front passage. It was a small man whom he saw, old and thin and wrinkled and frail, dressed in rough, working clothes of brown moleskin. Yet it seemed to Bob that with the lean austerity of his face, and his dark eyes alight with the fires of fanaticism, he looked like nothing and never could look like anything but what he was: a great nobleman or—what was more essential—a great gentleman, adhering with quixotic devotion to the faith and the cause in which he believed.

"My boy," he said, as Bob approached, "in bringing the prince to this place you have performed a task that will enshrine your memory forever in all loyal hearts. One which causes me deeply to regret that we are not related in fact as well as in our necessary fiction. Now I would see his highness. Where is he?"

"In the living-room, Uncle Peter," answered Teddy. "He's asleep, so be careful

not to wake him. He isn't very strong, I'm afraid."

A look of deep concern spread over the duke's face as he started for the room in which the little lad lay. Catching Bob's sleeve, Teddy led him into a sort of small parlor, opening from the passage, its door opposite that of the erstwhile drawing-room.

"I wanted Uncle Peter to go by himself," she explained. "I know he'd rather. Josie means so much to him. So much more than even to you and me. We love Josie, but to Uncle Peter he's a symbol of all that's most sacred on earth. You understand, don't you?"

Bob understood; understood perfectly. In fact, instinct would have restrained him from going into the living-room just at that time, but he could not have put his reason into words as the girl had done.

"I wonder, Teddy, if you know what a blazing fine sort you are!" he exclaimed, with impulsive admiration.

Teddy bobbed an ironical little curtsy and ran away in response to a cautious knock at the front door. From the passage Bob could hear the tone, though not the words, of a few quick questions and replies. Then Teddy returned. She did not look at Bob, and of this he was glad; for, like most youths of Anglo-Saxon stock placed under like circumstances, he felt rather as though his impulsiveness had led him into something resembling indecent emotional exposure.

"It was Maria, my old nurse, who has just come back from the station," remarked Teddy. "She was wild with delight when I told her that Josie was here, quite safe."

The heavy net curtains that guarded the room from outside observation had become a trifle disarranged. As Teddy twitched them into place, she glanced out through the little crack between them—then whirled back into the room, her face ghastly white. Catching Bob by both lapels of his coat, she dragged him out into the passage.

"It's that man!" she gasped. "The one who spoke to us. He was looking at this house—was walking toward it—from the other side of the street. He may be able to see through those curtains—I don't know. But he mustn't see you or me. He may suspect that we're here, but he mustn't know it!"

Between excitement and fright, the girl trembled so that she could hardly stand. Bob slipped an arm around her waist in order to support her. Heedless of all but her own dismay, she clung to him, sobbing hysterically.

At this moment Uncle Peter, the duke, very quietly emerged from the living-room. He spoke no word and evinced no surprise; simply looked at the pair with an air of mild inquiry. Tearing herself away from Bob, Teddy flung both her arms around the old man's neck and poured forth a tempestuous account of what had happened. He listened without comment, his delicately-chiseled face as inscrutable as eternity.

"My dear," he said, kindly, as she finished, "it is unfortunate that this man should have stumbled upon our whereabouts, but not especially unfortunate for us. So far as we are concerned, it simply means that I have been obliged to change my plans. Pray go to Maria, Theodora, and ask that the evening meal be hurried. Our meal—not that of our charge. The prince will sup when he wakes."

Pulling herself together, Teddy obediently departed.

"She is a good girl," remarked Teddy's ducal uncle, as she disappeared. "Don't you think so, Bob?"

He did not look in the least like a duke at that moment; only like a shrewd, kindly old gentleman, who was very wise, and who consequently had divined a young man's thoughts—which he had; though Bob, had he expressed those thoughts, would probably not have couched them in such very moderate words.

Bob felt this remark to be a decided intrusion upon his mental privacy. Also he felt himself to be coloring hotly. Greatly did he desire to change the subject.

"Here are some things I brought with me," he began, lifting his bag.

"Exactly," interrupted Uncle Peter. "We will attend to that matter directly. First, however, I would like to have you step into the little reception-room there, look out of the window and come and tell me what you see."

Bob could not even guess the reason for this request, but he did, without comment, as he had been asked. Going to the office window, he parted the curtains and looked out. He found himself staring into the face of the man of whom Teddy had spoken—of the "jackal"—which was less than a yard from his own as its owner leaned across the area railings in an attempt to see into the little parlor.

Bob started back, but not so quickly that he failed to see the other man hurry away. Excited and angry, Bob returned to the passage and reported. Uncle Peter, as inscrutable as before, merely nodded, as though he heard what he had expected to hear.

"That man, you will find, has not gone for long," he remarked. "He will report to the consulate that employs him and then return here. In the meantime, come with me, Bob; it soon will be dark, and first we'll see that you are relieved of the remainder of your charge."

He opened the door of what once had been the drawing-room of the house, but which was now his cabinet-maker's shop. A work bench, wondrously neat, stood before the two windows. Here and there were ranged various articles in different stages of incompletion. One piece alone was complete, and that, being larger than any of the others, stretched across the rear of the room.

This was an altar—small for an altar, but large for the room in which it stood. It was of wood, elaborately and beautifully carved. Bob, though by no means professing to be a judge of such things, still had seen much good art, and had appreciated what he saw. Rarely, however, had anything of its sort appealed to him so strongly as did this altar. To him it seemed a masterpiece—as, indeed, it was.

"You like it?" asked Uncle Peter, with a smile.

"It's simply wonderful!" the young man replied. "Did you do it, Uncle Peter? How on earth did you ever learn such a craft?"

"Woodworking as an art always interested me," answered the duke. "I made it my recreation as some men take up painting or music. After my exile it became at once an avocation and a disguise. But come—let us verify the property you have brought."

With a sigh of relief, Bob heaved the heavy bag, which he still held, onto the work bench. From it he removed a few personal belongings; then inverted it. From it there fell an incredible number of tiny parcels, done up in white tissue paper. As they lay on the work bench they made a heap that might have been measured in quarts.

"I was advised to carry them loose like that," remarked Bob. "Then, if the bag was cut and some of them stolen, some also would surely be missed."

"It was a wise plan," approved Uncle Peter. "We will open the packages and put each sort by itself. If necessary we can go over the lists afterward."

So together they began to unwrap the little white bundles. Each, as it was unwrapped, revealed a single gem. Each sort was placed on the work bench by itself. All the stones were large, all practically flawless, many practically without price. It is doubtful if all the vaults in Maiden Lane could have disgorged an equally valuable collection of unset stones. Yet, even so, the handling of them was not an exciting task.

Very soon, in fact, so far as Bob was concerned, the job ceased to be even an interesting one. The beauty of the individual gem was lost amid such a multitude, and the sense of their collective value was lessened almost to the vanishing point as they lay promiscuously huddled in that dim light on the work-scarred planks.

Bob's mind began to wander. Shortly, as was but natural, it drifted back to that episode of the parlor window, and the man who had been trying to look into it. With only partial success he tried to formulate a theory that would fit the facts. At last he ventured a question.

"Uncle Peter, did you *want* that spy to see me? So he'd go back to the consulate and report what he'd found and therefore would have to leave us alone for a while."

"Yes," answered the duke, without looking up from his work. "I have an errand to do before he returns."

"Why should he return, sir? To see that Josie and I haven't sneaked away?"

"Partly. Partly, in all probability, in order to try and steal these jewels. He must know of their existence, and would naturally imagine the attempt to involve little risk. In this he is mistaken. He is a clumsy scoundrel. The Providence that guards our sacred cause has mercifully ordained that he shall be so—a species of human vermin, practically soulless and mindless. Vermin is always dangerous, but when not in large numbers is fortunately easy to exterminate."

"But when that beggar goes and reports, won't the consulate get busy, sir?" pursued Bob.

"Not to-night," answered the duke tranquilly. "It is too late for them to do anything; I made sure of that before I allowed you to show yourself to that creature. To-morrow morning the emissaries of the consulate will appear, bringing search warrants and all other legal instruments to enable them to accomplish their ends."

"Then isn't it up to us to act rather quickly, sir?" asked Bob uneasily.

"We are already acting," the duke replied. "Still—"

He consulted a watch that looked somewhat like a small muffin, made of massive gold, which he fished from an inner pocket by means of a shoestring that served as a guard. He frowned as he read the hour.

"You did well to remind me, Bob; we have indeed spent rather more time at this task than I intended. What little of it remains to be done can be attended to later. Now I shall show you a secret, my boy. A secret known to no one in the world but you and me."

While speaking, the ducal Uncle Peter had spread a handkerchief on the workbench. On it he placed what few of the little tissue-paper packets that remained unopened and then gathered up the unset jewels in double handfuls, as thought they had been so many dried peas, he added them to the pile and took up the handkerchief by its corners and tied them across, making a bundle. Taking the bundle in one hand, he went to the altar that filled the rear of the room.

There was a cross that surmounted the altar. Not a crucifix; just a cross, its severe, rectangular lines unbroken, though its face was covered by an intricate arabesque of symbolic figures, carved in low relief. With his free hand the duke who had fashioned this altar pressed a boss in the ornamentation of its frieze and then, grasping the shaft of the cross as high up as he could reach, began to pull.

"Help me!" commanded Uncle Peter.

So Bob caught hold of the cross and added his strength to the pull. With a stiff "living" resistance, and sundry creaks of protest, the cross leaned forward, its arms bending downward as it came. At last, as it lay horizontal, its carved face beneath, something clicked into place, and the resistance ceased. The displacement of the cross revealed a cavity in the base upon which it normally stood. Into this cavity the duke dropped his handkerchief-enclosed bundle of jewels.

It was a medieval sort of hiding-place, cleverly executed. Also it was efficient; for in conception it was so antique that for all practical purposes it would be quite new and unsuspected. It was not upon this device, however, that the attention of Bob was fixed. With astonishment and only partial comprehension, he was studying the cross itself.

Unlike its face, the back of this cross was smooth save for a deep groove that ran mid-way along its shaft from a point near its base to its top. Its arms, now bent down so that they and the shaft were almost parallel, were held in that position by a cord, made of many strands of picture-wire. The arms, at first sight, seemed to be hinged at their lower corners, where they joined the shaft; but on closer inspection what seemed to be hinges proved in reality to be angular steel springs, enormously strong, set into the wood so that they were invisible from the front of the altar.

Bob looked inquiringly at Uncle Peter. The latter smiled, and from the place where the jewels had been laid he took a knife—an ordinary butcher-knife, cheap and new. Around its haft he twisted a piece of folded newspaper; then laid the knife, point foremost, in the groove.

"The paper acts like the feathers of an arrow, so that the knife will fly as it is pointed," he explained.

Taking the knife out of the groove, he replaced it in the recess. He pulled a loop of wire that protruded from the shaft of the cross. Instantly the arms sprang back into place with a resonant "tang" of the cord that had joined the ends of those arms; which cord was tightened as the arms straightened precisely as any other bowstring tightens when the bow is shot. Had the knife, with the paper wrapped around its haft, been suffered to remain in that groove, where for a moment it had been placed, it would have been driven forward as an arrow is driven.

These facts, however, were things that for a moment Bob failed to comprehend. As the arms straightened, and the string twanged, the cross itself flipped upright, noiselessly and quickly, as though it weighed no more than a huge quill. It stood upon its base, to all appearances rigidly fixed there, concealing the jewels and the knife that lay under its foot, holding the tightened bowstring behind its arms, seeming to challenge the world to assert that it ever had been or ever could be anything but what it appeared to be; the symbol of Christianity, fitly surmounting a Christian altar.

It was this swift transformation, at which he stared with rounded eyes, that caused Bob a moment of confusion; but the significance of what he had seen was too plain longer to conceal itself.

"Why, the thing is just a huge crossbow!" he exclaimed.

"Yes. An *arvalesta*," assented Uncle Peter, reverting to his native tongue for the technical word.

"It would shoot that knife as a field gun fires a shell," Bob went on.

"Yes," the other agreed once more. "Also, when in position, it will traverse like a field gun, so as to command the two windows of this room. Unlike a field gun, however, it makes no report."

To this Bob offered no comment; but something of a thought that darted through his mind must have shown in his face. His companion went quickly on, with a manner now wholly that of the duke—of a great nobleman of the old, ultraconservative school—of the rabid loyalist, with eyes that flamed with the light that had kindled the fires of the Spanish Inquisition.

"You think it strange that the cross on an altar should be designed for such a purpose?" he demanded. "Does it occur to you that for centuries the family of that boy whom you brought has lived for the defense of the faith for which that cross stands? Does it occur to you that this child—that sleeping child—is the only hope left to that faith in the land whence he comes? Is it not fitting, then, that the cross should defend the scion of its champions, otherwise defenseless? As yet, it is true, this altar is not consecrated, and it may never be consecrated in the usual way. Yet this night—before the dawn of another day—by its own act—by yours and that of Theodora, its consecration shall be made, full and complete!"

He paused. Bob still maintained his silence. With all his soul he yearned for an explanation of those latter and more cryptic remarks, but he did not dare ask for them. It would, he felt, have been like asking questions during the celebration of a high mass in Spain, say, during the early part of the sixteenth century.

Then the duke spoke again; but his manner now once more was that of Uncle Peter. Of simple, kindly Uncle Peter.

"I must leave you for a little, Bob, but I shall soon return," said he. "I am only going to the house of the parish priest—a most trustworthy man. Owing to the sudden change in my plans, rendered necessary by that spy, there are arrangements to be made. To-morrow I will see that those jewels are placed in a position of permanent security, but to-night they will do very well where they are. Pull down the cross, Bob—quickly, before Theodora comes and finds us here."

Bob did as he was told; the cross creaked and yielded as before. First most carefully tucking the paper around its haft, Uncle Peter laid the knife in the groove. Together they left the room as the girl's light footfalls were heard on the stairs. Uncle Peter locked the shop door and hurriedly departed an instant before she appeared.

"Where's Uncle Peter?" she asked. "He oughtn't to have gone out now. Supper 'll be ready in a minute."

Bob made Uncle Peter's excuses, and Teddy listened absently—just like any other girl, Bob thought to himself, whose mind was concerned with domestic affairs. The sight of her, thus occupied, caused a queer little tug at his heart. It savored so of home, and peace, and security, and all the things for which he yearned, but which were so sternly forbidden him by the life he had for years been forced to live.

"Well," said Teddy as Bob finished, "if Uncle Peter said he was coming directly back, I suppose it 'll be all right. For, anyway, Josie is awake, and says he won't go to sleep again until he sees you. We just have put him to bed."

She retraced her way up the stairs, and Bob followed her into an open bedroom which Maria, the old servant, left as they entered. In the bed, his dark face somewhat flushed, lay Josie, who extended a hot, thin little hand to each.

"On-kel Bob," said he, and laughed, a cackling little laugh as he said it; because, for some reason comprehensible only to childhood, Bob's avuncular title—in English—always had been an irresistible standing joke to Josie.

Then, turning to Teddy, he attempted to address her in like manner, but the feminine form of "uncle" was too much for his limited stock of the language. As he frowningly hunted for the word, Teddy would have prompted him; but Josie solved the problem in his own way.

"You," he said, smiling triumphantly into Teddy's face, "you *Meeses* On-kel."

Taken by surprise, Bob burst into a laugh. Teddy darted one furious look at him; then turned away, blushing furiously. Poor Josie, knowing that he had said something unintended, looked from one to the other in consternation.

"Me—I—wrong?" he asked, piteously, his eyes filling.

"You are not," answered Bob with a flash of valor.

"Not in what you meant to say, dear," the girl hastened to add as she bent over the flushed face on the pillow. "'Aunt Teddy' is what you tried to think of. Now we must leave you for a little while, Josie, and you must go to sleep. So shut your eyes!"

Josie obediently squeezed them shut. Teddy kissed him, then straightened, and with an imperious signal for Bob to precede her, left the room.

"Bob," she demanded as they gained the passage, and she had closed the bedroom door, "haven't you *any* sense?"

"I always supposed I had," returned Bob, doggedly.

"Sense! Do you think it's sense to bellow with laughter as you did—like a great calf?" she stormed. "Sense—to cast ridicule upon that sensitive child, already more than half sick! You may call it sense. I don't!"

Bob stared at her blankly, astounded by her flagrant injustice. Even had he been guilty as charged—which he was not—her words would have been far more severe than the occasion called for. He felt that there was a decided rejoinder coming to that girl—that she needed it. Search his mind as he might, however, no adequate verbal retort could he find; so he made the only one that occurred to him. Reaching out, he drew her to him and kissed her, without haste, but with a world of determination, full upon the lips.

She made no resistance; neither did she yield. She was like a graven image—if there could be such a thing—made of firm flesh and warm blood. Bob released her. There was a moment of silence; then she spoke.

"Are you proud of yourself?" she inquired icily. "But I hope you're not. I hope you are approximately as ashamed of yourself as you ought to be."

"I'm not a bit ashamed," growled Bob defiantly, refusing to be bullied further. "I'm glad I did it. For two pins I'd do it again!"

Mentally he braced himself to receive her reply; but he braced himself in vain, for she made no reply. Instead she reached around him, and opened a door against which he stood.

"That is your room," said she. "You'll probably want to wash your hands. Sup-

per—we don't call it dinner—will be put on the table directly Uncle Peter returns."

Then she turned and went down-stairs.

Bob made a hurried toilet, fuming as he did so. He fumed because he did not understand. How on earth was he to understand? Had Teddy pulled away from him, crying "I hate you!" her conduct would have been logical enough. Even had she returned his kiss, he would have been greatly astonished, but in no way mystified. As it was—

Bob flung down his hair-brushes with a bang, and descended to the floor below just as Uncle Peter returned and supper was announced.

They went into the dining-room, where the meal awaited them. It was not a cheerful repast. Teddy was silent, and this troubled Bob, for notwithstanding his defiant attitude he hoped, with a fervor that exasperated him, that he had not hopelessly offended her. Uncle Peter—or rather, the duke, from his present aspect he appeared to be—was occupied with his own somber thoughts. So long continued was the silence that Bob would endure it no longer.

"Had that spy returned to watch the house when you returned, sir?" he asked.

"Yes," replied the duke. "He was leaning against the lamp-post that stands opposite the work-shop windows. Doubtless he will continue to stand there for some time to come."

"Aren't you afraid that he'll break in while we're here at the table?" Bob pursued.

"No," was the reply. "Not at this hour; even in this quiet street there would be too many possible observers to permit such an attempt. Later—but that man, there by the lamp-post, matters nothing. He is a tool, to be used or broken and tossed aside as an unconsidered trifle. His acts or his fate can serve only to add one more item to the account of those who employ him; to burden still further the sin-laden souls of the unspeakable traitors who have already usurped the birthright of the Lord's anointed, divinely appointed to govern and guide them, and who now would lay impious hands upon his person; to lend one more impulse to the many that will push those souls of theirs to the very bottom of the pit of perdition that yawns to receive them!"

He looked at Bob as he finished speaking, and though no question had been asked, the younger man somehow knew that he was expected to reply. To stem that stream of fiery invective, as sincere as absolute faith could make it, was the last thing he desired to do. Almost he feared to do so; but lie he would not. Lying was a species of cowardice—and Bob did not admire cowards. Therefore he spoke frankly, telling the truth as he saw it, as gently as he could.

"I never was quite certain about the divine right of kings," he said. "But at least it always appeared to be that men, properly bred, are like other animals, also properly bred. Each sort has its own uses. One wouldn't put a toy spaniel to chasing foxes. So it is with Josie's people. They're rulers, bred as such for centuries—a specialized breed. When I see the mess that the bounders now in power are making of Josie's country, it reminds me of a lot of cart-horses trying to run on a race-course. They can put up a race of sorts—but it's a mighty poor race, for all concerned. I don't know whether you can follow my meaning, sir; but I'm afraid I can't explain myself better."

The duke said nothing, but sat looking at Bob with the inquisitorial fires still smoldering in his eyes. There would have been an embarrassing pause, but for Teddy. Speaking for the first time she came to the rescue.

"I'm sure that Bob's beliefs are the true ones," she said, very thoughtfully. "And I'm sure that those beliefs are not merely consistent with the doctrine of Divine Right, but that they actually go to prove that doctrine."

"Your reasons?" demanded the duke, curtly, turning his eyes upon her.

"It was a talk I had with Josie, only a little while ago, that put it into my mind," she answered. "Josie longs, above all else, to be just a small boy, playing about like other small boys. He told me so. He knows that he's small, and ill and weak, but he's determined to live. To live for his people—only for them. His care for them

coming, as it does, before everything else, is as instinctive as the act of a kitten that watches at a mouse-hole. Could any power but that of the Almighty implant such instincts in either cats or kings? It doesn't seem so, does it?"

For a moment the duke sat looking at her, and as he looked the fires of fanaticism in his eyes faded into the kindlier light which properly belonged in the eyes of Uncle Peter.

"'Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings,'" he quoted under his breath, and then spoke aloud.

"You are right," he admitted. "But do you realize, Theodora—and you also, Bob—that you also come of races that are 'specialized' in their ordained duties only a little less than the royal race of which we have been speaking? Duties, I mean, to the church, to the state, and to their embodiment in the child asleep up-stairs. Do you realize this, I ask?"

"Of course," answered Teddy simply. "You know I do, Uncle Peter."

"Haven't I proved that I realize it?" answered Bob, in his turn, rather aggrieved.

"No," answered the duke decidedly. "You both have proved yourselves willing to risk your lives in order to aid and protect Josie, the boy. That you are willing to spend those lives in the service of King Joseph is quite another thing, and one that remains to be proved. This very night that proof is to begin, and will continue until you meet your rewards, in this world or the next, as the case may be."

He paused. Their possible differences for the time forgotten, Teddy and Bob looked at each other in blank bewilderment. Neither had the faintest notion of what was meant, and with some apprehension they waited to hear. They had not long to wait.

"You both know that our plans have been changed," the duke went on. "Now that the identity of our charge is known, he cannot remain here. On the continent to the south of us there are spots where what we believe in still is beloved—still is powerful. While I remain here, to set in motion the machinery that will eventually restore him to his people, to one of these spots our prince shall go. There, for a time, while health and strength return to him, he shall be 'just a small boy,' as he so longs to be. There he shall live as the son of a simple American gentleman—of Robert Howard, a wealthy merchant, and of Theodora, his wife."

Bob jumped as though a pistol had been fired close to his ear.

"Good Lord!" he gasped. "You mean, sir, that we—that Teddy and I—are to be married?"

"What, pray, did you think was meant?" demanded the duke, frowning.

"But, Uncle Peter, isn't there a license required?" asked Teddy, coming to Bob's rescue. "And won't that man outside follow us when we go?"

"The man will not follow you," answered the duke. "And as for the license—it is immaterial, but it nevertheless will be obtained as soon as the proper office is open, by a couple sent there for that purpose. As the marriage will not take place until after midnight, the date will be—"

There was a ring at the door-bell. The duke rose to answer it.

"It is the parish priest, Father O'Farrell," said he. "I sent for him to come at this hour."

Teddy and Bob, the latter "rattled"—to quote his own expression—as no personal danger ever had rattled him, followed the old nobleman into the passage. They saw him admit a sturdy, kindly faced priest. They saw him leave the priest standing while, after a courteous word of apology, the duke went for a moment into the darkened shop. There they heard him moving about. They heard him close the shutters. Then he called to Father O'Farrell, who joined him in the shop probably because the altar also was there. For a moment the two young people were left alone. With a strong effort Bob pulled himself together, and turned to the girl.

"Teddy, if you say the word, I'll chuck this thing—I'll tell 'em I won't," he whispered. "You needn't get yourself in wrong—needn't let a peep out of you. I'll manage the whole affair if you don't want it to—"

"Would you call that doing your duty?"

she whispered in return, interrupting him. "For it isn't in the least my idea of duty done—"

"Theodora," called the duke, emerging from the shop. "Father O'Farrell will prepare you for the sacrament. Afterward Robert can go. I have certain matters to attend to. Soon I will return."

So Teddy walked resolutely into the shop, which now was to serve as a chapel, and Bob remained behind, his head in a whirl such as never before had it experienced. Never afterward could he remember that interval, neither what his thoughts were nor how long it was before Teddy emerged, her face pale, but flashing him a smile of encouragement that he never forgot.

Then Bob took her place in the chapel—for it seemed really to be a chapel now. Candles, standing upon the altar, lighted only it and its immediate vicinity. Bob stumbled through some sort of confession—he knew that he must have done so. But his only clear recollection was that the altar cross was standing upright, dignified and beautiful, upon its base. He recollected this because until now all memory of that cross, its functions and the posture in which he last saw it, had been driven away by subsequent happenings from his mind.

Nearly all men, it is said, are in a state of mental chaos at their own weddings; yet, as he knelt before that altar, Bob felt that his mind was clearing. For Teddy was kneeling beside him. Behind stood the three wedding guests—a royal prince, a duke, and an old maid-servant, the first of the three full of delighted excitement and the last dutifully sniffling, as women at weddings always will do.

Then there was another ringing of the door-bell. Old Maria answered it. Bob heard her say "Hush!" and became conscious that a fourth guest had been added to the other three; but could not turn around to see who it was.

The beautiful service drew to its close. Bob felt a queer sensation—something as though he stood in a swiftly descending elevator—as he heard the solemn words that pronounced him and Theodora man and wife. The prayers were ended, and they rose.

Then, for the first time, Bob caught sight of their latest guest. It was a sergeant of police, who beckoned to Father O'Farrell. The priest, still in his vestments, followed the policeman out into the street. When they returned, which they did almost instantly, Father O'Farrell was talking. His tone was low and his words hurried, but Bob's ears were sharp, and he caught them all.

"I saw that man when I came here," said the priest. "Most certainly there was no knife in his heart at that time. He was very much alive, leaning against that lamp-post and apparently looking at this house. No one has left the house since I came into it; that I can state positively. And I wish you'd have that body taken away at once, Clancy; it's an ill thing for a bride to see."

Possibly Police Lieutenant Clancy was a parishioner of Father O'Farrell's, but, at any rate, he saw to it that the priest's behest was promptly obeyed. A few minutes later Bob walked from the house to a taxicab, which had appeared notwithstanding the attention that its coming might attract. By his side walked Teddy, with Josie, still wildly excited, capering between them. And nothing more gruesome could be seen than Lieutenant Clancy himself, who grinningly slammed the taxicab door and wished them "joy and happiness forevermore."

The taxi rolled away toward the Pennsylvania Station, where Bob had alighted only so short a time before. Sighing, he tried resolutely to take dispassionate stock of himself and his circumstances, which latter had been so astoundingly and suddenly changed.

To begin with, he was married; that was the basic fact. Married to a girl whom he never had seen until that afternoon; yet, as he now acknowledged to himself, the one whom, had his choice been untrammeled, he would have chosen among all he ever had known. Nothing in the world did he so long for as that their lives should go on as the old duke had arranged for them to go.

But what did Teddy think? Though half of his own race, she had been reared where the custom of arranged marriage had been universal. She probably would not

rebel strongly against such a marriage. But Bob would rebel for her—with every drop of his Yankeeized, Anglo-Saxon blood!

He turned and looked at her. She was bending over Josie who, now that his excitement had passed, was leaning back against the cushions, his heavy eyelids drooping though, nevertheless, he smiled happily.

Reaching out suddenly, he caught one of Bob's hands and one of Teddy's, joining them, as he had seen the priest do.

"On-kel Bob—an' *Meeses* On-kel Bob," said he; then laughed sleepily at his little joke.

Teddy tried to pull her hand away, but could not, because Bob's grip had tightened upon it. He leaned toward her.

"Teddy," said he, awkwardly, his voice hoarse with earnestness, "do you mind—what has happened? Do you mind so very much? Tell me!"

"Mind!" she returned with a scornful little laugh. "If I minded, do you suppose that I'd have made you kiss me—as I did? Don't be a goose, Bob! And let go my hand; you're hurting it."

Bob leaned back weakly. It was too dark for him to see her face, which was a pity; but that was something he did not know.

Her tone was enough, however. It was conjugal—proprietary—finally and irrevocably so. It left not one shred of doubt that he really was a married man. It took his breath away.

Bob's breath returned haltingly. They had passed out of the semigloom of Twilight Land in among the lights of Broadway. And in Bob's mind, usually little given to imagination, these lights became transformed into tropical moon and stars. Beneath them he saw a rambling, palm-shaded house that sheltered him—and Teddy—and Josie, now "just a small boy" in accordance with his heart's desire—and joy and happiness forevermore as Clancy, the policeman, had wished them.

A YANKEE MAID

THERE lurks a witchery about
  This dainty Yankee maiden;
She wins me with a smile or pout
Through varying moods, and is, no doubt,
  With wiles and wisdom laden.

Her face is dreamy as the purr
  Of noontide brooks through flowers;
In dimples deep the sunbeams stir,
Her smiles are gay as ever were
  The fauns in lazy hours.

Her lustrous eyes in merry wise
  Low laugh from under lashes
That in a lazy languor rise;
And bluer than the bluebell lies
  The deep hue in their flashes.

And then to crown a rare delight
  She studies Worth and Virot;
A great hat from our wondering sight
Hides softest curls engoldened bright—
And he who saves his heart is quite
  A wondrous kind of hero.

Anonymous.

The Caravan of the Dead

by Harold Lamb

Author of "Marching Sands," "The Sunwise Turn," etc.

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

WHAT HAS ALREADY HAPPENED

AT the roof of the world, on the shores of Lake Issyuk Kul, John Donovan left his native servant to follow the mysterious Caravan of the Dead. And the servant, disobeying his master's behest to remain and watch for his return, was mysteriously slain at the town of Srinagar, after giving Major Fraser-Carnie his story.

Meanwhile, at Quebec, Edith Rand's meeting with Edouard Monsey, a Russian, and his saving her life, was followed by the departure of herself, her father, and aunt for India. Leaving the father at Calcutta, niece and aunt journeyed to Srinagar, where, after the girl had been vaguely disturbed by the intent gaze of a scar-faced man at Baramula, Fraser-Carnie spoke of him as bearing a strong resemblance to the killer of Donovan's servant, Jain Ali Beg.

Then, visited by one Iskander, a seller of rugs, Edith felt that the man was something more than a mere pedler—there had been something in his manner. But the arrival of Rawul Singh, Fraser-Carnie's orderly, interrupted, and later the girl was surprised to find that the belongings of Donovan, left with Fraser-Carnie by Jain Ali Beg, had vanished. Then followed the mysterious disappearance of her aunt's medicine-chest, and Edith might have put two and two together could she have looked into a certain house where Monsey was conversing with one Abbas, an Alaman. There the two men plotted the girl's abduction, to take place the night of a dance given by the maharaja. Her father was expected at any moment.

The kidnaping occurred according to schedule. Edith being abducted from the palace grounds in an ill-smelling ekka, her captors being none other than Iskander and—the man from Baramula. They drove furiously for the hills.

And at Srinagar Fraser-Carnie went over the case with Miss Rand. Concerning the cart in which Edith had been abducted and Fraser-Carnie's statement that no one admitted knowledge of it, Monsey, who was present, put in:

"Now, what does Rawul Singh say?"

Fraser-Carnie answered: "Rawul Singh was found dead beside the carriage-drive at dawn."

CHAPTER XIII.

TWO BIRDS WITH ONE STONE.

MISS CATHERINE RAND had recourse to the salts. Monsey looked interested.

"You connect the death of your orderly with the disappearance of Miss Rand?"

Fraser-Carnie smiled, a trifle wearily. He had been up all night with a patient at the bungalow.

"Rawul Singh had his orders—not to leave Miss Rand. He would obey orders, you know."

"Yes, he would do that." Monsey's voice was uncertain, as if he were thinking quickly. "May I ask—how he died?"

"Stabbed in the back, and his throat slashed. Quite clearly he was attacked in the road, for we found blood-stains there. These led us to look for the body in the bushes. It was thoroughly wet, having been exposed to the rain during the night." The officer took up his pen. "Dhar Beg!"

The figure of the Afghan stiffened.

"Did Rawul Singh come to you among the carriages last night?"

"*Sahib,* he did not come." Dhar Beg

This story began in The Argosy for June 12.

was the son of chiefs, and he had been a noncommissioned officer in a native regiment. Wherefore, his words were prompt and to the point.

"You did not see him seeking the carriage?"

"Nay. A storm was arising, and I was leading the horses to a covered place. *Sahib*, I thought Rawul Singh called to me once. I did not answer, being busy with the beasts. But, later, I went to see if he had called, and I did not see him. There was much confusion because of the coming storm."

"Know you aught of this cart?" Fraser-Carnie and Dhar Beg were conversing in Hindustani.

"A cart—nay." Dhar Beg plucked at his beard shrewdly. "But a carriage passed before my sight, rolling swiftly."

"What carriage?"

"The same, *sahib*, that nearly ran us down owing to the thrice cursed arrogance of its driver when we first entered the palace grounds. I knew the horses."

"Do you know the owner of the carriage?"

Before the Afghan could answer, Monsey broke in: "It was mine."

"Ah. But you were not in it?"

"You have heard my testimony."

Monsey was quite at his ease now. He had come to the quarters of Major Fraser-Carnie fully understanding that he must answer for his whereabouts the evening before. And he had made it clear that he had not left the palace until some two hours after Edith Rand had been seen with him. What was more to the point, his story was verified by certain native dignitaries and British officers, whose word was better than a bond.

Well aware of the hostility of Fraser-Carnie, reticent though the Briton was, Monsey enjoyed his advantage: his alibi was complete. Perhaps for this reason he insisted on making his testimony as formal as possible—as if he had been charged with complicity in the matter of Edith Rand.

"Then," inquired Fraser-Carnie, ignoring the other's tone, "who was in your phaeton?"

The Afghan drew a deep breath.

"The driver, my friend Fraser-Carnie," responded Monsey carefully. "I had sent for the carriage to escort Miss Rand back to the bungalow. Unfortunately"—he shrugged—"she chose to go with Rawul Singh."

Dhar Beg waited until the speaker had finished, then let out pent breath.

"*Sahib*," he addressed the major, "the carriage came not to the side entrance, but went swiftly out the gate."

Fraser-Carnie glanced inquiringly at Monsey.

"You said the phaeton called for you at the palace entrance?"

"I did not enter it. Because Miss Rand—she had gone." Just a trifle, Monsey's slight accent thickened. "So, I dismissed the driver."

"Who returned to the stables?"

Monsey was quick of thought. At the card table he seldom hesitated. Nor did he hesitate now.

"Yes, *monsieur*—I believe the chap drove around the drive, however, to arrive at the stables."

Fraser-Carnie glanced at Dhar Beg. It was not an easy matter to give the lie to a white man; but an Afghan has principles of his own, and he generally lacks fear.

"*Sahib*, with my eyes I saw the carriage roll from the palace gateway, and it did not come back."

This time the major nodded slightly. By long experience he knew when Dhar Beg was telling the truth. Monsey rose.

"My dear fellow," he observed idly, "am I answerable for the route followed by that scoundrel who is my driver? Was I, or was I not within the palace during the whole of the evening?"

At this Miss Rand announced that she must return to the bungalow. Fraser-Carnie ushered her to the door and commanded Dhar Beg to escort her. Then he swung around on his remaining visitor, gnawing at his white mustache.

"Monsey!" His full voice rang out sharply. "Where was your friend Abbas Abad last night?"

The Russian stared, and the skin of his face darkened.

"Abbas Abad? The Alaman drug sell-

er of the bazaar? Why do you call him my friend?"

"On the testimony of Rawul Singh."

"Really?" A hard smile crept across Monsey's thin lips. "I fancy your orderly was mistaken." To himself he muttered: *"Les absents ont toujours tort!"*

"Was Abbas at the palace last night?"

"Dear major, where was your watch-dog? I do not follow the nightly prowling of the scum of the bazaar."

The British officer paced the narrow confines of his quarters, glaring at the more nimble-witted man, much as a caged lion glares at its keeper.

"I think you do, sometimes," he admitted frankly, "when there's a chance of money in pocket."

Monsey's hand twitched toward his coat and his smile was wiped out on the instant. But he had broken the gentleman's code so often that he could well afford to overlook one other insult. Besides, he realized that he held the whip hand. Fraser-Carnie was helpless to accuse him of any wrong-doing. Nor could any blame be affixed to Abbas. So he smiled.

"Each to his taste, my dear chap. You Englishmen have a saying—'trade follows the flag.' *Voilà!*" He lowered his voice earnestly. "Fraser-Carnie, you cannot afford to offend me. Have a care what you say. Remember this: I did not kill your orderly, nor did I abduct Miss Rand. But through this man Abbas I believe I can trace her—perhaps. Do not forget that."

He bowed to the steady-eyed Briton.

"Is the inquisition over—the *concours* at an end? Yes? Then I have your leave to depart."

"By all means," growled the officer.

In the roadway without Monsey gritted his teeth and spat heartily.

"Idiot! Donkey with ears a yard long! *Cochon! Canaille!* Oh, what a fool! By all the saints and the ninety-nine holy names of Allah, his brain is transparent as the monocle in his eye!"

Thus muttering, he strode to the canal bank and hailed a passing gondola. Making sure, without appearing to do so, that he was not followed, he directed the paddler to the bazaar quarter.

Monsey did not go to the house where the Alaman sold his poisons, but landed at the silk shop of a Bokharan Jew. Pushing impatiently through a splendid rug hung as a curtain, he confronted the squatting proprietor, who was deep in talk with Abbas Abad. The Alaman had buttoned the open flaps of his dirty drill suit, and boasted a new pair of English boots, but he lolled over the spluttering water pipe very much at his ease.

Like the Turkish dignitaries he sought to ape, he was solidly fleshed and eager to gratify his senses; unlike the average Turk, he was active in the brain cells, energetic when it was necessary, and possessed of unusual strength in his massive figure.

Monsey dismissed the Bokharan with a jerk of the head, and took the precaution to stand near the curtain until he was sure that no one lingered on the other side.

"What luck?" he demanded of Abbas.

The Alaman grinned, picking at yellow teeth.

"Patience, my excellency. Am I not a splendid man of business? By Allah, I am!" He slapped his girdle until it chinked. "Gold, silver. I would take no paper bank-notes. We have enough—"

"For a good outfit—good horses, guides—armed followers?"

Abbas nodded complacently.

"Am I not Abbas Abad, who once made a fortune in Khokand and Baku? Nay, my own men will guide us."

"How many? Are they well armed?"

"Is a beetle ever without his shell? Eh? They are as many as the fingers of two hands, less one—Sarts, godless thieves—one or two Tatars, dogs without wit, but hardy—a cousin of mine would rip up his grandfather for a silver ring."

"And this Bokharan advanced funds?" Monsey nodded toward the curtain behind which their host had disappeared.

Again Abbas patted his girdle.

"*Khosh!* I persuaded him, and he gave a letter to his uncle in Kashgar, who will aid us—"

"All this without security, Abbas?"

"Aye, Timan is generous."

"Look here!" Monsey scowled at his companion. "If you are lying, I'll stretch

your hide over the door-post of Yahka Arik."

"Excellency mine, would I embark upon a journey where I did not smell a profit at the end? Would I have slain the rat of a Garhwali if I were not in earnest?"

"That was a blunder!"

"Now, by the Prophet's beard," growled the Alaman, "how was I to know that the woman would be whisked away from under my eyes while I was attending to the affair of the dog of a Rawul Singh? Eh? I have not the eyes of a cat, so I did not see the cart drive up."

Monsey shrugged his shoulders.

"You blundered. I brought you to the palace in my carriage. You saw the girl and the soldier outside, in the roadway; you were a fool to slay the man before seeking the woman."

"Ah-h-h." Abbas Abad grinned. "Shall I, who am no man's fool, take a wolf cub from under the teeth of a grown wolf before striking down the stronger one? The Garhwali was active and swift as a snake."

"But you saw the woman put into the cart?"

"Aye."

"And the cart was that hired by Iskander ibn Tahir, in the relay station?"

"Aye. Likewise—for my ears are keen—I heard the Arab shout to his men." Abbas Abad paused to spit, then nodded with great self approval. "Monsey, my friend, verily your luck is good. For lo—the woman is taken, and not by us. Now we have but to take her from those who hold her"—he laughed gleefullly—"and Iskander, that dog of a desertman, he is a fox that I can trail. *Maili barlik!* (Everything is prosperous)."

He slapped the leg of his companion.

"Monsey, *effendi*, in your carriage I follow the *ekka* without the gate, through the lanes of this accursed city, and up into the northern road to the first relay of horses. By the winged horse of Afrasiab, they went swiftly! Come, in the name of Allah, we must lose no time! All is ready. Oh, I have not been idle. I and you also know whither that fox of an Iskander will run to earth. By riding certain sheep paths, we can overtake them."

Attentively Monsey had followed the complacent words of the Alaman. Now he checked Abbas.

"Will you take Alai-Bala?"

"Nay." The Turkoman reached for his hubble-bubble. "She abides here."

"I could make a place for her in our party—she rides well."

"Nay," said Abbas sullenly, "those sons of many jackals, my men, would not respect her." He fancied that Monsey found the Georgian attractive.

"Well, then, where will you leave her?"

"With Timan, the Bokharan. He will keep her."

Monsey frowned irritably. It was significant of the relations between the two that the Alaman was obdurate in trifles, whereas he recognized the superior leadership of the Russian in weightier matters.

"So long as you are certain you can overtake Iskander at Kashgar—well and good. We will leave before sunset."

"*Effendi* mine, my men can trail a marmot through hell. They know the hills yonder as a Tatar knows his sheep."

"But first," murmured Monsey, "I shall visit the American father. Abbas, these American fathers have nothing but their children in their hearts, and their purse strings are open to the touch. Be ready with the horses in an hour, and take heed that the British major sees you not."

"Nay, the eyes of the man are closed, now that Rawul Singh is dead."

But Monsey had strode from the curtained chamber. Abbas Abad yawned and stretched, binding his girdle more tightly about his stout body.

"*Sa'at*," he murmured, "it is the hour of commencement. Eh, but that Russian milor' has wits—little else he has, but wit—yes-s-s! He is not one to sleep when the dogs are a prowl, by Allah, no. He is useful. Ohé—Alai Bala! My parakeet, my soft pigeon. Have you forgotten the voice of your friend and father?"

He stepped into an arched hallway leading into the rear of the shop. At a curtained recess he paused prudently. Timan was a Bokharan, and the rooms beyond were those of his women. Even though the two were firm friends—which was the case

—it would have been a mortal offense for the visitor to enter the space beyond the curtain where the women lived. To speak as he did was daring enough. Abbas heard Timan curse in his beard, and grinned softly.

"Alai Bala," he called, "be kind to your new master. He is a righteous man. Verily, an honorable man. Abide here, and think not of the hills and pathways of the uplands."

Leaning forward, he listened shrewdly. He heard a half sob, then the growl of a man's voice in an angry whisper. The whimper of Alai Bala came to him faintly:

"You swore—we were mounting to ride to the hills—I would ride to the hills and the valley of Khorassan—"

"*Kaba-dar* (have care)," grumbled the heavy voice of Timan.

"Dance lightly for Timan, my delightful pigeon," added Abbas. "Bathe in musk for his pleasure, and scorn not the *kohl*. Oh, weep not, for I said to Timan that you were a rose of beauty. But now we go—the *effendi*, and I—to take another rose." He muttered to himself as he slipped away from the curtain: "May you cost the Bokharan a pretty penny for your opium—that he suspects not. However, a bargain is a bargain." Whereupon he slapped his girdle and listened to the *chink* of coins, well pleased with the world.

He had been paid a good price for the woman. That price he would double, in his claim upon Monsey for the money spent on their journey, and he would get a half of the profit from the blackmail received from Rand.

So Abbas Abad was well content. Not so very often had he been able to kill two birds with one stone and pluck the feathers of both in this fashion.

"*Maili barlik*," he repeated.

CHAPTER XIV.

MONSEY SPEAKS.

BY posting a native servant across the roadway from the bungalow of Major Fraser-Carnie, Monsey had made reasonably certain that the owner of the bungalow was absent when he climbed the steps to the veranda.

"I will see the American *sahib*," he informed the house-boy who came to the door. He was further relieved to discover that Miss Catherine Rand, exhausted by the vigil of the night, was asleep in her room up-stairs.

The native ushered Monsey into the small den off the drawing-room that was used by Fraser-Carnie for sleeping quarters. It was a bare room, revealing unpainted pine boards. On a camp cot a man tossed under heavy blankets.

"Pardon," the boy salaamed, "*sahib*, it is ordered that no visitors may stay but the space of—"

"Very good. I have important business with the American. You may go."

Monsey listened as the door closed, then swung around on Arthur Rand, taking in with a swift glance the purple-red face, the perspiration-soaked skin, the feverish eyes of the sick man.

"Fever, Mr. Rand? I'm sorry." He smiled regretfully and extended a hand. Rand took it, although his own fingers quivered, and rose to a wabbly elbow.

"Monsey!" he cried. The high temperature made him unnaturally alert. "The very pe'son I want to see, sir. I can't get the major to speak out, and my sister also is keeping something from me."

"Really?"

"They will not tell me"—Rand stared anxiously at the face of his visitor as if endeavoring to read his thoughts—"where Edith is. They say she is slightly ill. Mr. Monsey, I know my daughter. If she were able to stand she would be here in this room to greet her father."

The Russian nodded, watching his companion keenly.

"Either," resumed the American, "Edith is seriously ill—dangerously ill—or she is not in Srinagar. Mr. Monsey, you would know the truth. Where is Edith? I sent for her last night—during the ball at the—the palace. I was somewhat troubled by chills and fever, and I could not go myself. Major Fraser-Carnie assured me, sir, that Edith would join me here at once."

So Miss Rand and the officer had kept the knowledge of Edith's abduction from her father! Monsey was rather pleased than otherwise at this. It put another card into his hand to play. Not that he needed it. Given a few moments alone with the Southerner, he was certain of his success.

Rand was talking effusively, somewhat aimlessly. His thoughts had been preying upon him. The journey had broken down his weakened constitution, and he was not far from a complete nervous collapse. So Monsey judged, coolly.

"Edith is not in this bungalow," went on Rand. "Is there a hotel? Who is taking care of her? What does Fraser-Carnie's story mean?"

"The major kept the truth from you, Mr. Rand."

The sick man lay back on his pillow, every sense alert for his visitor's next word.

"Edith is not in Srinagar, Mr. Rand." Monsey's low voice was sympathetic. "As your friend, I consider it my duty to tell you that your daughter is missing."

"Missing!" The word acted upon the aroused Southerner like the lash of a whip. He would have climbed from the bed, but his companion restrained him. "When? How? And Fraser-Carnie dared to keep it from me."

By an effort of will Rand mastered his emotion, fanned by his racing blood, and faced Monsey calmly. "I fear," he said sternly, "I am not myself. Will you tell me all that has happened?"

Surprised by the abrupt calmness of the man, and not realizing that sudden dread regarding Edith had inspired it, Monsey related carefully what had occurred at the palace, concealing the fact of the death of Rawul Singh. So Rand received the impression that Edith had vanished when under the care of the major's orderly.

"Fraser-Carnie has cross-examined everybody," concluded Monsey, "not excepting myself, Mr. Rand; but he has learned nothing. It would have been—ah—heartless if I had told you this without offering some good news."

"What is that?" Rand was rigidly calm, save for the pulse that beat in throat and forehead.

"A native merchant believes that he knows who carried off your daughter."

"Then she was abducted?"

"Yes." Monsey shook his dark head regretfully. "The native of whom I speak saw her lifted into a cart. He assures me that he knows the owner of the cart, and that he can follow it."

"Edith has been taken from Srinagar?"

"Yes, Mr. Rand."

"And the scoundrels who are responsible for the outrage can be pursued?"

"I think so."

The Southerner clenched a lean hand.

"Are there any—trustworthy—police to be called in, sir?"

Monsey explained the political situation in Kashmir frankly. To all intents he was genuinely anxious to play the part of true friendship. He flattered himself that the cards were falling well. But Rand's next remark stiffened him in his chair and brought a flush to his cheeks.

"And you—and Fraser-Carnie—sit here in the bungalow, under those circumstances? Damnation, sir! I have heard you call yourself a friend of my daughter—"

"But—"

"Mr. Monsey, if I could straddle a horse I would be after the scoundrels. Confound this fever!" He groaned, and sat up abruptly to stare into the other's face from narrowed eyes. "Did Fraser-Carnie know all this and keep it from me?"

Monsey almost smiled—so exactly were events transpiring as he planned. When the interview was over he promised himself that Rand should have grave doubts regarding Fraser-Carnie.

"Really," he observed, with polite reluctance, "I could not say just how much the major knows." He leaned forward earnestly. "Mr. Rand, I would be riding after your daughter instead of sitting here if it were not for lack of funds."

A quick frown passed over the Southerner's high forehead. He did not relish excuses. Monsey hastened to explain.

Edith's captors, he pointed out, had a good start. The pursuit would be a matter of many days, certainly—weeks, probably. Servants and horses must be hired. Speed

in transport in central Asia must be purchased at a high price. Guides and local chieftains would have to be bribed. In short, an expedition must be launched—and paid for. Local authorities would lend no assistance.

"If you bribe them they'll send a rider or two—next week. And the confounded British officials won't stir from their posts. But I know the highways above Srinagar—my native friend will trace your daughter. Do not fear, we will find her. Only money—"

He glanced up, with a well-simulated shrug of helplessness. Rand was silent, the features of his fine face pinched and strained.

"Money," he said moodily; "that is what you need."

"Unfortunately, yes. I have explained why."

The silence after this hung heavily between the two. Monsey moved irresolutely. Had he overplayed his hand? He thought not. But why did the American hesitate at a mere thousand pounds or so when the safety of his daughter was at stake?

"How much do you need?"

"Six hundred—a thousand pounds. I would have to be prepared for contingencies."

"Yes." Rand leaned back with a sigh, and passed his hand across his eyes. Money! A mere three or four thousand dollars. His fevered mind tormented him with the thought. That Edith should be in danger for want of a sum such as that!

His fancy turned to Fraser-Carnie. The Briton might assist him. But no; Fraser-Carnie had wilfully deceived him—had allowed Edith to be carried off from him by the natives. Moreover, the man—so Rand reasoned—was doing nothing to aid Edith.

"Five thousand dollars!" he murmured. Then he laughed, softly at first, but with growing violence. "Five thousand dollars. Why, there were days when I paid that for a pair of good ho'ses. And now—"

Monsey's frown deepened. He wondered whether the American's fever was making him light-headed.

"Yes," he prompted, glancing fleetingly at the door. Fraser-Carnie might return any minute.

"I am bankrupt."

Rand was breathing hard, his eyes staring straight in front of him. The laughter had left a grimace on his lips, and the usually well-kept gray beard was sadly awry.

"The news came to me in Calcutta. My company failed, and the liabilities exceed the assets. There will be long complications. I do not know if I have a dollar to my credit in the world. That, Mr. Monsey, is the reason why I can not answer your just appeal for funds."

Into the Southerner's excited voice crept what was almost a note of appeal. His pride was hurt, and his fears for Edith rose overmasteringly in his heated brain.

"Nor can I borrow here, without security, sir. If I were on my feet—"

He broke off, into grim silence. Monsey scrutinized the cigarette he was smoking in the sick chamber. Apparently, he was merely politely concerned. But a muscle in his lean cheek twitched persistently.

"I see," he murmured. "I am sorry." His last words were quite sincere.

"I could ask Major Fraser-Carnie—a gentleman could not refuse—"

"Don't do that." Monsey rose to pace the room. Time was pressing. His thoughts raced. So, Rand could not pay blackmail, ransom, or a sum for Edith's release from marriage. This meant that the plans of Abbas and himself were spoiled. And yet—

"Fraser-Carnie is like all British officials, Mr. Rand. He will do nothing outside routine. He will not lend you money." Monsey did not want the major to know of his own departure until he was well away from Srinagar. "Perhaps—"

Rand stared up at him, mutely eager, at the change in his tone.

Monsey was weighing one thing against another. To be sure the certainty of blackmail was lacking. But — there was Edith. Was it not his luck that had taken the girl beyond the confines of civilization? Into the lawless regions where a man could keep what he could take?

"Perhaps I can risk up something

among my own friends, Mr. Rand," he suggested, gazing through narrowed eyes. "The natives with me can be paid on our return. I can borrow horses. So long as the bills can be footed eventually—"

"Give me time—a month's time—and I will settle them. A few thousand dollars. My sister could help me." The Southerner hesitated weakly. "I could manage it. But lose no time, Mr. Monsey! You must lose no time!"

"You will settle my accounts? Perhaps if you cared to sign a note—" Monsey's covetousness overcame his caution. But the pride of the Southerner flared up.

"Monsey, my word has never been defaulted yet. You have my promise."

A pledge from Rand meant money in his pocket, Monsey felt. It was a good risk. And at the other end of the journey was Edith. The beautiful girl of the Quebec ballroom, alone, in central Asia. Surely, his luck was good. He would not count the cost, and Abbas could be won over. Monsey smiled fleetingly.

Was it not fate that had decreed Rand's failure? Penniless, how could the American expect to win back his daughter? Monsey's memory dwelt hotly on the girl's delicate, friendly face, on her warm charm of manner—little tricks of personality that carried intimate fascination—and, most of all, her pride.

Yes, it was fate. And Monsey welcomed the alternative. Edith Rand would belong to him, and he would put the money from his mind. "*Kismet!*" he laughed.

Rand glanced up wearily, his heavy eyes inquiring.

"I start at once, Mr. Rand."

The American nodded approvingly, and held out his hand.

"God bless you, Monsey!"

CHAPTER XV.

CONCERNING A CLOAK.

IT was a fair, sunny morning, and the caravan was passing through the upper ravines of the mountain shoulders where four kingdoms meet. Yet, so desolate are the heights of the Pamirs, in the Himalayas, there was no sign of mankind except the moving file of the caravan itself.

For days Edith Rand had seen nothing except the winding sheep paths that led from rocky defile to glacier slopes of the mountains where the route was marked only by ibex horns upright in the snow and by the occasional *mazar*—the rock-built tombs that guarded the caravan routes from evil spirits. For days they had been buffeted by sudden winds that chilled even Iskander.

The Arab was plainly master of the caravan. He gave orders to the *caravan-bash*, and he was obeyed without question. Alone of the natives, Iskander rode a horse. Edith, a good judge, saw that his seat in the peaked saddle was centaurlike, and that he cared for the Iran stallion with his own hands. Not that the girl liked Iskander. Rather, she had never hated a man more.

In the soft-mannered Arab she recognized the individual who played the part of her master. To be sure, it was Iskander's attentive care that kept Edith so well. He seemed to understand her needs without being told. Her food he inspected carefully; every night he saw to the erecting of her stout felt tent, braced on willow poles, the earth beneath it covered with splendid rugs and *numdahs*. A clean mattress had somehow been procured for her use, and the blankets were of the softest Kashmir wool. Always, men went ahead to pitch the tent and light therein a fire among stones skillfully arranged—a fire that had rid itself of smoke and subsided to comfortable embers by the time that she arrived at the camp site.

Edith knew that while she slept Aravang—the big man with the scar—or Iskander himself watched before the entrance of her shelter. By this time it was clear to her that Iskander and the others intended no immediate harm to her. In fact, the girl had never feared them. Raised as she had been in an environment of total safety and comfort, it was inconceivable to her that these men should molest a white woman.

To Edith Rand they appeared as unruly servants who had rebelled against their mistress—except for Iskander. Aravang

was a hideous sort of watch-dog, more her slave than guardian. The others seemed merely camelmen—a score or so. But Iskander knew why Edith had been taken from Srinagar, and whither she was bound. He was the only one of the caravan who could understand her, and he steadfastly avoided talking; a thing that increased the girl's cordial dislike. There is nothing that ruffles a spirited woman more than to be ignored.

"Do you know Mr. Monsey?" Edith had asked once when the Arab urged his horse close to her—with difficulty, fine rider though he was, for a horse never willingly approaches a camel.

"No," he said shortly, then his black brows went up. "Of a Monsi I have heard—a Turki-Russian man who bought and sold through his agent—some wares," Iskander broke off, as his horse pranced. But Edith had seen him touch spurs to flank.

"You are not—his agent, *kapra wallah?*"

She called the Arab that because she knew it angered him. It was thoughtless of her, but Edith Rand had never had occasion to deny her whims. Her light scorn was not a thing to ignore by any means, and many times she fancied that the inscrutable Iskander writhed mentally, which made her happy for the moment.

"No! Allah, the all-wise, forbid!" He scowled and muttered in his mustache. "Nor am I a barterer of cloth. As my father, and his father, I am a soldier."

When Iskander was provoked the quick-witted girl could read him readily. Thus, she was reasonably sure that Monsey had no hand in her abduction. If not he—who? Iskander? Yes. But she felt strongly that Iskander was acting for another. Once, when she had overslept—the exertion in the high altitude always made her intensely drowsy from sunset to sunrise—he had upraided her vehemently through the tent.

"Are you a Sultan's favorite to linger in this manner? By the honor of Tahir—uprise and haste! I have pledged my word, and we are late, late. If we are too late, you shall know sorrow!"

It was the inborn arrogance of the Mohammedan, who is monarch of women, breaking through the studied courtesy with which Iskander had sought to ease the rough journey for the woman. And it stirred a thrill of revolt in Edith's breast.

She had dressed, it is true, and then sat down deliberately on a carpet from which she did not move, in spite of the tempting odor of breakfast which she knew Aravang was nursing impatiently without. The net result of this rebellion was that Iskander forced her to don a cloak of his own, with a hood to cover her hair and the small tam-o-shanter—also a woman's veil for the lower portion of her face.

Edith had promptly torn off the offending articles. She had never seen the usually emotionless Arab so aroused. Fiery oaths fairly flew from his twisted lips, and his black eyes snapped furiously.

"Once you were a European madam," he observed. "Now you are otherwise. You will obey me, and I command that you shall be robed in decency—thus. In the path we follow a woman covers her face—thus."

Whereupon Edith tossed the veil into the dying camp-fire.

"And I will not—thus!"

With tightly clenched hands and rigid lips she faced Iskander, whose lean face darkened with anger. In his hand he held a knotted whip. At once he lifted the whip. Edith's eyes blazed. She did not shrink back, but looked full into the Arab's eyes. For a long second her gaze challenged him hotly, but his eyes did not soften.

Then came Aravang between them. The big native spoke vehemently to Iskander, gesturing much with powerful hands. He seemed to be arguing something of great importance.

The Arab lowered his whip and swung away in his swaying walk, to spring into the saddle of his horse. At this Aravang held out the cloak and hood to Edith, signifying by dumb show that she should put them on. His dark, oxlike eyes wheedled her mutely. He looked so ridiculously unlike a lady's maid that Edith smiled, and put on the garment. For the time being

the question of the veil was ignored. But, later, Edith donned the Mohammedan *yashmak* of her own accord.

For a while she wondered at the *raison d'être* of the cloak. Being quick of thought, however, she did not fail to note certain caravans that passed them, going south. Iskander seemed to keep to the byways through the hill passes, and Edith was sure that more than once they had withdrawn into a blind gorge or up a mountain slope to allow a great trade caravan to pass them with its unending string of plodding camels heavily burdened, its plodding, patient men, its raucous escort of mongrel dogs.

Moreover, she noticed a difference existing between these caravans and her own. The others went very slowly, keeping to the majestic, supercilious gait of the loaded Bactrian camel; hers pressed onward, the caravaneers beating the camels, at a swifter pace. And no dogs followed; nor were there any bells to give out a rusty *clang-cling*.

No stoop-shouldered Mongol, staff in hand, walked ahead of them to indicate the way. Iskander led, and he did not spare them. The camels were burdenless, save for the shelter cloths, provisions, and the dozen odd men themselves—slender, brown-skinned — fairly cleanly dressed, active and talkative in their own tongue. Very industriously they worked. Edith knew that the caravan was making good speed.

Whither? That question always confronted her. She had lost count of the days since her first long sleep and spell of unconsciousness. Many days had passed —more than two weeks, she hazarded.

Apparently the caravan had come to meet her and Iskander. Apparently it was traveling steadily to the north. Why was it different from the others? Why the necessity for speed—unless they were pursued?

Edith had spent many hours in glancing longingly back, down the vista of looming gorges, snakelike ravines that threaded among the peaks, and across the snow stretches which were part of the Himalayas that she had watched with such joy from Srinagar. But she had seen no riders. Moreover, Iskander, though he kept an alert scrutiny about him, did not seem to fear being followed. They had come very far from the City of the Sun.

It was difficult for Edith to believe the reality of her flight across the mountain passes. She could not imagine life, separated from her father, her aunt. She experienced the physical inertia that comes with sudden change into a harder, more exacting environment. During the first days of the caravan she rode in a kind of stupor. The cold wind that forever pressed in her face, the swaying motion of the clumsy, grotesque beast, the inevitable smells that assailed her—one by one these things stripped the strata of life's luxury and softer side from the girl.

She did not weaken. Watched vigilantly by Iskander, her natural strength, bred of an outdoor life, came to her aid. Edith regained her appetite by degrees, and for long she slept heavily—slept on camel back, and the instant Aravang removed her supper from the tent in the evening. Thus Edith adapted herself to the hardships—as it had seemed at first—of the caravan.

In time Edith passed through the coma of fatigue, through the first sickness bred by the camel ride, and the rough food. Her cheeks became firmer, more rosy, her eyes brighter than ever. She was her alert self, and Iskander straightway felt the result.

One of the things that struck her attention was a box she observed one day strapped on the camel in front of her. She knew that box. It was the one containing the kit of John Donovan.

Whereupon the girl sent her watch-dog, Aravang, for Iskander. By long usage she was beginning to pick up some words of Aravang's speech. The Arab came, as he always did, at her summons, but was ill-pleased when she pointed out the box.

"Iskander," she smiled, seeing his irritation, "you are a first-rate robber. In my country you would be called a second-story man. I think"—more doubtfully—"they would call you a yegg, a yeggman."

"Story — tale? 'Egg'?" Iskander's English did not measure up to the occasion. Yet his keen wit scented insult, and his wrath simmered unseen.

"Yes, *kapra wallah*. A very bad man. You understand that. I've read about them. They have gangs, just like yours. And they steal—just like you."

"Gangs?"

He surveyed the animated, rosy face of the beautiful woman, a face about which whipped golden strands more fine than the spun gold itself. His was the measured glance of the epicure—the man who can read the fairness of a woman as a priest reads a book. But, too, there was a kind of shame in the glance despite its boldness, for Edith was not destined for Iskander, and she was unveiled.

"Yes, Iskander. Rowdies, blackmailers"—Edith sought for damaging words—"thugs!"

This word acted on the Arab as acid poured upon water. He became quietly furious. Edith could not know that the term *thug* had arisen in India itself, and that Iskander ibn Tahir knew India.

"By the mercy of Allah," he cried, "were you a man—" He broke off, helpless, before Edith's pleased smile. The girl was reckless of harm as an indulged child in the cradle. "*Thuggi*—that is below caste and honor. I—a strangler, and a burier of the dead—"

"And a thief!" Edith nodded at the box. "This you stole from the English major, and the pail of medicines from Miss Rand."

Whereupon Iskander fell silent, as if pondering. She had expected another outburst, more violent than the first. Instead a smile twitched the dark mustache of the scion of Tahir.

"Yes, madam," he admitted thoughtfully. "They were stolen—the medicines and the box. We took them because we could not buy. And we took them, not for ourselves, but for another."

"Why?" Edith's curiosity mounted as she wondered what whim could render two such articles desirable in the eyes of Iskander. It had not been common theft—the Arab seemed moderately wealthy.

"There was need. The things could not be bought—the medicines."

Edith thought of her aunt's elaborate assortment of staples, remedies, and cure-alls. Certainly these could not be bought in Srinagar. Again Iskander glanced at her meaningly, with something of an irking anxiety. "We took the pail," he observed slowly, "the day Aravang climbed to the upper room of the bungalow while you talked near by. The medicines are for you to use."

For her use! The girl fancied at first that Iskander had brought the precious pail of her aunt in case she should fall sick. Yet as she pondered his words she realized that there was a hidden, deeper meaning. The Arab expected that the time would come when she would have use for the medicines.

Either that, or she must administer the remedies to another person. Edith could not judge which thought had been in her captor's mind.

"What is written is written," said he gravely. "And who can read what is to come to pass?"

Curiously, Edith glanced at the now tranquil warrior. The hood and voluminous cloak concealed his expression. She fancied that he resembled a priest meditating upon the doctrines of a sacred book. Perhaps he regretted stooping to theft; yet his pride was satisfied—he had done it for another person.

Intuitively the girl understood that the Arab adhered rigidly to the dictates of the Mohammedan and his own hereditary law. Certain things he would have died rather than do. His code was not hers. Yet, like her, he had his steel-like pride. In spite of her anger at the man, she half admired his courteous manner and his unyielding will. Long ago she had discovered the uselessness of asking him direct questions. Dissimulation is second nature to the Orient. So Edith delved for information as a skilled fisherman casts a light trout fly.

"Did not you carry the box from the bungalow of Major Fraser-Carnie? The time you sold me the rug?"

"Yet, madam," he demurred, "if you were to take from one thief what he had stolen, and give it into the hand of the one from whom it had been stolen—are you another thief?"

"Why, perhaps not."

"Then I am not a thief. The box was stolen by a faithless servant who has been paid in like coins. I am taking it back to him who owned it."

The girl's clear eyes flashed at the calm Arab.

"John Donovan?" she could not keep from exclaiming.

Long and fixedly Iskander met her gaze. She guessed that he was surprised, perhaps displeased.

"Dono-van Khan—thus he is called."

A hundred questions trembled on Edith's parted lips. She wanted to ask where the man Donovan was—why the box of clothing and personal articles was being taken to him—who John Donovan was. The last, she decided, was most likely to draw an answer.

A curious expression crossed Iskander's thoughtful face at her words.

"Who?" He swept his wide-sleeved arm in a broad gesture. "Who is the eagle that flies from mountain to mountain? Dono-van Khan is a strong man—a leader of men. Some call him *khalga timur*—the iron body."

It seemed impossibly long ago that she had heard Fraser-Carnie say that Dono-van Khan was a power among the hill tribes. She tried to recall all that the Englishman had said about the missing John Donovan. Vaguely she remembered a caravan that he had followed, and the statement of his servant that he was dead. But Iskander spoke of him as a living man.

They were rounding the broad base of a pine-clad mountain. Edith could not see the summit, although she could make out crags and pinnacles that reached up into the veils of mist, and above the mist vast stretches of moraine.

For the first time, as they came to a rise in the trail, she saw the flat roofs of a town, looking for all the world like miniature clay blocks sprinkled with spindly trees in a sandy plain some distance below and to the right of them. Delicate minarets rose over the roofs; she could discern the sweep of a city wall.

Iskander did not enlighten her, and Edith had no means of knowing that they were rounding Mustagh-Ata, "the father of mountains," and were looking down on the roofs of Kashgar.

No change of countenance showed the Arab that the girl had perceived their nearness to the town. Presently the vista of the roofs was blotted out by clumps of tamarisk and stunted oak.

"Have you seen John Donovan?" she asked patiently, wishing to divert the attention of her captor from the town.

"Yes."

"Is he a white man?"

A vain question, but the girl was hungry for some crumb of assurance.

"He *was*." Iskander gathered up his reins. "It is time to halt—"

"Please!" Edith's eyes begged him to listen. "Where is John Donovan? Are we going to him?"

The Arab scowled, and his eyes grew hard. It was plain that he had no desire to answer the girl. She seized his rein boldly, leaning down.

"You must answer," she cried. "I have been told that this white man followed a caravan—"

Iskander laughed, baring white teeth.

"Eh, I was in that caravan. And these"—he motioned at the tired camels and natives—"these also were there. We saw him." He freed his rein from the girl's hand swiftly. "Soon you also will see."

Whereupon he trotted away to view the site selected for that evening's halt. Edith gazed after him with mingled feelings. So she was part of the caravan that had mystified beholders in the hills! Fraser-Carnie had pooh-poohed the idea that there was anything uncanny about the caravan that John Donovan had followed.

At all events, she reflected, Iskander and Aravang were assuredly living men. And the camels and other natives were alive. But what had the Arab meant when he said that they might be too late? And why did the caravan hasten so—flitting among the defiles of the silent mountains?

All at once she felt very lonely, very much disturbed. It was a misty evening, but the sun did not flame on the rolling clouds as at Srinagar. She had the fleeting illusion of having stood on the mountain slope before.

Immediately, as if it had been waiting for just this moment, a sinister fancy gripped the mind of the girl. This was the mountain slope of the dream—that night in the Srinagar bungalow!

It fastened upon her vividly — she recalled the implacable grip of Iskander, the hidden forms lying on the ground under the carpets, and the terrible voice that had cried:

"These are no longer alive."

Edith shivered, cramped and numbed by the long day's ride. Yet the evening was far from chilly. Waves of heat emanated from the plain of sand below. The twilight air was hazy; somewhere behind the great mountain she knew that the sun was setting in a red ball of flame.

Bravely she tried to throw off the deep impression of the dream as she approached the tents and the vague shapes of the natives moving about through the smoke of fresh fires. She thought of the hidden bodies of the dream. Then a startling thing came to her. Iskander, many days ago, had said:

"A life has already been spent."

Then another voice, this time not an echo of memory, came to her ears:

"Missy *khanum*. O, missy *khanum!*"

Startled, the girl turned her head. No men of the caravan, as she knew, were behind her—merely the two led-camels carrying food, tied nose to tail with her own. And the native on the camel in front of her had neither spoken nor looked around. Plainly he had not heard the low words.

Some twenty yards away in the sand on the slope below the caravan track was a thicket of stunted tamarisks. The branches of the nearer bushes had been carefully parted, and she saw a native gazing at her and beckoning. It was not one of the followers of Iskander.

Seeing that he was noticed, the newcomer put finger to lips and held back the bush further so that Edith could see a white horse, saddled and bridled, but without a rider. The man of the tamarisks pointed to the horse and to her.

"Missy *khanum* (Young lady mistress), you come—come queek, bime-by, yes!"

He was a stout, powerful fellow in a dirty white suit, with soiled crimson sash and a red fez. Grinning, he released his hold on the tamarisk, which flew back into place, concealing him.

Edith saw that the native in front of her had moved his head idly, not quite certain whether he had heard anything or not. She sat her camel rigidly, her pulse pounding, and breathed a sigh of relief as the caravaneer ahead of her, seeing nothing untoward in the tamarisk clump, turned back to the more interesting spectacle of the camp fire and its heating pot of meat—now near at hand.

She bit her lip from sheer excitement. Friends were near at hand! The native who had signaled to her must have been sent by Major Fraser-Carnie or her father. They had managed to outstrip the caravan to the city that lay under the base of the mountain! The man and the horse had been waiting in concealment for her coming.

Stiffly the girl clambered down from the camel after it had knelt. Every member of the caravan was busied setting up the tents or unloading the beasts. Aravang was making up her own bed. Iskander she saw beyond the camp engaged after his custom in evening devotions, at the sunset hour. That she was watched she knew; but she had long been free to rove around the camps, and the tamarisk clump was not more than a hundred yards distant.

The depression caused by Iskander's speech and the memory of her own dream made the unexpected prospect of liberty all the more alluring. It did not occur to Edith to hesitate, now that rescue seemed at hand. Who could have sent the man with the white horse, except her friends?

Walking to the fire, she picked up an empty water jar and looked around, as if seeking the well that experience had taught her must be near the sight of the camp. As carelessly as her rigid limbs permitted, she moved slowly in the direction of the tamarisk grove.

A horse, and a real city near at hand! She wanted to fling away the jar and run. Instead, the girl paused, to glance back at the tents. Aravang, shading his eyes against the sunset glow, was watching her. As she looked he beckoned imperatively.

Edith measured the distance to the yearned-for thicket and decided that she was half-way to her goal. Whereupon, drawing a deep breath she dropped the jar in the sand and ran, blessing her short walking skirt.

Aravang's shout reached her ears, without inducing her to look around. Gone was the stiffness she had simulated on descending from the camel—gone, her customary quiet. Edith fairly flew over the sand to the tamarisks, and darted in among them.

A hand reached out and grasped her arm. She was drawn toward the waiting horse by the native and assisted bodily in her leap into the saddle. The horse reared, but Edith—expert horsewoman as she was—had the reins in hand in a second. The man pulled the beast's head about, and pointed down a gully hidden by a scrub and leading away from the camp.

"Kashgar!" he cried. "You go queek as hell—yes!" He slapped the horse on a hind quarter and Edith started down the gully at a swift trot. Vaguely she saw her confederate turn and dive into the thicket on the further side of the gully.

CHAPTER XVI.

EDITH RIDES ALONE.

IN the varied collection of guide books and tourist schedules in the possession of Miss Catherine Rand there had been one pamphlet that described briefly the location, climate, picturesqueness, points of interest, population, and means of travel of the mountain city of Kashgar.

Four kingdoms, said the guide book in florid phrases, met at the center of the Himalayas. But the makers of maps hesitated over the Himalayas. They were a no-man's land. Only in Kashgaria did the slovenly, quilted, musket-bearing soldiers of the Celestial Republic emerge from guard-houses of mud and cry "Halt!"

But the guide book *did* say that there were two Kashgars—two cities: the old and the new, some five miles apart. In the new were progressive Chinese merchants, silk-clad magistrates, and the Tao-tai with all his pomp and power; likewise Punjabi traders, two isolated but indefatigable British missionaries, and even a native officer of British India who acted as a make-shift *chargé d'affaires*.

Edith Rand had not seen the guide book. She was ignorant of the nature of the two towns of Kashgar. Iskander, of Tahir, would have said that destiny drew her to the older city, away from the men of her own race.

To tell the truth, Edith came to the crossroads leading to the two towns and chose the walled town swiftly—swiftly because she feared pursuit, and because the wall suggested to the girl, who was not acquainted with the vagaries of architecture in the Orient, more of a sanctum than the rambling streets of the modern Kashgar.

Not that she fancied, even in her agitation, that the men of the caravan were immediately behind her. Experience had taught Edith the utmost speed of the powerful Bactrian camels, and the length of time needed to propel, beat and curse the protesting beasts into momentum—and Iskander's horse, even if the Arab had set out at once on his trail—was tired. The white stallion was fleet. The high-peaked saddle afforded her a rough pommel for her knee, sitting sidewise. Edith was a splendid rider, and the feel of the smooth pacer under her gave the girl mute assurance. Her spirits rose as rider and horse swept down-hill through broken brush, past cypress clumps, tranquil in the quiet of evening, into the dust haze that hung over the sandy expanse, with its spots of verdure, lining rough canals.

The beat of the white stallion's hoofs struck an echo of joy in Edith's heart. She was free! Surely, there would be somebody in Kashgar to appeal to for protection from Iskander—local authorities, perhaps even her father. Slow was she to knew she had taken the wrong turning.

They had passed outlying huts by the canals where ragged children stood at gaze, peering through the soft dust which is ever in the air of Kashgar. The stallion's hoofs left a trail of denser dust. Now, he slowed obstinately to a walk, panting and grinding at the bit.

Edith urged him on, under an archway, through the wall of the town. They pounded over a ramshackle wooden bridge which spanned the ancient moat under the wall. And a myriad smells assailed horse and rider. Edith grimaced, and the stallion fought for his head.

It was by then the last after-glow of evening. Purple and velvety crimson overspread the sky. Stars glimmered into being and slender minarets uprose against the vista of distant mountains. There was a great quiet in the atmosphere; but in the streets of the old city of Kashgar pandemonium reigned.

Into a narrow alley, flanked with canopies stretched across the odorous fronts of booths and stalls the horse raced protestingly. Figures stepped aside reluctantly, only to hasten after. Glancing back, the girl saw that a crowd was following her—a crowd made up of motley and grotesque forms—smocked, wizen Chinamen, sheepskin-clad, swaggering youths, hideously degenerate of face, bulky women with giant, gray headdresses, half-naked urchins—all shrilling and chuckling in a dozen tongues and with a hundred gestures.

Laden donkeys pressed against her knees. She heard the curses of the donkeys' owners. Peering about for sign of a clean and European-looking house, she saw only square, gray and brown huts of dried mud with some loftier edifices of blank stone walls.

A yelling lama, beating about him with a heavy staff, his body grotesquely dressed in white and black squares of cloth with a peaked cap of brightest orange, pushed her horse back, staring at her with a louder yell of surprise. Behind him grunted and squealed a line of laden camels, tied nose to rump. Dust swelled and swathed all in the alley.

In a fury of irritation at the camels, the white stallion backed obstinately against the open front of a structure larger than the ordinary from which lights gleamed. In the reflection, Edith could see a leprous beggar mounting at her.

"*Backsheesh*—plentee *backsheesh*. O my God! *Backsheesh*. O my God!"

This parrot-like ritual emerging from lips half eaten away from the toothless mouth was his one stock in trade. Perhaps this unfortunate plied his trade solely with the missionaries. But in Edith's appearance, he sensed the opportunity of a declining life.

"No!" she cried, motioning him away frenziedly. "No *backsheesh*." To the crowd she appealed eagerly. "English! Where are the English? Don't you understand? Does any one speak English? *Sahib-log!*"

A Chinese merchant of the higher ranks would undoubted have gone to Edith's help, from various motives—perhaps from the instinctive good manners of his race. A Punjabi would have defended the girl against a mob, so strong is the bond between Briton and Indian. Even a group of Afghans might have assisted her boldly, enjoying the excellent pretext for beating the despised Sarts and Chinese and perhaps letting a little blood. Later, they would have claimed a small ransom from the *chargé d'affaires*.

But there was no Afghan, to take the center of the street against the throng of bazaar scum, indolent Sartish townsmen, idiotic Taghlik shepherds, staring, ignorant Kirghiz, and all manner of general diseased filth.

All were intent on her, all gazing, all talking. She could not move the white horse forward against these *trouards* of the bazaar of a—to all intents—medieval city. Instead, her mount backed against the reed matting that covered the enclosure front.

A fat man in a fez ran out in his slippers and started a tirade against the invader of his premises. Then, seeing the American girl, he fell voiceless, with his great jaws agape. He backed into the house, through the matting, still staring.

"English! I will pay!" Edith faced her tormentors stoically. "Oh, can't you understand? Go—*Boro! Boro!*"—a phrase borrowed from Iskander, in anger. "Take me to the sahibs, the *effendi!*"

She paused, biting her lips. The bleared eyes stared, through the dust, emotionless. The passing camels coughed and grunted. Vile odors swept into the girl. From behind her through the matting billowed a

pungent scent of frying fish, mutton fat, dirt, smoke, stale human breath, wine-laden, and a penetrating, sweetish aroma she did not recognize as opium.

"*Nakir el kadr!*"

A voice bellowed near her. At once a snapping, snarling chorus of dogs arose as the curs of the alley felt encouraged to annoy the frantic horse. Edith saw a beast with the body of a *dachshund* and the head of a mastiff snap at the stallion's flank; a brown mixture of terrier, and setter with a Pekingese tail slunk near her. A giant wolfhound bared vicious teeth.

The mob paid no attention, never ceasing to watch her.

It was hideous for Edith to think that in another street Englishmen might be sitting down to dinner, or the governor of the city, dining upon his terrace. Perhaps an American missionary was walking nearby. She could not move toward them—if, indeed, she knew where to go.

For the first time in her life Edith knew the meaning of real fear. Long-nailed hands felt of the silver that ornamented the elaborate saddle of the horse; a greasy, pudgy fist clutched suddenly the bracelet on her arm and wrenched it off. A parchment-hued face, wrinkled and evil as sin itself, peered up at her, a clawlike hand holding a paper lantern to her face. Other lanterns moved jerkily along the alley as their owners joined the assembly of spectators.

Then the voice bellowed again behind her. The wrinkled face spat, and vanished. The thieving hands fell away reluctantly. She saw the man in the fez bowing and holding her rein. He pointed into the house. Edith shook her head. Bad as the alley was, she preferred it to the walls of such a building.

Whereupon the fat man jerked down a portion of the matting, revealing a spacious room with a stone floor and a huge pot hung over a fire in the great hearth. Shadowy figures of veiled women were visible, and one or two men, also stout, sitting against the wall on cushions. It seemed to be an inn, and the perspiring proprietor made a herculean effort at English, or rather European speech.

"*Serai* — yah! Entrrez, surte — verree good, my word! *Serai*, good, yah!"

But Edith would not forsake the vantage point of her horse. Afoot, her woman's wit assured her that she would be helpless in the hands of the mob.

Instead, she signed to the *serai* keeper to send away the mob. He nodded readily, and pounced upon a half-naked boy to whom he whispered urgently. The youth slipped out into the shadows of the alley. Edith noticed this by-play, but could not judge whether evil or good inspired it.

Then the fat inn-keeper summoned the sitting men with a single word. They leaped up, grasping staffs, and flew at the throng. It was fez against turban, with objurgation rising to the roofs of the alley, slippered feet planted against broad buttocks and staffs thrust into spitting faces.

Apparently the alley scum were not disposed to fight for the chance of plundering the girl. They seemed listless in defense as well as attack. The men from the inn cleared a small ring around the now passive horse and squatted there, apparently to wait.

To Edith the pause was intolerable. She could not ride free of the alley. The tired horse would not budge—disliking, beyond doubt, the presence of skirts upon his back. The actions of the *serai* keeper suggested that he had sent for some one. Who?

Edith decided to wait and see. Every muscle in her slender body ached with fatigue. She dared not dismount to ease her cramped limbs.

Where were Iskander and Aravang? Had they traced her to the walled city? She hoped that they had taken the other turning. Every minute increased the suspense.

Then swaggering men bearing simitars pushed through the throng that gave back readily. The leader of the file gripped Edith's reins and led the stallion into the *serai* and she recognized her friend of the tamarisk grove. At this, the inn-keeper placed matting across the front of his room with care. One of the newcomers with bared simitar remained at the entrance.

"Mees Rand!" smiled the man at Edith's side, adding to himself: "Verily is the luck of Monsi good, for here is the

woman herself—alone, too, and quite harmless."

Thus he of the leadership, the soiled fez, the immense shawl girdle, and the very dirty drill suiting—introduced himself—Abbas Abad, newly arrived in Kashgar, and gave sharp command to one of his men to seek out Monsey in the new town.

To Edith, it was clear that Abbas Abad was turning a deaf ear to her pleas that he should take her to the "sahibs—" if indeed, he understood. Her heart had leaped when she heard her name spoken. Eagerly, she stared at Abbas, trying to place him. Then her heart sank.

The whole appearance of the man—oily, black hair, moist, blood-shot eyes, and flabby mouth—was against him. He met her gaze boldly, and grinned, muttering to himself. "Who is your master?" she asked.

Abbas shrugged his shoulders, not understanding. When Edith drew back, he gripped her arm in an iron clasp and pulled downward. Instinct warned the girl to keep to the saddle, Abbas only grinned the more, and dragged her down with the calm assurance of a constrictor coiled about a gazelle.

She slid from the saddle. And Abbas passed a tentative hand across her slim shoulders and the breast of her jacket, after the manner of a skilled Kinghiz feeling a sheep.

"If the American father will not pay," he muttered to himself, "you will be worth much—much, but otherwise."

Edith shrank back from the smiling Alaman in angry revolt. The followers of Abbas looked on apathetically, but with some curiosity at the dilemma of the white woman. Usually in Abbas's seizure of women there had been wrangling and a price to pay. This was different. They gazed idly at the girl's flushed face and indignant eyes.

She saw the *serai* keeper approach Abbas servilely, and the Alaman toss him some silver coins. It was if a price had been paid for her capture. The cold expanse of the wall touched her back, and Edith leaned against it, wearily, all the exhilaration of her escape vanished under the certainty that the man was not her friend. Hopelessly, she scanned the smiling Abbas, the leering inn-keeper, the two armed followers—and she saw Aravang standing inside the matting.

It did not take an instant for the girl to make up her mind which of her captors was preferable. "Aravang!" she called.

The sentry at the matting touched the newcomer warningly and motioned to the alley. By way of response the scarred follower of Iskander gripped the guard of the scimitar, jerked it from the man, struck him viciously with the hilt between the eyes, and leaped toward Abbas.

Edith stifled a scream and watched, absorbed by the swift flash of weapons and leap of bodies. She saw Abbas bury his knife in the arm of Aravang—saw Aravang fling a useless sword at the remaining enemy with his left hand and spring to grips with the powerful Alaman.

For a moment the two muscular bodies swayed and trampled across the floor, the men cursing and panting. One of Abbas's men gripped Aravang from behind. Whereupon Edith's guardian—for now she thought of him so—thrust Abbas away, to reel back to the opposite wall. Then the other assailant, gripped by the back of the neck, flew head over heels to the floor. Aravang sprang to the hearth and flung a blazing log at Abbas, who dodged. Seeking a new weapon, the scarred champion of Edith bellowed defiance, and seized the great, black pot from its rests.

"Savak!" he roared.

Abbas had caught up one of the low tabourets that stood in front of the cushions by the wall and advanced to Aravang, knife in hand. The pot of steaming meat and boiling water was hurled, but the table resisted it and the next moment Abbas was on his foe, stabbing and grunting with rage.

Aravang was thrust back, moaning, almost into the fire. He looked over the shoulder of his assailant, motioning in spite of his own peril, to Edith to run from the room. But even if she had had command of her limbs, the two men of Abbas were hovering about the hearth with drawn weapons. The *serai* keeper lurked cautiously by the door, wishful to keep intruders out, but with a keen eye for the safety of his own skin the while.

With a cry Edith covered her eyes with her hands. She had seen Abbas's knife flash red in the firelight—with a redness that was not of the fire. She had seen the mute appeal in the eyes of struggling Aravang.

Two shots roared in the narrow confines of the room.

Startled anew, Edith dropped her hands. She saw Iskander's tall form framed against the mats, a smoking revolver in his hand. The Arab's face was utterly tranquil, save for a slight smile and a certain alertness of the keen eyes.

The two followers of Abbas staggered and slumped slowly to the stone floor, their hands groping, and their mouths wide in dumb amazement. Abbas himself turned from Aravang to hurl his knife. Seeing the flash of steel, Iskander swayed aside, so that the hurtled blade barely tore the skin of his side, pinning his cloak to the matting. He wrenched himself free at once, but Abbas had vanished into a curtained archway. Nor was the inn-keeper any longer to be seen.

Iskander cast a brief glance at the two bodies, moving slowly on the floor, and shot a question at Aravang. The big native bared his fine teeth in a smile and shook his head. Then the Arab took Edith by the arm.

Revolver in hand, he led her out of the *serai*. The white stallion had galloped free during the struggle. Iskander, however, seemed at no loss for a destination. He strode through the alley, followed by Aravang, whose strong frame seemed able to stand upright and walk in spite of the stabbing it had endured. Edith half ran, half skipped to keep up.

She was silent, feeling very much as she had felt once when her father caught her playing truant from school and escorted her home. Dim forms emerged to look at them, and the dog pack gave tongue. But Iskander's tall figure and the drawn weapon were ample safeguard in the alleys of Kashgar.

They passed under grotesque wooden arches, between tumble-down huts, across a turgid canal, on one of the curving Chinese bridges, and came to the shadowy bulk of a waiting carriage.

Into this Iskander thrust Edith with scant ceremony. There was a roomy space about the rear seat, covered with straw. Aravang lay down at once, and Iskander, who had jumped upon the front seat beside the driver, called back softly for Edith to sit in the straw until they were free of the town.

With Aravang beside her, she would have no chance to leave the carriage. But Edith did not intend to try. Wearied by the events of the evening, she had no desire to attempt a second flight into the city. What she had seen in the eyes of Abbas and his men had made a deep impression on her consciousness.

Iskander spoke to the driver. Edith heard a muttered reply.

"*Allah!*" muttered the Arab impatiently.

But there was the flash of a match, and the driver—a bearded giant with bronzed, high-cheeked face, and enormous sheepskin hat—lit his pipe with care. This done the Kirghiz leaned back indolently and cracked his whip. Edith, peering over the front seat, could distinguish no less than four horses attached to the vehicle.

As they went, the Kirghiz rumbled a kind of song in his throat. He seemed utterly indifferent to the horses, who plunged forward into the dark. Edith made herself as comfortable as she could in the straw, but she could not sleep at first because of the moans that were drawn at times from the lips of Aravang.

Once when they stopped long enough for a man by the roadside to pass something to Iskander, she ventured to speak.

"Poor Aravang," she said to the Arab. "He is in such pain. Can't we stop at a house and see how badly he is hurt?"

"No," Iskander responded briefly. "He has said that he will not die. Sleep! You must sleep!"

But sleep was long in coming. Once she started as a hand touched her. Then, because of her taut nerves, she almost cried, out of pity. The injured Aravang was endeavoring to place his cloak about her as a covering, for the night was growing cold.

(To be continued NEXT WEEK.)

Other People's Firewood

by Talbert Josselyn

TOMMY BORDEN caught the crook of his little finger in the handle of the back screen-door, opened it the width of a shoe-toe, swung it wide open with the thrust of his leg, and passed from the wet night into the lighted kitchen.

"Why, Tommy!" cried young Mrs. Borden, turning from a three-burner kerosene stove, fork in hand.

"Just open that door into the living-room," urged the burdened Tommy. "Now that I've got hold of this confounded wood I'm not going to put it down until I've got it spang up by the fireplace."

He followed his wife into the bungalow's front room, gingerly lowered himself to his knees, and dumped his burden upon the raised hearth. Straightening up, he flexed his arms. "Gee!" he remonstrated, "that stuff's like pig iron. For just old branches and ragged scraps I never saw anything like it."

"But where did you get it?" asked Mrs. Borden.

"Next door."

"Next door? I didn't know that the place was tenanted."

"It isn't."

"Why, Tommy!" Elsie Borden's eyes widened. "Do you mean to say that you just went and took it?"

"That's just what I do. First I knocked at the back door and then I knocked at the front, and then I came around to the back door again, and then the rain began to come down in real earnest—"

Elsie put out a solicitous hand. "Tommy, your coat's all wet!"

"Never heard of a dry rain yet," said Tommy. "But just as soon as I get this old fireplace stoked up and going I'll be like toast. So I knocked at the back door again, and I thought of that leg-breaking half-mile walk up-town among the pines with the evening getting blacker and blacker, and little or no chance of finding that blamed Mexican wood-dealer after I got there—I'll give him plenty and then some for promising to bring us the wood surely before dark and then leaving us in the lurch—and I thought of how fine an open fire would be on a rainy night after having nothing but radiators, so I tried the door to the screened porch, and darned if it didn't open.

"I knocked again on the kitchen door, but there wasn't any sound except that of the trees rubbing against the roof, so I struck a match and projected around, and this is what I found. It was in an old wood box in a corner. I got it all in one load, and, believe me, it was some load."

"No wonder," said Elsie, examining a piece. "It's pitch pine. There's no other wood like it for heat. I don't see how people could have gone away and left it."

"Summer people that rented the house, probably," said Tommy. "Had more

money than they knew what to do with. And now that that's all settled, how about the cook paying the wood man for all his work?" He folded Elsie into his arms with a grin. "Payment, lady! For the wood and the kindling, *and* the lighting of the fire."

A dimple showed in the cook's cheek. "Such a woodman! I'm glad we don't have such ones in the city. There's for the wood, and there's for the kindling, and *there's* for the lighting of the fire. And now if you don't leave me alone you won't get a mouthful of supper."

Tommy laughed. "Some little idea of ours, eh, to get the bungalow of Ed and come down to this little old town for the week-end? Hear that surf! And the wind's rising. We're in for a real old rip-snorting storm. The waves ought to be mountain high to-morrow. Honest, if I'd known Seashore was like this I'd never have given it the go-by all these years."

"I always told you," said Elsie.

"I know, I know. But now I'll make up for it. Some day when the Twitchell Realty Company thinks that I am as good as I think I am—"

"As *we* think you am," correcte Elsie.

"As we think you am, we'll get a house and lot of our own down here, and, every chance that shows itself, watch us come and learn what real living is like."

"When you get the Crosby Syndicate to sell, for instance."

Tommy's smile had a touch of grimness. "No fooling. Every one else in the firm has tried to land the syndicate and gotten nowhere. If the syndicate's lawyers would only give us the chance to talk to some of the owners who are holding back. I'll bet I could show them. They might do worse than letting me have a chance at that."

"Might! I know it. Ooh, the *steak!*"

The cook fled into the kitchen. "Nothing burned," she called back, "but one side is going to be mighty well done. I'll close the door—broiling steak smudges a room up so."

Tommy settled himself in front of the fire. "Whew!" he said at length, drawing his chair back, "I'm glad I didn't put any more on. Whoever left that wood is out of luck. Now about that Crosby Syndicate. H-m!"

Suddenly he looked up, knit his brows, glanced toward the kitchen, surveyed the fire, and put his head on one side. "I could have sworn that somebody knocked," he said. "Somebody *is* knocking."

With wrinkled forehead he went toward the door. The firm couldn't be sending for him, and that any one in Seashore should be out on such a night. He opened the door.

"Good evening!" said a cheery voice.

A pleasant-faced woman past middle age, wearing a waterproof coat and rubbers, and carrying a small valise, an umbrella, and lantern, was standing on the porch.

"Er—good evening," said Tommy.

"I'm Mrs. Rutledge," continued the pleasant-faced woman. "Your next-door neighbor."

Something like a tight-coiled watch spring snapped inside Tommy. His next-door neighbor!

"I saw your light as I was on my way to my house from up-town," the cheerful voice continued, "and I thought I would drop in for just a moment to make myself acquainted. I haven't seen the Parkinson house occupied in winter for ages. It's like old times again."

His next-door neighbor; the owner of the wood. Numbly Tommy continued to stare. Then, with a rush, he had taken her umbrella and lantern, and was shaking her hand. "Borden's my name—Tommy Borden. Just let me put down your umbrella. Mighty glad you dropped in—yes, we're friends of Ed Parkinson's—the wife and I are down for over Sunday—right inside, please—your satchel—I'll call the wife—there."

"I mustn't stop but a minute," protested Mrs. Rutledge. "You're all ready for supper. And you're going to have it in front of the fire—and a pitch-pine fire, too. Wherever did you get it? I didn't know that the woodmen carried it any more. Was it from Alvarez or Juan Castro?"

"Alvarez. No, Juan Castro. That is, I ordered it from—you see—"

"I always have a little pitch-pine in the house," continued Mrs. Rutledge, going toward the hearth, "so that when I come down from the city at odd times I can have a real fire. Good wood is so hard to get nowadays, and so hard to keep. There was a time when we could leave it out and be gone months and not think anything about it. But nowadays, with so many new people in town—"

"Yes'm," said Tommy. "That's just it. You see—"

"Tommy!" called Elsie from the kitchen. "If you don't stop talking to yourself in all those different voices I'll have to come in and speak to you. You aren't rehearsing for a play." The kitchen door opened, and: "Here comes supper," said Elsie.

The supper got half-way through the door; then stopped.

All in a breath Tommy blurted: "Elsie, Mrs. Rutledge, my wife, our next-door neighbor, dropped in for a moment on the way to her house, you probably didn't hear, and she's going to stay for supper."

The surprise with which the cook greeted this statement was equaled only by that of her guest. But the cook was the quicker of recovery. Tommy, standing behind Mrs. Rutledge, had accompanied his words with a frantic pantomime which semaphored: "Wood—her wood—doesn't know it—keep her here—supper—get it back somehow."

"Stay for supper," cried Mrs. Rutledge.

"That's it exactly," said Tommy, and: "Why, of *course*," said Elsie. And: "Bless you, Elsie," telegraphed Tommy.

"But I never thought of such a thing!" expostulated the guest. "I must be going; I intended stopping in for only a moment; I must be getting my fireplace fire started."

"That's just it," said Tommy. "I mean, we've got ours started, and you haven't, and we couldn't think of letting you go into a cold house right away when ours is all nicely warmed."

Tommy met Mrs. Rutledge's questioning look with all the courage that he could muster. "I'm sure we should feel better if you would eat supper with us rather than all by yourself, especially on such a stormy night; and your house hasn't been opened in some time, I'll wager."

"Why, no, it hasn't."

"Just what I thought. It will be all cold and chilly. Later—now, later—why, later—There, that's all settled, and you'll stay with us." He rubbed his hands. "This is the sort of party that I like."

To Tommy's justice it was exactly the sort of party that he liked, and it cut him as with sharp knives to think that his was the hospitality of duplicity.

"We'll have it right in front of the fire," said he, "just as we planned. Now let me help you off with your coat and rubbers, and Elsie, you see about the table, and I'll poke up the fire."

"Well," smiled Mrs. Rutledge, with a tone of resignation and finality, "there doesn't seem to be anything for me to do but as I'm bid."

"Correct," said Tommy, and threw more wood on the fire.

He shuddered as Mrs. Rutledge picked up a piece and examined it, and half expected to hear it cry out against him like the speaking tree of the fairy tale.

"That's good wood," commented Mrs. Rutledge. "That's the sort I like to burn."

"Just—just let me have that, if you will," said Tommy. "This room is getting cold. How it's raining! And let's sit down. That steak will be like the room in another minute, and for one I'll say I'm hungry."

But keen as his appetite was, the problem of getting Mrs. Rutledge's wood back in her house ahead of her was keener, and repeatedly he caught Elsie's warning glance telling him that a really hungry man never minces at his food. To make matters worse, Mrs. Rutledge's animated conversation seemed wholly to run on the subject of firewood—of green oak that smoked one out of house and home, of ordinary pine that was like so much wet punk, of driftwood that came in after a big storm, and how the townspeople would gather it in huge piles on the beach, and no one would ever think of touching another's find.

"It's like old times, indeed, discussing wood and fireplaces with people who are interested," said she. "I haven't felt so much at home since I first built. Of late years I haven't been down as much as I would have liked. Business has kept me

away, and the only reason for my visit now is that I wanted to be wholly by myself, where I could think over the pros and cons of a certain affair."

Tommy clutched at the shift in conversation as a drowning man clutches at the proverbial straw. Anything but the nightmarish subject of wood.

"I came down from the city myself to sort of get a perspective on things," said he. "I'm with the Twitchell Realty Company," he added, with a touch of pardonable pride.

The look that Mrs. Rutledge shot him was far keener than he realized.

"Indeed! And how do you like the firm?"

"Fine. Their word is as good as their bond. Do you know of them?"

Mrs. Rutledge looked at the fire. "Yes, I know of them."

"I've been with them a couple of years," expanded Tommy. "I've had one raise, and if I do as well as I hope, I'll soon be getting another. Now, if any of your business affairs are along the line of property, and I can help you, I'll be only too glad."

"That's very kind of you," said Mrs. Rutledge. "I am considering selling some property"—she again looked at the fire—"a small piece of property, held jointly with some friends, and I really would like to get an opinion on it from some one who knows conditions, and yet who is unbiased." She again looked at Tommy.

"Certainly," agreed Tommy. He shoved aside his cup and planted his elbows on the table. You just fire ahead. I beg your pardon, I mean, you tell me as much as you want to, and I'll give you my opinion, and you can decide as to its worth."

He was again the Tommy Borden of the Twitchell Realty Company, forgetful that he had ever stolen the wood of the woman who sat opposite, now questioning with few words, now answering with direct and illustrative phrase, computing interest and taxes, sketching real estate conditions; in short, showing a knowledge of his profession in a way that elicited the keen attention of one of his hearers and the open admiration of the other.

"Tommy," exclaimed Elsie, "does the Twitchell Realty Company *know* that you know so much?"

Tommy grinned his acknowledgment, and brought his knuckles down on the table. "To sum it up, Mrs. Rutledge, I'd advise you and your friends to sell. You'll make a good profit. The buyer in turn eventually will make one, but in the meantime you have had yours, something real, something tangible, a thing to be enjoyed, for with you at your age life is to be lived *now*."

He sat back conscious of a glow of satisfaction. He had stated the facts as they were.

Mrs. Rutledge seemed lost in a reverie. "I am very much obliged to you for so straightforward an opinion," she said at length. "Very much obliged. And now, my dear," turning to Elsie, "let me help you do up the dishes."

"Why, not at all!"

"But I'm going to," said Mrs. Rutledge, and proceeded to stack the dishes.

As she went toward the kitchen the solution of the wood question burst upon Tommy. "I'll help you two carry them out," said he, "and then you can do them."

As the last dish was put on the drainboard he casually put his hand on the knob of the living-room door. "I'll just close this," said he, "and then you two people can talk woman talk to your heart's content."

He swung the door to, and in that instant took on a catlike stealthiness. Swiftly he stowed the remaining sticks of wood into his arms, rose, and made for the front door. A feeling of guilt swept over him as he paused on the threshold to make sure that the pair in the kitchen had taken him at his word. The impulse came to him to go boldly to the kitchen, but his courage did not back the impulse.

He eased open the front door, put his toe against the screen door, turned, and reached for the door-handle. The wind, as though it had been waiting for this opportunity, swooped down upon him with full violence.

The screen door slammed upon his leg, the front door went wide open. He lunged

at the fast-moving knob. The topmost stick of wood fell from the load. He caught at it, juggled it, leaned too far, tried to withdraw his foot from between screen door and threshold, failed, and went down with a crash.

The kitchen door opened as by dynamite.

"Tommy!" cried Elsie.

"Have you hurt yourself?" said Mrs. Rutledge.

Tommy rose slowly to his feet. "That's what comes from trying to carry too much at once," he said in a tone which he tried to make matter of fact. "I should have gotten all my wood in before dark. I won't try to get in any more. Not to-night. I guess you must have thought that the house was coming down."

He laughed as lightly as the circumstances permitted, picked up the scattered wood, and carried it to the window-seat.

"I'll put it away with the rest," he explained.

He sat down and took up a magazine, but even then he did not dare catch Elsie's eye. Nor had he formulated the least iota of a plan when the dishes were done, and Elsie and Mrs. Rutledge were again in the front room.

"Now," said Mrs. Rutledge, "I'll be going over to my little house."

Tommy was on his feet. "You just stay where you are," he said persuasively. "Let me have the key; I'll go open it up, and when it's all ready I'll come back and let you know."

He hadn't the slightest idea as to what he might be able to do, but something had to be done. The time for telling Mrs. Rutledge that he had taken her wood had long since passed.

"Is your husband always this considerate?" asked Mrs. Rutledge of Elsie.

Fortunately for Elsie, she could truthfully nod. "Yes," she said, "he is." But she blushed, nevertheless.

"Hear how it rains," said Tommy. "If you'll just let me have that key. Yes'm, I think I understand how to open it—pull and press down—most doors stick, anyhow."

"And you'll find the wood—" began Mrs. Rutledge. But Tommy was gone.

The storm harried him across the yard and up onto the porch. The door stuck as Mrs. Rutledge had described that it would, and added a new wrinkle on its own account. With muttered imprecations he tugged it open and made his way inside. Here, with the electric-torch searching out the corners and showing nothing in the way of help, he turned the imprecations upon himself:

"That's right, get into a fix, and then not be able to get out of it. Be so all-fired smart and go and take people's wood, and then not have the nerve to tell them. Stir your stumps now if you want to get out of a trap that you were only too glad to get into. Get busy!"

But neither words nor fierce knitting of the brows seemed to be of any avail. Kitchen, bath-room, the single bedroom, none of these lent him a hand. Nor did any amount of rummaging in the wood-box on the back porch bring to light a single overlooked stick. "Had to hog it all," he muttered. "Some bright boy."

He stumped back into the kitchen, and was making his way through the small bedroom when his glance fell on the bedding, neatly folded at the foot of the bed. Without knowing exactly why he did so, he stopped and looked at the bedding; then, with the idea slowly growing, he swung the torch about the room.

"Only one bed," he said. "I wonder—" He hastened into the front room. Two tables, chairs, window-seats, a couch. A couch. But it had only a cover; no bedding.

Again he was in the bedroom, rummaging into the clothes-closet and linen-chest. "Fine! All piled on the foot of the bed, and if anything was to happen to it, how could any one sleep here? They'd have to sleep at our house, and once they were asleep I could get that wood. Boy, you're going to get out of this, but no thanks to yourself. A rainy night, and the bedding piled in one place. All that's lacking is the leaky roof, and a couple of dippers of water will do for that, not forgetting to splash some up against the ceiling. Say, I'd rather cut off my right hand than do this, but I haven't got the moral courage

to tell that old lady that I took her wood. I'll make up for it some time. And, listen, next time, if I ever try to get gay—"

He was out in the kitchen searching among the pots and pans. "That 'll do. Now, if the water has been turned on—it has—well, here goes."

Five minutes later a nervous-looking Tommy tensed himself.

"Well, I guess you'll have a bone to pick with the carpenters that made your house, Mrs. Rutledge," he announced. "The roof's leaking. Right above where all the bedding's piled. It's soaked clean through." He fell back upon his usual support. "Gee, but it's raining!"

"Ooh!" said Elsie. "*That's* too bad!"

"Well, I never!" said Mrs. Rutledge, and started toward her overcoat and hat.

"Now, Mrs. Rutledge," said Tommy, "There's no need in your going over. No, ma'am. I've put all the bedding out on newspapers and pulled the bed away and put a pan where the water is dripping. Now, to-morrow, when the storm is over—"

"I always had my doubts about those men that shingled the house," said Mrs. Rutledge. "I told them at the time—and all of my bedding was laid on the foot of that bed."

"Yes'm," said Tommy. "I noticed that."

"I'll go to the hotel," said Mrs. Rutledge.

"You'll do nothing of the kind," said Elsie. "Will she, Tommy?"

"She certainly won't. You're going to stay right here. We've got the room, and if we even didn't have the room, you'd stay." Again the knives of contrition hacked into him. To say this and mean it, and still know that he was forced to say it— The blades went deep.

"I don't suppose that there's any use of my arguing the matter," said Mrs. Rutledge, with a whimsical smile. "You are the sort of young man that seems always to have his own way."

"Oh, no, ma'am, I'm not," protested Tommy. "No, ma'am. So we just won't talk any more about it. I'll just build up a rousing good fire—"

"If you haven't got enough wood," said Mrs. Rutledge, "I can tell you where to get some of mine."

Tommy choked. "I think we have enough—enough for the night. Thanks, just the same; but we've got enough." He vigorously stirred up the fire, which in no way needed attention.

"There certainly is nothing like pitch," said Mrs. Rutledge.

"Yes'm," said Tommy, and steered the conversation in the opposite direction.

Bedtime came. "My," said Mrs. Rutledge, "I didn't know it was so late."

Tommy roused himself for action.

"Whenever you are ready to retire, Mrs. Rutledge, please feel at liberty to do so. I'll move my belongings out here, and have Elsie make up a bed for me on this couch."

"For once, young man, you are wrong. Your belongings are not going to be moved. *I* am going to sleep out here."

"But—" said Tommy.

"No buts about it," smiled Mrs. Rutledge. "It's my turn to have my own way. No one is going to be dispossessed of his room."

Though Tommy's appeals bordered on the frantic, and even though Elsie was rushed in as an eleventh hour and not too comprehending an ally, Mrs. Rutledge remained firm.

"You two people have had your plans upset enough for one evening," she finally announced. "If I can't have the couch and not disturb you I'll—well, I'll go over to the bungalow, rain-soaked blankets and all. There."

Tommy surrendered. He retired with one set purpose in mind: To rise somewhere before daylight and track down an armful of pitch-pine or perish in the attempt. "Otherwise," as he mumbled to Elsie, "we might just as well pack our grips."

At the precise hour that he had intended to rise he fell into the first sound sleep of the night. When he awoke the sun was shining in at the window.

He stared at it dully. Then he leaped from the bed and dove into his clothes like a fireman.

"Wha'—what is it?" demanded Elsie.

"Why didn't you *wake* me?" wailed Tommy. "Look at that sun!"

He darted out of the back door. Halfway across the yard his worst fears were realized.

Mrs. Rutledge was carefully picking her way through the long grass toward her bungalow.

"Good morning," she greeted him. "And isn't it a good morning? Just look at that sun through the trees."

"I'm looking at it," said Tommy.

"I hope you never have cause to forget it," said Mrs. Rutledge, with a new tone in her voice. "I came to my decision last night. I think it was the fireplace that finally did it. I shall sell, and shall ask that you be given the credit as agent in the sale."

"Thank you," said Tommy.

Mrs. Rutledge looked at him.

"But first I have a confession to make. I deceived you last night about the size of the property. I wanted to get your opinion; your real opinion. Especially since it is your firm that has been wanting to make the sale. I am the largest owner in the Crosby Syndicate."

To Tommy the sun seemed to go out of the heavens. The Crosby Syndicate—*the* syndicate. And Mrs. Rutledge's foot was on the first of the porch steps.

"I should have come right out with it," pursued Mrs. Rutledge, "but I wanted to make sure. We'll go into all of the details later. I certainly hope that this door doesn't stick."

The Crosby Syndicate—the chance that he had wanted. And now—Tommy's tongue stuck in his throat as he realized how rapidly his chance was disappearing.

The door was opened. "My," said its owner, "it's a good thing I didn't stay here last night. Damp's no name for it. First, the fire."

"Mrs. Rutledge—" began Tommy.

But Mrs. Rutledge was paying no attention. She had crossed the room and was bending over the floor near the fireplace. Taking hold by a metal ring, she swung up and back a square-hinged section of the flooring. Reaching down, she picked up a piece of pitch firewood and held it aloft.

"Just see the handy place that I keep my firewood. Whenever I'm down cellar I stack a sufficient amount on this framework, lift the trap-door when I'm up-stairs, and there I am. Dry, handy and safe."

But Tommy was no longer in the room. Hands to his head, he had staggered out through the kitchen and back porch. A large wagon was drawn up beside the rustic fence.

He blinked at it.

"Hello there," said the man on the seat. "I brought the rest of your wood. I was so busy that I could only bring you a little pitch last night, and seeing that it was going to rain I stored it in the wood-box." He looked sharply at Tommy. "You got it, all right, didn't you? Ain't this the place where you're stayin'?"

BEWITCHED

ARE you sorceress or Circe,
Never warmed with thought of mercy,
Calmly binding me within your cruel snare?
Have you charmed the tender skies
Till they linger in your eyes?
Have you deftly wound the sunlight in your hair?

Deep enchantress, witch, or fairy,
Do you join with comrades airy,
Swiftly flying on the racing clouds above?
Are you these, oh, nymph unruly?
Are you these, or are you truly
A distracting mortal maiden, whom I love?

Doris Webb.

Findings Is Keepings

by John Boyd Clarke

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

CHAPTER XX.

ON THE TRAIL OF SLIM.

THE hoarse growl of a police sergeant on duty—and in the pursuit of a particularly unpleasant duty—is not easily to be mistaken. Harry Vale could visualize the group of uniformed and plain-clothes men in that narrow hall at the top of the stairs, the leading sergeant with his locust poised for a drastic attack upon the door panels.

"Open, or the door comes down!"

The spectators of the fight in the lodge-room had been smitten dumb at the first thump on the door. But Harry Vale kept his head after landing his finishing blow upon his adversary. Canniff was senseless. Moore was only then sitting up in the corner and rubbing his head. Let *them* explain the "lodge meeting" when the vice squad burst in!

Vale leaped over Canniff's huddled form and darted into the kitchen. *Crash!* the point of the raiding sergeant's night-stick splintered the upper panel of the door. There was a sound at the shrouded back window that warned Vale the raiders were likewise on the fire-escape.

By no means panic-stricken, although his surprise at this outcome of the fight was as great as that of the others in the lodge-room, Vale knew on the instant just what to do.

He ripped off the gloves, got into his shirt, buttoned on the collar and tied his tie in the dark. He slipped his billy into a hip pocket and clapped on his cap. He was buttoning his coat when the police tumbled in through both shattered door and forced window.

"This way!" he exclaimed hoarsely, to the first of the vice squad who came.

He had at once known it was Bull Monahan at the door, clamoring to get in. Bull's squad was after poolrooms. It was easy to guess that some dick, anxious to make a record, had butted into Canniff and Moore's game without knowing why so many strangely assorted men were going up to the lodge-room in the afternoon. The conclusion that the bang-tails were being played in the rooms of the Ancient Order of Noble Stars was not far-fetched at all.

Now the rookie cop mixed with the uniformed reserves who had been brought from the precinct station to aid in the raid, and passed unnoticed through the fire-escape window. He did not care to be dragged into any inquiry regarding the fistic séance recently held in the lodge-room. He was already deep enough in trouble with his superiors.

If the fight had been arranged at Smooth Dick Prandle's instigation (and Vale believed it had been) let him do the explaining to Bull Monahan and those higher up. Vale was quite sure the plotters would not care to hang anything on him in connection with the rumpus. He had slipped through their coils again.

But he might not always so escape.

This story began in The Argosy for June 5.

That crowd was bound to get him if they could. Starting with Andrew Maywell, he felt he had a wicked bunch on his trail. He considered this very seriously as he wended his way back to his own precinct.

He removed such marks of the encounter as he could from his face in the wash-room. But the bruise on his forehead could not entirely be hidden save when he had his cap on. In the loafing-room old Sergeant Coleman asked grimly:

"What did you run into, Harry? You look like you used that head of yours for a battering ram. I understood that those bullies didn't get you the other night, at all?"

"They didn't. I just run into a lamp-post to-day," said the rookie, grinning. And before the sergeant could probe deeper he hauled out the hundred dollars he had received from "Doc."

"Look here," he said to the sergeant. "I got a donation for the Patrolmen's Benefit Association. You take it, and pass it to the proper guy, will you, sergeant? Just say it's from a friend."

"Gee, Harry! Where did you hold the man up for *that?* And you in uniform?"

"Needn't never mind," rejoined Vale carelessly. "Maybe I played a long shot and got it. Anyhow, if it's dirty money it will surely do clean work in the sick benefit fund."

He did not expect that all history of the fight in the lodge-room would be smothered. It was bound to leak out. In the first place, it was too good a story on Canniff and Pete Moore for the vice squad to keep!

But Harry had no intention of letting them say *he* had made any coin out of the fight. His purpose in demanding his share of the "gate money" in the first place was merely to add to Canniff's punishment.

He heard nothing of the matter—save vague rumors—for several days. The skipper let him severely alone, too. Whatever Smooth Dick Prandle was planning now, Vale could only wait and wonder!

Nor did he see Allaine again. He hovered about the Akron Building when he could, in most disreputable disguises. And, of course, he never passed the Maywell house without wondering what was going on within. Allan remained under cover.

But chance was good to him in one particular. One morning (he had left the station for home in citizen's clothes) he ran across Slim Bagley. Slim always interested Vale. He wondered if the stool-pigeon who appeared to be so friendly with Andrew Maywell had located the mysterious individual whom he had reported as seeing at the Green Island Ferry.

Vale knew all about Green Island. At the northern end was the Corliss Flying Field. The southern end, below the village and ferry landing, was a small wilderness, its edges being a fisherman's paradise. Harry Vale knew this wild spot as well as he knew his own city ward.

Slim was just swinging upon a car bound for the ferry in question when Vale spied him. The latter took a chance of not being noticed in his present outfit, and got onto the front platform of the car. He knew the motorman.

There he stood with his back to the car until it reached the ferry end of the route. He slyly watched Slim Bagley disembark and get aboard the ferry-boat. Vale trailed him, but remained at the rear of the craft until Slim had gone up into the village on the other side.

Vale believed the fellow was still combing the locality for the man whom Andrew Maywell desired to discover. Who this man was he could not imagine. And whether the matter had any connection with the Maywell mystery or not, the policeman had no means of knowing.

He would have kept close on the heels of Slim Bagley had that been possible. But the fellow started out of the little hamlet upon an open country road. There was no shelter for the rookie cop, and he must needs keep far behind his quarry.

Just as Slim whisked aside into the underbrush that bordered the south side of the road, Vale discovered a pair of pedestrians coming across the fields on the north side—from the direction of the aviation field. One was in the uniform of the Flying Corps. The other's gesticulations while he excitedly talked to his companion seemed somehow oddly familiar to the policeman.

The latter slowed down. Indeed, he stopped at the conjunction of the path with the highway. He waited the coming of the two in growing surprise.

"Mr. Maywell!" he exclaimed. "Aren't you lost over here?"

Allan Maywell looked at him with a scowl. Then his face smoothed out. Evidently he thought better of quarreling with Harry Vale. The cop knew too much!

"Oh, that you, Mr. Vale?" he said, in some confusion. "Er—meet Captain Post of the Flying Corps, Vale. Although just now Captain Post is relieved of duty with the army to conduct some experiments with the Corliss people on a new type of plane."

The captain was fresh-faced and sandy-haired—the brisk, up-to-date type of army officer. He offered a cordial hand.

"I must have read something about that in the newspapers," Vale said. "You know, we cops are great readers."

"Glad to meet you, Mr. Vale," said the captain in a friendly manner. But Allan broke in with:

"Not much you didn't read about it. This that the captain is doing is strictly on the q.t. Captain Post is monkeying with his own invention, and if these airplane hogs don't steal it from him, he is going to make a fortune out of it, believe me!"

"I believe you," said Vale suddenly, as, he said afterward, "having a rush of brains to the head." "By the way, you've just some from the flying field up yonder?"

"Yes."

"Captain Post is working there?"

"I have been making experimental flights from here for two or three months, Mr. Vale," explained the aviator courteously.

"And I bet you take a friend up with you, now and then?"

"Oh! If you really care to go up, Mr. Vale. Sometimes—"

"Not on a bet!" exclaimed Harry Vale. "I've all I can do to keep tabs on what's going on down here on the ground. I'll leave flying to the birds—and the bugs!" Then: "Your home's near Hallington, isn't it, Captain Post?"

"Oh, yes," rejoined the captain.

"And I suppose it's nothing for you to hop off here and land up there at Hallingham in—how long?"

"Oh," Captain Post said, before the suddenly anxious Allan could stop him, "it's only a three-hour jump under favorable circumstances."

"Glory!" yelled Vale, wheeling on the abashed Allan. "I got you!"

"Wha-what?" murmured the amazed captain.

Allan expressed his feelings in a sour grin. "You are a smarter cop than your uncle, Inspector McKane, Vale. He hasn't guessed it yet. Nor has Drew—damn him!"

Vale said quietly now: "Uncle Dan hasn't my advantage. I had reason all the time for knowing your alibi was phony. You put on a spurt that night after—er—you left the vicinity of the Maywell house, and beat it up here. Captain Post took you on a flight to Hallingham. You made it in time to catch that four twenty-eight train down."

"So you say," grunted Allan. "You don't expect me to acknowledge any such thing, do you? And if you think Captain Post will bolster up your flight of imagination—"

"Can it, Maywell," retorted Vale, turning sharply away. "If I want to get you I'll do it without dragging your friends into the mess," and nodding briefly, he passed on.

By this time he had lost Slim Bagley. Beating the covert beside the road did not reveal him, and Vale was forced to return to the city without gaining anything in that direction. He determined, however, on his next long relief, to make a thorough search of the Green Island wilderness.

He had discovered one interesting point: The explanation of Allan Maywell's alibi was clear. And if that seemingly perfect alibi was so easily exploded, why might not the mystery connecting Grif Pelley with the Maywell affair be likewise explained? Did he believe he could get the truth out of Allan, Vale would have cheerfully grilled him again.

The policeman went home with this pricking thought in his mind: What could

Grif Pelley—a man abed after an operation for appendicitis—have to do with the safe burglary on Trevorth Street?

CHAPTER XXI.

THE TRUTH AT LAST.

MAIZIE, the gum-chewing blonde behind the cigar counter, assured Harry Vale that Pelley expected to be home from the hospital before the week was out.

"I ain't had the time to go and buzz him none," she confessed to the policeman. "But he sent me woid he was aw-right and was coming back. So he ain't gonna croak this time."

"Who brought you word?" asked Vale, idly enough, although the information asked for was one of those "little things" he had trained himself to take note of.

"A feller with his arm in a sling—just as honest looking as a tin watch painted yaller. Gee!" Maizie added, shifting her gum, "I don't see where Pelley picks all his phony friends."

She was evidently not familiar with her employer's past record. Vale knew the individual she referred to was probably Slim Bagley. He had seen the stool-pigeon in the neighborhood that day.

This incident revived in Vale's mind the suspicion that Grif Pelley was in close association with Mr. Andrew Maywell. Slim was the go-between.

It did not reveal, however, who the man was that Slim was trailing for the criminal lawyer at Green Island. But the whole puzzling affair kept Harry Vale from sleeping properly during his rest hours.

"And he doesn't half enjoy his meals when he gets home to eat them," the Widow Vale complained to her brother, the inspector. "This is a bad business he has got into, I fear me, Dan."

"Nonsense! The police game is no worse than any other," declared Inspector McKane. "It never cost *me* me appetite, I can tell ye. The trouble with Harry is his imagination, not his digestion."

"But he has an awful welt on his head, Dan. He won't tell me how he came to get it," said the anxious widow.

"Then he's a poor liar," observed the inspector. "His imagination doesn't seem to help him *there*."

He had his own supicions as to how his nephew had received that bruise. Indeed, he knew the rookie cop was in line for his first big pounding since joining the force. He had been all through the mill himself, in his young days. He believed it was better to grin and bear such things. Harry had run athwart the system; he must get out of the trap himself.

Thus far—from what the inspector had heard—he was proud of the rookie's record. He had bucked Canniff and Moore—Smooth Dick Prandle himself—even Mr. Andrew Maywell. And he had got away with it!

On the other hand, the inspector had little idea that his nephew was so deeply interested in the Maywell family intrigue and the safe robbery. He considered Vale as idly curious about these things.

To tell the truth, Inspector McKane was not discussing the Trevorth Street burglary with anybody, if he could help it. Canniff and Moore had brought him nothing but negative information regarding it. He had spent more of his own precious time than he cared to already on the case—and had accomplished nothing.

It is a fact that had Inspector McKane dreamed that his nephew had information that had not yet come to *him*, he certainly would have given his cheeky young relative the "third degree."

Just at this time Harry Vale was tormented in both his conscience and his mind by many suspicions. Trailing Slim Bagley had amounted to nothing. Watching Andrew Maywell seemed to yield no information at all. He could not see his way clear to forcing further information from Allan without betraying his own hand—betraying the fact that he was in possession of the will favoring the criminal lawyer.

He realized that all parties to the intrigue were merely marking time. Mr. George Wilmot held the will giving Allan the estate, but did not probate it because of Andrew's threat to produce the document Vale had picked up in the burning studio. And Allaine—

If Vale could only talk to Allaine and regain her confidence! She had plainly shown that she disapproved of her brother's recent course. She must know, then, just how closely he was connected with the safe robbery and the exchange of wills. Vale could easily plot out the reason for the attitude she had assumed so far.

How to reach Allaine was the question. Where had she gone to live when she had left the Maywell house in so angry a mood? Vale put his mind to this line of thought in real earnest.

His was the graveyard watch that night. He went on tour at midnight.

These quiet night tours were good for patient thinking if for nothing else. When Harry Vale was anywhere in sight of Chirotti's corner he was watchful as well as thoughtful.

Nothing was sprung on him during this tour, however, but his meditations brought him one sharp conclusion. As he passed the Maywell house about six in the morning (sun-time) Maggy, the maid, was sweeping the walk. She had more than once passed the time o' day with the patrolman since his visit to the house on the day Allaine had left it.

"Tell me," he asked of the rosy-cheeked maid, "do you see anything of Miss Allaine these days?"

"Not a thing, Mr. Vale. She's writ one letter to Mrs. Callahan, but that's all. And it's me belief Master Allan is quite put out by her leavin'."

"Humph!" grunted the policeman. "Allan's worries aren't anything in my young, sweet life—and shouldn't be in yours, Maggy. Say! Where did Miss Maywell live when she and her brother left their uncle's home here two years ago? Do you know?"

"Sure I do. I was there once on an errand for Mrs. Callahan."

She gave Vale the street and number. It was not in the neighborhood, but the policeman had no difficulty in locating it as soon as he had had breakfast and got into cits. Cogitation had convinced him that the girl had very likely returned to her old lodging. He should have thought of that before.

The house was on a tidy square with a pleasant little park in the middle—a park in which nursemaids and their charges were the principal occupants in the afternoon. But at this early hour there were few human beings in it save the men of the highway department spearing papers and sweeping up refuse.

As Vale approached the house in question he saw a powerful blue car beside the curb. He recognized it, for it usually stood during business hours near the Akron Building. If Andrew had an errand at any distance from his offices, he used his car.

The man who drove it had "thug" stamped unmistakably upon his countenance. Vale had already sized him up and believed that the finger-print experts at headquarters had his record. But perhaps the famous criminal lawyer hired the man because nobody else would give him a job.

From the car and its ugly chauffeur Vale shot a glance to the doorway of Allaine's lodging. He saw Andrew Maywell just turning away from the closing door to descend the steps. Vale stepped into one of the park entrances and waited.

Instead of entering the automobile the lawyer crossed the street toward a gateway of the park. Vale jumped at an instant conclusion. The girl had gone for a walk and Andrew was in search of her.

The patrolman kept out of sight himself and followed a path he thought might cross that into which Andrew Maywell had turned. He walked for some minutes before hearing voices. Then, from behind a clump of ornamental shrubs, he looked into a little swale where there was a bit of lawn and a bench.

Allaine had dropped her needlework and stood defiantly to face her cousin. The latter's attitude was almost threatening. He was no longer the calm and self-contained lawyer. His uglier passions were unleashed.

"I demand that you tell me the truth, Allaine," he was saying harshly. "You cannot defend your brother. I've got him in any case. But you must tell me all you know about that robbery to clear your own skirts."

"You are trying to frighten me, Drew. I am not so easily alarmed," Allaine said distinctly.

"I mean business—"

"And bad business. You have never been in any other," she rejoined cuttingly. "I know you of old, Drew. My father warned us—both Allan and me—against you. He said, 'Watch Andrew!' and had we done so more closely years ago, Uncle Hardy would never have misunderstood Allan and believed your lies about him."

"Ha! But I notice you cannot stand your brother's company now."

"My reason for no longer living in the old house with Allan is my own affair," returned the girl haughtily.

"You cannot pull the wool over my eyes," said the lawyer harshly. "Do you supose that I will for long let a young whippsnapper like Allan balk me? I have evidence enough right now to convict him of that safe burglary. And I'll put him behind the bars for it."

"Allan's alibi is perfect," said Allaine. But even in Vale's ears her voice sounded uncertain. Andrew laughed harshly.

"There's no alibi that can't be broken down. That is an axiom of my profession. And I have the witness in this case who will disprove Allan's statement. I'll make that rookie cop knock the props out from under your brother's alibi."

"Who—what do you mean?" the girl asked in sudden excitement.

"Your friend Vale is the lad I mean," sneered Andrew. "Don't say you did not know it. He saw Allan lingering outside the house that night. I'll make him identify your brother, no matter how well he has been bribed."

"I do not believe you, Drew," said Allaine with more confidence. "I do not believe Officer Vale can be bribed by anybody."

"Indeed? He is the first cop, then, who is so pure," the criminal lawyer declared. "And *you* shall be made to tell the truth about Allan, too. My God, girl! Don't you see how foolish you are to try to shield your brother? He will do nothing for you."

She was silent, her face pale, but her eyes glowing. He went on recklessly:

"You know well enough Allan put that old will in the safe in place of the one Uncle Hardy made favoring you."

"I know nothing of the kind!" she stammered.

"You would better believe it, then, for it is so. And don't think he intends to divide the estate with you if he gets it through this trick. He's got a girl up there in Hallingham that he has been running after for months. Allan's got no use for his sister, my dear. That Post girl will benefit, not you, through the crime he has committed."

"I do not believe you," murmured Allaine faintly.

"I thought I could tell you something you did not know," sneered the lawyer. "Allan has not taken you into his confidence, I can see, on this point. He is hiding more than that from you, Allaine. You would better think twice."

"I will talk to you no longer, Drew," she declared, stooping to pick up her fallen work.

Andrew put his foot upon the bag. He seized the girl by the wrist and dragged her upright to face him again.

"Listen to me, Allaine Maywell!" he began, and looked up to see Vale pushing through the bushes.

"Mr. Maywell," said the policeman significantly, "your chauffeur wants you. He's got engine trouble, or something, and he wants your advice."

"Mr. Vale!" murmured Allaine, stepping back from her cousin and rubbing her wrist.

The lawyer's countenance gathered a storm cloud. His thin lips opened for speech. But Vale stepped close to him, looking him straight in the eye.

"Did Smooth Dick Prandle tell you what happened to those strong-arm guys—and to Canniff? I'm loaded for you, Mr. Maywell, right now. But I don't want to smear you all over this walk in front of Miss Allaine. Get out!"

He spoke only above a whisper and Allaine scarcely appreciated the threat. But Maywell understood and he knew he was in danger. He retreated. The younger man turned quickly and picked up the trampled needlework. Allaine had sunk upon the bench.

"I came to see you myself, Miss Maywell," Vale said, his face still pale with the emotion he had suppressed. "But I wish

I had not found you here. Your cousin would have been carried out to his car instead of walking out—believe me!"

"Oh, Mr. Vale! Why—why have you aroused his enmity?"

"Don't worry. I've beat him at his own game so far," Vale returned grimly. "And unless he is smarter than I think he is, he will never catch your brother in his alibi. He was bluffing you just now—that is all."

Her look was altogether different from that blazing glance she had given him when she left the Maywell house several days before.

"Perhaps I have been too harsh with you, Mr. Vale," Allaine said hesitatingly. "I—I cannot forget that you saved my life at the fire. And now—"

"Don't let that worry you, Miss Allaine. Sure, I'd do it again gladly!"

"But—but you *did* break your promise to me."

"No, ma'am, I didn't."

"Cousin Andrew told me—"

"Yes. I *did* let him know that it was you I brought out of the fire. But that was not giving you any publicity. I knew he would never spread it abroad. He doesn't love me enough to put me in line for an honor medal. Don't you see?"

"Oh!"

"Let me tell you how it was," urged Vale. "Maybe it won't look so bad to you."

He sketched the incidents connected with the headquarters complaint filed against him, and the threat to send him to trial before the deputy commissioner.

"So you see, I bluffed," he concluded. "I knew I had Andrew Maywell where his hair was short. He wouldn't dare let me call you as a witness—and I assure you I had no such intention."

"Oh, Mr. Vale! Has Drew been hounding you through your superiors to make you witness against my brother?"

"That's his game, Miss Allaine," said Vale. "But don't let it bother you in the least. He will not accomplish anything."

"But you *did* see Allan out in front of the house that night?" she suggested.

"How could that be?" he demanded. "Your brother's alibi is unshakable!"

"I do not understand it," Allaine admitted. "He—he *must* have got back to Hallingham in some way. But, Mr. Vale, Allan was standing out there in front of the house at about ten o'clock that evening. You did see him.

"You deserve to know the truth," she went on gently, as he sat on the bench beside her. "If you know all you may be able to explain some part of this mystery, and my brother's strange actions. I am utterly at sea about it all myself."

CHAPTER XXII.

CONFIDENCES.

"I WILL tell you all that I know, Mr. Vale," Allaine Maywell began after a moment. "Perhaps you—an outsider—will be able to explain some things that I cannot seem to understand. Allan is *so* different from what he used to be. Do—do you suppose what Drew just told me is true?"

"What's that?" the policeman asked quickly.

"That Allan is interested in some woman? He never mentioned such a thing to me."

Harry Vale here showed a serpentlike wisdom. "Well! It would not be strange if your brother was interested in some nice girl, would it?" he murmured.

"Oh, but that was not Drew's intimation."

"Humph! I'd want a lot of salt on anything that lawyer said before I'd swallow it," rejoined the policeman in his whimsical way.

"Well! I supose that is so. And I shall always believe that Cousin Andrew has been Allan's Nemesis. He—Andrew—always hated us. Mr. George Wilmot will not even now believe that Andrew is all bad. But I *know*.

"I have feared to tell Mr. Wilmot everything, because of Allan. If I reveal to him all that I know Andrew did that night—the night of the burglary—I must betray my brother, too. *You*, Mr. Vale, will have no reason to repeat what I say to you? And I *must* have advice."

"I wouldn't harm a hair of your brother's head, Miss Allaine!" the policeman assured her. "I'm only a cop—a rookie cop. I'm told almost every hour of the day by somebody or other that I mustn't think, or judge for myself, or do any little thing off my own bat! I'm only to consider the shine on my shoes and the polish of my buttons," he added with disgust. "You can safely tell me anything, Miss Allaine. My mind is a deep well, and none of my superiors would think it worth while to stir up the sediment in the bottom of it."

She laughed at his rueful emphasis. But it was a sympathetic laugh, and Vale warmed to it.

"Somehow I have complete confidence in you. But I dare not talk to Mr. Wilmot as frankly, for I do not know how far his sense of duty might make him go.

"If he should repeat the whole story to the surrogate, Allan would surely get into trouble. I risked my life, Mr. Vale, to try to undo what my brother did. I did not venture into that burning studio for my own sake, Mr. Vale! I don't care if I never touch a penny of Uncle Hardy's money."

"Tell me," interrupted Vale, but encouragingly. "Perhaps I can help you."

"I must advise with somebody. The night before Uncle Hardy was buried (Mrs. Callahan had got word to me that morning that he was dead) Allan walked into my rooms over yonder. He had not received my message. It had passed him on his way. I think he was in some trouble. I think he had come to borrow money of me."

Vale waited, saying nothing in comment.

"Mind you, I only thought this. The news of Uncle Hardy's death stopped any plea that he may have had in his mind. At once he wanted to know if Uncle Hardy had made any change in the provisions of his second will. We both knew, of course, that *that* document favored Andrew.

"Mrs. Callahan had told me that there had been a new will made just before uncle died and that she and Andrew Maywell had witnessed it. 'Then,' said Allan, 'Andrew is not a legatee.' He seemed sure of that, and it gave him great confidence.

"He was very anxious to know who *was* the principal beneficiary of the new will. I was urged against my better judgment to go to the house and ask Mrs. Callahan if she knew.

"Allan went with me; but he did not enter the house. He waited outside while I was admitted by Maggy by the area door and went up to Mrs. Callahan's sitting-room on the top floor.

"Maggy warned me that Mr. Andrew Maywell was in the library looking over some papers for Mr. Wilmot. Only Uncle Hardy and Mr. Wilmot had the combination of the library safe, so I do not suggest that Andrew could have opened it. I went up quietly to Mrs. Callahan's room. I did not want to speak to my cousin."

"I see," said Vale, wisely nodding.

"Maggy soon came up to bed. The housekeeper could tell me absolutely nothing about the contents of the new will. I would not let her go down with me, for I knew the house perfectly. Maggy was then asleep.

"When I got down to the lower hall I heard voices in the library. The parlor door was open. I was curious. I stepped in and stood behind the curtains dividing the room where poor Uncle Hardy lay in his coffin, from the library."

Vale's gray eyes sparkled. "Now we're getting at something!" he murmured.

"I listened for some moments," Allaine said quietly. "The man with Drew was an old burglar named Pelley who kept a cigar-stand in the neighborhood."

"Grif Pelley!" gasped Vale.

"Yes. Andrew had some power over him. He had made the man come there and enter the rear window. Andrew charged him to break into the safe."

"Wait! Wait!" ejaculated Harry Vale, throwing up both hands. "Here's another perfect alibi gone blooey! I—I can't understand it, Miss Allaine."

"But it is so."

"At what time in the evening was this?"

"Around ten. Just a little before."

"And at six, or thereabout, that evening Grif Pelley was taken to the hospital to be operated on for appendicitis. He's there now—to my actual knowledge," said Vale.

"Oh, Mr. Vale! Then you—you do not believe me?"

"Of course I believe you! I only don't understand," he told her, soothingly. "Talk about alibis! Why, Allan has one that we know isn't so; and this Pelley has another."

"I am sure of this man Pelley. Andrew sat there and told the burglar he could have all the money he found in the safe if he would change an envelope Andrew gave him for the will that Mr. Wilmot had put in the safe."

"Great Scott! You've got Andrew then, on the hip!"

"Wait," she said quickly. "I was nearly caught listening. I dared not leave the house by either door, for both had to be slammed to latch. I could not use the telephone. Indeed, I dared not bring the police into it even then. All I could think of was to get Allan and advise with him."

"I see," murmured the policeman.

"I found an electric torch that was always kept in the wash-room next to the library at the end of the hall. I used it to light my steps down-stairs to the coal cellar. I unhooked the chain of the manhole cover of the coal-chute. Allan heard me and I was telling him what was happening inside the house when you, Mr. Vale, first came along and spoke to my brother."

"Great Scott!" muttered Vale again.

"After you had passed the second time we decided that Allan must come into the house. He determined to fool the burglar. Andrew had already gone away."

"What did Allan do?"

"I will tell you what he *said* he did, Mr. Vale," Allaine returned, with a sigh. "I remained in the basement. Allan told me he got up-stairs and into the parlor where I had stood, just as that burglar forced the safe door.

"That man, Pelley, was dragging out the cash-drawer. He scooped the money into his pockets. The document envelope Cousin Andrew had left for him to substitute for the will in the safe lay on the table.

"Allan says that Pelley went into the wash-room to wash his hands before he touched the envelope. It gave my brother time to switch the wills himself—so he says. He put the envelope on the table into the left-hand upper compartment of the safe, and left the envelope he took from that pigeonhole on the table.

"So," continued the girl, "if Pelley exchanged envelopes as he was told, the right will—the last testament of Uncle Hardy—would be returned to the safe and Cousin Andrew would be overreachd.

"Great idea!" exclaimed Vale.

"It was the right idea, Mr. Vale," said Allaine seriously. "I had told Allan to do that myself. I was determined—whoever the last will favored—that Uncle Hardy's intentions should not be thwarted."

Vale looked at her with much approval. He saw now just the kind of a girl she was. And just the kind of a girl Allaine was was the kind of a girl Vale had wanted her to be all the time!

"Allan was not armed and he said Pelley had a gun in sight all the time. My brother came down to me, whispered what he had done, and we fled from the house. If at all, Pelley must have been frightened away when he heard the area door slam.

"My brother left me at the first corner. He said we would better separate and he told me to deny having seen him until he 'officially' arrived from Hallingham next day. How he made his alibi so perfect—"

Vale could have told her that. But he did not. Just then he was more interested in another phase of the matter.

"But the will found by Mr. Wilmot in the safe after the funeral?" he asked. "Surely that was not the one Andrew wished to be exchanged for the will making you, Miss Allaine, the chief legatee?"

She looked at him dumbly. Vale came to a swift conclusion. His face burned.

"Then Allan—"

"Oh! Let me tell you. I hate to believe it. But Allan had carried away that first will with him when he quarreled with Uncle Hardy two years ago. He must have had it with him that night and substituted it for the last will.

"I saw that, at once the old will was found. That my brother should do such a deed! And I suspected that he had hidden the last will he took from the safe behind the secret panel over the mantelpiece in his old studio which he had leased immediately on his return to town. He used to

keep private papers there," the girl confessed. "I—I tried to save Allan from the consequences of his crime when I went to get that paper from the studio. I hoped he would be conscience-stricken and prove himself the man I had always believed him to be."

"Hold on," Vale said. "Maybe at that he isn't as bad as you think him. At least, he was not trying to cheat his own sister out of her rights."

"What—what do you mean?"

"You climbed up to that burning studio to save the hidden will?"

"Yes."

"And you got the tile out and grabbed the paper just as the floor gave way. I saw the paper in your hand."

"Oh, Mr. Vale! I fainted. You did not realize the importance of the document."

"I guess I did the wrong thing," said Harry Vale, looking at her steadily. "*I saved the paper.*"

She leaped up from the bench. Her face shone with sudden relief. She placed her hands upon his shoulders, gazing intently into his face.

"Then—then Uncle Hardy's last will and testament is safe, after all? You brought it away from there? Where is it?"

"Hold on!" exclaimed Vale. "Don't jump so quick at that conclusion. Suppose the will that was hidden by your brother was not the one favoring you, after all?"

"Oh! But if it is the will that Uncle Hardy intended should stand—what do you mean?"

"I hate to tell you," said Harry Vale, shaking his head. "Your brother did not get the third and last will. The one he hid is the second will—the instrument giving the entire Maywell estate to your Cousin Andrew."

CHAPTER XXIII.

"WHERE THE TREASURE IS."

WHEN Harry Vale finally separated from Allaine he carried away with him a discovery that he put into words and repeated over and over again to himself as he went down-town:

"You can't beat 'em! A *good* woman is the funniest proposition God ever made."

Here was a girl who had everything to lose and nothing to gain by having the truth about the wills come to light. Yet she was determined—and she had made Harry Vale agree—that the document the latter had in his possession should be given to Mr. George Wilmot, the Maywell family attorney.

By so doing she knew that Allan as well as herself would lose any chance of sharing in the fortune. Yet this course was the only one she would agree to. At first Harry Vale was sorry he had told her of the existence of the will he possessed.

And yet, how could he say that? Her attitude swept out of his thought for all time any suspicion that Allaine was not as straight as a die! She was better than beautiful. She was good. For a fellow who admired his mother's character as Vale did, this discovery put Allaine Maywell on the same pinnacle as that of the Widow Vale.

"Had I saved that will from the fire," Allaine told him, "and it proved to be the one I thought Allan had hidden—the last one Uncle Hardy made—I would merely have shown it to my brother and told him to do as he pleased about it. If he is so hungry for money as to carry out his present plans, he can have the fortune. I want none of it.

"But now there is only one thing to do. I believe Andrew is a greater criminal than my brother. But two wrongs never yet made one right! Andrew must answer to his own conscience for what he has done. I will not be a party to any crime, even if it be attempted to thwart Andrew.

"Allan did not know at the time he made the exchange that he was wronging me. He was determined to get the fortune no matter *who* was wronged. No, Mr. Vale. There is but one right way. I ask you to go to Mr. Wilmot with that second will. Tell him all."

She had made Vale promise. He could not get out of it. Yet he felt that he would be cheating the rightful legatee. Colonel Maywell had intended Allaine should inherit his estate. He had good reason—better reason than Allaine dreamed perhaps—

for doubting Allan's character. Neither Allan nor Andrew was worthy of inheriting the estate, nor was either Colonel Maywell's choice.

Allaine could see nothing but the one thing to do. Vale feared that old Wilmot would take the very same attitude. And if the estate was given up to the criminal lawyer, the policeman was confident that a greater wrong would be committed than this that Allan had tried to put across!

For, see: Allan had doubtless merely exchanged the old will he had so long possessed for the one Andrew had left in the envelope on the library table. That was the simplest exchange to make under the circumstances.

At that time Allan had no knowledge of the contents of the last will of the eccentric old colonel, which made his sister the chief beneficiary. He had done something to thwart Andrew and benefit himself. Andrew was, in any case, the chief criminal.

Come to think of it, from the standpoint of the practical thinker that he was, Vale could not see that Allan Maywell had been so far wrong in what he had done. Had he exposed his own act and returned the second will which Vale now had in his possession, Allan would merely be playing into his Cousin Andrew's hands.

But the evidence connecting the criminal lawyer with the safe burglary would scarcely stand in court. Allan would merely entangle himself in criminal proceedings if he tried to force action against Andrew. The latter was a man of great influence in the courts and with the police. Vale's own late experiences had proved that to be a fact.

Harry Vale had passed his word to Allaine. She would not let him leave her until he had done so. The touch of her clinging hands was upon his own. Her breath seemed still upon his face as he hurried down-town. She had shown him plainly that she thought highly of him, and the policeman believed that he could only hold that opinion in her estimation, and gain further influence with her, by obeying her commands in this matter, to the end.

As far as Allaine being wealthy or poor was concerned, Vale thought little of it. Had he considered this at length he probably would have felt rather pleased than otherwise that it was probable she was not going to be rich.

Under the present circumstances and of her own choice, Allaine had put herself quite in Vale's class. There was no barrier of caste or position between them. The policeman's heart sang at this thought. Shucks! After all, what was half a million dollars, more or less?

Lying on his cot that noon, his hands clasped under his head and wide awake, Harry Vale cogitated upon the whole affair, and to some length. He had no right to let the matter of the Maywell mystery drop. After giving the second will to Mr. George Wilmot, there was still something to clear up.

Otherwise his mind would never know peace! He had learned the trick of Allan's alibi; but the problem of Grif Pelley's alibi was more troublesome than ever!

Against his own reason and personal knowledge was Allaine's evidence that Grif Pelley could *not* be in the hospital. A "ringer" had been used in place of the cigar-store proprietor. Andrew Maywell had doubtless been able to arrange that as easily as he planned other things.

But it seemed that one thing—and that important—which Andrew had schemed for, had gone wrong. The absent Pelley had seemed to fail his employer. Otherwise the will favoring Allan would not have appeared in the safe in place of the one favoring his sister.

This document that the policeman now held was the one that Andrew had expected Mr. Wilmot to find in the safe. Andrew's attitude since the unexpected discovery of the first will was now easily understood by the rookie cop.

Andrew was stalling, waiting to get hold of the absent Pelley who evidently he hoped had made some mistake and was in possession of the will favoring the criminal lawyer. The latter was searching for the old crook whom he had not supposed he would care to see again until the ringer came out of the hospital.

Vale's suspicions, first aroused by the conversation he had overheard between An-

drew Maywell and Slim Bagley, were now convictions. Slim was searching for Pelley. A clue to the man's hiding-place had been found by Slim near the Green Island Ferry.

Vale knew of just one place in the wilderness of the south end of Green Island where a man might be well hidden. A twenty-four-hour leave was due him and he took it the next day. He started early in the morning with his fishing-tackle, apparently bound for a day's sport.

It proved to be a day's sport, too; but Harry Vale by no means expected what happened during his outing.

He walked from the ferry when he reached the island and in an hour and a half arrived in sight of a cabin which stood back from a narrow strip of beach and in quite the wildest part of the island. A curl of smoke from the rude chimney proved the cabin was occupied. He marked a figure with a crab-net on the shore of the inlet that slashed the beach.

Of course, Harry Vale had nothing but a " hunch " to go by. If a man was in hiding on Green Island, this spot was the only one which offered real privacy. But there was nothing but suspicion pointing to the individual now in sight of the policeman's keen gray eyes being Grif Pelley! Slim Bagley might be reckoning up quite another person for Mr. Andrew Maywell.

Vale ensconced himself behind a hedge of hackberry-bushes almost within a stone's throw of the man with the crab-net. The latter was about Pelley's size, it was true. In his normal state the cigar-store proprietor wore a well-trimmed brown beard. But this individual's hirsute adornment was gray, bushy, untrimmed. Vale was near enough, however, to note the man's pale blue eyes.

The patient at Dr. Skeen's hospital had looked quite as much like Grif Pelley as did this fellow with the crab-net. How was Vale to make sure of his identity? This question cost him some pondering.

Finally he thought of the contents of the cabin. There must be something there belonging to the hermit, and those possessions might identify the man as Pelley.

Vale slipped away from the shore and got into the cabin through a rear window. The closed door was in sight of the man crabbing at the inlet.

There was a decrepit stove, a table and chair, and two bunks, one above the other. There was a blanket in the lower bunk, an old coat without a distinguishing mark upon it—even the tailor's label was torn off—and a pair of worn shoes. There was no bag, or satchel in sight—nothing at all of a really personal nature. It was as though the crab-fisherman was here only for the day.

Some meat was simmering in a pot upon the stove, and there were potatoes and onions ready on the table to be added later to the stew.

Vale went over every article in the cabin for the second time, replacing each as he found it. The thought came to him:

" If this is Grif Pelley, what did he do with the will he took out of the wall safe in the Maywell library? He certainly has not seen Andrew since, and must still be holding onto the document."

That will, Vale was sure, was the final instrument sealed by Colonel Hardy Maywell—that giving the bulk of the property to Allaine. And Andrew would never trust Pelley to destroy the paper—no, indeed!

It seemed the natural thing to suppose that Pelley would hide the stolen document somewhere near where he slept. He would not carry such an important paper in his clothing when he went fishing.

The policeman examined the tick stuffed with dry marsh grass, and the boards of the lower bunk. The upper bunk was empty. Nothing in the nature of a paper rewarded his efforts. The searcher was frankly up a stump.

If the fisherman *was* Pelley, how to make him reveal his identity and—more important to Vale's mind—the hiding-place of that last will of Colonel Maywell?

Wherever the paper was Pelley must have his mind upon it. If Harry Vale could but read the man's mind!

Where the treasure is there the heart is also. If this fisherman was Pelley and he had hidden the will in the shack, how to make him divulge the hiding-place?

For fear of being discovered in the shack Vale climbed out of the window again. Thick woods bordered the clearing back of

the cabin. He went to the edge of this jungle and sat down to think where he could be hidden.

He drew forth his jack-knife, cut down a small sapling, and began to trim it. The stick had a crook in it at the lower end—like a shinny-stick. He trimmed it carefully while he ruminated.

"Where the treasure is—"

Harry Vale got up suddenly. He reached forward the stick with the crook at the end. He visualized what he might do with it. His gray eyes brightened; his face began to shine.

He looked all about again as he left the shelter of the woods. There was nobody in sight, for from the fear of the shack he could not even see the man on the beach.

Vale crept to the window again. The cabin was so small that he could easily reach the stove with the crooked stick. He lifted the simmering pot from the fire and tipped it over on the floor. The stove had but three legs. The fourth corner was held up by a brick. Vale reached a second time, crooked the stick about this brick, and pulled out the support.

The stove fell forward. The pipe was jerked away from the chimney-hole. The live coals were spilled out upon the floor.

The split poles of which the floor was made began to smoke. Indeed, almost immediately the shack was filled with smoke which sought every crevice to escape.

Vale was driven away from the window by it. He watched the path to the shore from the shelter of the corner of the house. Was the crab-fisherman going to ignore the burning cabin until too late? The policeman suddenly realized that he might have brought about a real catastrophe.

Suppose this *was* Pelley, and suppose the ex-crook had hidden the will inside the burning cabin? Vale was tempted to dash inside again and put out the blaze.

Then he heard a shout from the shore and the man came running. He dashed up the path and burst in the door. The smoke that met him drove him back for an instant.

Then he leaped for the bunks against one end wall. Vale, again peering through the window, saw him clearly. The fisherman did not at first realize how small the fire was.

He thrust his hand back under the flooring of the upper bunk. A board slipped aside. He drew out a flat parcel or envelope. Vale saw it plainly for the moment the man hesitated with it in his hand.

Then the room swiftly cleared of smoke. He saw that the danger was not great. He replaced the envelope in its hiding-place and slid the board back into place. He went about setting up the stove, swearing heartily as he did so.

Vale left him expressing his feelings loudly, and went back himself to the shelter of the woods. It was Pelley. That had been the lost will he had hidden, the policeman was sure. His hunch had been a good one!

CHAPTER XXIV.

JOURNEY'S END.

MR. ANDREW MAYWELL—smiling, suave, the perfectly poised professional man—left his offices at about that hour on this particular day at which Harry Vale was staring into the window of the Green Island shack, watching Pelley put out a fire therein.

The criminal lawyer took an elevator going up rather than down. He got off at the top floor and entered the modest offices, old-fashioned in furnishings and appointment, of Mr. George Wilmot. His appearance before the bushy-haired, white-mustached old attorney had something patronizing about it. Even Mr. Wilmot's clerks were subservient in their attitude to the famous criminal lawyer.

"Ah, Wilmot! Fine day! Your note was called to my attention by my chief clerk. Really, you are quite insistent."

"I know my duties, Andrew, as executor of Colonel Hardy Maywell's estate," said the old attorney gravely, as the visitor seated himself. "The matter of probating the will has hung fire too long already."

"Tut, tut! There's a deal of water will run past the mill before that document in your hands will be allowed by the court."

"Then produce the instrument you say

is in your possession, Andrew," Wilmot rejoined bruskly.

"Plenty of time—"

"No. I tell you, Andrew, that I am determined to bring the matter to a head. I do not expect to find the final will executed by my old client. If he did not destroy it and substitute this will favoring Allan, then the third will has been made to disappear by other means."

"You grant, then," said Andrew quickly, "that this will you have does *not* legally express Uncle Hardy's intent?"

"I grant nothing of the kind. I believe Colonel Maywell determined that the twins should enjoy his fortune. As the new will cannot be found, I believe this one which I took from the safe is in line with my deceased client's wishes. I shall fight on the behalf of Allan and Allaine any attempt to set aside the only will thus far produced."

Andrew's face darkened. But this suffusion of blood was his only betrayal of anger. The smile did not leave his lips.

"You are threatening a bold bit of legal trickery, Brother Wilmot," he sneered. "Do you think I will let you get away with it?"

George Wilmot stood up, his indignation fully aroused.

"I do not allow any man to repeat such a calumny. I am through with temporizing, Andrew. Produce the will you claim to have, or I shall go at once to the surrogate."

"You offer *that* will and I shall get out a warrant for Allan's arrest," snapped Andrew. "I accuse him of making the exchange of wills. I can prove that he was hanging about the house the night of the burglary. I mean what I say, Brother Wilmot."

"You have threatened this before. Do it," said the old attorney. "Good day, sir. I shall be ready with Allan's bail-bond when the warrant is served."

Andrew Maywell withdrew, and with no appearance of feeling abashed. His perfect poise was still maintained. But secretly he was far from feeling confident.

His bluff was about to be called.

From the beginning—from that very moment when the old will had been found in the rifled library safe—the criminal lawyer had been stalling for time. The second will executed by Colonel Maywell, which Andrew had arranged for Pelley to exchange for the instrument favoring Allaine, must be in the burglar's possession.

At least, there had been a mistake made somewhere. Andrew could not explain it, but he knew Pelley had the key to the mystery.

If the crook still held onto the second will, all well and good. Andrew would produce it and claim the fortune. Perhaps Pelley had both missing wills.

If the third will only was in Pelley's hands, the criminal lawyer hoped still to take a trick in this game which he had been so shrewdly playing.

A wedge had already been driven between the sister and the brother. He proposed to widen this breach. If nothing else came of his possession of the third will, he hoped to bargain with either Allan or Allaine for it—and for a goodly share of the Maywell fortune!

Grif Pelley's success in hiding himself for three weeks while his double remained in hospital gave Andrew Maywell the keenest anxiety. Whichever will the old crook might have in his possession, something might happen to it. This fear had become the secret obsession of the criminal lawyer.

He descended in the elevator after his interview with George Wilmot, and strode out of the Akron Building with his usual cheerful appearance. He was about to enter the blue car, which was parked on the side street, when Slim Bagley sidled up to him in a most furtive way.

"I say, Mr. Maywell!" the stool-pigeon whispered hoarsely. "I been waitin' for youse since before noon. I found that guy —sure."

Maywell could not wholly repress a certain eagerness as he turned to demand:

"Where is he?"

Slim described the locality of the cabin at the south end of Green Island. Maywell listened, nodded, and finally said:

"Go to Dick Prandle to-morrow for your money. If you have told me the truth you'll be paid as agreed."

He turned from Slim with the order on

his lips to drive to the Green Island ferry. Then he marked the expression on the chauffeur's face.

For his own purposes the criminal lawyer had such men as this fellow in his employ. But he trusted none of them. The very delicacy of his mission to Green Island warned him to be particularly cautious.

There were other ways of reaching that cabin on the island beside going directly there by automobile.

"Home, Keeler," he said placidly, and entered the car.

The evening was well advanced, and the last purple hues trailing the sunset had faded from the sky. A small electric launch swerved in toward the narrow beach below the cabin which had been threatened with destruction by fire that very day. The south side of Green Island seemed deserted.

The man in the launch ran the boat into the narrow inlet that here cut the beach in two, shut off the power, and carried a line ashore. He was roughly dressed; but it was the outing dress of the city amateur rather than the clothing of a professional sportsman.

He seemed to know the locality well enough. He went directly up the path to the shack. A faint gleam of light shone from within around the door-frame.

On the door the visitor rapped. The man inside had been eating his delayed supper. He had set the cabin to rights. And he had braced the stove upright so that it would scarcely fall again.

Surprised, but displaying no fear, the man facing the door called: "Come in."

The visitor lifted the wooden latch, pushed the door open with his foot, and peered into the cabin.

"Come in," repeated the man at the table. "What's the matter? Lost your way? Have a bit of supper? I don't know you, do I?" Then "Mr. Maywell!"

He sprang up, kicking over the box he was sitting on. His visitor slipped into the cabin and closed the door. His gaze was fixed on his host.

"You *did* give me a start," said the latter. "I did not expect to see you around here, sir. *He* isn't out of hospital yet."

"Never mind that," Andrew Maywell rejoined, and the tone he used was as sharp as the crack of a whip. The bearded man's pale-blue eyes blinked. He was silenced by the tone.

"I want to know," said Andrew, "if you did exactly as I told you to when I left you in the house back yonder to crack that safe?"

"Exactly. Why?"

"I know you got the money all right, and made your getaway," sneered Andrew. "But what about that envelope I gave you to exchange for the one in the safe?"

"I exchanged them, just as you told me to."

"Are you sure, Pelley?"

"Certainly. I took the envelope from the table and switched it for the one in the upper left-hand pigeonhole of the safe. I was mighty careful about leaving any fingermarks upon it, too. The one in the safe was docketed, as you said it would be."

"Then you have the last will of Colonel Maywell?"

"I suppose so."

"Haven't you looked at it?" asked Andrew suspiciously.

"Curiosity is not one of my failings. What I don't know ain't never hurt me yet," said Pelley.

"Then, by God," ejaculated Andrew Maywell, smiting the table with his fist, "my slick young cousin *did* get in there after you left and switched his old will for mine. I knew his alibi was phony. I'll put him behind the bars yet for that crack, unless he is willing to divide the plunder. I'll force that damn cop to testify against him."

Pelley merely blinked. He evidently did not understand. Andrew continued after a moment of grim satisfaction:

"Where is the will you brought away from there?"

Pelley went to the bunks, slipped the bottom board of the upper bunk aside, and drew out the envelope. He brought it to his visitor without a word.

"If it had not been for that damned cousin of mine, everything would have gone all right. How he came to be in the house that night I have no idea. But somehow he got the will in which my uncle made me

his heir. *This* one gives all the estate to the girl. But I will make use of it one way or the other."

He lifted the flap of the envelope and drew forth the document. He opened the paper and glanced at it. He read down the first page. Suddenly he whirled on Pelley, who had righted his soap-box and seated himself again.

"Pelley! You dog!" Andrew shouted, and plunged for the smaller man. He shook the paper in the air. His face was empurpled and his eyes glared like those of a mad wolf. "You liar! You did *not* do as I told you. You double-crossed me, you dog!"

The old crook gazed up at him, his expression of countenance slowly turning from wonder to hate. He licked his lips, but he said no word.

"Damn you!" shouted Andrew Maywell. "*This* is the will I told you to put in the safe—the will giving me my uncle's property. You did not bring away the will he last signed at all. My rascally young cousin has that, I'll be bound. No wonder he is so confident—the young dog! If he can't put over the will favoring himself, and I bring forward *this*, he will offer for probate that making Allaine the beneficiary.

"You double-dealing scoundrel, you, Pelley!" He advanced on the old crook, shaking his clenched hand in the man's face in a palsied rage. "I'll put you through for this! I warned you of what you might expect if you did not do exactly as I said."

"I did!" barked Pelley. The phrase came threateningly. His pale eyes blazed.

"You lie! Purposely or not, you betrayed me. *I'll send you where you'll rot behind the bars.*"

He plunged across the table to strike the crook. The automatic flashed into Pelley's hand. From below the edge of the table he fired—one shot.

The ball tore through Andrew Maywell's throat and came out, spent, at the base of his brain. Blood spouted over the food and the coarse tableware.

The criminal lawyer sagged forward slowly, his hands clutching at the air, until finally he rested upon his breast on the table. The light died out of his eyes. The last breath bubbled through his lips.

"You won't send *me* back to stir, damn you!" muttered Grif Pelley.

CHAPTER XXV.

FAMILY CONFIDENCES.

THE very pretty blond girl clung tightly to the black-eyed young man's arm as they came from the taxicab and mounted to the door of Allaine Maywell's lodgings.

"I really feel timid about meeting her, Al," the girl whispered.

"Nonsense! My sister—"

"But I am. I guess you don't understand. Men never do. I've taken you away from her, in a certain sense."

"Why! One would think she was my mother—or something," he chuckled.

"I know how she feels. I shall feel that way about *my* brother, old as he is, if he ever gets married."

"Emil is married to that invention of his."

"But he'll find a woman he loves some day. Then I shall feel that she is robbing me," and the girl sighed.

A maid came to the door in answer to Allan's ring.

"Yes, sir, Miss Maywell is in. You know her suite? Will you please go right up?"

The pair went, hand in hand, up the stair. When Allan knocked a gentle voice within said:

"Enter."

The blond girl squeezed Allan's arm. He turned the knob and pushed the door open. The lights of the chandelier blazed upon Allaine sitting at the table facing the door. Beside her was a broad-shouldered figure in blue.

"Allan?" said his twin in gentle surprise.

"Oh! A policeman!" murmured the blond girl, and snuggled even closer to her escort.

"H-m!" observed Allan, his face suddenly clouding. "How did you get here, Vale?"

A paper lay before Vale and Allaine on

the table. The former would have refolded it; but Allaine put the restraint of her hand upon his own, and he desisted. While Allaine's hand rested there it thrilled him marvelously.

"I didn't fly here," Vale said, smiling grimly. "I don't need an alibi."

Allan flushed, but then grinned like a bad boy caught in some peccadillo. His expression was scarcely that he had displayed when he quarreled with his Cousin Andrew.

"I suppose," Allan said slowly, "that it is really up to *me* to explain my call, Allaine. I want to tell you that there is no need of our being bluffed by Andrew any more. Mr. Wilmot tells me that he intends asking for the probate of the only will in existence."

"Oh, Allan!" ejaculated his sister.

"How about that second will giving Andrew the property?" asked Vale curiously.

"*That* one was burned up in the studio fire. I might as well tell you."

Said Allaine: "Yes. I learned that was the will you hid there, Allan, just lately. When I risked my life to get into your studio, I thought you had hidden Uncle Hardy's very last will."

"What?" her brother cried. "And cheated *you?* What kind of a brother do you think I am? I don't care anything about the money—not for *much* of it, at least. Fifteen or twenty thousand will do me. You see"—he glanced, with a smile that Vale thought quite transfigured his face, at the girl beside him—"you see, Captain Post needs that amount to put his invention through. He's used all his own means, and army pay isn't much, you know. I told him I'd get some money for him. Why, Janet, here, started to work in Mr. Jim Dunbar's office—I got her the job—to help earn money for the invention."

"Wait," said Vale, breaking in. "Answer me this before you go any further: Just what did you do in your uncle's library that night after Grif Pelley opened the wall safe?"

Allan reddened, but he answered the query boldly:

"I could not get to the safe. It was the width of the library from the door where I watched that burglar. It was too dangerous. Pelley's gun was never far from his hand, and I had no weapon.

"But I *could* get to the table when he went into the washroom near the safe to wash his hands. The will Allaine had seen 'Drew leave for Pelley to switch for the one in the safe was on the table in plain sight. I had carried Uncle Hardy's old will with me always. I—I was kind of superstitious about it, perhaps. I felt that the old gentleman would some time be sorry he cut Allaine and me off with so little, and favored Andrew, who already had so much.

"Anyhow," Allan continued, "I made use of it right there. I was determined to balk 'Drew. I did not know to whom Uncle Hardy had left the property by his new will, but it surely wasn't meant that 'Drew should get it under the terms of the second will.

"So I transferred my old will for the second one, and later hid that in the wall pocket in my studio."

"So it was the second will I risked my life for?" murmured his sister.

"But, you see," said Vale quietly, "that second will was not destroyed after all, Mr. Maywell."

Allan started, and the look of alarm that flashed over his countenance made the girl beside him cry out:

"What's that you say?"

"*I* rescued Andrew's will as well as your sister from that fire."

"Good Lord! Where is it? *That* will knocks everything into a cocked hat for us, if Mr. Wilmot gets hold of it. For of course either 'Drew or that Pelley has destroyed long since Uncle Hardy's third will."

"No," said Vale quietly. "Pelley removed the third will from the safe and carried it away with him, as he was instructed by your cousin. The latter is altogether too bright a lawyer to trust Pelley to destroy an instrument that later, coming to light, would dish all his plans."

"And Pelley?"

"I found him over there on Green Island this afternoon. Andrew has been searching for him, too. You can easily understand that Mr. Andrew Maywell was

very badly scared by the turning up of *your* will."

"Yes. I knew that. But *his* will? Have you it now, Vale? Why didn't you let the blame thing burn?"

"To be frank with you," Vale told him, "had I dreamed it was a will favoring Andrew Maywell when your sister drew it from its hiding-place and then fainted, I should have been seriously tempted to allow it to be destroyed. But since that time I have been carrying it around in a canvas belt next to my skin. I have taken no chance of anybody else getting it."

"And *now?*" gasped Allan eagerly.

"Now I have returned it to your Cousin Andrew," said Vale coolly. "At least, I put it in the care of his henchman, Pelley, this afternoon."

"You *did?* My God!" wailed Allan. "You've ruined everything. Don't you see? The fortune honestly belongs to Allaine. I was only saving it for her by insisting that *my* will be probated. I never begrudged you a cent of it, Allaine. I'm doing well enough up there in Hallingham in the hardware business to satisfy Janet and me. I only wanted enough money for Emil—"

"Hold on!" put in Vale. "You're going off at half-cock. I told you I found Grif Pelley there on the island. I was sure he was holding the third and last will to give to Andrew. I was just telling your sister, when you came in, how I made Pelley betray to me where he had hidden the document."

He went on to relate the incident of the fire in the cabin. After Pelley had righted the stove, rebuilt the fire in it, and salvaged what he could of his supper and set it to simmer again, he went back to his crabbing activities at the inlet.

"And then, what do you suppose I did?" Harry Vale asked in triumph. "I did what even your sister, here, admits was the right thing to do. And what she says is right, *goes.*"

"What—what did you do?" murmured Allan.

"I climbed in at that window again and for the last time I switched those wills. I put Andrew's will behind that bunkboard in place of the real will. Findings is keepings! This"—and he smacked his palm down upon the paper on the table—"is the will Colonel Maywell made last, and which expresses his real desire. This is the will that invalidates both yours and Andrew's, Allan. It gives the fortune to your sister."

For the first time Allan escaped from the pretty blond girl's side since entering the room. He fairly leaped for Vale, got hold of his hand, and pumped it with enthusiasm.

"You're the real thing, Vale!" he shouted. "Say! Whoever tells me hereafter that the police of this city don't know their business will get an earful. And what will old Wilmot say?"

"But Uncle Hardy cuts you off in this will, Allan, with only five hundred dollars for a ring," said his sister.

"Pooh! Does that matter? You'll lend your brother fifteen or twenty thousand—just to boost Captain Post's invention along. Won't you, sis?" wheedled Allan. "I'd have done as much for you if the old will had stood."

"You shall have all you want—half of it, if you like!" cried Allaine, springing up to kiss him. Then she turned to the blond girl, smiling. "You didn't introduce us, Allan, you thoughtless boy. I suppose this is Miss Post?"

"No," said Allan proudly, drawing the blond girl's left hand into view. "This is Mrs. Allan Maywell. We were married just before we came up here to-night."

CHAPTER XXVI.

DID YOU EVER HAVE APPENDICITIS?

TWO or three days later Griffin Pelley came back to his store. Aside from the pallor of his cheeks, which had been closely shaven, and a careful halt in his step which he sometimes forgot, he did not look much like a man who had spent between three and four weeks in a hospital after a serious operation.

That smart-looking young patrolman, Harry Vale, gave the old ex-crook a cheerful greeting. The cigar-store proprietor liked to display a certain familiarity with

the members of the force. It added to his feeling of security to know that he was in good standing with the very men who—a few years previous—had hunted him like bloodhounds.

It was Harry Vale, too, with whom Pelley first spoke about the mysterious murder of Andrew Maywell, the great criminal lawyer. The heading of the story was spread in crimson type across the front page of the afternoon papers.

Mr. Maywell's friends and his law partners had missed him for several days. But they suspected no horror such as this.

Then a wandering fisherman found the murdered man in the cabin on Green Island. The police were quick to identify the victim.

"A great man," Pelley said to Harry Vale. "I admired him hugely. He was a regular customer of mine. And in the old day, I confess, he helped me when the bulls got me right. Many an ex-crook like me, and some that stick to the game yet, had reason to be grateful to Andrew Maywell." His pale-blue eyes sparkled. "I scarcely believe what it says here."

"What is that?" asked the bluecoat.

"That some denizen of the underworld, as the newspapers call it, some gun who had it in for him, killed Mr. Maywell. No, sir."

"You think he was universally beloved, do you?" Vale remarked.

"'Universally' is the word."

"Suppose he had a little game on with one of his crooked friends," the policeman said argumentatively. "You know, he might."

"Ah—yes."

"And Mr. Maywell thought the gun had betrayed him?"

"Ah—yes?"

"And he was unwise enough to threaten the crook with something he, as a criminal lawyer and in the gun's confidence, knew of and held over his head. He is said to have been the confidant of many crooks. Suppose *that*. Now, what might the gun do?"

"Oh! I don't think it was anything like that. Nothing like that."

Nevertheless, the next day, when Harry Vale was off duty, he sat in Inspector Dan McKane's office and discussed this very point with the head of the detective bureau.

"But you haven't got an iota of corroborative testimony, Harry," ejaculated Uncle Dan, with exasperation. "Why didn't you tell me before? What if it *was* linked up with the Maywell family squabble? Why, damn it, boy! You had a right to report to your skipper."

"Whoo! And have Old Buffalo bark my head off? According to him, a rookie cop isn't to show even ordinary intelligence."

"Well," snorted the inspector, "they don't—often. But here murder's been done!"

"You had two of your men on the case from the start. They should have found out as much as I did."

"Ha! Canniff is sick."

"I believe you. And he's the sickest fellow you ever saw, Uncle Dan."

"So I understand," returned the inspector, eying him obliquely. "It's whispered that ye come near killing him. But don't ye dare tell me a thing about it, ye young Jawn L. Sullivan, you!

"About this case, now. I sent Moore to the hospital, and he reported that it was all as straight as a string about Pelley."

"I found that out, too," grunted Vale. "Believe me, I'm never going to believe *any* alibi again."

"I'd have kept tabs on that ringer when he left the hospital if I'd known as much as you seem to, Harry. And you'd ought to have had somebody working with you when you went over on the island. How we going to prove Pelley was there at all? You say he's a different looking fellow now. No, sir! I don't see how we are going to get the goods on Pelley unless we can break him down—"

"Did you ever have appendicitis, Uncle Dan?" interrupted Harry Vale.

"No; I never did," snapped the gray inspector. "Why?"

A rap at the door and a head thrust in.

"Here's Moore with that Pelley guy you sent for, inspector."

"Send 'em in," grunted Old Dan.

Griffin Pelley preceded the plain-clothes

man into the room. He was excited and looked to be a little angry. But he had been in this very office—or one like it—too often to do any blustering. He did not even scowl at Vale, whom he must consider had something to do with his being invited down to headquarters.

"You haven't got anything on me, inspector," he said persuasively. "Really, I've been following the 'straight and narrow' for years."

"I know it, Pelley. But sometimes a man's foot slips," the inspector grunted.

"I assure you—"

"Never mind that. No glib tongue will save you. A little bird tells me that you were mixed up with that crack on Trevorth Street several weeks ago."

Pelley smiled. His manner was almost debonair.

"I am glad to say that I didn't even hear of that till I got out of hospital the other day. You know, I was operated on for appendicitis. Dr. Skeen will tell you. I was taken to the hospital, I believe, before that crack you speak of happened, inspector."

"Huh!" grunted Uncle Dan again. "Ain't you the slick little alibi-maker?"

"Why, Mr. Moore can tell you I was at Dr. Skeen's. I understand he came there to look over my record. And young Vale saw me personally."

"The next time I want somebody to follow sheep," said the inspector tartly, and favoring Moore with a scowl, "I'll send Pete Moore—or Canniff. They can't lead a fish to water.

"Pelley, you are a liar. You haven't been in hospital. You cracked that safe at the Maywell house. You were seen there by two witnesses. Why, one of them actually saw you clean out the cash-drawer. I've—got—you—dead—to rights, Pelley!"

Pelley still smiled. "Go ahead, inspector. Bring on your witnesses. Mistakes in identification are sometimes made, you know, by the best of police witnesses. Dr. Skeen's word and that of his attendants will stand as good a chance in court."

"I tell you I've got you, Pelley," said the gray inspector calmly. "If I wanted to I could put you through the hoops tomorrow for that break. But I'm not going to."

Pelley for the first time appeared a trifle nervous.

"No," said the inspector. "Cracking a tin box isn't good enough to send you away on. Even as an old offender, you wouldn't get more than ten years for that job. I'm going to do something bigger than that for you, Pelley."

He leaned across his desk and suddenly transfixed the old crook with a hairy forefinger.

"*I'm going to send you to the chair!*" Inspector McKane pronounced. "I am going to convict you of the murder of Andrew Maywell, Pelley."

Pelley jumped at that. His eyes widened and his shaven face paled. He licked his lips before he spoke, and then his voice came, high and hysterical:

"I—I—you're making a goat of me, inspector! What's the game? You know my record. I *was* a gun, and knew how to use the soup an' all; and you got me right on several cracks. But you know I wasn't no yegg. I never used a smoke-wagon on any fellow. That never was my way—"

"Can it!" commanded the inspector gruffly. "I've got you. You're just as good as boarding in the death-row right now. You killed Andrew Maywell."

"I never! You can't prove a thing against me. Why, I was in that hospital the very day your own dicks say Mr. Maywell was shot."

The shrill, hysterical voice went on and on. The grim old inspector eyed Pelley wrathfully. Finally his gaze switched to Harry Vale's face. He barked:

"Well, what's on your mind? You rookie cops think you know a lot more than your betters. Out with it!"

"Uncle Dan," Vale repeated, "did you ever have appendicitis?"

"No, damn it! I tell you, no!"

"Well," said Vale softly, "if Pelley *has* had it, and was operated on, the fact cannot be hidden. Talk about your Bertillon measurements, and all that finger-print bunk. Shucks! They are not deuce high

beside the identification by a surgeon of his own handiwork.

"Call in Dr. Skeen. If Pelley chanced to have an operation for appendicitis at any time, Dr. Skeen can soon tell you whether *he* did it or not, and whether the operation was recent.

"Why, there's nothing to it, Uncle Dan. This fellow hasn't got any alibi at all!"

The beautifully upholstered Hoyle-Joyce rolled up to the grimy front of the Tenth Precinct Station, on the posts before which the green lamps had just sparked. It was around six o'clock, and the squad was going out, two by two. Not a man of them could resist looking at that car.

But it wasn't the car so much they looked at as what the limousine held. She was bundled in soft, white furs. These made her plumes of hair, her brows, and her sparkling eyes all the blacker in contrast. Her pale, flowerlike face shone out of this setting like a jewel. She smiled at them all, these plain patrolmen, as they marched out of the station.

Captain Micah Griggs followed them. It was his supper hour. He spied the car and the girl. As she reached to open the door of the limousine he came down to speak to her, cap in hand.

"Ha! This has got to stop, Miss Maywell! This has got to stop!" he barked, but with twinkling eyes. "You'll ruin discipline. Whoever heard of a common cop being brought to and from his work in a six-thousand-dollar car?"

"*Is* he a common cop, Captain Griggs?" she asked, pouting.

"Well—now—I don't know. He's one of these here new kind o' cops, and they ain't trained like us old fellows were, and don't look at their job in the same way. But I'll grant you, this Harry Vale isn't one that you can exactly call 'common.'"

He passed on as she dimpled and nodded. Out through the swinging door came Vale himself—on the jump. He could scarcely wait until he was in the limousine before he burst out with:

"It's come!"

"Oh, Harry!"

"My mother will be so proud, there'll be no holding her," laughed the young fellow. "Wait till you see her when I tell her at supper to-night that I'm transferred to headquarters."

"Oh, Harry! See! People can look right in here," as the car wheeled around the first corner.

"Bother people! Listen," he said. "The commissioner said it was my work on the Maywell murder case that turned the trick for me. I'm going to go into training under Uncle Dan."

"And what does the inspector say?" asked Allaine, laughing blithely.

Vale made a face. "He says that it's likely he'll have to go into training under *me*. He makes out the force is going to the dogs when a rookie cop can be jumped so many grades just because he's shown he can use his brains."

"But I know he must be secretly as proud of you as *we* are," she said, gazing at him with open admiration. "Oh, wait, Harry! They can look right into this car."

"Great Scott! Why don't people mind their own business? Allan and that little jane of his have got it *right*. Up there at Hallingham, billing and cooing in a rose-covered cottage. I wish we—"

"But you've got to make good at your new job first, Harry," interrupted Allaine, putting up her hand.

"Shucks! Never mind. Let's talk about something more interesting. Police work is more or less dull, after all."

"Dull!"

"Oh, it's only once in a while that anything like this Maywell case turns up. Uncle Dan says so himself. I may never have another chance to show off," and he grinned.

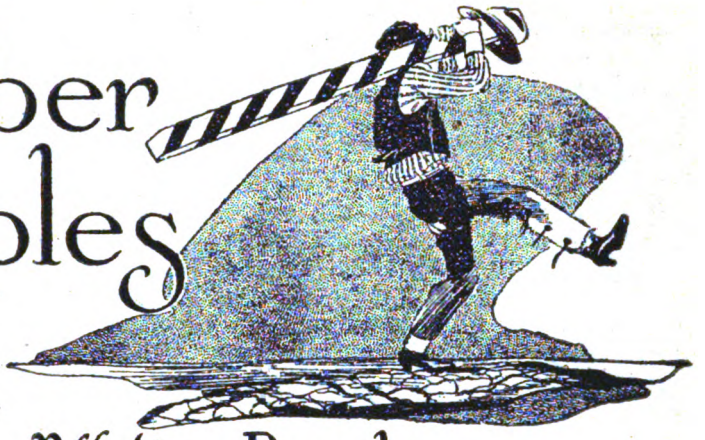
"But I know you'll make good if another chance does come," she said proudly.

Her lips were temptingly close, while her glossy head touched his shoulder. One of his arms encircled her lithe body swiftly. They flashed past another corner, and the street lamp shone in upon them again.

Harry Vale deliberately reached across the girl and pulled down the shade at the car window.

(The End.)

Barber Poles



by Walter Roush

LUCK THOMPSON was riding hard. Little clouds of dust spurted from beneath his horse's flying hoofs, hung suspended in the air a minute, then drifted slowly to the ground again. Behind, dimmed by distance, loomed a huge mountain, its peak stretched out as if in effort to pierce the blue heavens; while far ahead the plain rolled gently to a crooked line of silver that marked a fast-flowing stream.

Somewhere between Luck's dust and the mountain lay the Curtice Ranch; beyond the silvered line a mid-west city thrived.

Luck was a cow-puncher at the Curtice Ranch. Yesterday had been pay-day. Half an hour before Luck had come in from line-riding and found his two particular pals already gone to town. He had ridden the first few miles at a fast clip in an effort to overtake them.

When the speed began to tell on his horse, Luck slackened him into an easy trot. Then he let him walk a bit.

"If you could o' run that way for five more miles, Bony, I reckon we'd have headed them," he told his horse, patting his neck affectionately. Then he added, humorously: "If we had only five more miles to go."

Bronzed by sun and wind, Luck's features lost a certain clean-cut look that was indicative of an intelligence seldom found in men of his calling. Save for the crinkling eyes, a casual observer would have discovered nothing in Luck's countenance to distinguish him from any other sunburnt cow-puncher.

But there was a difference. Old Man Curtice, proprietor of the Curtice Ranch, noticed it, and voiced the opinion that in Luck's curly head were real brains should he ever take the trouble to unkink them. But the trouble was, Luck never took the trouble.

It was the middle of the afternoon when Luck rode into town. He pulled up at the stable that had once faced a main street, but which had been crowded into the alley by the advent of a garage. He was dusty and tired, and not a little peeved at the world in general, and his two pals in particular for not having waited for him.

He had his mouth all set for his favorite thirst-quencher at his favorite saloon, but recalled that prohibition had hit the State the instant he glimpsed the barkeeper. Usurping the place of the familiar mustached drink-dispenser was a girl.

Luck never was a ladies' man. He walked right in, turned around, and walked right out and across the street to a cigar store. Here he invested in double his usual supply of tobacco. From the man behind the counter he learned that his two pals had preceded him by less than ten minutes. This information hurried him around to all the places they were wont to visit in the old days, but nowhere were they to be found.

The farther Luck traveled the worse his

temper became. If it had been in the old days—which Luck had read about, but never enjoyed—he would probably have gone down the middle of the street with a spurting gun in either hand. But times had changed, and instead of going on a rampage, Luck continued to walk aimlessly up and down the streets.

A gaudy barber pole setting out on the curb caught Luck's eye, and he suddenly decided he would invest in a hair-cut. He didn't need one—he had got one on his last trip to town a little less than two months ago—but he must pass the time, and this seemed as good a way as any.

Immediately he sat in the chair he dozed off. It looked to the barber as though Luck needed a few things other than a hair-cut, and he put them on. Besides, Luck had blundered into a shop he had never patronized before—one of those places where an industrious lad, the color of a cascaret, dusts your shoes and polishes your hat while you sleep.

The size of his check took all the sleep out of Luck's eyes. He started to argue on the prices, and was informed that everything in the tonsorial line had been advanced within the last few days.

It looked like a thousand per cent raise to Luck, and he told them so in the best profanity at his command. If he had had a gun on him he might have illustrated his point. But he didn't, and, as two of the barbers were heavyweights, he soon found himself sitting on the sidewalk without having walked through the door. It is a fact, however, that they didn't charge him for the heaving.

Luck finished counting the funny little stars, collected his thoughts—and then his legs. He looked about for his hat, and it came sailing through the door to him. Finally he went down the street talking to himself.

He was still talking when Shorty Young and Slim Jones, the two he had trailed into town, bumped into him.

"Who you arguing with, Luck?" Shorty wanted to know. Shorty's monniker was somewhat misleading, in that he measured six feet three with his shoes off and his socks on.

By way of answer, Luck merely continued the line of talk he had been entertaining himself with.

"Why, th' dirty, yellow, sneakin' coyotes," he grated. "Get a man asleep, raise their prices pronto, an' then throw him out of th' door when they figger he's observin' th' State law that won't allow him to tote his gun."

This was rather vague, but Luck's two listeners seemed to know just what he was talking about.

"Barbers, eh, Luck?" Shorty Young pulled off his broad-brimmed hat as he spoke, and exposed to view a pate that missed being of the billiard-ball variety by a hair—or two. A short stubble appeared here and there. "An' they took a big hunk out o' my pay for doing that," he explained.

Then Slim Jones, who was fat as a hog, uncovered his head for inspection, and uttered the plaint that made unanimous the ill feeling toward the profiteering barbers.

"It ain't provocatin' to gentleness to have no tinhorn face-scraper boost his prices indiscriminate," he contributed, pushing back a few stringy red hairs that persisted in falling over his eyes, "but how 're you going to argue when your gun's in th' locker in th' harness shed?"

"An' how'd they get two bits worth o' Rosa-something on them hairs o' mine?" Shorty inquired, rubbing his stubbles.

A seeker of sympathy need only to encounter some one nursing the same particular grievance as he. It was indeed balm to Luck's wounded pride to hear his pals' complaints. And yet, the memory of his forcible ejection from the barber shop, and the price he was forced to pay, still rankled in his brain.

Shorty and Slim continued their discourse, but Luck paid no further attention. He began to think—to take the kinks out of his brain as the barber's scissors had taken them out of his hair. One persistent idea possessed him. It was to get even in some way with the barbers before leaving town, and he was due back at the ranch that very night.

Suddenly Luck got a real inspiration. He cut in on the two and began outlining his plan so clearly that even they could

understand. As Luck went on, Slim and Shorty became enthusiastic, and agreed to follow wherever Luck should lead.

Finishing his explanation, Luck said: "We got to get square with th' sneakin' galoots. I reckon we could lick a few, but that wouldn't be all, an' we want to get them all, an' this is shore one great way to do it." To all of which the others heartily agreed.

It was two hours later.

Stabs of crimson and streaks of purple and yellow lit the western sky with a blinding radiance. Then a drab cloud loomed behind, slowly obliterating the wonderful sunset.

Luck puckered his lips to the sibilance of a ranch song and led his two cohorts down to a barber shop located on a side street. He had picked out this particular shop for a purpose. It was operated by a genial Irishman who was proud of the name of Kelly. Many times had he fractured the rules in favor of some tardy customer.

The three filed in as Kelly was about to close up for the evening.

"I'm sorry, boys," began Kelly, as was his way, "but rules are rules. You should have come in earlier. You can't get anything done to-night."

"Don't want nothin' done, Kelly," reassured Luck. "We got some other business, though, which we reckon we can do with you."

In answer to Kelly's puzzled look, Luck continued:

"We reckoned we'd start a barber shop. What will you take for th' shack?"

Kelly's facial expression changed instantly. For the past year he had been trying to sell out in order to return East. This Luck knew, but Kelly didn't remember having told him.

"A nice little shop it is, boys," lauded Kelly. "Now, what with the fixtures, good will and all, I might sacrifice for three thousand dollars."

"I reckon we don't care to stake all that," returned Luck, after appearing to consider it, "but I'll tell you what I *will* do, Kelly"—and he let his wandering gaze fasten on the gaudy barber pole visible through the window—"I'll give you three dollars for your pole."

"And what will you be wanting with a barber pole?" came from the astonished barber.

"If we start in the barber business I reckon we'll need a pole, won't we?"

After much bickering, Luck got the pole for five dollars, a figure at which Kelly maintained he would be lucky to buy a new one to replace it. Before Luck handed over the money, however, he produced a bill-of-sale, properly made out, which he made Kelly sign.

"Just to have something to show for," he told the inquisitive barber.

The trio then hoisted the pole onto their shoulders and made off with it down the street. But they had traveled only a few blocks when a big policeman intercepted them, sneered at their claims of ownership, and roughly steered them toward the police station.

At the station, the policeman made his plaint to the desk-sergeant.

"These three fellows were carrying this pole down Main Street, sarge, and I reckon they stole it."

"Names," demanded Sergeant Noyes, pen poised over the police-blotter.

"Luck Thompson's my name, sergeant," drawled Luck slowly. "If you care to, you might look at this bill-of-sale here an' be convinced that we bought th' pole from Dan Kelly that runs a shop down on Colorado Street. I reckon you'll find it O. K."

A brief examination of the paper convinced Sergeant Noyes that Luck had stated a fact. He returned the paper, hoisted his feet on his desk, and resumed the newspaper he had laid down.

"Beat it," he invited tersely.

Luck carefully replaced the paper in his pocket, and the three lost no time in carrying out the sergeant's command.

Again they started out, choosing a different street, and celebrating their acquittal with a lot of noise.

Had Luck been so minded, he could have avoided the blue-coated guardian of the law standing on the next corner. Perhaps he thought him the same one they had en-

countered before that evening—they all look so much alike. However, it wasn't.

This officer smiled knowingly as they tried to convince him that the pole belonged to them.

"You're walking for your health, anyway," he sagely argued. "A little trip back to the station won't hurt you."

The sergeant reluctantly lowered his paper as the trio made their reappearance in tow of the policeman.

"Sergeant," commenced the officer, "I think the boys stole—"

"Just a minute, O'Reilly, just a minute," interrupted the sergeant. "You're the second policeman that thought that same thing inside of fifteen minutes. At this rate they'll have the entire force in here before midnight."

He turned and scowled at the boys. He was puzzled as to the disposition he should or could make of their case. The pole belonged to them, and they surely had the right to carry it where they pleased, but he couldn't allow his men to be interrupted in their regular routine in such a manner.

Luke offered a suggestion at this point.

"I reckon, sergeant, that you could write a note or something givin' us permission to tote th' pole around th' town, couldn't you? All th' cops would honor that, an' we'd have no trouble passin' them."

"What I ought to do is lock you all up for disturbing the peace," the sergeant threatened gruffly. "And I'd do it, too, if I thought your conduct really warranted it." Then, as he considered Luck's suggestion, and appreciated the advisability of carrying it out, he added: "Well, at that, what you suggest can't do any harm, and assuredly it will save the force a lot of bother."

He accordingly scribbled an order and handed it to Luck, who turned it to the light and read aloud:

"ALL POLICEMEN:

"Let these three cow-punchers and their barber pole go unmolested on the streets. They have bought and paid for the pole, as their bill-of-sale will show.

"SERGEANT JOHN A. NOYES."

Luck had a word of thanks for the sergeant, but that crabbed individual refused to hear it, and curtly ordered them out of his sight.

Once again they left the station. This time they headed straight for the center of the town. Then began the culmination of Luck's well-planned plot. With the most difficult part of the undertaking accomplished, that of convincing the sergeant of their good faith, all remained was to use discretion, and indulge in a little hard exercise.

For several hours they seemingly paraded the streets with that barber pole on their shoulders, stopping from time to time to appease the wrath of a policeman with the magic slip of paper bearing the sergeant's signature. And the police invariably gave them right of way.

In reality, however, fifteen minutes after they had quitted the presence of the sergeant, the pole they had then carried was hidden in the rear of the city hall, and they were off in search of another barber pole.

They worked with untiring energy, and brought pole after pole to the hiding-place. And even though they often met the same policeman a number of times, none was discerning enough to notice that each time they carried a *different pole.*

When they had visited every section of the town likely to support a barber shop, and pilfered everything that resembled a barber pole, they procured a couple of ladders, by means of which they hoisted the two dozen poles they had collected to the top of the city hall.

It was midnight before Luck found his way to the stable where he had left his horse, and, joining his pals, started on the long journey back to the ranch, happy in the thought of having perpetrated a hoax such as the barbers of that town were not likely soon to forget.

Next morning the populace of the town was greeted with the spectacle of twenty-four barber poles of various sizes, shapes and designs, standing on top the city hall, their outlines boldly defined against the sky.

In the center of the group stood a huge placard upon which appeared in large, crudely painted letters:

THE BARBERS RAISED THEIR PRICES BUT FORGOT TO RAISE THEIR POLES

Vials of Hate

by George C. Shedd

Author of "The Red Road," "Cold Steel," etc.

CHAPTER XXIV.

DEVIL'S BREW.

ISABEL sprang up.

"Who told you this?" she demanded.

"The superintendent, Garcia. I met him in the lower hallway as he was leaving the Barbaneras' room where he had been in conference with them. He advised us ladies to remain inside, and when I asked why, he told me the reason."

"Does grandfather know of this?"

Felipa shook her head. "I don't know."

"He doesn't, I'll wager," Isabel cried. "Come, let us find him."

In the great room before the fireplace they discovered Hernando Zorrilla reading "Don Quixote." There was no fire, but he was seated there in his great chair as if from force of habit. On the mantel candles burned brightly. If he knew of any prospective invasion, his manner as he twisted his long, white mustache and read the lines in the book, failed to betray the fact.

In a rush of words Isabel informed him of Felipa's news.

"Why did they not tell you?" she demanded, as from his mingled surprise and frown she perceived he was ignorant of the Cubans' action. "I've already told you of my suspicions of these Barbaneras, grandfather, and this proves them. They've determined to take your authority into their own hands.

"I don't believe the Gaillard people plan any attack whatever. I think it's all a false scheme to destroy them without excuse and to establish these Barbaneras in power. They ignore you, flout you, and will get rid of you, too, in the end, if they can.

"Did they say anything at supper of this coming attack? Have they said anything since? No, they let you sit here reading while they gather our people without your knowledge, arm them, lead them in an unwarranted attack that will destroy our peace and involve us all in trouble."

"Wait here," said Hernando calmly.

He walked out of the room in silence, but with an ominous scowl on his face, which boded ill for the Barbaneras. When he returned, almost immediately, his countenance disclosed disappointment.

"They're not in their room," said he. "It is dark, empty."

"Oh, I remember now," Felipa cried. "Garcia said the men were to be armed and gathered on the bank of the bayou at ten o'clock, ready to take boats and cross to the other side. He laughed. He said the Barbaneras were very cunning. Having learned that the French attack was set for midnight, they planned to anticipate it with an earlier one from his side."

"Always the wonderful Barbaneras!" Hernando muttered.

"The men were to get their guns and wait at the bayou, where they would be led by the Cubans when the latter returned."

"Returned, eh? Returned from where?"

"From Gaillard's plantation, where they were going. They would make a reconnaissance, Garcia said. They might possibly seize or kill Louis Gaillard himself, which would leave the French villagers without their leader, and thus insure the success of the Zorrilla forces. First, they were to go to the village to see what was being done, and then to Gaillard's house."

"Aha!" said Hernando. "Go on."

This story began in The Argosy for May 29.

"When I asked Garcia if it were not very dangerous for them, just the two of them, to go, he laughed once more. He said it was dangerous, but that the men were cunning and depended upon the unexpectedness of the thing to carry them through."

"Then that's where they've gone now," said Isabel with conviction.

"I suppose so," Felipa remarked.

"It's all this Emilio's plotting," Isabel exclaimed. "No longer are they guests in our house, these Barbaneras, but masters, it seems. No longer are the Zorrillas worthy of consideration; no longer is it necessary that they be consulted in regard to life-and-death affairs; no longer need any one pay attention to their opinions or words.

"The Barbaneras arrange and order everything. Hernando Zorrilla is feeble, while Isabel Zorrilla is only a silly girl. The Cubans have taken charge, and henceforth will guide the destinies of the plantation. They arm and lead our people as suits their purpose or pleasure. They attack the French across the bayou with the intention of slaughtering them without warning or warrant, and do it while the Zorrillas sit by silent. They—"

"Silence, Isabel!" old Hernando thundered, his white mustache and beard bristling with fire.

Her passionate declamation, so full of bitterness, had stung him to speech at last. Under it his face had in the beginning gone dark, but now was pale. Angry gleams flashed from his black, restless eyes.

"I shall see who rules here, the Barbaneras or Hernando Zorrilla," he next stated in a hard, sardonic voice. "Bring my hat, Isabel. I shall go to the village."

And when his granddaughter had placed his head-covering in his hand, he clapped the great panama on his head and, without another word, stalked forth on his errand. Then, when he had gone, Isabel caught Felipa by the arm and rushed with her out of the house.

"Louis Gaillard saved your life, Felipa," she said.

"Yes," her cousin responded.

"I'm going to warn Louis Gaillard," Isabel declared in a low voice. "And you're going with me."

"Oh, Mother of Saints! Don't make me go!" And, dropping upon her knees, she continued: "They're there now. I've never told you before, but I'm afraid of that great José, who looks at me with an air of devouring me. He wouldn't hesitate an instant to carry me off if he had the chance. The thought he might come on me over yonder in the darkness sends chills over my body. Why are you so mad to rush over to that Louis Gaillard's house, Isabel? I can't go, and I won't go, though you drag the hair off my head."

"Don't be silly, Felipa."

"Oh, I can't go! My legs will give way under me if I even try."

"Nonsense! What a big coward you're pretending to be. Nothing is going to harm you, Felipa. We'll hasten there and warn Louis, and then come home at once; we've time to do so, for Garcia told you the Cubans were going first to the village." And with a little push that took Felipa unawares she toppled her cousin off her knees into the skiff by her side.

A wild shriek left the terrified girl's lips as though the pair of Cubans was already at her throat. But before a second scream could follow Isabel had leaped in, seized an oar, and pushed the craft from the pier.

"If you scream again, Felipa, I'll push you into the water and let you choke," said she. "I thought you were a Zorrilla, with courage and spirit, but you're a bigger ninny than an old woman. Now hush."

Her position, from which there was no escape, and Isabel's mad mood froze her into silence and immobility. Crouching in the bottom of the boat, she remained there in terror while her cousin rowed the skiff out into the middle of the bayou.

There the rower rested on her oars while she listened to learn if the Barbaneras had been in ear-shot. But the night was quiet; no sound came from either bank; on the surface of the water was peacefully reflected the stars overhead. Occasionally there came the light plash of a leaping fish. A profound tranquillity reigned over all.

"Isabel," said Felipa in a timid whisper.

"What is it?"

"I think I see them there."

"Who?"

"The men."

Isabel strained her eyes over the water in every direction. Nothing was in sight.

"You see nothing."

"But I think I do."

"You think!" was the contemptuous rejoinder. "You're so scared you see everything and nothing. I'd be ashamed to show such cowardice. Especially when a man's life is at stake, and that man Louis."

That was the second time within three minutes Isabel had used Gaillard's Christian name alone. Terrified though Felipa was, her mind was not so numbed but what this curious circumstance impinged upon it sharply.

"You call him Louis," said she.

"That's his name, isn't it?"

"Ah!" said Felipa.

"Now why do you say 'ah'?" came in a fierce whisper.

A silence succeeded.

"You're in love with him," said Felipa at last.

"How dare you say that!"

"You wouldn't speak of him as 'Louis' if you weren't, nor would you be going to warn him, hauling me along with you among the murderers. Oh, why did you fall in love with him, Isabel?" The last words threatened to rise in an agonized wail, as if Felipa perceived an addition of new sorrows.

Her cousin bent toward her until their faces were almost touching and their hair mingled.

"If you so much as dare to breathe a word of this foolishness to any one, I'll never speak to you again in my life, Felipa Zorrilla."

"I won't, I won't; but why did you do it?"

"You're not only a coward, but a dunce," said Isabel angrily. And she began to row in a sort of fury down the bayou toward the foot of Gaillard's grounds.

To have Felipa guess her secret was very nearly the next thing to having it known by her grandfather, which, of course, would be the ultimate catastrophe. At the moment she felt quite sure that if her cousin should betray her, she should do something terrible—perhaps elope, perhaps commit murder.

But of one thing she was sure, come what might, she would save Louis this night from the criminal hands of the Cuban ruffians.

At length the skiff reached a point midway between the open ground before Zorrilla's house and that running down to the bayou in front of Gaillard's dwelling. In both mansions lights were visible, whose gleams danced upon the lightly swaying water. Again Isabel allowed the boat to lie motionless for a time while she gazed hard at Louis's illuminated windows.

What if she were too late with her warning? What if the black-hearted scoundrels her grandfather's roof had sheltered were already there, engaged upon their murderous task? A stab of pain shot through her heart. If Louis Gaillard now should die, the world would seem infinitely empty, and she would feel it better to cast herself into the bayou than to continue living with the knowledge that his bright look never again would be turned to her.

With that she dipped her oars and pulled with all her strength. She had not come to mourn over him, but to save him. And save him she should.

"I just can't go up there," Felipa whimpered, when the bow of the boat was fast against the bank and Isabel had leaped out.

"Oh, Felipa, if you love me the least bit you'll come, for I need you; I can't go alone," the other appealed, with a sudden change of mood. "I do love him, and I must save him."

Felipa sprang out at once, like a changed person.

"That's different," said she.

CHAPTER XXV.

EMILIO PAYS A DEBT.

AS on the previous evening, Jerry and Anita Carley sat on the veranda of the small cottage after supper, talking, breathing the perfume of the old Frenchwoman's flowers, enjoying the soft and balmy air. Before other houses along the village street others were likewise making

the most of the peaceful dusk, for from time to time there came to their ears the sound of liquid French, or a low, musical laugh.

The night came down with its velvety gloom, impalpable, languid, suffusing the earth, until the youth and the girl could barely distinguish each other's forms. Jerry had flung away the last of his cigarette, and its ruddy coal had died in the grass.

As they talked, their voices had dropped to a more confidential and more guarded tone, as comported with the subject Anita had broached.

"You should fear for those papers and for yourself," she was saying. "I know Emilio Barbanera. If he suspects you, if he suspects me, he will never give up trying to recover what you took, if the documents are of the least importance to him."

"I've an idea they are. Mighty important—and very private, too. For they didn't want old Zorrilla to see them when he appeared at the door of their room. Friend Emilio stuffed them back into his trunk in a hurry."

"What if they came over here?"

"That's not likely," Jerry replied confidently. "There are always a number of our men on guard at night."

"On a dark night like this it wouldn't be difficult to slip by guards. I've an uneasy feeling about those papers, and you."

"And what about yourself?"

"Well, I'll include myself, Jerry. I've a sort of premonition Emilio Barbanera has waited to regain his documents about as long as a man of his kind would wait. Forty-eight hours have passed."

"That's not a premonition," Jerry laughed. "More likely imagination."

To this Anita Carley made no immediate reply. Her companion's light dismissal of her fears had no effect in producing a change of opinion. She was not obtuse; she had seen sufficient of Emilio Barbanera in the unpleasant past to learn something of his character; she knew his diabolical, restless nature.

In the darkness she shivered slightly, as though a chill current of air had suddenly blown upon her. She had a sincere and unremitting fear of the little plotter. At times in the night she would awake with a feeling that the man had her in his claws as a spider holds a fly, and was drawing her farther and farther back into his web to devour her; and at such moments she prayed wildly, tremblingly, to be saved from such a fate.

"You should find out at once what these papers really contain," said she at length.

"Why, what's the hurry? I'd thought of using them at spare times to brush up on my Spanish."

"Do you actually know any Spanish?"

"I've got along as far as adjectives in my grammar, under Pacheteau's instruction. He's teaching me French and Spanish both; and I'll confess that he sometimes raises his hands in despair over my efforts."

Anita gave an exclamation of impatience.

"And you plan to pick away at these papers at your leisure, as if time didn't matter. I credited you with sense, but this action causes me to doubt if you have any. For all you know that wallet may be holding dynamite in the form of documents."

"Pooh," said Jerry, though secretly inclined to believe in that possibility.

"Why don't you bring your teacher what's-his-name here some evening and have him translate them for you?"

"That would spoil the fun of finding out Emilio's private affairs for myself. Think of getting part way into a paragraph and finding something exciting, then having to wait until next day to finish it, like a continued story."

"Jerry," said she.

"What now?"

"Promise me to have your Spanish teacher read the papers soon. It may be the very thing to prove these men's crimes and disarm them. You wish to do that, of course."

"Sure thing."

"Then promise me you will," she urged.

"All right; I promise."

"Now that you've agreed to that, why wait? Have him do it this evening."

Jerry lighted a fresh cigarette and settled himself into a more comfortable position. He had no inclination for Spanish at this time, nor for the company of Pacheteau, agreeable little Frenchman though he was,

nor even for knowledge of Emilio Barbanera's mysterious documents.

On the other hand, it was altogether to his liking to sit exactly where he was. His supper was digesting pleasantly; he enjoyed the serenity of the night, the fragrance of the air, and this relaxation of mind; while Anita's voice and presence admirably supplied the human element. No, he was decidedly averse to any change in the existing state of affairs.

"Pacheteau's probably busy this evening," he murmured.

"But he would come if you explained that the matter was important," she argued.

Jerry knew this was the truth, for the little Frenchman had a consuming hatred for everything connected with the Zorrillas and would gladly discommode himself if thus he believed he should work an injury to the enemy. In addition, he was very polite, and had exhibited a fondness for Moffat, probably due to the fact that the young man had been instrumental in saving Louis Gaillard's life in New York, on which account he would consider it no inconvenience to put himself at Jerry's service.

"Oh, well," he sighed, "if it will relieve your mind, I'll go bring Pacheteau."

"It will—tremendously—and you're a good fellow, Jerry."

"I knew that before anybody else did," said he, rising. "In fact, other people have been rather slow at times in finding it out, and I was too modest to tell them."

He inhaled his cigarette, gazed up at the stars, looked down at the dim form of the girl, then descended the steps of the porch and went along the path to the street.

As he reached it he almost collided with two men who seemed to rise out of the ground. A great, powerful hand fell upon his shoulder, clamping him to the spot where he had stopped, while at the same time the muzzle of a revolver was pressed against his side.

"You will return with us into the house," said a voice that he recognized as Emilio Barbanera's.

"When did the Barbaneras acquire authority on this side of the bayou?" Jerry demanded loudly.

"Silence," Emilio hissed, "and obey. Choke him, José, if he speaks again, and bring him along with us."

The youth made no further effort to oppose his assailants, nor indeed would it have been safe with the greater brother's grasp upon his neck. He had, at any rate, accomplished his purpose by his one loud utterance, which was to apprise Anita of the presence of the Barbaneras, give her warning, and allow her to escape.

That she had made her escape into the house he discovered when he and his captors ascended the veranda. But they did not pause there, for the Barbaneras immediately forced him through the open doorway into the little sitting-room, where in the darkness his captors stood for a moment to listen for an alarm.

Apparently they were satisfied, as a whispered colloquy between the two Cubans next followed. Jerry did not underestimate the danger in which he found himself, since men desperate enough to venture into territory where their lives were forfeit would not hesitate in turn to take life at the first need. In Anita now lay his single hope of deliverance, if delivered he were to be. She could arouse the village, bring help.

"You perhaps weren't expecting visitors this evening," Emilio addressed him in a satirical voice.

"No, I wasn't; not you two, or I should have been receiving you with a load of buckshot," Jerry stated bluntly.

"Naturally. So we were circumspect enough not to send an announcement of our call in advance," was the rejoinder. "And now, my dear young man, you will answer a few questions before I dispose of you as your interference in my plans in New York merits."

"Oh, so you know that, do you?"

"Were you not the young scoundrel who saved him on the street?" the other returned, with a trace of anger. "Were you not with him at dinner at the hotel? Did he not bring you here? You must imagine I'm stupid. And now you've interfered again by assisting a young woman to attempt to disregard my wishes, and are joining her, no doubt, in concealing papers she stole from our room. Men who meddle in my affairs receive prompt punishment."

As to that, there could be no question now in Jerry's mind. Too late he wished he had given closer heed to Anita's forebodings; the girl had known exactly what she was talking of when she described this man's reputation for quick action. Well, all he could do at present was to watch for an opportunity to escape from the clutches of the tall, bearded brother who grasped his collar.

"Where's the girl?" came next.

"What girl?"

"Dog, don't attempt to play with me!" Emilio snarled.

"You mean Anita Carley?" Jerry hastened to say. "Why, she went out somewhere."

"Where's the wallet of papers she brought?"

"If she had what you name anywhere about her when she came here, then she let me know nothing about it," the youth protested earnestly. "You say she stole papers from your room? Then I'm ignorant of the fact. She has shown me nothing, let me see nothing, told me nothing bearing on that matter—and that's the truth, whether you believe me or not."

To this, moreover, Jerry, could have stood up in any court-room and have sworn.

"Hold him, José, while I light a lamp, and we'll have him conduct us to her room."

With this command Emilio struck a match and by its rays located the table lamp, whose chimney he lifted that he might apply the flame to the wick. A faint sound like a gasp caused him to grow rigid. Then he hastily lighted the lamp, replaced the chimney, and turned up the wick.

A low cry of satisfaction escaped him as the illumination filled the room. By the doorway leading into the dining-room stood Anita Carley, one hand holding the door part way open, the other clutching to her breast the paper portfolio containing Emilio Barbanera's documents. Wide-eyed with fright, leaning against the door jamb as if her limbs were about to give under her, she uttered not a word.

The little Cuban picked up the revolver he had laid upon the table in order to remove the lamp chimney. On his face was a smile of cruelty.

"Ah, so our lovely Anita's present, after all," he exclaimed. "And in her hand my papers! You were just ready to fly, were you not, my dear? But we entered before you had got through that door, and so you've been standing here all the while listening to my conversation with this foolish youth with whom you fled. Well, you shall return to the Zorrillas again when we've finished our business on this side of the bayou. I've missed you, my little blond angel."

"And I also," put in the tall José. "Emilio and I shall decide by a throw of dice which shall have you."

Emilio darted an angry glance at his tall brother, as if desirous of annihilating him, but let the statement pass. For Jerry, however, this outrageous speech was too much; with a furious wrench he twisted himself about and struck José Barbanera full in the pit of his lean stomach—a blow that caused the man's fingers to loosen on his collar, while an anguished groan came from his lips.

Jerry sprang at the other brother. He succeeded in gripping the little conspirator's left wrist, but the other he could not reach.

"Run! Run!" he cried to Anita.

The girl flung open the door and darted away into the dark dining-room, but not before Emilio Barbanera leveled his weapon at her and fired. Evidently he mised, for no shriek or fall of body followed; indeed, the slam of a door at the rear of the house quickly sounded.

Jerry had lunged for the hand with the gun, yet the Cuban evaded him. Next instant José's huge paws seized the youth from behind and tore him back, firmly held him.

"Kill him quickly," said José.

"Yes, kill me and be damned to you!" Jerry cried. "You dirty sneaks! If I'm alive after this, I'll murder you both."

"Quick; others will have heard that shot!" José urged.

Emilio calmly brought his revolver down to a line with Jerry's heart. For the first time in his life fear, pure and complete,

took possession of Moffat. He was to die; he had no chance against the ruffians; they would murder him in cold blood. Now he saw the black muzzle of the weapon confronting him. In the Cuban's eyes behind it was a devil's spirit looking out at him. He beheld the man's lips tighten a fraction, that mercilessly brown mask of a face harden.

With all his strength he jerked himself downward. But nevertheless he received a blow on the breast. In his ears was a roar that grew and swelled till it engulfed him, while his senses reeled, became confused, were lost in darkness.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE WARNING.

BEFORE the mansion which so recently had sheltered them, the two girls, Isabel and Felipa Zorrilla, stood harkening for a sound that would reveal the Barbaneras' presence within. But the house was peaceful. The lighted windows seemed to give an assurance of security; the night was quiet, and the anxiety that had lain on Isabel's heart yielded to a throb of joy.

With all the force of her passionate nature she had been swept away by Louis Gaillard's impetuous wooing, until now nothing in the world mattered but their love. And to save him again this night, as she had preserved his life before, was the whole object of her thoughts.

Stepping forward, she lifted the heavy brass knocker and sent a summons echoing through the hall inside. Then she waited. Beside her Felipa waited, keeping silent. Steps sounded faintly. The door was opened. There, by the light of the hanging lamp, the two girls beheld Louis Gaillard himself, answering the knock.

"O blessed saints in heaven, I thank thee!" Isabel cried as she beheld him. Then she hurried in with Felipa at her heels, further to address the amazed host: "Louis, I come to warn you. The Barbaneras are seeking your life. They preceded us, and have landed somewhere and gone to the village, for what purpose I can't say. But your life is in danger, since they will come to this house to murder you. Oh, Louis, I should die if they succeeded in killing you!"

The ardent look in her violet eyes as she uttered these words and the emotion in her voice caused a beatific smile to appear on Gaillard's face. He closed the door and gently took her hands in his.

"Ah, no harm shall come to me, my beloved Isabel," said he. "I'll endeavor to receive them properly, and I can't tell you the profound happiness it gives me to know that I'm in your thoughts, that my safety is so greatly your concern, and that you've risked so much to put me on my guard against those scoundrels. But are you certain of this news?"

"Absolutely." She tightened her clasp on his hands and gazed at him as if to read his soul. "You plan no attack upon us to-night, Louis, as they say?"

"I? Of course not! What foolishness!"

"I knew it—and so I told grandfather, who knew nothing of their ordering our men to arm. But grandfather will stop them. I see now it was all part of the Cubans' lies and plots."

"Come, let us go in where we can talk in comfort."

"But they may come any instant!"

"We will chance that. Come, both of you."

Even the threat of the Barbaneras' quick arrival failed to cause him to lose his calm or to neglect the courtesies due his guests. He conducted them into the long room where he and Isabel had had their first meeting alone, bestowed them in chairs, and begged them to partake of a glass of wine. But this they declined.

"I see that you're both nervous," he remarked, "and doubtless alarmed lest your absence be noticed.

"It's not that. The two men may come any instant. You should seek help, or if it be too late for that, hide yourself," Isabel said.

Gaillard's smile tightened. He shook his head, regarding her with dancing eyes.

"I'd not hide myself if a thousand men were coming," he declared. "This is my house, my home; and an eternal shame

would be mine for the rest of my days if I should flee from a pair of rascally adventurers. On the contrary, I trust to give them something to remember their visit by."

He strode to a desk, from a drawer of which he obtained an automatic revolver. After examining it he dropped the weapon into a coat pocket.

"You'll not sit here under lights waiting for them?" Isabel asked.

"No, no. That wouldn't do at all. I think it would be best if I greeted them outside the door."

"Where it's dark, yes," said Isabel.

Several minutes more of discussion ensued, while Felipa grew more restless, until at length Louis Gaillard, perceiving her distress of mind, stated that she and Isabel must go. If the Barbaneras proposed to make him trouble, they must be well away from the spot.

With a sigh of relief Felipa sprang up.

"By all means, those two men mustn't see us here," she asserted. And, hastening across the room, she passed out into the hall.

Now that the purpose of their visit had been successfully accomplished, she was beginning to fear not so much the Cubans as her stern relation, Hernando Zorrilla. She could imagine his wrath if he learned of this clandestine errand—a wrath which would freeze her with terror even to the marrow of her bones. She believed the old man quite capable of killing her with his own hands if the idea once prevailed in his mind.

But Isabel had not followed her. It seemed an age that Felipa waited for her to come; then at length she retraced her steps and glanced back into the room. Ye gods! Isabel was in Louis's arms, her head upon his breast as if there she proposed to keep it forever. And the two of them were murmuring tender words. And their faces were radiant. And she had been utterly forgotten. And the Barbaneras were coming.

Felipa's fears came winging upon her with a hundredfold increase. She wrung her hands; she ground her teeth.

"Isabel," she whispered.

No answer. The pair of idiots were quite rapt.

"Isabel Zorrilla, are you coming or are you not?" she demanded, crying the words loudly this time.

Louis glanced around at her with a smile. As for Isabel—shameless creature—she never even so much as stirred, which was altogether more than any one, let alone a cousin, should be required to endure. Felipa whirled about with an absolute intention of marching out of the house and across the grounds to the bayou and rowing home by herself. Exactly what Isabel deserved to have happen to her!

As she was about to crystallize this resolution she perceived the small figure of Louis Gaillard's housekeeper, the little old Frenchwoman who had been his nurse, come soundlessly toward her.

"M. Louis—where is he?" she asked.

"There," Felipa stated, pointing a tragic finger at the room.

"Oh, my good Louis—" the woman began as she entered; but she got no further. For the sight of Isabel Zorrilla in her favorite's arms quite dumfounded her.

Louis and Isabel stepped apart, the girl coloring brightly under the gaze of the aged housekeeper.

"Pardon, my Louis—I was unaware you were entertaining guests," the latter said, recovering her wits and at the same time her courtesy. "But a strange thing has happened. Just now into the kitchen door, near where I was sitting engaged at a bit of lace, staggered a girl whom I've never seen before. She only stared at me, as I stared back at her. Afterward she fainted and fell forward into my arms, that I involuntarily held forth to catch her. And it was then I saw she was hurt, wounded, with the back of her dress soaked with blood."

"Great Heavens!" Gaillard cried.

Next instant he was running along the hallway toward the rear of the house where the kitchen was located; while after him came Isabel, Felipa, and last the housekeeper. Gaillard bent over the motionless figure on the kitchen floor, but already by his first look at the blond head he had recognized the unconscious girl.

He gently turned her on her back. Though her face was pallid, a tinge of color showed that life still beat in her veins. The lids had closed over her blue eyes. Her features were in repose. She might have been peacefully sleeping instead of lying in a comatose condition.

"They shot her," he said quietly, looking up at Isabel and Felipa. "You know who she is, of course. She was staying at a cottage in the village. Very likely they've shot Jerry Moffat, too."

Slipping his arms under the limp form before him, he lifted it and bore it out of the kitchen, and after him once more the others followed as if moved by a single thread, through the hall and up a servants' stairway, with the old Frenchwoman bearing in her hand the kitchen lamp. In a chamber above Louis laid Anita Carley on a bed and directed the housekeeper to wash the wound.

"Isabel, you and your cousin must go now. Every minute increases your hazard. I shall telephone at once for a doctor and for men in the village to come and assist in a search for these miscreants who make war on women as well as men. And short shrift they shall receive, I promise you, if we take them."

"It won't be Felipa or me who plead for them," Isabel answered. And this her cousin affirmed by a nod and a "No."

"Perhaps it will be wisest for you to go down the stair we've just come up," Gaillard went on. "The kitchen's now dark. You will be able to slip out of its door unseen or unheard, and make your way safely back to your boat. Thus if the Barbaneras are near, you'll not be observed departing."

"And you—you guard yourself," said Isabel.

"Yes—but my chief business now is to shield the lives of others. These two men are assassins. They stop at nothing, apparently. They will shoot down whomever they encounter. They must be captured or killed, like mad beasts. Go now." He bowed to Felipa. He pressed Isabel's hand and raised it to his lips. Then he hurried away to use the telephone.

The two girls did not immediately depart, as he had begged them, for the sight of Anita Carley, wounded, seemingly lifeless, from whose bust the old Frenchwoman was already beginning to cut away the garments with a pair of scissors, kept them as under a dreadful spell.

She had been in Isabel's house until she had vanished. She had eaten at their table. Though they ignored her as a creature of Emilio's deserved to be ignored, nevertheless they had been companions of a sort from the very nature of their association.

A pang of pity moved Isabel Zorrilla's heart. For however wicked the girl may have been—and of that wickedness she felt doubts as she gazed at her face—she at least had paid the penalty.

"She's not dying?" she whispered to the old woman.

"No, but she's seriously wounded in the shoulder. See! Whoever shot her, shot her from behind. From the amount of blood that has escaped, she has come some little distance—from the village undoubtedly, where she was staying."

"Come, Isabel," Felipa begged, with a shiver. "I almost fear to go out into the darkness."

"Once we're in it, we're safer than anywhere else."

"Oh, but those terrible men! That great wolf of a José, with his burning eyes and hideous smile!"

"He's no worse, if as bad as his brother. Come now; show a little courage. You've been brave enough so far; this is no time to tremble and faint."

"I'll not faint, never. Not in this house, at least."

Down the servants' stair they descended on tiptoe, then reached the kitchen, stole through it as noiselessly as possible, and at last slipped out into the night. When they were some paces from the door, they halted beside the wall of the house to listen; but the only sound that came to their strained ears was the distant cry of some night bird over the bayou.

"Thank goodness, I can breathe again!" Felipa whispered, and a sigh succeeded which might have come from lungs freed of an incubus.

"I don't hear any one," said Isabel.

"I don't want to hear any one," was the answer. "Oh, what a terrible night! And you—I thought you were mad, hanging on your lover's breast in there with the Barbaneras at the very door."

"Why, they're nowhere about yet. And isn't Louis splendid, glorious?"

"And won't you catch it when your grandfather learns of your goings-on? Oh, Isabel, it's tremendously romantic, but I shake in my shoes to think what Hernando Zorrilla will do. Either he'll kill Louis Gaillard, or Louis Gaillard will have to kill him to keep from being killed."

"Hush, hush! Don't speak of it!"

"Unless you run away with him—"

"I don't know what I'm going to do, and so don't keep croaking, Felipa. Now let us creep along the wall. Everything's quiet. I want a last peep at Louis through one of the windows."

"I won't; I'm going home."

"You will, because I say you must. If I had known you were such a little coward, Felipa Zorrilla, I'd never have brought you along."

Without waiting to see whether she was obeyed or not by her cousin, Isabel went stealthily ahead until she neared the front of the house, and perforce the other girl, whose alarms arose anew at the thought of being left alone, must follow.

Presently they reached a window that Isabel guessed to be one of those opening from the room where they had talked with Louis Gaillard. Their heads came even with the window sash, and as the curtain had not been fully drawn they were able to obtain a fairly clear view of the main part of the apartment.

As Felipa halted beside her cousin, she heard a gasp escape the latter. Then Isabel's fingers closed on her arm in a nervous clutch.

"What's the matter?" Felipa exclaimed low.

"Look! Look! Oh, they're with him!"

"Who? Merciful St. Theresa! The Barbaneras!" And Felipa appeared ready to sink into the earth with terror.

For some time, somehow, since the girls had last seen Louis Gaillard, the pair of murderous scoundrels had penetrated the house and surprised him before he had been able to make a defense.

That he was in their power was plain. To be sure, he stood facing them with his customary demeanor of calmness; in fact, he was even smiling, while his eyebrows were slightly elevated as if in quizzical inquiry. One might have imagined the three to be friends engaged in amiable talk, had it not been for one thing. The one thing was a black, wicked-looking revolver in Emilio Barbanera's hand.

"Run for help," Isabel whispered fiercely.

Felipa glanced fearfully about at the night, then shrank closer to the speaker.

"I don't see any," she quavered.

And she began to whisper swiftly one prayer after another. Isabel, too, was praying with numbed lips—praying desperately for Louis Gaillard, supplicating with all her soul One whose power was infinitely greater than all the Barbaneras that He would spare the life of her lover.

Yes, a Zorrilla was praying that a Gaillard be saved! Strange mutation in that hatred which so long had lain between these two houses! Strange enough, indeed, to cause all the dead Zorrillas and dead Gaillards buried in this corner of the earth to sit up aghast in their graves.

In the mean while, Emilio Barbanera kept his weapon directed at Louis Gaillard's breast with a decidedly businesslike air. Emilio had no use for prayers, but he knew the full value of bullets.

CHAPTER XXVII.

MILAN BLADES.

THE two men had come so quietly into the room that Louis Gaillard, who had just finished his telephone conversation with Pierre Careval, was able neither to rise from his seat by the instrument nor to draw the weapon in his pocket. From Careval he had learned that the village had just been alarmed by the murderous attempt on Jerry Moffat's life, the youth's housekeeper having run for assistance when she found her lodger unconscious on the floor with a wound in his breast. Men

were gathering, bringing arms with them, enraged, crying for vengeance against the unknown assailants.

And to this report Gaillard had answered by ordering Careval to come to the mansion as quickly as possible for instructions and to give aid, as doubtless the Barbaneras were already on their way thither in pursuance of their plan.

How true this was he perceived when he had hung up the receiver. The pair of Cubans were even then advancing upon him through the doorway and the revolvers they carried made resistance out of the question. But they had not heard his words to Careval; of that he was confident.

They came to a halt two paces from where he sat by the table, their faces hard set with the implacable malevolence they bore their enemy.

"You escaped us the other evening, and doubtless supposed yourself secure," Emilio Barbanera stated harshly, "but we finish what we begin." He thrust his hand into his breast and drew forth a bulky, folded document, which he tossed on the table. "You will immediately fix your signature at the bottom of that paper."

"And I presume you'll murder me, then, the instant I've laid down the pen," Gaillard remarked.

"Not at all. We'll simply require you to take boat and depart. Dead, your signature might successfully be disputed by others; alive, you could not do so, for you wouldn't deny your own writing. The Gaillards have always boasted, I understand, of their truthfulness."

"No, I shouldn't deny it, though I might explain it and the circumstances under which it was obtained. However, if I'm to be permitted to go unharmed, all I can do is to sign, for you have me at a disadvantage."

"You're not altogether a fool, I perceive," said the other with a sneer.

"I'm naturally prejudiced when it comes to an opinion on that point," Gaillard returned calmly. "There's a pen and an inkwell in the cabinet yonder. Shall I bring them, or will you?"

"My brother will render you that service, my good man." Then, addressing his companion, he said: "Find them, José."

While the tall, gaunt, bearded Barbanera went to obey this bidding, Louis considered the other, the little Cuban, with a smile. He knew the utter falseness of the man's character and words; he understood perfectly that the pair of scoundrels had no intention whatever of permitting him to live, once he had signed the deed transfering to one or the other of them his estate. Time alone could save him, and in a pretended acceding to their demand he saw his single chance to gain delay.

José Barbanera returned with pen and ink. Lifting the document from the table, Louis opened and smoothed its pages. It was in handwriting, Emilio's of course, and in Spanish, which was not unusual in Louisiana, where instruments both in French and in Spanish were frequently filed for official record.

He noted, too, that the conveyance was made to Emilio Barbanera, instead of to José, from which he inferred that the little plotter, notwithstanding his statement when Gaillard was previously a prisoner, was preparing to double-cross his brother.

José very likely had not examined the deed. With an extreme simplicity in legal matters, he was trusting Emilio with its proper composition. Had the subject concerned swordsmanship, he might have been sufficiently interested to read the text, but since the matter pertained to property, albeit he was supposedly to benefit, he had left it in the hands of his brother with a fine but misplaced faith. Very likely Emilio schemed, once he had title to the estate, either to rid himself of or to ignore the other's claims.

"You seem to have my property quite accurately described," Louis mused aloud, flipping the pages over and pausing from time to time to read a paragraph.

"It's taken from the parish records, which I visited some weeks ago," Emilio Barbanera replied. "But we're not here for discussion, but for another purpose; your business is to sign that document, and sign at once."

(To be concluded NEXT WEEK.)

The Log-Book

By the Editor

THESE are strange times indeed in which we live. Here is the New York *Sun-Herald* actually congratulating Spokane, Washington, on having less population in 1920 than in 1910. Such a state of things means more chance for people to find homes in this non-building period, and as the editorial points out, implies indirectly that possibly more folk have gone into the country to till the soil. The drift cityward has of late been so pronounced as to excite alarm in some quarters. In spite of the automobile, the trolley and the advent of the picture-show into rural regions, it grows constantly harder to keep the boys on the farm. The farmers are lamenting the difficulty of getting labor, and with farm work stopped, we automatically quit eating. What are my readers' experiences and opinions in this matter?

* * *

The things that count—what are they? Pride of place and race, rigid, inflexible—or the naked soul of a strong man, stripped of shams and pretense, forthright, elemental?

"PRIDE OF TYSON"

BY JOHN FREDERICK

Author of "Crossroads," "Luck," etc.

is a big story in every sense, for it is filled with the big things of life, the things that count, the vital things. And what is more vital, more alive, more tremendously virile with dynamic drive and power than a man such as was *Edward Garth?* And as for *Henry Tyson,* if *Garth* could be likened to one of his own pile-drivers, the former was like a bright sword, a keen flame. And as between the two, read the story, and judge for yourself, even as *Margaret Tyson* and *Rona Carnahan,* each in her own way judged. The first of six generous instalments begins in THE ARGOSY for July 3.

* * *

Beneath the flowing tide of life which seethes and bubbles in the purlieus of a great city there are turgid undercurrents, least of all known and suspected by the dwellers in the tenements thereof.

"THE MISER OF MOTT STREET"

BY RABER MUNDORF

Author of "The House of the Echo," "When Ludlow Street Laughed," etc.

is the tale of a strange and curious curse which laid its blight upon Miser's Court; of a murder mystery unique in the annals of crime; and of a human owl who dealt in traps for rats who walked on two legs. This is published as a complete novelette in THE ARGOSY for July 3.

An inside view of how suckers are played in the racing game is supplied by Maxwell Smith in his extraordinary story, "FEED-BOX DOPE," scheduled for next week's ARGOSY. It certainly has a climax to be exclaimed over. Camp-meeting doesn't sound particularly exciting as a background, but in "THE STUBBORNEST MAN," by Wallace M. Sloane, the conversion of a hardened sinner lays the train for the liveliest scrimmage that particular community ever saw. A captivating little love story is fitted into "PINK ORGANDIE," by Mella Russell McCallum, to which, I am sure, with its Coney Island setting, you will give a cordial greeting in these summer days.

A HUSBAND'S CHANGE OF HEART

Dixfield, Maine.

I wish to add a few words of praise to the many I have read in the Log-Book since becoming a reader, about four years ago. My husband chided me about my devotion to THE ARGOSY, but I have hard work to get it from him now. I like all of your stories, but my favorite authors are Charles Alden Seltzer, Garret Smith, and Katherine Eggleston. MRS. ALBERT TRASK.

TOO MUCH TO SAY TO WRITE MORE

Cripple Creek, Colorado.

I see in THE ARGOSY of April 10 where Lieutenant A. Simmons wants letters from Colorado in the Log-Book. How will one from Cripple Creek, eighty-five miles from Denver, suit him?

I have read THE ARGOSY for years, and enjoy it. I prefer the Western stories. "Drag Harlan" was fine. Would love to see a story in THE ARGOSY about Colorado. Seltzer is a fine writer, also Douglas Grant; so is "Beau Rand" a good story. Can't tell you all I like, so will stop.

M. A. Z.

THE ARGOSY IN AFRICA

Lagos, West Africa.

I have just finished reading my December 6 issue of THE ARGOSY, and surely enjoyed it from cover to cover. "Going North," by Stephen Allen Reynolds, is an exceptionally fine story. I have read it twice, and I expect to read it again before I get back to little old Brooklyn, New York.

This isn't much of a country for a white man, and the only real enjoyment I have is reading THE ARGOSY. I have all my back numbers with me, dating back since March, 1917. Enough said. I find THE ARGOSY stories most interesting and worth while. ARTHUR F. BELLMYER.

VOTES AGAINST ANY CHANGE

Centermoreland, Pennsylvania.

Enclosed find subscription. I have been reading THE ARGOSY for six months, and I think it is one of the best books on the market.

I see many letters in the Log-Book, and I certainly enjoy reading them. But I always want the stories to continue the way they have been. I certainly would not listen to the few knockers. Majority always rules, and I am with the thousands of pleased readers who say no change for THE ARGOSY. So keep the good work going, and the book cannot fail. I have been running a chance of getting it at the news-stands, but I will always subscribe for it now. I have not missed one single copy since I have been a reader, and I do not want to. JAMES RINUS.

KEEN FOR THE WILD WEST TALES

Hamburg, New York.

I have been a reader of THE ARGOSY since it first came out, and I don't think that I ever read a better magazine in my life. I am glad to find so many Wild West stories in your magazine, as that is the kind I like best. I like "Luck," "Crossroads," "Square Deal Sanderson," "Last of the Duanes," and "Drag Harlan." "Drag Harlan" had the most pep in it of all. These stories keep you interested so much that it is hard to wait for the next issue.

My wife is also a great reader of your magazine. I like to read your Log-Book to see what some of the kickers say. It also keeps me in mind of some stories I have read years ago. "The Trail Horde" is good, as far as it has gone.

GEORGE C. LA VERE.

HIS IDEA OF WHY A FELLOW HAS TO KICK

Waldron, Arkansas.

I have been a reader of THE ARGOSY for the past year and think it is the finest magazine of its kind published.

One thing I do not like about THE ARGOSY is waiting on the serials. Would rather have one complete long story, as I get so interested in some of the serials I can hardly wait for the next issue.

I understand why you print the serials and, do not blame you, for we are both out for the money, but if left to a vote of the readers of THE ARGOSY they would favor long stories instead of serials. LESLIE S. TOMLINSON.

P.S.—I am not a natural-born kicker, but a fellow has to kick once in a while to get the meanness out of him. L. S. T.

An era of THE ARGOSY, in which all the stories were complete, has already been tried and failed to find favor.

ARGOSY'S PART IN A HALF YEAR OF WINTER

Alberta, Canada.

I have never seen a letter in the Log-Book from Alberta, so I am going to try my luck. Here the snowfall this winter was over seven feet. This,

coupled with six months and three weeks of winter, made THE ARGOSY a wonderful help to pass away the long evenings.

The stories are all good, but "The Last of the Duanes," "Square Deal Sanderson," "Slow Burgess," "Riddle Gawne," "Jerry the Spirited," and many others were the best stories I ever read. I agree with G. C. B., California, that the only fault in THE ARGOSY is that it should come twice a week.

"The Trail Horde," by Charles Alden Seltzer, is a fine story. I hope he has another ready when it is done. CARL ARNOLD.

ARGOSY WORTH MORE THAN THE PRICE

New York City.

I often marvel that so much interesting reading can be obtained for the small sum of ten cents. How do you manage to give us the benefit of reading stories written so well for such a small amount of money? In these days of high cost of living it is seldom one can find anything which is worth more than the price, and we consider THE ARGOSY is.

Your continued stories always stop at such an exciting place that we can hardly wait for the next number to find out what is going to happen, and all try to grab for the book to get it first.

I think all of your writers are clever. Of course I enjoy some of the stories more than others, but all tastes are not alike, and you have enough variety to please every one.

CATHERINE WAIDE.

ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL

Pilot Rock, Oregon.

I have just been reading the Log-Book in THE ARGOSY for March 27, and notice that Mrs. C. S., of Altee, Oregon, is very indignant at my correcting her error in placing the Rockies in Oregon, and I beg her pardon. Of course I did not know she really did know she was living in the Blue Mountains. I spend many pleasant summer days in those same mountains, fishing in its many streams, bathing in some sulfur pool or lying in the shade of some mighty pine or fir-tree, with THE ARGOSY for company, and I did not like to think of having them up-rooted and transplanted in the East.

I do not consider it being ill-bred to simply sign one's initials. M. P. B. stands for a good American name, and one I certainly am not ashamed of. Good luck and long life to THE ARGOSY. M. P. B.

NO PROFITEERING ABOUT THE ARGOSY

Ludington, Michigan.

I have taken THE ARGOSY nigh onto three years, and am still as eager for it now as I ever was. I have read good stories and "punk" stories in it (but not punk enough to make me quit THE ARGOSY), but in every issue I'll admit I get my money's worth. There's not a magazine now that I know of with the number of stories that THE ARGOSY has that sells for less than twenty cents, and I've read some of the magazines and the stories aren't worth reading, they're so dry.

THE ARGOSY for one doesn't believe in profiteering. What is the matter with Marianne Gauss, the author of "The Spirit of the Feud"? That was the most beautiful story I have ever read. The way Miss Gauss portrayed the South, especially around the Ozark Mountains, made you wish you were there to listen to the mockingbirds, to walk along the dusky roadways at twilight, the air heavy with the perfume of flowers that grew on all sides and she knew how to tell it. With best of luck to THE ARGOSY,

LEROY OLSON.

A CHEERY LETTER FROM A HOSPITAL

Dunkirk, New York.

This is my second letter to THE ARGOSY, and I know the Log-Book is not fiction, as my first letter appeared in it. Two weeks ago I had the misfortune to lose two toes on my right foot, and since then I have been lying here in the hospital. We have a wonderful time here in the annex, because most of the fellows here are hurt and not sick. We have a Victrola, fine nurses and, best of all, we have a bunch of ARGOSYS I had brought from home, and they sure are popular here. Every one is especially interested in "The Trail Horde." It sure is great.

I see the fellows and girls are still fighting about the powder and paint argument, and it's sure good to read some of the letters, considering the fact that men powder also, after shaving.

I hope you will continue to give us stories like "The Trail Horde," and if possible a good story about the Alaskan gold mines as they were years ago.

JACK PIERCE, JR.

IN THE WAKE OF "THE TRAIL HORDE"

Long Beach, California.

This will herald the coming of a new cavalier to the ranks of THE ARGOSY, but I want you to know how much I appreciate your good work in putting out so fine a magazine.

Charles Alden Seltzer's new story, "The Trail Horde," was the magnet which attracted mother and me to THE ARGOSY, but since reading that first issue I have become thoroughly interested in nearly everything else between its covers. I love the Western stories because I know and understand the West as nearly as any one can. Seltzer has a fine, clear style about his writing that appeals very much to me, and his characters are strong and distinctly human. Keep up the good work, Mr. Editor!

The inspiration which fired me to write you this morning was Douglas Grant's "Anything Once." I didn't believe anything could so surely take a fellow's mind away from the petty irregularities of city life. Literally, that brief sojourn with two lovable young Americans has given me a new lease on life, and more than ever do I endorse good, wholesome reading as a paramount need of the younger generation. My heart aches for the youth of to-day's metropolis in its vain, frenzied pursuit of—what?

Again accept my sincere appreciation and the wish for THE ARGOSY's continued success.

(MISS) BILLIE RUSSELL.

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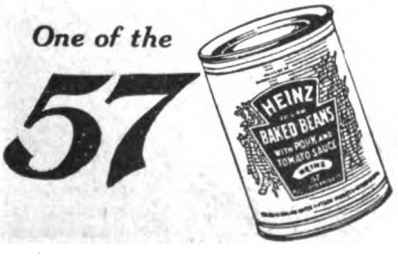

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