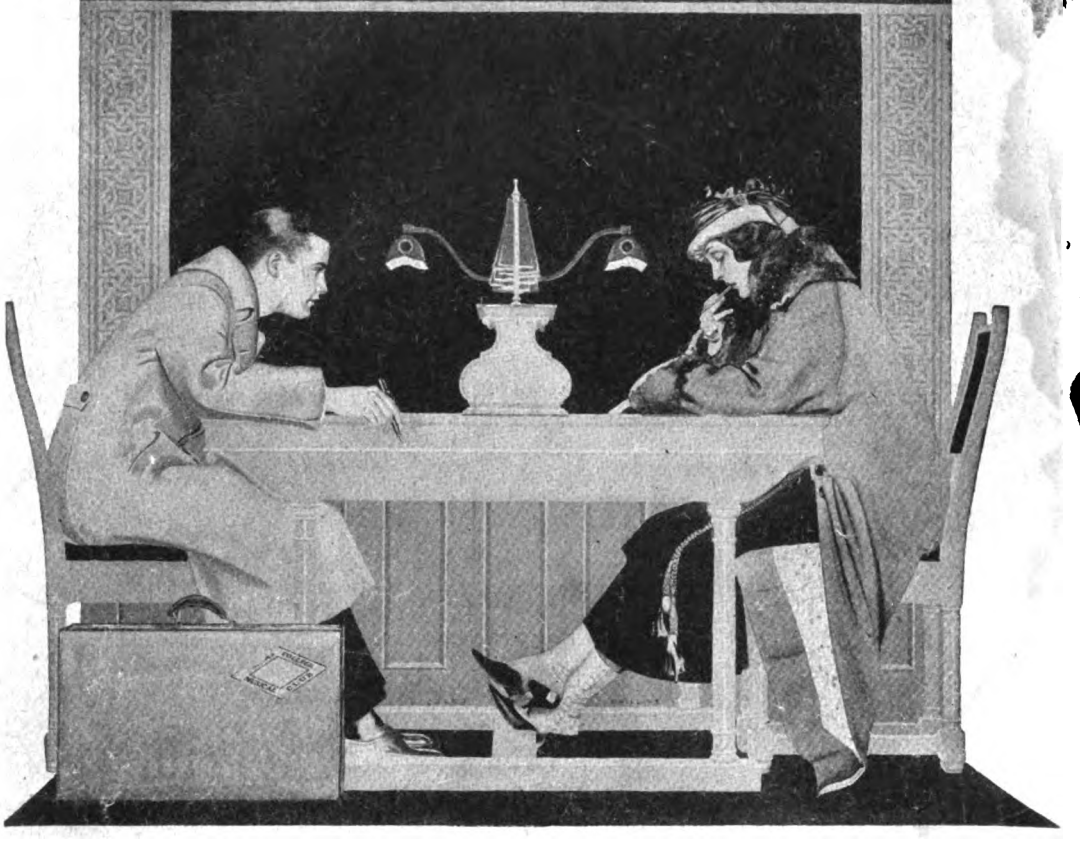
ARGOSY ALL-STORY WEEKLY

Romance and Adventure Down the Old Mississip

The Varnished Boat

Soft-Paw by Raymond S. Spears

SHEAFFER'S PEN
AND PENCIL



His Diary

Sept. 12—Arrived right side up. School again tomorrow and my SHEAFFER Fountain Pen is filled with words of wisdom. Someone very distracting on the other side of the desk. She is surely *some* peach. It takes a mighty good pen to write under such difficulties.

Her Diary

Sept. 12—Arrived safe. School opens tomorrow and my lovely new SHEAFFER quite prepares me to take down copious notes. Somebody very interesting came and sat opposite me today, and I noticed he uses a SHEAFFER too. So far our tastes agree.

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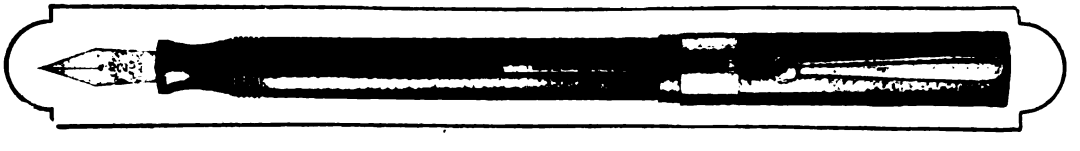

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ARGOSY-ALLSTORY WEEKLY

VOL. CXXV CONTENTS FOR SEPTEMBER 4, 1920 NUMBER 1

NOVELETTE

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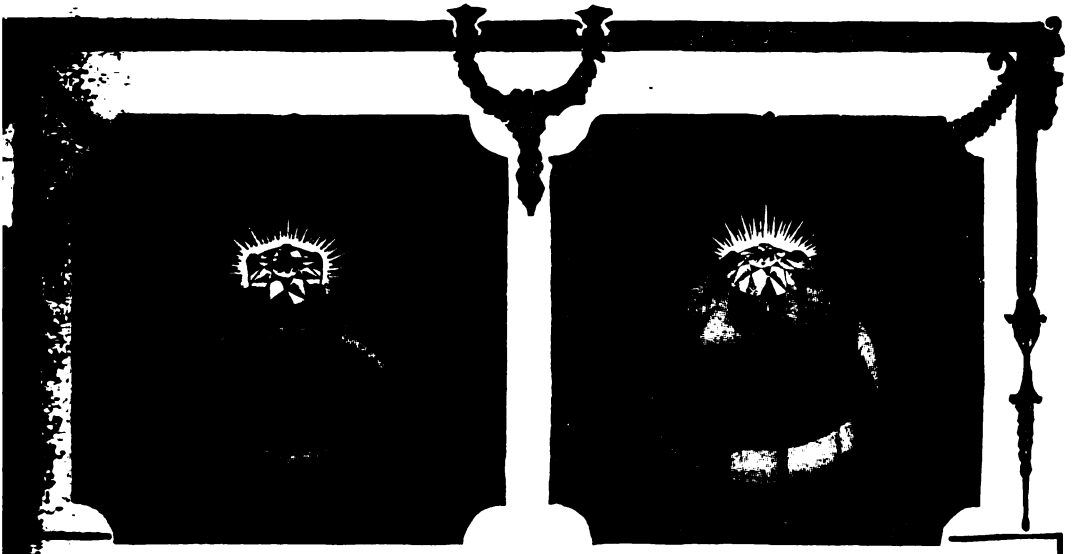

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Classified Advertising continued on page 6.

Classified Advertising continued from page 4.

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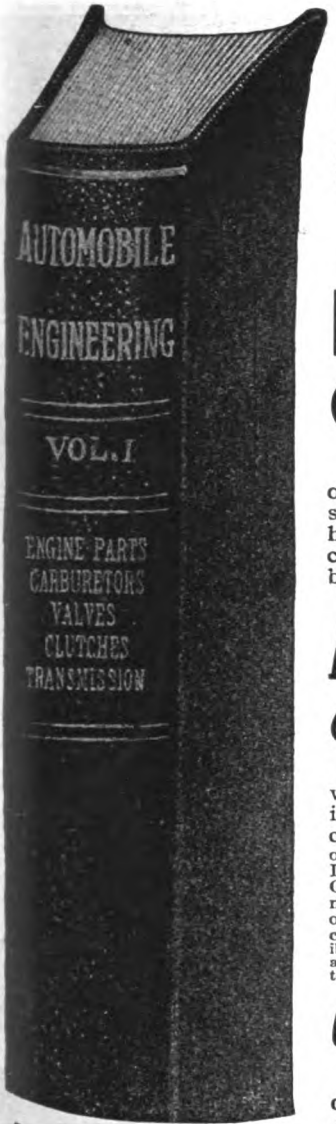

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ARGOSY-ALLSTORY WEEKLY

VOL. CXXV SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 4, 1920 NUMBER 1

The Varnished Boat Soft-Paw

by Raymond S. Spears

Author of the *Jamie Frete* stories, "Dancing Laura," etc.

CHAPTER I.

A SHANTY-BOAT DE LUXE.

A RUMOR came down the Mississippi in Smiler's whisky-boats that a soft-paw was passing Cairo. The soft-paw, river people said on their oaths, was surely a dream among the lower river and bottom-land visions. He was in a shanty-boat that was built of cypress and spruce, with cherry trimmings, all in the natural colors, and varnished like an automobile or one of the swell hardwood floors of people who live in mansions on the Walnut Hills.

The boat had running-boards, and polished brass rails along both sides, and the cleats were of brass, and the oak mooring-posts were finished off with brass nigger-heads; the lines were pure manila, and there was a patent anchor for a mudhook. The sweeps were long ash oars, leather-collared and brass-tipped.

There was plate glass in each side of the cabin, to let in daylight, and fancy automobile lamps on the bow and stern. A little gasoline motor kept the storage battery chuck up with electricity to illuminate the cabin, stateroom, kitchen and all the rest. The boat had kerosene stoves for cooking and heating, too, and all this in a boat thirty-six feet long and ten feet wide, with a forty-inch-deep hull.

"Yassuh!" Captain Daffadill, of Smiler's whisky fleet declared. "He's got a shanty-boat that cost two thousand to build, if it cost a dollar, an' he mout of had a gasoline cruiser for the same price."

"What kind of a tender's he got?"

"Well, he's got a launch alongside, he tows with; but he don't use it much. That tender's about twenty foot long, but it's covered up with canvas, to keep the rain out, an' he don't never use it none. He pulls his own daylights out, with them sweeps, instead of havin' gas-power to work for him. He's sure the softest-pawed shanty-boater ever come down old Mississip'!"

An old-timer at the Hickman sandbar had a good look at the outfit. This was Whisky Williams, who for thirty years had won and deserved his nickname, but of late years he had sort of lost his nerve, and had

been selling bottle soda-water instead of his personal brand of Sweetbrier, unstamped liquor. Younger men, like the Smilers and the Paycotts and the other blockade-runners, had learned their trade from him, but not the lessons he had learned from the law.

Whisky Williams saw the varnished shanty-boat land in Hickman bar eddy, and the flash of the reflection from the afternoon sunshine on the side of the boat, and its flare on the surface of the water proved the varnish.

Williams hastily shuffled along the sand and caught a line to help land the man in. Apparently the man needed help, for he had tried to land against the reverse current, and rowing was hard. No finer proof of a man's river ignorance could be had than this trying to row against an eddy's reverse current.

But Williams cordelled the man down next to the soda-water boat, and the fancy shanty-boat threw him a maul—an honest, wooden-headed, iron-bound maul! Also, there was a mooring stake, turned in a lathe and iron-headed.

Williams, who had driven shanty-boat stakes for thirty years with the flat of an old ax or a piece of cordwood, almost lost the shanty-boat while the rope slipped through his nerveless fingers, and he gazed at those semblances of munificence, extravagance and—and regular riches! Only the richest man in the world, and a regular Yankee, would ever come so well prepared for shanty-boating de luxe—thataway!

Williams, roused by the plaintive wail of the river navigator, made haste to tow in the shanty-boat, to drive such a pin, with such a maul as he had never heard of—varnished both!—and then he put in another pin, and made another line fast. The shanty-boat was bow to the sand, at last, with a bow-line out to port and another out to starboard.

"That 'll hold!" Williams observed.

"Yes, sir!" the stranger smiled. "I believe it surely will! Anyhow, I've dropped an anchor-line over the stern, too, to hold the bow from pounding on the sandbar."

Williams looked at him suspiciously. There was something in that bit of river craftiness that stirred the old river man's subconsciousness. He thought a moment, and then in a casual manner he asked:

"Where'd you hear tell about an anchor-line astern?"

"Why, an awful nice little gentleman up to Paducah told me that," the man replied, beaming. "A nice little man—his name was Carpay, Judas Carpay. My! how he hates that name—Judas! Judas! What a burden to put on the life of an innocent child and a grown man!"

"Did that gentleman have red hair?" Williams asked reflectively.

"Yes, sir! My! Do you know him? He was perfectly splendid—"

"No—not by that name." Whisky Williams shook his head. "And you entertained him? A little man, with red hair, red whiskers, and large hands—"

"Ah—yes! The same man, I do believe—with spatulate finger-tips and baby-blue eyes—"

"Spatuwhich fingers?" Williams asked.

"Why—you know—flat finger-ends. He said he got them rowing house-boats and—ah—dories and hunting punts down the river."

"And—um—did you play cards with him?"

"Play cards with him!" the soft-paw gasped. "I play cards? Dear me! Excuse me, sir! What in my appearance gives you the idea, sir, that I would play cards?"

"Oh—I was mis-speaking myself!" Williams blinked. "I just happened to think—to think of something else."

"And poor Judas was such a nice man, too." The stranger shook his head. "And you—you suggested he might play cards. Do you imagine anybody would play cards with a man named Judas?"

"No, suh."

"That name would hang all the sins of the world on a man's poor, frail frame!" declared the shanty-boater with indignant emphasis. "Oh, dear! Parents are so cruel to their children; sometimes too kind, sometimes too loving, and sometimes too vengeful against the world!"

"I didn't mean any harm," Williams blinked.

"Oh, of course not! I do not hold your

ignorance, your thoughtlessness, up against you; the hour of dinner is at hand. Might I not persuade you to dine with me this evening? I should be so delighted to have you come aboard. I do believe that you are a real, experienced river man, are you not?"

"Why—ye—n-n—I've had spells when I thought I was. But—but this dad—dad—this old riveh—Lawse, stranger, the longer yo' trips ole Mississip', the more su'prisiner he gits!"

"I believe so; Nature's phenomenon is never repeated. Come aboard, friend; I anticipated a lonely night upon the sandbar. Instead—ah me!—I shall have, I am sure, a most amusing and profitable evening."

Whisky Williams looked at the backs of his hands and then at their palms.

"Just—just a minute, stranger," he said nervously. "I'll be right back!"

He went on board his boat, surreptitiously catching up a handful of sand as he climbed onto his own cruiser's bow deck. Going aft into the engine pit, he caught up a handful of soft soap from a pail, and mixed the sand with it. Then he washed his hands to his elbows, and his face to the back of his neck, and when he viewed the consequences in a beveled mirror he had found in some river drift, he was satisfied.

He changed his regular clothes for some he had in his trunk, and, having with his teeth straightened out the buttonholes in his patent indestructible collar, he was soon walking with increasing daze up the bowstairs of the varnished boat, which had been lowered for the approach of the guest.

The deck was polished, and the cabin floor was polished, and the inside of the boat was varnished, polished and decorated chastely. Had Whisky Williams been transported into the mansion of a millionaire on Riverside Drive, New York City, he would not have been more awed nor surprised.

Williams found his host waiting, and the host had on black, pressed trousers, a waistcoat with about three inches and two buttons on it, a cravat tied in a nice little bow-knot, and a space of about 13 1-3 inches by 8 3-4 inches of the whitest shirt bosom Whisky Williams had ever seen—and at one time he had been to a liquor dealers' convention in Louisville, too.

Down the front of this white shirt were three little white cloth buttons. A diamond ring sparkled on the man's little left finger, and—and—and a kind of a Chinaman-looking little chap glided in with a pitcher full of soup, and Whisky Williams was glad it was time to sit down. He had really stood up to about all he could stand.

"My land!" he whispered to himself. "My land!"

At the same time he kept his eye on the servant, a Jap, who might have been politely violent if he had known what was going on in the visitor's mind. Williams felt his backbone stirring in its sockets when that man passed behind him. He had the idea that some game was being played on him. The slithering, gliding, smooth-actingness of all this affair made him nervous, but before very long he was settled down to the roast young goose that comprised the main part of the meal.

"It is extraordinary how one's appetite does increase down here!" the host declared, passing over about a pound and a half, including dressing. "I really eat scandalously, myself."

CHAPTER II.

ARFAXED COLOVAR.

EATING gave Williams something to do. Amid all those surroundings, only two things were natural—the eating, and the whispering, lapping, bumping of the eddy waves along the side of the boat. It seemed almost as though this exquisitely built craft echoed the river sounds with greater emphasis and finer music. The sound of the crisp goose in his jaws, and the noise of the waves, kept him from growing superstitious and fearing that he had been transported somewhere.

The coffee was delicious, too. The man mentioned casually:

"I'm a Dry, myself, and I've always advocated liquor not being sold; but I do think the reformers go too far when they talk about stopping the importation and consumption of coffee, don't you?"

"Wha—what? Put coffee on the prohi' list! I ain't heard nothin' of that! Why, the d—"

"Sh!" the man raised his hand warningly. "My—ah—Prongo never hears violent language on the boat—with my permission."

Williams blinked and swallowed his words. He swallowed considerable coffee, too, black and as good and strong as drip coffee. Then, presto! all signs of the meal were gone, and the table was folded up and vanished.

They were now in a gentleman's library-sitting-room. There were cigars, and they sat back in soft, seductive chairs, and Williams felt overcoming him an inclination to ease and luxury. He looked at his host with narrowing eyes.

"Say, pardner"—he sat up suddenly and leaned toward him, gesticulating with as good a cigar as he had ever smoked—"what's the idea?"

"Eh?"

"Your comin' down old Mississip' in this here palace de lucks shanty-boat?"

"Why—ah—the idea! How amusing!" the man smiled. "It just occurred to me I'd like to—ah—trip the river. So I had the boat built, and Prongo and I sailed upon the bounding rivers."

"An' you've come a thousand miles in this thing!"

"Why not?"

"Ah—h-m—who'd you meet at Paducah—that feller—Judas—"

"Judas Carpay?"

"Yes—I wonder—if it's any of my business—what 'd he say to you?"

"Why, the poor fellow—he couldn't thank me hard enough. You see—but I was not at all inquisitive. He came down the wharf, on board the boat—ah—in a hurry, you might say.

"He mentioned something about river people always standing together—helping one another—loving one's neighbor as oneself, you know—and—ah—a very nice, friendly, helpful man, indeed!"

"In a hurry?" Williams grasped at a tangible fact.

"It seemed—really—you know—"

"Oh—I see! Course, that's right. You've got the right idee; I don't aim to ask anybody else's secrets; they ain't none of my business. But you see, I'm—I'm kind of dumbfoozled myse'f. Likely I know Mr. Judas—Judas Carpay. He sounds real familiar, he does. I bet you pulled out with him, an' drapped him down to Cairo, prob'bly?"

"That, sir, is his business—where he took his departure!"

"Stranger, seems like you've caught on, down thisaway; you got the right idee! Carpay's a friend of mine. Reg'lar river folkses talks among theirselves, freelike, an' hit's on'y up-the-bankers they don't let on none to. Red 'd feel like he'd neglected hisself, if he didn't have to leave a town suddint an' 'tween days."

"A very remarkable character," the man admitted.

"He knows more places to hide and more ways to git to them than any other man on the river," Williams declared with emphasis. "When that man ain't doin' things to hide out for, he's lookin' up new special places to hide at."

"Poor, poor man! Always a fugitive!" murmured the listener. "You know, my heart bleeds for that kind."

"Yes, suh!"

"Ah! You, too, feel the divine afflatus of sympathy?"

"Eh—ah—I ain't sick!" Williams retorted with some resentment.

"Not sick?" the man puzzled, and then he smiled a rare smile, as he added heartily but gracefully and in beautifully modulated tones: "Ah! I see!"

The two held their conversation that night with gusto, each in his own way. They touched upon a thousand river features, and when Whisky Williams returned on board his soda-water boat he stretched upon his wild-goose-down bed and lay awake for hours, wondering.

Sometimes he thought it was the strong coffee that kept him awake. Sometimes he was sure that the strongest coffee ever percolated couldn't deprive him of his sleep, but that the man had stirred something in his soul that made his soul astonished beyond dreams by the rare quality of the reality.

In the morning Whisky Williams slept late, and when he looked out, to feast his eyes again on that shanty-boat of splendor, it was gone. That filled him with regret. He had hoped to enjoy a greater, a continuous intimacy with the man. In all his years down the river, few men had appealed to him as good company, worth cultivating; for the most part, he had chosen to live alone, keeping close tongue on his own affairs.

But this man, this godly shanty-boater, with a Japanese cook—and about the best-danged cook of whose art Williams had ever eaten—had seemed a blessing to a man in his advancing years, with the gift of astonishment still unabated in his soul.

Williams dropped out of the eddy after breakfast and burned a few gallons of gasoline. He wanted to get below the fancy shanty-boater, and let the boys know he was coming. Once in a decade there was news like that to spread.

It was something to have obtained the man's name; looking back, Whisky Williams couldn't tell just how he had learned that this stranger was Arfaxed Colovar, of the old Albany Colovars, and perhaps the most purely original Dutch of all the proud Upper-Hudsonites who have upon their escutcheons the stretched fur of mink, muskrat, pekan, weasel, or other emblem of the old fur trade aristocracy.

Williams had some real information on this subject, however. He was an old Mohawk Valley boy himself, before he changed his name and his place of residence. Now that he knew this was Arfaxed Colovar, he could add some fine details about those Albany Colovars, and their riches and their connections, for in truth Williams was a regular old Mississippi River gossip, and if he kept close tongue upon his own affairs, and never betrayed a secret that would get any one into trouble up-the-banks, he delighted in nothing better than to have some juicy, interesting wholesale morsel to tell those who did not yet know, and might never know but for him.

So Williams, tending to the soda-water business, and selling a hundred dozen here and there amidst the thirst of the passing hot weather of the summer season, retailed from fisherman tent to cotton-gin town the full description, the wonderful aristocracy, and the unparalleled kindhearted innocence of this soft-paw of the varnished shanty-boat.

"But he's got the right idee!" Williams declared. "I knowed Red was wanted to Paducah, but he shut up like a clam about Red's business, the minute he seen I was asking pretty clost into hit. Arfaxed Colovar won't betray no man, he won't! He's funny, but he's all right!"

CHAPTER III.

LOTUS OF THE RIVER.

MISS LOTUS LILLAY was tied in at the mouth of Obion River, when Whisky Williams dropped in and sold her a case of soda-water, lemon and vanilla flavors. Miss Lillay had Williams in to supper, which consisted of several fox squirrels baked in a pie, with no soup preliminary flourishes, nor any fare-ye-wells of desserts, except some apples and another cup of coffee.

While they ate, Lotus told of her late experiences up the Obion, where she had been prospecting for button shells, and had a streak of luck in a little brook, which yielded a lot of crippled mussel shells, no good for buttons, but which gave her thirty dollars' worth of baroques, and pearls that she sold for thirteen hundred dollars to a buyer before they were fairly dry.

"That's luck!" Williams declared. "An' say, Lotus, I had luck, too—not that same kind, but another kind. Hearn tell of this feller Arfaxed Colovar who's drappin' down?"

"No, I hadn't heard; what's it—a circus or a showboat, or a new kind of animal with a scientific name?"

"A little of all three, I bet," Williams laughed. "It's the funniest meat in the darnedest shell that you ever seen, anyhow. There's two fellers on board, and one's Prongo, a Jap, and the other's this Colovar person, and the boat's a shanty-boat varnished and finished in the natural wood."

"I bet it's just as pretty as can be—what kind of wood?"

"Cypress siding and oak framing, and spruce trimmings."

"Varnished—I bet it's beautiful!"

"An' the floor's that slippery you could skate on it with your shoes. I liked to kerflummixed on it."

"But it's got power?"

"Nope—just a regular old flat boat, thirty-six foot long, ten wide, and forty-inch-deep hull—bit deeper 'n common, course. Bow an' stern decks, an' if you don't hang on, you'll slip off'n the decks; canvas laid on boards for the roof. Copper mosquito netting, an' long ash sweeps—eighteen foot long, with blades about forty-two inches long and a foot wide. Why, it's the dad-blastedest layout I ever hearn tell of! I bet it cost two-three thousand to build that boat, an' it's got swell mansion furniture into it, an' a lot o' books."

"But the man?"

"Gosh! He'd make you laugh if you wa'n't sorry for him, an' then agin he ain't nobody's fool. Red—you know that mean river pirate—come down on him at Paducah, two jumps ahead of the sheriff and the chief of police, an' this Arfaxed took him on board, an' won't talk none about him, nohow. That's what I call honorable—not givin' a man away what the sheriff's after."

"But what's his game, this fancy-boat fellow?"

"Why, just seein' old Mississip'! You know—everybody gits the idea, once or twict, to see the river. Some jes' suffers, an' never does it, an' some comes down an' gits it over with, an' is satisfied an' has somethin' to talk about the rest their lives. Course, he got the fit, an' hyar he is—"

"Round here?"

"Well, he dropped out of Hickman Eddy two days ago. I ain't seen nor heard of him sinct, but course he's trippin' down, him an' his Jap cook an' all that fancy shanty-boat. Varnished shanty-boat! Ho law!"

"I'd like to see that boat," Lotus mused. "What kind of a looking man is he—old and whiskery?"

"No—nary a whisker. He kind of fits into his scenery, though. Jee-Blam! He et supper with me on his boat—had a dress suit on. Made me feel like I needed a new pair of pants, an' I'd paid seven-fifty for mine, too.

"I ain't no respect for anybody that makes fifty-seven pants seem like a pair of worn-out overalls. This country ain't no place for that kind of folks. What right they got, sp'ilin' a feller's self-satisfaction, anyhow?"

"He's good-looking, then—young?"

"Round thirty, I expect. He's kind of a well set-up feller, good tan on his face, an' blue eyes. Got lots of hair, too; kind of s'prised me, that, seein' I'd hearn something the kind of a feller he was. You don't 'low to find these scienterific fellers with a full head of hair, an' so on.

"It wa'n't so much his looks as it was his manners. Gosh! He had more manners to the minute that any son of a gun that ever come down old Mississip', except that play-actor on the Cotton Blossom, away back in the old days, right after the Spanish war. You remember him?"

"No"—she shook her head. "I wasn't but four or five years old in those days. I never heard tell of him."

"Well, anyhow, you know what I mean—kind of a soft and curvy-moving feller. Diamond on his little finger—"

"What! A man fool enough to wear diamonds down here?"

"He had one on."

"Somebody 'll get that man!"

"He had Red on his boat for a time, and Red didn't get him."

"Wonder—h-m— He just floats down, same as any shanty-boater, and ties in anywhere?"

"He came into Hickman Eddy, against the reverse current. I cordelled him in—I wanted to get a good look at that outfit. Why, that boat shone like a looking-glass—"

"Oh—I must have seen it, this morning! I saw a boat flash when the current turned it—I thought it was a big window glass—"

"His boat's got a glass eight foot long and four foot high in it—just one pane. Hit's big's a store-front glass."

"Then he's down below," she remarked with finality.

They exhausted the topic of Arfaxed

Colovar, and then reverted to other river topics, including pearls and button shells, the soda-water business, and whether they'd ever catch Smiler, the champion bootleg artist and blockader king.

"Think of a man like him, pertending to be a whisky runner!" Whisky Williams shook his head mournfully. "Why, when I was in business, we wouldn't hire that kind to rustabout the cases and kegs up the bank. An' the stuff he sells and runs—ho Law!

"Just account of that, they'd ought to send him to the farm. They never was no such low-down stuff sold on the river in my day. We had corn er fruit into our stills; their whisky is just chemicals."

"Corn or chemical," she shrugged her shoulders, "it's all poison. It was noble of you, giving up the whisky running and bringing down soda-water."

"Yes'm," he nodded his head, doubtful, "I never felt so shamed in my life, as the day I started down the river to sell sody-water. Customers 'd come on board the boat, see me, an' smile all over. They'd grin an' say, 'Hello, Whisky! Gimme somethin' good to drink—special XXX stilled Sweetbrier, eh?'"

"And you—"

"I handed up a bottle of lemon sour, er vanilly—I couldn't look 'em in the eye, an' they looked sick. They looked anxious. They leaned over, kind o' scairt, an', whispered, 'Don't you 'member me, Mr. Williams? I'm faithful! I ain' never give you away!'

"They'd all got their mouths set up for whisky, an' they was so thirsty they had to have a drink—they drank soda-water, but it was awful to see 'm. My lan'! Nobody knows what prohibition means, till he's seen somebody that knows good liquor drinking sody-water an' tryin' to forget it ain't got no kick.

"I'm gettin' hardened to sellin' sody, now. But I don't b'lieve anybody that's set up good liquor can feel the same about sody-water. An' then theh's women comes aboard, now—women an' chilluns an' boys. Why, in old times, the last place on earth a woman 'd go was on a whisky boat, 'thout she had business there; but they come a trottin' down the gangplank, a gigglin' an' a smilin' an' a takin' theirn settin' down, an' talkin' tucks an' hat trimmin's an' babies— Ho law!"

Lotus laughed, while her great eyes flashed.

"Even I take a case!" she suggested.

"Why—why—nothin' pussenal. You's riveh folks!" he cried, alarmed.

"It's all right; I'm just perfectly delighted!" she said. "If it was bad for women to drink whisky, why should men drink it?"

"I done quit argyfyin'!" he declared morosely. "Goin' back up to git some more barogies an' pearls, Lotus?"

"No," she shook her head. "I'm going to drop down the river. I'd pulled out this afternoon, but the wind kept up. I'm going to drop down into Canadian Reach tonight.

"I'm going to look up Cold Creek, probably. Don't tell anybody. I never heard of anybody thinking of shelling up there, did you?"

"No—but all the creeks and rivers have been shelled, ain't they?"

"I picked up thirteen hundred dollars in ten days up a brook you could jump across anywhere, above here. Nobody knows where pearls is, or ain't. It's luck, finding them. And I'm the luckiest little girl there ever was, pearling."

"Wonder you haven't been stolen long before this!"

"That's what everybody said," she smiled grimly. "When my folks 'lowed I should marry that Darter Trabole, I cut out between days—skiffed it six months, then shanty-boated it; now I've got my power-boat, and money in three banks in different river towns."

"Why didn't you like Darter? He was a likely feller."

"My folks liked him." She shrugged her shoulders.

"What ever became of him?"

"He come down the river," she replied. "He heard I was drifting logs and flotsam in a lonesome bend. He found me. He said he was a cave-man. I said I was the female of the species."

"Eh—yes?" doubtfully.

"I was just a slender slip of a girl, and he was tolerable husky as a lad. He 'lowed that all there was to it was grabbing me. I got on the stern deck, and he had me cornered.

"I'd run away, all the way, to there. He reached to catch me, and I caught his hand, and gave him an awful pull. Over he went, a pig-squealing! Then I drew my revolver and shot bullets all around his head—he like to have drowned, ducking. I'd never taken the same chance with another man.

"Comes a man that's impudent, and I draw my gun, right off the reel, ready to shoot and intending to shoot—and shoot straight. That's all there is to it—be ready to shoot, and mean it."

CHAPTER IV.

A DINNER FOR TWO.

WHISKY WILLIAMS returned on board his boat, and Lotus cast off her line and backed out into the current, and drove down the stream at slow speed. The man did not notice the inconsistency of her remark about the wind laying, and her boat a power boat

She could have gone, wind or no wind. She laughed as she thought how she had pulled the wool over his eyes, realizing his ignorance of her stratagem.

"I'd like to see that man Colovar," she said to herself, "so I'm going to take a look at him."

Luck favored her. She discovered the boat the following day as she dropped past Yankee Bar, above Fort Pillow, where she intended to prospect Cold Creek for pearls and button shells. Through her glasses, at three hundred yards, she confirmed all that she had heard about the varnished shanty-boat.

The boat was only two miles above Fort Pillow, at the point of the lower bar. A line of wild-goose decoys she had seen on the old Yankee Bar probably belonged to the sport. That fact bade her hesitate. A man who knows how to hunt wild geese might be a soft-paw, but again he mightn't.

She didn't run in beside the fancy boat. She dropped on down to the mouth of Cold Creek, which was navigable for a skiff at that stage of the Mississippi, and went up looking for shells with her tongs.

In two hours she returned with a few grabs of shells which she had gathered in the creek. They were mostly good muckets, and would serve very well for buttons, if they were to be had in any quantity. Judging from the feel of the bottom, there were probably a few tons of shells on that bottom, but the zest of shelling had gone, now that she had found good pearls, not very large but in exceedingly commercial numbers. A hundred dollars a day had spoiled her for a mere five dollars a day or twenty dollars a week, figuring on the weather.

"I believe I'll go down to St. Francis or White River," she thought to herself, "or up Yazoo, or some of those other rivers and bayous. Of course, those lower river pearls aren't so good—but they're larger! Probably there's more of them, too!"

As she argued with her conscience, she watched the distant varnished boat through her glasses, and was rewarded by seeing a small boat come down from the upper bar and round up to the stranger's craft.

"I was right," she mused; "that man was goosing, and he put those decoys out into V-lines. I'd like to know—h-m—seems to me he's tolerably knowing. Why—he's cutting loose!"

The varnished boat drifted out into the main current and dropped down the bend. For a minute or two Lotus hesitated. The stranger floated slowly, and in the edge of the current.

Lotus cast off her own lines, shoved out into the eddy, and floated up the bank, around the foot of the Fort Pillow bar eddy, and three licks of the sweeps sent her across into the main current, half a mile ahead of the stranger.

As twilight fell, the two boats were only a hundred yards apart, and apparently oblivious to each other.

Lotus cooked her supper, and was sitting down to eat, when she heard a hail. Stepping outside, she found that the boats were only ten or fifteen yards apart.

"Howdy," she replied.

"Oh—a lady!" the other exclaimed. "I beg your pardon!"

"That's all right," she replied. "My name is Lotus Lillay. Father's the Lillay Combination manager—show-boats, you know. He used to be the store-boat Lillay."

"Ah—yes—yes—I believe I saw the theater-boat on the Ohio, did I not?"

"Probably; he's used up there this summer."

"But you're not alone?"

"Oh, no!" she replied. "I have a repeating shotgun, a 25-20 and a 30-30 rifle, and—h-m—side arms."

"And you'd really dare shoot—if you had to?"

"I know I should," she answered, "because—because—"

"Because why?"

"I've done it."

"Oh!"

"You have a beautiful boat there!"

"Is it? I didn't realize it was anything special. I had the Parkright Company build it for me, at Pittsburgh, in their shipyards."

"And they built it right, too."

"Have you—ah—dined?"

"No; I was just sitting down. Won't you come aboard? I know this is Mr. Colovar, isn't it? Of Albany?"

"Oh, my, yes!" he hesitated. "Certainly—delighted!"

"I had heard of the Colovars," she continued as the boats drew together, and the Jap dropped over woven rope fenders. "Mother was one of the Devensants—"

"Indeed! Is that so—but—down the Mississippi?"

"She ran away with daddy; he was one of those Boston Lillays, and he just couldn't stand — couldn't stand being cooped up."

"Ah! I see — I understand!" he beamed, and, having come on board her boat, looked around with curiosity.

His face lighted up with interest. The cabin sitting-room and dining-room was about eight by ten feet, and it betrayed to his glance the truth of her ancestry. It was a shanty-boat interior, but there were books in the plain bookcase, there were double curtains over the window, there were rugs on the floor, including a bear and a panther skin; and the table was set with the daintiest of real china, silver, cut glass, and, oddly enough, it was set for two, a detail that the visitor did not grasp.

If the appurtenances were dainty and pretty, and chosen with good taste, the dinner Miss Lotus served was not merely delicious; it was wholly ample; she knew very well how to feed a man. In no respect was her dinner lacking, from bouillon, through game fish—baked—and a young roast coon, to Louisiana drip coffee in thimble-cups.

There was ample of everything, and the hostess, in a dark satin gown, astonished the man. It was an environment, now, in in which he dared not ask questions; the string of pearls around her throat were, obviously, genuine!

It was almost incredible that they were floating down the mid-Mississippi in a shanty-boat, a river-girl's craft. Yet a glance around him revealed the homely details of a simple river flat-boat. Plain, clean paint, an inexpensive cabin frame, and bare carlins overhead, small windows—neatly curtained—and the meager furnishings of a small house-boat yielded in the astonishment presented by this young woman who entertained with superb dignity—and remarked, casually, that she was a pearler.

"Luck has been with me," she said, unclasping the string from around her beautiful throat. "I found all these, to begin with; it was in a little stream in Missouri, and they were all in one bed, about ten yards long and three or four feet wide. I was after game fish, and opened one of the shells and found that pear-shaped pendant, the first thing.

"I opened about ten bushels of shells, and I had those pearls—almost of a size—hardly a grain difference in their weight. There were baroques and other pearls, too, but I sold them. I was after game fish, because I was hungry. I'd eaten rabbits till I was sick of them.

"I'd just suffered, waiting for hickories to fall with the frost, so I could eat them. But that didn't bring me clothes or paint for my boat, or new lines—I didn't have

even a handy line in those days. But those pearls—oh, I love them! When I think what they saved me from—"

He nodded, as he looked at those beautiful pearls—bright, white, eight to ten grain little gems of the fresh water mussels.

"You could love them, just for themselves!" he ventured.

"Indeed I could—and do!" she laughed. "I saved the best of my find."

"I know some of your mother's relatives," he remarked. "They would never speak of her—she just vanished. My mother used to wonder about her—what became of her."

"She was good and honorable!" Lotus exclaimed angrily.

"Yes! They all said she was the most spirited of the Devensants," he approved. "I've seen her picture—a very beautiful girl."

"She is yet," the girl said; "but she's proud and high-spirited—she was afraid of me."

"Afraid of you?"

"Yes; that I'd run wild. But I wouldn't marry that—oh, a man by the name of Trabole. I cut loose then, and I've looked out for myself ever since."

"On the Mississippi?"

"Safest place in the world—if you know how to take care of yourself," she smiled bewitchingly.

"Yes! Yes!" he nodded a little breathlessly.

She carried away the cups, as the Jap might have done, and put down on the bare, round table a cut-glass dish full of candies of several colors, soft and creamy, with an aroma like that of flowers. They nibbled candy then, as they talked.

He looked curiously at the bookcase, and she pulled back the curtains. Across the backs of the books were brass rods, to keep them from falling out when the waves rolled high.

"You read these?" he asked, indicating a long, red set of Shakespeare.

"I know most of them by heart," she replied. "I'm alone, you know. I'd be crazy in a year, living alone—people grow odd if they are down here and have nothing to do but trip and sit through the gales, and the long evenings. But I find that if I read those people and think their thoughts—it helps, at least, to keep me normal."

"Normal?" he repeated. "That's so. The wonder is—it isn't exactly normal, is it, living down here in a shanty-boat?"

"Not judged by up-the-bank standards," she admitted.

There was a far-away rumble. Instantly she started to her feet and went out on the bow deck. It was a clear, starlit night; the wooded river banks looked far away, and there were few ripples to disturb the spotting of the surface by the star reflections. Down the dark, gray river a great structure all aglow with lights was coming up, a river packet that had blown its whistle to warn them of its approach.

The Jap was already on the bow of Colovar's boat, and Miss Lotus said:

"We'd better cut loose, I think; that's a Lee liner, and they throw an awful swell."

The Jap cast off the stern lines, and she hauled in the bow line. With a few strokes of her sweeps she threw the boats apart, and as they separated she called:

"Good night—I'm sure we'll see each other below, won't we?"

"Indeed we shall!" Colovar replied. "Yes, indeed!"

An hour later Lotus Lillay, her boat anchored in, she didn't know just where, stood before a three-quarter length French bevel mirror, giving herself a careful looking over. A slight, amused smile was on her lips.

"I'd like to know what happened to Red," she said, half aloud.

CHAPTER V.

INTRODUCING MRS. MAHNA.

"YOU take a man that's got lots of money and not much sense, er even know-how-to, and he ain't no business onto the river," Mrs. Mahna declared with feminine finality. "That's what is the matter with that soft-paw comin' down below Cairo.

"The idee of his havin' a varnished boat! Why, great lan' sakes! the next we

hear of that man, an' hit won't even be his echo. He'll be busted in the haid, an' that Jap of hisn 'll be gone to roost, and both 'll be gone to Kingdom Come a hellin', they will!"

"Jes' what I was thinkin' "—Whisky Williams shook his head uneasily—" when I et supper with him, an' him wearin' a diamond, an' probably five-ten thousand dollars on board, an' livin' thataway, into a dress suit, an' reg'lar silverware, too. I tried the forks, an' I could bite right into 'em. Yo' can't do that to nothin' but reg'lar silver. Same way with the spoons. They was silver, an' thin too.

"Why, when I set my teeth into one of them—he had three-four spoons all dif'rent side my plate, an' hit were real convenient. They wa'n't hardly big 'nough, and I et my soup with one in each hand. Why, you could bite one of them spoons inside out. I done it on the end of one of them, while I was eatin', didn't hardly nick my teeth onto it, either."

"Well, yo' wait 'n' see. Red er some of them river pirates 'll git to get him, shore's yo're borned. I don't understand why Red didn't get him b'low Paducah."

"Cap'n Daffadill said, on his way up, that Red was comin' down into a rag-house on a raft. Red wouldn't talk none."

"Must have gone by here, at night. I didn't see him. You take those fellers that travels nights, when there ain't no wind day times, they're up to something. How's Lotus?"

"Had supper with her to mouth of Obion. She was layin' off to stop in to Fort Pillow—"

"I bet she's goin' up Cold Creek after shells er pearls? I bet she is. She talks about shellin' for button shells, but I bet she don't for buttons. Eveh sinct that gal sold them pearls to St. Louis, she ain't been no sheller. She's a pearler, she is!

"Look't her hands! Nice, soft, took care of an' cold-creamed. Never was no laborin' sheller kept her hands as nice as that! She's a pearler, stylish an' all that; but she's real common; she don't want nobody to think she's pearlin', an' all stuck up! So she says she's shellin', an' talkin' like she was common folks."

"She's awful nice thataway," Whisky Williams declared. "Good-lookin' as she is, an' dresses like she does, an' bein' one of them show-boat Lillays—why, that gal 'd be reg'lar society, to Memphis or N' Orleans or anywheres; but she's just as common an' friendly as can be."

"If a man behaves himself!" Mrs. Mahna suggested.

"If a man behaves hisse'f," Whisky Williams repeated approvingly. "Ho law! How she's waked up the idees of some of them sports! Course, yo' cain't blame a sport none, bein's she's so purty an' livin' down old Mississip'!"

"Whisky Williams!" Mrs. Mahna's black eyes glittered. "If yo' wa'n't a fool man, I'd shoot yo' for sayin' a thing like that!"

"Wha—wha—what 've I said?" he gasped helplessly.

"One of them fool man remarks," she clicked her teeth. "I've lived thirty-six years on this old river, an' blim me! when I fust come down men was pesterin' aroun' an' pesterin' aroun'—Lawse!"

"Course we did!" Whisky Williams agreed.

"Ho law! That's so—I 'most plumb forgot; me'n yo' was married, fustest along, wa'n't we!" Mrs. Mahna burst into a laugh. "My lan'! That's twenty year ago, if hit's a day. Le's see, howcom hit I 'vorced you? I forget!

"That's right; I remember now; yo' was peddlin' whisky, an' I 'lowed yo' was yo' own best customer, an' I wouldn't have no man drunk aroun' me, an' I never would."

"I quit drinkin' soon after that," Williams reminisced. "I sold lots of liquor, but I never drunk none; I always felt better, too, not drinkin' around."

"Who was hit yo' married next?" she asked. "Seems like—was hit that lady to Pushmataha Landing?"

"Oh, no! It was Mrs. Dayling."

"Dayling? I don't remember her nohow!"

"Why, yes, you do! She was that Wabash River girl, come down with Len Dayling, an' was married to Evansville to him, but 'vorced him for seventeen dollars and a half to Memphis, an' then—"

"That's so. That's Helen Faxter—"

"Course 'twas! She was an awful nice wife, too; they say when she an' her last man left the river they went down to Texas, an' they've got a ranch, an' lots of money.

"She come to the Lower Sawmill two years ago, an' stopped there three-four days with shanty-boaters, talkin' over old times. She was askin' about me an' Taylor, her man that got killed up three years ago, and about Dayling. You know, he's been in Leavenworth prison, now—"

"Good lan'! Is that what has become of Len Dayling? I was wonderin'. What all did he do to git sent up?"

"Why, it seems he got to be a hold-up, an' he robbed two-three trains an' so on, an' a jewelry store, an' he killed a feller into Island 36—"

"An' the gov'ment sent him away?"

"For makin' an' passin' counterfeits."

"Poor Len! He was always a careless sort of fellow," she mused, and then she giggled. "I almos' married him myse'f once. How come hit? Why, I was trippin' down, no husband, an' all alone. Helen had jes' quit him, an' he hadn't never had a wife leave him before, an' he was awful lonesome.

"We met to Memphis, an' when I dropped out, he come 'long down the next day, an' below President Island he run alongside, an' 'lowed as Helen sure 'nough had got a divorce to Memphis, an'—tee-hee—she was goin' to marry you. Lawse! He wanted to kill yo' up, but I 'lowed hit wa'n't no use to do that.

"So we friendlied along a while. My first man had just been shook, an' if a man is no 'count an' mean an' shiftless, a lady finds it awful hard to forget her first husband. I bet, if it hadn't been for that, I'd married Len. But I'd made up my mind to trip down to N' Orleans alone, an' I done hit. He dropped out at Big Island, an' probably hit were round there that he met up with them hold-ups.

"Anyhow, they was a detective come down through Arkansaw City and around, lookin' for some Rocky Mountain fellers, 'count of a hold-up, about that time. Poor Len! Hit shore broke him up, losin' Helen."

"He shore lost somethin', losin' her," Whisky Williams shook his head. "She was what I'd call an A No. 1 wife, she was. But she had an awful temper when she was crossed."

"A woman has to have, or there ain't no livin' with a man!" Mrs. Mahna declared with decision. "I found that in my experience."

Whisky Williams blinked, but did not argue. He too had learned things by experience. The two reflected in silence on the things that had been. The years had been kaleidoscopic for them, and they had things to recall, as all people of full lives have. It was Mrs. Mahna who spoke:

"They say Lotus Lillay's rich, that she's found pearls so much, that she's got money enough to live on, off the income."

"So I hearn say; she's close about those things—talks plain, too, but you don't know, really, how much she's got."

"She's pretty enough not to need no pearls or nothing," Mrs. Mahna decided. "Her folks was always forehanded, too. Neither one of them ever got married but once, and they stuck to each other through thick an' thin. Now they got a hundred-thousand-dollar boat, motion pictures an' play acting, an' I bet they make more'n Johnson's storeboat, or any of them.

"They took on something awful when Lotus lit up an' out, the way she did. My lan'! But come along she got the reputation of shootin' anybody, careless like, an' none of those fresh fellows bothered her. They say she won't even let anybody propose to get married to her. She's odd thataway.

"Lawse! When I was a gal, gettin' proposed to was a reg'lar habit. But these here new girls, sho, they got a lot of new-fangled notions, an' they don't git married till they're twenty-five er thirty.

"Time I was her age I'd had two boys, two husbands, two divorces and a girl, and was going to be married agin directly. Oh, well! I s'pose I'm a back number. I been married now, this last time, ten years, an' ain't neveh regretted it, to amount to anything. I 'low I'm gittin' old.

"If a girl expects too much, she don't get it, an' I don't know but what it's just

as well, waitin' till you git what you want, 'thout no 'speriments, er runnin' away, the way I did. Lotus was nineteen when she runned away, an' I was fifteen, comin' sixteen. I married, an' she shot the man that come mussin' around her.

"She ain't never been in love, they say. Her folks tried to make her marry that Darter Trabole. Shucks—if they'd fit her an' said she shouldn't, he'd had her now, an' they'd been happy er 'vorced or something."

"I 'low that's so," Whisky Williams grinned. "If I hadn't said yo' shouldn't git a 'vorce from me, you'd stayed with me. If I'd said you should, then you'd been mad an' never left me anyhow. Jes' like a woman! Contrariest, darnedest critters!"

"Hi-i-i!" Mrs. Mahna laughed, and then she gasped: "Talk about the devil, an' hyar he comes! Look't who's here!"

CHAPTER VI.

THE MENACE.

IT was Lotus Lillay's little cabin boat, coming under its own power and rounding into Island 35 chute, out of the river.

"U-hoo!" she laughed. "I saw your boat, Mrs. Mahna, so I ran in; how are the folks?"

"Fine! Denna's got anotheh baby, an' my youngest boy Pete's gone an' married that Westcott girl, an' they live up-the-bank to Memphis. They's all well, an' I'm well, than-ee. How's you?"

"Oh, I don't know"—the girl shrugged her shoulders—"I get along."

"What troubles have you got?"

"Oh, I had a dress made at Cairo; I wanted it made real nice—some silk I got two years ago, and going to have it made up, real nice. Good, heavy silk. You remember; I showed it to you! Well, the way it's made, it's all up in front and down behind. Worst-looking thing!"

"That dark purple! Was that spoiled in cutting? You'd ought to cut the daylights out of the dressmaker—"

"Oh, I fixed it; I wore it the other night. I guess it looked all right enough, but you know when you've bothered with a dress a lot you don't feel the same about it."

"No indeed, you don't! Throw that line, an' I'll swing you off my stern; there's a mud bar there you'll get stuck on, the river's fallin' so."

"I'll anchor out to-night. I don't like the banks, down through here, anyhow. That's Whisky Williams's boat, isn't it?"

"Yes; he's aboard here."

"Real sociable, isn't he? Never a word to— Hello, Mr. Williams!"

"Howdy, Lotus."

"Fine!"

"The Lillay show-boat outfit's coming down to below Memphis," Mrs. Mahna suggested.

"I hadn't heard."

"You know, that Lower River show combine busted up. There's only a little kind of a rough gang showing down now. So your folks 'lowed they'd drap down an' hit the towns. I bet you'll be glad to see them!"

"They cut me dead, the last time," the girl remarked frankly. "They'd heard I was cutting up, and mother never would stand for that. It was just a lie; they'd ought to know I'm honorable; they wrote and said they were mistaken; but I had a long, lonesome trip, thinking they wouldn't trust me to behave myself—when I'd showed I would, cutting loose the way I did."

Her life on the river was an open book. She had lived always in such a way that by no possible chance could it truthfully be said she had failed to preserve her reputation from just slander. She well knew the value of giving people the truth to talk about; she had laid the foundation of good repute, merely by declaring that she had run away from home; that she had done so to avoid an unhappy marriage, and that subsequent accusations had been mean wrongs against her.

She had won her way down the river, trip after trip. Her first venture, one that had embittered her very soul for a time, had been in poverty and with haggard temptation and danger constantly hanging

over her—but she had won through. People who knew her, when she stopped in shanty-boat towns, and when she floated down with other fall migrants, could not imagine her as carrying herself in different mood, or in tawny abandon when she was down a lonely bend.

Mrs. Mahna, having made the boat fast by a light line, welcomed Lotus on board her own boat, and the arrival of Mr. Mahna, with a string of game fish which he had caught over in a bayou, enabled her immediately to set up a snack of hot fried black bass, with trimmings of various kinds. A thousand narratives of river tradition originate over the dining tables of the shanty-boats. The river custom is to have four meals a day—breakfast, hickory-nuts or some other luncheon, dinner, and supper—and sometimes a late lunch. Held in an eddy, or against a bank, by wind or during long days of drift or ice runout, or because a flood is running, the shanty-boater has few resources, and the most attractive of them is just plain eating. Accordingly, when a visitor drops in, if it isn't something to eat, it is at least a cup of coffee, as down in the Louisiana swamps.

"And what have you been doing?" Mrs. Mahna demanded.

"Prospecting for shells," Lotus replied.

"Found any more pearls?"

"Those I told Williams, here, about," she said. "And, too, I saw that sport from out the Ohio. The man with a varnished boat."

"You did! Whereabouts?"

"Oh, dropping down. Anybody seen Red lately? You know who I mean—that river pirate, never the same name twice?"

"No," the others shook their heads. "What's the matter—want him?"

"Want him! No—but his gang's mean, you know; I'm afraid of that man Red. You got to shoot that kind first, and talk afterward. You see—I've seen him. I've got my suspicions. I was never worried before. But, just lately, there's been a little hog-pen boat dropping down, and it's kept way up from me—but always coming along. Red's in it. There!"

Sure enough, out of the placid surface was an A-shaped craft. It floated down past, and, looking through a pair of binoculars, they saw the boat run into the east side and disappear in the shadow.

"That's right—they saw your boat landed in here," Mrs. Mahna admitted. "You'd better watch out! If they got hold of you—down some lonesome bend! You know what 'd happen then. It's no place for a girl that 'd mind bein' stole."

"And what's that coming down?" Lotus indicated another boat.

They waited a few minutes, and the six-mile current brought another floating craft down.

"Why, that's that Arfaxed Colovar's boat!" Whisky Williams declared. "Look at it shine and shimmer! Hit's bright as a pianer, er wiped-off automobile!"

"An' goin' right down past that hogpen on a raft, too," Mrs. Mahna whispered. "Maybe he ain't followin' you, gal!"

"Maybe not," the girl breathed. "There is nothing those scoundrels wouldn't do for ten dollars—nothing in the world!"

They watched the splendid house-boat, finished in natural woods, as it floated serenely down. Perhaps murder would be done on that boat that night. Perhaps the river pirates would shoot through one of the great plate windows, or perhaps get aboard, pretending to be decent people—many and many a shanty-boater has watched a soft-paw outfit dropping down into a lonely bend, speculating on whether it would ever get out across the next crossing or whether the crews would change—the soft-paws sunk in the river, and the pirates occupying the cabin?

These river people, the Mahnas, Whisky Williams, and Lotus Lillay stared. Never does the river tragedy seem so imminent as at the moment when the sun is setting, not a breath of air is stirring, and the current flutters along the edges a little, but moves by in mile-wide irresistible mass, with a surface reflecting the passing of a jay or swallow, or colored purple by the shadows of the trees on the bank, a mile distant. The very appearance of innocence and peace, lulling the soft-paw into a sense of complete security, aids in the grim crimes of the pirates.

The glistening, shimmering, varnished

house-boat floated on down. It passed the point where the A-tent boat had run in. When it was almost out of sight, there was a flicker on the surface. Lotus caught up the glasses and stared; then she uttered a low cry.

"It wasn't me!" she declared. "Look!"

The others looked, and handed the glasses around.

"Yas, suh!" Whisky Williams shook his head. "Jes' so! Red's drappin' down after that feller—an' Red ain't no hand to waste time! What you bet that boat don't show up, away down b'low some'rs—an' the soft-paw gone? An' a little red feller livin' into hit?"

A low, strangling cry from Lotus caused them all to look at her. With both her hands against her throat, she was staring down the river.

"An' I thought they'd—they'd follow me!" she half whispered. "They'd know I could take care of myself—and that—that he couldn't!"

Darkness fell; the brooding silence of the Mississippi quivered in the night; far away, they saw a flaring sparkle—it was the soft-paw boat, with running lights out! The pirates could see him five miles!

"I don't cyar!" Mrs. Mahna declared angrily. "I think hit's a shame, them pirates killin' up soft-paws, er settin' 'em up the bank, robbed! Hit 'd ought to be stopped. If river rats jes' killed one anotheh, hit mout be decent an' respectable, but killin' soft-paws—Lawse! They ain't nothin' fair about hit!"

CHAPTER VII.

A GAME OF CHECKERS.

MR. ARFAXED COLOVAR dwelt upon his varnished shanty-boat, as he might have lived in a palace or a mansion or a castle. Prongo, his servant, was the most orderly person in the world, and he arranged everything just so, to begin with, and thereafter if by any chance anything was moved from its determined position it was returned forthwith at the very first opportunity.

Colovar, sitting at great ease, in a broad, deep leather chair, smiled with appreciation at Prongo's solicitude. He readily admitted to himself that but for Prongo, affairs might be a bit different on board the good ark Champlain. At the same time, Prongo satisfied certain longings of the tourist tripper's subconsciousness.

It had been all, and more than all, the venturer's dreams had hoped for it. It had been marvelous, this meeting of the strange, picturesque characters. Of them all, Judas Carpay had been, perhaps, the most interesting.

Carpay, coming on board with a plaintive tale of being in a great hurry to get to Cairo, and no boat due, and an inherent inability to ride on the cars without getting car-sick, had proved an amusing and instructive guest.

It had been interesting, more than anything else, to observe the loquacious Carpay and the silent Prongo. Carpay, really, had been rather impudent. He had come on board the boat, cast off the lines, and started down the river before Colovar or Prongo knew what was happening.

In the dusk of evening, however, looking up the river, it had been noticeable that there was a policeman on the sloping wharf, and Carpay had admitted the policeman was down there to see him off—had even escorted him down to the river.

"An' I had only five minutes to make my getaway!" Carpay said. "What else c'd I do? If I swum—woosh! but it 'd been cold! So I told him yo' was a friend of mine—river people is always friendly toward one another—an' throwed off the lines, knowin' yo' didn't care if you stopped or just dropped down.

"Besides, I knew you—you started at Pittsburgh, and I've been laying off to get to see you ever since you passed Point Pleasant."

Judas Carpay, a little man, dressed in made-to-order clothes by the best tailor in Cincinnati, with fifteen-dollar shoes and other evidences of good, or at least expensive, tastes, was a novelty to Mr. Colovar.

"Really, you know," Carpay had said, "I'm a sport. My ancestors were among the settlers of the Ohio Valley, and I've a streak of the Lewis Wetzel strain of ad-

venture blood in me, and we're all of the Order of Cincinnatus—all our family are of that kind of people. Oil on our West Virginia farms, and coal and timber up in the West Virginia Mountains, largely undeveloped as yet—you know!"

Colovar knew the type described. As he dated back to the old fur trade days, Adirondack timber affairs, railroads and so on, it was decidedly novel to find the Ohio parallel of a black sheep on the head of the Hudson River navigation.

"I just dropped down from Louisville," Carpay declared. "Play the ponies there—lost my quarterly allowance, hocked my diamond ring, watch, and—you know—so on!—and would you believe it? Ten to one the third race, and a thousand down at seven to one—and now I'm on easy street!"

He showed the proof of his statements, a roll of hundred-dollar bills, flopped them open and thumbed the ends, and they were all hundreds. It was a vulgar display of money, but Colovar knew the type very well. He had, in his time, met wealthy young sons, black sheep of various families.

"I'm just going to enjoy myself!" Carpay declared. "I like to be a sport, a real sport. Ever play cards?"

"Oh my, no!" Colovar shook his head. "No games of chance for mine. You see, our family—they ah—were always against games of chance. Possibly skill—but not chance."

"Ah! You play checkers?" Carpay exclaimed.

"Oh, yes; we play checkers. That, you know, is a game of skill."

"Yes, sir; checkers is the ideal game! Drafts, you know! Sure—I love checkers myself!"

So after they had passed under Paducah bridge, and after they had dined, just to be sociable they had played a game of checkers.

It was, in a way, a nip-and-tuck game. There was no objection to playing for a little something. Carpay, talking of his weary home life, telling how he happened to be named Judas Carpay, played a gay, fast checker game—and he won.

It was a game something like—a game of his dreams, with ten-dollar gold pieces, heads up for blacks and birds up for whites. Jumping three for two was ten dollars to the good, and he was forty dollars ahead of the first game. He saw, to his unbounded pleasure, that there was the requisite of all up-to-date homes on this marvelous craft, a beautiful wall safe of considerable size, and his lips watered as he saw a three-inch-thick stack of currency in the safe, and also a drawer full of gold, from which he bought his first set of checkers, at ten dollars each piece.

Judas Carpay had suggested what a fine game it would be, if there were only gold pieces, something "interesting." Accordingly, the ivory checkers had been displaced—on his own suggestion.

The rest was easy. Judas played for the stakes, and it was Colovar who suggested twenty-dollar pieces. As the checker table was a beautiful piece of inlaid work, with two-inch squares of black walnut and pearl, the twenty-dollar pieces were more in keeping with the kind of game and its setting.

Just after daybreak, Judas Carpay, with his lips blue, his cheeks white, and the fishy stare of his eyes settled into an expression of conviction, drew his revolver and leveled it at his host.

"You've framed me! Yo' ain' no soft-paw—you've framed me! I want me money back!"

Colovar's eyes opened with surprise and he blinked unhappily.

"Dear me!" he gasped, raising his voice. "Why—you—a welcher!"

Judas Carpay cared not what the man called him.

"Fork over!" he demanded, and then his jaw dropped as he saw that accursed Jap, whom he had forgotten in the dismal, losing, desperate morning hours. The Jap was visible in a mirror on the opposite wall. In the little man's hand was a knife with a blade six inches wide, golden yellow along the back of it, and the edge nearly two feet long, and silvery razor-edged in its suggestion of Samurai efficiency. The blade was raised, and, Judas Carpay realized without parley, that one least motion, one twitch of that automatic trigger finger, and there would be a separation of head from

body, and one less citizen, very valuable to Judas Carpay in river circles.

"Don't cut his head off—yet," Colovar smiled, with all good breeding and modulated tones, and Carpay softly laid the pistol upon the fatal checker-board.

Truly, it had not been a game of chance! Judas Carpay would have sworn he could defeat any amateur blueblood from Albany or anywhere. He was an all around professional gambler, from craps to chess, from poker to three-card monte—a roulette wheelman—and, without boasting, a pretty fair judge of horses.

Choking, Carpay blinked and left the chair. His back humped up, his hands wide open by his sides, he walked out on the bow deck, and, knowing the requirements of the occasion, he picked up the long sweeps and pulled a practised stroke to the north bank of the Ohio. There, just below the Cairo wharf-boat, in the misty morning light, before the sun had struck through the fog, he jumped ashore to the paved landing, and saw the varnished house-boat draw out into the mist and vanish down toward the Forks.

"He was so entertaining," Colovar mused as he recalled that night. "I never enjoyed any one's conversation more. He had me charmed—sometimes I almost forgot my moves, I was so pleased. Too bad he was so desperate at the last! Checkers is really an intellectual game, a great test of the memory and ingenuity, and it was interesting, really interesting.

"Probably he would have played cards, or something wicked like that, if he hadn't played checkers. These black-sheep sons—dear me!—I'd rather lose everything than welch. I think I should—of course, I'm very fortunate in these intellectual games, checkers, and Wall Street and croquette tournaments, and golf and so on.

"And, Prongo! I shall never forget how you poised that beautiful specimen of the work of Goto Yujo!

"Mercy—suppose you had been obliged to strike?"

Prongo smiled.

"I had no idea we'd pay the expenses of this trip, too!" Colovar mused. "It had not occurred to me that my amateur championships of draughts would bring me such a—h-m. There! I lose my amateur position—for I played for money. Dear me! How this river does—does change one's perspective! I never once thought about that! Well—too late! I shall now compete for professional honors. Dear me!"

He laughed wryly. Temptation had assailed him, and he had unconsciously fallen victim to it. It was something he had not understood about Mississippi River life—the undermining of his foundations, so to speak, letting collapse his ancient habits and ideals.

He had played for money—a horrible thing, now that he thought of it; but not so horrible after all. He had rather gloated in his success. This Judas Carpay was, in fact, a professional gambler, as well as of the old, old Ohio Valley families. It was something to defeat such a person at his own game. Besides, socially, down the Mississippi, it served to introduce him to the river people.

Wherever he went, to whomever he talked, the Carpay matter was always approached by the men and women. They asked about it—but of course, Colovar would not, could not, tell. It was rather a disgraceful affair, not to be discussed, but people asked about it with crude, native tactlessness.

They even asked what had become of this fellow Carpay. Colovar hoped the man hadn't really gotten to the end of his rope and killed himself. That would have been too dreadful.

Colovar loved the Mississippi. It gave him new ideas. Its frankness was delightful. He had a feeling of mastery, and the sense of superiority was only too gloriously exhilarating. His boat, which he had designed himself, and which had been built to be a really typical shanty-boat, was a beautiful piece of carpentry, shipbuilding, and cabinet finishing.

All other boats, painted with mere outside white, or even mere tar-paper shacks, or rough wood cabins, were poor relations of this superb craft of his. He found endless amusement entertaining the shanty-boaters at his own table, and in dining at

their own crude boards. He prided himself with taking things as they came.

CHAPTER VIII.

RIPPLING BEND.

THERE had been no two people alike in all his experience from Pittsburgh down. He had found some very clever sportsmen and townspeople, of course—he had even met the son of a former Governor of Indiana, and reporters had interviewed him at various river towns. One person, Whisky Williams, was the real Mississippi River, old-time type—of that he felt assured. The old shanty-boater was genuine.

Lotus Lillay, however, was something else again.

She left him distinctly uneasy in mind. She didn't exactly talk river, nor yet act river, but she was decidedly river, as he felt. She was educated, and she was decidedly pretty—rather more than pretty, in fact. Also, she was of startling grace. Her manners were impeccable, but modified by environment. She was quite difficult to forget, very easy to think about, and very, very anomalous in her habitat, considering her character as he had seen it.

Frankly she had admitted her loneliness, her estrangement from her own people—he recalled the story of the Devensant girl who had eloped with Lillay, of Boston. It had stirred Albany and Back Bay twenty odd years before, and now he had met the daughter of that wilful union. The Devensants had tried to forget, and they never mentioned that escapade that proved to be a permanent love-match.

Lotus, calm, full of dignity, had permeated the atmosphere of the river, and the mind of Arfaxed Colovar found that she was the matchless river person to give the whole voyage of adventure the graceful and idealic touch that was needed to give fixture to the evanescent dreamland scenes and incidents.

For her he felt a profound sensation of interest and respect. It was easy to excuse a girl of the wayward strain in the vivacious Devensant blood.

"Really," he thought to himself, "I should like to meet her again. I should like to know her better. I might—ah—even find it diverting to flirt with her a little."

He hastened to assure himself that he had no vulgar idea in that rather questionable idea of flirting. He would be perfectly platonic in his view-point, and he should be very careful not to give the lady any wrong idea as to his view-point. He dared caution himself, however, with the reflection that a person in her position should not greatly object if a man should smile upon her and dare her to visual reflexes and consequent reactions to the emotional coquettishness that is the common heritage of humanity.

He felt, of course, the gentle admonitions of conscience as he contemplated this divertisement. He reflected that through his boyhood, youth, and young manhood he had lived with model sobriety and circumspection, utterly careful never by any chance to misbehave in any least particular.

Now, alone, two thousand miles from home, in a region more remote and less known than many parts of Europe—what harm if he did, by a very little, lower the standards of his conduct? If he did it deliberately, and very watchfully, he should not fall headlong into such a thing as had robbed him of his further right to play in amateur championship tournaments for checker trophies. He had played for money!

Besides, he felt that by cultivating the acquaintance of Miss Lillay, he should add greatly to his experience and knowledge. She could, if she would, introduce him to things of which he had never heard down the Mississippi, and as she had the inherited refinement of some of the proudest blood from Amsterdam to Rensselaer, she unquestionably would assist him in obtaining the very ideas that he most needed to complete his studies of the river and its odd, floating people.

Accordingly he was very sorry that he hadn't fixed upon some definite date and meeting-place. While he was slowly reflecting upon the matter, and when he had discovered how slowly his mind acted upon

what should have been a perfectly obvious course of procedure, the young woman's cabin-boat had vanished.

Heretofore he had not thought of finding any particular person, or going to any particular place. The river currents had carried him whither they would, into eddy or chute, to east or west bank, with the wind, against the wind, or whither the craft listed. The miles upon miles of shore, the vast surface, the far bends and turns—when he thought of finding one small house-boat of two hundred and fifty square feet or so upon a surface of ten thousand acres or more, he was appalled by the impossibility of his undertaking!

It occurred to him that he might never meet Miss Lillay again. In his throat there was an ache, in his heart a throb of dismay.

"Why! If I shouldn't, I'd miss half the value of the trip! She's a real person! Her conversation would be very elevating. I mustn't—I must—"

He considered the matter, and he decided that he must go rapidly down the river and then watch for her to come past his anchorage. Thus, instead of making only a short journey each day, he determined to make a long jump.

Accordingly he floated far, and in a twilight he landed in a long, wooded bend. He saw that the twilight was that of the moon, and it was hours after sunset. He was enamored with the scenery of the dusky river.

His thoughts welled with expectancy. He wished for adventure — for joyousness—for a real lively experience.

Old Mississip' seldom lets slip a chance like that. A motorboat came sliding down the river in the dark, and held quivering, like a watchful deer, a few yards off the stern of the house-boat.

"Howdy—whose boat?" a voice demanded softly.

"Colovar's," the man from Albany replied.

"Colovar's—oh, yes, that varnished-boat feller?"

"Yes, sir."

"Anybody come out that chute to-night?"

"Not since we stopped here; we've been here nearly an hour."

There was but a minute of silence, and then another motorboat glided into the eddy, out of a chute or bayou, in from where Colovar had anchored for the night. The two motorboats drew together, and then separated a few minutes later, the smaller one, a mere launch, coming to the house-boat. Colovar invited the skipper to come aboard.

Always he had found it most interesting to see these river people react to the surroundings on his varnished boat. This man was still another type.

He was of medium height, inclined to be chunky and exceedingly alert, his black eyes flashing. He had the quick, light step of a city man. He looked clean, too, and yet questionable.

"You're a stranger on the river," he said, greetings having passed. "You oughtn't to miss Island 37, over here. There's not another place like it, from Pittsburgh to the Passes. Better run over with me and take a look around."

"To-night?"

"It's a night resort; you'll surely enjoy it, I think; any way, it 'll give you new ideas."

"Ah—a resort? H-m—" Colovar hesitated for the fraction of a second, and then exclaimed: "Island 37? I've heard of it. I didn't know I was there. I shouldn't miss it for anything!"

He went to his stateroom, while Prongo brought a cup of coffee, for the varnished boat had fallen readily into the customs of the Lower River.

When Colovar emerged, he wore a business suit, carried a cane, wore a derby, and had on a pair of medium-weight tan shoes.

"You'll make a hit over there," the visitor smiled. "My name's Trafter."

They shook hands, and the two took their departure. They purred by motorboat down a rather narrow waterway, into a wide, placid old-river lake. They rounded up, at last, at a rather shacky landing, where there were a number of other boats, large and small.

Under the trees they saw a dance platform, and a number of houses and shacks.

Strident music smote their ears, and light laughter of women sounded in the woods.

"Do you dance!" Trafter asked.

"Oh, my, yes!" Colovar replied.

"We originate dances here," the man chuckled. "That yellow girl there is the best dancer below Cairo. See that?"

Colovar saw; a tall, saffron girl, with coppery, crinkly hair and curving grace was coming down the dance-platform all alone; every step she took she rocked, and there was a low clatter on the floor, and her head and shoulders whirled around in circles, while her back curved and swayed.

"See that?" Trafter whispered. "That's a new one—that's the White Hawk dance. There's a dancer up North saw her last winter, and gave her two hundred and fifty dollars just to teach her some steps and a wring-twist. Her name's Rippling Bend—and I'll introduce you to her."

"I'm sure I'll be delighted," Colovar replied, adding doubtfully, "if it's all right. I—ah—social conventions, you know."

"It's all right on Island 37," Trafter assured him. "Why, people come here from Mendova and all over, just for the chance of seeing that yellow gal dance. Of course, it wouldn't do anywhere else; but here, to-night, it's all right. Nobody's going to say a word. What people say and do here is forgot.

"Why, you'd be surprised if you knew who've danced with that girl! She can sure teach a white man to dance, if there's any dance in him! All she lacks is a good partner, as slick as she is, and say—oh boy! they'd make money on the stage. Ah—come heah!"

Rippling Bend came smiling through the dim light, and when she had swept Colovar with the glance of her wild eyes she bowed.

"Misteh Man!" she greeted. "Ah mean no 'fense to yo'-all, but cain't yo' dance—a lil bit?"

"Just a little bit!" he replied.

"Then, man, won't yo' dance with me? Niggers or white men—not one heah can dance to-night—less'n yo' can!"

"What step?"

"To that music, honey—listen! Now watch those ol' stampers of mine!" She lifted her skirt a little and her feet began to take wing.

"Don't yo' try that—no indeed!" She shook her head. "Yo' come through, so! Let me do the rattlin' an' the drummin'—yo' come a glidin' an' a slidin' an' a tossin' of yo' fryin'-pans, an' a catchin' with yo' hands! Ho law! Hyar we go—uo-o-ho! Lawse man! Yo' can dance—where all did yo' learn to dance? My lan'! Ahm happy now! But who taught yo', man?"

"At the Terpsichorean-Bacchian Academy," he replied.

"'Fore Gawd!" she gasped. "I don't know—nor cyar—where that temple is! Keep a goin'—jes' keep a goin'! Jes' watch them side-lines begin to stare, man. Lawse, Lawse! Now we go—honey—go like we neveh been befo'!"

"Step back! Give 'em room, boys! Step back!" floor managers cried, and the spectators willingly backed away.

This story will be concluded in next week's issue of the ARGOSY-ALLSTORY WEEKLY, the consolidated title under which both magazines will appear hereafter as one.

THE ORIGIN OF THE KISS

HE saw her lips, and deemed them roses fair
A flower he strove to pluck, and it was this—
I have it from a fairy who was there,
And saw it all while peeping from his lair—
Gave first to man that perfect flower of bliss—
The lover's kiss!

John Kendrick Bangs

The Plunderer

by

Anice Terhune

GRAY DAWN, Miss Ellison's big merle collie, was in dire disgrace.

He was rather apt to be more or less in disgrace, for he was young, and gay, and bumptious. He had a tremendous capacity for innocent mischief, such, for example, as worrying the irreproachable Panama hat of Betty's newest admirer, then romping off with it under cover of tea and conversation, to toss it gaily at last into the pigsty, at the farthermost corner of the Place, behind the cow-barn.

Another of Dawn's tricks when Betty had guests, was to rush up-stairs, in a gust of hospitality, to search for some fitting gift for the visitor. Dawn always invaded Betty's own room at such times and seized upon some article of her wearing apparel—a bedside slipper, a ribbon belt, a pink-satin camisole; the first thing his bright brown eyes happened to light on.

Betty always knew what he had been up to by the important way he came scrambling down-stairs; and her heart invariably sank. For he had a fatal habit of bringing the very thing of all others that he should not have brought, and generously dropping it in front of the guest; his white teeth showing in a happy grin, his plumy tail waving cordially, his graceful body bending low in a stretch that was the nearest approach to a courtly bow that he could manage.

For these and other like sins, Dawn was lectured, and—when necessary, as in the case of the Panama hat—properly, though lightly, punished. Indeed, so clever, and teachable, and loving was he, that Betty was beginning to feel that "his lower nature" was all but conquered. For some weeks the big merle pup's conduct had been irreproachable.

Then came the tragedy! One of the white leghorn pullets was missing—and its feathers (or feathers just like them) were found in Dawn's kennel yard.

Now the poultry on the Place belonged to the superintendent's wife; and she was a person of most certain temper. Also, her husband was a valuable man; the most valuable worker Betty's father had about the Place. Such men do not grow on every bush these days. Likewise, such men are prone to have been caught and married in early youth, by temperamental wives, who rule them with rods of iron, once they have finished their conscientious daily toil and sat themselves down, in carpet slippers and shirt-sleeves, to enjoy the evening paper, or an after-supper doze.

The night when Mrs. Ross discovered the loss of her favorite pullet, she waited

until her (by courtesy) lord and master had donned his carpet slippers and doffed his coat. Biting her lips, and with arms akimbo, she eyed him bitterly while slowly he drew out his pipe and lighted it. At the first puff she pounced upon him.

"Whad da ye think," she began; "that thievin' Dawn dawg's killed my best pullet!"

"That's too bad," drawled Mr. Ross. "What makes you think so?"

"Don't I know?" snapped his wife indignantly. "Ain't I seen the feathers scattered all around 'is kennel?"

"Well, that's too bad," again drawled the superintendent aimably, puffing rather hard at his pipe, as if he was afraid his wife's coming storm of words might blow it out.

"Well, you're a fine one! To set there an' puff, *puff*, PUFF, when my chickens is bein' et up, wholesale! I ain't a goin' to stand it, I say! Whad da ye goin' to do about it?" and she paused, panting.

"Well, I don't see what any one can do about it if the pullet is et an' done for," answered Mr. Ross mildly.

"Nathan Ross, you just take your feet down off the top o' that chair and put on your shoes an' your coat an' go down an' tell the boss about my pullet! I won't give you a bite o' supper till ye do, so ye might's well *start!*"

Reluctantly, but with the drear philosophy of the hen-pecked, Ross got out of his slippers and into his coat, and resumed the burden of life.

The thankless duty of being talebearer was made doubly unpleasant by Gray Dawn himself, who came dashing up to meet the superintendent as he took the path to "the Big House," and offered him first one silky paw and then another in joyous greeting, almost overthrowing the man as he frisked gaily about his legs.

Ross was shamelessly tender hearted, and he loved Dawn almost as well as did Betty Ellison. So, in telling his tale of wo to the master, he softened it as much as possible. Twisting his hat round and round, he said in conclusion:

"O' course, to me, a chicken or so don't matter, now an' then. Gray Dawn's more'n welcome to anythin' o' mine, in reason. He's worth a thousan' chickens, I don't care whether they're Leghorns, or Plymouth Rocks, or what not! But you know how my wife is, Mr. Ellison; she sets a store by those fowls o' hers, an' she's feelin' some sore. So, perhaps if we was to move Dawn's kennel a little farther off—"

"That would never cure him of chicken stealing, Ross," said Mr. Ellison firmly. "There is only one thing that will. If he does it again, we'll punish him so he won't ever forget it. Just leave the matter to me. Tell Mrs. Ross I'll make good the murdered pullet. And tell her I'll see that the thief is properly punished, if he repeats the offense. It's too late to punish him this time. For he wouldn't have the faintest notion what it was all about. Next time, we'll be on the lookout—but I hope there won't be any next time, tell Mrs. Ross."

Unfortunately, though, there was a next time.

Two days afterward, Betty, with Dawn at her heels, went out to the kennel to exchange an old water-pan for a new one she had just bought. There, directly in front of the kennel door, was a swirl of snowy chicken feathers, and, worst of all, there was the partly eaten body of a second pullet belonging to Mrs. Ross.

"Oh, Dawn!" cried Miss Ellison reproachfully. "How *could* you?"

Dawn looked at his beloved mistress. Then, following the direction of her accusing finger, he looked at the very dead chicken. His tail dropped disconsolately between his legs, and he turned his head away as though hoping, ostrichlike, to keep Betty from connecting him with the heinous crime.

"You naughty, *naughty* dog!" went on the voice of vengeance. "If you are a thief, you must be treated like one! Come here!"

Dawn wriggled up to Betty, with an ingratiating grin, seeming to apologize and ask for forgiveness in every wiggle.

Seizing the dog by the collar with one hand, and carrying the half-eaten chicken gingerly between two fingers of the other, Betty walked with determined tread to the kitchen door. From the cook she procured

a string. This she tied around the remaining leg of the chicken.

Then she fastened the mess tightly to Dawn's collar, just under his chin, where he could not get at it, but could not help smelling it, all day and all night; in fact, until in the natural order of events the chicken should rot itself off. (And this, by the way, is a surer cure for chicken killing than all the beatings on earth.)

"There!" she exclaimed, when the novel necklace was firmly in place. "I just *hate* to do it, Dawnie dear; but you've *got* to learn to behave. We all have to, sooner or later. And (though we wish all Mrs. Ross's chickens were at the other end of the world, and though the whole lot of them together aren't worth one of your beautiful silvery gray hairs), you've got to learn to be a real sport and play the game. And chicken stealing is *not* playing the game! So I'm going to cure you! And when this poor dead chicken gets ready to fall off, I'm pretty sure you'll never wish to see or hear or smell one again—particularly smell one!"

With a reproachful pat, she let the culprit go. And he understood.

With downcast eyes, he slunk away, never looking back. Shame, bitter shame, was in his heart. Shame that he should be thus humiliated, and by the hand of his adored mistress. Mingled with the shame was a horror of the mangled, bloody mass that dangled under his chin, for all the world to see. Already he hated the smell of it—it sickened and disgusted him—it deprived him in some strange, subtle way, of all desire to bark, or to gambol on the lawn.

This astonished Dawn, almost as much as it grieved him. Such disgrace had never been put upon him before.

Suddenly, he was overcome with rage at the imposition. He determined to rid himself of the ill-smelling neck-piece which clung to him so persistently.

He slashed at it with his white forepaws, jumping into the air in frantic attempt to tear the chicken loose; but all he did was to create a small whirlwind of feathers that tickled his nose and made him sneeze; and to daub his erstwhile snowy paws with streaks of blood that made them smell just like the hated chicken.

When, later in the afternoon, he had thoroughly tired himself out in vain, and in his best dumb show had pathetically begged every one on the Place, in turn, to relieve him of his hateful burden, all to no purpose, he bethought him of a wisteria arbor down near the lake, where he might go and conceal his utterly miserable self until such time as the chicken should weary of his companionship.

Toward this arbor he slunk solemnly and sadly, with dejected head held 'way to one side. He felt like hanging it down, but the ever-present chicken made that impossible.

The soft green grass felt cool and comfortable as he made his way toward the arbor. It reminded him of the cool lake; and he decided to wander down to the water's edge and drink before going to the arbor.

Perhaps he could shake the chicken into the water! At any rate, he would give it a good ducking, and wet his own dry tongue besides.

When Dawn finally splashed himself out of the lake, after plunging around and drinking until his raw nerves were somewhat soothed, the faithful chicken was still with him. It was more unforgetable than ever, as its water-logged condition made it twice as heavy as before.

So the collie hurried to carry out his original intention of hiding his misery from prying eyes, in the secluded arbor.

Alas for his well-laid scheme! Some one had got ahead of him! The arbor was occupied by two people—the two people he loved most on earth: his mistress, Betty Ellison, and his other idol, Jack Lambert.

At sight of them he tried, bowingly, to back away unnoticed; but though Betty pretended not to see him, Jack was less tactful.

"Good Heavens, Dawn!" he cried. "What's that hanging under your chin? You look as guilty as if you'd committed murder! Come here and let me help you get rid of that horrific mess, whatever it is!"

Dawn did not understand the words,

but the tone he recognized as friendly and helpful. So he grinned shamefacedly, and, wagging his tail stiffly, crouched along the walk till he had come even with Lambert's knees.

Leaning forward, the man started to investigate the now almost unidentifiable chicken. But Betty interfered. Putting her small hand on his outstretched arm, she said:

"No, Jack, you mustn't help him! Dawn has been *very bad.*"

Here she looked reproachfully at the dog, who turned his sleek head away from her as far as his furry ruff would let it go.

"*Very bad!*" she repeated. "He's been chicken-killing!"

Dawn thumped his tail mournfully; twice started to offer his paw; then gave up friendliness as a bad job, and slunk down in the corner of the summer-house, under the curved rustic seat. From the way his beloved humans both continued to look at him, he understood perfectly well that Betty was telling Jack all about what had happened.

He tried to pretend he was not listening by shutting his eyes; so, presently, the worn out dog went to sleep, and dreamed, twitchingly and delightfully, of a rabbit hunt in the backwoods.

When he wakened, it was almost dusk. Betty and Jack were still there, but they had evidently forgotten all about him; for they were holding hands and talking earnestly; and they were not looking at him, but only at each other.

It seemed as good a time as any to go back to one's kennel—especially as it was dog dinner-time; so Dawn drifted, unnoticed, out of the summer-house—a gray shadow among other gray shadows on the lawn.

His light footsteps made no sound as he slowly crossed the velvety grass, going around behind the house, past stables and garage, and on toward the hennery behind which stood his kennel—almost at the very edge of the Place. Just before reaching the kennel, there was a small knoll from which the ground sloped quite sharply down to the kennel yard.

As Dawn rounded the knoll, he stopped suddenly—ears upraised, back ruffled, tail pointed out; his eyes fixed on the yard lying below him.

What he saw caused a growl to die, unborn, in his throat.

There, in his yard, his very own dooryard, was a long trail of crumbled bread, leading up to and into his kennel. There, innocently enough, stood one of Mrs. Ross's hated pullets; pecking her way, inch by inch, toward the kennel door.

But that was not all.

Crouched flat on the roof of the kennel, with head hanging over the door, lay a strange animal—perfectly still, except for his wise bright eyes—which followed closely the foolish movements of the chicken. The same high wind from the north, which prevented the intruder from getting Dawn's scent, drove the other's scent stingingly and pungently into the collie's delicately sensitive nostrils.

What the animal was, Dawn did not know. He looked something like a small collie; but Dawn's sense of smell told him this was no dog; and instinct warned him it was an enemy.

Fascinated, Dawn stood so still he hardly breathed—while the chicken pecked her silly way onward till she reached the kennel door—equally unconscious of the eager eyes just over her head, and of Dawn just behind.

Following the pleasant bread line, she stepped daintily into the kennel.

Then, almost simultaneously, two things happened. The animal on the kennel roof dropped with lightning swiftness, and caught the chicken just as it was about to disappear inside the door. At the same moment, Dawn, with almost equal speed, hurled himself at the stranger and catapulted him clear into the kennel.

Thereupon ensued a terrific fight, the cowering chicken being completely forgotten.

Dawn, collie-like, tried to grab his antagonist by the throat. But the latter was quick, and slippery; also he was wily—more wily than Dawn—and his white teeth were cruelly sharp. Dawn was much the larger and the stronger; but the other animal excelled in "foot work."

It was such a fight as John L. Sullivan and Jim Corbett waged in the early nineties—only with a different ending.

Dawn, more excited than he had ever been in all his short, happy life, whined with the lust of battle; while his enemy barked in a high, undog like voice, whenever he could spare the time. The pair thumped and bumped about in the little kennel till it fairly rocked. Boards cracked oundingly. The roof threatened to tumble down on their heads.

The hen, nearly dead with fright, added her frantic squawks to the rest of the chaotic din.

Betty and Jack, who had been totally absorbed in each other, suddenly realized that something unusual was going on. As did Ross, away down in the rose garden; and one of the farm hands who was grooming Betty's horse, Jill, in the stable-yard.

From different directions the four rushed toward the squawks and screams and whines.

As they reached the kennel, masses of fur seemed to revolve rapidly just inside the door—like an enormous caged squirrel on its wheel.

"Great Scott," Lambert shouted. "Is Dawn having a fit, or what?"

"Look—look!" cried Betty. "There's *yellow* fur! It's another dog! Oh, no—it's the Bramhalls' fox!"

Jack made various grabs for Dawn, while Betty called the dog frantically. But Dawn, usually the soul of obedience, was deaf and blind to everything but his intended victim, the fox.

At last the chance he had been working for came. He got his enemy by the scruff of the neck, and sank his teeth deep, at the same time bearing down with all the mass of his body. The fox crumpled under the frightful pain, and the smothering load of Dawn's solid weight.

The fight was over.

Just at that moment, however, the farm-hand who had quitted the scene of action reappeared on the run, with a kettle of cold water. Without waiting an instant he poured it straight on Dawn. And, in spite of himself, Dawn had to let go.

Before he could renew the attack, Jack seized him by the collar and dragged him out of the kennel. The farm-hand dived in to secure the fox. But there was no need to hurry, for the wily chicken-stealer was too nearly dead to defend himself, and only snarled feebly as the man picked him up.

"Well, if it ain't Bramhall's tame fox!" he exclaimed. "Jest about beat out, ain't ye, old feller?"

Then Betty saw something which caused her to reach into the kennel.

Gingerly she drew forth a small, battered white hen, unharmed except for a lame leg; but petrified with fright from her unwonted experience.

"So it is *you*," she said to the fox, "and not poor Dawn who has been chicken stealing!"

And dropping the hen gently, she gathered Dawn into her arms and apologized to him until the dog, tired and overwrought as he was, wriggled with joy. When Betty borrowed Jack's knife and cut from his neck the few thin strings that remained of his badge of shame, his delight was pathetic. He knew, then, that she understood!

After the fox, chastened and battered, was returned to his owner, Mr. Bramhall confessed:

"Yes, we always knew he stole chickens. He's the cutest fox I ever saw. He makes a trail of food crumbs for chickens to follow; and then, when they're near enough, he pounces on them. That's an old trick of pet foxes, you know. He killed two of our chickens that way; but Mrs. Bramhall's so crazy about him. she won't let me shoot him. So we tie him up; but every day or so he manages to slip his collar. Of course we'll pay damages to you people. We don't want—"

"Oh, no, Mr. Bramhall!" said Betty eagerly. "You sha'n't pay a cent! It's worth the loss of the chickens to know that Dawn isn't a thief! Father 'll settle with Mrs. Ross."

And Dawn, his wounds carefully bathed, and his stomach full of "plate" meat and ice-cream, sighed happily, at his kennel door, and thought of the grand fight he had fought that day.

The Purple Limited

by Henry Leverage

PRECEDING CHAPTERS BRIEFLY RETOLD

ROBERT LARKINS, known as "Lark," car-checker on the C. M. and Western Railroad, owed his job to Darrah, division superintendent, styled familiarly "J. J. D." And so, when the mysterious disappearance of the Purple Limited brought a storm about the "super's" ears in the person of the traffic manager and the chief of detectives, Lark made up his mind to aid Darrah in every way possible. A rigorous search up and down the line had failed to disclose the slightest trace of the train—it had simply vanished into thin air—but Lark had these things to consider as possible clues:

A strange, furtive girl named Nan, who had inquired as to the Purple Limited; a red mask; and seven burnt matches which he had picked up at the water-tank. Then, with the finding of the engineer and fireman, bruised and battered, it became a certainty that the train had been "stolen."

Then, after his Uncle Add, a retired engineer, had told him of a "stick-up" at Mile 243 in which one Black Arnold, now supposed to be in the "pen," had been implicated, Lark rescued the girl from some wipers, learned that she lived at Green Creek Bottoms, twenty miles away, and, most significant of all, discovered that her last name was Arnold.

He hurried to J. J. D.'s office. There was every possibility that the division superintendent would be hard at work. But J. J. D. would be more than interested in Nan Arnold!

CHAPTER VI.

GREEN CREEK BOTTOMS.

THE despatchers' office was a bustling scene when Lark set his lantern on the platform and opened the door. Two despatchers were on duty, assisted by a wire chief who was keeping the lines busy.

Inside the doorway that led to J. J. D.'s sanctum stood Mrs. Darrah talking to her husband. He was in his shirt-sleeves. A bald spot showed livid on top of his head. A clerk sat near J. J. D's desk.

Lark tried to make himself inconspicuous. Mrs. Darrah turned, and after recognizing who he was, smiled quickly. She said something to her husband—lifted a fur muff, and moved toward the outer door. Lark opened it for her.

"Come and see us some time," she offered invitingly. "Come over as soon as this awful mystery is cleared up. It's sure to be soon, I hope."

Lark admitted that it should be. He liked Mrs. Darrah almost as much as he liked J. J. D.

He closed the door, and went to J. J. D. "May I speak to you, alone, for a minute?" he asked, glancing at the clerk

"I'm busy, Lark!"

"But this is important. It's something I just found out."

The clerk rose from the desk when J. J. D. nodded. He stepped into the despatcher's office. Lark blurted what he had learned concerning Nan Arnold. He detailed all Uncle Add had told him about the former robbery.

"How long ago was that robbery?" asked J. J. D., much impressed.

"Many years ago. It happened at Mile Post 243."

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for August 28.

"That's just outside of Butte Tunnel."

J. J. D. leaned and pressed a buzzer. He said to the clerk who appeared at the door:

"Find Ragan and send him here right away."

The clerk hurried out to locate the railroad detective. Lark fingered his cap and watched J. J. D. lift a telephone-receiver, set it back on the hook, and snap his armband.

"Arnold, eh?" he mused. "Well, Ragan ought to know. If he doesn't know the details, I'll get along distance to connect me with the warden of the penitentiary. We'll run your clue right to earth."

"What luck are the detectives having?"

"Not a damn bit! I'll bet there's fifty sleuths on the line this minute. Why, one even followed me into a jewelry-store this evening where I went to get my wife's bracelet mended. I recognized the man from seeing him before."

"Does he think you stole your own train?"

"That's about it! It's the G. M.'s orders. They all seem to think I've got the Purple Limited stowed away some where—maybe in my pockets, maybe in my house. They've been snooping around there."

Ragan came in and scraped his feet. The chief detective at Newhouse was a heavy man inclined to stupidity. He had been with the road for more than thirty-five years.

"Mike," asked J. J. D., "who stuck up a C. M. and W. train at Mile Post 243—years ago?"

Ragan looked very wise. He rubbed his nose. "There was a stick-up there, about the early half of 1900. Two men got settled for the job. They were caught with the goods. Both had records. They'd done time for bluelining."

"Bluelining" was robbing freight-cars. Lark bent toward Ragan as J. J. D. asked:

"What were their names?"

"One was Black—Blacky—no, Black Arnold. That's it!"

"And the other?"

"I don't know. At least, I don't remember."

"Has Black Arnold finished the prison sentence?"

"Must 'ave, super. He got twenty years, which, with good time off, would have let him out long ago."

"And you never checked him up?"

"No, I didn't, super."

J. J. D.'s cheeks reddened. He snapped at Ragan the next question:

"Where did Black Arnold live?"

"Seems to me, super, he used to live at Cotopaxi. It was on the line, somewhere west. He wouldn't go back there after doin' a bit in th' pen."

Ragan glanced at Lark, wondering what concerned him in these pointed questions of the superintendent's.

"Where is Joe Reardon?" asked J. J. D.

"Reardon is laid up with th' rheumatism, super."

"That leaves you alone on the job?"

"Sure. But there's about thirty detectives within whistlin' distance. They're buzzin' around like flies."

"Well, here's another. I'll try him out on this case," said Darrah, indicating Lark. "He's going to be my man Friday. He's to act for me. You keep it quiet, Ragan."

Ragan left the office. J. J. D. began drumming on his desk. "We'll see!" he said incisively. "I'll wire the penitentiary for full information concerning Black Arnold and the other man who was sentenced with him."

J. J. D. looked at Lark. "You better get some sleep. Go out to Green River Bottoms, look around, and then shoot down the line and walk westward. Pretend you're a hobo. Put on your oldest clothes. Keep me posted by mail. Mark each envelope personal. Do you need any money?"

Lark shook his head. "I've got last week's pay."

"Keep an account. I'll see that you collect ordinary expenses."

J. J. D. fingered his silk arm-band. "Also, look out for mail addressed to you care of General Delivery, Cotopaxi I'll send you Black Arnold's description when I get it."

Lark opened the door. "Have you any theory regarding the Purple Limited?" he asked.

"Not a damn one that amounts to a hill of beans! My head's sore, thinking about it. But—Lark—we'll find that train!"

"We certainly will!" said Lark.

He walked through the despatcher's office, told Ragan, on the platform, that he would be away for a few days, and then hurried to the yard-master. He turned in the list of cars, and at the same time announced that J. J. D. had ordered him off on some business affair for the next few days. He went home across lots.

Uncle Add was asleep. Lark woke early, rolled over, yawned, and got out of bed. His legs were numbed. He washed, put on clean underwear, his oldest suit, and sat down to a quick breakfast.

Uncle Add was smoking a pipe by the kitchen stove.

"We're on the trail of Black Arnold," said Lark.

"Be careful, Lark. Seems to me, I've heard—years ago—he was a killer!"

Lark said good-by to the old man. He pocketed a small coupling-pin as he passed through the back yard. That, and a large jack-knife, were the only weapons he carried.

He ran for the trolley, and caught it when it slowed at Wentworth Avenue—the same place where Nan had got on. The conductor was a new one. Lark questioned him about the road. Green Creek Bottoms was a squatter settlement lying between Green Creek and Broad River. The locality had a bad reputation. Moonshiners were supposed to be in hiding there. The conductor admitted, however, that there were stills in every part of the county since prohibition had come in.

The trolley road, built long after the C. M. and W.—wound across marsh land—went over a trestle, and dropped to a sandy region before it skirted the foot-hills. Between the foot-hills and the mountain ran Green Creek and Broad River. The merging of these two streams formed Green Creek Bottoms—a desolate moor.

Lark swung off the trolley at the station in the Bottoms. He saw, above tin roofs and squalid shacks, the lifting piers of the trolley bridge that spanned Broad River. Below this bridge, three or four miles, stretched the draw-bridge over which the C. M. and W. trains rumbled at all hours.

The spot where Lark took up his position afforded a good view of the settlement in the Bottoms. Tin cans, ash-heaps—broken buggies—prowling cats, a canary-colored nag in front of a general merchandise store—and perhaps a score of houses was what Lark saw. Boats, rotting piers—shore-ice, and stakes, lined the creek and river.

The snow had melted in spots within the straggling lanes of Green Creek Bottoms. Chickens pecked amid the garbage. A sign, read from Lark's position, announced:

BAIT FOR SALE

BOATS TO HIRE AT ALL HOURS.

Lark drew his muffler close around his neck and crammed his hands in his pockets. He slouched toward the general store. A light wagon, with its shafts secure in the forks of an elm-tree, contained two sacks of corn-meal and a busy rooster.

The storekeeper was a vinegary-faced man, openly suspicious. Lark glanced around the store at two men sitting before a huge sheet-iron stove, beneath which was a square of zinc and a crooked poker.

He asked for some cheese and crackers. "About ten cents' worth, and let me have a sack of smoking-tobacco with papers and matches."

The storekeeper stepped behind the counter. Lark pushed forward a dime, two nickels, and five pennies. He obtained a view of the two men near the stove. One was tall. The other, by his stumpy legs, could not have been much more than five feet in height.

Both were somewhat aged. Their faces were straight-browed. Their chins were determined. Each had steady, gimlet-boring eyes.

Lark left the store and walked to the river. He sank to his shoe-tops in snow and mud. The boats scattered about were half filled with bilge muck. A less likely place to find the Purple Limited did not exist.

He wheeled and moved toward the embankment, where the trolley road was elevated for the first span of the bridge.

The village dogs started barking. A girl came out from the back door of a shack and emptied ashes on the snow. Blue smoke plumed from the chimney. Lark narrowed his eyes. He saw that this girl resembled Nan.

A hand reached through the doorway. A gripping set of fingers jerked her toward the shack. She protested by placing her palms against the woodwork, after dropping the ash-pan. She was drawn inside despite her cries and struggles.

It was Nan. Lark clenched his fists. He felt the weight of the coupling-pin dragging down his rear pocket. He wanted to jerk it out, charge the shack—break somebody's head, and rescue Nan. Such a move would be fatal, however, to his chances. Nan was probably used to blows.

A scrawny dog sidled close up to the trolley embankment, snapped, barked, and set up a dismal howl. A flurry of light snow hid the village for a moment. Lark picked a lump of slate from a pile of refuse and aimed it a yard or more above the dog's head.

A small and neatly lettered sign on the trolley bridge, announced that foot-passengers crossed the river at their own risk. Lark stepped upon the ties and turned his back on Green Creek Bottoms. He came, in mid-stream, to an ancient draw where sat an old woman keeping watch. A controller and a motor, fed from the trolley-wires, actuated the bridge mechanism.

Lark stopped beside the old woman. He pulled the crackers and cheese from his pocket, offered her some, and started munching on the crackers.

"You better look out, young feller!" cackled the old woman. "You ain't allowed to tramp over this bridge."

Lark's smile was ingenious. "I can't swim with the ice chunks the way they are."

"You'll be took up by th' constable!" warned the old woman. "Don't you dahr set foot on them tracks!"

A trolley whistle sounded. A high-speed car rushed into view. Lark climbed to the end of a tie longer than the others. He dropped down, and held tight. The step of the trolley-car grazed his head. The conductor gesticulated wildly.

There were safe places on the bridge, where a foot-passenger could stand. Lark made note of these. He concluded that any villager could cross the river at any time. This was a valuable point to have settled—if Nan's father proved to be Black Arnold, the ex-convict and train-robber.

A smudge of smoke rose from the south side of the embankment, where the trolley bridge reached the land. Lark went down the soft gravel and snow, heels foremost. He got to his feet as a song rolled from beneath the viaduct. A second voice chimed in:

Oh, there was a husky burly
Who started for th' West!
But he only got as far out as Chey-en-ne—
Where he met—

The song stopped suddenly. A matted face was poked beyond an ice-sheathed pile. Another face appeared. Lark gazed into the baleful eyes of two hoboes. These knights of the road were openly hostile.

"Hello, 'boes!" said Lark.

"Hello yourself!" said one. "Who tu-hell are you?"

"My name's m' own!" retorted Lark. "I'm not bothering you."

The two tramps ducked out of sight. Lark followed them around the pile, and saw a large tin can hanging by a string above a wood fire. A savory odor came from the can. A third tramp lay near the fire. He eyed Lark, and climbed to a standing position with arms akimbo.

"Hey, stranger! Are you a railroad dick?" he questioned.

Lark assumed an air of importance. "Sure! I'm looking for a blueliner or two."

The three tramps made a sly sign by twirling their fingers behind their backs. One, the spokesman, pointed to the can. "It's a Mulligan," and then he added dolefully: "A nice, square face o' white line would go well to wash it down."

Lark brought forth his cheese and two handfuls of broken crackers. "All I got, boys. But you're welcome to it."

"Take pot-luck with us, stranger," said one of the hoboes to Lark as he handed over the cheese and crackers. "You're welcome!"

Lark told the men that he was from Chicago. "I got run out of Newhouse on account ov a train robbery there."

This statement evoked instant attention upon the part of all the hoboes. They exchanged glances, and then looked furtively at Lark's broad shoulders and closely-shaven chin. A short silence ensued. The spokesman, believing Lark to be a bona-fide Knight of the Road, swelled out his chest.

"Good job!" he said. "But you've got it wrong, stranger. That stunt was pulled off further west on th' line than Newhouse."

"You don't say so!" exclaimed Lark innocently. "Where do you suppose it was pulled off?"

"Where?" repeated the hobo. "Where does those big bugs stow their kale when they steal it? Take it from me, bo, that was an inside job. Th' rattler went right through Cotopaxi, an' kept a-goin' west. They painted th' car some other color, maybe. Ain't we just come from Cotopaxi an' th' junction?"

The records of the despatcher's office at Newhouse showed that no train had gone west through Cotopaxi Junction after midnight on the morning of the robbery.

The tramp's surmise was wrong. Lark began moving away in spite of the invitation to share the Mulligan, more than once repeated.

"I've a hunch to go on down the river to the main line," said Lark. "Guess I'll say good-by."

Lark tested the ice at the river-bank, glanced up at the trolley bridge, and started along shore. The hoboes were singing:

Oh, th' lady-loves, th' lady-loves,
Take 'em away—
Oh, bring 'em back to me!
I've been down East
An' I've been out West,
Th' lady-loves, th' lady-loves,
They gimme no rest,
Oh, take 'em—oh, bring 'em back to me!

The song died to a husky note as Lark walked through slush-ice. He climbed the bank, and found a wagon-road paralleling the river. Ahead, not more than two miles, loomed the towering piers of the C. M. and W. Railroad bridge.

The same old man who had given the testimony at J. J. D.'s investigation of the missing train was sitting in the open door of the little tower-house high above the span. A pipe was in his mouth. He was half asleep.

Lark hesitated when he reached the embankment. He first thought to question the bridge-tender. The man's attitude warned him that the answer would be a snappy one. Old Pop, who kept the bridge, had been with the road for a number of years. He was a terror to tramps coming his way. He usually phoned into Newhouse when he sighted a hobo on a blind or crouched in a coal-car. Ragan arrested the trespasser at the yard limits.

There seemed to Lark no necessity for crossing the bridge. He climbed the embankment and looked south. A crew of section men had dredged the river. The report lay in J. J. D.'s office that there were no signs of a train having left the bridge. Even a hand-car jumping the track would have cut the railroad-ties.

Lark crammed his fists in his pockets and swung east. Four shining rails vanished around a curve near Butte Tunnel. Down the right-hand set of these rails he began walking with his eyes on the road-bed.

No scratch, however faint—no siding—or spur-track was visible. He felt assured that nothing had escaped him that could throw a light upon the disappearance of the Purple Limited.

CHAPTER VII.

THE ROAD OF STEEL.

GRADUALLY, as Lark walked west, the happenings of the past few days kaleidoscoped through his mind. It seemed an impossibility for a train to disappear. His steps were only tie-wide. He pulled down his cap and arranged his muffler about his chin. It would have been a difficult matter to recognize him.

The clouds hung heavy-laden. There was a slight warmth in the air. Butte Mountain reared a black triangle against the western sky. The road-bed was rock-ballasted. It curved out of sight near the foot of the mountain.

Lark breathed slowly—the heart within him tuned to the search.

A section hand was the first man he encountered after leaving Broad River Bridge. A hand-car stood alongside the track. Lark stopped to ask the man for a match.

"How far is it to Cotopaxi?" he inquired as he lit a cigarette.

The section hand looked Lark over and answered: "I dank you better look a leet-le out, hobo. There's a jail at Cotopaxi."

"Can't a fellow walk the track?"

"No, he daresn't since yesterday. Robbers has been about."

Lark scanned the hand-car—detached a pile of spike-bars and mallets, then moved on with his shoulders braced aggressively. He had a union card in his pocket. It was for identification, in case the detectives got after him.

The first intimation of the thoroughness of the search for the missing Purple Limited came when the curve was reached. Two horsemen loomed into view at the side of the track where a narrow trail led north.

One of these horsemen displayed a huge tin star. He dismounted and advanced toward Lark.

"Where are you going?" he queried.

"Up the road. West!"

A swift pair of hands tapped Lark's pockets. A swifter snarl sounded when the marshal touched the coupling-pin. He drew it out. He showed it to the second horseman.

"No gun," he said. "Shall I let this fellow go?"

"Let him go! They'll pick him up soon enough."

Lark started on minus the coupling-pin. There were many weapons of a similar nature along the road. He looked back. The two horsemen were not to be seen. Undoubtedly they were lurking near where the trail crossed the railroad.

There had been no marks on the ties at this crossing. The ground on both sides of the road-bed was lower than the track, far lower. Lark was searching for a place where a temporary track could be thrown from the main line. This would necessitate level country and a near-by cover, such as a mine or quarry.

He found no such condition until he came to Butte Tunnel Station—here the wrecking-train had stopped. The operator was on duty. A marshal, surrounded by a group of mountaineers, sat on a baggage-truck. Two of the mountaineers had rifles. Horses were hitched to railroad-ties. It was not possible that the Purple Limited could be hidden within a mile of that close-guarded station.

Lark strolled on, momentarily expecting to be halted.

Dusk arrived with a slow darkening overhead. A snowflake touched Lark's cheek. Another fell before him. He lifted his chin from out his muffler.

The shadowy outlines of Butte Mountain towered in the west. An opening showed where the double tracks burrowed beneath the rock. As he walked, Lark swung his glance to left and right. The embankment dropped to the level of broken land across which no spur track could have been laid without endless labor.

A yellow flare marked the tunnel's mouth. An old man, wrapped in a heavy, short overcoat, crouched near a signal-station. He was the track-walker who guarded the eastern end of the tunnel. Coldly he gazed at Lark.

Lark knew the railroad rules. To walk through the tunnel was not allowed. There was a path around the mountain. It was almost impassable save for a sure-footed man.

Drawing his union card from his pocket, Lark let the old track-walker study it.

"All right," said the man, "it's business for the road that lets you through. You're about th' tenth that's passed this way today."

"Did they find anything?"

The track-walker tapped the rocks with his pipe. He filled the bowl.

"What is there to find?" he questioned.

Lark picked up a torch, lighted the end and held it above his head. He examined

the concrete at the mouth of the tunnel. It occurred to him that the action was wasted effort. Butte Mountain was a solid mass of mother-rock. It was flinty. There were no mines nearer than the coal deposits west of the other entrance. A train, such as the Purple Limited, could not be concealed in the tunnel. It was just wide enough for two tracks.

The moisture from the rocky seams dripped upon Lark's head. He swung the flaming torch to examine the sides of the tunnel. With every stride he took he inspected the wooden ties.

He paused at a place hollowed in the rock. It was barely large enough for one man to stand erect in. A train whistled at the western end of the tunnel. Lark waited. He winced before the blinding flash of a head-lamp, which was followed by a long stream of lights as the train passed by. A smothering roar filled his ears. Smoke almost gagged him. He slowly stumbled forward through the fumes. Finally the air cleared.

The gray rock sent back a solid echo. A weight pressed upon Lark's temples: Claustrophobia—almost. He had a horror of closed places. In a close-cut tunnel drilled through the hardest rock in the world, he was searching for a lost train that weighed several hundred tons and was a hundred and fifty feet long. He laughed and was startled by the sound of his own voice that had a metallic ring new to him.

He discovered ahead the first thin light of the exit. He hurried toward it, and emerged from the tunnel in time to step from the path of a local freight that rattled to the coal-mines.

A second track-walker stood not far from a bunk-house. He took the torch from Lark without question.

"All day they've been lookin' in Butte Tunnel," he said. "Maybe they think the Limited is in there."

"It isn't!" blurted Lark. "I'll swear to that!"

The track-walker pinched the torch's wick with finger and thumb.

"The Limited never come through th' tunnel," said he.

Lark thought the man was too positive.

"How do you know?" he asked.

"Well, I know! Haven't they been lookin between here an' Cotopaxi Junction, an' haven't found it? If it ain't west, then it's east of here."

Lark remembered the tramp's statement, that officials of the road were concerned in making away with the Purple Limited. He recalled that they had said the Purple Limited had been camouflaged into another kind of train. And now the track-walker was sure it hadn't reached the tunnel. On the other hand, J. J. D. was sure it had.

With his brain whirling Lark walked from the shadow of Butte Mountain. Suddenly he stopped before a white mile-post. The number on this post was 243.

It was the spot where a train had been robbed by Black Arnold twenty or more years ago. Lark looked around, and studied the lay of the land. His knowledge of civil engineering came to his aid.

The ground sloped on the right-hand side, dipped into a ditch, then rose by gradual steps into a foot-hill where scrub pines showed. There was no chance for a train to go up the grade. It was at least seven per cent.

Lark leaned against the mile-post to survey the southern or left-hand side of the tracks. Here a similar ditch appeared in which was melted snow-water. Beyond the ditch stretched rolling country cloaked in dried grass. A blue-black range cut athwart the sky. A cleft through this range indicated a pass. A yellow path wound down the hills and terminated at Mile Post 243.

Staring into the night mists, Lark discerned, tacked to a tree, a white oblong. It was fully one hundred yards from the mile-post. He took one step toward the tree —then quickly dropped and rolled noiselessly into the nearest ditch.

He raised his head, peered over the edge of the ditch, and saw a form flitting along the yellow path. A small stone rolled down a grade. A dry twig snapped. Lark ducked his head. Again he raised it, this time more cautiously.

A man, heavily clothed, with a cap pulled over his face, stood regarding the white paper on the tree. A mocking laugh

sounded. Lark felt a cold shiver run through his soaked frame. The man's laugh died in a husky throat. His hand shot out, ripped the paper from the tree, crumpled it, and thrust it into his breast. He gazed down the track, thrust forward a strong jaw, and was gone along the yellow path to the cleft in the range.

Lark waited ten minutes. He crawled, foot by foot, toward the tree. He rose in its shadow and looked at the tacks which had held the paper. Two fragments were left. Their edges were serrated. Lark carefully pulled out the tacks and pocketed the pieces of paper. He thrust the tacks back with his thumb.

Moving on bended knees, he returned to the railroad and crossed the tracks. The idea that churned in his brain was a new one. Some one had come from the south, descended to the valley, snatched a message from the tree, and carried it through the cut in the mountain.

Lark had never been in that cut. He had walked to Butte Mountain on more than one occasion. Once, only, he had visited Cotopaxi. The land to the south was wild and uncultivated until a second railroad was reached which ran parallel to the C. M. and W.

This road was at least fifteen miles away. It was called the Anamosa and Southern. There was no connecting spur between the C. M. and W. and the A. and S., save at Anamosa, two hundred and forty-three miles to the east of Lark's present location.

The strange man's actions in ripping the paper from the tree were partly explained when Lark stepped from the tracks at a siding to study the rails and the surrounding land.

An oblong of white paper showed on the side of a box-car. Lark went to it and read distinctly:

$10,000.00 REWARD !!!

The above sum will be paid for *information* leading to the arrest and conviction of the robbers who held up the Purple Limited on the C. M. and W. R. R. and escaped with the *entire train* and *contents*.

$2,000.00 REWARD !!!

This sum will be paid for each train-robber, dead or alive, providing there were not more than five men implicated in the robbery. If more than five men were implicated, a pro rata sum will be paid.

$20,000.00 REWARD !!!

This sum will be paid for information leading to the return of three Combinationless, Newbold Spherical Safes and contents, consisting of $1,006,376.45 in gold notes, silver certificates and minor coins.

Address all communications to J. J. Darrah, Division Superintendent, C. M. and W. R. R., Newhouse.

Lark leaned against the box-car and looked toward the south. He wondered how he could follow the man who tore the proclamation, or whatever it was, from the tree. There seemed no way. He crawled into the car, curled up, and went to sleep with the problem on his mind.

He awoke in bright daylight. An east wind had blown the clouds away. There was a scent of spring in the air. Melting snow was everywhere on the hills. He thrust his head out of the box-car door and gazed around.

He climbed from the car and bathed his face in a puddle of clear water. A switch lamp still burned at the west end of the siding. Lark furrowed his brow as he studied the double-track road-bed.

There was no place, west or east, where a temporary spur could have been constructed from the main line. Both sides of the road-bed sloped to a ditch, then rose at a steep grade. The spoilers of the Purple Limited had not made way with the train in that locality.

Lark wanted to save J. J. D. from disgrace and perhaps arrest. The responsibility for the Purple Limited rested upon the division superintendent's shoulders.

The problem of the Limited was the first great task Lark had ever faced. He enumerated every detail that bore upon the case. He discovered that owing to the few hours' sleep he had been able to take during the last few days, and the consequent excitement of the hunt, his brain was abnormally acute. He measured angles, contours, grades, and rails, using his knowledge of civil engineering to check up each individual detail.

Walking slowly, and watching each tie,

he arrived at the first siding, where ran a rusty line of rails toward a coal-dump and a tumble-down tipple. A few cars stood on this line. Lark stooped to examine their wheels. Some were blocked with lumps of coal. The coal, because of the shadows cast by the cars, was frozen to the rails. The lumps had not been moved in many days. There was other evidence that no train had gone up that spur. A patch of clean snow between two pieces of timber covered the rails. It was uncut by car wheels.

Lark circled the tipple and coal-dump. He came back to the main line fully satisfied that the Limited was not hidden in the mine. He detected in the foot-prints about that a thorough search had been made by railroad employees.

The second mine Lark inspected was deserted. It was up a two per cent grade from the road-bed. No engine or car had gone across the rails in months.

He found at the third mine a group of miners swarming over the tipple. The foreman advanced toward him with an aggressive swagger. A filled car dropped below the chute. Lark stepped aside and rested against a pile of old ties.

"What are you doing here?" asked the foreman.

Lark fingered his ancient coat. "Looking for work," he said.

"You're a husky enough chap," returned the foreman. "Go see the clerk in the mine-shed."

Lark turned from the foreman, and, instead of moving in the direction of the mine-shed, walked across the slag and slate to the road-bed of the C. M. and W.

The aggressive foreman—the numerous miners, the hilly back-country, and a glimpse he obtained of the company's store and cottages, each with a smoking chimney, decide him against any further search at the mines. There were too many sharp eyes around the coal-fields to harbor the thought that the Purple Limited might be hidden here.

Avoiding the tiny station, where a day operator sat staring out of an unwashed window, Lark went west to Tie Siding—a lumber spur leading north. A marshal, the night operator, and a group of lumbermen were on the station-platform. The spur which ran by means of a switch-back into the wooded hills, was blocked by a long line of flat cars. Smoke plumed through the trees in a score of places. Wagons and one auto stood before the rail in front of the general store.

It was out of all reason to suppose that the Purple Limited had been shunted up the lumber spur. The night operator had been on the carpet before J. J. D. at the investigation. He swore that 43 west, the Limited, had not reached Tie Siding.

The marshal approached Lark. A glance of recognition flashed over his face. He remembered the wrecking train when Lark was the first to spring off on the morning of the robbery.

"Anything new?" Lark asked.

"Hell, no! It's gettin' to be a kind o' joke around here. Everybody's askin' everybody what they did with Darrah's pet train."

Lark remained at Tie Siding long enough to eat breakfast with the night operator and question that man to the limit of his patience. The operator followed Lark to the railroad-station. He picked his teeth with the point of a knife.

"Going to Cotopaxi?" he asked.

"Yes," said Lark.

"There's a local, west, due in thirty minutes."

Lark shook his head, and started over the ties. He reached Cotopaxi Junction at noon, and Cotopaxi at two o'clock, where he went into the post-office and inquired at the General Delivery window for any mail.

The clerk handed out a yellow envelope. It was addressed in J. J. D.'s best telegraph-hand—a flowing series of shadeless loops and whorls.

Lark opened the envelope and pulled out a telegraph-blank.

LARKINS:

Have rogues' gallery picture and prison "mug" of Black Arnold. He was released three years ago this coming May. Try to trace him through chief of police, Cotopaxi. They give Arnold's height as five feet eleven—a blue powder-stain between the thumb and index-finger of left hand.

Keep this information Q. T. Let me know by mail if you have run down any clue.

J. J. D.

CHAPTER VIII.

BLACK ARNOLD.

LARK noticed that J. J. D. had omitted one item in his brief note. He had not mentioned Black Arnold's partner, who had been sentenced with him at the time of the robbery at Mile Post 243.

The chief of police at Cotopaxi proved to be a new man who was ignorant of the affairs pertaining to his office. He looked up Black Arnold's record after Lark had explained that Arnold was supposed to be in some town on the C. M. and W.

"Did this Black Arnold have anything to do with the robbing of the Purple Limited?" asked the chief.

"No! I'm just curious about him."

The record in the receiving-book of the county jail showed that a man called Black Arnold, alias Blacky Arnot—had been arrested, tried, and convicted of train-robbery. His sentence was twenty years in State's prison. His partner's name was Edward Darrington, who also received twenty years for the same crime.

Lark peered over the chief's shoulder, and saw a number of notations in red ink on the yellow leaf of the book. "What do those red ink things mean?" he inquired.

"Bad conduct, I believe, while waiting trial. Tried to escape, maybe. Hit a guard. Guess he was a hell-roarer! Book says here he come from Redman County. That's down th' State a piece. It's chock full of moonshiners and squatters."

Lark thanked the chief and left the office. He walked to the railroad-station, wrote a short letter to J. J. D. and dropped it into the slot marked "Railroad Business Only."

He reviewed as he stood on the platform all that he had learned in connection with the disappearance of the Purple Limited. His checking up on the walk from Broad River to Cotopaxi proved that No. 43, westbound, passed through Newhouse, stopped at the water-tank, was reported at Green Creek—Broad River, and possibly at Bettie Tunnel, and from there was seen no more.

It had left the track between Broad River and Cotopaxi Junction. There were no marks on the ties to show where this had happened. No informing eye had reported the fact. Over a million in money was missing—also a perfectly good Atlantic-type loco, and a heavy, purple-colored express car of the latest make.

Lark had youth to call upon. He realized that the deductive brains of the Middle West were engaged upon the problem. He decided to strike out along a new line.

With Nan Arnold, he reasoned, lay the secret of the disappearance of the train. That girl—brat, almost, was probably a tool employed or coerced by the master minds of the robbery. The robbers were undoubtedly ex-convicts. They had long planned the job. No one save a crook skilled in opening strong boxes would have stolen the Purple Limited. It was common knowledge at Newhouse that the safes in the express car could not be opened with nitro-glycerin. Their combinations were set—the spindles and dials removed, and sent to the destination via another train.

Lark boarded a train going East. He knew the conductor, who allowed him to ride in the caboose. He swung off at Mile Post 243. From that point he walked to Broad River Bridge in order to get a new slant on the countryside. Nothing of advantage came to him from this walk.

His letter, sent by railroad mail to J. J. D., was a move in advance of what he intended doing. J. J. D. would be prompt in acting on the request.

Lark struck south from Broad River Bridge, and walked along the wagon road by the river. He timed himself to arrive at the hobo camp at dusk. A fire was burning under the trolley bridge when he reached the embankment.

The same husky-throated tramp began to sing:

Oh, I've been out East,
An' I've been out West—

"Hello!" called Lark, breaking in upon the song. "Have you fellows got room for me to-night?" Lark viewed a large and airy space beneath the trolley bridge.

The three hoboes rose and stared across the fire. They eyed their visitor. "It's th' same chap," said one. "He don't act like a dick. A 'bull' wouldn't have this guy's nerve."

"Come down!" they cried to Lark.

Lark seated himself on a log and watched the tramps finish their game of poker with a greasy deck of cards. An odor floated from the open top of an old kerosene-can. Now and again a hobo laid down his hand and stirred the simmering soup with a pronged stick.

"Bum scoffins," he admitted to Lark. "You go across the bridge an' panhandle th' main stem over there. We need bread an' Java."

Lark glanced at the lights of Green Creek Bottoms. He fished in his pocket and drew forth a half-dollar.

"Here's the price," he said, somewhat amateurishly. "I'm afraid to go over that bridge in the dark. The ties—"

A hobo snatched the money. "Tu hell with th' scoffins," he said. "This 'll buy a pint of white-line. What d'ye say, bo?"

Lark nodded. The hobo climbed the embankment and started across the narrow trestle. He stopped to let a trolley-car go by. He moved on and arrived at Green Creek Bottoms.

An hour later he was back with a pint flask from which he poured four drinks of a pure white liquid. To Lark it tasted like liquid fire.

The remainder of the night was spent listening to ribald songs of the road, pitched in three different keys. Lark fell into a light sleep long after his companions. He awoke at daylight and built a roaring fire. He stood close to the flames and warmed his numbed body.

When the tramps turned over and sat up rubbing their lids, the sun was shining on the muddy waters of the river. Light glistened from the tin roofs of Green River Bottoms. Ice floated down-stream.

Lark turned to go.

"Why don't you stick around?" asked the hoboes.

"I'm going to work."

"W-ork—"

"Sure," said Lark.

He proceeded over the bridge—silenced the old woman at the draw by pretending to be in a great hurry, and walked to where a surveyor and carpenter were measuring the platform for a trolley stop at Green River Bottoms. The surveyor was a bona fide employee of the trolley company. The carpenter had been sent from the railroad-shops at Newhouse. J. J. D. had carried out the instructions in Lark's letter. A close affiliation between the trolley company and the railroad brought about a perfectly logical reason for locating a number of strange workmen at the Bottoms.

Lark applied to the surveyor for a job at any kind of work.

A bargain was struck within sight of two or three curious villagers. Lark took off his coat and began sawing timber.

At noon he took an hour's rest and strolled to the grocery-store. The vinegary-faced proprietor stood talking with two men who sat by the stove and squirted tobacco-juice in an unending stream.

These men were the same he had seen around the stove on his first visit to the store. They looked at his soiled shirt and muddy shoes and trousers, and exchanged glances.

Lark bought a half-pound of cheese, a can of sardines, and ten cents' worth of loose crackers.

"It was about time they was fixin' that platform," said the proprietor to Lark. "You work regularly for th' trolley company?"

"No," admitted Lark, "I'm a carpenter, an' just got th' job. Is there any place I can get a room and board? I can't pay over seven dollars a week."

The storekeeper pressed a finger to his nose. One man rose from the cracker-box near the stove. He stretched his arms and pretended to yawn. His face was scarred and deeply furrowed. Strength of a flexing kind showed in his movements. A half-flash lighted his eyes.

Lark calculated this man to be about five feet eleven inches tall. The glitter that flashed from his steel-blue eyes had never been acquired at honest labor. It was as if a demon had climbed to his cavernous sockets and peered out.

"How about it, Arnold?" asked the storekeeper. "Got board an' a bed at your house for this man?"

"Hell, no!"

Lark drew in his breath with a swift intake. He was face to face with Black Arnold. He saw clearly enough a blue mark at the base of the man's left thumb. Hair extended along the wrist, almost covering this mark.

The man who remained seated by the stove was shorter than Black Arnold—thick of neck and shoulders, and jimmy-jawed. His eyes were slate-gray and penetrating.

A tenseness filled the air of the grocery-store. Lark thought at first it was his own conscience. He measured Arnold. The thought came to him that the sour-faced storekeeper was not a confederate in the train-robbery or whatever else Arnold was bent upon.

Lark said to the storekeeper: "I'm not very particular. Any sort of a room will do."

Black Arnold drawled: "I'd like to put you up, mister, if I had th' spare room. I need th' money." He scrutinized Lark from head to foot.

"Come around again to-night when you knock off work," advised the storekeeper. "I'll ask the widow-woman who keeps one or two boarders if she has a room."

Lark thanked the man, gave an involuntary glance toward Black Arnold, who kept his face in shadow, and walked from the store.

He felt Arnold's stare upon him. There was power in the lurking eyes. The statement about needing the money was disconcerting. Lark thought it over. If Black Arnold had pulled off a successful train-robbery he would hardly need money.

Lark worked at sawing rotten timbers and planing the surfaces of the top planks for the platform. It occurred to him that Black Arnold was under cover. The ex-convict had settled at Green Creek Bottoms, made his plans, connected with his confederates, and struck at a calculated hour. He probably was watching the efforts to locate the missing train.

Arnold had been lurking under the water-tank on the night of the robbery. Nan was sent to find out why the train was late. Arnold boarded the Limited with two pals, threw off the conductor and engineer, and made way with the train.

Lark reasoned the problem to his own satisfaction. The steps in his deduction were Nan, Arnold's former incarceration in State prison for train-robbery, and his general description, which answered for one of the two tall men who climbed on the locomotive at the water-tank.

Arnold would have little fear of any one recalling a train-robbery on the C. M. and W., which took place twenty years before the robbery of the Purple Limited. He could settle down almost anywhere along the railroad without being recognized.

Lark finished surfacing the platform, and joined the surveyor and carpenter, who were sitting on some timbers waiting for a trolley to take them to Newhouse.

"I'll stay in town," he said. "Tell Mr. Darrah everything is all right."

The carpenter promised to tell J. J. D. Lark took possession of the few tools brought out by the two men, wrapped them in a bundle, and walked up the track to the bridge over Broad River.

From this position he could see the shack where Nan lived. Smoke spiraled from a chimney. Chickens scratched the gravel of the back yard. A mangy-looking dog was coiled on the front porch. It rose and stretched when Arnold, followed by the jimmy-jawed man of the grocery-store, came down the road and entered the gate.

Before entering the shack both men looked around. Lark slid down the dirt embankment and made his way to the store.

Swinging the bundle of tools, Lark sought out the proprietor.

"Have you found me a room?" he asked.

"I reckon I have. Go up th' road two houses. Knock on the third one. Tell Mother Bolt I sent you. You'll have to pay in advance," added the storekeeper.

Lark shifted his bundle, and inquired ingeniously:

"I suppose not many outside workmen come here hunting a job?"

"No—not many. Since th' war business is bad."

Lark weighed his next question. Despite the dour look on the groceryman's face he seemed willing to talk.

"Are there rooms in town for ten or twelve carpenters and helpers? Could that man who was in here at noon and said he needed money put up a boarder or two?"

"What would ten or twelve carpenters do in this town?" asked the storekeeper.

"The trolley company is going to fix the bridge," answered Lark.

"Oh, it is! Well, we can put 'em up somehow, I reckon. Arnold, the man you mean, is filled up now. He has two roomers in his house. Th' little fellow who was with him is one of the boarders. Then there's the other."

Lark dared not ask the man more questions. He realized that the squatters of Green Creek Bottoms were on the lookout for revenue collectors. His guise as carpenter for the trolley company would be effective if he minded his own business—hunted around for mild diversion, and worked hard in sight of the villagers.

He left the store, found Mother Bolt's house, paid her seven dollars in advance for his week's board, deposited his tools in a small, whitewashed room, and sat down to eat a fair supper. Mother Bolt was a sad-eyed woman weighted with overwork. The one other boarder told Lark that he owned the barber-shop and pool-room up the street. His breath, over the table, was like a gust from a distillery. His face, in repose, resembled a wax figure's, without a particle of expression.

Lark learned during the supper that the man's name was Jack Degroote.

He accompanied the talkative barber to the pool-room. A sign above a chair read:

SHAVE	**25 Cents**
HAIR CUT . . .	**50 Cents**
SHAVE and HAIRCUT .	**60 Cents**

Lark picked up a billiard-cue and started knocking the balls around a set of dead cushions. He intended cultivating the society of the barber with a specific purpose in mind: By a little dallying he was sure to learn about the squatters of Green Creek Bottoms.

Black Arnold had chosen a quiet enough spot when he settled at the Bottoms after his prison term. The squatters did not realize who he was. His boarders were in all likelihood his pals in crime. Nan did all the housework and the preparing of the meals. She would hardly be prevailed upon to inform against her father or his cronies.

Degroote trimmed and lighted the lamps in the barber-shop. He offered to play a game of bottle-pool. Lark accepted. They played two games. A scratching sounded at a rear window. The barber racked his cue and crossed the floor. He lifted a shade, pulled up a sash, and whispered to some one on the outside of the building.

Lark caught the thin note of a girl's voice. The barber went to a door, unlocked it, and passed into a back room from which he emerged carrying a flask wrapped in brown paper.

The small-town "speak-easy" was in operation. Lark heard the clink of coins. A penny or dime dropped to the floor. The girl said:

"It's every cent we've got in the house, Jack."

The window was jerked down. The blind rustled into place. Degroote reached for his cue.

"I guess I won't play any more tonight," said Lark, counting out what he owed the barber. "I've got a big day's work ahead of me. I'm going to bed."

He lingered a moment at the front door to lull any suspicions the barber might have about his sudden departure. He spoke about the hard work expected of a carpenter in the dead of winter, then he said good night and moved around the frame building, waded the muddy street, walked past the grocery-store, and hurried in the direction of the river.

Nan, with the wrapped flask under her arm, was running across a field toward a light that shone in the kitchen of Arnold's shack.

"Wait a minute," called Lark.

He saw her turn and clutch the flask. Recognition came flooding into her eyes. "It's you!" she exclaimed.

Lark held out his hand.

"What are you doing here?" asked Nan.

"Working on the trolley road. I gave up my job checking cars at Newhouse."

The girl's hazel stare became accusing.

"That's a lie!" she blurted. "You've come to the Bottoms for another reason."

Lark glanced at the kitchen light, then at the flask under Nan's arm.

"Suppose I told you I was a revenue officer."

"You're not! You're a railroad—"

Nan thrust Lark away with a shaking hand. She bent her head. A voice, heavy with menace, rolled over the field. The kitchen door opened wide. A man's form blocked the inner light.

"Come here, you brat!" resounded through the night.

Nan, despite Lark's detaining call, was drawn toward the figure in the doorway.

"Say nothing about me," he warned.

She climbed a fence, hesitated, then nodded, and ran across the yard with the bottle clutched tightly at her breast.

Lark threw himself face downward in the slush. He waited until the door closed with a loud bang.

There sounded from within the house when he rose a cry as if a punishing blow had been meted out to Nan Arnold.

CHAPTER IX.

THE FIGHT.

BLACK ARNOLD'S shack reared its unpainted sides within a stone's throw of the creek. The river was at least a quarter-mile away. The ground before the shack sloped into a frozen bog.

Lark watched the windows, saw a shade come down with a jerk, and afterward heard loud voices. It was evident to him that Black Arnold and the two boarders were drinking the liquor which Nan had brought from the small-town speak-easy.

A lodger began singing:

> Oh, th' Empire State must learn to wait,
> An' th' Cannon Ball go hang!
> When th' westbound's ditched—

The voice stopped as if a hand had been laid over the drunken singer's mouth. Lark crept upon the snow to the fence that was back of the chicken-yard. He heard Black Arnold roar:

"Chop that stuff! I'll bust you if you don't!"

The surly answer was lost behind the pine walls of the shack. Two men moved across a shade. The shack shook when they clinched. Then they parted and stood eying each other.

Lark crawled away for fear the rear door would open. He wondered who had dared thwart Black Arnold. The man whose shadow crossed the shade was taller than Nan's father. His bulk seemed greater. He it was who had struck the girl when she had brought the liquor from the barber-shop.

No other song sounded in the shack. Lark circled the tumble-down fence, veered away from the front yard, and suddenly saw what had escaped his attention during his former observations.

A telephone-wire ran into the shack. In fact, two wires were strung from a pole in the street. They were standard equipment of the Newhouse and Cotopaxi Telephone Company. Lark saw a lightning-arrester on the next pole, but one, to Black Arnold's house.

He breathed on his chilled hands and looked at these wires. They placed a new difficulty in his way. Black Arnold or the boarders could connect with almost any town in the state. It was possible for them to keep in close touch with the search being made for the Purple Limited.

Lark was fully satisfied that Black Arnold; the short, heavy-set man whom he had seen at the grocery-store; and the other boarder were the three who had climbed aboard the Limited at the water-tank.

Nan was in the hands of ex-convicts, and worse. No wonder the girl seemed furtive and wild. Her life was in danger.

Lark had an abiding conviction that deep in Nan's breast lurked a resentment against her father and his friends. He had no direct confirmation to this theory. The girl had spoken loyally enough. There was that, however, to buoy Lark up. He realized that one word from Nan would bring about a murder, or near murder, at

Green Creek Bottoms. Black Arnold would see that a railroad detective was either driven, or carried in a box, from the village.

Nan had kept silent. She could be seen again. Lark went over the fields and entered Mother Bolt's boarding-house. He tossed and turned in his uncomfortable bed until daylight came.

The carpenter from the car-shops at Newhouse appeared for work, without the trolley company's surveyor. Lark joined him, after breakfast, and began sawing new planks for the platform.

The view from the elevation included, not only all of the shacks and lanes of Green Creek Bottoms, but also a sweeping vista of Broad River Valley, which was mantled with snow.

The hobo's fire across the river sent up a blue spiral of smoke. The framework of the C. M. and W. bridge loomed through the morning mist. North showed a third bridge, over which wagons and pedestrains crossed the river on a State road.

Lark caught a good look at Black Arnold's towering boarder when the man came out of the back door of the shack, kicked at the dog, and went into the chicken-house.

He was a hulking figure, muscular, square-jawed, and deliberate in his movements. His hair was brushed straight up from a slanting forehead. His shirt was torn.

Nan appeared in a gingham dress. The girl edged around the shack and stood at the front gate. She looked longingly toward the river. She climbed the gate and started to swing back and forth. Lark, despite the distance, heard the squeak of rusty hinges.

A rough voice from within the chicken-house was followed by the appearance of the big man. He looked around the back yard, glared at the dog, and called for Nan.

She turned a startled face toward the shack, jumped from the gate, and hurried through the front door. The man strode up the steps into the kitchen. A smudge of smoke from a chimney announced that Nan's efforts were toward appeasing the man with breakfast.

Lark went over his plans when he resumed work on the platform. He reasoned somewhat vaguely that the girl could be induced to tell what she knew concerning her father and the boarders at the shack. Her evidence, coupled with Black Arnold's record, might solve the mystery of the Purple Limited.

It would be well to know, however, just who the big man and the short, heavy-set man were. There was a slight chance that one of them was Black Arnold's partner in the old robbery at Mile Post 243.

Lark wrote a long letter to J. J. D. He explained that if a guard from State prison, or a detective familiar with the criminals of the State, would come to Green Creek Bottoms there was every chance to identify a bunch of crooks who were probably guilty of sticking up the Limited.

"Tell the detective or guard," he added, "to bring a small pair of field-glasses. Also," he wrote, "it might be well that a new girl be put in charge of the telephone central at Green Creek Bottoms so that she could listen in on any messages going to or coming from Black Arnold's shack.

Lark finished the letter by stating: "It's Black Arnold all right, J. J. D. Same height, same name, same blue scar at the base of the left thumb—as you wrote about. He's pretending he has no money. I don't believe any of the plunder has been taken from the safes."

J. J. D., always prompt, sent a detective, guised as a carpenter, on the day after Lark mailed the letter by handing it to a trolley conductor who promised to drop it in a box at Newhouse.

This detective, staggering under the weight of two pieces of timber, heard what Lark had to say, then lay down across the platform, pillowed his head on a block of wood, and pretended to sleep.

He drew a pair of high-powered glasses from under his coat and watched Black Arnold's shack for more than an hour.

Lark, busy with the timber, told the detective to look out for the sun's flash on the glasses. The sleuth nodded grimly. He kept staring beneath his arm toward the shack.

Black Arnold appeared in shirt-sleeves. The ex-convict went around the house and

stood by the front gate. His gaze was on the river.

"Don't know that fellow," said the detective. "He answers Arnold's general description, but he was before my time."

Arnold was joined by the short, heavy-set man whom Lark had seen in the grocery-store.

"Ah," said the detective, "that's 'Butch' Cassidy! Butch would know me if we met."

"Who is he?" asked Lark, pretending to measure a long plank with a jointed rule.

"Butch is a stick-up. He did two bits in prison. He was mixed in the Argyle murder at Short Hills. He's been missing from the State for two or three years."

"Is he wanted?"

"N-o."

The detective watched the two men go into the house. He cleaned the glasses, lay down in a new position between a beam and a pile of lumber, and waited for further developments.

It was a half-hour after Black Arnold went into the shack before the big man came out the back door, leaped the fence, and walked rapidly in the direction of the grocery-store. The detective clicked shut his glasses, threw his arm over his head, and smiled at Lark.

"It's a fine outfit!" he exclaimed. "Black Arnold, Butch Cassidy, known as the Killer, and Big Ed Kelly."

"You mean that the—"

"I mean that we've just seen Big Ed Kelly."

"What did he ever do?" asked Lark.

"He's the best heavy man in the State. He did time in prison. He only goes after big touches. We thought he was dead. Now, here he is, hooked up with Butch and Black Arnold, if that is Black Arnold."

"They're all three ex-convicts?"

"Sure! I've a mind to phone to Newhouse, get help, and pinch the whole bunch on suspicion."

Lark shook his head. "You haven't anything on them yet," he suggested.

"No, that's right. Well, we will! They're th' ones that took the Purple Limited. They're th' only mob that is clever enough to turn a trick like that."

The detective looked toward the grocery-store, where Big Ed Kelly had vanished. "That crook," he said, "is three times dangerous. There's few men in the underworld good enough to carry his tools. You can bet th' job is covered up."

Lark thought of Black Arnold's statement in the grocery-store that he needed money. He remembered Nan telling the barber that she was giving him every cent they had. The two instances, coupled with the poverty-stricken shack, showed that the thieves were prepared with an alibi in case of arrest.

The detective went to New house by the next trolley. He told Lark that a new telephone-operator would be sent out to take the place of the girl at Green Creek Exchange. The new girl would keep a careful record of all telephone calls coming from the stores or shacks at the Bottoms.

Lark went by the Gas, Electric, and Telephone Building when he left off work. It was the only structure in Green Creek Bottoms with a stone front. He wondered if the records of the Telephone Company would show any calls made by Black Arnold upon the day of the train-robbery. He reserved this idea until he could communicate with J. J. D.

Dinner over at Mother Bolt's found him with nothing to do except watch the ex-convict's shack or play bottle-pool with the barber. Lark decided to watch the shack. He walked along the trolley embankment until he reached the bridge. Two lights shone in the shack. A blind was up in the kitchen.

Black Arnold and Butch came out and moved through the gloom in the direction of the grocery-store. Lark hid behind the embankment. He saw the kitchen door open, then close. A figure glided past the chicken-house.

Nan appeared near the trolley-platform. She climbed the steps and appeared to be waiting for a car. Lark hurried in her direction. He saw her frightened look when she recognized him.

"Did that man strike you?" Lark blurted.

The girl shook her head. She pulled

the edge of a shawl over her eyes. She raised a corner.

"Won't you go away?" she urged. "Please go back to Newhouse. You're in great danger here."

Lark shrugged his shoulders. "I've got as much right here as anybody, I'm working for the trolley road!"

"I don't believe it!"

Lark pointed to the planks which he had sawed and planed that day. He held out his calloused hands. "I am," he insisted.

The girl drew away and leaned against a railing. She looked toward the shack; then gazed across the trolley bridge.

"I wish a car would come," she said.

Lark detected a note of fear in her voice. "Why?" he asked her. "Are you running away from the brute that struck you?"

Nan shuddered. She threw back the shawl.

"My father," she said bitterly, "shouldn't have such men in the house. Edward Kelly is a coward!"

"What does he do for a living?"

The old loyalty to Black Arnold showed in the girl's eyes. "He don't do anything in the winter. He works in the summer. He has a lot of girls. Have you ever heard of Ed Kelly's girls?"

Lark shook his head. "No. What about them?"

The girl touched her neck suggestively. "He always marks his girls. There's Sally, who he marked, and there's a girl at Newhouse who plays a piano in a movie. I don't want to be one of Ed Kelly's girls. Everybody would know it."

Lark heard a trolleys' bell on the other side of the bridge. He grasped Nan's arm. "Where were you going?" he asked.

"Father told me to go to Newhouse and get the newspapers. It 'll take until twelve o'clock to get them. That's where I am going."

Lark glanced up the track. He swung toward the grocery-store. No one seemed to be watching him. "I'll jump aboard the trolley," he said, "and have the conductor bring out the papers on his next trip. I'll say they're for me. Then you and I can take a walk along the river."

Nan assented without hesitancy. It was evident to Lark that the long trolley trip to Newhouse was distasteful to her. He boarded the car, gave the conductor a quarter, and obtained his promise that he would throw the papers off when he passed again.

Nan was crouched in the shelter of a pile of lumber. Lark climbed the platform and called for her. She came out, took his arm, and turned toward the river path.

"Don't ask me any questions," she pleaded. "Just tell me about yourself. You and I shouldn't be seen together."

"Does your father suspect me?"

"He suspects everybody."

The answer was direct enough. Lark guided the girl through a narrow place in the path and stood with her where they could see the soft gleam of a winter's moon on the ice-flecked waters of Broad River.

"Tell me," said Lark, "if your father is living straight? If he is, there's nothing for you to worry about."

"It isn't my father that I'm worried about. I never saw him until three years ago. It's Ed Kelly and the other man, who are always hitting me. They call me a jade. They drink and talk. They have girls—both of them. Why should they beat me? Why should Ed Kelly say he's going to mark me some day and then everybody will know who I belong to?"

Lark was at a loss for an answer. He felt a warmth go out for Nan. Nan never had a chance. She was the plaything and slave of three desperate men. She might possibly round on them and tell what she knew. Loyalty showed in her hazel glance of defiance when Lark asked:

"Don't you want money and clothes for telling what you know about the robbery of the Purple Limited? I know you know all about it!"

"So you're a detective?"

"No, I'm not, Nan. I'm your friend."

The girl laughed bitterly. "I have no friends," she said. "I want no clothes, or money."

"You have an education."

"Yes, what I got for myself. I tried to do right. It was no use. Father came, mother died, blows began, and now they say I'm almost a woman."

Lark looked at Nan. Her clothes were

neatly mended. Her shawl was of wool and silk. Her neck, where it was exposed, was clean.

He thought of Ed Kelly, and the mark the crook was going to make on the girl. His fists clenched. Slowly he turned and glared toward the shack. He was in time. A shadow moved along the river's edge. A man stopped, bent with hands on knees, then straightened and lurched toward Nan.

Ed Kelly had happened on a discovery. Sneeringly the crook muttered when he came up to Nan:

"Oh, she's got another papa on th' Salt Lake line!"

Lark dodged a vicious blow when Nan screamed a warning. He sidestepped in time to avoid Ed Kelly's second punch. The third, driven with the force of a pile-driver, struck Lark in the stomach. He went down, sprang up, dodged, and sent a swing to the crook's head.

Silently Ed Kelly waded through Lark's blows and again struck him in the stomach. Lark fell over backward. He felt a rib smash when the thief kicked viciously. Again he rose, saw red, and began flailing the air. One or two of his blows staggered Ed Kelly. The others were useless.

Deliberately the thug started around Lark like a cooper at a barrel. He was a boxer with a championship punch. Lark had youth, without much science, to call upon. He rocked Kelly's jaw. He pounded one ear until it began to swell. Then, and still more deliberately, the crook stepped back, swung, feinted, and finished Lark with a straight drive.

The blow landed him in a puddle of ice and water. Lark rolled to the edge, and started crawling out. He saw Big Ed Kelly chucking Nan under the chin.

The girl edged away, came to Lark's side, where he sat on the snow, and, dipping a handkerchief into the water, bound it around his forehead, where the last blow landed.

"I'll get him!" cried Lark.

Nan leaned and whispered:

"Don't get up. He will kill you."

Lark attempted to rise. He swayed, felt the girl's arm around his waist, fell to the snow.

When he lifted his head, Nan and Big Ed Kelly were walking toward the shack. The thief had said no word during the fight. Lark remembered this fact through the hours of a sleepless night.

It was snowing at Green Creek Bottoms when Lark went to the trolley platform on the morning after his fight with Big Ed Kelly.

The crook had left his mark—rather two of them. Lark's forehead was bruised, his breast ached where a hammerlike blow had ruptured the flesh.

He was not finished with that fight. He intended facing Big Ed on the first opportunity and trying next time for the thug's belt instead of a cast-iron jaw. Big Ed was rather long around the belt.

Lark found the same carpenter at work. Assisting him was a new man, who looked slightly familiar. Lark looked at this man, and nodded. He was the detective who had brought out the field-glasses and identified Ed Kelly as an old-time crook.

The carpenter pointed to a bundle of unopened papers.

"Found them on the platform," he told Lark. "Some conductor must have thrown them off."

Lark unbound the string, glanced over the white-topped roofs of Green Creek Bottoms, and spread out the papers. He found two items of interest.

The search for the Purple Limited was still on with a vengeance. J. J. D., in an interview, promised results within forty-eight hours. The road-bed from Newhouse to Cotopaxi was being examined by a trained corps of men from a technical college. Also every train and car on the entire line had been inspected by car inspectors.

The result of the examination and inspection was being withheld from the newspapers.

Lark presumed that Black Arnold and Big Ed Kelly were keeping in touch with the situation by means of daily newspapers.

He reread a second item before he bundled the papers up and laid them on the rail where Nan could get them.

This item stated that, lured by an enormous reward, private detectives were shad-

owing many prominent railroad men in Newhouse and Cotopaxi.

Lark thought of J. J. D. The division superintendent might be arrested at any moment and charged with being an accessory to the robbery. "How else," the paper asked, "could a train disappear from a modern two-track, except through the connivance of railroad officials?"

The detective discussed none of his theories with Lark. He watched the shack all day while pretending to assist the carpenter. At noon he strolled into town. He came back and resumed work.

"Tough place!" he admitted at nightfall. "The whole town seems to be suspicious of this work up here."

Lark put on his coat, bundled his tools, and asked the detective if he were going to remain at Green Creek Bottoms.

"No," was the answer. "You keep your eyes open and let me have your report in the morning."

Lark ate dinner with the barber and went with him to the pool-room. Snow was still falling. A nip of frost came from the north. The river was party filled with ice floes.

Sitting in the barber's chair, near the pool-table, Lark asked the barber to trim his hair. A door opened when the operation was half finished. Big Ed and Black Arnold came in, stamped their feet, and picked up billiard-cues.

Immediately the room grew tense with something about to happen.

This story will be continued in next week's issue of the ARGOSY-ALLSTORY WEEKLY, the consolidated title under which both magazines will appear hereafter as one.

ANDY TODD buckled the straps on his two big piles of pelts and carried the packs out of the cabin. He loaded the sledge and harnessed the dogs. Then he went back for his mitts.

When he was coming out again his squaw stopped him at the door.

"Andy," she questioned softly, "you come back—when?"

Young, "Little Shadows" was, not more than eighteen, and, for an Indian woman, rather out of the ordinary. Her garb was not that of the Redskin woman, but the cloth blouse and skirt of civilization, and they were clean; her figure was exceptionally symmetrical in outline, and her features, while typical, lacked much of the native sensual coarseness; her straight, black hair had not been greased, and was combed and gathered in a neat knot on the back of her neck.

Also her eyes were different. When she stopped Andy at the door and looked up into his face there was something in her eyes that was not characteristic; something—something deep and dark and vague, like the depths of a forest lake in the moonlight.

Something in Little Shadows's eyes there was that Andy had never noticed there before. He looked past her, avoiding her gaze.

"Let's see, now," he mused thoughtfully. "It's eighteen miles to Steel, and eighteen back—thirty-six miles. It won't take me longer than an hour to sell those pelts and buy the few things we need. H-m." He pulled on his mitts. "I'll be back—" He caught up his whip.

Then as he stepped through the door—

"I'll be back to-morrow."

To-morrow?

The drone looks up at the rising sun and yawns; and goes back to sleep again. He'll go to work—to-morrow. The procrastinator lays down his tools, and frowns. He'll finish the job—to-morrow. The chronic cadger wrinkles his brow in evident consideration of his financial circumstances, and says: "I'll pay you back—to-morrow." And to-morrow never comes.

Andy Todd was going back to his trap-line and his cabin and his squaw—to-morrow. When he reached Steel he would sell his dog-team and board the first train for civilization. He was done in the bush.

Andy yelled to the dogs and flicked the leader with the tip of his long whip. He was done in the bush. Done with his trap-line and cabin; for it was early spring, and, with the exception of the musquash, the trapping season was practically over. Done with his traps and outfit; they had been second-hand to begin with, and he would not be using them again. Then, too, he had been very successful, and the returns from his two big packs of pelts would very much more than reimburse him for the loss of his outfit.

And he was done with his squaw.

Andy glanced back at the curling smoke from the chimney of his cabin and grinned. He was done with Little Shadows. Down in civilization there would be no wood to cut, or fires to build on cold, frosty mornings; the heating system in the boarding-house where he lived in the city was steam. Down in civilization there would be no pelts to be peeled from half-frozen trapped animals, and carefully stretched; he worked on the lake docks in the summer. And a red-skinned, frowsy, broken-English-speaking Indian woman as his wife was impossible in civilization.

Nor was he guilty of anything very much out of the way in leaving his squaw. In fact, the "arrangement," as it was known, was quite common. Indian girls were very eager to be white men's wives, and a gallon of whisky and a cheap rifle was the father's price; they were great workers, and never talked unnecessarily, and were quite apt at learning to cook the white man's way; and then, when spring came, and the trapper wanted to get away, the squaw accepted without question his word that he would be back—to-morrow.

Just an arrangement it was. There was no binding ceremony. For even had the native code demanded benefit of clergy, the clergy were few and far between in that country. And should the squaw be exceptional enough to ask for banns and a band, all that was necessary for the white man to answer was:

"Sure! To-morrow."

A profitable arrangement, too, for both the white man and the red. The white man got a slave, a very willing slave, for the winter, for her board and clothes; and the red man got a gallon of whisky and a new rifle, and one less mouth to feed when food was hard to get. While the squaw—

"Hunh! A squaw!"

Andy Todd sold his pelts and dog-team when he reached Steel, and caught the first train for civilization. He stood on the rear observation vestibule when the train pulled out. Stood there, looking back on a section of the bush wherein he had spent nearly seven months, and fingered in his pocket a roll of money. He had come up there with three hundred dollars. He was going back with three thousand. He had no regrets.

Back in his cabin on his trap-line in the bush, his squaw, Little Shadows, was waiting for him to come back. To come back—Andy grinned. Yes; he was going back. He was going back—to-morrow!

To-morrow?

But "to-morrow" does come—sometimes. The "to-morrow" of our youth becomes the "to-day" of our gray hairs—sometimes.

Andy Todd went back.

Andy prospered in life. He wasn't a

wastrel, and the usual dissipations so alluring to young men of his age were not sufficiently so to prove an irresistible attraction. His early years had known nothing but poverty, and the luxuries of life, expensive clothing and food and amusements, were outside his simple tastes. And he was possessed of a good, keen brain for business, and that three thousand dollars he had won from his trap-line was just the start he needed. He invested that three thousand in Lake Superior copper-mining stocks, and began to climb.

Lake Superior copper stocks were new on the market, and went begging. Little was known of the North Shore district, and few cared to risk their money in wilderness mines. But Andy had been born and brought up in the north country, and had never lost faith in it, and some of the old-timers he had known all his life assured him that the copper was there. So he invested his three thousand dollars, and sold out a year later for thirty thousand.

Then the Porcupine district was exploited, and gave him another boost. Twenty-five thousand dollars invested doubled itself in less than two years. Andy Todd, then, became known as Mr. Andrew Todd.

And that was only the beginning.

After that Andy's climb was rapid and spectacular. Every investment he made paid dividends. Mines, oil, real estate—everything that he focussed his keen gray eyes upon piled up for him in the banks its acknowledgment in cold gold dollars. Step by step he climbed the ladder of financial success, till few there were above him. Till Andy Todd, the dock-hand, became known as Andrew Todd, Esq., rated in Bradstreets as one of the country's few millionaires. That three thousand dollars Andy had garnered on his trap-line when he was twenty-five years younger, had grown in thirty years to one and a half millions.

But that—that one and a half millions of cold gold dollars was all he got out of life. In the concentrating of his mind and the centering of his whole ambition on the single-track purpose of acquiring dollars, everything else worth while in living had been ignored or ruthlessly thrust aside. Social position that could have been his for the seeking was sneered at; his bachelor's quarters in a big hotel was not a home, but a place to eat and sleep; the books in his book-cases gathered dust. An hour was made up of sixty minutes. His working hours were worth so many dollars per. He didn't have time.

With the inevitable result.

At fifty-five years of age Andy Todd was a broken old man. He had to be helped in and out of his car, and he walked—hobbled, with the aid of two stout sticks. His food was prepared by a dietician, and weighed out carefully for each and every meal. His doctor's bill was rendered quarterly.

Nor was that all. His hair, the little that was left of it, was white—a dingy yellowish white. His face, the little of it conspicuously apart from his scraggly eyebrows and mustache and beard, was mummified—corrugated with a thousand leathery wrinkles. His hands were talons, the thick-nailed ends of his big knotted fingers warped permanently inward. His venal ambition had caricatured itself in his merely human body.

Andy Todd had degenerated, from a man to a character, in thirty years.

And then—then, to-morrow came. The "to-morrow" of Andy Todd's youth became the "to-day" of his gray hairs. He went back to the cabin of his old trap-line in the bush.

A prospector uncovered a lode of copper eighteen miles north of Steel on Andy Todd's old trap-line. Andy Todd's engineer investigated it, and gave an enthusiastic verdict. Andy paid a half a million dollars for it.

No; sentiment found no place in the purchase of that mine. Thirty years of piling up cold gold dollars had relegated to the limbo of unprofitable things all memories of Andy's youth. He bought that property as he had bought others: on the strength of his engineer's report, and drew a check for it. It was only and merely a business proposition.

The copper was there. Copper was worth money. The find was a rich one.

But when Andy started development on

that mine, came trouble. Andy's engineer walked into the head office, and announced:

"We're having some trouble up there, Mr. Todd. There's an old squaw living in a shack right on the spot where we want to go down, and she refuses to move. She—"

"Refuses—hell!" Andy roared. "If she won't move off, throw her in the river!"

"But," the engineer expostulated, "she's toting a rifle, and—"

"No buts about it!" bellowed Andy. "Burn the shack! Get her drunk and drown her! Do something! That's what you're there for! Now get out!"

The engineer got out. He quit Andy's employ right there. He was a man.

Andy hired another engineer. But the shaft didn't go down. The second engineer, too, was a man.

Then Andy advertised for and hand-picked an engineer who would obey orders—for a price—and went north with him.

But the shaft didn't go down. Andy Todd had paid a half a million dollars for that property, but as long as he lived there would never be a dollar's worth of copper taken out of that lode.

Yes; Andy recognized the place. Thirty years of piling up cold gold had failed to kill quite all the memories of his youth; and those thirty years had wrought but little noticeable change in the bush where he had garnered his first three thousand dollars. The river still ran in its old channel; the big birches on the river-banks were still standing; and the shack that housed the squaw was the cabin that he himself had built.

But old associations made no impression on Andy.

He hobbled up to the cabin and pushed open the door.

The cabin was empty.

Andy turned to his new engineer and ordered:

"Burn it down!"

The engineer felt for a match.

But the match was never applied. The cabin fell in on itself fifty years later.

Came the sharp "cluck" of a working rifle-breech, and Andy turned his head and saw the squaw. She was sitting on the ground about twenty yards to the right of the cabin, her rifle to her shoulder.

"Wait!" Andy threw up his hand. "You stay here; I'll talk to her first. I've had a little experience with squaws, and maybe—" He stopped. Memories were coming back to Andy. He hobbled toward the squaw.

Little Shadows was tiny and old and wizen. The blazing eyes of a vacant mind. Thirty years of waiting for "to-morrow" had caricatured themselves in Little Shadows's merely human body.

Andy's hand went into his pocket. He was going to try persuasion first.

"One hundred dollars!" he barked. "I'll give you one hundred dollars and a gallon of whisky and a new rifle if you'll clear out?"

Little Shadows stared.

Andy rattled noisily the gold coins in his hand.

"I'll make it two hundred," he snarled. "Two hundred dollars, and a gallon of whisky and a new—"

He stopped short.

Little Shadows moved. With her hands on the ground on either side of her, Little Shadows lifted her body up and sidewise and set it down again. And behind her former position—hidden by her body it had been—stood a small slab of white stone. The usual small, cheap, white, chiselled slab of stone that is used to mark a grave.

Andy glanced at the stone, and his eyes caught a familiar name chiselled in its top. He leaned forward and read:

TODD

Sacred to the Memory of Andy Todd

Only Son of Andy Todd and Little Shadows

Aged 7 Days

We Will Meet Again

To-morrow

The gold coins in Andy Todd's hand slipped through his talonlike fingers.

For one brief second Andy tensed rigid. For just one brief second. And yet, in Andy's mind that second was thirty years.

For thirty years Andy Todd had been

gathering cold gold dollars. He was worth a million and a half. But that—that million and a half of cold gold dollars was all that he had got out of life. Everything else in life worth living for had been ignored or ruthlessly thrust aside. Everything—a home, his own fireside and wife and children—everything! In that one brief second Andy realized.

Andy Todd never straightened up again. The stooping position he had assumed to read the inscription on the stone that marked the grave of his only son was with him for the few remaining years of his life. The "to-morrow" of his youth had found him in his gray hairs.

Andy hobbled back to the cabin. With a sickly gray pallor on his mumified face, and his eyes fixed straight ahead, he turned his back on Little Shadows and the grave of his only son, and hobbled back to the cabin. And behind him, lying on the grass beside the white headstone that marked the grave, lay scattered a handful of cold gold coins.

The engineer met Andy at the cabin door. He pointed to the cabin and grinned.

"When," he questioned shortly, "will I burn it down?"

Andy Todd stopped and looked toward him. Looked toward him, but not at him. For in Andy's mind but one idea remained. The idea chiselled in the headstone on the grave of his only son:

"We will meet again—to-morrow."

The engineer repeated his question.

"When," he asked, "will I burn it down?"

And then Andy answered.

Andy Todd's lips moved, parted, framed a word. Just one word. The last word of the one idea in his mind. He said:

"To-morrow."

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THE SILVER BIRCH

THE sky your mirror is, beloved one;
The stars the candles in your dressing-room.
I watch you—as the husband earth may watch the sun—
While self-absorbed and exquisite, quiet,
You place the vain black patches à Pierrette,
And blanch your round cool arms with powder-bloom.
A white gown made on satin loom
Clings to your slender silhouette.

Now in the silvered ballroom of the night
And lustrous candelabra of the moon
While waltzes throb from reed-grass strings in tune—
The wind has drawn on them a bow so light!—
I see you stand against the forest dark
White, gleaming, marvelous—a lark
Of vision. Trees are crowding toward you.
(Dear one, that lofty pine-tree, what has he to sue?)
I feel the lure of your green-plumed fan
As it in slow and rhythmic cadence waves;
The scorn and ardor of your swaying grace.
But dead! That pine-tree near you—in my place—
He has bent toward you; whispers. Ah, I scan
In vain—your face—for the rebuke my whole heart craves.
Instead you murmur low together, and you laugh—
Is that the deep and trembling laughter lovers quaff?

Kathryn White Ryan.

Jungle Love

by Raymond Lester

Author of "Dust to Dust," "Walls of Clay," the *Nan Russell* series, etc.

PRECEDING CHAPTERS BRIEFLY RETOLD

JULIE SOMERS, stenographer, decided to seize opportunity. At Fourteenth Street the girl came face to face with Artie Falwell. Cocktails, dinners, jazz, and Artie's artful insinuations followed. Julie was a willing butterfly on the wheel. The next morning she awoke with fear and apprehension. She had an appointment for the evening with Artie.

Ernest Kennedy had witnessed Artie's Sabine maneuver of the day before. All day Sunday he hung about the girl's corner, and when Artie met her, he followed them to the door of the Mogolia.

Once inside the hotel Artie led Julie to a room on the upper floor and left her while he "arranged a nice little surprise party." After an hour's wait she discovered she was locked in. When Artie effected her "rescue" he proposed that they elope at once.

For an ostensible honeymoon they took ship for South America. Before the boat sailed Julie overheard certain remarks of Artie. She also identified a two-dollar bill. The girl was in possession of her husband's number, but not of his full sinister intentions.

On a shell-strewn coast of Brazil in a tiny cabin Julie sat and tried to piece together some coherent plan of action, while out on the Atlantic beyond the horizon, a ship was carrying away the man who had abandoned her.

CHAPTER XVI.

A LOST PROSPECT.

IN the old barbarian days young girls were sold to the highest bidder in the open market-place. Right here, at his elbow, within reach of his hand, was a man trying to sell his own wife. Not yet had the descendants of those ancient, hell-spawned barterers been stamped out.

"David, my boy," he thought with growing anger and disgust, "you're not in the habit of butting in; but this is where you take a hand or—choke. There are deals that are raw and deals that are rotten. This is one that does not go through. I'll show these birds that a nephew of Uncle Sam is around and kicking, be darned if I won't."

David Stern had seen Julie when the Falwells had landed. Now—she was for sale! The bargain was being made. Literally and bluntly speaking, the drunken Artie offered to sell Julie for a thousand milreis, about three hundred dollars. The price may be considered extortionate or dirt cheap. At any rate, there was present one white man who had no intention of sitting idly by while a flagrant piece of nastiness was being hatched. David Stern was a salesman; but he dealt in steel and iron, and no man could traffic in souls or barter a girl while he was within earshot.

Artie had overindulged in sugared water and oxygene, a camouflaged concoction of wormwood that passes the customs of S. A., while absinthe, its plainly labeled twin, is sternly and hypocritically prohibited. This product of Algeria speedily plays havoc with the brain cells of those who toy or soak in its seductive, opalescent potency; and Arthur having talked loudly, incautiously and definitely to the greasy, swine-eyed Turk who roamed from seaport to seaport trading cheap jewelry and live stock, gave himself away to ears he had not reckoned with.

David Stern came round the screen.

Too far gone in bemusement of his senses by the imp of pale-green poison and the

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for August 21.

human whirlwind who descended upon him and tore him away from his confab with the Turk, Artie never quite remembered how he had been transferred from the café table to a prone but appropriate position in the gutter. The Turk, wise in his crafty abstention from an overdose of alcohol in any fascinating guise, knew all about it; but he had not stayed to tell. From his shelter beneath the marble-topped table, he saw the whole affair, and crept hurriedly away before Artie's assailant returned for further collection of rancid humanity.

The next morning a terse spoken gentleman had called upon Artie while he was still trying to recall how he had been so violently bruised and man-handled, and also how he had managed to lose a wad of twenty-dollar bank-notes. His bile fermented when he learned much about himself from Stern that was unpleasantly threatening.

Following David Stern's quiet but incisive exposition of his opinion of Artie, this last had made an attempt to bluster; but it was no more than a puny fizzle.

"What c'n you d-do?" he had stuttered. "Who are you anyway?"

"An American. Just that; but you'll find it means a whole lot in your rotten existence if you're not watching your step. Question is, what are you going to do?"

"About what?"

"That girl wife of yours. Have you any clear idea of what happened last night?"

"Aw, that was all a mistake. Drank too much absinthe."

"No doubt about that; but—what are you going to do now? I want to know, because—"

Artie had waited for his visitor to continue, but he had waited in vain.

"What right have you to ask?"

"The right of any decent man. If you don't satisfy me by answering my question straight, I'll put the Brazilian authorities on your track, and they'll manage somehow to keep you out of mischief."

All sorts of subterfuge and nasty ideas had popped in and out of Artie's mind while he was talking; but by great good fortune he had managed to keep his tongue between his teeth and uttered no remark reflecting on David's good intentions toward the girl. By the look on David Stern's face, it seemed probable that he might grow violent again and—the window was open.

"We're going back to the old country," had said Artie at last. "We're only here on a visit."

"When are you going?"

"Day after to-morrow."

With this David Stern had nodded curtly and left. He was satisfied; more than content, for he also was booked on the same boat, and he determined that once they reached New York harbor, he would make it his business to give the police a hint concerning one Artie Falwell.

Julie, listening at a keyhole, had been unable to make head nor tail of what she had heard. She gathered sufficient to know that something untoward was going on. Her husband was cringing, apologetic, and sought shelter and excuse behind something that sounded like oxygen.

Julie had a nodding acquaintance of "cream-dee-mint-frap" and the ubiquitous cocktail of gin or rye base; but for all she knew oxygene might be a poison gas. One thing she did, however, distinctly learn and note: Artie had told the stranger he would take his wife back to the United States. By this the girl came to the conclusion that her husband was too badly scared to stay in South America, and would rather face whatever might be awaiting him on the home shore.

All the same, the prospect of returning to the vicinity of Sixth Avenue had not pleased her. Her first glimpse of the continental freedom and glitter of Latin customs at the mouth of the sluggish Amazon, tickled Julie's palate. In New York she had passed comparatively unnoticed. In Para, her forget-me-not blue eyes, her clear, creamy complexion attracted to her a satisfying if indiscriminate and not very choice collection of male glances of admiration. Even the low caste natives, creatures with dirt-encrusted feet swollen to the semblance of elephant hoofs, favored her with visual commendation, and muttered sibilant, flowery compliments.

After David Stern had gone, Artie wan-

dered about his room muttering and kicking things. On her side of the communicating door, Julie sat glumly silent. She had not known what she had escaped, but she did not want to go back.

Then she remembered the tap that had come at her door. It was Artie who had knocked and—

"Pack your bag," he had ordered.

"What for?"

"We're going away."

"When?"

"This noon."

"Back home?"

"What's eating you. Nix on the home stuff. You've got an hour. Be ready or —stay behind."

When she had realized that Artie had lied to the stranger, and they were not going to leave South America, Julie had been willing enough to fall in with Artie's plans to proceed to another coast town.

"Maybe," she had thought, "we'll go to Rio. From what they say, that's some town. Anyway, I can't be any worse off than here."

Julie had decided she liked Brazil; but when after five hundred odd miles of stewing and tossing on a tenth-rate coasting steamer, she had found herself mistress of a mud hut on the seashore, she dreamed differently. The safe, sure and humbly ordinary events of her life, previous to her meeting with Falwell, assumed a nagging attractiveness. The stuffy, poster-plastered side-street movie shows were cheap, harmless thrills for a dime, plus war tax. Coney Island, realm of nickel delights, of hot dogs and cold cones, was a paradise of canned, condensed excitement and — again the power of the dime came into Julie's consideration. When she was satisfied with whirligigs, chutes, and mechanically induced sensation, she had been able to go home. Back to her hall room to sleep till Monday morning came with the never-failing rush to get dressed, breakfast, and catch the down-town "L" train for the office. In another quick-change of mood the odiousness of contrast made her squirm, and she viewed all things with a soured eye. The past was no better than the present.

It is a grateful man and a love-wise woman who now and again turn the pages of the past and re-recreate some tender, poignant scene. There is new hope and renewed courage to be found pulsing in the faded lines of some message from an absent friend.

It is an effort-stifling habit to live entirely in retrospect. Now is the moment we possess, and to look backward, fret over what-have-beens, and dig the tares of yesterday is foolish and an abuse to one's intelligence. Memories should be constructive, and since all memories are not pleasant, there are some that must not be allowed to elbow their influence into the good faith of to-day.

Julie, from memories near and far, could draw no guiding hint. It was not at present in her to face her errors and reconstruct her moral make-up. She could bemoan her hard luck; but her keen egotism completely blinded her to her own folly. It came natural to her to gloss things over. Lots of folks flower bedeck their *faux pas*.

For two, three hours she sat in the doorway of her hut and sulked with resentment and discontent. The word-thoughts of her mental vocabulary were altogether inadequate to express the length, breadth, depth of her degree of utter disgust with her condition. Granting that the familiar colloquism: "thirty cents," is expressive of a muggy state of mental vision and physical depression, it may be understood that Julie felt like a prematurely discarded dancing pump buried beneath a pile of ashes, empty but odorous fish cans, and the general riff-raff of the rubbish heap. And yet, the same mess of pottage that prostrated one individual will uplift another. Of such stuff is human nature, and it is surprising what wonders Mme. Experience can perform with sentient clay.

CHAPTER XVII.

A MORSEL OF SECRET HISTORY.

JULIE FALWELL should have done this, that, and so on, but even like we-alls and some others, she had her own, unpractical way of looking at things. No

one, not even herself, could say what she would do next. One thing is certain; her contact with Artie, albeit she had relegated him to the position of husband tolerable in name only, had not improved her.

She had hardened, and where before she had little perception of herself, she now took a rather cynical pleasure in skimming over her possibilities. When she had thought herself helpless, or just listlessly allowed circumstance to control her actions, Artie had been unimpeded in his exercise of dominion; but directly she had made a stand, he had lost his authority. Just as she had been so easy to lead when she was unquestioning, so, when her resentment had been roused by the partial discovery of Artie's true character, she had been stubbornly insistent upon her rôle as a wife in name only. The realization that she had self-directive powers had been a novelty to the girl, and the fact that Artie had left her, she took as evidence that her will was stronger than his.

The truth of the whole matter was, Artie did not want a wife when he found he could make no immediate profit out of her, and he was jubilantly glad to be rid of an encumbrance. He still had a few hundred dollars left from the fund subscribed for him by Sid and the Mog management, and he had no intention of spending any more of it on a discomplaisant matrimonial partner. In permanent alliance, Artie had no more use for a wife than he had for a barrel of molasses. Liberty and loose license were synonymous terms in Artie's shifting code of personal freedom, and since Julie had brought him nothing but trouble, he deposited her in the seashore hut, returned to the pier and caught the boat that had brought them from Para. Buenos Aires was his destination.

The capital of Argentina is notorious for its love of " high-life," its Avenida, all-day-all-night cafés, its lotteries and its calliopian pleasures. Paris, London, New York, and San Francisco are cloisters of sedate amusement compared to riotous Buenos Aires. Cocktails are served on the sidewalk, and there are no spiritous, *sub rosa* hypocrisies. Spanish is the language; but the song is flowing money. Artie, small-caliber crook, was going to drop his mite into the flood.

Julie was left to sink, swim or drift. And from the vantage point of her mud hut, Brazil did not seem so wonderfully filled with romantic or stirring possibilities after all. What did the future hold for her? She had not wanted to go back to Sixth Avenue, to sit all day at a desk, tap keys and listen for the ting of a silly bell. Now— Artie had been gone three days, and Julie was not quite so sure she liked the tropics. She had dropped the shackles of distasteful office slavery, but after all there is no great fun in listening to the clop-clop of sloppy sandals on bare, calloused heels, no amusement in watching the sand spraying up the fishermen's bare backs as they plodded, bent-kneed along the league-long hump of shore.

Hunched on her box, with her shoulder to the whitewashed wall, Julie gazed out of the half-open door until she grew disgusted with the eternal sameness of it all. In endless procession the white-capped, blue waves came tossing and curling landward. From morning until night the sun glazed down from a vault of unchanging blue. Blue, unclouded sky; blue, white laced water and fawn, burning sand. Beautiful, crude, and deadly monotonous.

Now and again a flock of naked little children scampered screeching from the shade, and squatted, jabbering shrilly on the sand. They swarmed excitedly over a scrap of paper or a bit of broken, colored glass; or united in the common bond of thoughtless mischief in throwing pebbles at some flea-bitten, sore-footed, sad-eyed dog.

To some an oddly picturesque scene, but—

" Pot-bellied little kids," thought Julie, resentful at all things. She was not far wrong, for however much one may idealize the progeny of the human race, there are certain species very kin, during the adolescence period, to nimble, hairless monkeys. Some women simply dote on real monkeys; they would much prefer a long-tailed, scratching imp of cunning slyness to a nice, plump, pink and cooing baby of their own. And although Julie had not given this matter any thought, she knew

she hated monkeys, and did not like brown-skinned children. It often requires a mother's eye to see the true beauty of Willie's curls, and a mother's love to appreciate his boisterous, roguish ways. It takes a father's pride to envisage his putty-nosed, thumb-sucking son as the great and future coming trust baron or political nabob.

Anyway, Julie was not competent to judge, or under any bond of convention to express herself in terms appropriate to cultured ears. She said what she felt and let it go at that.

A diet of bananas, farina, dry biscuits, and black coffee is not what you might call conducive to sweet and gentle thoughts. Add to this daily banquet such diversions and mental disturbances as can be produced by scuttering, rustling red beetles; crawling, hopping monsters an inch long, armored in black-horn casing. Throw in a few wicked-eyed and drab house-lizards, a scorpion or two, a spider with a leg-reach that would straddle an ordinary saucer; a legion of ants and other small but blood-loving insects, and it must be admitted that for a girl accustomed to uneventful sequestration in a down-town hall room, Julie showed a surprising stick-to-itiveness.

She did not swear or use bad language, which is no great evidence of her forbearance, for there was no one to listen or understand; but she began to scowl with the burden of inaction and an accumulation of unspent energy.

On this fourth morning of her grass-widowhood she came to a decision and performed a preliminary operation. Her scrap-of-paper husband had gone. Left her to fend for herself. Therefore her wedding ring, symbol of Artie's double dealing, was a useless encumbrance. Sans legal flummery or delay, Julie took off the ring and pronounced the decree of divorce absolute. This deed of separation complete, Julie considered that she had cut the final knot that linked her with Artie, the Mog, and her old life entire. But the deeds yesterday have long, tough antennæ. They reach over months, years, and prick and prod, demanding a balanced settlement.

Artie had spun his little web and became enmeshed himself, and Julie, though she did not remotely suspect it, had trailed behind her a filament that had started from the Mog. It had twisted about Leila, entangled Ernest, and finally wound its way into an office, auxiliary to police headquarters. There it stirred up a whole lot of trouble, spread consternation far and wide, and long before the boat bearing Julie to Brazil had passed Sandy Hook, murder had been committed. And Julie was the cause of it, or was it Miss Blonde?

Not knowing anything about the fluster and tragedy she had started, Julie hummed a gay little tune; but finding that she could not compete with the strident, nasal efforts of a *café-au-lait* colored lady who squatted on the sand a few feet away from her hut, Julie relapsed into silence, and reaching for her bag, took stock of her possessions. She counted the money in her purse. There were those two two-dollar bills, some Brazilian coins, and a few very soiled and decrepit milreis notes. Arthur had not been wildly liberal in the matter of providing his wife with small change. Yet a fleeting smile dimpled the girl's smooth cheeks, and to this circumstance hangs a morsel of secret history.

For the rest of his existence Arthur Falwell was pledged to an implacable prejudice against oily gentlemen of Turkish ancestry. He labeled them all rascals and sneak-thieves more cunning than himself; but Arthur erred in judgment, for the hairy-backed hands of the dealer in gimcrack novelties had not been near Falwell's pockets. On the night when Artie had recovered himself from the gutter and returned to his hotel, his oxygene-swamped brain had gone blank. During his mental hiatus, Julie had come into the room and her pink finger-tips had strayed investigatingly in the pockets of her husband's apparel. Now, tucked in a stocking at the bottom of her steamer trunk was a roll of twenty-dollar bank-notes. There were fourteen of them. Two hundred and eighty dollars! Amply sufficient for passage back to New York, and a bit over for job hunting. Wouldn't it be nice to join again the ranks of hard-working, honest girls? Julie stood frowning. She epito-

mized her view of the situation in one word.

"Nix," she murmured, and made final her half-formed decision to pretend she was broke. Some freak of cunning owing its inception to her association with Falwell led her to believe that a penniless, deserted girl stood a much better chance of exciting sympathy than one who held a substantial nest-egg of twenty-dollar bank-notes. Question was, how to proceed? Stenography and typewriting were Julie's only accomplishments. Was there, in this South American seaport, some cotton king or rubber monarch who would employ her as a typist, and then—and—then—what then?

Blissfully forgetful that she could not say two words, or even one, in Portuguese, Julie let her fancy run loose and saw herself the recipient of some highly important, choice position in an export office. The clerks, the manager, the boss himself would pay homage to her. Girls have queer fancies. Pathetically great small desires and heroically lofty ideals. Some tend roses in sordid poverty, and others grow weeds in rampant luxury.

Back in the tenements, in the reek and steam of cabbage water and washing, little Mollie, aged six, is crying for a dolly. Somewhere on the Heights, the Drive or some such place where mansions sprout, Miss Geraldine de Vansitart Plumppet, aged twenty-six, is pillow-propped in a silken bed debating whether she shall take her morning constitutional along the avenue, ribbon-tied to a billy-goat, or to a pound and a half of yelping, peevish, sib-bred parody of a dog. Somewhere in a factory loft a girl with love light slumbering in her eyes is working overtime and saving every cent she can toward the bare furnishing of a two-room home. Somewhere in a boudoir a worldly wise young ignorant is wondering whether she'll barter herself for another ten million or cozen pah-pah into buying her a wizened, poverty-tamed count, or a lazy, drawling offshoot of the British peerage. To be desired, desirable, or to desire something or some one is perhaps the pivotal axis of the individual personality. Julie didn't know what she desired, but it was nice to think of herself in some enviable, triumphant situation.

"I sure picked a lemon in Art," she murmured. "And it is up to me to watch out I don't get bit twice in the same place. When I go back to little old New York I'm going with bells and rings on."

The phrase tripped sweetly enough, but at the mention of rings the girl's face clouded. There had been one circlet that she had accepted with thoughtless heed of what it entailed, and although she had figuratively freed herself from its symbolic tie, there were legal attachments that might prove a hampering clog to future developments. Julie borrowed a argumentless catch phrase. "I don't care," she murmured, and with a shrug of her shoulders dismissed consideration of herself as Mrs. Arthur Falwell. "Time enough to get the law onto him when I'm good and ready to be quit of him and his name for keeps. Thing to do now is to dress up and give this sand-pile burg the once over."

CHAPTER XVIII.

WHO PAID JULIE'S FARE?

ANKLE deep in the fine sand, Julie ploughed toward the pier. As she passed the scattered huts, dusky-complexioned women stopped their lace-making to watch this strange young girl from North America. From door to door they signaled to each other, rolled their eyes and held up their hands in gestures that, translated into American, plainly said: "Can you beat it?"

Now and again Julie heard a: "*Pst—pst!*" which is the native way of trying to attract attention. The sibilant sound is a staccato sort of hiss and is often accompanied by the clapping of hands.

A short distance from her hut she came to a spur of rusty rails running alongside a shed. Here, excepting that she had to take a circuitous passage among a lot of odorous hides laid out to dry, she found easier walking on the ties and also opportunity to slip off her shoes and empty them of the sharp sand that was cutting into her feet.

Keeping to the center of the curved track she came to the custom-house, a gray-stone building, massive, ugly, and guarded by a flat-chested, dreamy-eyed sentry. A group of cotton-clad dock laborers stopped their chattering to stand and stare while she passed. A gentleman, clad in a white drill coat and nicely creased cream flannel pants and with helmet headpiece of pith lined with green, strode by with uplifted nose and unseeing of anything left or right.

At least that is what he would have the world and Julie believe, for he was the manager of the British and Brazilian Bank, and could not be supposed to unbend sufficiently to openly take notice of a pretty but stranded and husbandless young girl. Onward he stalked, and his straight, stiff back was eloquent of righteous self-conscious, Clapham Junction respectability and conventionality.

On his home soil the average British subject is one of a hundred billion others of all nationalities in mediocre decency and humanness; but transplant an ordinarily inoffensive, middle-class Englishman in lands strange and foreign, and he mounts a stilted horse and puts on airs that would be comical if they were not so utterly silly. As a rule the American is inclined to be over freely and democratically hail-fellow-well-met.

The bank manager was the first white person Julie had seen since she had been left in her hut, and she stopped and looked at him with a beseeching air of a lost, stray persian. The bank manager's forbidding dignity was greater than her nerve, and Julie let slip a chance to try her hand at melting British insularity.

Strange and contradicting as this may seem, it might not have been so difficult of achievement, for the standoffish subjects of King George are warm hearted enough once the ice of reserve is broken. Still, on the other hand, Julie might have been coldly snubbed, for already she had acquired a reputation in that small seaport town that was concocted of a dram of truth and a peck of lies.

The world over people talk and the Vere de Veneerings no less than the Daws exaggerate and embroider ignorance with imaginative inventions alleged to be facts.

A tale-bearing gossip's tongue girdles the village. Two gossips are the back-stair newsmongers of a small town. Three, plus each one three, are the carriers of scandal in a big city. At their approach strong men smile sickly and bold women quake. When these malicious scandalmongers drink tea or dine in homes they insidiously enter, the bones of family skeletons rattle in their secret closets. They knit, play golf, they titter in boudoirs, they hang around the village store. They dig clams, jerk grimy thumbs and spit innuendo and nod wisely. They lounge in club-rooms and smoke real cigars and damn a good woman's name with a grunt. They peep behind curtains and let the dinner burn while they listen on the party wire. They—oh, they're an indescribable social pest; sneaky peckers and nibblers of others' happiness and sowers of discord and misunderstanding. A meddler is often good intentioned, a tale bearer seldom—if ever.

From the settlement of fishermen their lace-making wives had carried tales to kitchen doors of the town houses. The servants had told their mistresses and these same had retailed the gossip to their husbands. The husbands carried their various home-made tales to the cafés, and everybody tore a little bit off here or tacked on a bit there. By the time Julie set out for town she had a private history as varied and as colorful as Joseph's coat.

Julie was reported to be everything from a super-designing vamp to a much-put-on ingénue. Anyway, she was too well known by report for the manager of the bank to be seen talking to her on the pier. So Julie went past the sentry, picked her way round the custom-house, side-stepped in and out of an untidy conglomeration of bales of cotton, piles of packing-cases, and a litter of red-rusty ironware, and boarded a waiting trolley.

It was a two-mule power-car, and presently it jolted off, and the white-capped, swarthy conductor swung himself along the rattling footboard and commenced collecting fares. When Julie offered a milreis

note the man shook his head and waved his hand lazily toward the rear of the car.

Julie didn't know what to make of this, but she put the bill back in her bag and sat tight. She meant to stay on that trolley until it arrived at some place that looked like the center of business. For the moment there did not seem to be any what-you-might-call, a this—now—town. On the left of the bumping, rattling car was an up and down collection of white walls, blue walls, red walls, and yellow walls. Glaring, crude, dazzling they joggled by in a long, uneven ribbon. In and out of black openings swarmed squads and files of barefooted, brown, black, and fawn-colored men staggering beneath bundles of hides, bales of cotton, heavy wooden cases, baskets of oranges and clusters of bananas, and sacks of flour, grain and coffee. On the right was a stretch of sand hillocks, junk littered with stranded freightage and desolate in systematic neglect.

Then came a sudden change; the trolley-wheels rasped and grated round a sharp corner; the mules slowed to a walk, and Julie saw before her a long, steep hill bordered with thick foliaged trees. During the next few minutes she found time to examine her fellow passengers and arrive at a solution of the mystery connected with the conductor's refusal to take her fare.

In the middle of the hill, with no consideration for the straining, panting mules, a woman boarded the car. She took a seat in front of Julie. The driver's whip cracked and the mules pulled again at their creaking traces. Before the conductor could collect from the new passenger a man seated on the same bench as Julie reached over and tendered the conductor a coin. A moment or two later the woman turned, smiled, and nodded; the man raised his hat and the incident closed.

"So some one paid my fare, then. I suppose they do that here the same as we pass round candy at home," thought Julie, and wondered to whom and why she, a stranger, could be so favored and indebted. What was the right thing to do? Should she turn and scan the faces behind her, smile and nod, or should she sit still and keep her eyes front?

The problem made her feel uncomfortable; but she was curious to know the identity of the person who had so distinguished her. It gave her a pleasant feeling to know there was some one friendly inclined. Who was he? Of course it was a *he!*

When the car topped the hill, Julie shifted sideways and glanced casually around. The eyes she met were polite, impersonal in their regard, and showed no response. Presently, far back of the car, she saw a face wearing an expansive smile. It was owned by the woman from the bodega. Julie returned the smile, and her feeling of curiosity was followed by a let-down kind of feeling. Without actually formulating the thought into definition she had surmised herself to be the object of some distinguished Brazilian *señor's* favor.

At the top of the hill the car turned to the right, rattled and rocked past a short block of single-storied houses and then entered the main thoroughfare. As they swung round the second corner Julie caught a glimpse of a railed-in square punctuated with pillars surmounted by broken, dilapidated urns, a water-tower, a tree with a mass of large, blazing crimson flowers, a fountain and a group of cigarette-smoking young men gathered about a green-covered table that looked like a miniature pool or billiard-table. It was a bagatelle board, and Julie came later to understand that the *jeunesse* of Brazil takes its pleasure any time from between 7 A.M. and one and two in the early morning. There are practically no days closed to the pursuit of enjoyment. When there is no lottery being drawn at Rio de Janerio the small towns rely on a sensational movie or a touring theatrical company for amusement. And when either of these four fail to mark the day with a worth-while divertisement, they get up a tabloid revolution. At frequent intervals business and pleasure is halted to honor some saint, and after church the cafés are thronged.

The mules stopped facing a shaded row of benches set at the edge of another square flanked by lilliputian buildings. In the center of the square was a garden. At the four corners were cafés, and all around

were stores, more cafés, general warehouses, and a Cinema. Off the square towered a three-storied edifice which was the opera-house. Under the trees promenaded a leisurely crowd of white-clad men and brightly dressed women airing sunshades of all shapes and colors. In the center of the sun and shadow patterned square was a bandstand. Some of the ladies had their heads covered, some wore lace mantillas in the Spanish style, a few had hats. Julie was one of the minority.

The girl decided she would walk all around the square and obtain a general idea of her surroundings. This proved to be easier said than done, for the café tables were dotted about like so many obstructing and gigantic mushrooms. People stood about in groups, gossiping and lazily gesticulating. Few stared, that is, with any marked rudeness; but Julie was soon aware that she was an object of comment and polite curiosity.

"I s'pose," she thought, "it's my hat. I'll have to leave the lid home an' get me a bumbershoot. Gee, there's a bunch around, but it's kinda lonesome. Guess I'll see if there's anything doing over there. Maybe they'll speak English. Salgado and Morton. One of them is English or American."

Over there proved to be the agency of a famous shipping line, and when Julie stepped out of the brilliant sunshine into the cool, dark interior of the office, she stood blinking and trying to accustom her eyes to the sudden change from light to comparative twilight.

Presently, behind a curved railed-in counter, she saw a fair-haired, white-skinned, silk-shirted young man. He looked as if he might speak English; but although not imposing in stature, he had a cold, I-don't-know-you pair of gray eyes that forbade familiarity. He was Morton, the junior, very junior partner of Salgado.

When Julie entered he looked up, gave a brief glance at her, and went on with his work. He was engaged in a peculiar occupation. Beside him on the polished counter was a square, stoutly made box covered with big daubs of broken sealing-wax. In front of him was a goodly sized pile of glittering coins. They were sovereigns, English pounds, and he was shoveling them up with a copper scoop and pouring them onto a scale.

The pleasant tinkle of the gold, the yellow glitter of the precious disks fascinated the girl, and she stood watching. Just as if she had not existed, the young man weighed the consignment and deftly but with unhurried movements started to pile the sovereigns in little piles of twenties, fifties and hundreds.

"I called—" commenced Julie.

Without one upward glance the sleek young man went on with his work.

Julie turned aside and looked about the office. To her unaccustomed eyes it had an appearance more nearly kin to a white-washed barn than an orthodox place of business. It is true that within the enclosing counter there were familiar roll-top desks, a couple of typewriters, a safe, and a litter of papers and red-bound ledgers and account-books; but the walls were bare stone, the floor was cemented. Through a wide-open doorway at the back, she saw a small yard wherein stood a donkey drowsily ruminative. On the side of the door hung a wooden cage containing some brightly plumaged birds.

Her survey finished, Julie was struck by a bright idea.

"Are you an American?" she asked.

The young man looked up. His placid, clear-skinned, clean-shaven face, excepting for an absurd and flossy smudge on his upper lip, was a mask of expressionlessness.

"I beg your pawdon," he said, "but if you will be good enough to take a seat I will attend to you in a moment."

"You don't say!"

This was an unspoken retort, and Julie with a little spot of pink in either cheek sat down on a bench by the door. Here was treatment she had not been accustomed to. This lofty, stand-offish wait-your-turn kind of greeting was something she had not yet encountered. Inwardly she boiled; but as the ladler of gold had treated her with punctilious politeness, there was nothing, so to speak, that she could get her teeth into. She felt like a naughty schoolgirl who had been told to stand in a corner.

Riled as she was she had plenty of time to cool off.

In twenty minutes by the clock the young scion of Albion finished counting his shipment of gold and hid it from sight in the depth of a safe as big as a small garage. Every now and again the torch of revolution flames in one or another of the tropic states, and gold is worth while and desirable loot. Paper money is numbered and identifiable; coin is always negotiable.

"What can I do for you?"

The softly spoken query served to acquaint Julie that she was bidden to state her business. Blithely enough she tripped over to the iron-guarded counter. A job, even in this dark staidness, was better than nothing, and had she been in New York she would have found no difficulty in immediately stating her case. Here, facing the unsmiling, self-contained Britisher, she hesitated and groped for words. Had the neatly tailored, human iceberg evinced some antagonism, given some sign of rudeness, Julie would have been ready with a quick reprisal. She had held her own with snappish, brusk hustlers of officedom; effectually squashed over-fresh office-boys and generally held her end up. Now, the thing that floored her was the dudish young man's supreme and complete indifference to her as a nice-looking girl, or a prospective traveler. Beyond the fact that he had recognized her presence by bestowing upon her a few drawling words, his blank gaze took no more cognizance of her than if she had been a speck of unconsidered dust.

"Stuck up little Percy," thought Julie, and blurted: "I'm looking for a job."

"A situation?" corrected the young man in prim paraphrase. "I regret, but we do not require any one at present. In fact, I may add, we never employ young ladies."

Julie knew when to take no for an answer, however many words it may be wrapped up in, and she moved away. Before she reached the door the calm, drawling voice halted her.

"May I ask in what capacity you were seeking a berth?"

"Stenog," snapped Julie.

"I see. You type letters and transcribe from shorthand notes?"

"You've got it."

Indignant that she should be questioned, when, so far as she could tell, there was nothing to be gained by the process, Julie's blue eyes flashed a glance of scorn.

"I'm a reg'lar information bureau," she suggested. "Anything else you'd like to know?"

The verbal shaft, meant to be stinging, glanced off the imperturbability of Morton.

"Thank you, no," he replied; "but you might try the gas-works."

"Fresh beast," thought Julie, and passed out into the sunlight, angered and much more disappointed than her manner betrayed.

"Gas-works," she repeated as she left the square. "He didn't have to rub it in. Ugh! I hate a cold-as-a-dead-fish fellow."

CHAPTER XIX.

NOT WANTED.

IN a long street of silent, closely shuttered, seemingly deserted houses, Julie found another wide-open door. A gold-lettered sign informed her that there was domiciled the Brazilian branch of a London bank. This was equivalent to a notice to the effect that English was spoken, and although she wished she could have read the words: New York instead of London, she decided to have another try.

A junior clerk smiled at her across the polished mahogany, but shook his head apologetically when she asked to see the manager.

"Ingleza, yes," he said. "If you please to wait."

The young Brazilian hurried away, and following a short palaver, a stout, pompous man grudgingly detached himself from a brass-railed desk. His bulging eyes fixed on Julie with about as much sympathetic interest as would be shown by a dyspeptic bull-frog ogling a blade of grass.

"Job?" he grunted, and pursed his lips disapprovingly and shook his head. "Manager's out," he continued, "but I am sure there is no necessity for you to wait his return. We have all the help we need. Thank you—good day."

Not quite certain what she was being thanked for, but positive she was unwanted, Julie next tried the headquarters of the mule-power trolley company and called at the British-owned railroad.

In both distinguished centers of control, Julie was thanked and—dismissed.

The last call brought her to nearly the end of the street. It did not seem to be any use to go farther. The crossroad was grass and weed covered and bordered by a mass of trees and tufted palms.

"May as well go round through as back," thought Julie. "What a dump to be in! Guess I've about reached the limit of chances for a job. There's nowhere else to go but back to my hut. I'd give something to see a ice-cream parlor. Come to think of it, li'l' ole New York ain't so bad after all. A girl has a tough time now and again, but folks don't keep on handing her the frozen eye. This is where I get off while the going's good. If I turn to the right—"

At the corner of the street Julie came to a stop and her intentions hung in the balance. She saw something that by vision and smell reminded her of the suggestion made by the young man at the shipping office.

The neglected road curved down a sandy slope and below her she saw the flat, cylindrical top of the gasometer. In that tropic zone the huge, iron-riveted drum looked odder, uglier than usual; but it was a sign of industry, and where they were making gas there were books to be kept and letters to be typed. So, despite her belief that Morton had meant to be satiric in proposing that she "try the gas-works," Julie determined to make one more call.

"I'd have the laugh over that fish if I did land me a berth as he called it," she decided, and two minutes later passed under a striped awning and walked through an open doorway into the manager's office.

Greatly to her surprise she was not instantly bidden to state her business and as quickly shown the way out. The bushy eyebrowed, weary-looking man who sat before a table strewn with papers and unpaid gas-bills, motioned her to a chair.

Julie gave a little sigh as she sat down. She realized she was very hot, very tired and dispirited and thankful to find some one who could be human, even in the gas-making business. At the best of times, and under favorable conditions, job hunting is a none too pleasant task, and what with the intense heat of the sun and the extreme coldness of her reception in the hives of British enterprise, her intention of making the best of an unprofitable quest had been sorely tested.

Forked, insinuating ubiquitous gossip is a bludgeoning stultifier of good endeavor and intention, and in a small town, especially a place with a very limited settlement of whites, an alleged black sheep is usually judged off-hand and condemned in camera.

"I heard—they say—" are high-speed grindstones, destructive to character and reputation. Scandal grinds in secret and outpaces the mills of God.

Julie was quite unaware that she had been combating conditions other than a behind-the-times prejudice employing female help. The British are notoriously conservative, resentful of innovation and change in set procedure; and the conditions forced into acceptance in the United Kingdom by the Hun debacle, will be long in reaching the outpost colonies scattered in far corners of the globe. But none the less than having her say, woman will have—her way. Man may still be privileged to propose, but his castle of masculine supremacy is a sand-pile. The hairpin is more powerful than the sword and the Gibraltar of masculine labor is besieged by petticoats.

"I have been expecting you," said the gas-works manager. "Hoped you would come here first. Saved trouble. I suppose you've been the rounds and got snubbed."

"How did you know?" asked Julie.

"Word came to me from the shipping-office that you were job-hunting."

"From the young man I saw?" exclaimed the girl. "Why, I thought he was joking when he told me to call at the gas-works."

"The junior partner of that firm never jokes," said the manager dryly. "He's rather serious-minded, but he means well. Didn't like to give you any advice, so he sent you to me. I'm older and supposed to be wiser."

Once again Julie realized that she had been mistaken in her judgment of character. Mrs. Bruce had had no amiable surface attractiveness, yet had not the old woman brought up a breakfast and given her a two-dollar bill? Morton had seemed but a languid, affected poseur and yet—he had gone to some trouble on her behalf. Was the grizzled man in front of her a friend in disguise? He looked kind.

Before she had set out on her campaign of job-getting, Julie had pictured a speedy success and an easy time. It was now the moment for her to smile seductively and charm the gas-works manager into giving her a tiptop position, but somehow or other she forgot all about her cue to vamp, and smiled with artless attractiveness.

The manager frowned. Not at the smile; but at the thought of the tales he had heard. What was it his own wife told him that morning at the breakfast-table? It had been of shocking import and her remark had ended with a pronounced and indignant sniff. And those others—what had they said? What *hadn't* they said. According to all accounts, this girl was a bad character; a creature to be shunned, A lost soul.

In one brief glance the manager decided that, considering her reputation, Julie looked remarkably innocent and ignorant of guile.

For one fleeting second he thought of telling his wife how wofully mistaken she had been in her judgment by hearsay, then, quite as impulsively, he changed his mind. The lady who for ten years or so had mended his socks, lectured him, and cooked him some mighty good dinners, had her weak points. She was kind to stray dogs and generous in providing saucers of milk for wandering cats; but he felt sure that her charity of mind would not extend to this girl. Frankly speaking, this pretty, stranded American was a difficult subject to handle. If she had been cross-eyed and frumpish, fat and inane or afflicted with some physical and obvious blemish, the case would have been different and so much easier. As it was—why the dickens didn't she go to the American consul?

This thought irritated the manager. There were French and English consulates. Until recently, Germany had been sumptuously represented; but he remembered there never had been an American consul in that town.

"How stupid, unenterprising," he thought. "A big country like America ought to have a man here. I can't do anything. Maybe—how would you like to go to Rio?" he asked suddenly.

"Rio," repeated Julie blankly. "Haven't you anything I can do right here? I'm a good ty—"

"It doesn't signify how quick you may be," interrupted the manager. "There's no possible chance of your getting anything to do in this place. That is, not with an English firm. All the staffs are engaged in the old country and sent out here. Also, only men are employed. If, as you were advised, you had come to me first, I could have saved you many useless calls."

"But you know of a vacancy for me in Rio?"

"Nothing of the kind. All I was thinking of was to send you to your consul. He's the nearest I know of and its three days' journey at that."

"But—why send me to the consul?"

The manager looked at Julie in annoyed surprise. He felt quite sure that she was not as black as she was painted; but he did believe she had been abandoned. The fact that she was living in a hut adjacent to the fishing village, and was looking for work, was evidence to his good sense that she was in need of help. A girl with the means would stay at a hotel.

"Have you any money?" he asked.

"Y-yes. That is, not much."

"How much?"

"A few dollars."

The evasiveness of the girl's replies caused the manager to eye her sharply; but he did not imagine she had a secret store laid by; he put down her avoidance of definiteness to a natural shyness of disclosing her private affairs to a stranger.

"Well then," he asked peremptorily but with kindly intention, "will you tell me how you are going to exist?"

Julie's lips set a trifle closer. "I can find work," she asserted.

"The stubborn, unreasoning blindness of youth!" ejaculated the manager. "I tell you that you cannot. This is no place for a young girl. You are alone and—" Delicacy forbade reference to the runaway husband, so Julie's well-meaning adviser concluded: "You must go to Rio. You're an American and the consul will see that you get a passage home."

Julie stood up. "I will not go to Rio," she declared. "I don't want to go back to America."

CHAPTER XX.

AN INCOMPLETED SOLO.

THE manager threw up his hands. "Very well then," he said sharply. "I can be of no service to you; but it is my private opinion you—"

Whatever that was will never be known, for before the manager could finish his speech, Julie had marched out.

In her haste she went down the hill instead of up; and when she realized she had turned in the wrong direction, she found herself facing a colony of ramshackle huts. Sordid and ugly, the patched, lop-sided hovels were jumbled together as though they had been spilled at random.

At every door squatted a woman, lacemaking, smoking a pipe or combing her hair. Around corners peeped a black, tan or yellow child-face; curious and gravely watchful. This was the fringe of the gas-workers' settlement, and Julie, with her high heels, her smart neatness of attire and spruceness, was an unusual sight. In fact, her presence anywhere excepting in an American or European setting was a distinctly noticeable anachronism. She stood out in striking contrast to her surroundings and had in no measure that faculty possessed by some for blending with their environment.

While she hesitated whether to retrace her steps or plunge bravely on, the half, three-quarter and altogether undressed tribe of peeking children ventured nearer. The instant there was a leader, the rest followed. In a moment Julie was surrounded by a mob of small, upturned faces. Teeth flashed in approving grins and grimy hands fingered her skirt. One little creature, rivaling the élite of the ultrafashionable, in that she wore nothing but a hat and a girdle, endeavored to clamber up the girl for closer inspection.

Julie moved on quickly. Between the huts she saw the sea and it required no highly developed sense of direction for her to know that if she kept on walking and followed the edge of the water, she was bound to come to the fishing village. Before she reached the hard sand bordering the retreating tide, Julie made an irrevocable resolve that never again would she venture near a place where the wives and offspring of dusky gas-workers congregated. Dodging between the mud shacks she had run a gauntlet of impudent laughter, jealous looks, an evil-sounding chatter of comment, and a host of odor that made her wish she was temporarily deficient in the sense of smell. The mingled effluvias clung to her long after the children had given up following her.

Along the hard strip of wet beach Julie made good progress; but, although she could see the pier distinctly, she did not seem to be getting nearer to it. The clearness of the air gave her a false estimate of measurement; also, the shore line curved in a wide arc. The shortest distance between two points is, according to Euclid, given in a straight line; but nature and circumstance have a way of making us go a long way round to reach a much-desired objective.

Soon another obstacle barred Julie's path. This was a ten-foot wide stream of running water. To cross it there were just two things to be done, either wade through it or try to get round it. The first implied the removal of her shoes and stockings, the second necessitated plunging through the loose, dry sand above the high-water mark. Julie turned inshore and plodded up the slope. It was not far, but before she got to the top she had the unpleasant experience of stumbling into a sun-bleached skeleton of chalk-white bones. Julie had no osteological bent of mind, and she did not stay to ascertain whether the long jaw-bone with its rows of gleaming teeth had be-

longed to an ass, a horse, or a mule. The exquisitely articulated and spotlessly clean, tinder-dry spiral-column that broke apart as she touched it with the toe of her shoe, did not interest her one bit. She ran and was extravantly thankful to find when she came to the top of the slope that she would not have to go back on her tracks. A partially demolished arch, half submerged in the sand, bridged the narrowed channel of the fresh water stream. Keeping a wary lookout for other surface burial-grounds, Julie forged ahead.

For ten minutes she kept up a quick pace; but when she saw that the pier seemed just as far off as ever, her feet lagged and grew heavy. Her spurt dwindled to a slow walk and soon she began to stop and look back uncertainly. When at last she came alongside a low, crumbling wall, footing a hillside covered with dense growth, she sat down under a tree and allowed her strained muscles to relax. A numbing feeling of exhaustion crept over her. The tropic sun was claiming due observance of its power. Julie had stopped just in time. Only the breeze blowing from the sea saved the venturesome girl from the dangerous consequences of her walk. Had she known the temperature, she would most probably have wilted sooner; but the soft wind on her face had lulled her to a belief that it was not so *very* hot, and she had no knowledge that she had been forcing herself to strenuous, unaccustomed physical effort with the thermometer at—a hundred and ten! And still rising.

All the way from the gas-works, what shadow she owned had been a small, circular blob wavering about at her feet. The sun was directly overhead; a bad position for the sun to be in when a stranger from a temperate climate takes to hurrying in the torrid zone.

At no time are the peoples of tropic lands enamored of physical exertion, least of all during the hours of middle day. The cult of leisure is carried to a fine point, and the South Americans, in common with world-scattered procrastinators, have great faith in the belief that to-morrow is always a better day. Until evening they stay indoors, or if compelled to move, do so—in the shade. The majority of the women do not venture out until evening. Then, the shuttered houses wake up. Chairs and rockers are moved out onto the sidewalk and noon-time deserted streets swarm with life. Marketing and shopping are done in the early morning, and social and interfamily calls are made at night. Conversations and receptions are held between door-steps and gutters. Pedestrians walk in the road.

So, it will be agreed that Julie had yet to learn there are thermometric as well as other reasons connected with customs for adapting oneself to the habits of the Romans when one is in Rome. Some Englishmen insist on drinking the same amount of whisky in the tropics that they absorbed in the British Isles, and never again do they see dear old London. Thirsty, headstrong Americans, refusing to cut out cocktails and gin-fizzes, are oftimes reported down with yellow fever. A true diagnosis of their case would often read: Stung by alcoholic poisoning. The little winged Borgia—*stegomia fasciata*—is not always responsible for the demise of a good fellow abroad. See Venice and die used to be the slogan among the literate of beauty-spot seekers. To-day, now private stocks are dwindling, the catch phrase goes: See Cuba and get a ticket for the Manhattan-Martini-Bronx, Brass-Rail express. Prices are high in Havana, but drinks are going down just the same.

Happily for Julie, her system was untainted by alcohol, and after a while the heat induced exhaustion began to give way to her powers of recuperation. She looked about her and some perception of the strangeness of her surroundings in relation to herself, a down-town stenographer, dawned upon her.

"It beats all," she murmured, "but I ain't going back. Not yet. I'll see if the Brazilians won't give me a chance. No hallroom and the same old work to do day after day for mine. I'm through being shoved and put upon."

Tempered with wisdom and a fair amount of caution, not to mention good mental ability, Julie was by the way of getting out of the rut of contentment with only

a moiety of her share of the good things of this life; but she was rather like the boy who set out to shoot lions and tigers with a popgun. The desire was dawning in her to make something out of her existence, to have a hand in shaping her own destiny; but she was not nearly as well equipped for the fray as her newborn wish led her to believe.

"It's good to be your own boss!"

Back of Julie's mind as she made this reflection was the thought of her nest-egg. She could afford to dream and make plans, for if the worst came to the worst there was that reserve fund to draw upon.

"Rio," she murmured. "I should be shipped off, tagged and labeled, and asked a lot of fool questions. Not me. Guess that old gasman was all right, though. He meant well, but—oh!"

Julie shrank back in sudden fright as an obscuring shadow swept down upon her. A huge, ugly bird alighted heavily on the sand not far from where she sat. It was a turkey-buzzard, fierce-eyed, hooked-beaked, and not at all reassuring to eyes accustomed to seeing nothing more formidable than sparrows, and chickens plucked ready for the oven. The inland-blowing breeze wafted a new, unpleasant smell across the girl's face. Buzzards are epicurean in their taste for gamey provender and this one had just lunched. Julie made an involuntary movement of disgust and the unwelcome visitor rose on flapping wings.

"Ugh—horrid!" exclaimed the girl and the next instant sat enthralled and motionless.

A thrilling warble of flutelike sounds charmed her. For perhaps five seconds the notes of the bird-song cascaded in wooing tremolo. The melody hung on one plaintive note. Then—silence.

Julie waited, but the songster did not continue.

"He didn't finish it!" she exclaimed, and turned to see if she could discover the singer.

Deeper than she was aware of, the unfinished song had reached into her being. It had left in her heart a queer ache and an indefinable longing that went further than the hope of hearing the bird again. The beauty of the unfinished carol had quickened in her a sense of detachment and estrangement from herself. Why did the song linger in her mind? Why should her thoughts dwell on a long, drawnout, and incompleted solo? Why bother herself with wondering about a hidden bird?

Why indeed is our delight in the glowing, perfumed call of the rose, tinged with haunting sadness? Is it because we know the rose must fade, or is it by reason of our materialism being shamed by the passionate estheticism of the purely lovely?

All in the space of a short, passing moment Julie had been shocked and repulsed, fascinated and uplifted. Of the two occurrences the buzzard had been more tangible and substantial; yet, when she resumed her walk, it was the bird she had not seen she was thinking of. She had perceived the beautiful and vaguely grasped at the all-embracing antidote to thoughts tending to dwell on the ugly and trivial.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE MAN ON THE PIPE.

NO less glaring to the casual eye was the long, curved shore; just as crudely, samely blue was the desert sea; yet with her interest sharpened by the novel experience of being awakened to consideration of an event outside of her own affairs, Julie recommenced her walk, not only with renewed vigor, but with a less self-centered, introspective mentality. She began to look, listen and observe things that did not, so to speak, jump at her. There were shades of color in the sand and sea and low-lying cliffs that were not before visible to her. In the sand that sprayed from her feet she saw bits of flying rose, pink and violet.

She stooped and found shells. Just sea shells; but when Julie held one in her hand, she could not help thinking that she had found something prettier than she had ever seen in the stores. Here was something more delicate and highly finished than the roses on the Mog teapots. Every now and again she stopped and found some different flower-petal of the sea, and forgot every-

thing except the quiet enjoyment that is the reward of the collector of nature's treasures. To Julie this suddenly found amusement was filled with a keener sense of novelty than is the portion of most girls. Julie had never seen the meadows and orchards in the glory of spring-time blossom; never buried her face in an armful of newly plucked, wild flowers. She had been city-born, bred, and bondaged. The simple, yet always remembered joys of childhood had not been hers; she had been deprived of natural, necessary pleasures. Her playground had been a stuffy room or a cemented sidewalk.

When on one sweltering holiday Julie had gone to Coney Island, the fenced sands had been hidden beneath a tumultuous mob of bathers, picnic-parties, perambulators, and an untidy litter of delicatessen bags, cage-cartons, and scrumpled newspapers.

Man often forgets to leave space for a garden in his cities and for love of dimes he tries hard to mulct the visitor to a popular resort for a breath of fresh air. Where there are crowds, there is a premium on elbow-room. For the first time in her life, Julie was to all intents and purposes getting something for nothing. She could wander at will; there were no wickets to pass, no nickels to pay and—

"Hallo, there! Is it pearls or bawbees ye are getting?"

The voice startled Julie. She had taken it for granted she was alone; there was no one behind her, no sign of a human being except the tiny figures trooping backward and forward on the still distant pier. She looked out to sea. On a neck of sand she saw a shed. Through the roof jutted a thin, black chimney. She heard the faint beat of an engine. From the side of the shed a red-rusty pipe zigzagged across the hillocks of sand toward her. The mouth of the pipe projected over a shallow hole. Close to the iron rim sat a man clad in dusty-brown. He gave Julie the impression of being very old, very sun-dried, and—

"Kinda lonely," she thought. "What's he doing on that pipe, and what's that he said? Baw-bee! That's a new one on me."

In the course of the conversation that followed Julie learned that a bawbee is Scotch for a coin known in Edinburgh as saxpence and a tanner by the cockneys. But before this enlightenment, she accepted a banana, a seat in the shade of some boards propped against the pipe, and found that she was in the company of one, Angus MacBane.

Angus was an engineer, he had taken honors at college and South Kensington; but as he was now forty-eight and looked sixty-five and was resigned to the low-paid sinecure of land reclamation and watching two thousand gallons per hour of sand-muddied water flow through the pipe, Angus may be written as one of those pathetic men: a has-been.

Naturally, Angus MacBane was a puzzle to Julie. His soiled, neglected clothes; his stubby, lined face, his not-overclean hands did not accord with the courtesy of his manner, the gentle, well-bred softness of his voice. Also, there were his eyes. Angus was shaky about the knees; his thin, veined hands trembled, but under his gray-flecked brows were a pair of bright, blue eyes. They were smaller, sharper, and now and again hinted of furtive sadness; but they were as clear as Julie's. The body of Angus was a conglomeration of ill-used tissue, aching bones and jumping nerves; but the tough spirit of him held his mind to sanity.

Cachaca: the distilled, fermented juice of the sugar-cane was rotting his flesh, prematurely aging his limbs; but the brain of Angus, though deliberately indifferent to restraint of his self-destroying indulgence, had remained young and strangely, strongly impervious to decay. The man whom his wife knew, the man who had lost caste among his fellow countrymen, who was contemptuously pitied by the Brazilians, was not the real Angus. *He* dwelt within, and watched an actor for whom he sometimes wished the curtains would fall for the last time.

For ten, fifteen, twenty years, and sometimes longer, men will absorb poison in various alcoholic guises; but because its action may be slow, they are seldom branded with the stigma of self-murder. Suicide does not become perceptible unless a man

bores a hole through his heart or brain; or quaffs some skull and cross-bones labeled poison and leaves this place with despatch.

Following the Scot's mention of his name, Julie returned the courtesy, but not, strictly speaking, with equal veraciousness. She had cast off the tie of Artie's ring and she introduced herself as Somers. She was true to the spirit if not to the letter.

Angus, having heard her referred to as Mrs. Falwell by the captain of the ship that had brought her from Para, glanced at her sharply, but he made no remark. He had watched Julie for a long while before he had hailed her, and was another who was favorably impressed by her appearance. She was a lonely lassie, he argued, and it was no business of his what name she chose to sail under.

"'Tis a risk ye're taking," he observed. "This blazing shor-re is no place for a lass wi' skin like yours. I thought maybe you were taken seeck when ye sat down under yon tree, an' would be needing help."

Julie looked back along the coast. The place where she had rested was a long way off.

"How could you see so far?" she asked.

Angus MacBane nodded toward a pair of field-glasses standing under the pipe. They were a relic of better days, and if the girl had asked him what he kept them for, he would not have told her. They were high-powered binoculars, not spy-glasses, and only the unnaturalness of a white person being on the beach had attracted his attention to Julie.

Angus brought those glasses with him to the beach in order to be able to read the names of the ships as they came to their anchorage beyond the coral reefs. Every now and again a Glasgow-built boat arrived, and on those days, Angus was a happier and sadder man. A ghostly little boy who had gazed up in awe and wonderment at the towering framework of the ships being erected on the banks of the Clyde, came and sat beside the man, self cast out. In those moments, foreign things and ways slipped into the discard, and Angus dreamed of tumbling, sparkling mountain streams; of misted hills purple with heather. Bonnie, purple heather.

There are prisoners other than they who languish behind iron bars.

At less frequent intervals there was another wraith who came to Angus when he sat vacant-eyed beside the pipe and the oppressing torpor of vain regrets was upon him. It seemed that a gentle hand touched his shoulder and white, slender fingers caressed his cheek. Perhaps it was only his fancy, but always when on these occasions he muttered a name that was cherished above all the once-upon-a-time memories that haunted him, he felt a cool breath on his brow. But his Laureen, gone from him these ten years, never gave any other sign.

On the evenings of these spirit-kissed days, Angus, morose and taciturn, stayed longer in a corner of some low-class drinking hut before going home. There was no joy to be found in the evil-smelling, vile-tasting stuff that he drank; but it helped him to veil the past and forget.

"You'll be taking the boat soon," said Angus more in statement than in question.

"Indeed I will not," replied Julie, a trifle irritated and wondering why such anxiety should be shown for her departure.

"Like it here?"

There was a suggestion of surprise in the Scot's raised eyebrows.

"Got to," said Julie. "If I find work to do I'll be all right until—until my brother comes back."

"An' your brother left ye here t' fend ye'rself. I'm thinking it's a waster an' a rascal ye're talking of. What will ye be doing here? I hear the wimmen in London an' ye're own country are ousting the men; but here, they stay home. Go back to ye're own land, lass, before ye get homesick. It's a gr-rand country, this—for some, but ithers—I tell ye"—Angus stopped and shook his forefinger at the girl—"there's noo place to compare wi' the land ye were born in. Mark me, sooner or later ye'll feel the pull at ye're heart-strings."

"Why do you stay here?" asked Julie.

Angus turned away.

"I'm old," he said after a time, and to the girl's mystification he added: '"'A Scottish king gave hostages for his fidelity.'"

After another long pause, during which Angus filled and lighted his pipe, he made a suggestion that Julie seized upon with alacrity.

"If ye're so set on remaining here, ye could teach English. There was an Irish lady here some months ago, and they paid her good money. Ye're an American, but at that ye're accent is nearer to the real thing than hers was. She had a br-rogue ye could cut wi' a knife."

Just as Angus was quite sure his own English was of the purest brand, so did Julie consider that she was capable of teaching the language. It was a fine idea. Much better than being confined in an office. She could go to the different houses, give a few lessons each day, make lots of friends, and—

"How will I get pupils?" she asked. "Will I put a piece in the paper?"

"Ye'll no waste money like that," said Angus. "Yonder at the custom-hoose, I'm well acquainted. I can say a word for ye, an' ye'll not be lacking plenty ta do until ye're brither comes back. There's children here aplenty, an' after the learning. I'll tell Salgado about ye when he comes back. He's a guid mon. Morton's na so bad neether; not for an Englishmon."

Sometimes Angus was very Scotch.

The picture of herself here suggested did not fit Julie's preconceived ideas. She had imagined herself the center of a class of young people about her own age. Did this helpful but ancient Scot imagine she would or wanted to be governess to a lot of babies?

Angus soon made her aware that this was exactly what he intended.

"Ye'll no be teaching any young men," he said with blunt, fatherly finality. "Ye're ower young as it is to be far from ye're kins folk. An' I misdoubt if I should help ye at all to stay in this country. The heat—"

"Down where I live it's cool, and there's a dandy beach for bathing," interrupted Julie. "Moonlight nights it 'll be great. Why don't they have a pavilion here? The water's fine."

"Stop! Ye're daft!" cried Angus. He stood up, and his brown, wrinkled face looked gray and haggard. "'Tis madness ye're talking," he continued. "Do ye no ken there's sharks in that sea? They'll tear ye limb from limb, an'—don't I know?"

Something of the horror and hatred that was in the man's voice communicated itself to Julie. She shivered, and when Angus sat down again on the iron pipe and buried his face in his hands, the girl felt embarrassed and painfully guilty of having touched upon a subject that was, to this strange man's mind, associated with some terrible tragedy.

When we are powerless to help, incapable of understanding another's great grief, the impulse is to honor the sorrowing one by our absence.

"Good-by," said Julie gently. "I'll remember all you've said, and—and I'm sorry I reminded you of—of—something. I—"

"'Tis naught, lass. Ye meant no harm. A puir fool is the man that falls under the cross of memory. Some day, maybe, I'll tell ye aboot my—my Laureen. Now, ye'll hasten home and rest. Guard ye're strength, child, and if ye need a friend ye'll find me here or in that wee bit shanty over there."

CHAPTER XXII.

WANTED.

ON her way home, Julie gathered no more shells. Her mind was occupied with the new vista opened up before her by Angus MacBane's suggestion. Some sort of prearranged program was now possible, and the optimism of youth buoyed her to the belief that her immediate future was cleared of all difficulties. Conversational English; this was to be her means of providing herself with an income. With money coming in regularly, she would be mistress of her desires; able to stay or go, and, above all—her reserve fund would be in no danger of being encroached upon.

Angus had a funny way of talking, but he was a nice old man.

"He's had his share of trouble," thought

the girl, "and I guess maybe it is drink that's made him so trembly; but I'll say he's white, although he's browned and wrinkled up. It sure don't do to judge by what people look like. It's what they are inside that counts. Here I go all over town looking for a job; seeing the men that are supposed to hire help, and after all, it's that old Scotchman that puts me wise. It's a shame he lost his Laureen. Guess I'll go down and talk to him to-morrow. He certainly looked lonesome sitting on that pipe. If he don't want me around, I'll beat it and look for that bird."

Altogether, Julie had had a day of experiences that had somewhat widened her views, and when she arrived at the door of her hut, she found something that further testified that kindly feeling is a human trait that crops up at unexpected moments and in all kinds of people.

All of us, unless we be of the blase-cum-indifferent order, which is a miserable coterie to belong to, have a weakness for surprises that take the form of parcels. The wrapping plays a most important part, and couples pleasure to the elements of anticipation and conjecture.

Cut flowers in a long box nicely wrapped and tied up, have a greater impressionable influence than a bouquet bereft of all covering. Red roses are more alluringly red when taken from their bed of soft tissue paper. Dad never uses the leather case that enclosed the pipe he received on his last birthday; but he remembers how fine that now blackened brier looked when he lifted it from its silk-lined shell. The cardboard box that contained the gloves to mother cost less than two cents; but it will be found in the drawer where she keeps her treasured knickknacks. It is associated in her mind with the memory of the happy feeling that was hers when she lingered over the job of lifting the lid.

Julie's surprise took the form of a woven reed basket. It was placed close to her door, and covered with green leaves. What did it contain? Where did it come from?

The girl made several guesses, but she did not correctly solve the pleasant little mystery. She prolonged the fun by opening her door and placing the basket on her trestle table before lifting the edge of a leaf.

She found a dozen eggs. Just eggs. That was all, and yet, although Julie smiled, she also brushed away a sudden strange moisture in her eyes.

They were decidedly fine-looking eggs; big and with a faint, delicate bloom on the shells; but who can become emotional over eggs? The solution is: it is the motive behind the gift that, thanks be, touches us on a tender spot. It is the thoughtfulness of the giver that really stirs us.

While Julie was making a fire, preparatory to coffee and boiled eggs, she heard the clapping of hands. The opening to the kitchen faced the front door, and the girl had only to make one step back to see the whole length of her domain. Her caller was the bodega woman, and although Julie eventually succeeded in satisfying herself that it was her attentive neighbor who had given her the eggs, she could not make herself understood with regard to the matter of having her fare paid on the trolley.

When she showed her ticket and went through a pantomime of what she imagined had taken place, the woman shook her head and Julie could not make out whether it was that her visitor could not understand, or whether she had been mistaken and some one else had bought her a ride.

"If it wasn't you, who was it?" she exclaimed, exasperated, and the lady of the bodega only grinned, and in her turn, but more successfully, indicated that she had not come to talk, but to lend a hand in preparing Julie's meal. This service rendered, she went away, and soon after nightfall the girl closed her shutters and prepared for her hammock. She was tired and sleepy, but the sun had scorched through her thin stockings and burned her ankles. Her shoulders also felt scalded.

A liberal application of powder helped to tone down the smarting, but Julie's chief concern was her face. Would the skin peel off her nose? She got up again, and by the dim light of the lamp made a minute inspection of that rather well-shaped and precious feature.

"It feels kinda hot," she decided, "but I guess my hat saved me."

It was comforting to feel she was to be spared having a red and blistered nose; but, nevertheless, Julie passed a bad night, and was glad when dawn came and she could give up trying to find an easy position to lay in. After a cup of cold coffee, Julie opened the top half of her door and busied herself sorting over her clothes.

The first living thing which passed her door was a chicken, then came a grunting, scrawny pig, and soon after this breakfast hunter came a man. At least he was dressed as such, but he had the face of a bearded gargoyle. A heavy black box hung from a strap over his shoulder. He stopped, and a prolonged stare was exchanged. Then, being a commercial traveler, and therefore a business man, the newcomer swung his box to the ground and spread his palms flapper-wise. He bowed and simulated a smile of servile humbleness, muttered a string of words, and bowed again. He then flung back the lid of his box and struck an attitude of ingratiating expectancy.

Looking over her barrier half door, Julie saw the box contained a heterogeneous collection of cheap jewelry, reels of cotton, packets of needles, and pins, and remnants of gaudy-patterned calico.

"What a lot of junk to peddle around," she thought. "Wonder what he is? He's too greasy looking for a Brazilian. I s'pose he's some poor, stranded—"

"You buy?"

The pedler leered slyly at Julie's startled face.

"You speak English?" she exclaimed.

The man shrugged his shoulders. He thought it a very foolish question to ask one of his Ishmaelite habits. Besides his native language, he could get along well enough for trading purposes in four others. And as for being poor or stranded, a Turkish pedler, shoddy as he may appear, has plenty of money, and is far too slippery to often fail to get in or out of any country he wants to enter or leave. Ethically considered, these wandering Turks are rotten salesmen; but weighed on a basis of results they are prodigies of usury in the art of buying or selling, barter or exchange. They will blandly sell a ten-cent brooch for all it will fetch over the equal of a dollar, and will buy fifty dollars' worth of handmade lace for something around three dollars or less. Their greatest asset is the ignorance of their buyers and sellers.

In his own country this wandering pedler would most probably have worn a red girdle stuck with cutlery and gone a-butchering helpless Armenians. He found it less risky and far more profitable to comb the outskirts of South American towns and villages and "stick" easy marks.

One of these same crafty merchants had come near to making a deal with Artie, and if David Stern had not been of an impulsive nature and quick with his hands, Julie might have been forced to go where we would not care to follow.

"How much?" asked the girl, suddenly pointing to a string of gilt beads.

The pedler did not at once reply. Julie was a foreigner; American or English, she was therefore likely to be well informed regarding values. He subtracted about two hundred per cent from his usual asking price and mumbled something in Portuguese.

"How much in American money?" asked Julie.

"Fi' dollars. Sheep, no?"

"Cheap?" echoed the girl. "Say, you old turkey-buzzard, you got up early, but I'm no worm."

"Sheep," insisted the Turk; but somehow his manner lacked confidence. This girl spoke too plainly. She knew too much.

"Rats," said Julie succinctly, and added: "Beat it, I'm through, finished."

She ducked down behind her door, heard a guttural muttering, the slam of the box lid and the creak of the shoulder-strap. When she looked out again the pedler was shuffling through the sand to less discriminating patrons.

According to the pasteboards shuffled by certain predatory and voluble ladies who favor faded kimonos, and who have an inherent dislike for manicurists, Julie should just about here have encountered some prince of dashing demeanor and fabulous wealth. She should have been wooed, pursued, and won. A seeress of the summer amusement parks favored by gullible city

folk, would have earned her fee by dark hints concerning the coming of the prototype of the knave of clubs, the king of spades or the jack of hearts. As it was, no creature more fascinating than a chicken, a pig, and a Turk had so far appeared on this morning. But Julie's thoughts were not bent on frivolous matters. She was thinking of the pupils she was to get, and she finished dressing with more than ordinary care. At the psychological moment she tenderly applied an invisible coating of powder to her pinkish nose, and stood ready to greet any eager applicants for conversational English. The expected happened unexpectedly. Along the shore came a stranger. He was mounted on a white horse, and with quite flattering ceremony he cantered up to the girl's door, swept off his broad-brimmed hat and dismounted.

"Miss—Somers?"

To only one person had Julie given her resumed name, therefore, she concluded, this courteous, nice-appearing visitor had come from Angus MacBane, and he was an emissary from some Brazilian family.

A fair enough surmise, but not quite tallying with the actual truth.

"My name is Kragen," said the man. "Johan Kragen. I hear you are contemplating taking pupils."

"Children," said Julie, mindful of what the Scot had said.

Kragen smiled. "You will find them an awful nuisance. Besides, I have a very good offer to make you. Most advantageous. You surely would have no objection to teaching a member of your own sex, even if she were a grown-up?"

"Why—no. That is—"

"Then we can come to terms," ejaculated Kragen promptly. "I wish to engage you exclusively, and I am of course willing to pay you well."

"The lady is a Brazilian?"

Kragen nodded. "She is my wife."

"And you want me to come to your house every day?"

"I want you to come and stay. Take up your residence with us until my wife is thoroughly able to converse. You would have your own rooms, and I assure you that you would not find your duties arduous. Later on, if you are willing, you could accompany us on a trip to Europe. We plan to stay in Paris for a few months. If I may say so, you will have a most enjoyable time. My wife is a charming woman, and I am sure will take to you at once. Will you come?"

The pointblank question took the girl at a disadvantage. The offer seemed filled with attractive possibilities. She would have no housekeeping to do, no responsibilities, no walking from pillar to post, and there was that trip to Paris. Why shouldn't she accept? This Kragen was fair spoken; a man of wealth. Everything was above board, and she would have a well-paid position with none of the drawbacks of long hours.

"Would a salary of four hundred milreis a month meet your views?"

Julie looked blank. Four hundred milreis had the sound of being a lot of money; but how much it was she could not say. She was speedily enlightened.

"In American money," said Kragen, "that would be about a hundred and forty dollars."

Subdivision of this into four parts was easy.

"Thirty-five dollars a week," thought Julie, "and no expenses. I should say that does meet my views. It's a collision, not a meeting. I'm on."

When she spoke to Kragen, though, she tempered her enthusiasm and restrained any show of over-eagerness to accept his offer.

"Then we'll seal the bargain," said Kragen, and took out a well-filled pocketbook. "Here," he went on, handing the girl a clean, crisp bank-note, "is an advance on your first month's salary. Can you be ready by this afternoon? My home is not far; but it is less fatiguing to travel by train than on horseback."

Julie was in a condition of mind to agree with almost anything. There was a substantial reality about the bank-note she held, and with all her determination to keep cool and calm, her good fortune flurried her. Not that Johan Kragen gave her any reason to suppose there was any need to be on her guard. On the contrary, he was

businesslike, expeditious, and disarmingly impersonal.

He gave her full and careful directions about which trolley-car she was to take; wrote on a slip of paper her train and the name of the station she was to get off at.

"You hand that to the ticket clerk," he instructed, "and you won't have any bother. I'll meet you at your destination."

When Johan Kragen rode away, the girl was slightly dazed with the rapidity with which she had been transferred from a state of joblessness to an assured position; but her new employer fully measured up to her standards of what a good boss should be.

With the intention of going to thank Angus for his so satisfactory efforts on her behalf, Julie started to hurry over her packing and arrangements; but as morning advanced, the customary sea breeze died away and the sun blazed down with untempered violence.

Adverse weather conditions frustrate many good intentions. Julie grew limp and sluggishly slow with the oppressing heat; but the moments fly by just as quickly when we are dull and somnolent as when full of snap and energy. It was a long time before she again saw Angus MacBane. She arrived at the station with only five minutes to spare before train time.

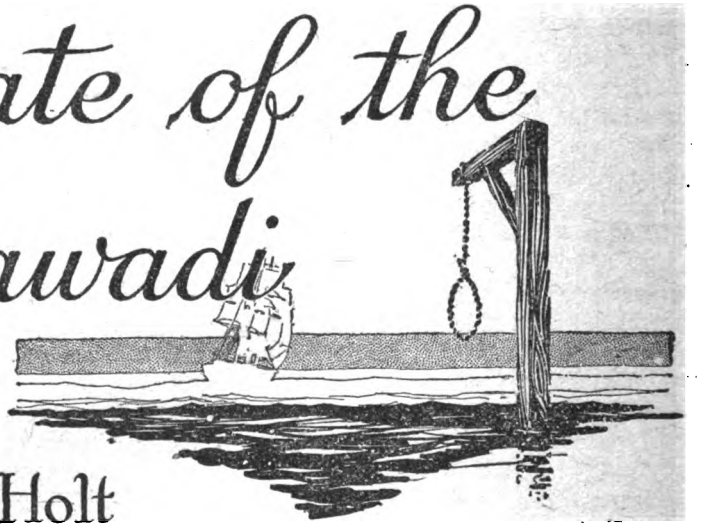
Scheduled hours of arrival and departure on some railroad systems are propositions that do not always work out in demonstration. For upwards of half an hour, Julie sat in the open-sided coach and wondered whether the engine had been mislaid or there was a strike on.

"At last," she murmured, "we're off."

This story will be continued in next week's issue of the ARGOSY-ALLSTORY WEEKLY, the consolidated title under which both magazines will appear hereafter as one.

Mate of the Irawadi

by Henry P. Holt



BARNEY QUICK was neither worse than the best of some of us nor as bad as the worst of us, but fear had begun to grip his very soul. And, incidentally, there was a girl in the Bronx whom he loved better than all the other girls he had loved put together; better than good black tobacco; better than the freedom of bachelorhood. Which is saying much, for Barney was a sailor.

He had made five trips between New York and Malay as mate in the steamer Irawadi, when Jimmie Lamson, the skipper, began to drown his sorrows in the flowing bowl, as was his invariable practice immediately they reached the Far East. Barney was easy going and held a master mariner's certificate; and of these facts Captain Lamson took unfair advantage. He soaked himself in foolish waters until he

couldn't see, until he didn't know whether the Irawadi was going or coming, and until his own temper became vitriolic and Barney grew aweary of shouldering responsibility.

While rational, Lamson was good natured, fair, square, and capable, and after sobering up he always vowed he would climb high up onto the water-wagon and view the world from that healthy eminence for the remainder of his days. Often, on such occasions, the skipper tried to press extravagant presents on the mate. Only on the previous trip Lamson had offered him a valuable diamond ring, which Barney refused, though he did accept a monkey which the captain had bought from a native just before the ship sailed out of Sengora. Barney thought perhaps the girl in the Bronx might like it, but when she tactfully explained that monkeys and the Bronx don't exactly mix, he decided to keep it, and handed the creature over to the guardianship of his brother.

But now, on the fifth trip to Malay, even Barney's patience was tried beyond endurance. Lamson did not descend gracefully from his perch on the water-wagon: he fell off, with a bump. Barney tried all reasonable and unreasonable means of persuasion. Lamson grew unbearably offensive, and once there was an angry scene on deck when the mate, in order to bring the befuddled skipper to his senses, threatened savagely to knock him overboard and finish him off. This, unfortunately, within earshot of several members of the crew. So that, two days later, when Lamson chose to appear in the middle of the first watch and make an especially irritating attack on the mate, and Barney lost his temper, there was damning evidence against him.

At that moment navigation was difficult and dangerous, anyway, owing to a dense fog, for the brass-throated voices of ships passing in the Gulf of Siam could be heard in the distance. Barney had left the bridge for a hurried meal, and was just returning, when he encountered the skipper on deck. Lamson poured out a volley of oaths at the mate, and raised his clenched fist, which nobody else happened to see. In self-protection, Barney hit out, just as two deckhands appeared on the scene. The blow fell on the skipper's jaw. Lamson reeled back, lurched against the rail, toppled over, and was swallowed up by the night, the soft, clinging mist, and the ever-waiting sea.

With two bounds Barney reached the bridge ladder. Twenty seconds later the engines were stopping and the ship's heel was swerving so that the man in the water might stand some chance of not being cut to pieces by the propeller. Life-belts were also thrown overboard, and a boat was lowered, but nothing more was seen of Captain Lamson.

And this was why fear had begun to grip the very soul of Barney Quick. It did not come instantly. Some time elapsed before he fully realized his position. His first feeling, after the boat returned, unsuccessful, was one of deepest sorrow, not on his own behalf, but for Lamson. In a way, he had liked the skipper. He would have liked him very much but for the calamitous effect the Far East had upon Lamson. Then began a growing feeling of discomfort on his own behalf.

Murder was murder. And not only had the men heard him threaten to knock the captain overboard: two deckhands had actually seen him do it. Of course there were extenuating circumstances, but nobody really understood those except the mate and the skipper. The stark fact was, Barney reflected, that he had threatened to kill Lamson, and then done it. And people who carry out a program of that nature are placed in the electric-chair.

Even then it was not actual fear which possessed him. That did not come until his thoughts flashed several thousand miles across land and sea to the girl in the Bronx. Then it dawned on him what her feelings would be when she heard that he, Barney Quick, had killed a man and was to be executed for it. She would probably take his word that it was an accident, but that would make her grief all the harder to bear when the time for his execution came. And so it was really more on her behalf than his that the fear existed.

Barney had a perfectly frank talk with the deckhands who would be the witnesses against him, and their attitude was uncom-

promising. Somebody, they maintained stolidly, would have to suffer for knocking the skipper overboard, and that was the man who did it. Barney became immersed in deepest thought as the Irawadi swooped in-shore for her regular call at Sengora before starting the long run for home. The crucial moment was arriving. If he was once placed under arrest he wouldn't stand a dog's chance. He saw no reason why he should absolutely give his life away.

When the steamer dropped her mud-hook in the roads he settled the point by quietly slipping over the side, and with long, powerful strokes, swam through the shark-infested waters to the shore which, considering all things, was likely to prove about as inhospitable as the sharks. He had fifteen dollars, a slight knowledge of the Malay tongue, the hand of every white man against him, and probably the yellow hand of any native, also, who thought he might earn a reward.

An unholy mass of riffraff swarmed like flies on the veranda of the crimp-house. Gunga-Lal, who provided these land-wrecked sailors with board and lodging without charging a penny in advance, ran his eyes over them as though they were cattle, ear-marked for eternity. Then he shrugged his shoulders slightly. Who in all Malay would hope to pick out the right man from among that crew of discredited humanity? A mere name? Pouff! What is it? They were here to-day, and gone to-morrow, or rather, their bellies gnawing for honest forecastle salt beef, they hoped to be gone to-morrow. But ships were not so plentiful at Chadrou, or Gunga-Lal would be a rich man.

Besides, Gunga-Lal did not *know* that this Barney Quick was under his hospitable roof. All he had heard was that the fellow was believed to have left Sengora as one of the scum employed in the stoke-hold of the steamer Cleopatra. The Cleopatra had then called at Chadrou, and some of the scum had deserted in that port. The name "Quick" was not on the crimp-house ledger, but that didn't amount to a row of pins. A dozen new specimens of riffraff had become guests of the establishment in the last seven days, since the Cleopatra put to sea again, and they all looked very much alike, Gunga-Lal reflected, rolling a morsel of betel-nut in a leaf and placing it into his mouth. Perhaps there were two out of the dozen who differed from the rest. One of them was so thin that if he walked sidewise he would get into Heaven, because they wouldn't see him coming. He was no ship's officer, and never had been.

The other looked more promising: the name he had given was Carter. Judging by his clothing he was quite as disreputable as the rest, but he had not that cowed look which stamps the dweller of a crimp-house, where any male thing with legs and arms, and with nothing but his immortal soul to sell, may seek refuge, such as it is, until the proprietor of the establishment finds him a ship and modestly draws on the man's wages, in advance, ten times what he deserves.

Gunga-Lal had positive inspirations at times, and he was moved by one as he stood there masticating betel-nut on that mosquito-ridden veranda. He shuffled up into the midst of the sailors.

"I have a—a friend," he said, "who wants a capetain for his schooner. A capetain who can navigate." Gunga-Lal was, of course, lying. To begin with he had no friends, not even Magra, the misshapen Malay craven who obeyed the crimp-house master like a dog. To go on with, Gunga-Lal knew of no vacant berth in any schooner. It was finesse on his part.

A hoarse laugh went up from one or two of the sailors. They knew well enough that if any master-mariner were in their midst, it was because his certificate had been somewhat crumpled by the stern processes of the law.

"Got a clean ticket to hand out, Gunga?" some one queried in a raucous voice.

"That can be arranged," replied Gunga-Lal, for it was well enough known that bona-fide certificates belonging to dead men got into precarious circulation at times.

The man who had given the name of Carter moved uneasily in his seat. Gunga-Lal glanced in his direction.

"You?" the crimp-house master queried

blandly, with only a dim suspicion that this might be Barney Quick. Barney hesitated, nodded, and then could have kicked himself from Perim to Pittsburgh. For six months, now, he had sunk his identity, passing as coal-trimmer, stoker, and deckhand. Once, only, had he communicated with the outside world, and that was when, perched on the edge of a bunk in a stifling fo'c's'le, he had written to a girl in the Bronx, telling her the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, and informing her that when the affair had blown over a little, he was going straight to her, to ask whether she considered he ought to face the music or not.

Barney knew that Malay was almost the last country in which he ought to seek sanctuary, and he would not have been there but for two distinctly disconcerting facts. He was stoking on a steamer which called at Sengora. A good many people at that port knew him, so while the ship lay there he kept well out of sight. Just as she was leaving, however, he put his head over the side, and met the astonished gaze of the Malay dock laborer who had sold the monkey to Captain Lamson. The distance between them was widening rapidly, but the Malay shouted and gesticulated. Barney ignored him utterly, and hoped the Malay, whom he knew well enough, was not feeling too sure. Only a few hours later the chief engineer gave Barney a queer glance.

"Mon," said the chief, "I hae put ma eyes on ye afore, somewhere, an' I ken weel ye no stokin' then. But I canna place ye."

"We all have doubles," Barney said lightly; but he sidestepped the danger the moment the good ship Cleopatra touched at Chadrou. Safety first was an ingrowing maxim with him these days. It was, however, instinctive disgust at having to herd with the great unwashed, that prompted Barney to nod when Gunga-Lal spoke of a vacant berth on a schooner, and Gunga-Lal's face was as inexpressive as that of a mummy when he raised one yellow finger and beckoned the candidate to the seclusion of his own quarters. Even as Barney followed, he dubbed himself a fool for taking such a chance. Gunga-Lal's oblique black eyes were fixed on the ex-mate of the Irawadi when he invited him to take a seat on an empty crate, and proffered a villainous cigar.

"You a capetain, uh?" asked the Malay with the utmost urbanity.

Barney fingered the cigar. He was thinking hard.

"I guess so." A bare flicker passed over Gunga-Lal's face. Barney had given his nationality away with his first reply.

"A good capetain, uh? You lose your ticket. What you lose it for?"

"That's none of your blamed business," snapped Barney. "Say, what kind of a skipper d'you want? You said something about a schooner: not a P. and O. boat."

The crimp-house master expostulated with a skinny arm.

"My friend pay good wage," he said, "but he must have a good capetain. What for you lose um ticket?"

Barney, who, as a matter of fact, had not "lost" his ticket, but was merely finding it inadvisable to parade one which gave away his identity, scowled at the five feet of olive-tinted humanity before him.

"I lost a steamer in collision," he said glibly. "Now, what in hell has that got to do with your rotten little schooner?"

For a moment the crimp-house master thought he had the wrong man, in spite of the two gold fillings in the front teeth, in spite of his being an American, in spite of his probably having come from Sengora in the Cleopatra. There was only one man who could identify Barney Quick to Gunga-Lal's satisfaction, but he was at Sengora. The crimp-house master did not want to take any chances. There was a small, tame ape ogling them both as it clung to the bamboo rafters in a corner. Gunga-Lal's slant eyes squinted at the animal, and then, on a second inspiration, he played his trump card.

"The schooner," he said, "trades monkeys down the river to the coast."

"My God!" muttered Barney disgustedly. "It's a high-toned job, this."

"But the pay is good," the Malay went on temptingly. "The monkey trade is a good trade, if you understand monkeys. Do you know anything about monkeys?"

"Why, yes," replied Barney, already re-

velling in the thought of something better than man-handling coal. "I've got one of my own?"

"Here?" asked the squat-faced crimp-house master. Something in the way the Malay put the question arrested Barney's attention. Up to that moment he had suspected there was some joker to the captaincy of the schooner. Now he brought his teeth together with a jerk and realized suddenly that Gunga-Lal, though preserving the expression of a sphinx, was taking altogether too much interest in his affairs.

"No," replied the ex-mate of the Irawadi irritably. "I had one, but it died, years ago. Say, Gunga, I'll think about that job you're offering me," he added, rising and strolling away. The crimp-house master followed the sailor with his eyes for some distance. Smiles came very rarely to the Malay's face, but he permitted himself the luxury on this occasion. There happened to be no ships, save a few native craft, at Chadrou. This man Carter or Quick or whatever his name was, was therefore in a trap, the door of which was closed, and it would probably remain closed for several days. Nevertheless, Gunga-Lal called softly for Magra, to whom he gave very precise instructions, after which the misshapen little creature moved away in snakelike fashion, following the route which Barney Quick had taken.

The instinct of self-preservation had become keenly alert in Barney. He tramped for two hours aimlessly until he arrived at the irrevocable conclusion that Gunga-Lal had smelled a rat. To remain in Chadrou was to court an enforced trip back to America and then the electric-chair; and if he had to take that particular route to heaven he preferred to give himself up in New York City like a man, rather than be hounded down by a dirty Malay in a God-forsaken place like Chadrou. Twice he looked over his shoulder suddenly and twice saw the slinking form of Magra in the distance.

That settled the matter for Barney. He headed straight toward the crimp-house, stuffed into his pockets one or two of his more valued possessions, and, in as natural a manner as might be, strolled out again. He was burning to set miles between himself and Gunga-Lal's establishment. Sengora, he must avoid: too many people knew him there.

There was a port, of sorts, sixty miles along the coast in the other direction. It would be hard going, a-foot, some of the way, for Malay jungle paths are mountainous and uncertain. Still, needs must when the devil drives. Barney quickened his pace and traveled two miles in the wrong direction until he felt sure he had shaken Magra off his trail. Then, taking his bearings afresh, he steered for his destination and an hour later was feeling almost light-hearted once more when something whizzed through the air. He spun round, but saw nothing, for a sharp blow on the temple almost robbed him of consciousness. He was vaguely aware of hearing voices around him. Whether he was in Malay or lying in his own bunk on the steamer Irawadi, he could not be sure, because his head felt as though it were splitting, his brain was leaden, and the effort of thought was painful. When consciousness did fully return, the first thing he was definitely aware of was that the black, beady eyes of Gunga-Lal were staring into his, and that he was unable to move either legs or arms for the simple reason that he was trussed up after the fashion of a Thanksgiving turkey.

"So you would have leave us," remarked the Malay, with his eternally blank expression. Barney craned his neck and came to the conclusion that he must have been carried back to the neighborhood of the crimp-house. The peculiarly shrill cry of one skinny rooster smote his ear. Yes, assuredly he had been carried back. He was lying in a bamboo hut—probably one which he seemed to remember having seen from the outside in circumstances which were less trying.

"Well, and what d'you want?" was Barney's reply.

"You lie to me. You are not Carter, but Quick, uh?"

"What in blazes has that got to do with you?" Barney's ire was now fully aroused at the indignity of being thus treated by a Malay crimp-house rat. Fear of

what the immediate future might hold for him was the last thing that worried him just then.

"Leesen," said Gunga-Lal calmly. "I make you what you call a proposition." He lowered his voice. The two were alone. Because he had no option, Barney listened.

For three weeks the ex-mate of the Irawadi had lain in his bamboo hut, a prisoner. Each day he was given barely sufficient food to keep him alive. It was a slow process of starvation, well suited, according to the Oriental mind, for the purpose. And the Oriental mind is capable of infinite artistry in such matters. Once a day, before Barney was fed, Gunga-Lal interviewed him. The conversation never varied: a question put by the Malay, and a reply from Barney consisting of three words only, which included precise directions to Gunga-Lal on the subject of his future abode.

Barney grew hollow-eyed, and hollow inside, but his three-word reply to the crimp-house master never lost its snap. He was just figuring out how long body and soul could cling together in such circumstances, when the unmistakable sound of a scuffle outside the hut caught his ear. There was a blow and a grunt. Then the lattice work at the entrance was drawn aside, and there entered a white man, who held the misshapen Magra firmly by the ear with one hand and a gun in the other. Barney looked up at the visitor, emitted a curious noise from the back of his throat, gulped, and then closed his eyes, under the impression that this was the effect of a too-attenuated diet. But he opened his eyes again, for the visitor was cutting his cords.

"S-say," Barney began jerkily, "that—that isn't Jimmie Lamson. And yet it's your voice, and it looks like you. Jim, you son of a gun, how in—for the love of Mike, is it *you?*"

"It's me all right," replied Lamson, cutting the last strand. "There, get on your pins. Hello, weak, eh? Well, lean on me. Let's get off to the Irawadi. She's lying close. We'd better beat it. I don't think I've killed that crimp-house master, and he may set a whole bunch of trouble going. He went for me with a knife."

"I'm all right," Barney protested as he hobbled along painfully. "But tell me, why aren't you dead?"

"Got picked up by a ship," replied the skipper. "Did me good. Been on the wagon ever since. Got a message for you from your girl. Says if you don't go right back and marry her at once you needn't go at all. Said a lot more, but I didn't remember it."

"But how on earth did you come to look in that shack for me?"

"Little feller with a twist in his legs came aboard this afternoon. Said he wanted to get even with Gunga-Lal for licking him. But, gosh, I forgot, Barney, don't say you put 'em wise!"

"About what?"

"About where your monkey is."

"Monkey! Is it true, then!" gasped Barney. "How did you hear?"

"Malay that sold it to me came aboard at Sengora next time we called, and nearly had ten fits. Told me he didn't know it had been stolen. It's the most sacred thing in all Malay, is that monkey, Barney—the monkey god of the Orang Benua, the wild men in the hills. The Malay told me he was scared stiff. The Orang Benua priests had hunted down the man who first stole it, and chopped him up into little bits as a sacrifice to *your* monkey, Barney. Then they'd promised a similar treat to the man who sold it to me if he didn't get on to its track again. I told him I'd given it to you—he remembers *you* all right—and I didn't know where you were. Then he had another dozen fits, an' I couldn't find either you or the monkey. Where *is* the darn thing, Barney? Of course I went to ask your girl next time we were in New York, but she hadn't any idea."

"The monkey's safe enough," replied Barney. "Better bring it over next trip if they're so darn keen on the thing. Funny thing, these dago religions. You'd never think that Gunga-Lal had any religion in him, would you? Yet he must have. He was ready to go the limit with me if I wouldn't tell him where it was. He started off with some yarn about a reward being offered for the thing and said he'd go halves. I had thought up to then that

he'd got me there for—for quite a different purpose. Tell you about that some other time, though. I wasn't exactly polite to Gunga, and then he got mean. Said I could either tell him where it was and get nothing, or die. And I wasn't going to give in to any Malay crimp-house insect. No, sir. There's our boat, isn't it? Yes, I can see old Stetson. Still got him with you, then. Jim, I wonder if there was any truth in Gunga-Lal's yarn about a reward. If there was, it's yours, of course."

"I shouldn't say it was religion that interested your crimp insect," replied Lamson dryly. "Those hill-men's priests are offering a reward, which is equal to about ten thousand American dollars, for the missing monkey god. We could squeeze 'em for more if we were in the monkey-god stealing business, I dare say, but ten thousand will do. What do you say if we go fifty-fifty, in the circumstances, Barney?"

Barney nodded. He was stepping on board. The Irawadi was just leaving for New York, and at the moment Barney's mind was fixed on a forthcoming event there, which was much more important to him than all the monkeys in Malay, much more important to him than all the wealth of the East.

NIGHT AND THE AGES

DUSK with a charm has lulled
The noisy world to sleep;
Only the stars keep watch,
And the never-resting deep.

Think of the countless years
That night has come to men,
Going they know not where,
Nor if it came again!

Over the sparkling blue
Of the gem-isled Grecian seas
It crept with its shadows cool,
Hiding the argosies.

Cæsar its coming knew
Where, by his camp-fire's light,
He dreamed of his far-off Rome
And the steps that lead to might.

Over red Waterloo
It laid the shroud of peace,
Cooling the parching lips,
Bringing with death surcease.

Centuries now have gone—
Still do we watch it come,
Touching the heart with peace
Till railing lips are dumb.

Here do I welcome it,
As countless men have done;
Ages have come and passed,
But night makes mankind one!

Arthur Wallace Peach

The Stray-Man

by Charles Alden Seltzer,

Author of "Riddle Gawne," "Square Deal Sanderson," "The Trail Horde," etc.

PRECEDING CHAPTERS BRIEFLY RETOLD

TAYLOR NELSON, known everywhere on the range as Shorty, although he is a giant in stature, cannot forget that in battle with outlaws a year back, his pal, Larry Dillon, was treacherously slain from the rear by Brail Kelton, of Blondy Antrims's band Having bided his time for vengeance he finally decided this had arrived and, on Governor Kane Lawler's horse, Red King, presented to him by the Governor, whose service on the ranch he was leaving, Shorty set out to find Kelton and exact it. At a water-hole near Loma he came upon a girl, daughter of the owner of the Circle Star, disabled through a fall from her horse, and was complimented that she chose him, rather than Tim Blandell, one of her father's men, to carry her home. Offered a job at the Circle Star by the girl, he at first refused, feeling that he must carry out his mission, but after a run-in with Blandell at Loma, where he also fell in with Lefty Knable, he started on a return to the ranch, but was shot in the back on the way. Red King carried him to the ranch-house, where Helen nursed him back to strength, only to have him confronted by her father, who turned out to be none other than Brail Kelton. Feeling from her talk that Helen must have heard him in his delirium mutter the name of the man he intended to kill to avenge Larry, Shorty went to the corral one night, determined to solve his problem by running away from it, when Helen came out to lay her hand on his arm and ask him bluntly who killed Larry. To which Shorty replied that she'd never know by his telling her.

CHAPTER XIII *(continued)*.

BY RED KING'S SIDE.

HELEN looked at him steadily then, one hand gripping his arm.

"Shorty," she said, "you think father killed Larry, and you are going away because you didn't want me to know. Isn't that it?"

He was silent. His guess had been accurate. She knew; he had talked about Kelton in his delirium. He was not surprised to find that she knew; but he was astonished at her actions. For she was holding tightly to him now, and her eyes were brilliant with delight that he could not mistake.

"You think father did it?" she repeated, her voice earnest, her hands gripping him tighter. "But he didn't, Shorty—he didn't. For on the 10th of June, last year, father was with me in the East. We left here during the last week in May, and we did not return until the end of June!"

Shorty stiffened; his eyes were glowing with a light that made her wonder at their power to express what he felt.

She felt his big hands gripping hers; she felt his muscles twitching. And at last his voice came.

"You ain't tellin' me this—" he began. And then, when he saw how her eyes met his—with a steady honesty that could not be doubted—he dropped his hands to his sides and laughed, lowly and vibrantly, as laughs a man who has come triumphantly through many dangers.

"But the note that was found on Larry?" he questioned.

"I don't know. I can't say about the

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note, Shorty. But father has enemies—Blandell, and more of the old Antrim band. Any of them might have done it; they are capable of perpetrating a ghastly joke like that."

The explanation was plausible; he grasped it eagerly.

"I reckon they might," he said. "I'm figurin' you heard me talkin' about your dad while I was ravin' with the fever. But if I said then that he killed Larry, why didn't you tell me before?"

"I wanted you to do—just what you did, Shorty; I wanted you to forgive, and to let God punish the murderer."

He laughed. "I'd sure have made a mistake if I'd done what I intended to do—wouldn't I?"

"How made a mistake?" she inquired.

"If I'd have rode away without hearin' what you've just told me."

The girl did not answer. But she might have told him that there had been little danger of his riding away unnoticed; for she had watched his every movement during the time that had elapsed since the conversation in which he had given her his promise. Now she held tightly to his arm as they walked toward the house, after he had taken the saddle and bridle from Red King and turned him into the corral.

CHAPTER XIV.

ENTER MORLEY STEWART.

SHORTY had become well enough to ride, but he was not yet sufficiently strong to join the outfit. To his insistence Brail Kelton told him there was "plenty of time," and that he would have a chance to make up for his "loafin'" before the season ended.

Shorty had grown to like Kelton. Since he had become convinced that Kelton was not the man he sought he had discovered qualities in him that he had not been able to see before. For instance, there were Kelton's eyes—which had baffled Shorty when he had looked into them on the occasion of their first meeting. He had thought then that Kelton's eyes betrayed a cold and malevolent nature; now he knew that they betrayed merely the steady, calm courage of the man who has confidence in himself.

Helen Kelton had not spoken to her father of Shorty's former suspicions. When one day Shorty asked her why she had not done so, she replied that since Kelton and Shorty seemed to have developed a mutual liking for each other it would not be fair to either of them to refer to a matter that might provoke her parent to resentment.

The explanation was logical, and Shorty accepted it as he had accepted her simple statement that her father had been East when Larry had been murdered.

Shorty had never doubted Helen's word. Perhaps in his acceptance of her declaration of the whereabouts of Kelton at the time of Larry's death there was an eagerness to accept any sort of an explanation that would make it possible for him to stay at the Circle Star; for he had hoped—even before she had spoken—that one could be found. But Shorty's belief in Kelton's innocence went deeper than that; it was founded upon his faith in the girl.

The paleness that had settled upon him immediately following the disappearance of the fever had been gradually yielding to the influence of the care that had been accorded him by his nurse—who also directed his daily activities—and Shorty's cheeks, at the end of a three weeks period of convalescence, were glowing with the bloom of health.

He had always been diffident in the presence of women; but the inevitable intimacy that had been wrought between him and Helen during the days and nights of her constant attendance had brought a fellowship in which there was little constraint. Yet though Shorty was aware of a new feeling between them, he did not presume upon it; he would not alter his attitude toward her until—he did not know when.

Though he knew that the old feeling of strangeness in her presence had gone, there was a deeper red than usual in his cheeks when one morning he asked her to go riding with him.

Two hours later, after having dismounted from their horses, they were sitting on a flat rock on the edge of a bastioned hill that rose above the narrow bed of a river

at a distance of several miles south from the ranch-house.

During the ride the girl had pointed out many landmarks, to be remembered, she told him, in the days that were to follow when he would be riding the Circle Star range for her father—if he decided to stay.

"I reckon I'm goin' to stay," he had told her; and she had shot a glance at him which had made his heart leap.

"That range of hills northward marks the limit of dad's range in that direction," she said now. "Just a little beyond those low hills westward is a little gully. The Circle Star range ends there. The river you had to cross going to Loma is the eastern limit; and that stretch of broken country south is where our land ends in that direction.

"Morley Stewart owns the ranch on the other side of that broken stretch. You've never seen Stewart. He rode over on the second day after you came to the Circle Star. You didn't know it, of course, but he was in the room, looking at you, while you were unconscious.

"I think you will like Stewart," she went on, some enthusiasm creeping into her voice. "He's an old friend of dad's. They were in business together in the old days, back East; and Stewart and dad came West and bought land after the failure."

So she had lived East. That accounted for many things about her that had puzzled Shorty—her manner, hinting of a refinement that he had never seen, but of which he had heard and read; her ready flow of language—words that sounded natural when they came from her lips, but which had sounded odd and stilted upon the tongues of other persons he had known—with the exception of Kane Lawler and his wife, who had been a school-teacher.

Education had never bothered Shorty much, though he respected it, and he had liked to hear Lawler talk, and Ruth Hamlin, who had become Mrs. Lawler. But now that Helen had told him of the life she had led before coming West—for the word "East" had filled his mind with pictures of civilized communities where there were places where one might improve one's mind and manner—he suddenly felt his inferiority; felt that something wide and vast had come between him and the girl who sat beside him.

He smiled into the distance, aware that there was only one hope for him. It was in that word "failure." That, according to the girl, was what had sent her father West; it was a thing that would make the gulf between them immeasurably smaller, providing Helen Kelton possessed those qualities of humanness that are not influenced by wealth. For an instant he yielded to a pulse of satisfaction, of grim joy that her father *had* met failure. For it had been that failure which had sent her out here to meet him.

Then a quicker sympathy seized him.

"Failure," he said. "I reckon that was too bad."

She smiled at him. "That is a question," she said, a light in her eyes that he could not fathom; "I have been very happy out here. I like the West."

"That ought to be satisfyin'."

"Yes," she said; "Morley Stewart has been father's friend. After the failure father had very little money left. Stewart loaned him enough to buy this ranch, for Stewart had some money that was not involved in the failure. Father has since repaid the loan, but we can't forget that we owe what we have to Morley Stewart. But I have often wondered what became of Eugene Lattimer."

The seeming irrelevance of the last sentence caused Shorty to look sharply at her. And a pang of jealousy shot through him. The name "Eugene" had a sound that suggested youth to him, and he pictured a young man, perhaps a suitor, who was still well-remembered.

"Eugene Lattimer," he repeated. "I reckon I never heard of him."

"Of course not. I forgot. My story was incomplete, wasn't it? But still, if you had been where newspapers were printed—about six years ago—you must have read about him. The papers were full of it. Eugene Lattimer was treasurer of the firm of Kelton & Stewart. It was he who caused the failure. He absconded with twenty thousand dollars of the firm's money. He has never been heard from since."

Shorty laughed. "I reckon there's thieves everywhere," he said. "In this country as well as in the East. Only they go about it different out here. But whether a man steals money or cattle, it don't make a whole lot of difference. There's a lot of Eugene Lattimers out here, only they're wearin' commoner names."

He was looking at her as he spoke, and he saw her eyes quicken; saw her lean a little forward and peer into the level stretch of country south of the river. Following her gaze he saw a horseman riding through the tall grass and sage that carpeted the level.

It was evident that the man had seen them, for he was looking directly toward them; and when Shorty saw him he was removing his hat from his head in greeting.

Shorty noted that he was a tall man, heavily built, and that he rode erect in the saddle, with a grace that was apparent despite the distance from which Shorty viewed him.

"I don't seem to know him," said Shorty slowly. "I was thinkin' that mebbe it was Knable."

The girl laughed; it was plain to Shorty that she liked the newcomer.

She turned and looked at Shorty, and what he saw in her eyes made him feel that he in his turn was not going to like the rider.

"It is Morley Stewart!" said Miss Kelton, her voice leaping.

Shorty did not share in her enthusiasm. He leaned back, clasping his hands over one knee, wondering if there was any difference in the quality of the affection a girl felt for a friend of the family and the affection she felt for a man who might possibly be regarded as a suitor.

CHAPTER XV.

THE SHADOW DESCENDS AGAIN.

MORLEY STEWART was forty-five years of age, and looked ten years younger. The emotion which swept over Shorty at sight of him was undoubtedly jealousy. For Stewart was one of those men who seem to be reluctant to permit youth to pass; who hold tenaciously to its vigor, its virility and its mannerisms.

He was tall, lithe and good looking. His movements, as he dismounted, betrayed the flexibility of muscle and sinew so admirable in men who keep themselves in perfect physical condition. When he walked to where Helen Kelton was standing, there was a smile on his face that made it actually handsome. Shorty admitted this despite the wave of jealousy that swept over him.

And Miss Kelton seemed also to realize that Stewart was good to look upon. For her smile betrayed the pleasure she felt; and Shorty saw her eyes glow with delight as Stewart clasped her hand in greeting.

For an instant it seemed to Shorty that he had been forgotten. As Stewart paused him to greet the girl he shot a quick glance at him, and then he was talking with Helen, having turned his back on Shorty.

Shorty swiftly appraised the newcomer, and his dislike was for Stewart's manner. The man held his head too high to conform with Shorty's idea of physical deportment; his shoulders were thrown too far back, and there was a little swing to them when he walked that hinted of a swagger—the cock-sure and self-conscious stiffness of the peacock.

Stewart's lips were thin, with curves that suggested petulance; and his eyes—at least to Shorty—seemed to hold a glint which told of vanity.

Yet Shorty had Miss Kelton's word that Stewart was a dependable friend. He had been proved and tested in the crucible of adversity, and according to all the rules of conduct, Shorty was compelled to accept him at the value the girl had placed upon him.

Therefore he shook Stewart's hand firmly when Helen introduced him, met his gaze steadily, and was rather astonished to find that the light in Stewart's eyes was frank and warm and manly. At that instant Shorty wondered if his jealousy had not prejudiced him against the man when he had been judging him previously.

"Taylor Nelson," said Stewart, smiling. "Mr. Nelson, I expect I have the advantage of you. For I saw you some weeks

ago. I took a good, long look at you, but you didn't seem to be much interested in what was going on around you. That was a bad wound; but any one could see that you are not going to die for some time yet."

"I'm expectin' to stay here," began Shorty.

But Stewart did not await the completion of the sentence; he turned to Miss Kelton while Shorty was talking, and began to say something to her in a low voice, while Shorty, snapping his words through clenched teeth, turned and looked in another direction.

Women, Shorty supposed, were entitled, because of constitutional emotionalism and their position as teachers of the race, to a volubility that custom proscribed in men. And Shorty had never warmed to men who cackled. And that was what Stewart's voice sounded like to him. Just now he was running on at a great rate to Miss Kelton, indicating by his manner that interest was draped upon every syllable he uttered.

Shorty had got up to greet Stewart; now he sat down on the rock again, and cupping his hands under his chin, stared disgustedly into space, not listening to the other's drivel. He decided that had he been Stewart's partner he would have been glad to encounter failure—if failure meant that he could escape contact with the man.

Sitting on the rock, Shorty decided that he knew why Stewart had done so much for Kelton. Shorty would have jeopardized Red King in a wager against 'most anything that Stewart was not married; and when he heard the fellow mention "the late Mrs. Stewart" in a voice that had not a suspicion of emotion in it, his former opinion was strengthened.

Stewart had helped his old partner because he wanted to marry the partner's daughter.

For Shorty the day was spoiled. He had purposely brought Helen Kelton to this spot, that he might say to her a thing he had meditated saying for the past week—if he should find the courage to do so. But this man Stewart, appearing out of the southern distance unheralded, had driven all thoughts of romance out of Shorty's mind.

A little later, when Stewart suggested riding back to the ranch-house, himself helping Miss Kelton into the saddle and seeming to ignore Shorty's presence, the latter refused to stir from the rock.

Miss Kelton looked inquiringly at him.

"Shorty," she said, "aren't you coming back with us?"

"I'm reckonin' to rest here a little while, ma'am," he said quietly. "That is, if you don't mind."

"Why—no-o," returned the lady hesitatingly. "But don't you think you ought to come now?"

In the glance she threw at him was some suspicion. And there was color in her cheeks that had not been there before. Watching both Miss Kelton and Shorty, there came into Stewart's eyes an ironic gleam.

Shorty smiled broadly.

"I'll be comin' along after a while, Miss Kelton," he said.

"Shorty," she said severely, to conceal the concern she felt, "your wound is not bothering you again?"

His wide grin was reassuring. She reluctantly turned the head of her horse toward the ranch-house, but she was plainly disturbed by Shorty's manner.

Stewart was already several yards distant, and was looking back over his shoulder, his thin lips curved in a derisive smile.

Miss Kelton drew a deep breath. But Shorty's look was still reassuringly steady; and Miss Kelton sent her horse forward, with Stewart riding beside her. At a little distance she turned in the saddle and waved a hand to Shorty. He replied to it gaily. Then he watched them as they rode, until they vanished beyond the crest of a slight rise.

Once again had Shorty refused to play the hypocrite. Into his heart had crept a great dislike for Stewart, and he could not have endured the ride to the ranch-house with him—compelled by courtesy to talk with him, should Stewart show an inclination to talk; or to listen to him as he chatted with Helen Kelton.

"There's times when a man don't feel like listenin' to a guy like that—shootin' off his mouth like it was made only to talk

with, an' showin' by his actions that he's a heap worth listenin' to. I reckon this here stillness is a lot more sensible," he ruminated, waving a hand at the mighty desolation that now surrounded him. "Anyhow, it's a heap better to look at—than Stewart.

"That guy," he added, speaking aloud to the river that gleamed in its narrow bed below him, "has got a little world all by himself. An' he lives in it, not givin' room to any other guys." He scratched his head and gazed doubtfully at the river.

"She said he'd helped her dad out, eh? If she'd have said he helped her dad *in*, it would have been a heap easier to convince *me!*"

Two hours later Shorty got up from the rock and climbed on Red King. He was now grinning, and various thoughts were giving to the grin a suggestion of guilt, reluctantly admitted.

"I reckon mebbe it was. But a man *would* be jealous after he'd been thinkin' things about a girl, an' a yap like that would come along an' take charge of her. An' mebbe he's doin' it because—because he sort of pities Helen. A man can't always tell what a guy's thinkin' by lookin' at his face. I've seen some square-lookin' guys that didn't measure up. I reckon we'll be takin' Stewart at his own figures until he shows they ain't to be trusted too much."

And so Shorty rode toward the ranch-house in a tolerant mood, having conquered his uncharitable thoughts, and ready to accept Stewart at his own valuation until events should prove him unworthy.

And in that mood he met Stewart returning.

Shorty halted Red King and grinned cordially at the other.

Stewart's manner had been a trifle cold until he saw the grin on Shorty's face. He answered with a hearty:

"Well, did you get tired of it?"

"I'm thinkin' mighty serious of grub," returned Shorty. "I've been missin' my share pretty regular."

Stewart's face grew serious; and as Shorty watched him, noting the frank, manly gleam in his eyes, he began to realize that he misjudged the other.

"Shorty," said Stewart, "I want to hav a talk with you. That's what I rode ov here for. I didn't expect to meet Mi Kelton up there—or you either, for tha matter. I was intending to have my tal with you privately. I don't know of an better place than this."

"I'm listenin', Stewart."

"Shorty," said the other gravely, his ga level and steady, "I knew you the instant saw you in the Circle Star ranch-house."

"There's a lot of men know me, Stewart. I ain't none surprised."

"But not many men know what you came here for, Shorty," returned Stewart evenly.

Shorty started; and then he sat rigid in the saddle, watching Stewart with a cold alertness that caused the other to smile mirthlessly.

"I reckon you'll explain what you mean, Stewart."

"Certainly. Now, understand, Shorty, I'm not looking for trouble. I'm tryin' to prevent it. I don't intend to oppose you in anything you undertake. But I happen to have heard the story of the killing of Larry Dillon. And I have heard of the note the Circle L men found pinned to Dillon's clothing. Also, I have been told of your friendship for Dillon. That has been common talk. Not around here, perhaps; but for a good many miles in all directions from Willets and the Circle L. You came here to kill Brail Kelton for murdering Larry Dillon."

For a space both men were silent, the gaze of each steady and unwavering. And then, his eyes gleaming with cold inquiry, Shorty asked:

"Does Kelton know that?"

"I think he does," said Stewart.

Remembering what Helen Kelton had told him about her father and herself being in the East when the crime was committed, Shorty smiled. Helen had also told him that she had not told her parent of the revelations Shorty had communicated to her during his delirium. And since he believed the girl, he could not understand how Kelton knew of his intentions—unless, like Stewart, he had known of Shorty's friendship for Larry Dillon.

"What makes you think Kelton knows what I came here for?" questioned Shorty.

"Because he knew of your friendship for Dillon. Kelton and I have talked about it. That was before you came."

Shorty regarded the other steadily. "If Kelton knew Dillon was my friend, why did he pin that note on Larry, advertisin' he killed Larry?" he asked coldly.

Shorty still believed Kelton innocent, but he was curious to know why Stewart was betraying so much interest. Stewart, knowing Kelton so intimately, must also know that Kelton had been East when the murder was committed.

"Kelton didn't pin the note on Larry Dillon because he expected you to find it, Shorty," said Stewart. "He killed Dillon to be revenged upon him, and pinned the note to his clothing to let the world know he had squared things with Dillon. I have thought, since, that Kelton's terrible rage made him commit that indiscretion."

"Revenge," said Shorty. "I reckon Larry hadn't done anything to Kelton. I'd swear Larry never saw Kelton."

Stewart smiled oddly. "That's where you are wrong, Shorty. And that is why I wanted to have this talk with you. Kelton is my friend, and I want to convince you that he had plenty of reason to kill Dillon.

"We'll go back to the beginning." Stewart urged his horse closer to Red King and began to speak rapidly.

"Kelton and myself were in business in the East. We employed a treasurer, named Eugene Lattimer. Lattimer—"

"Miss Kelton was tellin' me about Lattimer this mornin'," interrupted Shorty. "What has Lattimer got to do with Larry Dillon?"

Stewart smiled. "So Miss Kelton told you, eh?" he said. "Told you all she knew, I suppose—about how Lattimer got away with the money. But she didn't tell you that the man you knew as Larry Dillon was in reality Eugene Lattimer! She didn't tell you that, Shorty—because she doesn't know it."

For all Stewart knew, Shorty received this news without excitement. Not a muscle of his body betrayed the emotion that had instantly gripped him. His gaze at Stewart was as steady as ever, and the smile on his lips was a visible sign of the incredulity he pretended. Pretended, for at this instant it seemed to him that Kelton must be guilty—guilty despite Helen Kelton's insistence that he had been in the East on the day Larry was killed.

"I reckon we're gettin' on too fast, Stewart," he said evenly. "How do you know Larry Dillon was your man Lattimer?"

"Kelton told me, Shorty. It seems that Kelton had seen Dillon two or three times. He recognized him as Lattimer. And when the opportunity came he took advantage of it and killed him."

"Larry was killed by a man who belonged to Antrim's band," said Shorty slowly. "When I came here I thought I'd made a mistake in thinkin' Kelton had killed Larry, because Kelton warned me about Antrim's old gang, sayin' Blandell belonged to it. An' I thought Kelton didn't belong to it. You don't mean to tell me he does?"

Stewart lowered his eyes and moved uneasily. It seemed to Shorty that he was reluctant to admit Kelton's connection with the remnant of the outlaw band, but felt that he had gone too far to retreat now, and must confess.

"Unfortunately he does," he said in a low voice.

Shorty's brain was seething with emotions that paled his face and made of his eyes two glowing pools of passion.

"Stewart," he said, "there's two stories that are conflictin'. Miss Kelton told me a week or so ago that Kelton was East when Larry Dillon was killed. If he killed Larry, he wasn't East. One of you is lyin'. Which is it?"

"Miss Kelton told me about what you said when you were raving in delirium, Shorty," answered Stewart quietly. "It was quite natural for her to attempt to defend her father. But I have always considered frankness necessary—especially in a case of this kind. And so I have wanted to tell you the truth about the affair. Miss Kelton was East last year. She went before Kelton.

"Kelton was to follow her the next day.

But he delayed starting for several days—long enough to take part in that fight with the Lawler outfit. Perhaps Miss Kelton thinks her father really did go East at the time he said he intended to go. She may believe it. But Kelton was with the Antrim band when the fight took place in which Larry Dillon was killed."

Stewart paused, and Shorty watched him steadily through a short silence.

"Now, Shorty," Stewart went on, "you understand what I have told you is between us two alone. You see where I stand. Miss Kelton believes in her father, and if she were to discover what I know—what we both know—the knowledge would kill her. Am I mistaken in thinking that you like her pretty well?"

Shorty's face was pale. He met Stewart's gaze, his eyes glowing with a slumbering defiance.

"I reckon any damn fool could see that!" he said. "If I hadn't liked her I'd have sent Kelton to hell before this!"

"That's what I thought," said Stewart. "And it was because I saw you liked her that I advised you to keep silent about what you know. She is high-spirited and has exalted notions of honor. If she thought you believed her father to be what he is, she would never speak to you again. And I think you like her well enough to keep what you know about Kelton from the ears of other people."

Stewart's voice had a ring of sincerity, and when he continued it had a soft, pleading quality.

"I have told you all this because I wanted you to see that Kelton had great provocation for killing Lattimer—or Dillon. I am sorry Dillon was your friend—in fact, I regret the whole affair. But it happened, and we've got to make the best of it. I think I know how you feel, and I shouldn't blame you much for taking the revenge you planned. But if you stop to reflect how Miss Kelton would feel if she knew that her father had killed Lattimer, or if you killed her father in revenge, I am certain you will keep your knowledge to yourself and let things go on as they are."

"I ain't reckonin' to cause Miss Kelton any trouble," said Shorty. "I ain't wantin' her to feel the things I've been feelin' for a year. That's why I ain't goin' to kill Kelton. Him an' me is quits as far as Larry Dillon is concerned.

"I ain't sayin' you've been lyin' to me, Stewart, but there's a chance that things have been jumbled up. Things do get that way, without folks knowin' it. An' so I'm askin' you for proof of what you've been talkin' about. You see, it's Miss Kelton's word against yours. Mebbe you're right, an' mebbe she is. Mebbe you're both wrong. If Kelton killed Larry, I'm lettin' him off. But if it was some one else, I'm wantin' to know it. That's why I'm askin' you for undoubted proof that Kelton killed him."

Stewart did not speak for an instant. He seemed reluctant; and Shorty liked him better for it. But at last he said:

"You say you were Lattimer's—Larry Dillon's friend. If that is true, there must have been something about Larry Dillon that you knew of—something he used often; a keepsake, perhaps. Kelton told me he had taken several such things from Lattimer's body. Would you know his watch?"

When he saw Shorty's eyes quicken he went on:

"Some time before Lattimer left us, I made him a present of a watch—a gold hunting-case. Engraved on the inside of the lid was the legend, 'To L. from S.' You will find the watch in Kelton's bedroom, in an earthen jar that he formerly used to keep tobacco in. I saw him put it there, and I have no doubt it is there still."

Shorty remembered the watch. He had seen the legend many times, though Larry had never explained it nor in fact mentioned anything of his past life.

He reached out and grasped Stewart's hand.

"A little while ago I didn't think a heap of you, Stewart," he said. "You've changed my mind considerable. I'll be seein' you again."

He dropped Stewart's hand and rode on, heavy of heart. For the shadow of tragedy, swept away by Helen Kelton's words not more than a week before, had descended

again. And this time there seemed to be no hope that the sun would ever shine again —for him.

CHAPTER XVI.

SAD DISCOVERIES.

HOWEVER, before Shorty searched for Larry's watch he meant to have a talk with Helen Kelton. His faith in her had not been shaken, though he conceded she might have distorted things to keep suspicion from falling upon her father. He would not blame her for that. What he would blame her for—if it turned out that Stewart's story were true—would be for not being entirely frank with him. For he had told her, even before she had assured him that her father was not guilty, that he had decided to forego his vengeance, and he considered that she might have had faith enough in him to accept his declaration at its face value.

He was still heavy of heart when he reached the ranch-house. He removed saddle and bridle from Red King and turned the animal into the horse corral.

Shorty still occupied the room to which he had been taken on the night Helen had found him unconscious in the saddle. Entering the kitchen, he found her setting the little table for the noonday meal. She smiled and looked keenly at him.

"Father and Knable have ridden south," she said. "They won't be in for dinner. There will be only us two. And there won't be much. If you will hurry and wash your face you will be ready by the time dinner is."

"You met Stewart, Shorty," she remarked when they were at table. "I saw you from here. Do you like him?"

"Stewart's all right." There was no doubting Shorty's earnestness; and a quickening of the girl's eyes, removing a shadow that had been in them, indicated that she had feared there might be a different answer.

Stewart had twice proposed to her; and each time he had been made to understand that she did not seriously consider him. And once her father had told her that Stewart had mentioned the matter to him, seeking his encouragement.

"Stewart's all right," Kelton had told her. "But he ain't just the sort of man I'd pick out for you—if I had to do the picking. In the first place, he's too old. Maybe that's all the objection I've got to him. But I don't know. I've just got the feeling that it hadn't ought to happen. And I've told him so."

He did not add that his rejection of Stewart had brought on a coldness between himself and the other; that they had both uttered words which still rankled; and that since that day Stewart and he had avoided each other as much as possible. Therefore, if Helen had overheard the talk between Stewart and Shorty, she might have suspected something of the motive which had caused Stewart to take Shorty into his confidence regarding the killing of Larry Dillon, and which had impelled the man to speak of Kelton's supposed connection with the Antrim band. As matters stood, however, Helen had no knowledge of Stewart's motives; to her he was merely what he had always been, a friend.

And she did not want that friendship to be misinterpreted by Shorty. And she made it very plain to him while they ate, so that into Shorty's eyes came the light of a great satisfaction.

It was when they had finished the meal and were sitting in the shade of the juniper tree where Shorty had passed many hours, that he spoke of a thing that had been in his mind since his talk with Stewart. He had told himself many times that the suspicion was unworthy, and that he could not blame the girl if she had tried to shield her father. But a desire to get at the bottom of the affair was strong in him. He would never be satisfied until he learned the truth.

He began obliquely.

"I reckon you found the East some different than this?" He swept a hand toward the far western horizon.

"Yes—different. But it wasn't new to me, you know."

"I keep forgettin'." He regarded her gravely, his eyes alert to catch the shades of expression in hers. "I reckon some day

I'll be goin' East—just to take a look around. But I expect I'd find it lonesome, travelin' alone on a train."

"But there would be other passengers," she smiled.

"But no friend. Acquaintances are all right. They'll talk, an' mebbe keep you interested; but the talk won't have no bottom to it—nothin' that you can remember after a while an' think about." And now he spoke of the thing that had been worrying him.

"But I reckon you wasn't lonesome—havin' your dad along."

"No," she answered. "That is, coming back. For father rode with me all the way. But going, the ride seemed rather long; for father—"

She paused; Shorty felt her grow rigid. He was not looking at her, but he knew her eyes were upon him; and he heard her catch her breath sharply.

But Shorty did not seem to be aware of her agitation. He sat at her feet, the forefinger of his right hand entwined in the tall, central stem of a bunch of gramma grass, and for all she knew he was not aware of her pause nor of the breathless way in which she added: "Father was in the smoking-car most of the time."

But now Shorty was convinced that Stewart had told him the truth, and that Helen had lied to him. The conviction hurt him, but still he could find no blame for her. Hers was a natural instinct, and there was nothing in his heart for her except admiration. Still, he felt he must go on.

"You was tellin' me about a man named Lattimer this mornin'," he said with a casualness that seemed to bring relief to her. "Now, take a man like him. I expect he'd be a sort of sneakin' lookin' cuss."

"No-o," she said, hesitating, obviously trying to remember the salient features of Lattimer's face; "no, he did not look sneaking. In fact, he was a rather honest-looking young man. I think he was about twenty when it happened. That was over six years ago, and I haven't a very vivid recollection of him. You see, though I saw him often, I was not interested in him." She paused again, and went on: "I haven't seen anybody since I have been out here who resembles him, except remotely. He had the type of face that seems to be rather common around here—lean, firm-jawed, with a prominent nose. In one way, the new man, Knable, reminds me of Lattimer. He squints his eyes when pleased, in the way Lattimer used to squint."

Shorty had noticed that trick of Knable's eyes, also. In Loma he had first noticed it, and had been reminded of Larry Dillon. He had thought since that it had been that trick of squinting that had caused him to conceive a great liking for Knable.

It was evident, however, that Stewart had told the truth. Lattimer was the man he had known as Larry Dillon. Allowing something for the lapse of years since the girl had seen Lattimer, and considering the inevitable changes that the developing of character brings to one's face, and adding to the girl's description the evidence he already had—seemed to leave no doubt.

He questioned Helen no further. Some time later he went into the room he had occupied since his arrival at the ranch-house, and sat there for a long time, brooding over the situation, a deep pity for the girl reflected in his somber eyes. Presently, when he heard her go outside, he went to Kelton's room, where he found the earthen jar Stewart had told him about. At the bottom, among a number of other small objects, he felt the watch, and so startled was he, despite his expectation of finding the timepiece, that he jerked back as though his fingers had grasped something venomous and deadly.

It was Larry's watch—there could be no mistake. For he recognized the engraving on the case; he recognized the chain attached to it; and the inscription he had seen many times.

He dropped the watch into a pocket and went to his room.

CHAPTER XVII.

SHORTY QUITS.

THE passing days brought no rift in the shadows that surrounded Shorty. He had got strong again, and had removed his effects to the bunk-house. Kel-

ton, however, arguing that Shorty "ought to take things easy," had objected to his joining the outfit, delegating him instead to the position of "stray-man." His duties were to ride the range alone, searching for cattle which had wandered from the herd to distant sections of the country, to become lost in the timber or bogged down in the various beds of quicksand that spread their smooth menace over the river bottom.

Calves had a habit of getting lost from their mothers; wolves exacted toll; and other dangers threatened. It was Shorty's business to keep an observant eye upon the range and to report what he saw.

Shorty's long rides gave him plenty of time to reflect, to meditate upon the ironical twist that fate had given to his search. He liked Kelton — liked him despite his conviction that the man was guilty; and he had remained at the Circle Star because he was reluctant to give up Helen.

He could not misunderstand his feelings. Women had never bothered him. But now he found himself in the clutch of a strange longing that often made him bring Red King to a halt while he sat motionless in the saddle staring into space. Many times, while riding distant sections of the range, he was forced to fight grimly an impulse to ride to the ranch-house, merely to be near her.

Nothing but the fear of being thought ridiculous dissuaded him. There could be no excuse for frequent visits there, and at the times when his longing was strongest the restraining influence was his power of self-dramatization. For in his imagination he could see himself sitting before the door —the kitchen door; for that would be where he would be most likely to find her —embarrassed, oppressed with guilt over his coming, trying to invent an excuse for his appearance that would seem plausible to her.

He knew she would penetrate the mask of unconcern with which he would attempt to conceal the real reason for his visit; he felt that she would know that he had come because he had not been able to stay away longer; and he could visualize her trying to suppress the mirth she felt over her knowledge.

But while he yearned to be near the girl, he was each day growing more convinced that he could not stay at the Circle Star. Mind, heart and body protested against his remaining. It was one thing to love Helen Kelton, but it was another thing to spend his days in the service of the man who had murdered his friend; to be forced to meet him often, to endure the sound of his voice; to look at him; to watch his hands, and to realize that those hands had done Larry to death.

Shorty did his work well, but day by day the situation became more intolerable. He felt that if Larry knew what he was doing he must loathe him. There were times when it seemed he saw Larry looking at him, a smile of bitter derision on his lips. To-day the feeling was strong in him, and when toward late afternoon he saw Kelton far away, riding the crest of a little ridge toward the ranch-house, he obeyed a sudden impulse and urged Red King after the boss.

Half an hour later, when he was within hailing distance, Kelton saw him and drew his horse down, smiling as Shorty rode up.

Bluntly, Shorty gave voice to his decision:

"I'm reckonin' on quittin' you, Kelton," he said.

"You're going to quit?" was Kelton's surprised interrogation. "Is anything wrong, Shorty?"

"Nothin' wrong. That is, nothin' you'd care to hear about!" The grim, sarcastic significance of his words brought a twisting smile to his lips. "I've been thinkin' of quittin'. That's all, I reckon. The time I've got comin' you'll keep to square things for the care you give me when I was sick. Mebbe that ain't enough."

He reached into a pocket. Kelton stopped him with a gruff:

"Oh, hell, Shorty, forget it! What in blazes has got into you? I reckon you ain't well yet. You'd better go back to the house an' rest a few days."

Shorty rode back with Kelton, and the latter renewed his attempt to have him reconsider. But Shorty's mind was made up, though he gave Kelton no reason for his decision to leave.

"Lately I'm a drifter," was the nearest he came to an explanation. "I don't seem to be satisfied anywhere."

When they reached the ranch-house Helen was not there. Kelton found a note from her on the kitchen table, saying she had gone to Loma on an errand. He took the note out to Shorty, who was packing his war-bag in one of the bunk-houses.

Kelton looked at Shorty somberly as the latter raised his head after reading the note.

"Shorty," he said, "I don't reckon it's just right for you to be leavin' this way—without seein' Helen. She'll be a heap disappointed."

Shorty did not answer. Curiously, at this minute he was wondering about Kelton's speech. How easily he had fallen into the habit of talking like the natives, idioms and elisions slipping from his lips with a fluency that made them seem perfectly natural.

"Mebbe I won't go far, Kelton," he said, looking straight at the other. "Some day I'll come back an' thank her for what she done for me."

"Which way you headin'?" questioned the other.

Shorty had not thought of direction. He had had a vague idea of seeking a job from some ranchman in the vicinity; any job that would not take him more than a day's ride from the Circle Star. For he did not want to go far away. It had been his idea merely to sever relations that had become disagreeable, though there had never been any thought in his mind of leaving Helen to endure alone the mental torture that in the time to follow would surely oppress her. He felt that one day she would need him, and he meant to be near when the day came.

"I reckon I'll be headin' south, Kelton," he said.

"South?" Kelton's eyes narrowed. "Shorty, I reckon you're square—you've showed it. You'll find a lot of men around here that ain't square—cow-hands an' owners. I'd be sort of careful who I tied up with."

"I reckon I'll be hittin' Stewart for a job," said Shorty.

"Stewart!" Kelton repeated the name sharply as he slowly stiffened. The gray eyes glittered with some deep emotion, his lips set into hard lines, his chin came forward. He looked hard at Shorty, saw that he was in earnest, and then laughed harshly, with unmistakable derision.

With the laugh his manner suddenly changed. There was hostility and suspicion in his steady eyes, and when he spoke his voice was cold with mockery.

"I'm wishin' you luck, Shorty," he said.

Before Shorty could speak again, Kelton had wheeled and was walking toward the ranch-house.

For an instant Shorty stood looking after him, mystified, unable to understand why Kelton should refer so sneeringly to the man who had stood by him in adversity. Then he reflected that a man who had done the things that Kelton had done would very likely be an ingrate.

But Shorty's thoughts did not dwell for long on Kelton. His sympathy was entirely for Helen, and as he mounted and rode southward he was wondering what she would think when she came home, to find he had gone without a word to her. Would she regret his going? He thought she would. But he did not intend to go far, and he would manage to find some excuse for visiting the Circle Star. No thoughts of ridicule would dissuade him.

He was giving up much for her, and there lingered in his mind a conviction that she knew it. But what he was sacrificing he would one day regain. Not in revenge—for revenge was now forbidden—but through another passion that he felt was more potent and satisfying, and which, were it lacking in the hearts of men, would make of the world a shambles.

CHAPTER XVIII.

GUNS OUT.

IT was late in the afternoon when Shorty rode Red King over the rim of a basin some miles south of the river which he and Helen Kelton had seen below them in the valley on the day of Shorty's meeting with Morley Stewart. Not far from the

base of the slope that merged into the floor of the basin he saw a ranch-house, with several outlying shacks. Beyond the house, on a big level, cattle were grouping, and in a little timber grove near the house several horses were tethered.

The horses were saddled and bridled, and as Shorty rode down the slope there was a glint of curiosity in his eyes.

"Seven," he said, counting the horses. "I reckon Stewart's holdin' a party. An' the party's breakin' up pretty quick, or them hosses wouldn't be wearin' their trappin's. Or mebbe the outfit's figurin' to slope. But before hittin' the breeze they're holdin' a confab with the boss. It's mighty unusual, but I reckon Stewart must be around—an' that's the main thing."

Proceeding with some deliberation, for he was now a man without a job and forced to bide his time until the moment arrived when he could approach his prospective employer without fear of interrupting him at some important work—he rode to one of the bunk-houses.

From where he stood he could glimpse a rear door of the ranch-house, yawning open. Shorty could see no one inside, and thinking that perhaps the owners of the horses might be in one of the other buildings, he left Red King in the shade of the bunk-house and walked to the stable.

The door of that building was open, too, and Shorty peered inside. There was a roan horse in a box-stall near the door; otherwise the stable was empty. Shorty noted the accumulated litter, the dirt and the disorder.

He grinned, disgustedly. "Not the way Lawler runs things," he commented mentally. "I reckon if Blackburn (the Circle L range boss) had a stable man that 'd keep his place lookin' like this he'd lam him over the head with a neck-yoke!"

He turned and walked to a lean-to that adjoined the stable—the blacksmith shop. Heaps of scrap-iron met his gaze; there were evidences of lack of system, laziness and inefficiency. Inside the shop was a forge with a bellows that seemed to yearn for repairs, an anvil awry on its block; the floor was littered with broken shoes and other débris; a work-bench ranging a wall was piled high with a miscellaneous array of broken parts of wagons and harness and odds and ends of the trade.

"I reckon the blacksmith ain't no wolf for work, either," grinned Shorty.

He left the shop and proceeded to a squat building with a wide door and an array of small windows. Looking inside he saw a big table with benches around it —rough, uncovered, dirty. Through another door he perceived a stove, and a number of pots and pans strewn about.

"Well," he said aloud, "that's attackin' a man's stomach right hard. I reckon a lazy blacksmith could be put up with—an' a good for nothin' stableman. A guy could cuss them, plenty. But a cook, now—a cook ought to have *some* pride. A man sort of expects it."

He stood erect and filled his lungs with the cool breeze that came sweeping over the level. His gaze took in the surrounding country. At a little distance northward was the river, on all sides was plenty of rich grass, bending to the breeze that swept it and glinting in the sunlight. While he looked he saw the sun vanish beyond the peaks of some distant hills.

Then he realized that he had spent some time inspecting the buildings. He walked slowly toward the ranch-house, thinking that perhaps Stewart's visitors had gone, and that he might now talk with him.

When he reached the bunk-house where he had left Red King he heard voices, seemingly coming from the side of the building nearest the ranch-house. He halted by the bunk-house door and let his hands drop to the revolvers that lay along his thighs.

This movement was merely precautionary, a habit of long standing, indicating an instinct toward preparedness. The owners of the voices might be friends. But Shorty knew that a man's continued presence in the country depended somewhat upon his alertness. He was taking no chances. Therefore he made certain that his guns were loose in their holsters. Then, moving with the deliberation that had characterized him since his arrival at the ranch, he stepped to the corner of the bunk-house nearest him.

Grouped around Red King were several men. Their backs were toward him, and he saw that they were strangers. But one man, who was standing near Red King's head, turned slightly as Shorty reached the corner, and for an instant his profile was toward Shorty.

The man was Blandell. There was a crooked grin on his face. He was talking, and his voice reached Shorty.

"That's him," he said, indicating Red King. "I'd know that cayuse anywhere. Any one would. Lawler used to ride him."

A man in the group laughed. "I reckon you'd know the guy that's been ridin' him lately, too — eh, Blandell? Seems you ought to be a heap acquainted with him, meetin' up with him at Kelso thataway— an' him takin' that Kelton girl from under your nose, sorta."

There was a laugh. And another man spoke:

"That guy was sure lightnin' with his maulers. Blandell will tell you that. He's big, but he's a hard man to hit—even with a rifle, eh, Blandell?"

Blandell spoke without looking at the man. His voice was malevolent.

"I'd ought to have bored him after I downed him. I was goin' to, but he looked mighty dead, layin' there. I'm gettin' him now. He's around somewhere—"

Over his shoulder Blandell caught sight of Shorty, standing near the wall of the bunk-house. Blandell flashed around and reached for his gun.

One of his friends stood between him and the man he intended to kill, and as he drew his weapon he was forced to leap sidewise. He threw a shot past the friend as the latter, sensing his danger, threw himself flat to get out of range. But Blandell had been too eager.

Shorty's bullet must have passed the one Blandell's weapon threw at him. It struck Blandell in the chest. He staggered; his knees sagged. But with a venom that blazed out of his eyes he tried to swing his pistol up again.

The arm came up slightly, the elbow crooked, the forearm dangling limply. Blandell tried to lift it, tried to straighten it, while his knees continued to sag and his body began to bend forward from the hips. He stared hard at the hand, seeming to marvel that the fingers that held the pistol were slowly loosening. Then as the weapon fell from his fingers he appeared to realize what had happened to him. He grinned satirically, grunted contemptuously, then plunged headlong, face down in the soft sand.

After shooting Blandell, Shorty paid no further attention to him. He had drawn both guns, and after he saw Blandell sag forward he leaped to a point near the center of the bunk-house wall, both guns menacing the other men.

A quick glance at their faces told Shorty that among them were some that had been in the group that had surrounded him that day in Loma when he had knocked Blandell down; and in his eyes as he watched them now was a lust none could mistake.

The men saw it. Not a man moved. They all stood facing Shorty; their bodies rigid, their hands extended stiffly outward, to indicate their complete readiness to respect the pistols that menaced them. Blandell had wheeled and shot before they could realize what was happening; and before they could adjust their senses to the fact that Blandell was lying before them, Shorty was holding them motionless.

"I'm aimin' to see how many of you guys was friendly enough to Blandell to take his end," said Shorty. "Any one who thinks Blandell didn't have it comin' can go for his gun."

The silence which followed Shorty's words was long and tense. The six remaining men looked at one another, at Shorty, and at Blandell, lying on his face at their feet. Apparently there was none who cared to take up Blandell's quarrel, for no man's hand moved.

Shorty's alert eyes observed some one coming toward him from the direction of the ranch-house. He did not remove his gaze from the men in front of him, but out of the corners of his eyes he saw that the newcomer was Stewart.

This story will be continued in next week's issue of the ARGOSY-ALLSTORY WEEKLY, the consolidated title under which both magazines will appear hereafter as one.

The Metal Monster

by A. Merritt

Author of "The Moon Pool," "Conquest of the The Moon Pool," etc.

(In collaboration with Dr. Walter T. Goodwin, Ph.D., I. A. S., F. R. G. S., etc.)

LIKE Mr. Merritt's narrative of "The Moon Pool" (published in *All-Story Weekly*, June 22, 1918), and "The Conquest of the Moon Pool" (*All-Story Weekly*, February 15 to March 22, 1919), "The Metal Monster" is published with the consent and authority of the International Association of Science. After the expeditions described in the earlier narratives, Dr. Walter T. Goodwin was placed at the head of a special bureau of the association and supplied with unlimited means to prosecute his investigations. Upon his recent return from Central Asia he gave Mr. Merritt the manuscript of his report, to be prepared for popular presentation. In its popularized form it is presented herewith.

PRECEDING CHAPTERS BRIEFLY RETOLD

WHILE traveling in the mountains of Turkestan Dr. Goodwin met Dick Drake, an American engineer. In a valley they saw a colossal imprint crushed into the stone—a curved heel with four claws, each twenty feet long, extending from it. Next day, while traveling an ancient road that passed through a hollow, they were almost overcome by an unseen force that sapped their strength. Winning through they met an American girl, Ruth Ventnor, daughter of a scientist, and her brother Mart. From them they learned that one night two men—the first humans they had seen for months—had come close to their fire and discussed Ruth with exceeding frankness—in archaic Persian. Awakening she had fired at them, and wounded one. Next day they had seen a body of soldiers, dressed and armed like the legions of ancient Darius, approaching, apparently in search of them. They had escaped.

Ruth showed Dr. Goodwin and Dick a number of small metal objects, that formed geometrical designs that moved with intelligence. Metal—with a brain!

Attacked by the pursuing Persians they saw standing in a fissure in the mountain the figure of a woman. At her command hundreds of metal objects—the "Metal Things" formed themselves into a giant that struck out and destroyed the attackers. Speaking in ancient Persian the woman told them that she was "Norhala." She was beautiful—but not entirely human. At her command they followed her into the fissure—which proved to be a passage hewed by human hands—mounted platforms formed by the "Metal Ones," and were swept away through the mists and through an opening in the mountain.

Then came a hair-raising journey through the wonders of an unknown world. Norhala took the travelers before a strange—edifice—altar—machine?—formed of glistening, greenish cones and spinning, golden disks. With the weird guardians of these cones Norhala communicated. When Mart fired at one of the creatures a lance of green flame darted at him and left him a broken wreck. Norhala saved him from further punishment; told Dr. Goodwin and Dick that the—Thing—had given them to her for playthings; ordered them to carry Mart and follow her, and lead the way through a wall of light. After another strange journey they reached a palace, Norhala's home, where they were cared for by Yuruk, an eunuch, who later tried to hypnotize the men. Mart recovered sufficiently to tell them that humanity was in danger from the Metal Things, and to tell them to return to the city. Ruth declared that she was under the influence or Norhala, but declared that she would fight that influence. When Drake dropped off to sleep Dr. Goodwin slipped over to the eunuch and crouched, hand close to his pistol, facing him.

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for August 7.

CHAPTER XXVI.

YURUK.

"YURUK," I whispered, "you love us as the wheat field loves the hail; we are as welcome to you as the death cord to the condemned. Lo, a door opened into a land of unpleasant dreams you thought sealed, and we came through. Answer my questions with the limpid truth of the rain-drop and it may be that we shall return through that door."

Interest welled up in the depths of the black eyes.

"There is a way from here," he muttered. "Nor does it pass through—Them. I can show it you."

I had not been blind to the flash of malice, of cunning, that had shot across the wrinkled face.

"Where does that way lead?" I asked. "There were those who sought us; men clad in armor with javelins and arrows. Does your way lead to them, Yuruk?"

For a time he hesitated, the lashless lids half closed.

"Yes," he said sullenly. "The way leads to them; to their place. But will it not be safer for you there—among your kind?"

"I don't know that it will," I answered promptly. "Those who are unlike us smote those who are like us and drove them back when they would have taken and slain us. Why is it not better to remain with them than to go to our kind who would destroy us?"

"They would not," he said. "If you gave them—her." He thrust a long thumb backward toward sleeping Ruth. "Cherkis would forgive much for her. And why should you not? Is she not only a woman?"

He spat—in a way that had I less control would have made me kill him.

"Besides," he ended, "have you no arts to amuse him?"

"Cherkis?" I asked.

"Cherkis," he whined. "Is Yuruk then a fool not to know that in the world without new things have arisen since long ago we fled from Iskander into the secret valley? What have you to beguile Cherkis beyond this woman flesh? Much, I think. Go then to him—unafraid."

Cherkis? There was a familiar sound to that. Cherkis? Of course—it was the name of Xerxes, the Persian Conqueror, corrupted by time into this—Cherkis. And Iskander? Equally, of course—Alexander. Ventnor had again been right then.

"Yuruk," I demanded directly, "is she whom you call goddess—Norhala—of the people of Cherkis?"

"Long ago," he answered; "long, long ago there was trouble in their city, even in the great dwelling place of Cherkis. I fled with her who was the mother of the mother of the goddess. There were twenty of us; and we fled here—by the way which I will show you—"

He leered cunningly; I gave no sign of interest.

"And it came to pass that she who was the mother's mother of the goddess found favor in the sight of the ruler here," he went on. "But after a time she grew old and ugly and withered. So he slew her—like a little mound of dust she danced and blew away after he had slain her; and also he slew others who had grown displeasing to him. Then for a time she who was the mother of the goddess delighted him—and after a time she also grew old and her also he slew. And this time he blasted me—as he was blasted—" He pointed to Ventnor.

"Then it was that, recovering, I found my crooked shoulder. But years before that the goddess was born. He who is ruler here visited her mother often, and she is kin to him—certainly. How else could she shed the lightnings? Was not the father of Iskander the god Zeus Ammon, who came to Iskander's mother in the form of a great snake? Well? At any rate the goddess was born—shedder of the lightnings even from her birth! And she is as you see her.

"He-he!" he chuckled hideously. "He-he! They grew old and they were slain. But I who am indeed old hide when they come. And so I live. He-he!

"Cleave to your kind! Cleave to your kind!" croaked the black eunuch. "Better is it to be flayed by your brother than

eaten by the tiger! Cleave to your
Look—I will show you the way to
!"

sprang to his feet, clasped my wrist
ne of his long hands, led me softly
gh the curtained oval into the cylin-
l hall, parted the curtainings of Nor-
s bedroom and pushed me within.
the floor he slid, still holding fast to
and pressed against the farther wall.
ovoid slice of the gemlike material
aside, revealing a wide doorway. I
sed a path, a trail, leading into a for-
allid green beneath the wan light.
way thrust itself like a black tongue
he boskage and vanished in its depths.
ollow it." He pointed. "Take those
came with you and follow it."
e wrinkles upon his face fairly writhed
his eagerness.
ou will go?" panted Yuruk. "You
ake them and go by that path?"
ot yet," I answered absently. "Not

d was abruptly brought to full alert-
vigilance, by the flame of rage that
the ebon pools thrust so close.
ead back," I directed curtly. He
he door back into place, turned sul-
I followed, wondering what were
urces of the bitter hatred he so plain-
e for us; the reasons for his eagerness
rid of us despite the commands of
woman who to him at least was god-

d by that curious human habit of
ng for the complex when the simple
r lies close, failed to recognize that
s jealousy of us that was the root of
ehavior; that he wished to be, as it
d seem he had been for years, the only
n thing near Norhala; failed to real-
is, and with Ruth and Drake was ter-
to pay for this failure!

looked down upon the pair, sleeping
soundly; upon Ventnor lost still in trance.
"Sit!" I ordered the eunuch. "And
turn your back to me."

As he obeyed, a question long deferred
at last found utterance.

"Yuruk," I asked, "whence came this
house in which we are? Who built it?"

"The ruler here," he answered sullenly.
"He made it for the delight of the mother's
mother of the goddess."

I dropped down beside Drake, my mind
wrestling with the mystery, but every sense
alert for movement from the black. Glibly
enough I had passed over Dick's questioning as to the consciousness of the Metal
People; now I faced it knowing it to be the
very crux of these incredible phenomena;
admitting, too, that despite all my special
pleading, about that point swirled in my
own mind the thickest mists of uncertainty.
That their sense of order was immensely
beyond man's was plain.

As plain was it that their knowledge
of magnetic force and its manipulation
were far beyond the sphere of humanity.
That they had realization of beauty
this palace of Norhala's proved—and no
human imagination could have conceived
it nor human hands have made its thought
of beauty real. What were their senses
through which their consciousness fed?

Nine in number had been the sapphire
ovals set within the golden zone of the disk.
Clearly it came to me that these were sense
organs!

But—nine senses!

And the great stars—how many had
they? And the cubes—did they open as
did globe and pyramid?

Consciousness itself — after all what is
it? A secretion of the brain? The cumulative expression, wholly chemical, of the
multitudes of cells that form us? The inexplicable governor of the city of the body
of which these myriads of cells are the citizens—and created by them out of themselves to rule?

Is it what many call the soul? Or is it
a finer form of matter, a self-realizing force,
which uses the body as its vehicle just as
other forces use for their vestments other
machines? After all, what is this conscious
self of ours, the ego, but a spark of realization running continuously along the path
of time within that mechanism we call the
brain; making contact along that path as
the electric spark at the end of a wire?

Is there a sea of this conscious force
which laps the shores of the farthest-flung
stars; that finds expression in everything—
man and rock, metal and flower, jewel and

cloud? Limited in its expression only by the limitations of that which it animates, and in essence the same in all? If so, then this problem of the life of the Metal People ceased to be a problem; was answered!

So thinking I became aware of increasing light; strode past Yuruk to the door and peeped out. Dawn was paling the sky. I stooped over Drake, shook him. On the instant he was awake, alert.

"I only need a little sleep, Dick," I said. "When the sun is well up, call me."

"Why, it's dawn," he whispered. "Goodwin, you oughtn't to have let me sleep so long. I feel like a damned pig."

"Never mind," I answered. "But watch Yuruk close."

I rolled myself up in his warm blanket; sank almost instantly into a dreamless slumber.

CHAPTER XXVII.

PREPARATION.

HIGH was the sun when I awakened; or so I supposed, opening my eyes upon a flood of clear daylight. As I lay, lazily, recollection rushed upon me.

It was no sky into which I was gazing; it was the dome of Norhala's elfin home. And Drake had not aroused me! Why? And how long had I slept?

I jumped to my feet, stared about. Ruth nor Drake nor the black eunuch was there!

"Ruth!" I shouted. "Drake!"

There was no answer. I ran to the doorway. Peering up into the white vault of the heavens I set the time of day as close to seven; I had slept then three hours, more or less. Yet short as that time of slumber had been, I felt marvelously refreshed, reenergized; the effect I was certain of the extraordinarily tonic qualities of the atmosphere of this place. But where were the others? Where Yuruk?

I heard Ruth's laughter! Some hundred yards to the left, half hidden by a screen of flowering shrubs, I saw a small meadow. Within it a half-dozen little white goats nuzzled around her and Dick. She was milking one of them.

Reassured, I drew back into the chamber, knelt over Ventnor. His condition was unchanged. My gaze fell upon the pool that had been Norhala's bath. Longingly I looked at it; then satisfying myself that the milking process was not finished, slipped off my clothes and splashed about.

I had just time to get back in my clothing when through the doorway came the pair, each carrying a porcelain pannikin full of milk.

"Oh, Walter," cried Ruth gaily. "You should see the goats! The cutest little silky white things—and so tame! There's nothing the matter with this milk, I can tell you—and that awful black thing isn't about to poison it with his eyes! Ugh-h!" she shuddered.

There was no shadow of fear or horror on her face. It was the old Ruth who stood before me; nor was there effort in the smile she gave me. She had been washed clean in the waters of sleep.

"Don't you worry, Walter," she said. "I know what you're thinking. But I'm—*me* again. It was all quite true. But I'm going to stay—*me!* And don't you worry."

"Where is Yuruk?" I turned to Drake bruskly to smother the sob of sheer happiness I felt rising in my throat; and at his wink and warning grimace abruptly forbore to press the question.

"You men pick out the things and I'll get breakfast ready," said Ruth. "Oh!" She was looking down into the pool. "Somebody's been in it. We'll have to let it settle."

"I couldn't help it," I apologized guiltily.

"We won't have to wait. There's a spring outside," laughed Drake. He picked up the teakettle and motioned me before him.

"About Yuruk," he whispered when he had gotten outside. "I gave him a little object lesson. Persuaded him to go down the line a bit, showed him my pistol, and then picked off one of Norhala's goats with it. Hated to do it, but I knew it would be good for his soul.

"He gave one screech and fell on his face and groveled. Thought it was a light-

ning bolt, I figure; decided I had been stealing their stuff. 'Yuruk,' I told him, 'that's what you'll get, and worse, if you lay a finger on that girl inside there.'"

"And then what happened?" I asked.

"He beat it back there like an ostrich-legged rooster pursued by a ravenous smoke with automobile feet," he grinned, using one of his remarkable metaphors and pointing toward the forest through which ran the path the eunuch had shown me.

Briefly, as we filled the container at the outer spring, I told him of the revelations and the offer Yuruk had made to me.

"Whew-w!" he whistled. "In the nutcracker, eh? Trouble behind us and trouble in front of us."

"When do we start?" he asked, as we turned back toward the Blue Globe.

"Right after we've eaten," I answered. "There's no use putting it off. How do you feel about it?"

"Frankly, like the chief guest at a lynching party," he said. "Curious but none too cheerful."

Nor was I. I was filled with a fever of scientific curiosity. But I was not cheerful —no! It was not fear, it was not cowardice that lay beyond my shrinking from this ordeal; nor was it with Drake. It was the nightmare loneliness, the helplessness and isolation of our human selves alone among the unhuman, the unearthly; among Things that knew our helplessness better even than did we; Things to whom we were but strange and animate toys, to be played with or broken as the whim might be.

I can find no images to describe that unfamiliar oppression. Rhythmic, sometimes it threatened to submerge; left me gasping and fighting for life. Sometimes it was but a little wave lapping at my feet—but never did it entirely withdraw! Nightmare is the nearest word to it — and wholly inadequate.

We ministered to Ventnor as well as we could; forcing open his set jaws, thrusting a thin rubber tube down past his windpipe into his gullet and dropping through it a few ounces of the goat milk. Our own breakfasting was silent enough.

We could not take Ruth with us upon our journey; that was certain; she must stay here with her brother. She would be safer in Norhala's house than where we were going, of course, and yet to leave her was most distressing. After all, I wondered, was there any need of both of us taking that journey; would not one do just as well? Drake could stay—

"No use of putting all our eggs in one basket," I broached the subject. "I'll go down by myself while you, Dick, remain to help Ruth. You can always follow if I don't turn up in a reasonable time."

His indignation at this proposal was matched only by her own.

"You'll go with him, Dick Drake," she cried, "or I'll never look or speak to you again!"

"Good Lord! Did you think for a minute I wouldn't!" Pain and wrath struggled on his face. "We go together or neither of us go. Ruth will be all right here, Goodwin. The only thing she has any cause to fear is Yuruk—and he's had his lesson.

"Besides, she'll have the rifles and her pistols, and she knows how to use them. What d'ye mean by making such a proposition as that?" His indignation burst all bounds.

Lamely I tried to justify myself.

"I'll be all right," said Ruth. "I'm not afraid of Yuruk. And none of those Things will hurt me—not after—not after—" Her eyes fell, her lips quivered piteously—then she faced us steadily. "Don't ask me how I know that," she went on quietly. "Believe me, I do know it. I am closer to—them than you two are. And if I choose I can call upon that alien strength their master gave me. It is for you two that I fear."

"No fear for us," Drake burst out hastily. "We're Norhala's little new playthings. We're tabu. Take it from me, Ruth, I'd bet my head there isn't one of these Things, great or small, and no matter how many, that doesn't by this time know all about us.

"We'll probably be received with demonstrations of interest by the populace as welcome guests. Probably we'll find a sign —'Welcome to our City'—hung up over the front gate!"

She smiled a trifle tremulously.

"We'll come back," he said. Suddenly he leaned forward, put his hands on her shoulders. "Do you think there is anything that could keep me from coming back?" he whispered.

She trembled, wide eyes searching deep into his.

"Well," I broke in, a bit uncomfortably, "we'd better be starting. I think as Drake does, that we're tabu. Barring accident there's no danger. And if I guess right about these Things, accident is impossible."

"As inconceivable as the multiplication table going wrong," he laughed, straightening.

And so quickly we made ready. Our rifles would be worse than useless, we knew; our pistols we decided to carry as Drake put it, "for comfort." Canteens filled with water; a couple of emergency rations, a few instruments, including a small spectroscope, a selection from the medical kit—all these he packed in a little haversack which he threw over his broad shoulders.

I pocketed my compact but exceedingly powerful field-glasses. To my poignant and everlasting regret my camera had been upon the bolting pony, and Ventnor had long been out of films for his.

We were ready for our journey!

CHAPTER XXVIII.

INTO THE PIT.

OUR path led straight away, a smooth and dark-gray road whose surface resembled cement packed under enormous pressure. It was all of fifty feet wide and now in daylight glistened faintly as though overlaid with some vitreous coating. It narrowed abruptly into a wedged way that stopped at the threshold of Norhala's door.

Diminishing through the distance it stretched straight as an arrow onward and vanished between the perpendicular cliffs which formed the frowning gateway through which the night before we had passed upon the coursing cubes from the pit of the city. Here, as then, a mistiness checked the gaze.

Ruth with us, we made a brief inspection of the surroundings of Norhala's house. It was set as though in the narrowest portion of an hour-glass. The precipitous walls marched inward from the gateway forming the lower half of the figure; at the back they swung apart at a wider angle.

This upper part of the hour-glass was filled with a parklike forest. It was closed, perhaps twenty miles away, by a barrier of cliffs—how, I wondered, did the path which Yuruk had pointed out to me pierce them? Was it by pass or tunnel; and why was it the armored men had not found and followed it?

The waist between these two mountain wedges was a valley not more than a mile wide. Norhala's house stood in its center; and it was like a garden, dotted with flowering and fruiting trees, with gorgeous shrubs and fragrant lilies and here and there a tiny green meadow. The great globe of blue that was Norhala's dwelling seemed less to rest upon the ground than to emerge from it; as though its basis curvatures were hidden in the earth. What was its substance I could not tell. It was as though built of the lacquer of the gems whose colors it held. And beautiful, wondrously, incredibly beautiful it was—an immense bubble of froth of molten sapphires and turquoises!

We had no time to study its beauties. A few last instructions to Ruth, and we set forth down the gray road. Hardly had we taken a dozen steps when there came a faint cry from her.

"Dick! Dick—come here!"

He sprang to her, caught her hands in his. For a moment, half frightened it seemed, she considered him.

"Dick," I heard her whisper. "Dick—come back safe to me!"

I saw his arms close about her, hers tighten around his neck; black hair touched the silken brown curls, their lips met, clung. I turned away.

In a little time he joined me; head down, silent, he strode along beside me, utterly dejected.

A hundred yards more and we turned. Ruth was still standing on the threshold of the house of mystery, watching after us. She waved her hands, flitted in, was hidden from us. And Drake once more silent, we pushed on.

"I'm glad, Dick," I said at last.

"I've loved her since first I saw her"—he gripped my hand—"and she has me, she says. Told me that if she *knew* I really loved her, she could make a better fight against—against what she calls the taint in her while we were away. That's why she did the proposing." He laughed. "A taint! Any taint in that blessed angel! I guess not! Still—she's afraid, terribly afraid, of something she thinks *is* in herself. I'll admit I thought different last night, but then I was shaky. It's nonsense—all damned nonsense!"

But I had no words to reassure him; for I was not at all certain that Ruth's fear was imaginary. Her terror and shame had been too real, her description of her symptoms all too clear to be hallucination. Was it not possible that she had been put *en rapport* by the sentient Disc with itself and its people; that she had been subjected to some process of magnetization, not necessarily sinister, wielded by it and which produced in her a hypersensitivity to its will and thought? Among our own kind we have this receptivity—minds that react to each other without the stimulus of the spoken word, minds which are attuned; and other minds unattuned so that not even by the spoken or written word can our thought enter them.

What mysterious currents are these between brains along which the silent messages fly? Clearly only something of the kind could explain Norhala's interchange of ideation with—the Disc. Ruth, conscious of it, might well regard it as a taint. Yet it might be of the greatest aid to us—and neither taint nor harmful to her, unless—unless—

I strove to ward off the dreadful thought by taking minute note of our surroundings.

The walls of the gateway were close. The sparse vegetation along the base of the cliffs had ceased; the roadway itself had merged into the smooth, bare floor of the cañon. From vertical edge to vertical edge of the rocky portal stretched a curtain of shimmering mist. As we drew close we saw that this was motionless, and less like vapor of water than vapor of light; it streamed in oddly fixed lines like atoms of crystals in a still solution. Drake thrust an arm within it, waved it; the mist did not move. It seemed instead to interpenetrate the arm—as though bone and flesh were spectral, without power to dislodge the shining particles from position!

We passed within it—side by side.

Instantly I knew that whatever these veils were, they were not moisture. The air we breathed was dry, electric. I was sensible of a decided stimulation, a pleasant tingling along every nerve, a gaiety almost light-headed. We could see each other quite plainly, the rocky floor on which we trod as well. Within this vapor of light there was no ghost of sound; it was utterly empty of it. I saw Drake turn to me, his mouth open in a laugh, his lips move in speech—and although he bent close to my ear, I heard nothing! He frowned, puzzled, walked on.

Abruptly we stepped into an opening, a pocket of clear air. Our ears were filled with a high, shrill humming as unpleasantly vibrant as the shriek of the sand blast. Six feet to our right was the edge of the ledge on which we stood; beyond it was a sheer drop into space! A shaft piercing down into the void and walled with the mists!

But it was not that shaft that made us clutch each other. No! It was that through it uprose a colossal column of the cubes! It stood a hundred feet from us. Its top was another hundred feet above the level of our ledge and its length vanished in the depths.

And its head was a gigantic spinning wheel, yards in thickness, tapering at its point of contact with the cliff wall into a diameter half that of the side closest the column, gleaming with flashes of green flame and grinding with tremendous speed at the face of the rock!

Over it, attached to the cliff, was a great vizored hood of some pale yellow metal, and it was this shelter that cutting off the

vaporous light like an enormous umbrella made the pocket of clarity in which we stood, the shaft up which sprang the pillar.

All along the length of that column as far as we could see the myriad tiny eyes of the Metal People shone out upon us, not twinkling mischievously, but—grotesque as this may seem, I cannot help it—wide with surprise!

Only an instant longer did the great wheel spin. I saw the screaming rock melting beneath it, dropping like lava. Then, as though it had received some message, abruptly its motion ceased. It tilted, looked down upon us! I noted that its grinding surface was studded thickly with the smaller pyramids and that the tips of these were each capped with what seemed to be faceted gems gleaming with the same pale yellow radiance as the Shrine of the Cones.

The column was bending; the wheel approaching!

Drake seized me by the arm, drew me swiftly back into the mists. We were shrouded in their silences. Step by step we went on, peering for the edge of the shelf, feeling in fancy that prodigious wheeled *face* stealing upon us; afraid to look behind lest in looking we might step too close to the unseen verge!

Yard after yard we slowly covered. Suddenly the vapors thinned; we passed out of them—

A chaos of sound beat about us! The clanging of a million anvils; the clamor of a million forges; the crashing of a hundred years of thunder; the roarings of a thousand hurricanes! The prodigious bellowings of the Pit beating against us now as they had when we had flown down the long ramp into the depths of the Sea of Light!

Instinct with unthinkable power was that clamor; the very voice of Force! Stunned, nay *blinded*, by it, we covered ears and eyes!

As before, the clangor died, leaving in its wake a bewildered silence. Then that silence began to throb with a vast humming, and through that humming rang a murmur, as that of a river of diamonds.

We opened our eyes, stared forth, felt awe grip our throats as though a hand had clutched them!

Difficult, difficult almost beyond thought is it for me now to essay to draw in words the scene before us then. For although I can set down what it was we saw, I nor any man can transmute into phrases its essence, its spirit, the intangible wonder that was its synthesis—the appallingly beautiful, soul-shaking strangeness of it, its grandeur, its fantasy, and its alien horror! The Domain of the Metal Monster—it was filled like a chalice with Its will; was the visible expression of that will!

We stood at the very rim of a wide ledge. We looked down into an immense pit, shaped into a perfect oval, thirty miles in length I judged, and half that as wide, and rimmed with colossal precipices. We were at the upper end of this deep valley and on the tip of its axis; I mean that it stretched longitudinally before us along the line of greatest length. Five hundred feet below was the pit's floor. Gone were the clouds of light that had obscured it the night before; the air crystal clear; every detail standing out with stereoscopic sharpness.

First the mazed eyes rested upon a broad band of fluorescent amethyst, ringing the entire rocky wall. It girdled the cliffs at a height of ten thousand feet, and from this flaming zone, as though it clutched them, fell the curtains of sparkling mist, the enigmatic, sound-slaying vapors. But now I saw that all of these veils were not motionless like those through which we had just passed. To the northwest they were pulsing like the aurora, and like the aurora they were shot through with swift iridescences, spectrums, polychromatic gleamings. And always these were ordered, geometric—like immense and flitting prismatic crystals flying swiftly to the very edges of the veils, then darting as swiftly back.

From zone and veils the gaze leaped to the incredible City towering not two miles away from us.

Blue black, shining, sharply cut as though from polished steel, it reared full five thousand feet on high! How great it was I could not tell, for the height of its precipitous walls barred the vision. The frowning façade turned toward us was, I estimated, five miles in length. Its colossal

scarp struck the eyes like a blow; its shadow, falling upon us, checked the heart. It was overpowering, gigantic—dreadful as that midnight city of Dis that Dante saw rising up from another pit!

It was a metal city, mountainous!

Featureless, smooth, the immense wall of it heaved heavenward. It should have been blind, that vast oblong face—but it was not blind, and therein lay the intangible horror! From it radiated alertness, vigilance. It seemed to *gaze* toward us as though every foot were manned with sentinels; guardians invisible to the eyes whose concentration of watchfulness was caught by some subtle hidden sense higher than sight.

It was a metal city, mountainous and—*aware!*

About its base were huge openings—its gates, I thought. Through and around these portals swirled hordes of the Metal People; in units and in combinations coming and going, streaming in and out, forming as they came and went patterns about the openings like the fretted spume of great breakers surging into, retreating from, ocean-bitten gaps in some iron-bound coast.

From the immensity of the City the stunned eyes dropped back to the Pit in which it lay. Its floor was placquelike, a great plane smooth as though turned by potter's wheel, broken by no mound nor hillock, slope nor terrace; level, horizontal, flawlessly flat. On it was no green living thing—no tree nor bush, meadow nor covert.

It was alive with movement; seethingly, terrifyingly alive! It was animate with a ferment that was as purposeful as it was mechanical, a ferment symmetrical, geometrical, supremely ordered—

The surging of the Metal Hordes!

There they moved beneath us, these enigmatic beings, in a countless host. They marched and countermarched in battalions, in regiments, in armies. Far to the south I glimpsed a company of colossal shapes like mobile, castellated and pyramidal mounts. They were circling, weaving about each other with incredible rapidity—like scores of the pyramid of Cheops crowned with gigantic turrets and come to life and dancing! From these turrets came vivid flashes, lightning bright—and on their wake the rolling echoes of far-away thunder!

Out of the north sped a squadron of obelisks from whose tops flamed and flared the immense spinning wheels, appearing at this distance like fiery whirling disks!

Up from their seething the Metal People lifted themselves in a thousand incredible shapes, shapes squared and globed and spiked and shifting swiftly into other thousands as incredible. I saw a mass of them draw themselves up into the likeness of a tent sky-scraper high; hang so for an instant, then writhe into a monstrous chimera of a dozen towering legs that strode away like a gigantic headless and bodiless tarantula in steps two hundred feet long! I watched mile-long lines of them shape and reshape into circles, into interlaced lozenges and pentagons—then lift in great columns and shoot through the air in unimaginable barrage.

Through all this incessant movement I sensed plainly purpose, knew that it was definite activity toward a definite end, caught the clear suggestion of drill, of maneuver!

And when the shiftings of the Metal Hordes permitted we saw that all the flat floor of the valley was stripped and checkered, stippled and tesselated with every color, patterned with enormous lozenges and squares, rhomboids and parallelograms, pentagons and hexagons and diamonds, lunettes, circles and spirals; harlequined yet harmonious; instinct with a grotesque suggestion of a super-Futurism. But always was this patterning ordered, always *coherent!* As though it were a page on which was spelled some untranslatable other world message! Fourth Dimensional revelations by some Euclidean deity! Commandments traced by some mathematical God!

Looping across the vale, emerging from the sparkling folds of the southernmost curtainings and vanishing into the gleaming veils of the easternmost, ran a broad ribbon of pale-green jade; not straightly but with manifold convolutions and flourishes. It was like a sentence in Arabic!

It was margined with sapphire blue. All along its twisting course two broad bands of jet margined the cerulean shore. It was

spanned by scores of flashing crystal arches. Nor were these bridges—even from that distance I knew they were no bridges. From them came the crystalline murmurings.

Jade? This stream jade? If so then it must be in truth molten, for I caught its swift and *polished* rushing! It was no jade. It was in truth a river; a river running like a writing across the patterned plane!

I looked upward—up to the circling peaks. They were a stupendous coronet thrusting miles deep into the dazzling sky. I raised my glasses, swept them. In color they were an immense and variegated flower with countless multiform petals of stone shaped by the very genius of *bizarrie;* in outline they were a ring of fortresses built by fantastic unknown Gods. Up they thrust—domed and arched, spired and horned, pyramided, fanged and needled. Here were palisades of burning orange with barbicans of incandescent bronze; there *aiguilles* of azure rising from bastions of cinnabar red; turrets of royal purple, obelisks of indigo; titanic forts whose walls were splashed with vermillion, with citron yellows and with rust of rubies; watch towers of flaming scarlet.

Scattered among them were the flashing emeralds of the glaciers and the immense pallid baroques of the snow fields.

Like a diadem the summits ringed the Pit. Below them ran the ring of flashing amethyst with its auroral mists. Between them lay the vast and patterned flat covered with still symbol and inexplicable movement. Under their summits brooded the blue black, metallic mass of the Argus-eyed City.

Within encircling walls, over plain and from that City hovered a cosmic spirit not to be understood by man. Like an emanation of stars and space, it was yet gem fine and gem hard, crystalline and metallic, lapidescent and—

Conscious!

Down from the ledge where we stood fell a steep ramp, similar to that by which, in the darkness, we had descended. It dropped at an angle of at least forty-five degrees; its surface was smooth and polished.

"Hell!" Drake emerged from his trance of wonder into practicality. "We can't walk *that.* Once we get started—there isn't a traffic cop on Long Island who could catch up to us."

"Maybe there's another way down," I replied.

Through the mists at our back stole a shining block. It paused, seemed to perk itself; spun so that in turn each of its six faces took us in!

I felt myself lifted upon it by multitudes of little invisible hands; saw Drake whirling up beside me. I moved toward him—*thickly*—through the force that held us. The block swept away from the ledge, swayed for a moment. Under us, as though we were floating in air, the Pit lay stretched. There was a rapid readjustment, a shifting of our two selves upon another surface. I looked down upon a tremendous, slender pillar of the cubes, dropping below me five hundred feet to the valley's floor a column of which the block that held us was the top!

Gone was the whirling wheel that had crowned it, but I knew this for the Grinding Thing from which we had fled; the questing block had been its scout. As though curious to know more of us, the Shape had sought us out through the mists, its messenger had caught us, delivered us to it! Throughout all the spiring height of it I sensed that same curiosity—and it was as though from the cube that held us went down messages describing us, telling of us, as though indeed the block were the eye of the Thing sending our image into every hidden *nerve* of the column! There was about that still survey something indescribably—monstrous!

The pillar leaned over—bent like that shining pillar that had bridged for us, at Norhala's commands, the abyss. The floor of the valley arose to meet us. Further and further leaned the pillar. Again there was a rapid shifting of us to another surface of the crowning cube. Swifter swept up toward us the valley floor. A dizziness clouded my sight. There was a little shock, a rolling over of the Thing that had held us—

We stood upon the floor of the Pit!

And breaking from the immense and

prostrate shaft on whose top we had ridden downward came score upon score of the cubes! They broke from it, disintegrating it; circled about us, curiously, interestedly, twinkling at us from their deep sparkling points of eyes!

High above I could see the ledge from which we had been snatched. And as I looked the soundless veils of vapor of light covered it; hid it.

Helplessly we gazed at those who circled around us. Then suddenly I felt myself lifted once more, was tossed to the surface of the nearest block. Upon it I spun while the tiny eyes searched me. Then like a human ball it tossed me to another. I caught a glimpse of Drake's tall figure drifting through the air.

The play became more rapid, breath-taking. It was play; I recognized that. But it was perilous play for us. I felt myself as fragile as a doll of glass in the hands of careless children.

A score or more of the cubes merged, clicked into a fifty-foot obelisk which tossed me across a hundred feet of space. As I passed I saw that there were now thousands of the People of Metal crowding about the spot of which we were the nucleus. Their squared and curved and angled surfaces gleamed like pale blue steel; their eyes glistened. I caught a glimpse of other hundreds raising themselves from the throng in pillars and fan-shaped columns; thrusting themselves up to see us! In mid air, flying from the flicking of an obelisk similar to that which had thrown me, Drake passed. Upon the top of his tormentor I landed as softly as upon a feather pillow, but gasping, empty of breath from the swift flight.

Back to its fellow the twinkling shaft hurled me.

As I flew a great globe came coursing along. It stopped abruptly. In mid flight I was checked; drawn downward; hung poised a foot above the surface of this sphere. The unknown force it wielded held me suspended there while it spun beneath me, examining me!

I was tossed to another waiting cube; the globe spun away. On the ground, not ten feet from me, was Dick, face white, swaying dizzily. I saw that one of the great gateways of the City was close. Suddenly the cube that held me tightened its grip; tightened it so that it drew me irresistibly flat down upon its surface. Before I dropped Drake's body leaped toward me as though drawn by a lasso. He fell, swearing feebly, at my side.

Then pursued by scores of the Things and like some mischievous boy bearing off spoils, the block that held us raced away, straight for the open portal. A blaze of incandescent blue flame blinded me; again as the dazzlement faded I saw Drake beside me—a skeleton form! Swiftly flesh melted back upon him, clothed him!

The cube stopped, abruptly; the hosts of little unseen hands raised us, slid us gently over its edge, set us upright beside it. And it sped away!

All about us stretched another of those vast halls in which on high burned the pale-gilt suns. Between its colossal columns streamed thousands of the Metal Folk; no longer hurriedly, but quietly, deliberately, sedately.

We were within the City—even as Ventnor had commanded.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE CITY THAT WAS ALIVE!

CLOSE beside us was one of the cyclopean columns. We crept to it; crouched at its base opposite the drift of the Metal People; strove, huddled there, to regain our shaken poise. Like bagatelles we felt in that tremendous place, the weird luminaries gleaming above like garlands of frozen suns, the enigmatic hosts of animate cubes and spheres and pyramids trooping past. They ranged in size from shapes yard-high to giants of thirty feet or more. They paid no heed to us, did not stop; streaming on, engrossed in whatever mysterious business was summoning them. And after a time their numbers lessened; thinned down to widely separate groups, to stragglers; then ceased. The hall was empty of them.

We stood. As far as the eye could reach the columned spaces stretched. I was con-

scious once more of that unusual flow of energy through every vein and nerve.

"Follow the crowd!" said Drake. "Do you feel just full of pep and ginger, by the way?"

"I am aware of the most extraordinary vigor," I answered.

"Some weird joint," he mused, looking about him. "Wonder if they have regular streets and houses? Wonder if they have any windows? This whole place looked solid to me—what I could see of it. Wonder if we'll get up against it for air? These Things don't need it, that's sure. Wonder—"

He broke off, staring fascinatedly at the pillar behind us.

"Look here, Goodwin! There was a tremor in his voice. "What do you make of *this?*"

I followed his pointing finger; looked at him inquiringly.

"The eyes!" he said impatiently. "Don't you see them? The eyes in the column!"

And now I saw! The pillar was a pale metallic blue, in color a trifle darker than the Metal Folk. All within it were the myriads of tiny crystalline points that we had grown to know were the receptors of some strange sense of sight. But they did not sparkle as did those others; they were dull, lifeless. I touched the surface. It was smooth, cool—with none of that subtle, warm vitality that pulsed through all the Things with which I had come in contact. I shook my head, realizing as I did so what a shock the incredible possibility he had suggested had given me.

"No," I said. "There is a resemblance, yes. But there is no force about this—stuff; no life. Besides, such a thing is utterly incredible."

"They might be—dormant," he suggested stubbornly. "Can you see any marks of their joining—if they *are* the cubes?"

Together we scanned the pillar minutely. The faces seemed unbroken, continuous; there was no trace of those thin and shining lines that marked the juncture of the cubes when they had clicked together to form the bridge of the abyss or that had gleamed, crosslike, upon the back of the combined four upon which we had followed Norhala.

"It's a sheer impossibility! It's madness to think such a thing, Dick!" I exclaimed, and wondered at my own vehemence of denial.

"Maybe," he shook his head doubtfully. "Maybe—but—well—let's be on our way."

We strode on, following the direction the Metal Folk had gone. Clearly Drake was still doubtful; at each pillar he hesitated, scanning it closely with troubled eyes. But I, having determinedly dismissed the idea, was more interested in the fantastic lights that flooded this columned hall with their buttercup radiance. Still they were, and unwinking; not disks, I could see now, but globes. Great and small they floated motionless, their rays extending rigidly and as still as the orbs that shed them. Yet rigid as they were there was nothing about either rays or orbs that suggested either hardness or the metallic. They were vaporous, soft as the St. Elmo's fire, the witch lights that cling at times to the spars of ships, weird gleaming visitors from the invisible ocean of atmospheric electricity.

When they disappeared, as they did frequently, it was instantaneously, completely, with a disconcerting sleight-of-hand finality. I noted, though, that when they did so vanish, immediately close to where they had been other orbs swam forth with that same astonishing abruptness; sometimes only one, larger it might be than that which had gone; sometimes a cluster of smaller globes, their frozen, crocused rays impinging.

What could they be, I wondered—how fixed, and what the source of their light? Could they be the products of electromagnetic currents and borne of the interpenetration of such streams flowing above us? Such a theory might account for their disappearance, and reappearance, shiftings of the flows that changed the light producing points of contact. Wireless lights? If so here was an idea that human science might elaborate if ever we returned to—

"Now which way?" Drake broke in upon my musing. The hall had ended. We stood before a blank wall vanishing into the soft mists hiding the roof of the chamber.

"I thought we had been going along the way They went," I said in amazement.

"So did I," he answered. "We must have circled. They never went through *that* unless—unless—" He hesitated.

"Unless what?" I asked sharply.

"Unless it opened and let them through," he said astonishingly. "Have you forgotten those great ovals—like cats' eyes that opened in the outer walls?" he added quietly.

I *had* forgotten. I looked again at the wall. Certainly it was smooth, lineless. In one unbroken, shining surface it arose, a façade of polished metal. Within it the deep set points of light were duller even than they had been in the pillars; almost indeed indistinguishable.

"Go on to the left," I said, none too patiently. "And get that absurd notion out of your head."

"All right." He flushed. "But you don't think I'm afraid, do you?"

"If what you're thinking were true, you'd have a right to be," I replied tartly. "And I want to tell you *I'd* be afraid. Damned afraid!" In my own perturbation I let slip from me an unaccustomed adverb of profanity.

For perhaps two hundred paces we skirted the base of the wall. We came abruptly to an opening, an oblong passageway full fifty foot wide by twice as high. At its entrance the mellow, saffron light was cut off as though by an invisible screen. The tunnel itself was filled with a dim grayish blue luster. For an instant we contemplated it.

"I wouldn't care to be caught in there by any rush," I hesitated.

"There's not much good in thinking of that now," said Drake earnestly. "A few chances more or less in a joint of this kind is nothing between friends, Goodwin; take it from me. Come on."

We entered. Walls, floor and roof were composed of the same substance as the great pillars, the wall of the outer chamber; filled like them with dimmed replicas of the twinkling eye points.

"Odd that all the places in here are square," muttered Drake. "They don't seem to have used any spherical or pyramidal ideas in their building—if it is a building."

It was true; now that he had called my attention to it, I recollected that so far in the architecture I had seen neither curve nor triangle. All was mathematically straight up and down and across. It was strange—still we had seen little as yet. And there was a warmth about this passageway we trod; a difference in the air of it. The warmth grew, a dry and baking heat; but stimulative rather than oppressive. I touched the walls; the warmth did not come from them. And there was no wind. Yet as we went on the heat increased.

The passageway turned at a right angle, continuing in a corridor half its former dimensions. Far away shone a high bar of pale yellow radiance, rising like a pillar of light from floor to roof. Toward it, perforce, we trudged. Its brilliancy grew greater. A few paces away from it we stopped. The yellow luminescence streamed through a slit not more than a foot wide in the wall. We were in a *cul-de-sac*—for the opening was not wide enough for either Drake or me to push through. Through it with the light gushed the curious heat enveloping us.

Drake walked to the opening, peered through. I saw his body stiffen, his eyes widen wildly; joined him and stared as incredulously.

At first all that I could see was a space filled with the saffron lambency. Then I saw that this was splashed with tiny flashes of the jewel fires; little lances and javelin thrusts of burning emeralds and rubies; darting gem hard flames rose scarlet and pale sapphire; quick flares of violet.

Into my sight through the irised, crocus mist swam the radiant body of—Norhala!

Robeless she stood, clad only in the veils of her hair that glowed now like spun silk of molten copper, her strange eyes wide and smiling, the galaxies of tiny stars sparkling through their gray depths. And all about her swirled a countless host of the Little Things! From them came the gem fire piercing the aureate mists. They played and frolicked about her in scores of swiftly forming, swiftly changing, goblin shapes.

They circled her feet in shining, elfin rings; then opening into flaming disks and stars, shot up and spun about the white miracle of her body in great girdles of multicolored living fires. Mingled with disk and star were tiny crosses gleaming with sullen, deep crimsons and smoky orange!

A flash of blue incandescence and a slender pillared shape leaped from the floor; became a coronet, a whirling, flashing halo toward which streamed up the flaming tendrilings of her tresses! Other halos circled her arms and breasts; they spun like bracelets about the outstretched arms! Then like a swiftly rushing wave a host of the Little Things thrust themselves up, covered her, hid her in a fiery coruscating cloud! I saw an exquisite arm thrust itself from their clinging, wave gaily; saw her glorious head emerge from the incredible, the seething draperies of living jewels! I heard her laughter, sweet and golden and far away!

Goddess of the Inexplicable! Madonna of the Metal People!

"The babes of the Metal People," I whispered.

"God!" sighed Drake. "Their nursery. The nursery of the—Little Things!"

She was gone, blotted out from our sight! Gone too were bar of light and the chamber into which we had been peering. We stared at a smooth, blank wall! With that same ensorcelled swiftness the wall had closed even as we had stared through it; closed so quickly that we had not seen its motion!

I gripped Drake; shrank with him into the farthest corner—for opposite us the wall was opening! First it was only a crack; then rapidly it widened. There stretched another passageway, luminous and long; far down it we glimpsed movement. Closer that movement came, grew plainer. Out of the mistily luminous distances, three abreast and filling the corridor from side to side, raced upon us a company of the great spheres! Back we cowered from their approach—back and back; arms outstretched, pressing against the barrier, flattening ourselves against the shock of the destroying impact menacing.

"It's all up," muttered Drake. "No place to run. They're bound to smash us. Stick close, Doc. Get back to Ruth. Maybe I can stop 'em!"

Ere ever I could check, he had leaped straight in the path of the rushing globes now a scant twoscore yards away. He stood, head held high—a human straw against the onpouring metal avalanche. A human straw, yes—and an heroic symbol of the unconquerable human will!

The cataract of the globes stopped—halted a few feet from him before I could reach his side. They seemed to contemplate us, astonished. They turned upon themselves, as though consulting. Slowly they advanced. We were pushed forward; lifted gently. Then as we hung suspended, held by that force which I can always only liken to myriads of tiny invisible hands, the shining arcs of their backs undulated beneath us; their files swung round the corner and marched down the passage by which we had come from the immense hall. And when the last rank had passed from under us we were dropped softly to our feet; stood swaying in their wake. A curious frenzy of helpless indignation shook me, a rage of humiliation obscuring all gratitude I should have felt for our escape. Drake's eyes blazed wrath.

"The insolent devils!" He raised clenched fists. "The insolent, domineering devils!"

We stared after them.

Was the passage growing narrower—closing? Even as I gazed I saw it shrink; saw its walls slide silently toward each other! I pushed Drake into the newly opened way; sprang after him.

Behind us was an unbroken wall covering all that space in which but a moment before we had stood!

Is it to be wondered that a panic seized us; that we began to run crazily down the alley that still lay open before us, casting over our shoulders quick, fearful glances to see whether that inexorable, dreadful closing was continuing, threatening to crush us between these walls like flies in a vise of steel?

But they did not close; unbroken, silent, the way stretched before us and behind us. At last, gasping, avoiding each other's gaze, we paused.

And at that very moment of pause a deeper tremor shook me, a trembling of the very foundations of life, the shuddering of one who faces the inconceivable knowing at last that the inconceivable—*is!*

For, abruptly, walls and floor and roof broke forth into countless twinklings! As though a film had been withdrawn from them, as though they had awakened from slumber, myriads of little points of light shone forth upon us from the pale-blue surfaces—lights that considered us, measured us—mocked us!

The little points of living light that were the eyes of the Metal People!

This was no corridor cut through inert matter by mechanic art; its opening had been caused by no hidden mechanisms! It was a living Thing—walled and floored and roofed by the living—bodies—of the Metal People themselves! And its opening, as had been the closing of that other passage, was the conscious, coordinate and voluntary action of the Things that formed these mighty walls.

An action that obeyed, was directed by, the incredibly gigantic, communistic will which, like the spirit of the hive, the soul of the formicary, animated every unit of them!

A greater realization swept us. If *this* were true, then those pillars in the vast hall, its towering walls—all this City was one living Thing!

An incredible structure built of the animate bodies of countless millions! Tons upon countless tons of them shaping a gigantic pile of which every atom was sentient, mobile—intelligent!

Now I knew why it was that its frowning façade had seemed to watch us Argus-eyed as the Things had tossed us toward it. It *had* watched us! That flood of watchfulness pulsing about us had been actual concentration of regard of untold billions of tiny eyes of the living blocks which formed the City's cliff.

A City that Saw! A City that was Alive!

No secret mechanism then—back darted my mind to that first terror—had closed the wall, shutting from our sight Norhala at play with the Little Things! None had opened the way for, had closed the way behind, the coursing spheres. It had been done by the conscious action of the conscious Things of whose living bodies was built this whole tremendous pile! The fact was beyond comprehension.

I think that for a moment we both went a little mad as that staggering truth came to us. I know we started running once more, side by side, gripping like frightened children each other's hands. Then Drake stopped.

"By all the *hell* of this place," he said, "I'll run no more! After all—we're men! If they kill us, they kill us. But by the God who made me I'll run from them no more. I'll die standing!"

His courage steadied me. Defiantly we marched on. Up from below us, down from the roof, out from the walls of our way the hosts of eyes gleamed and twinkled upon us.

"Who could have believed it?" he muttered, half to himself. "A living city of them! A living nest of them; a prodigious living nest of metal!"

A nest? I caught at the word. What did it suggest? That was it—the nest of the army ants, the city of the army ants, that Beebe had studied in the South American jungles and once described to me. After all, was this more wonderful, more unbelievable than that—the city of the ants which was formed by their living bodies precisely as this was of the bodies of the Cubes?

How had Beebe phrased it—"the home, the nest, the hearth, the nursery, the bridal suite, the kitchen, the bed and board of the army ants." Built of and occupied by those blind and dead and savage little insects which by the guidance of smell alone carried on the most intricate operations, the most complex activities. Nothing here was stranger than that, I reflected—if once one could rid the mind of the paralyzing influence of the shapes of the Metal Things. Whence came the stimuli that moved *them,* the stimuli to which *they* reacted? Well then—whence and how came the orders to which the *ants* responded; that bade them open *this* corridor in their nest, close *that,* form this chamber, fill that

one? Was one more mysterious than the other?*

Breaking into my current of thoughts came consciousness that I was moving with increased speed; that my body was fast growing—lighter! Simultaneous with this recognition I felt myself lifted from the floor of the corridor and levitated with considerable rapidity forward; looking down I saw that floor several feet below me. Drake's arm wound itself around my shoulder.

"Closing up behind us," he muttered. "They're putting us—out."

It was, indeed, as though the passageway had wearied of our deliberate progress! Had decided to—give us a lift! Rearward it was shutting. I noted with interest how accurately this motion kept pace with our own speed, and how fluidly the walls seemed to run together. Our movement became accelerated. It was as though we floated buoyantly, weightless, upon some swift stream. The sensation was curiously pleasant, languorous—what was that word Ruth had used?—*elemental*—and free! The supporting force seemed to flow equally from walls and floor; to reach down to us from the roof. It was slumberously even, and effortless. I saw that in advance of us the living corridor was opening even as behind us it was closing.

All around us the little eye points twinkled and—laughed!

There was no danger here—there could be none! Deeper and deeper dropped my mind into the depths of that alien tranquillity. Faster and faster we floated—onward.

Abruptly, ahead of us shone a blaze of—daylight! We passed into it. The force holding us withdrew its grip; I felt solidity beneath my feet; stood and leaned back against a smooth wall.

The corridor had ended and—had shut us out from itself!

"Bounced!" exclaimed Drake. And incongruous, flippant, colloquial as was that word, I know none that would better exemplify my own feelings.

We were *bounced* out upon a turret jutting from the barrier. And before us lay spread the most amazing, the most extraordinarily fantastic scene upon which I think the vision of man has rested since the advent of time!

CHAPTER XXX.

THE VAMPIRES OF THE SUN!

IT was a crater; a mile on high and ten thousand feet across ran the circular lip of its vast rim. Above it was a circle of white and glaring sky in whose center flamed the sun. And instantly, before my vision could grasp a tithe of that panorama, I knew that this place was the very heart of the Metal Emperor's City; its vital ganglion; its soul.

Around the crater lip were poised thousands of concave disks, vernal green, enormous. They were like a border of gigantic, upthrust shields; and within each, emblazoned like a shield's device, was a blinding flower of flame—the reflected, dilated face of the sun. Below this glistening, glaucous diadem hung, pendent, clusters of other disks, swarmed like the globular hiving of the constellation Hercules' captured suns. And in each of these too hung prisoned the image of the day star.

A hundred feet below us was the crater floor.

Up from it thrust a mountainous forest of the pallidly radiant cones; bristling; prodigious. Tier upon tier, thicket upon thicket, phalanx upon phalanx they

* Of an amazingly analogous phenomena William Beebe has written: "Of that house every rafter, beam, stringer, and window-frame, door-frame, hallway, room, ceiling, wall and door, foundation and superstructure and roof, all were ants—living, motionless ants, distorted by stress, crowded into the dense walls, spread out to widest stretch across the tie-spaces. I had thought it marvelous when I saw them arrange themselves as bridges, walks, hand-rail, buttresses and sign-boards along the columns; but this new absorption of environment, this usurpation of wood and stone, this insinuation of themselves into the province of the inorganic world, was almost too astounding to credit." Nor, I may add, are the variations of shape, the grotesqueries of outline of these ants when observed under the glass less astonishing than were the transformations of what for want of better name I call the Metal Folk. For further information upon this subject see this distinguished observer's article in the *Atlantic Monthly* for October, 1919.—W. T. G.

climbed. Up and up, pyramidically, they flung their spiked hosts.

They drew together two thousand feet above us, clustering close about the foot of a single huge spire which thrust itself skyward for half a mile above them. The crest of this spire was truncated. From its shorn tip radiated scores of long and slender spokes holding in place a thousand feet wide wheel of wan green disks whose concave surfaces, unlike those smooth ones girding the crater, were curiously faceted.

This amazing structure rested upon a myriad-footed base of crystal, even as had that other cornute fantasy beside which we had met the great Disc. It was in size to that as Goliath to David; no—as Leviathan to a minnow. From it streamed the same baffling suggestion of invincible force transmuted into matter; energy coalesced into the tangible; power made concentrate in the vestments of substance.

Half-way between crater lip and floor began the hordes of the Metal People.

In colossal animate *cheveaux-de-frise* of thousand-foot girders they thrust themselves out from the curving walls—walls, I knew, as alive as they! From these Brobdignagian beams they swung in ropes and clusters—spheres and cubes studded as thickly with the pyramids as ever Titan's mace with spikes. Group after bizarre group they dropped; pendulous. Coppices of slender columns of thistled globes sprang up to meet the festooned joists. Between the girders they draped themselves in long, stellated garlands; grouped themselves in innumerable, kaleidoscopic patterns. They clicked into place around the golden turret in which we crouched. In fantastic arrases they swayed in front of us—now hiding by, now revealing through, their quicksilver interweavings the mount of the Cones.

And steadily those flowing in below added to their multitudes; gliding up cable and pillar; building out still further the living girders, stringing themselves upon living festoon and living garland, weaving in among them, changing their shapes, rewriting their symbols.

They swung and threaded swiftly, in shifting arabesque and *cocquillage*, in Gothic traceries, in lace-like Renaissance fantasies, arches and brocatteled astragals; utterly bizarre, unutterably beautiful—crystalline, geometric always.

Abruptly their movement ceased—so abruptly that the stoppage of all the ordered turmoil had in it a quality of appalling silence!

An unimaginable tapestry bedight with incredible broidery, rich with a *bijoutrie* Gargantuan, the Metal People draped the vast cup!

Pillared it as though it were a temple!

Garnished it with their bodies as though it were a shrine!

Across the floor, toward the Cones glided a palely lustrous sphere. In shape only a globe like all its kind, yet was it invested with power; radiated power as a star light; was clothed in unseen garments of supernal force; almost visibly behind it trailed the royal purple robes of puissance. In its wake drifted two great pyramids; after them ten spheres but little smaller than the Shape which led.

"The Metal Emperor!" breathed Drake.

On they swept until they had reached the base of the Cones. They paused at the edge of the crystal tabling. They turned.

Came a flashing as of a meteor burst! The globe had opened into that splendor of jewel fires before which had floated Norhala; had floated Ruth; the Flaming Disk into whose coruscations Ventnor had sent his bullets. I saw again the luminous ovals of sapphire studding its golden zone, the mystic rose of pulsing, petaled flame, the still core of incandescent ruby that was the heart of that rose.

Strangely I felt my own heart veer toward this—Thing; bowing before its beauty and its strength; almost worshiping!

Worshiping! I worshiping—That! A shock of revulsion went through me. I shot a quick, half frightened glance at Drake. He was crouching dangerously close to the lip of the ledge, hands clasped and knuckles white with the intensity of his grip, eyes rapt, staring—upon the verge of worship even as had been I!

"Drake!" I thrust my elbow into his side brutally. "None of that! Remember you're human! Guard yourself, man—guard yourself!"

"What?" he muttered, turning mazed eyes to me; then, abruptly: "How did you know?"

"I felt it myself," I answered grimly. "For God's sake, Dick—hold fast to yourself! Remember—Ruth!"

He shook his head violently—as though to be rid of some clinging, cloying thing.

"Thanks!" he said hoarsely. "I'll not forget again. Never fear!"

He huddled down once more close to the edge of the shelf; peering over. No one of the Metal People had moved; the silence, the stillness was unbroken.

Now the flanking pyramids shot forth into twain stars, blazing with violet luminescences. And one by one after them the ten lesser spheres expanded into flaming orbs; beautiful were they, but less, far less glorious than that Disk of whom they were the counselors?—ministers?—what?

Still there was no movement among all the arrased, girdered, pillared hosts.

There came a little wailing; far away it was and far. Nearer it drew. Was that a tremor that passed through the crowded crater? A quick pulse of—eagerness?

"Hungry!" whispered Drake amazingly. "They're *hungry!*"

"Drake!" I looked at him fearfully. "Drake—you're crazy!"

"All right," he muttered. "But I felt it. I felt that jump. It was a hunger shake. The damned things are *hungry!*"

Closer was the wailing; again that faint tremor quivered over the place. And now I caught it—a quick and *avid* pulsing!

"Hungry," whispered Drake again. "Like a lot of lions with the keeper coming along with meat."

The wailing was below us. I felt, not a quiver this time, but an unmistakable shock pass through the hordes. It throbbed—and passed.

Into the field of our vision, up to the flaming Disk rushed an immense cube. Thrice the height of a tall man—as I think I have noted before—when it unfolded its radiance was that shape of mingled beauty and power I call the Metal Emperor. Yet this Thing eclipsed it. Black, uncompromising, in some indefinable way *brutal*, its square bulk blotted out the Disk's effulgence; shrouded it! And a shadow seemed to fall upon the crater! The violet fires of the flanking stars pulsed out—watchfully, threateningly!

For only an instant the darkening block loomed against the Disk; blackened it.

There came another meteor burst of light! Where the cube had been was now a tremendous, fiery cross—a cross inverted!

Its upper arm arose to twice the length either of its horizontals or the square that was its foot. In its opening it must have turned, for its—*face*—was toward us and away from the Cones, its body hid the Disk and almost all the surfaces of the two watchful Stars. Gigantic, eighty feet at least in height, this cruciform shape stood. It flamed and flickered with angry, smoky crimsons and scarlets; with sullen orange glowings and glitterings of sulphurous yellows. Within its fires were none of those leaping, multicolored glories that were the Metal Emperor's; no trace of the pulsing, mystic rose; no shadow of jubilant sapphire, no purple royal; no tender, merciful greens nor gracious opalescences. Nothing even of the blasting violet of the Stars.

All angry, smoky reds and ochers the cross blazed forth—and in its lurid glowings was something sinister, something real, something cruel, something—nearer to earth, closer to man!

"The Keeper of the Cones and the Metal Emperor!" muttered Drake. "I begin to get it—yes—I begin to get—Ventnor!"

Once more that pulse, that avid throbbing, shook the crater. And as swiftly in its wake rushed back the stillness, the silence!

The Keeper turned—I saw it palely lustrous blue and metallic back. I drew out my little field-glasses, focused them. The cross slipped sidewise past the Disc, its courtiers, its stellated guardians. As it went by they swung about with it; facing it ever. And now at last was clear to me a thing that had puzzled greatly—the mechanism of that opening process by which sphere became oval disk, pyramid a four-pointed star and—as I had glimpsed in the play of the Little Things about Norhala, could see now so clearly in the Keeper—the blocks took this inverted cruciform shape.

The Metal People were hollow—spheres and tetrahedrons and cubes—hollow!

Hollow metal—boxes!

In their enclosing sides dwelt all their vitality, their powers—themselves!

And those sides were—everything that they were!

Folded, the oval disk became the sphere; the four points of the star, the square from which those points radiated; shutting became the pyramid; the six faces of the cubes were when opened the inverted cross. Nor were these flexible, mobile walls massive. They were indeed, considering the apparent mass of the Metal Folk, most astonishingly fragile. Those of the Keeper, despite its eighty feet of height, could not have been more than a yard in thickness. At the edges I thought I could see grooves; noted the same appearances at the centers of the Stars. Seen sidewise, the body of the Metal Emperor showed as a complexity; its surface smooth, with a suggestion of transparency. Had the golden globe, in which lay what I supposed were the organs of his senses, some function in the assuming of the globular form, I wondered? Paler than the Emperor's, this zone was possessed also by its ten satellites; I could see no mark of it upon the other Shapes.

The Keeper was bending; its oblong upper plane dropping forward as though upon a hinge. Lower and lower this flange bent—in a grotesque, terrifying obeisance; a horrible mockery of reverence! Was this mountain of Cones then actually a shrine—an idol of the Metal People — their God?

The oblong that was the upper half of the cruciform Shape extended now at right angles to the horizontal arms. It hovered, a rectangle forty feet long, as many feet over the floor at the base of the crystal pedestal. It bent again, this time from the hinge that held the outstretched arms to the base. And now it was a huge truncated cross, a T-shaped figure, hovering only twenty feet above the pave.

Down from the Keeper writhed and flicked a tangle of tentacles; serpentine, whiplike. Silvery white, they were dyed with the scarlet and orange flamings of the surface now hidden from my eyes; reflected those sullen and angry gleamings. Vermicous, coiling, they seemed to drop from every inch of the overhanging planes!

Something there was beneath them—something like an immense and luminous tablet. The tentacles were moving over it—pressing here, thrusting there, turning, pushing, manipulating—

This story will be continued in next week's issue of the ARGOSY-ALLSTORY WEEKLY, the consolidated title under which both magazines will appear hereafter as one.

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THE LIFE OF LOVE

THE life of love is the life of a flower
Which lifts to the touch of the sun and the moon;
The life of love is the joy of an hour,
The strain of a flute, or a viol's sweet tune.

The flower dies at the dawn's red heart,
And sorrow kisses fair joy to death;
The viol-sound's drowned in the roar of the mart;
The flute-voice dies with the player's breath.

Harry Kemp.

Old Man Davy

by

Ray Cummings

HIS name was William David, but every one about the office knew him affectionately as Old Man Davy. He was a lovable little *man*—meek, inoffensive, unforceful—a small-caliber man of big heart, grown old in a little job.

For twenty-three years a stream of bills that required checking had passed ceaselessly across Old Man Davy's desk.

"Each in its turn," he would say. "Each in its turn—and never let 'em pile up. *Then* everything's all right."

For twenty-three years Old Man Davy had been watching new employees join the office force of the Tonola Talking Machine Company. Some lagged behind—dropped out of the race; but most went ahead. Of them all only Old Man Davy remained stationary. It never occurred to him to wonder why; he accepted it without question as part of the natural order of things.

Life had been very easy, very good to Old Man Davy. He and his wife had never been in want. Always, each week, there had been enough money to supply their simple needs—enough to educate their son—enough even to lay away a thousand or two.

Old Man Davy did not know it, but the twenty-three years that had swiftly passed since he first became an employee of the Tonola Company had made this job as much a part of his life as were his wife and son themselves. For the first few years he had risen slowly but steadily; then at last he had found his level—and there he had stopped.

But twenty-three years of faithful service—day after day the patient, careful performance of routine work—had brought Old Man Davy privileges above his fellows; and had given a prestige that he did not wholly understand, but which filled him with a gratifying sense of personal importance. Every morning promptly at ten minutes of nine he sat down at his desk; the time-clock required others to be in at eight thirty. Often at noon he smoked his cigar half an hour past the lunch period. And in mid-afternoon—those long, hot summer afternoons particularly—frequently he would close his desk with a bang and remark ostentatiously to his neighbors:

"Four o'clock! Guess *I'll* knock off."

Macdonald, general manager—Czar in his domain of the Tonola organization—sometimes stopped to chat familiarly with Old Man Davy at his desk. And when he had left Old Man Davy would say grandly:

"Yes, *I* was here ten years before he was. I think a lot of Mac—he's a fine man."

Perhaps, years ago, Old Man Davy had had dreams; but they were faded now. He had dreamed perhaps of his own greatness; now he dreamed of the greatness of his boy—born the very year, he remembered,

that had given him his present job. Twenty-three years ago! How time did fly!

One sultry August afternoon, some six weeks after David, Jr., had gone to work in his first job for a New York brokerage concern, Old Man Davy sat idly at his desk smoking and viewing with a calm peacefulness of soul the busy office around him. The wire basket at his left marked "Incoming" was nearly empty. Its mate at his right, with the neat little inscription, "Outgoing," was piled high with the finished work of the day. Old man Davy glanced at the clock and sighed luxuriously.

"Four o'clock," he remarked to the man across the aisle. "Four o'clock! Guess *I'll* knock off."

It was only a short walk from the factory down the maple-lined avenue of the little suburban town to Old Man Davy's home. When he reached it this afternoon David, Jr., was already there.

"I'm fired," announced the boy briefly. "Lost the job, dad."

Old Man Davy kissed his wife abstractedly and sat down on the porch, fanning himself with his hat. He looked a little confused.

"But—but, Will," she protested, "you said you were getting along so nice."

"Maybe I was," answered the boy. "I thought I was. But, anyway, I'm fired now—sacked—canned." He grinned and shrugged his shoulders. "I should worry—I'll get another. But that's the trouble working for somebody else. It's hell. You work along and any minute maybe they get the bug to throw you out."

Old Man Davy said nothing, but at the boy's words his heart unaccountably beat faster. Foolish words—cynical words of youth and inexperience. Old Man Davy forgot them soon afterward. But that evening, as he sat down after dinner to read the paper, they came back to his mind; and that night after he had gone to bed, they were still ringing in his head.

At ten minutes of nine the next morning Old Man Davy sat down before his desk as usual. His morning's work was waiting for him—a neat little pile at his left. Force of habit made him reach for it—but his mind was far away.

"That's the trouble working for somebody else!" The words still rang through his head over and over. "Any minute, maybe, they'll throw you out—it's hell!"

Old Man Davy sat staring at his desk with unseeing eyes. Some one passing down the aisle slapped him on the back affectionately and he came to himself with a start.

"Better get on the job, Davy," admonished his neighbor jocularly, "or they'll be after you."

Old Man Davy forced a smile as he pulled his work toward him, but his heart sank at the words. Billings had said something like that to him the other day, he remembered. What did the man mean? It didn't sound quite so much like a joke this time as it had before.

"That's the trouble working for somebody else." He breathed the words to himself in a frightened little whisper. "It's hell—it's hell when they throw you out!"

Old Man Davy was at his desk the next morning at eight thirty. At four o'clock he glanced around and half rose from his seat mechanically—then dropped back again and went quietly on with his work. At half past five he was standing in line before the time-clock and looking with dismay at the column of red-inked impressions that marked his many early departures. And again the words rang in his ears:

"It's hell—it's hell when they throw you out!"

During the days that followed they joked Old Man Davy a little at his new-found morning promptness; and they wondered audibly what attraction held him at his desk until closing time. Old Man Davy said nothing. But his mouth was set a little firmer now; he did not smile so readily; and as the days passed the hunted look in his eyes increased, and a feverish air came into the usual placidness of his work. The privileges he had thought twenty-three years had earned him were gone now—one by one he took them away—denying himself, through fear, everything he had once gloried in, everything that had set him apart and above his fellow workers. Until at last he settled down into a monotonous

daily grind of work, with the possibility, the probability he thought now, of being discharged always hanging over him.

Some time later, when Old Man Davy had faced alone as long as he could the thoughts that seethed in his mind, he remarked abruptly to his wife one evening after dinner:

"I'm going into business for myself, Martha—right away."

They were alone on the little screened-in porch; David, Jr., was working for another brokerage firm now and had stayed in the city to a show.

Old Man Davy's wife stared at him in astonishment.

"I'm going into business for myself," he repeated. "I'm in a rut, Martha—don't you see? I must make a break some time."

He outlined his plans to her in detail—plans that he had been turning over and over in his head and of which he had not breathed a word to any one before.

His wife listened in dismay, but he set aside her feeble objections with a new-found vigor as foreign to his real nature as the contemplated plans themselves.

"Don't you see, Martha?" he repeated earnestly. "I've got to make a break some time—I daren't stay the way I am."

"But—but, William—leave the Tonola Company? You *can't* do that. Why, you've been there ever since we've been married."

"I've got to, Martha," he declared doggedly. "Five hundred dollars of the eighteen hundred we've saved—that's all I'll need."

The very next morning Old Man Davy went to the general manager. Macdonald listened to the solemn words of his oldest employee and repressed the smile that struggled to his lips.

"I've got to get into business for myself—got to get after the big things," was the gist of Old Man Davy's explanation. His thin little face, with the sparse gray hair above, was set with determination; his big, patient, kindly eyes shone with excitement.

He finished and stopped abruptly, trembling all over. The general manager gripped him by the hand.

"Good luck, Davy," he said heartily. "But—keep in touch with me. Let me know how you're getting on. Every week or two at most. Will you?"

"Yes, sir," said Old Man Davy. "I will, chief, of course, if you say so."

There were many preliminaries to Old Man Davy's plan. He attacked them with dogged vigor as soon as he left the Tonola Company. The break of leaving was softened by this new activity into which he plunged. He felt indeed as though he were only on a vacation from the company—a vacation filled with many diverse things to keep him busy. He was a little confused at first by the numerous details of even so small a business as this he was starting. He had to decide everything for himself now, alone and unadvised; and the responsibility frightened him sometimes.

The preliminaries over, Old Man Davy began calling upon New York retail druggists. The first day it rained. Old Man Davy saw five that day; and all of them looked at him coldly and without sympathy. Not one seemed interested in his plan in the least. Old Man Davy did not know that it was partly because the appearance of his wet, bedraggled little figure plodding around in the rain was so poor an ally to his verbal arguments.

The next day was bright and sunny. Old Man Davy, undiscouraged by his lack of success the day before, bravely called on ten storekeepers that day. To one particularly uncomprehending druggist he explained patiently:

"It's just like the old Tabard Inn Library—you remember that, don't you? Only this is with phonograph-records. I'll put a rack in your store here with thirty records in it. You sell them at the regular retail price. Then anybody who owns one belongs to our Record Library. Don't you see? Each of our records has a special envelope to identify it. Anybody owning one can bring it back any time and exchange it for another by paying a fee of twenty-five cents. After they've got tired of that particular song they can get another for very little money. Don't you see?"

He then went on earnestly to explain how most of the store's customers probably

owned phonographs—how they would get into the habit of making frequent exchanges—how he would increase the stock of new records as fast as the druggist could sell them to new members. And in enthusiastic detail he told just how he would share profits with the storekeeper who was put to no expense whatever.

"Who is this Record Exchange Company?" the druggist asked suspiciously.

"I'm general manager," said Old Man Davy proudly. He pulled a little printed card from his pocket. "It's my own idea—offices at 9, 10 Beaver Street, New York City." He thrust the card into the man's hand.

"It's a new concern," he added; and repeated: "I'm general manager."

After a little more argument the druggist did what Old Man Davy wanted him to do, and Old Man Davy shook his unresponsive hand and went his way. But somehow he did not feel elated. He had got a customer, but what he had wanted also, he felt vaguely, was to have made a friend. And that, somehow, he could not do in this new business.

Old Man Davy was very tired when he got out home that evening. He had had an eventful day—the most eventful business day of his life. On the train going out he thought it all over. The thing looked good. Three of the druggists had signed his agreement. Ninety records to go on sale—ninety possible members for the Record Exchange Library. Suppose each of these made one exchange a week on the average. That would be a weekly income of twenty-two dollars and fifty cents in fees. Half to the druggists. Old Man Davy figured that allowing for his operating expenses on that amount of business it should give him a net profit of nearly ten dollars. An established weekly income of ten dollars from one day's work!

Old Man Davy sat in the smoking-car of the train and puffed at his cigar thoughtfully. It was his first smoke that day. He hadn't had time to take his usual cigar after lunch, the way he always used to at the factory; and now it was nine o'clock in the evening. Everything looked good. He was going to make money—real money at last, and be his own boss. Nobody would fire him now. It would be hard work of course. And uncongenial. Strangers were so unfriendly. Nobody seemed to like him particularly—to be interested in *him*—only in themselves and what *they* were going to get out of it. Life had been like a battle, really, ever since he had left the old job—a fight to hold up your own end against everybody else. He shuddered a little as he wondered if it would always be like that.

And then he found himself wondering how the folks at the factory were getting on. He missed the chaffing he used to get almost every day from Archie Boyd. A clever boy. Archie—a good one to match wits against in an argument. And McIntyre, the traffic manager. "Hello, Old Man Davy," McIntyre would call to him half a dozen times a day; and thump him on the back as he went past. Nobody would ever call him "Old Man Davy" in this new business. He smiled to himself—but it was a wistful little smile—as he thought how foolish it would be if they did.

It was nearly ten o'clock when he got home. Martha was worried about him. That was foolish, too.

"I'm all right," he declared stoutly. "It was a wonderful day." And he told her all about it.

Then he went to bed. His body ached in every muscle. His mind was full of the details of his new enterprise. Visions of wealth—financial success—floated before him. But in his heart was a great sense of loneliness—an emptiness that he hardly realized, and did not understand.

The days passed and Old Man Davy's new little business prospered fairly well. He plodded at it steadily, and each evening on the train coming home his summary of the day showed him he had accomplished all he could have hoped. His enthusiastic accounts to Martha and David, Jr., showed that, too.

But underneath it all Old Man Davy was unhappy. He realized it suddenly one day, with a start of surprise. And then he realized, too, that it was because, without knowing it, he had been worrying. His

old job with Macdonald—how was *that* coming along? Who was doing it now? Perhaps it wasn't being done right? Perhaps there was something he could do to help?

And all the boys at the factory—how were *they* getting on? They were the only real good friends he had in the world—he mustn't neglect *them.* The chief had told him to report his progress in his new business. He felt very guilty as he realized he hadn't done that either.

Old Man Davy had many things that should have been done in New York that next day, but all at once they seemed unimportant. He did not go to New York that day. Instead, he lingered luxuriously over his breakfast, and at nine o'clock was in Macdonald's office.

"It's going to be a big success," he finished his explanation to Macdonald. "I'm going to make a lot of money."

"Fine!" said Macdonald. He looked at Old Man Davy searchingly. He was a keen student of human nature, this big executive—reading between the lines was his specialty—and he understood lovable Old Man Davy thoroughly. "Come outside," he added abruptly. "I want to introduce you to your successor."

They made slow progress through the big main office room. Everybody wanted to stop and shake hands with Old Man Davy. The traffic manager, passing them in an aisle, thumped him vigorously on the back.

"Hello, Davy, you old fakir," he greeted. "Glad to see you here again." And he passed on.

Finally they came to Old Man Davy's desk—the little old-fashioned roll-top desk he had had all those years—the only one of its kind remaining in the office. There it was—splotchy ink-stains and all—standing just where it had always stood, near the big double window.

A stranger was seated at the desk now—a callow-looking young man with a cigarette dangling from his lips. He tossed the cigarette away hastily as the general manager approached, and rose to his feet.

Old Man Davy swallowed the lump in his throat and acknowledged Macdonald's introduction.

"Pleased to meet you, Mr. Wilks," he said. They shook hands, and the young man sat down again at the desk. Old Man Davy stood close beside it. Instinctively his fingers ran along its battered edge caressingly. There was a moment's silence. Then:

"You've got the baskets on the wrong sides, Mr. Wilks," said Old Man Davy in his patient, gentle way. "The boy comes down *that* aisle—the *incoming* should be over there. He takes the *outgoing* from *this* side on the return trip. Don't you see?"

He pulled open one of the desk-drawers; then another. "*I* always kept the price-cards in the *top* drawer. You have to look at them all day long—you—you waste too much time when they're *here.* Don't you see? In work like this unless you—you—"

Old Man Davy stopped and turned away abruptly, plucking at Macdonald's coat.

"Let's go b-back to your office now—please, chief," he faltered in a pleading whisper. And without another word he started off down the room, brushing his coat-sleeve awkwardly across his eyes.

Back in the general manager's office Old Man Davy stood silent before his former employer. His eyes were fixed on the floor; he twisted his hat nervously in his hands.

"Chief, I—I can't go on this way," he began hesitantly. "I—I just can't seem to get along without all you folks here. I've tried, chief. I'm going to make money—I can see that—I'm going to be successful."

His voice gathered strength. "It isn't that, chief. It's—it's just there's something missing—something I've always had—and nothing else seems to take its place. I've told myself that's foolish—I've tried to forget. But I *can't,* chief—I just can't. And when I saw my old desk just now I—well, I just guess I'm lonesome for you all here. I *can't* go out among strangers after all these years. I—I guess I just belong here with you. That little desk and I seem to fit each other some way. I grew to fit that old job, chief, and I don't seem to fit anything else. I—you—well, I just want my old job back, that's all. *Can* I have it, chief?" His voice trembled with anxiety.

Macdonald slid a protecting arm about the old man's shoulders. "Can you have

it? Why, Davy, you don't realize what a load it will take off my mind to know you're at that desk. I don't have to worry—think about the work at all—with you there."

Old Man Davy sat down suddenly in the chair beside the general manager's desk. There was a long silence, then Macdonald said gently:

"It's fine to have you back, Davy. I'm glad it's all settled."

Another silence.

"Why did you think you might want to leave us, Davy?" Macdonald asked finally.

Old Man Davy's glance rose slowly from the floor, hovered about the room, and came to rest on the general manager's face.

"I—I thought maybe—I just got to thinking—I was afraid maybe some day you might fire me." He finished with a rush.

Macdonald hesitated only an instant, and in his answering tone there was none of the emotion he really felt.

"Fire *you?* Why, Davy, you're too valuable a man to us. We couldn't ever afford to do that. We figure you as permanent as the organization itself. It would be very poor business to let *you* go. You can see that."

And Old Man Davy was convinced.

At home that evening David, Jr., listened enthusiastically to his father.

"You bet your life I'll tackle your record business, dad," he said briskly, when Old Man Davy paused.

"And don't you see," said Old Man Davy, "I'll be right here to advise you. And I know *all* about it—just exactly how it ought to be done."

"I'll make a big thing of it, too, you see if I don't—it's a cinch," the boy added. "I told you before you ought to let me in it with you—it beats working for some body else any day in the week."

The next morning promptly at ten minutes of nine Old Man Davy was back at his little battered old desk. He smoked two cigars after lunch that day, and sat in the Greasy Spoon Lunchroom until nearly two o'clock, chatting with the proprietor and reading the newspapers with his chair tilted back nonchalantly against the window casement.

Two hours later he looked about the big office casually, glanced at the clock, and closed his desk with a bang. The man across the aisle smiled his friendly smile.

"Four o'clock! Guess *I'll* knock off," said Old Man Davy.

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PROFIT AND LOSS

THERE is more gained by helping than fretting;
And more earned by giving than getting.
The goods that we sell
May pay us—and well—
But the cheer that we give away free,
Will lend us forever
In cheerful endeavor,
Ten times what we'd get as a fee.

There is more had by laughing than growling;
And more made by smiling than scowling;
The fist that is tight
Does not know the delight
Of the palm that counts gain as a loss;
And the sunshine we measure,
When scattered, is treasure,
But hoarded, turns pinchbeck and dross.

Elias Lieberman.

How Many Cards?

by Isabel Ostrander

Author of "Ashes to Ashes," "Twenty-Six Clues," "Suspense," etc.

CHAPTER XXXV.

MICE AND MEN—AND TRIXIE BURNS.

"OF course you'd be pulling off a thing like that when I'm on duty and not with you for the fireworks!" Dennis mourned when later still that afternoon McCarty presented himself at the engine-house and reported his recovery of the emeralds. "Whatever put you in mind of that Bodansky again?"

"When I was going over the whole case in my head from the very start I saw a kind of a picture before me of that young crook slinking along to his job, and it come over me all of a sudden that 'twas not by accident he picked on the Creveling house. I only wonder I never thought of it before." McCarty shook his head. "'Twas easy enough to make him talk when I once got him going, and then I took Martin and Yost and trailed up Third Avenue looking for the little jewelry-shop of my new friend Kosakoff. We found it all right, and him mending watches behind his counter as meek and respectable appearing as the next one! He had a gold pair of spectacles on himself, down on the tip of his nose, and a full set of white whiskers that would do credit to Santa Claus, and not the sharpest dick in the business would have taken him for Bronheim's right-hand man.

"He made out to be hard of hearing at first, and acted the scared, bewildered old innocent to the life, knowing nothing about anything and having his business ruined and his good name took away from him because of some mistake of the hard-hearted police; but he sang a different tune when I opened up on him. I took a chance and told him that Spanish Lou and Diamond Harry had been run in and were down at headquarters telling all they knew, and then I sprung it that we were looking for those emeralds. He swore by all the little fathers of Russia that he never saw them nor heard of Crawford; but when Martin pulled out the warrant and the bracelets he saw that the game was up and made a grab down behind the counter. Then Yost—"

"And where were you while them two lads were making the pinch?" inquired Dennis.

McCarty grinned.

"I got to him before he reached his gun," he remarked modestly. "I took a glass case with me that was filled with cuff-links and such, and there was a bit of commotion around the place for awhile, but Kosakoff was willing to talk when he woke up after the little nap he decided to take, sudden, when he first hit the floor. Some more of the boys had come over from the station-house to keep the crowd back, and we got him into the room at the rear of the shop, and made him come across.

"He knows who Crawford was all right, though he won't admit it, nor that he had the least suspicion the emeralds were the

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for July 24.

same the papers were making such a holler about when the girl was held for trial and jumped her bail. It seems that a swell who gave the name of Foster had sold him a pearl necklace and some other junk, and when Crawford came he said Foster had recommended him there. Creveling had only meant to borrow those emeralds from his wife, not steal them, for he arranged with Kosakoff to hold them for three months and agreed to sell them back to him for thirty thousand; he must have been in a tight squeeze, for he only got two-thirds of what they were worth, and then dug down for ten thousand for Ilsa's bail when his wife was determined to send her up."

"Well, why wouldn't she be?" Dennis asked. "Did Hill's wife make sheep's eyes at you, that you can see only her side of it? It was tough luck, of course, her being innocent and all, but Mrs. Creveling didn't know that, and you can't blame her for wanting the thief punished."

McCarty shook his head.

"I'm not so sure, Denny, that 'twas a matter of principle with her so much as protection. I've got an idea that after she started the rumpus about the robbery and called in the police she got more than a suspicion of the truth; but 'twas too late to back down from the stand she had taken, and Ilsa was the goat. Mrs. Creveling is a hard woman, with the hardness that comes only to the proud when something has made them suffer and they don't take it right. There's some that tribulation makes gentle and forbearing and some that it turns to stone, and she's the last sort. I'm thinking her husband broke her heart, and if it hadn't been for her pride she'd have kicked him out long ago. 'Tis not love for him that's made her so set on finding his murderer, but other women have been the cause of her suffering and she suspects some woman is at the bottom of his being shot. As long as all this notoriety and scandal have been brought down on her anyway, she's going to find that other woman and make her suffer, too, or I miss my guess!"

"And she had never a word of regret for all the harm she'd done Ilsa when you told her the truth?"

"Oh, yes." McCarty's lip curled. "It's her own lawyers that 'll help quash the indictment, and her own influence through old Alexander that 'll smooth out the little matter of bail-jumping, and a handsome settlement she'll make on both Hill and Ilsa. I took the satisfaction of warning her that the matter of settlement might be decided by the courts if Ilsa brought action against her, and I hinted that the both of them more than suspected the truth. She'll move heaven and earth to keep it from coming out, of course, and I shouldn't wonder if them two was fixed for life."

"'Twas a grand bluff you handed her about finding the man that made the fake emeralds, and that he could prove Creveling brought the real ones to him!" Dennis remarked. "Where did you get hold of the fakes, anyway?"

"I was not bluffing," McCarty retorted with dignity. "Where do you suppose I've been the day, after seeing Kosakoff off for the station-house? I started to hunt up all the makers of imitation junk in town, and the fourth one I struck remembered the fine paste emeralds he made and put in the original old settings for a customer named Edward C. Crawford—he did not show much imagination in thinking up an alias for himself, did he? I pulled out a picture of Creveling that I'd cut from the newspaper, but with the name torn off, and he said it was the same man all right. Kosakoff, under pressure, had identified the same picture."

"But the fake emeralds?" persisted Dennis. "You'd think, after stealing them away from his wife he would have hid them good until he was able to have them replaced by the real ones."

"He did, Denny, and that's why 'twas easy enough to trace them." McCarty chuckled. "Of course he'd not leave them around the house or try to hide them from Alexander's prying old eyes in one of the office safes, and I didn't size him up as the fellow to trust anybody much, especially in a case like this. He seemed to like the name Crawford since he'd used it twice already, so I got a list of all the little out-of-the-way branch banks and trust com-

panies where they rented safety-deposit boxes and started out to look for one that had been hired by Edward C. Crawford a matter of two months ago.

"Well, I knew he wouldn't dare tackle any of the big, prominent places, for Eugene Creveling's face must be pretty well known in banking circles. I sent Martin to Brooklyn and Yost to the Bronx, and checked off all the places where Creveling or his father or Alexander had kept accounts, which narrowed the search down a lot. Inspector Druet lent me one of the department's cars, and 'twas well he did, for where do you think I found what I was after? Over on Staten Island, no less, at a branch of the Tradesman's and Artisan's Bank."

"You've the luck!" declared Dennis. "But who was this guy Foster that Creveling said had recommended him to this Kosakoff? The one that sold a pearl necklace?"

"There's no knowing, but it may turn out to be one of the suckers who got cleaned out at Cutter's poker table and sold some stuff belonging to some woman of his family to cover his losses. I figure out that he must have told Creveling, and that put the brilliant idea into his head, for he wouldn't think it up all by himself."

"Well, I'll say you worked quick," commented Dennis. "A matter of twenty-four hours and you've cleared up what the best fellows in the detective bureau haven't been able to do in two months; but you're no nearer yet to the man who killed Crev—"

"Denny, for the love of the saints, will you put on a new record?" McCarty exclaimed in exasperation. Then he glanced at his watch and chuckled once more. "And put on your regular clothes while you are about it, for 'tis nearly six o'clock, and you're going to a party to-night."

"A party, is it?" Dennis eyed him suspiciously. "If 'tis another of Mr. Terhune's little—"

"'Tis not. You're going to a theater this night—a big one on Broadway—to see what they call a musical comedy, and you'll be taking a lady out to supper afterwards; one of the ladies in the show."

"Not if I know it!" retorted Dennis firmly. "Have you taken leave of your senses, Mac, at your time—"

"'Tis a wonder I've not, trailing around with you all these years," interrupted McCarty. "I thought we'd be going on Saturday night, but Terhune's little movin' picture interfered; 'twas for that I mentioned a dress suit to you; but it's just as well to go as we are, for you'll feel more natural. I've bought the tickets already and left a note to be given to the girl when she reaches the theater."

"What's it you've got up your sleeve, Mac?" demanded Dennis. "What's the name of the show, and who is the girl? I know well what you're taking me along for, but I'll never in the world be able to talk to her!"

"If you think it is for conversation I'm inviting you, Denny, I could just as well take a deaf-mute, provided he'd not get rheumatism in his fingers!" McCarty replied with withering scorn. "As for the girl, you've had her on your knees many a time."

"Me?" Dennis turned a scandalized face on his friend. "I'll have you know Timothy Mc—"

"The show," McCarty put in innocently, "is a fool thing called 'Bye Bye Baby.'"

"I've heard that name somewhere lately, besides seeing it on the bill-boards," Dennis reflected aloud. "Wasn't somebody telling me— Mac! 'Tis the show Terry Burnses daughter is in; her that threw over Eddie Kirby for a stage career as I was after telling you the other day! 'Tis little Bea herself we'll be taking out for supper!"

"It is," McCarty admitted briefly.

"But why? Well, I know you'll not be taking an evening off in the middle of a case to go gallivanting to the theater nor yet to be seeing the daughter of an old friend. What's she to do with the shooting of that man Creveling?"

"Nothing, you loon!" McCarty exclaimed disgustedly. "Do you mind how we came to be talking of her the other day? I was telling you that some of the girls from that same show were at the party

Waverly attended on Thursday night at Sam Vedder's apartment. It come to me that if little Bea wasn't there herself she could introduce us to one that was, and I'd like to find out how Waverly acted that night; whether he was just having a good time without a care in the world, or if there seemed to be something on his mind. 'Tis six now, and you're off duty. Hurry up and come on."

CHAPTER XXXVI.

A FAMILY MASCOT.

BUT Dennis refused to be hurried, and no stage-door satellite could have been at more pains with his sartorial appearance. McCarty left him at length to follow at his pleasure, and returned to his rooms to add an extra touch or two to his own attire, and he was struggling with a new, tight collar when the telephone rang.

"Hello!" he said curtly.

"Are you there, McCarty?" Terhune's voice came to him over the wire. "If you are not busy I wish you would drop in at my rooms this evening. A new phase of the case has occurred to me which I would like to discuss with you."

McCarty gave an exasperated wrench at the collar and flung it on the floor.

"I'm sorry, sir," he replied firmly, "but I've got an important engagement for this evening."

"Then break it," advised Terhune coolly. "This is of the greatest importance. I have come to the conclusion after careful study of the situation that the man who killed—"

Very softly and deliberately McCarty hung up the receiver, and rolling up a bit of paper, he stuffed it under the bell on the top of the telephone. He was standing with a smile of infinite satisfaction, listening to its persistent but impotent whirr, when Dennis appeared at last.

They dined hurried at their favorite chop house, and reached the theater just as the orchestra was starting the overture. From their seats in the third row, Dennis craned his neck around and surveyed the house, taking a professional interest in the arrangement of the exits while McCarty studied the program and snorted.

"A fine kind of a job for Terry's daughter!" he commented. "She must be doing well, though; I see they've given her a lot of parts. She's a villager in the first act and a model and a hunt ball guest—whatever that is—in the second; and in the third she's *Babette*."

"That 'll mean she's got a line to speak," Dennis remarked. "If we can't spot her from the rest till then we'll know her when she opens her mouth, if she's grown up to be like her mother, God rest her soul! You could hear her to the Battery when Terry came home late."

"We'll know her, all right," McCarty smiled slyly, but Dennis had no time to inquire the reason for his certitude, for the curtain ascended and mundane things were lost to him.

"That's her!" McCarty exclaimed after an interval. "Third from your left."

"That tall girl with a bunch of violets on her as big as a platter, and hair like brass in the sun?" Dennis sniffed incredulously. "You're dippy, Mac! There was never a blonde in the family."

Nevertheless he watched her assidiously during that act and the one which followed, and when in the third his prediction was verified, and *Babette* fed a line or two to the comedian, he sank back in his seat.

"True for you, Mac," he muttered. "She could shoot up like a water-tower and bleach out the honest brown hair of her, but that's the voice of Moira O'Malley Burns!"

Later he sat in solitary state in the taxicab from which he had refused to budge at the stage entrance to the theater, while McCarty waited at the door and furtively scanned the faces of the girls in plain or elaborate attire as they emerged to hasten off alone up the street or be whirled away in waiting cars, and he thought miserably of the hour before him. How was he ever to talk to this strange, changeling daughter of Terry the fight promoter?

But when Miss Burns, with the grinning McCarty in tow, appeared at the door of the taxi, she unexpectedly lifted the anticipated burden from his shoulders.

"How de do, Mr. Riordan?" She touched his hand with her gloved fingers and settled with a little whirl into the seat beside him. "It was awfully good of you two old dears to look me up. This is the first night I haven't had a date in a month. And I want to thank you so much for my violets; I got fined for wearing them in the first act, but it was worth it to see old Sylvester's face when she made her entrance. She's the worst cat in the business."

"Violets?" Dennis turned a suspicious eye on the other old dear who was gazing steadily out of the window. "I never—"

Miss Burns was oblivious to the denial.

"We're in for an all-summer run," she went on. "When Dolly Whitfield leaves to head the number two company, I'm going to have her part; that's why I changed my hair. You remember that song the tenor sings at her in the second act, 'Just a Strand of Your Golden Hair'? Where are we going for supper?"

In a daze Dennis followed her into the glittering restaurant and listened while she commandeered the services of a waiter captain and ordered as to the manner born. The object of their party had passed completely from his mind until McCarty seized an opportunity when frog's legs poulette had temporarily dammed the flood of their guest's volubility, to remark:

"It must be grand to be so popular, out at parties every night and all! To think of little Beatrice Burns wasting an evening on two old codgers like us when she might be meeting society swells!"

"I'm Trixie, now," the young lady reminded him a trifle sharply. Then her manner softened. "Beatrice hasn't got pep enough for Broadway these days. Of course I meet society men all the time, but I'm always glad to see old friends."

"There's a man I know that's seen your show a lot." McCarty felt his way with care. "Sam Vedder's his name, and he's in with a lot of society people—"

"Sports, you mean!" Trixie laughed. "We all know Sam! He's crazy about Whitfield, but she can't see him. He gave a supper party for her one night last week in his apartment up on the Drive, and he certainly knows how to do things right even if he is only a kind of a con. man, as they say. This was my souvenir."

She exhibited a gold card-case attached to the chain of her mesh bag, and Dennis glanced swiftly at McCarty, but the latter was examining the trinket admiringly.

"Sam told me about that party and some of the people who were to be there," he observed. "Several of your company."

"Only the girls. He left it to Whitfield, and she asked eight of us. The men were all Sam's friends: Chedsey, the hardware man, and Danton—you know Danton's Flesh Cream—and Mayer, of the Emperial Cloaks and Suits; and Jeffrey Hunt, and Roy Goodsell, and Fales Ogden, and a couple of bookies whose names I don't remember." Trixie paused for breath. "Lots of money, and good sports; but Ogden was the only real swell."

Dennis stiffened, and McCarty's grip tightened upon his fork.

"Sam said something about a fellow named Waverly," he remarked with studied carelessness. "Maybe he was one of the bookies—"

Trixie made a little grimace.

"No he wasn't. Who doesn't know Doug Waverly? Disgusting beast; but he's what you'd call a society swell, all right. It's funny Vedder spoke of him to you; trying to make out he's intimate with people that have got class, I suppose. Waverly goes around with Ogden a lot, but he wouldn't trail with a sporting man like Sam."

"Then he wasn't at that party last Thursday night?" McCarty persisted. "Maybe he came after you left."

"Well, he must have come with the milk if he did, for we girls all left together at five in the morning." Trixie stifled a yawn as she picked up her gloves. "I haven't been to bed before dawn in ages, and I've got to cut out the parties soon for a while and get down to study on Whitfield's part."

"I understood from your father that you were going to make a grand career for yourself," Dennis remarked. "You'll never be doing it on two hours' sleep and broiled lobsters, Trixie."

"Oh, you're as bad as father!" She tapped him playfully on the cheek and he reddened violently. "It's as much a part of the show business to mix in and get a following as it is to wear your clothes right and sing on the key, and I'm not looking to play *Juliet,* you know."

They discovered that she had ceased to live at her father's old house up-town, but had leased an apartment in the theatrical district with another show girl, so the ride homeward was a mercifully short one, and she forcibly kissed them both good night with a final admonition to come and see her in the new part.

"If I was Terry, I'd spank her!" Dennis growled as he rubbed his cheek vigorously. "At my time of life to go back to the lads in the engine-house with the mark of painted lips on my face!"

McCarty had given fresh instructions to the chauffeur, and now he settled back in Trixie's vacant seat.

"You'll not be going back just yet," he announced. "We'll pay a little call first on Mr. Samuel Vedder and find out why he lied to an officer of the law!"

"Mac, I'm thinking you had a hunch that Waverly's alibi was cooked up!" Dennis declared accusingly. "'Twas not to find out how he acted the night that you took that scatter-brained daughter of Terry's out, but to find out if Waverly was there at all."

McCarty smiled grimly.

"Have it your own way, Denny. 'Twas just a lucky shot, but it hit the mark. There's an old saying about the best laid plans of mice and men ganging aglee, and it's usually a woman that upsets most of them.

Waverly thought he was slick, and Vedder played up all right, but one litte word from Trixie Burns and that fine little alibi goes up in smoke."

Mr. Samuel Vedder was at home, and received them after some protest, in barbarically striped pajamas and an exceedingly bad temper.

"You fellows have got an awful nerve!" he grumbled. "I don't care if you are from police headquarters, you've got nothing on me, and this is a hell of a time to rout a man out of his bed! What do you want, anyway?"

"The names of the men who were your guests at that supper party here last Thursday night," McCarty responded shortly.

A change came over the dark, smooth-shaven face of Vedder, but he replied with an assumption of ease:

"I don't know what for; it was a perfectly regular party. Let me see—there was Fales Ogden and Roy Goodsell and Henry Mayer and Douglas Waverly—"

"Stop right there, Mr. Vedder," McCarty interrupted sternly. "Mr. Waverly was not in your rooms last Thursday night. You ought to have coached Chedsey and Danton and the rest of them if you were going to stick to that lie for him."

Vedder shrugged.

"So that's it, is it? They've been talking. Well, I only tried to do a favor for a friend, and it's not my funeral; I wasn't on the stand."

"Come through now, then. What did you lie for when I phoned you last Friday morning?"

"Because he asked me to. Douglas is an intimate friend of mine, and he called me up and told me he'd been out all night, and he thought the wife had put a couple of dicks on him, but he managed to lose them. I'd met him the day before and invited him to the party, and he said he had another date, but I suppose that's what made him think of using me for an alibi. He said if any one called up to tell them that he'd been here at a little stag party, and I was glad enough to help him out." Vedder paused and regarded them shrewdly. "It's a horse of another color, though, if headquarters is taking an interest in him. Say! That's the night his friend was shot!"

"Oh, nothing like that!" McCarty laughed. "This is a little matter about a private gambling establishment that we've got the goods on. By the way, if you're such a friend of Waverly's you must have sat in more than one game with him; what's his particular hunch, his mascot, his lucky card? He's got one, hasn't he?"

"Sure he has!" Sam Vedder laughed. "He says it has brought a streak of luck

down through the family for generations; it's the nine of diamonds!"

CHAPTER XXXVII.

STACKING THE CARDS.

LEAVING the apartment of Samuel Vedder, McCarty parted with the reluctant Dennis and took the taxicab down to the Cosmopolitan Club. For the first time in his career he wanted to pursue his investigation without the companionship and comments of his old friend, and if he felt the satisfaction of achievement and the one-time zest of the chase, it was not evident in the stern set of his countenance.

The doorman at the gloomy portals of the exclusive club was most impressive in appearance, and disposed at first to be supercilious, but when McCarty disclosed the purpose of his errand and hinted at a social scandal that might spread to the very foundations of the aristocratic institution if the information which he sought in order to hush the matter up were not forthcoming, the factotum bundled him hurriedly into the coat-room, dismissed the attendant there with a lordly wave of his hand, and closed the door.

"What is it you want to know, sir?" he asked with a look of pained resignation. "This is most irregular, and I ought to take you to a member of the house committee, but the quieter we can keep anything of this sort the better. There's not been a scandal connected with the club these twenty years—"

"That's all right; there won't be now, if you'll find out what I want to know for me," McCarty assured him. "Do you know Mr. Douglas Waverly?"

"Of course, sir." The man's tone was noncommittal, but his expression spoke volumes.

"Then I suppose I needn't tell you who has decided to find out at last what he is doing when he's not home," McCarty winked deliberately. "Now, we know all right, but it's our business to hand in a report that 'll let him out, see? He was here last Thursday afternoon late, wasn't he?"

"I don't know, but I can find out for you." The man looked his contempt for the shady private detective he believed the other to be. "I only come on at eight o'clock. Mr. Waverly may have been here earlier, but he came in a little before nine o'clock."

Nine o'clock! So another part of Waverly's alibi was untrue! He had said that he had gone directly from Sharp's chop house to see the last act of 'The Girl from Paradise," and from there to Vedder's apartment.

"Was Mr. Waverly alone? Did he stay long?" McCarty asked.

"No, sir. He only remained about a quarter of an hour, and he was looking for some one." The man spoke with evident hesitation. "It may have been an appointment, but I couldn't say. Mr. Waverly seemed much annoyed, sir."

"Was he in a temper?"

"He was. It isn't proper for us to discuss the members of the club, sir, but a fat man like Mr. Waverly oughtn't to get himself all worked up the way he does. He'll drop dead some day right here, and there's bound to be unpleasant comment in the papers. I thought myself that he would have a stroke that night!"

"And who was he looking for?" McCarty saw the man's color change.

"I really don't know, sir. I didn't hear him say."

"Oh, that's all right." McCarty laughed. "If it was Eugene Creveling, the man who was shot that night, you needn't be afraid to say so. I've got a friend in the homicide bureau down at headquarters, and he says they know all about the quarrel between Mr. Waverly and Mr. Creveling, and that it doesn't cut any ice; they know the fellow that did the shooting, and they're going to spring it as soon as they get a little more evidence."

"Yes, it was Mr. Creveling who Mr. Waverly was looking for, and it was just as well he wasn't here or there would have been a scene," the man admitted confidentially. "Mr. Waverly was purple in the face, and the language he used wasn't fit to be heard in the club, but it was quiet here, and few of the members were around.

A telephone call came for Mr. Waverly, though, and after he'd answered it he calmed down."

"What time was this?"

"Only a minute or so after nine; he couldn't have been here more than ten minutes then."

"Who was the call from?"

"I don't know, sir." The man hesitated once more. "The boy at the switchboard told me about it after, or I wouldn't have known he got a call. He must have sent for his car right away, for in another five minutes it was at the door, and he drove off. I haven't seen him since; he hasn't been around the club, at least not in the evening."

"And how did he seem when he drove off? Was he over his fit of temper?"

"Oh, quite. He chuckled when he took the wheel."

"Then he drove himself? Which car did he take out that night?"

"His fast roadster, sir. Yes, Mr. Waverly drove himself, and he told the man who brought the car down from the garage that he didn't know when he would send it back; he'd call up if he wanted him to come anywhere for it."

"Didn't one of his own chauffeurs bring the car around, then?"

"No. I think both of them are down at his country place, and Mr. Waverly keeps the car in a public garage when his town house is closed."

"What garage?" McCarty persisted.

"The Porter-Adams, up on East Eightieth Street."

"What is the number of Mr. Waverly's roadster? Did you ever notice?"

"Of course. I know the numbers of all the members' cars. His is 0479-X. New York."

The doorman was evidently growing restless under the interrogation, and McCarty turned as though to take his departure, but halted.

"You say you don't know who that telephone call came from; but the boy at the switchboard would know, wouldn't he? I don't belong to any swell clubs myself, but don't people usually give their names when they call up? Isn't that a rule?"

"It is the custom, sir," the man stammered. "I'll see if the boy knows; but it would be as much as my position here is worth if you told who gave you any information, and I've been here a matter of twenty-four years."

"I won't give you away," McCarty promised. "I think we know who the party is, but certainly no names will be mentioned."

Reluctantly the man vanished upon his errand, and McCarty paced back and forth while he waited. He was making definite progress at last, yet still there was no elation in his manner, but rather an odd weariness and doubt. Would the case work out to the end as he had planned, or at the last moment would there be some hitch, the occurrence of some untoward incident which might necessitate a fresh start from the very beginning?

When the doorman returned he was shaking his head.

"There was no name given, sir. The boy asked for it, but the party phoning said it would not be necessary, that Mr. Waverly expected the call."

"But 'twas a lady, wasn't it?" McCarty eyed him narrowly.

"Yes, sir. It was a lady."

McCarty left the club and turned north on the avenue until he came to the park, when he struck westward. It was close on to three o'clock in the morning, and although he had not closed his eyes on the previous night, he felt in no mood for sleep. The evidence which he had collected was purely of a negative nature thus far, but as plainly as though he had himself been present, he could now trace in his mind every incident of that fateful Thursday night. But would he be able when the moment came to lay his cards upon the table with enough circumstantial evidence to carry conviction? Proof was not to be hoped for, since no living being but Creveling himself and one other had been within those walls when the shot was fired, and McCarty knew that a confession was not to be thought of, unless—

He reached his rooms at last, healthily fatigued after his long walk to find that a note had been thrust under his door. It

was from Inspector Druet, and read in part:

DEAR MAC:

Fine work recovering emeralds, but where have you been? Why don't you keep me posted on movements? Tried to get you all evening. Think I'm on track at last of man who killed—

"May the devil and all his relations take him and his tracks" cried McCarty aloud and without troubling to read further he tore the note in too and flung it in exasperation into the waste-basket. Then he turned out the light and went to bed.

The sun was high when he awakened, and after a hasty breakfast at the little near-by restaurant, and a glance at the papers, he started down-town once more and across to the Porter-Adams garage. He had purposely neglected to shave, and the old suit which he had donned was unpressed and shiny as to seam while the usual derby had been replaced by a shabby cap set at a decidedly rakish angle, which concealed a long strip of perfectly superfluous surgical plaster. He looked every inch a middle-aged mechanic, hard-working, but with failure written upon his lugubrious countenance.

The garage proved to be a large one, and from the costly types of the cars which filled every available foot of space it was evident that it catered to an exclusive class of private trades. A man in overalls with an oil-rag in his hand slouched in the entranceway and glanced up half surlily as McCarty halted before him.

"Does a guy named Waverly keep his car here?" the latter asked without preamble.

The man spat and wiped a grimy hand across his mouth before he responded.

"What's it to you if he does?"

"It's a lot to me" McCarty seconded the truculent tone of the other. "I've been looking for him ever since I got out of the hospital."

"What's the matter?" The man straightened with a show of interest and eyed the thick-set figure before him appraisingly. "Had a run-in with him? You'd ought to have been able to knock him out all right; he's all flabby fat."

His tone was contemptuous, and McCarty retorted:

"I've had no chance at him yet; but wait till I get hold of him, that's all! A fellow standing by when he ran into me told me his number while I was waiting for the ambulance. It's 0479-X New York, isn't it? And his car is a long, low roadster with an engine built like a racer?"

The other nodded.

"You got a straight tip; there's the car over there now." He pointed toward the farther side of the garage. "How did it happen?"

"So that's it, is it? That's the road-louse that busted my taxicab?" McCarty doubled one fist significantly. "And the rotter that was behind the wheel driving off like the devil and leaving me for dead for all he knew nor cared! I'm going to have the law on him good and proper, but I'll take a little of it out on his hide first! A decent, hard-working man ain't got a chance to make a living these days with guys like him hogging the road and riding over him."

"That's right!" the other agreed. "Was it your own cab?"

"Sure." McCarty was succeeding in working himself up into a well-simulated state of ire. "I just got it paid off two weeks ago, and I've been too busy to look after the insurance."

"Tough luck!" The man spat again. "It ain't a complete wreck, is it? You can get it patched up?"

"Wreck?" McCarty snorted. "I'm lucky if I don't lose my license for leaving a heap of junk obstructing the road. Who is this guy Waverly, anyway? I've just come from the license bureau, where I went to look up his number."

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

READY TO OPEN THE POT.

"OH, he's one of the big stiffs from the avenue." The man gestured toward the park. "Got a bunch of dough, but he's a tight-wad; hope you sting him good! He's more trouble than anybody else who leaves their cars here;

always kicking, and bullying, and flying into a rage over nothing, and getting his damned little bus out all hours; but the tips he hands out in a month wouldn't buy you a square meal! He's the kind, all right, that would sideswipe you from behind and ride off and give you the laugh!"

"That's just what he did to me, but I'm laughing now!" McCarty said grimly. "It ain't only my cab he'll pay for, but my twelve-dollar fare that I had rung up, to say nothing of my bu'sted head and shoulder and the loss of my time! Look here!"

He lifted the cap for an instant, displaying the long strip of plaster, and the other grunted sympathetically.

"Make him dig down deep; it 'll serve him right! Say, what happened to your fare? Was the party hurt, too?"

"No, only shook up bad. He hired me to take him out to his home in Greenwich, and I didn't get the location of his house or I'd know where to find him for a witness. He said he'd direct me when we got into the burg," McCarty lied glibly. "He skipped before I came to."

"Say! When did this happen?" the man demanded suddenly.

"Last Thursday night, nearer Friday morning. Four days have I laid on the flat of my back in the hospital—"

"Thursday night!" the other repeated. "That accounts for it!"

"Accounts for what?" McCarty felt at last the old thrill of exultation. Was his long-drawn-out histrionic effort to be rewarded?

"Why, the bent mud-guard and the twisted axle and the blood on him!" the man explained. "I worked all Thursday night, taking the place of one of the other fellows that had been hurt when a car was backed in. Waverly sent for his little bus about nine o'clock from one of his clubs, and it was after four in the morning when he drove it in. He usually sends for some one to go and get it, but this time he brought it himself, and he was in one hell of a temper, swearing because some other guy had left his car in the way, and yelling at me till he was purple in the face! That little bus of his is a good machine, all right, and powerful for her size; but she come limping in like a dog that had been kicked, and I see she was all battered up on one side. Waverly wasn't in no state to be asked questions, though, and he didn't say anything about an accident. He had on a big yellow-leather motor-coat, and I saw there was blood on it."

"Was he hurt, too?" McCarty added with as vicious a snarl as he could muster: "I hope to the Lord he was!"

"No. I was putting the car up and he was standing round under the lamp when I first got a good flash at him. He looked mad, and kinder scared, too, and the blood —there wasn't much of it—was smudged on the chest and sleeves of the coat. He caught me staring, and looked down at himself, and that was the first he knew of it, I guess, for he got out of the light quick and started cursing again. He waited, though, until I had finished with the car, and then gave me directions about having it fixed first thing in the morning. Handed me a dollar, too; first time I've seen more'n a quarter from him at one time!"

"I'm glad he had some damage, anyway, and I'm going to damage him a whole lot more before I'm through with him!" McCarty declared. "I guess it's no use hanging around here any longer; he'll probably send for his car if he wants it, and not come for it himself. I've got his address from the license bureau; think I'd catch him in now?"

"Don't know." The man turned as a voice from the depths of the garage hailed him. "He ain't got any regular hours that I know of; but I wish you luck; he's sure some bad actor! So-long."

Taking leave of his informant, McCarty returned to his rooms, and shaving, dressed himself in his usual immaculate attire. Then he went to the telephone and called up Mr. John Cavanaugh O'Rourke.

"It's just to remind you of your promise, sir, and to ask a favor of you."

"Sure, Timmie, anything for old times' sake!" came the cheery response.

"For old times' sake!" McCarty repeated softly as though to himself. Then he raised his voice. "'Tis for that I ventured to ask it of you, sir. For that, and to keep

any notoriety about the entertainments of your friend down near Washington Square from getting in the papers and my—my associates down-town from starting anything."

"I've got you," O'Rourke said quickly. "What do you want me to do?"

"Well, sir, they've got wind of certain things—my associates, I mean—but I've got a kind of a drag myself down there, and I know I can square things so that nobody 'll be interfered with or even questioned." McCarty spoke with jaunty assurance, but a deep flush mantled his honest countenance as though he were heartily ashamed of himself for the rôle he was playing. "I told you I've no wish to stop people from enjoying themselves in their own way, especially when it's my way, too, now and then, and that was on the level, but this is on your account, too, sir. Will you go to see the gentleman down near the Square and tell him that the only way he can keep from an awkward investigation which would displease his friends as well as himself, is to give a little party to-night and let me pick the guests?"

"I'll do it, Timmie. Say, it would be deucedly rotten if anything comes out!" There was an unaccustomed note of worry in the other's buoyant tones, and McCarty hastened to reassure him.

"Nothing will, sir, if Mr.—your friend—will do as I say. I'll be bringing three men friends with me, and be sure you're there yourself, sir, but not—not the Lady Peggy."

"Look here, Timmie!" There was a hushed note in O'Rourke's voice now. "What's the game?"

"Just the usual one, sir. Be sure you tell your friend that. The usual game in every way—all members of the club. You understand?"

"I do, yes; but whether I can make Cutter see it—"

"He must, sir, unless he wants to take a little trip down-town, for they've got the goods all right, and you know you said yourself that things were different here to what they are in the old country. There's no discrimination used between the amusement of gentlemen and the profession of blackguards. Tell him it wouldn't do any good for him to—well, to go out automobiling, we'll say. He's got new neighbors that are interested in his house, and his car might break down before it had got far. I can't speak any plainer."

"I understand!"

"He's not to be surprised that one of my friends that I bring will be Inspector Druet; he's the fellow that 'll hush everything up for us. There's just one thing more; your friend must get hold of Mr. Douglas Waverly and see that he'll be there without fail. He's apt to be in a bad humor to-day, but no matter of that. He must be made to understand that it's just a sociable little party, and me and my friends are fixed proper, and there to give protection as well as wanting to horn in; we don't want any trouble, so give him the quiet tip that it 'd be well for all concerned if he sits in real cordial, just as though we were in the same class with him."

"All right, Timmie, I'll do my best for you. I'll call you up later and let you know what luck I have," O'Rourke replied. "Where and when can I get you?"

"At half past six at my own rooms, sir. I would not ask it of you, but 'tis to avoid trouble for all your friends."

McCarty listened with a still flaming face to the other's slightly incoherent expression of gratitude and then hung up the receiver. For a moment he paused undecidedly. Dennis, he knew, would be waiting eagerly for his appearance at the engine-house to learn what new developments had arisen, but he did not want to take him into his confidence just yet; Denny was loyal, but his histrionic ability was not great, and by his expression alone he would betray to the most casual observer the plan which was afoot.

Just before noon McCarty dropped in at the office of the *Bulletin* and found a letter awaiting him. An hour later when he presented himself at Mrs. Bailie Kip's house, he bore a somewhat bulky package wrapped in brown paper and the habitual twinkle in his blue eyes had hardened into a steely, purposeful light.

"Really, I cannot understand why you

people keep hounding me!" Mrs. Kip swept into the room and regarded him with a look in which indignation and appeal were skilfully blended. "It is odious, but I suppose it is because I am a woman alone in the world that you dare to persecute me! I don't know why I have been singled out of all the Crevelings' friends, except because Mrs. Creveling has developed an inexplicable animosity toward me!"

"Has she, ma'am?" McCarty asked mildly.

Mrs. Kip shrugged.

"I have called twice and she refused to see me," she admitted. "She will not even talk to me over the telephone, and Mrs. Waverley's tone is positively insolent! I can only think that some one must have poisoned Mrs. Creveling's mind against me, but one would not imagine that she would stoop to be catty at a time like this."

"Maybe she's been hearing a few things about fans and Chinese cabinets," McCarty suggested blandly.

"What do you mean?" Mrs. Kip retreated a step and a rich color dyed her face.

"Only that now her husband's gone it was probably just as easy for Mrs. Creveling to get a line on things she hadn't known before, as it was for us to do the same thing, Mrs. Kip!" There was a stern note in his voice. "'Tis nothing to us, of course, since it has no bearing on the actual murder, but neither has the errand that brought me here to-day. There's enough dirt and scandal in this case as it is without dragging in more that don't concern it and people that have been only foolish. That's why I come to you quietly to return something you lost."

He held out the bundle and Mrs. Kip took it from him in silence with averted eyes. She had winced at his brutally frank mention of "dirt and scandal" and her pose seemed shaken, but her face was an expressionless mask as she unwrapped the paper.

The next instant she shrank back as though from a blow as a scarf of rich, lustrous fur fell at her feet, and raised suddenly terrified eyes to his.

"What is it?" she cried hysterically. "That is not mine, I never saw it before! I have lost nothing! Why have you brought that here to me?"

"Because it is a part of the duty of our organization to restore lost property, ma'am." McCarty watched her face steadily. "If you've forgotten you lost that fur neck-piece and where, there are plenty of people who can identify it as yours and one who knows where it was found and who else was there. It's no use, Mrs. Kip; we've got the goods straight."

She wavered and caught at a chair-back. Her lips moved, but for a moment no sound came. Then she asked in a hoarse whisper:

"What are you going to do?"

"That depends entirely on you, ma'am."

"Oh, what do you mean?" she cried quickly. "You have your price, of course! I forgot that! Tell me your terms. I will do anything, pay you all you—"

"You can't pay me anything, ma'am!" McCarty interrupted. "If you'll do what I tell you there'll be no word said of that scarf unless you open your own lips, and I don't think you'll do that. If you go your own way, of course, we'll have to go ours."

"Oh, I'll do anything, *anything!*" Her hands were working convulsively together. "Only tell me what you want me to do!"

"Stay in your house, ma'am, for the rest of the day. Don't write any notes or talk to a soul on the phone or see anybody who calls. I'll come for you early this evening and I want you to be ready to go out with me and some friends of mine. You needn't be alarmed, there'll be friends of yours there, too, and you'll not be detained more than an hour."

A little color had come once again into her blanched face and now she raised her head with a little of the old spirit.

"Mrs. Waverley and Mrs. Creveling? Will they be present? I don't know anything about Mr. Creveling's death; I refuse to speak of it—"

"You'll not be asked to, ma'am. You'll just be yourself and look on, and if you speak of anything it 'll be of your own will. Of course you are free to accept my terms or not as you please—"

"I'll accept!" she laughed hysterically. "I know when I'm beaten, and you hold the cards! After all, it's every one for themselves, isn't it? I'll be ready for you, Mr. McCarty, when you come."

Dennis Riordan was almost ill with suspense when, just as he was going off duty that evening, he was called to the telephone.

"'Tis me, Denny." McCarty's voice came to him over the wire. "Hotfoot it around here to my rooms as soon as you're dressed, for I'm taking you out in society to-night for a quiet little game."

"I'll have none of it!" Dennis declared. "The last time I sat in one with you I lost everything but the immortal soul of me! Where have you been this day?"

"I've been stacking the cards, Denny." There was a grimly portentous note in his tones. "I'm ready now when my deal comes to open the pot, but the Lord only knows what will come with the turn of the card!"

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE PARTY ASSEMBLES.

"WE'RE in for it now, but I don't mind telling you, Jack, that I think this is damned bad business!" Nicholas Cutter eyed his guest moodily across the dinner-table. "It is infamous of the authorities to attempt to interfere with a man's amusement in his own home among friends! I tell you things are coming to a rotten state in this country! How do you know that this outrageous demand of the McCarty fellow isn't just a trick to catch us in the act?"

"Because I know him," John Cavanaugh O'Rourke declared stoutly. "He's a friend of mine from my boyhood days and he wouldn't do anything to hurt me or my wife, you can rely on that."

"A gambling scandal wouldn't affect you so much, my boy; you'd be merely one of the players, but you forget that these games have been taking place in my house and I've been the banker. It would mean ostracism, ruin to me to be hauled up in court like the keeper of a common gambling-house!"

"Timmie knows that, and he is protecting you because you are a friend of mine," O'Rourke replied.

"But how about Doug Waverley? Why was that detective chap so anxious to have him here? I tell you it doesn't look good to me!"

"I don't know." A little thoughtful frown gathered on O'Rourke's forehead, but he added loyally: "Whatever his motive is, Nick, you can be sure it is only to avoid trouble for us. I wish I could be as sure of all my friends as I am of Timmie!"

"Oh, you Irish!" Cutter smiled, then he asked quickly: "But what did you mean by that?"

"Oh, nothing; forget it." O'Rourke shrugged. "I was just thinking of Gene Creveling, that's all. He was pretty sure of his friends, wasn't he, and yet some man broke bread with him and then shot him down in cold blood."

Cutter shuddered fastidiously and pushed back his chair.

"By Jove, you're in a cheerful mood!" he exclaimed. "I've been trying to get poor old Gene out of my mind all day. If he didn't kill himself, it is my opinion that we'll never know who did and there's no use being morbid about it. He has cashed in, but the game is still going on and we've got to play. Come into the music-room; I've had the piano restrung and I want you to hear the tone."

They passed from the dim, cloistered beauty of the high-ceilinged Jacobean dining-room into a larger, more lofty apartment, its walls a tracery of rich carvings that had been brought panel by panel from a Florentine palace, its chandeliers a glory of glittering crystals which were reflected in the sheen of the mosaic floor. Upon a raised platform at the farther end of the room were grouped a score or more of musical instruments of all ages, from an ancient lyre to the most modern masterpiece of the piano-makers' art and nearly all possessed histories which had made them coveted by museums the world over.

With an impatient gesture Cutter switched off all the lights save that which

glowed from a single low lantern behind the piano and advanced to the platform while O'Rourke dropped into a chair at its foot and gave himself up in a dreamy ecstasy to the wondrous tones which welled out beneath the master touch of his extraordinarily gifted host.

He came to himself with a start when Cutter stopped abruptly and whirled around upon the stool, exclaiming while still the notes of the final chord pulsed upon the air:

"Damn it, this McCarty has something up his sleeve! Why should he practically blackmail me into receiving him and his confounded friends to-night? If he is going to use his influence to keep us out of any mess on your account, as you are so confident he will, why doesn't he do it and not force himself on us? I don't like it, and no more does Doug. Have you seen him?"

O'Rourke nodded.

"He's like a bear with a sore head. Somebody has been poking their nose into his private affairs and I've never seen him in such a rage. I had my work cut out for me to make him realize that it was to the interest of all of us to be diplomatic to-night and extend a glad hand to our friends of the police department. He promised finally that he would come."

"Who are the other two McCarty is bringing beside Inspector Druet?" asked Cutter. "It wouldn't surprise me to see the district attorney and the head of the Vice Committee—"

"Oh, nothing like that!" O'Rourke laughed. "He didn't say, but I think we can safely leave the personnel of the party to his discretion. There they are now, or Waverley!"

The muffled thud of the knocker had come faintly to their ears through the opened door and Cutter rose without a word and led the way toward the back of the house, to the glass-enclosed extension which jutted out into the yard.

No flowers bloomed here, but the rarest and most beautiful of all the objects of art with which Cutter had surrounded himself were grouped in this exquisite room like a collection of perfect jewels in a fitting casket. The rich, somber hall through which they passed served but as a background for the fairylike brilliance which greeted them on the threshold. Myriads of soft lights shone upon world-famed paintings and were reflected in the long mirrors, gleaming back in a thousand flashing facets from the crystal and gold of the superb supper service spread out upon the long sideboard; fauteuils and cabinets of marvelous workmanship lined the walls in strange contrast to the plain mahogany table covered with green baize and the equally severe chairs that surrounded it which occupied the center of the room and which seemed by their mere incongruity to focus the attention.

The apartment was a familiar one to O'Rourke and he stood a little to one side conversing with his host in a low tone as the old man-servant threw open the doors and admitted the visitors.

"This is a pleasure, Mr. McCarty, I assure you." Cutter advanced to the foremost of the arrivals and held out his hand. "If you had told me when you called the other day that you were a devotee of our national indoor game I would have gladly extended an invitation to you to join us any time. We play quite frequently, you know."

McCarty's eyes twinkled with amusement at the audacity of his host, but he turned with grave dignity to present his companions.

"This is Inspector Druet, Mr. Cutter, and an old friend of mine, Dennis Riordan, who is not connected with the force. Mr. Terhune, I'm thinking your acquainted from the other evening."

"We have met," Mr. Cutter acknowledged somewhat wryly as he shook hands. "I am glad to welcome you, gentlemen; you know Mr. O'Rourke, I think."

McCarty drew the latter gentleman aside under cover of the general conversation which immediately followed and asked:

"Where is Mr. Waverley?"

"He promised to be here, and I expect him any minute." O'Rourke looked at the other quizzically. "Say, do you know anything about what made him so angry to-day?"

"Was he upset like?" McCarty grinned.

"I thought he'd have a fit! You warned me over the phone that he would be in a bad humor, you know, and I thought you must be at the bottom of it. I don't mind telling you, Timmie, that Cutter doesn't half like the idea of this little party to-night; he is afraid you are up to some trick, but I assured him that you wouldn't try anything of that sort on a friend of mine."

There was a rising reflection in his tone as though he were asking a question, and McCarty responded to it gravely.

"It is a trick, in a way, sir, and I'm bound to admit it, but it has nothing to do with the games that's been going on here. 'Tis a more serious matter, entirely, and this was the only way to come at the truth."

"A more serious matter?" O'Rourke repeated. "Good God! You don't mean anything to do with Creveling's death?"

McCarty nodded slowly.

"I'm telling you this in strict confidence, sir, not only because it's your due since you helped us arrange this little party, but because I want you to sit tight and say or do nothing no matter what is said or done that you might take exception to. You'll realize that we've a purpose behind it all and wait till we can explain more fully." He paused and added in a still lower but most impressive tone: "You see, we know who killed Mr. Creveling, but we don't know *why*. Waverley does, and it's the last link we need in the chain against the guilty person. We've got to get the truth out of him, even if it takes a hell of a scare to make him tell all he knows. You understand?"

"Yes, I think I do, Timmie, but was it necessary to drag us all in?" There was infinite reproach and chagrin in O'Rourke's tones.

"'Tis to keep you all out of anything further that I've asked you all to be here to-night," McCarty responded. "Waverley 'll get the scare here, but he'll do his explaining afterward, in private, and it 'll let the rest out that's here. I'm keeping my promise to you and doing whatever's in my power to prevent trouble from coming to all of you."

"'Evening, everybody. Have I kept the game waiting?"

They all turned with one accord to the door to find Douglas Waverley standing on the threshold. He appeared composed and tried to smile, but a faint, mottled flush was visible upon his flabby countenance and the veins on his forehead stood out like whipcords. Nodding with cool assurance to McCarty he acknowledged the introduction to the others civilly enough and turned to the baize-covered table where Cutter had already seated himself and was busily engaged in stacking up the ivory chips.

The latter looked up with a smile of welcome, which quickly changed to a look of concern.

"Hello, Doug! Anything the matter? You look a little seedy. You're not ill, are you?"

Waverley shook his head, but one pudgy hand went to the left breast of his shirt-front.

"Just a touch of the old trouble, but it's been giving me some rotten twinges to-day," he admitted. "I'll be all right, of course; I've been running the old engine too long on high, I expect. What's the limit to-night? We'll have to pike, I suppose."

"Sit beside me, sir, on my left," McCarty said in a hurried undertone to O'Rourke as they all with one accord moved toward the table.

The latter glanced at him in surprise, but obeyed without comment, his eyes wandering to the others as they took their places. Dennis Riordan marched to the chair at his other side, next to that of Cutter, while Terhune in turn seated himself on Cutter's left and Inspector Druet on McCarty's right, leaving the only vacant chair between himself and the criminologist. Waverley looked about him, shrugged and, pulling out the chair, dropped into it. As he did so his face twitched for an instant and his hand went again convulsively to his heart.

"Ten-dollar limit, gentlemen." Cutter raised his eyes. "Is that agreeable?"

Dennis shot an agonized glance at McCarty, but met with an answering one which made him quail and add a hurried assent to those of the rest, and the game

began. It went slowly at first, Q'Rourke taking the first jack-pot on three queens, with two of which he had opened. McCarty eyed Waverley curiously as the latter fumbled clumsily with the cards in dealing; the fat man was breathing heavily and his voice had seemed thicker than on their first meeting. Had he fortified himself for the evening by an overindulgent incursion into his private stock, or was he laboring still under the agitation of which O'Rourke had spoken?

As he laid down the pack to take up his hand the door behind them opened once more and a high-pitched ripple of laughter came to their ears with a little hysterical note running through it.

"That stupid Gregory tried to keep me out, Nickie—oh!" Mrs. Bailie Kip, in an evening gown which displayed her full-blown form to perfection, paused in seeming confusion on the threshold.

"Mrs. Kip!" Cutter left his place as the others rose and advanced quickly toward her. "This is an unexpected pleasure! I—we—you see—"

"Tell him to let her stay!" McCarty whispered in a hasty aside to O'Rourke, and, passing, Cutter bowed before her.

"Good evening, Mrs. Kip. You've not forgotten me?"

"Mr. McCarty." She laid an icy hand in his for a moment. "I had no idea that you were a friend of Mr. Cutter's, nor that I was intruding upon a stag affair. I understood that Mrs. Waverly would be here this evening and I fancied that some of the other ladies were also coming this evening."

"Won't you stay, anyway?" Cutter drew away from O'Rourke and flashed a strange glance at McCarty, who returned it with an almost imperceptible nod. "This is quite an impromptu affair or we should have telephoned to you and Mrs. O'Rourke and the rest, but it really doesn't matter. Choose one of us to chaperone you, and join us, do."

"We-ell—" Mrs. Kip flushed, dropping her eyes. "I wouldn't think of intruding in the game, but if you are quite sure I shall not be in the way, I might be persuaded to look on for a little while. I know it is horribly unconventional, but I was bored to tears at home."

She came slowly forward and Cutter presented Terhune, the inspector, and Dennis Riordan in turn. McCarty observed that after greeting the criminologist her eyes passed swiftly to those of the inspector as though seeming not to see the man who stood between, and she turned with unmistakable relief to bow to Dennis, who was gaping at her in fatuous admiration.

O'Rourke, at a gesture from McCarty, had drawn a chair up behind his own and to the right of that of the fireman, and he patted it invitingly.

"Come and give me luck, Mrs. Kip," he begged. "I won the first pot, but that was because you were already almost here, I am convinced of it!"

Mrs. Kip smiled in acquiescence and made a laughing rejoinder, but she seated herself with obvious reluctance, for she was directly across the table from Waverley and could no longer attempt to avoid the gaze he bent upon her. It was a curious mingling of warning and questioning, and before it her color ebbed, but she held her head high.

The rest seated themselves, and the game was resumed. All passed until Dennis was reached, when that individual suddenly became galvanized into life and opened for three dollars. Cutter stayed, and Inspector Druet and O'Rourke, but the rest dropped out, and McCarty sat back in his chair, intently studying the faces about the table.

O'Rourke seemed intent upon his cards, Mrs. Kip was looking down at her tightly locked fingers, Dennis was preoccupied, and Cutter inscrutable; Terhune, too, leaned back with a detached, slightly bored air. Waverley chewed sullenly upon his unlighted cigar, and Inspector Druet moved restlessly in his chair, while over all of them a nameless suspense brooded, a tensity as of relentless bands tightening about them.

It was slightly leavened when Dennis, with naive glee, raked in the pot on a bluff and proudly displayed his opening pair of aces.

"Gad, I'm thirsty!" Waverley ran a fat finger around his collar as though it

were choking him. "Tell Gregory to get some water, will you, old man?"

CHAPTER XL.

DILUTING THE TRUTH.

THE man-servant was at his elbow in an instant with a slender crystal carafe and glass upon a mirror-lined tray, and the inspector made room for it between them as he picked up the cards to deal. Waverley drank deep and cleared his throat, but his voice seemed thicker than ever as he addressed a remark to their host.

McCarty looked down at the cards in Inspector Druet's hands.

"Odd design, aren't they?" Cutter had followed his gaze from across the table. "They were made especially for me in Austria some years ago, and I laid in a good supply. I must have a hundred fresh packs or more lying around the house."

"I've never seen any just like them." McCarty studied the grotesque pattern picked out in green and purple *and* gold upon the backs of those he held in his hand, and then raised his eyes to Cutter's. "They must have cost a lot of money?"

"I've forgotten. I believe I paid around twenty-five dollars a pack for them," the other responded absently. "You couldn't get them now at any price, of course."

"Think of that now!" marveled McCarty. "I lost a hundred and sixty-five dollars one night on a trip from Kansas City to Milwaukee and the deck I played with only cost fifty cents."

"If you're opening, Mac, say the word!" Dennis admonished, emboldened by his recent coup. "You're holding up the game."

Waverley's chair creaked, Mrs. Kip dropped her gloves and retrieved them quickly before O'Rourke could stoop for them, and even Cutter stirred in his seat. The tensity which for a moment had lightened descended again with almost tangible force and the hand was played out in a strained silence broken only by the monosyllabic utterances of the bettors.

Waverley won with a full house, but his only comment was a grunt. The mottled flush had deepened on his face and a pulse throbbed perceptibly in his temple.

It was McCarty's deal, and as he picked up the cards Dennis drew a deep, convulsive breath as one about to plunge into cold water and started a lengthy post mortem about his last hand which, strangely enough, seemed suddenly to interest Terhune and the inspector also. They promptly took issue with him, and as the discussion waxed one of McCarty's hands stole in a lightning movement to his pocket and back to the deck of cards which he held just at the edge of the table.

He proffered them to Inspector Druet, who cut gravely, and as he started to deal the argument died down as swiftly as it had arisen. Mrs. Kip stiffened suddenly, and Terhune, glancing across at her, followed her gaze to the man at his side. Waverley's head had fallen forward on his thick neck and his chin lay in folds over his collar.

"Your cards, Mr. Waverley." Terhune touched his arm.

"Pardon," Waverley mumbled, jerking his head back. "Confoundedly hot in here! Cutter, old man, you needn't be afraid of a ray of light or a breath of air now; we have the majesty of the law on our side!"

He grinned lopsidedly up at Inspector Druet as McCarty picked up his hand and scrutinized it. He held the seven, eight, nine, and ten of clubs and the eight of hearts.

"Who opens?"

"I'm by." O'Rourke regarded his hand critically, and Dennis reluctantly threw down his cards.

"I'll open it." Cutter pushed three chips into the center of the table. "Anybody with me?"

"I will—er—trail." Terhune followed suit.

"Same here." Waverley drew a stertorous breath.

"Nothing stirring." Inspector Druet relinquished his hand and sat back.

"Raise you five, Mr. Cutter," McCarty remarked.

"I know when I've had enough." O'Rourke dropped his cards upon the table.

"Little action at last, eh?" Cutter smiled and shoved ten chips forward. "Right back at you, Mr. McCarty!"

"I will drop," said Terhune. "The psychology of success in cards as in all things—"

"I'm staying right with—you—both," Waverley breathed rapidly. "Only we—three—in it?"

McCarty nodded.

"How many cards?" he asked.

Before Cutter could reply Waverley's head fell forward again and his great body seemed to slump in his chair. He had thrown one card aside and the pudgy hand holding the remaining four dropped inertly on the table.

"Not any, thanks; I'll play these." Cutter spoke with cold annoyance and his eyes turned once more to Waverley, whom he was now convinced had been indulging too copiously in stimulants, just as the latter crumpled forward in his chair and his head, with the flabby, twisted face, turned sidewise toward the inspector and McCarty, and rested upon the table.

For an instant they all sat spellbound and McCarty darted a swift, keen glance at the strangely relaxed form and the unclouded surface of the mirror-lined tray which those gross, half-parted lips all but touched.

No breath issued from them! McCarty held his own as the startling fact surged through his consciousness, and watched the surface of the tray with straining eyes. It remained undimmed, and there was no slightest stir of that bulky mound of inert flesh!

Great God in heaven! A reverential awe went up with that silent cry from McCarty's heart and a pæan of thankfulness and swift-rising exultation. That which but a moment before had been a man was now but a *thing*, an inanimate substance incapable forever more of betrayal, for out of his body with the passing of life had gone the secret which would always have imperiled McCarty's plan! It had not been accident, nor the normal result of his own evil passions and dissipation which had stilled the heart in that gross body, but the hand of God Himself that had been laid upon it, and miraculously the way lay clear before McCarty to a solution of which he had not even dreamed.

Alive, Waverley had been a menace, but dead he was priceless! The others did not yet realize the situation, and McCarty gathered his forces for the greatest coup of his career.

"One card, Mr. Waverley!" he cried, and at the ringing quality of his tone an electrified start ran around the table. "There is your card, your lucky card, but you lose with it now! It is stained with the blood of the man you killed! I arrest you, in the name of the law, for the murder of Eugene Creveling!"

As he thundered the accusation to dead ears, he had slipped quickly from the bottom of the deck the nine of diamonds which, torn and blood-stained, he had found beneath the strip of tapestry on the table beside the body of Creveling, and now he flung it down before that which had been Douglas Waverley.

A moment of silence followed his denunciation, and then a stifled shriek from Mrs. Kip broke the hideous tension and O'Rourke leaped to his feet.

"Waverley!" he cried. "For God's sake, Waverley!"

"So that was the game, the real game!" Cutter kicked his chair aside. "Doug, do you hear this maniac? Sit up and answer him, or by Heaven—"

"Wait!" Terhune had bent forward even as Inspector Druet placed his hands upon the shoulders of that inert figure, and together they raised it once more to an erect position. The head fell back, revealing a face suffused with purplish blue, the close-set eyes half-open and glazing in a fixed stare, the chin dropped hideously. Mrs. Kip shrieked again and covered her own eyes, and Terhune exclaimed:

"The man is dead!"

The others crowded about, and Inspector Druet pressed his ear for a moment against the wide expanse of shirt bosom. When he raised his head they read confirmation in his eyes even before he spoke.

"Mr. Terhune is right," he said solemnly. "We were just a little too late!"

Mrs. Kip dropped her hands, and her

eyes, dark and wide, gazed straight into those of McCarty. The next moment she fell back limply in her chair.

"I've just one thing to say to you gentlemen, and a decision I'm going, with the permission of the inspector, to leave to you." McCarty stood on the hearth-rug in the sumptuous library where he had been received on his first visit to the house and surveyed Cutter and O'Rourke, who with Terhune, Inspector Druet and the still dazed Dennis were grouped before him.

It was an hour later. Mrs. Kip, hysterical and fainting, had been sent to her home in the capable care of Cutter's buxom housekeeper, and back in that dark, silent room where the last game had been played to a tragic finish an immovable figure lay stretched upon a fauteuil beneath a pagan prayer-rug.

"A decision?" Cutter raised his eyebrows. "It looks very much as though you had taken things into your own hands. Waverley was my friend. He's gone and he cannot answer your charges, but in his place I should like to know what grounds you have for them. That, at least, you owe me since you chose to stage your farce in my house!"

"It was hardly straight cricket, you know, Timmie!" O'Rourke spoke in a shocked, strained tone. "I don't believe, though, that you're the sort of man to make an accusation like that unless you thought you could substantiate it."

"Thank you, sir." McCarty shot a grateful glance at him and then squared his broad shoulders. "We can prove that Douglas Waverley had a quarrel with Eugene Creveling in that gentleman's own house at a late little supper about a fortnight ago, and we have a witness who listened to it. The two of them are dead now, but you both know them of old; do I need to say what that quarrel was about in a general way, though no names were mentioned?

"Waverley threatened Creveling then, and they've not spoken to each other since. If you'll look back, you'll both recall what happened in this very house a week ago to-night; how Creveling threw down his cards and left the game when Waverley came. Can either of you remember one occasion when they have talked friendly together in the last fortnight?"

There was silence while Cutter and O'Rourke looked at each other, and then McCarty resumed:

"I can go back further than that if it's necessary; I can show you the root of that quarrel months ago, and the jealousy and all that branched out of it, but 'tis best buried with the two of them. Last Thursday something happened between them that brought things to a crisis. We'll never know what it was, perhaps, but we can guess. Creveling invited Waverley to come to his house that night and have it out, and Waverley accepted."

"But look here!" O'Rourke interrupted. "Creveling went down to Broadmead, to Waverley's country place, over the week-end ten days ago; he wouldn't have done that unless they were on speaking terms, at least."

"But Waverley himself wasn't there," McCarty replied. "Ask Mrs. Waverley if you like; I did, over the telephone this afternoon, and she said business had kept her husband in town. Waverley must have thought for some reason that Creveling had given him the slip, early on Thursday evening, for he tore into the Cosmopolitan Club like a mad bull looking for him, but Creveling phoned to him not to be late, that he was expecting him at half past twelve. Waverley must have had it all planned out what he meant to do, but he sent for his car then and drove all around town, waiting for the time to come. Have either of you noticed in the last few days the fresh-scarred curbstone in front of the Creveling house? Waverley bent his mudguard and twisted his axle scraping against it when he finally drew up at the place.

"There's no use going into what happened between them then, for we'll never know that either, but they made a farce of eating supper together and then the quarrel was renewed in the library. For some reason Waverley flaunted that card in front of Creveling—the nine of diamonds that I handed him back an hour ago—and then the end came.

"Waverley must have left the house as if the fiends were after him and driven around like mad until nearly morning. We've a witness who can testify to his distraught condition when he brought his car back to the garage and that there was blood on him. When I questioned him later at the Belterre Hotel—where he tried at first to say he'd been all night, though I'd seen him go in myself not half an hour before—he gave me another alibi and the name of a man who could prove it, and it was only late last night I found out from a third party that the man had lied and he admitted it. I needn't go any further, gentlemen; that's our case, and we can prove every step of the way."

For a moment after he had finished there was silence and then O'Rourke passed a shaking hand across his brow.

"Great God!" he groaned. "It seems incredible! I can't believe it of Waverley, and yet— What do you say, Nick?"

"I don't know what to say!" the other responded. "I never thought it would come to that between them, but we all know Waverley's violent, uncontrollable temper; how he beat that hunting mare of his to death with an iron trace chain! It would be like him, granted sufficient real or fancied justification, to go about revenge in a bull-headed rage without counting the cost. God, it's horrible! But you said a decision rested with us? What decision?"

"Just this, sir. I told Mr. O'Rourke over the phone to-day that we'd got wind of certain things down at headquarters; we had, but not what he thought. I told him to-night that I wanted to scare Mr. Waverley into telling me what he knew of the motive for the murder of Mr. Creveling." McCarty smiled to himself as he added: "I didn't tell, though, that I intended to let Waverley see that we knew the truth and make him confess! I said that I was here to do whatever was in my power to keep trouble from coming to all of you, and I'm still here for that purpose, but we've others to consider now—two women."

"Mrs. Kip?" O'Rourke asked in a low voice.

"No; she'll never speak. I meant Mrs. Creveling and Mrs. Waverley. We've a great opportunity straight from Providence! Mr. Waverley died of heart disease or a stroke at the card table; we'll let the doctor have his way about that when we call him in. Was Creveling murdered or did he kill himself? That is the question that we in this room have got to answer to the world."

"Gad, I never thought of that!" O'Rourke sprang from his chair. "You wanted Waverley to speak, Timmie, but you'd have a hell of a time finding anything out from him now! We've got a chance to hush everything up and no one need ever know!"

"And Mrs. Creveling?" McCarty interrupted. "There's one that 'll have to be told, Mr. O'Rourke. Aside from its being her right to know, she'll never rest until she finds out the truth, and in her search for it she might drag in innocent people and dig up things that are far better left buried."

"If you tell her you might as well tell the world!" Cutter shrugged again. "Her sense of justice won't be satisfied till she cries Waverley's name from the house-tops when she knows why they quarreled!"

"She'll go after the—the cause of that quarrel, too, tooth and nail, and though you couldn't blame her, I must say my sympathies are with Mrs. Waverley, for she's the weaker of the two. It would be one thing to live down the fact that your husband had committed suicide, and another to have his memory branded as a murderer!"

"What if we were to tell Mrs. Creveling the truth and persuade her to keep it a secret forever, for the sake of the other woman who would suffer needlessly?" McCarty urged. "We could tell her the truth about the manner of her husband's death, but the cause— Gentlemen, they quarreled over a game of cards!"

CHAPTER XLI.

THE LAST HAND.

"AND so you are going back to the old country?" McCarty asked. "I'll miss you both sorely, for 'twas a breath of the times that are gone that you brought with you, Lady Peggy!"

It was a month later, and McCarty sat beside Mrs. O'Rourke in the deep window seat of her little sitting-room.

"It's best," she spoke with a slight tightening of her lips. "America has not been unkind to us, and some of the friends we found were good and true, but since John found out the truth about Mr. Waverley's crookedness through Mr. Ford exposing him in the papers for cheating him at cards, he's disgusted. He wants to go back and settle down and be 'the' O'Rourke once more; and I—I shall be so glad!"

"You'll be happier there," said McCarty in a low tone. "Did you ever know that my grandfather was born with a caul and I've a bit of a knack at telling fortunes? People would laugh at it here, but you—I believe the fairies still dance for you at the turn of the moon!"

"I wonder!" She was gazing off into space and her blue eyes had misted. "I wonder if they will come back? But will you tell me my fortune, Mr. McCarty? I promise not to laugh, but to believe you true!"

She held out her small palm and he took it very gently, as though it were a fragile thing that might break in his clasp.

"There's a long life before you, Lady Peggy, a useful and happy life, and contentment of mind. You've known all the sorrow that 'll ever come to you, and the way is clear now, and sunny and peaceful." He drew a deep breath and added slowly and very deliberately: "I wonder how so delicate a bit of a hand could stand the kick of a .44?"

Her eyes met his quickly and clung there, widening and darkening even as she shrank slowly from him and the blood ebbed from her lips. The shrill laughter of children playing in the park across the avenue came floating up to the open window on a breeze that was laden with the perfume of blossoming wisteria.

When she spoke at last her voice was very low, but clear and steady.

"You know, then? I'm glad, I think." Then after a little silence: "How long have you known?"

"Since the last time I came here; that Sunday night, do you remember? I'd come for a bit of a chat with himself, and he brought me in here to you. You were sitting at that desk over there writing a letter, and as I stepped up to you to shake hands I looked down. I don't know what made me, for I hadn't a thought of the truth." He paused. "The words you had written stared up at me as though they were in letters of flame, and I knew the writing; I'd been looking for it ever since a certain note came into my hands with seven words at the bottom of it. 'I accept. Expect me at half past twelve.'

"Of course, I'd known from the minute I stood beside that supper table in the other house that a woman and not a man had been there; the remains of that supper showed that it had been light and fancy, not at all the sort of stuff for the hearty appetites of two men, and I thought I could guess what had happened, but I wasn't sure. When I knew who the woman was, I couldn't think at first why she had done it. There was some one who I thought could tell me, but—but I got no hint from his lips. I think the whole story of it is clear to me now."

"I wonder if it is?" she said slowly. "You know the old, reckless, gambling strain in the blood of both John and me, Mr. McCarty?"

"The fine old sporting strain!" he exclaimed. "Tell me why you did it, Lady Peggy; why you killed him!"

"I am trying to do so," she replied. "We're as poor as church mice, you know. The rents at home were getting lower and lower, and the dear old castle tumbling about our ears. John had a wild idea about coming to America and getting rich as quickly as some millionaires do here; and so we came and got in with Mr. Cutter and all that set. I loved the cards, too; the gambling fever was strong in me as well as in him. Soon I was deep in debt, and I couldn't bear to tell him, for he had lost also, and the disgrace of it stared me in the face, sleeping and waking!

"The man who—who died in his study that night had been very kind. I did not realize that it was all part of a game, a horrible, vile game which none of my sort had ever played. He knew the position I

was in, he offered to lend me money and I was weak enough to accept it. I gave him notes, of course, and I always hoped to win back enough to pay him; but I lost instead—he saw to that!

"When I was in too deep to extricate myself he put on the screws, and I was desperate. I knew that John would never forgive me if he knew, and there was no one to whom I could turn. He—that man—demanded that I come and have supper with him; he said he had a proposition to make whereby I could repay him, and he was so plausible that I half believed him, yet I was afraid, for all that.

"He said if I came that I should have my notes back; that he would trust to my word, and at last I consented. He sent a peremptory message, summoning me, and I went, but I took the pistol with me; it was one that a servant of ours had carried in the war and left here when he went West.

"I stole like a thief out of my own house and down the avenue to his, and made a pretense of eating the supper which was laid out. I even tried to smoke a cigarette, but the amber holder broke in my fingers. It was after supper, in the study, that he laid his cards on the table, and I had no choice. I was alone there with him, and it meant his life against what was more to me than my own. You understand now, don't you, Mr. McCarty?"

"Yes." He nodded very gravely. "All but about that nine of diamonds."

"That card! You found it?" She glanced quickly at him and then away. "It was a lucky card, a mascot which Mr. Waverley had given me. I knew its history; once before the words 'no quarter' had been written across the face of it, and I took it with me to show that man if his intentions toward me were really as black as I feared, and warn him that I, too, would give no quarter. I did show it to him, but he countered by showing me my promissory notes and telling me that in the morning they would be in my husband's hands if I did not surrender.

"The card fell to the floor, and afterward—afterward when he, too, lay at my feet, I looked down and saw it. I picked it up without thinking what I was doing, and it was stained with his blood! A sort of horror seized me then, and I thrust it under something, I don't know what. I took my notes, laid the pistol beside his hand, and stumbled out of the house. I don't know how I got home; I don't remember anything until I found myself in my own room, and all that had passed since I left it seemed like a frightful dream."

"And that's all it is, Lady Peggy. A dream that you'll wake up from and forget when you're back in the old country again," McCarty said softly.

"Oh, what a friend you are!" Her eyes were shining as she turned them to his once more. "But why didn't you denounce me? Why didn't you speak when you knew? It was your duty—you were an officer of the law!"

"The law that man has made, maybe, but there's a higher law than that, and by it you were justified." He paused and added whimsically: "Would I go back on my own? You're Irish, too, Lady Peggy!"

(The end.)

THE HESPERIDES

THE world is wondrous wide and fair
Since I have slain the dragon Care;
The rich Hesperidean fruit
At last is won, through long pursuit;
I pluck at will from boughs low bent
The golden apples of Content!

Clinton Scollard.

"Hook 'em, Hombre!"

by James W. Egan

ANY amount of odd babies have ambled into the old cherry orchard since I started second-basin' for the Cinnamons; but nobody ever pulled a stunt like the one Bud Weed worked. And he wasn't what you might call a nut, either.

The club was out exercisin' one May mornin', Manager Bill Pratt figurin' we needed extra toil or a shot in the arm or somethin' to jolt us into annexin' a few ball games, when a commotion is heard at one of the bleacher gates. Naturally we all give a look, and what do we lamp but a bird boundin' our way on the back of a horse!

I guess we greeted him with a fine flock of astonished gazes, for friend horseman seemed to have stepped right out of a Buffalo Bill show or a movie picture or somethin'. He was all adorned in a regular cowpuncher getup, with sombrero, hairy pants, blue shirt, silk handkerchief around his neck, and everythin'. He even carried a rope in his hand, which he was twirlin' as he galloped up the field.

"What's this now?" gasps Bill Pratt, takin' off his cap and scratchin' where his hair should be.

"You tell 'em, Wells-Fargo," remarks Josh Twain, our comical third-baseman. "I can't express myself."

"New travelin' secretary for the club, mebbe," muttered Hap O'Connor, one of our catchers.

Young Wild West never drew rein until he was almost on top of the bunch, and then he suddenly yodels:

"Yee-ipp-ee! Hook 'em, hombre!"

He let fly with his rope and it settled around Bill Pratt's shoulders. Holdin' Bill captive, the stranger slid off his steed and bowed.

"How do you get this way?" barks Bill, about as pleased and happy as a guy who has been kicked hard on the shin.

"Manager Pratt of the celebrated Cinnamons?" asks the cowboy person in soft accents.

"Yes, I'm Pratt! Take this thing off me, young fellow! Who are you, and what do you want?"

The horseman bows again, and flips the rope free.

"Excuse me, pardner. That was just by way of introduction. I'm Bud Weed, of Alkali Creek, Arizona. When I ain't busy herdin' cows I play baseball. Right now I ain't busy herdin' cows."

"Oh, you're a ballplayer, are you?" Bill remarks. "What does the horse do?"

"I'll let you talk with him afterwards if you want to," says Mr. Weed. "Right now I aim to discuss myself. Sabe?"

"I'm listenin'. Talk fast."

"I reckon I can, Mr. Pratt. I've heard you are plum' anxious to get a first-baseman, and get him pronto. Correct?"

"H-m! So you're a first baseman, huh?"

The Cinnamons were tryin' to grab off

a first sacker. Hack Snyder, who guarded that hassock for us, had a pair of bad pins, and no understudy. Bill Pratt had been utterly unable to get another man.

" I'm figurin' to be somethin' like that," admits Bud Weed.

" Don't you know this is a big-league club? It ain't no bush squadron. Do you mean to tell me you can play ball good enough to win a job here? I never heard of you!"

" Nobody ever heard of the steam engine until Fulton come along, either. If I didn't reckon I could play that bag I wouldn't be takin' up your time, Mr. Pratt."

" H-m! Well, you look more like a Colorado bandit in reel two than a ballplayer; but if you'll go down to the clubhouse and have the trainer dig you up a suit I'll try you out. Better park that mustang somewhere, first. He might get too friendly with some of my noble athletes if you don't."

" Oh, he's got manners, I reckon," says Weed, leadin' him off. " He'll wait for an introduction."

While the new arrival was changin' things in the clubhouse, Bill Pratt shook his head.

" I've seen a bunch of nuts at this ostrich farm," he observes, " but this bird is a new brand. If I didn't want to get a line on a new first baseman I'd never bother with him at all. There's one chance in a million he may show somethin'. What a make-up! I'll get a good story from the newspaperboys outa this, anyhow."

" If he doesn't look good on first, bring in the horse. No use overlookin' a bet," twits Josh Twain.

Bud Weed filled a baseball unie rather gracefully. He was a slim young sixfooter, and appeared husky and healthy enough. Bill Pratt ordered him to take his turn with the regulars in battin' practise, and chased " Smoky " Crews out on the hill.

Of course Crews ain't no Johnson or Alexander, but he has enough speed and stuff to scare the ordinary busher into seven different graves, and he took everythin' off the ice when Bud Weed got up to the plate.

His fast ball failed to bother the cowpunchin' gentleman, however. Weed clicked that onion out on a line. He had a nice free swing and a good eye. I knew right away he was no yap.

" He stands up there, by golly!" says Bill Pratt.

" I'll say he's a ballplayer," utters Hap O'Connor, who's usually able to pick 'em out.

After the apple had been mauled, Bill sent us out for fieldin' practise, sendin' Weed to first base instead of Snyder. And I'm here to say he could handle himself around that cushion! He scooped throws high and low, was mighty fast on ground balls, and could whip the egg around swiftly and accurately. Yes, indeed, Mr. Bud Weed looked good!

" Can you beat it?" Bill says to some of us, after the workout. " This goof is a real ballplayer! I thought those things never happened outside of magazine stories, but here this guy rides in and appears to be a wiz!"

" Must be a wonderful climate out there in Arizona," says Hap O'Connor.

" I'll sign this bird and board him for awhile, I guess," Bill decides.

" And the horse. Don't forget the horse!" adds the merry Twain.

" Yes, and the horse, too!" Bill grins.

So Bud Weed was in a Cinnamon suit that afternoon, watchin' the game from the pit. We were battlin' the Scalpers, with Lefty Logan chuckin' for us, and Eddie Sanders deliverin' for the hated opposition, and it was a tight little contest.

About the fifth stanza, Pratt sent our wild Westerner out on the coachin' line, and in about two twirls of the umpire's indicator he had the fans goin'. He was yellin' in that strong voice of his:

" Yee-ipp-ee! Hook 'em, hombre! Hook 'em!"

The crowd fell for Bud Weed, and quite forgot Hap O'Connor, whose antics usually had 'em roarin'.

" I'm getting jealous of Bill Hart," Hap confesses. " He's liable to bring out his horse to-morrow, and then my job will be gone!"

The game was scoreless up until the first

of the ninth, when Whang Dempsey, of the Scalpers, cut the cherry for the circuit. By usin' two pinch punchers in our half, we evened the count, and the combat went into extra innin's, Pete Raymer replacin' Logan on the mound for us.

In the eleventh frame Pete weakened, and the Scalpers pushed two across. With one out, a coupla Cinnamons reached the hassocks, and Pete Raymer was due to swing the ash.

"Hit for Pete there, Bud Weed!" suddenly orders Bill Pratt. "Crack the first good one you see. Eddie Sanders doesn't throw many of them."

The gentleman who admitted he was from Arizona strolled up to the plate, appearin' quite cool and calm. Bill Pratt smiled.

"I think Deadwood Dick has nerve, at that," he says.

The Scalpers cut loose on Weed, tryin' to slip him the old razzberry. Clown Jordan, who rides everybody, was barkin' madly from second:

"Bear down, Eddie, bear down! This yokel is your meat! He'll be out of the league after you throw three!"

Eddie Sanders made a quick movement and shot a high fast one at the batter. Bud didn't wait. He took a man-sized swing and busted that bulb on the pick. High up in the left-field stands it landed—a home run. Then and there the game was finished!

I honestly think he was lucky to smack that one off Eddie Sanders, who is one of the best hurlers in the game; but it made him a hero, just the same. The papers were full of him the next day. One sheet even had a picture of him on his horse, which moved Josh Twain to innumerable jestin' references.

Bud Weed received oodles of publicity the next few days, for he made no attempt to dodge the newspapermen. He was a novelty, and was played up as such. His bizarre method of applyin' for a job was detailed at length.

Havin' a keen eye to box-office values, as well as bein' willin' to bench Hack Snyder for a bit, Bill Pratt placed Weed on first base. The first day the Arizonan worked he crashed out three hits and fielded like Fred Tenny, which was better than he did for several days followin'.

"I suppose we'll have to carry that horse with us when we go on the road," laments Josh Twain. "Get a Pullman with an extra stall, Bill. Bud would be lost without his champin' equine."

Truly, such seemed to be the case. Every day Weed rode out to the park on his horse, and back the same way. He kept the plug in a livery stable near the hotel, and was in no apparent hurry to give up his Western ways. He always wore his big hat and loud silk shirts as a part of his street attire.

By the middle of June he was pretty near a fixture on first. His fieldin' was high class, and although his hittin' had fallen off after the big-time hurlers had got used to him, he managed to pound out his allotment of base-knocks. He was popular with the fans, for he was on his toes all the time.

His pet phrase, "Hook 'em, hombre!" had become a byword with some of his admirers. The boy and I were quite chummy, for there was somethin' about him I liked.

After one hot game on the local onion-patch with the Boston Indians, durin' which fracas I had snagged three doubles, a fan happened to hail me as I was on the way to the showers. I recognized Judge Seymour, a wealthy attorney, who seldom missed a contest.

"Can you wait a minute, Dan?" he calls.

"Certainly, judge." I stop.

"I want to ask a favor of you. I suppose you know my daughter, Kit?"

"I have seen her out here many times, judge."

"Yes, she's a great fan. Well, there's some stunt on, and Kit would like to ring your young first baseman into it, if possible. I don't know Mr. Weed, myself, and I thought maybe you could help me out. Think you can, Mr. Baird?"

"I don't know. I'll do my best."

"Tell him my daughter would like to have him call her up this evening." He gave me a telephone number. "Thank you very much, Dan."

I called Bud aside in the clubhouse and sprung it on him.

"Here's your chance to break into society, you wild Arizonan," I gargle. "Kit Seymour is a great little girl, from all I hear. And she sure has the looks. You never saw any one like her out there among the cactus and dusty desert."

"Oh, I ain't no society hombre!" he says. "I'd look plum' foolish at one of them swell affairs. I don't aim to butt in none on them!"

"You call her up!" I snap. "Don't miss a bet like this, you idiot!"

I guess he failed to do it, however, for the next evenin' while Bill Pratt and he and I were sittin' around in the lobby of the Ridgmere talkin' about Gila monsters or some such desert insect, a big blue heap rolls up in front, and Judge Seymour and his daughter descend upon us.

Kit Seymour was a little thing, but certainly a vision of female loveliness, especially when dolled up. I could see Bud Weed's jaw fall a coupla fathoms. She hit him for a home run right off the bat.

"We were afraid you had failed to deliver our message," the judge says to me, smilin'.

"Not guilty," I deny, glancin' indignantly at Mr. Weed, who blushed.

"Why didn't you call up, Mr. Weed?" Kit Seymour asks in a voice which would earn a hello-girl a million wrinkles in tips.

But Weed muttered and squirmed, and I hastily gave Bill Pratt an introduction to the judge and his daughter.

"I'm afraid Weed ain't no great hand for social festivities," says Bill, gettin' hold of the situation.

"Oh, perhaps you didn't quite understand!" smiles Kit Seymour. "You see, we want Mr. Weed to help out in a charitable undertakin'. Surely you will do that, Mr. Weed?"

"Well—just what do you mean, ma'am?" stammers our first baseman.

"We are holdin' a big society circus to raise money for the orphanage here. We thought it would be great if you would agree to appear and do some real Western ridin' and tricks."

"When does all this happen, ma'am?"

"Not until the latter part of July. You will do it, won't you? You have your horse here, I understand, and—"

"But he ain't my regular hoss, ma'am. He don't aim to be used for no fancy ridin'. My best hosses are out in Arizony."

"Oh, but you won't have to do anythin' real difficult! Just a little ridin' and some tricks with your lariat or whatever you call it."

"S'pose there was an accident or somethin' and Bud got hurt," horns in Bill Pratt. "This trick ridin' ain't no cinch. I'd be out a first baseman, and it's sure hard to get hold of those babies these days!"

If Bud Weed didn't flash him a grateful glance then I don't get sore when the official scorer cheats me out of a base-knock!

"Mr. Pratt, there surely couldn't be much danger with such an expert as Mr. Weed in the saddle!" says the judge's daughter, givin' the old boy the full effect of her eyes. "And think of the advertisin' we can get from this! Not only will the orphans be helped, but the ball team as well."

"I should say so!" chimes in her dad.

"H-m! There's somethin' to that, all right. What do you think, Bud? Want to be featured in the big circus?"

The gentleman from Arizona did a lot of sidesteppin', but Kit Seymour put everythin' on the ball, and finally landed a promise from him.

"I'll want you to come up and see me, Mr. Weed," she says, givin' him her hand in partin'. "You'll be sure to call, won't you?"

"Yes—yes, ma'am," he squawks.

Later, when he and I are alone, I try to kid him about stallin' along with such a queen as Kit Seymour.

"Stop it, Dan!" he barks. "You don't know how I feel about this! To have to go through with the thing after meetin' her!"

"Huh?" I remark.

"Oh, I'm just a fourflusher!" he snaps to himself more than to me. "And she's —she's wonderful!"

After which clear and lucid observations he closed up like the celebrated clam.

It's hard to fool an old head, though, and I've jazzed through the mill. In less than a week I figured Bud Weed was in love with Kit Seymour clean up to his ears. He called on her, all right. Not once, but several times. And he lost a lot of that old pepper he used to shake around the egg ranch.

"What's the matter with this cow-puncher?" Bill Pratt growls one day. "Is he a bloomer, after all? He is playin' ball that's almost as rotten as an umpire's decisions. Looks like I'll have to throw that cripple Snyder back on the bag."

"Oh, he's just in a slump. He'll come around," I squawk, although I wouldn't have gambled many buttons on it.

A bird in love is a tough proposition to handle. He's easier to misjudge than a bad grounder, and as touchy as a pitcher with a sore arm. And the way I looked at it, Bud Weed was stakin' himself against a lot of class. Kit Seymour was among the topnotchers socially and financially, although she wasn't the kind of girl to get snobbish on account of it. It was hard to imagine her fallin' for this Arizonan, even though females have done a great deal stranger things.

Some of the boys planned to see the society circus, which was an invitational affair, and Hap O'Connor and I were among those who secured bids. A coupla days before the big noise I tried to draw somethin' out of the mopin' Mr. Weed.

"How's the stunt rider?" I quiz.

"Hell!" snaps Bud. "I wish this was over, Dan! I'm a sick hombre. I don't know what's the matter with me!"

"You're in love, you darn fool!" I says. "No use bullin' me, Bud. You've fell for Kit Seymour. Ain't it the truth?"

He hung his head.

"I reckon I'm a plum' fool, all right. I couldn't help it, Dan."

"Havin' lamped Miss Seymour, I quite agree with you. Why don't you go and tell the girl? Have it over with."

"You don't understand. There's a lot of things I'm aimin' to explain later, but I can't now. The worst of it is, Dan, that she likes me. Likes me because she believes I'm a typical Westerner and a square shooter. She thinks I shoot square with her and the world—and I don't!"

"Meanin'—what?" I ask.

"Oh—just a horrible mess! That's all! I wish I had never taken a job with the Cinnamons!"

"Of all the good little goat-getters I've seen, you surely cop the silk-handled mushroom!" I gargle. "I suppose you'll be tellin' me some day you robbed the bank at Cactus Creek or Alkali Cañon, or wherever you came from. Or maybe you shot a coupla sheriffs and fled East."

Weed refused to respond. Back into mystery and silence again, and I really worried some. Possibly the Westerner had a past. There was somethin' mighty funny in his actions lately.

Hap O'Connor and I turned out to be the only players who had nerve enough to doll up and go to the society circus, staged at Judge Seymour's country place. Josh Twain offered to go along and hold Bud's horse, but he was merely kiddin'. Mr. Weed himself was as nervous as a bush pitcher with three on the bags and nobody out.

Before the big show Hap and I toured the place with him, a groom havin' taken his trusty steed off his hands. Bud was rigged out in his puncher get-up, even to a big .44 Colt, and he looked as if he had jumped from the cover of one of those old Western tales you bought for a jitney. But he was not smilin' and happy.

"Cheer up!" I bark. "You ain't plannin' to kill anybody, are you?"

"You're in society now, you know, old deah!" utters Hap. "You and the horse. I hope they don't give us a meal here. I always eat with my knife."

Bud's head suddenly went back. His eyes flashed.

"By Golly! I'll end it right now!" he says. "I'll go to her!"

He grabbed a servant and asked where he could find Kit Seymour.

"Miss Seymour is in the study at the rear of the house," he is told. "She is busy countin' money taken in for the circus and doesn't want to be disturbed."

"I'm sorry, but I must see her." Away he strode.

"Let's follow this disturber," whispers Hap. "He seems goofy to-night."

Although we were at his spurred heels, Weed paid us no attention. He followed the graveled walks until almost at the study window. Suddenly he halted, and Hap and I also clapped on the brakes.

The study window faced the walk, and it was wide open. Somethin' highly interestin' seemed to be goin' on inside. At any rate, Miss Kit Seymour was standin' with her hands elevated in front of a tough bird with a gun, and another guy was on the floor examinin' a bagful of lettuce.

Before they were aware of Bud Weed's presence he had whipped out his big gat and had it trained on them.

"Drop that gun, pronto!" he orders. "Reach for the sky, you hombres!"

Well, a lot of things happened in a hurry. Kit Seymour gave a glad scream, and the guy with the gun suddenly turned and shot at Weed. Hap and I saw our first baseman flop to the ground, and we rushed to him. The two birds who had been robbin' the orphanage fund went flyin' through another window.

In no time at all a terrible gang of people had crowded around Bud Weed and us. The cow-puncher was bleedin' from a wound in the head, and we didn't know whether he was dead or alive. Several special cops showed up and were put on the trail of the bold burglars.

Hap O'Connor had picked up Bud's gun, and after lookin' at it, he shook his head.

"What kinda Westerner is this guy?" he whispers. "Not a shell in the gun. Empty! He had his nerve pullin' it on those babies! Poor devil!"

The "poor devil" hadn't been killed. Medical examination revealed his wound to be merely of the scalp, and not serious.

"He'll be all right in a few days," says the doctor. "He was lucky. That's all I can say."

Kit Seymour, comin' to after an extended faint, insisted that Bud be carried inside the house and cared for. She wouldn't hear of removal to a hospital.

"It's little enough to do for him. He risked his life to save that orphanage money, for they certainly would have got away with it!" she utters. "I do hope they catch that pair of burglars!"

"They are very bold and desperate criminals," says her father, the judge. "Far too dangerous to remain at large."

Of course the society circus was off. After helpin' install Bud in a nice white bed, Hap and I departed, wonderin' what the boys would think when the story was sprung.

The papers carried oodles of publicity on Weed's stunt and the attempted robbery the next day. The bandits had been nailed and were in the hoosegow, and the story was smeared on every sheet in sight.

"This is all very fine," scowls Bill Pratt, "but it slows up my infield. I suppose Bud can't play for a month, now. When he does get back into the game, though, they'll sure pack this park! What a lot of advertisin' that baby has brought this club since he joined it!"

As soon as he was able to receive callers, Josh Twain, Hap O'Connor, old Bill and I went to see our wounded cow-puncher. We found his room decorated with flowers, and Kit Seymour handlin' the nursin' duties. When she had slipped out and left us alone, I observe:

"Pretty soft, you darin' plainsman!"

"They've been powerful good to me here," Bud admits. "I wish I was back in the game, though. I'll be out in another week, the doc says. How's the club goin'?"

"Charlie Dean dropped one to-day. We didn't hit behind him," Bill gargles.

"Hack is hobblin' around on his crutches, coverin' first," Hap informs.

"And I'm lookin' after your horse," chimes in Josh.

After some more useless chatter, just as we was gettin' ready to leave, Bud asks Bill Pratt and me to linger a minute.

"I have somethin' important I'm aimin' to say to you both," he says.

We remained. As soon as Josh and Hap had left us, Bud remarks, with a kinda smile:

"Boys, confession is good for the soul, and I have somethin' to confess. I might as well get it off my chest now and be done with it.

"My name isn't Bud Weed, and I'm not from Arizona. I never saw a ranch in my life. I have never been in the West. About punchin' cows I know nothin'. I'm just a fraud."

"What do you mean?" Bill inquires, surprised.

"I'm a college ballplayer, Mr. Pratt, and have been told I was a good one. But I was never sought by any big league clubs, and I had a cravin' to play with the Cinnamons or some strong club for awhile. Now you know, and I know, that advertisin' has a lot to do with makin' a ballplayer, sometimes. I figured if I could break into the league in some freak fashion and grab a bunch of publicity I would win a job.

"So I bought a horse who has never been farther West than myself, and learned a little about throwin' a rope—very little, I might observe. Also stocked up on a little dialect and a pet phrase or two. From a real cowboy I secured my outfit, and you know how I made my bow."

"You sure put it across," Bill admits. "I guess you got more advertisin' since you joined the club than even Lefty Logan, the best southpaw in the business. But you ain't really a cow-puncher?"

"Oh, no! That's why I had cold chills when they invited me to do stunts at the society circus. I knew I was fourflushin', and I felt terribly cheap, especially after seein' Kit Seymour."

"Well, you'll have to keep up this Bud Weed gag, now," Bill squawks. "The fans are crazy about you, and we can't throw away all the swell publicity."

"That part of it is all right. It's the girl—Miss Seymour, I mean—I'm thinkin' about. She admires me because she thinks I'm a real, squareshootin' Westerner—as if a real Arizonan would trot around in harness without a shell in his gun. This shootin' has increased her admiration, I suppose. I hate to tell her the truth, to let her know I'm a fraud and a liar. I'm not shootin' square with her, and I know she'll never forgive the underhanded method by which I've gained her confidence."

Right then I was moved to speak.

"Bunk!" I says. "All bunk! You can shoot square with her easily enough. Tell her the whole truth. Be a real man and lay your cards on the table before her, as you did with us. I'll bet she'll understand!"

"She'd never forgive me!"

"H-m! A heluva lot you know about women!" snorts Bill. "She's made up her mind long ago as to whether you shoot square or not. Girls don't spend their valuable time nursin' birds who are unforgivable, believe me! Try your luck, and then hurry up and get well. I want you back on first. Get me?"

"I'll do it!" vows the patient. "Hook 'em, hombre! That 'll be my motto."

And it may be interestin' to note that after the Cinnamons had staggered through the world's series, Kit Seymour changed her name to Mrs. Herbert Kline—the same bein' the moniker Bud Weed uses in private life. And, as Hap O'Connor and Josh Twain have asked me to add, they still own the horse.

HER FAN

HER little fan is snowy white,
And filmy as a veil;
The sticks are carved of ivory,
And delicately frail.

And yet I know her little fan,
So fragile and so fair,
Has wafted me my happiness,
And fanned away my care!

Lilla B. N. Weston.

Just Released

—Great Diamond Loan Bulletin Listing Very Low Diamond Prices

SEND the coupon at once for our great Diamond Loan Bulletin just issued. Fresh from the press. Newest and greatest bargains just released to the public. Get full details. Valuable diamonds now offered to the public at much less than real value because owners did not pay back money loaned. Save money by buying a diamond out of pawn, direct from the brokers who loaned the money. In business over one-third of a century. Approved by great banks. Write for money-saving bargain bulletin. Fine stones offered away below retail prices. Bulletin proves it. Send coupon now—at once. Write now before it is too late.

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Compare our prices with your local jeweler. If you can duplicate at 40% more send the diamond back. We lend money on valuable jewels. When our loans are not paid on these pledges, we must sell regardless of current prices.

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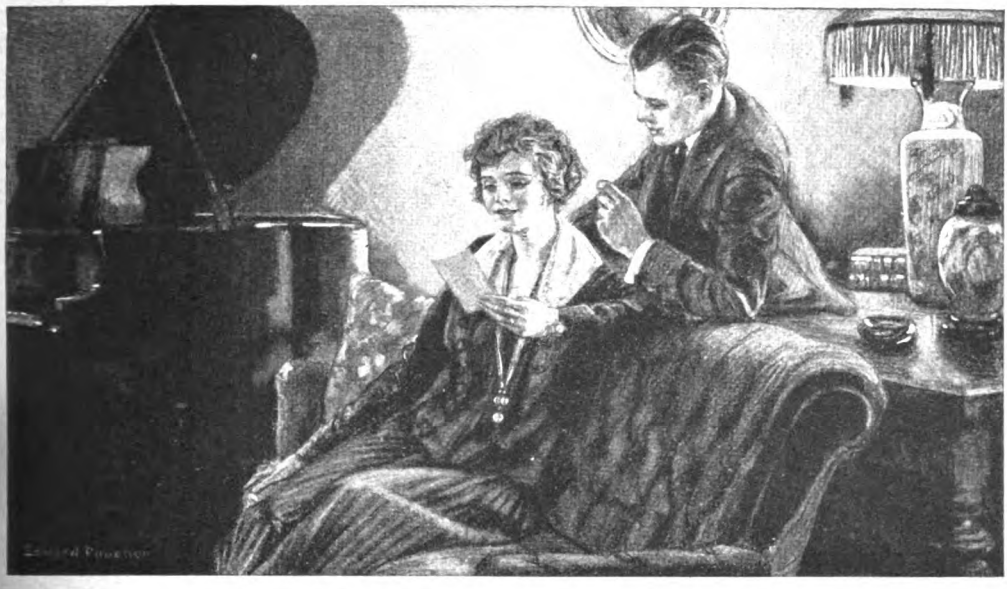
City.....*State*.....



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"I bought another good bond today and tonight Helen and I were figuring up our investments. We now have $5,000 altogether, saved and invested where it will bring us $25 a month interest year in and year out. There's a wonderful satisfaction in having money you've worked for working for you.

"I used to laugh at the idea of my ever having that much money invested. I was just scraping along in routine work and spending what little I earned. Then one day my employer gave me some advice that really marked the beginning of things for me. He said success depended on two things. First, learn to do some one thing well, so well that others will pay you for what you know. Second, save and invest something out of what you earn each month.

"I was out of school and couldn't go back, but I decided then and there to get some special training. I wrote to Scranton and found I could get just the course I wanted and study at home evenings. So I started, and it wasn't long before I could see a whole new future in our business. The manager found I could do things others couldn't and he gave me more important work—and more money. I kept on studying and kept on climbing, with three increases the first year. And each pay day I put something aside.

"So it's been ever since. As I advanced at the office and my salary grew, my savings grew faster and I put them into good securities. It's really amazing what a few years of consistent saving will do.

"Since Helen and I have been married, we've had every comfort we could want and yet she has been as interested in saving as I. Why, she was happy as a lark tonight when I told her we had five thousand dollars in safe sound investments working for us!"

Success is *not* something remote—it's *not* something that only the other fellow can enjoy. It is within easy reach for *you* if you'll just follow the simple rules that have made all men successful who have practiced them.

First, decide what *your* work is, the work you would most enjoy doing, then study it, learn everything about it that you can. The easy convenient way to do this is to let the International Correspondence Schools help you. For 29 years they have been helping men and women out of routine drudgery into the joy of doing work they like—helping them to win advancement, to earn more money, to have happy prosperous homes, to know the thrill of getting ahead in business and in life.

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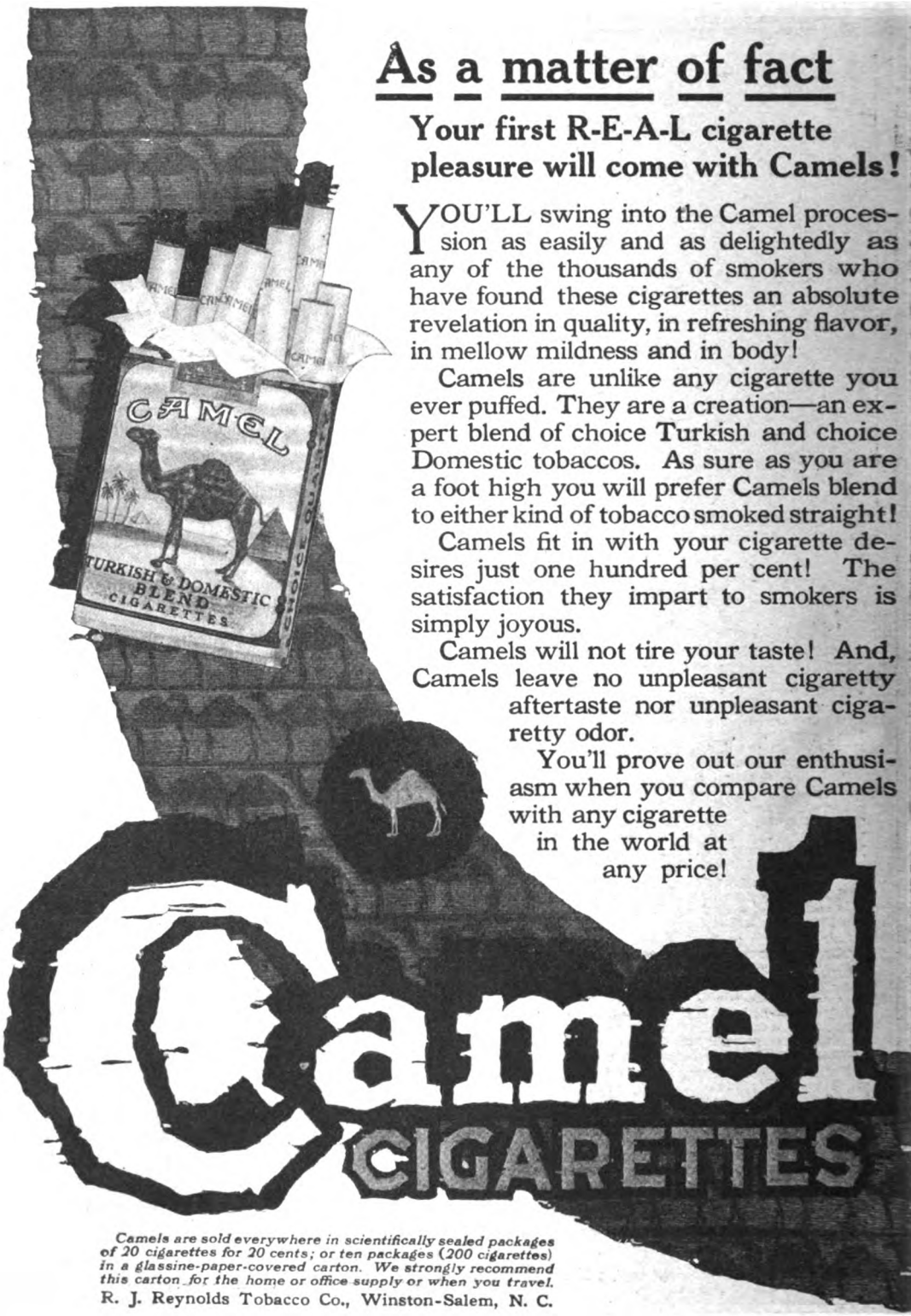

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HOOK up with the Automobile industry. THE BUSINESS THAT MAKES MILLIONAIRES! Stop and think of the men whom YOU know—men who have become PROSPEROUS and RICH through their association with the automobile game. Automobile representatives, Tire dealers, Garage proprietors, etc., haven't YOU, deep down in your heart, envied the SUCCESS OF THESE MEN; haven't YOU LONGED to DUPLICATE THEIR SUCCESS?

HERE IS YOUR OPPORTUNITY to get into the automobile business. To get into it with a proposition that OVERTOPS them all. Learn—

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One of my TIRE SURGERY STATIONS forms a SOLID FOUNDATION for a THRIVING, GROWING, EXPANDING, PROFITABLE, PERMANENT BUSINESS.

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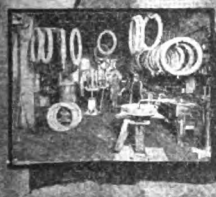
Mr. Evans is MAKING MORE MONEY in ONE DAY than he formerly made in one whole week. He's his own boss. The harder he works the more he makes. He's NOT TIED DOWN to a certain wage. DOESN'T HAVE TO WAIT UNTIL PAY DAY FOR MONEY. It's coming in every MINUTE OF THE DAY.



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This same splendid OPPORTUNITY is within YOUR GRASP. Regardless of your age, education, experience or location, there's a FUTURE—a BIG future—for YOU as manager of a TIRE SURGERY STATION.

FULL DETAILS FREE

Learn this PROFITABLE PROFESSION—get FULL DETAILS at once—I'll send them to you FREE—go into this proposition THOROUGHLY—do the same as J. W. Blair, O., who is averaging $100 DAILY with his Tire Surgery Station, or N.E. Gibbard, Mich., averages $800.00 monthly and hundreds of others of my students who are doing EQUALLY AS WELL. YOU get started—mail COUPON NOW.

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Stylish, All-Wool Tricotine Dress

This dress would be noticed anywhere as a style creation of most artistic merit. Made of fine, soft quality all-wool Tricotine which is so popular now. Note the simple lines secured by the designer to give the effect of youthful charm—and observe also the new "V" shaped insert of rich silk satin at front, this insert being outlined with self color and silver braid. A similar feature is found in the back, the coat-effect waist opening over a similar satin insert with the same pleasing braid ornamentation. The three-quarter length sleeves are finished with braid, satin and fancy metallic ornaments. A finishing touch is given by the chic leather belt. The lining is a Jap silk.

Women's sizes 34 to 44. Skirt length 39 inches. Misses' sizes 14 to 20 years, skirt 36 inches. Navy blue only.

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You will find the Style Book so fascinating, so full of interesting opportunities for getting the latest, most correct, most individual styles, that you ought to see it before you buy any of your fall apparel. Just sign and mail the coupon now and get your copy.

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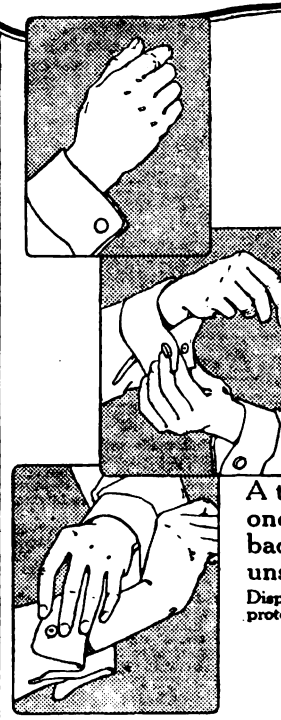

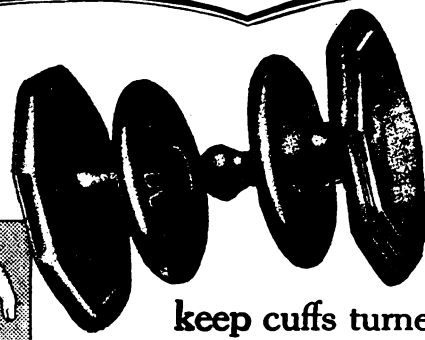

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They Snap Together

A two-piece cuff button that can be snapped or unsnapped with one hand. So convenient that it *invites* the wearer to turn cuffs back and avoid wear and soiling. Cannot fall out of cuffs when unsnapped. Holds cuffs smoothly when fastened.

Displayed in distinctive patterns, at various prices—at haberdashers and jewelers. For your protection specify "Jiffy Links." Made by a house famous fifty years for its integrity.

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$18.00 Fine Suit MADE TO MEASURE

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SAMPLES FREE! A book full of cloth samples in all the latest colors, patterns, and weaves—the finest quality that money can buy. Every garment made to your measure, guaranteed fast color and delivered free. No extra charges.

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If you have a few hours spare time your own suit won't cost a cent. We are paying good men $10.00 to $50.00 a week for all or spare time. No experience needed. Send no money—just your name and address.

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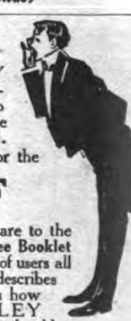

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is to the ears what glasses are to the eyes. Write For Free Booklet containing testimonials of users all over the country. It describes causes of deafness; tells how and why the MORLEY PHONE affords relief. Over one hundred thousand sold.

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A touch of chill in the air —'mums in full bloom— hearts high—appetites on edge —a refreshing cup—and—

NABISCO

Sugar Wafers

You wonder whether you eat more and more of them for their petal-light strips or for the rare creamy goodness that lies between. Always delightful, *at* a feast or *as* a feast.

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I'll Teach You Piano In Quarter Usual Time

To persons who have not previously heard of my method, this may seem a pretty bold statement. But I will gladly convince you of its accuracy by referring you to any number of my graduates in any part of the world.

There isn't a State in the Union that doesn't contain a score or more skilled players of the piano or organ who obtained their *entire* training from me *by mail*. I have far more students than were ever before taught by one man. Investigate by writing for my 64-page free booklet, "How to Learn Piano or Organ."

My way of teaching piano or organ is *entirely different* from all others. Out of every four hours of study, one hour is spent *entirely away from the keyboard*—learning something about Harmony and The Laws of Music. This is an awful shock to most teachers of the "old school," who still think that learning piano is solely a problem of "finger gymnastics." When you *do* go to the keyboard, you accomplish *twice as much*, because you *understand what you are doing*. Within four lessons I enable you to play an interesting piece not only in the original key, but in all other keys as well.

I make use of every possible scientific help—many of which are *entirely unknown* to the average teacher. My patented invention, the COLOROTONE, sweeps away playing difficulties that have troubled students for generations. By its use, Transposition—usually a "nightmare" to students—becomes easy and fascinating. With my fifth lesson I introduce another important and exclusive invention, QUINN-DEX. Quinn-Dex is a simple, hand-operated moving picture device, which enables you to see, right before your eyes, every movement of my hands at the keyboard. *You actually see the fingers move.* Instead of having to reproduce your teacher's finger movements from MEMORY—which cannot be always accurate—you have the correct models before you during every minute of practice. The COLOROTONE and QUINN-DEX save you months and years of wasted effort. They can be obtained *only from me*, and there is nothing else, anywhere, even remotely like them.

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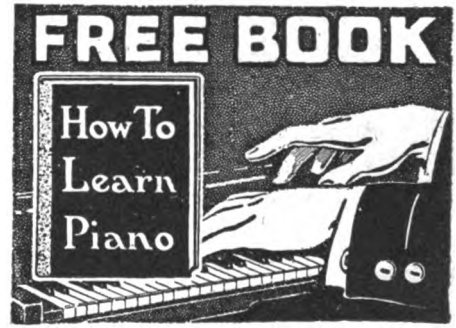
From the Famous Sketch by Schneider, Exhibited at the St. Louis Exposition.

Men and women who have failed by all other methods have quickly and easily attained success when studying with me. In all *essential* ways you are in closer touch with me than if you were studying by the oral method—yet my lessons cost you only 43 cents each—and they include all the many recent developments in scientific teaching. For the student of moderate means, this method of studying is *far superior* to all others; and even for the wealthiest student, there is nothing *better* at *any* price. You may be certain that your progress is at all times in accord with the best musical thought of the present day, *and this makes all the difference in the world.*

My Course is endorsed by distinguished musicians, who would not recommend any Course but the best. It is for beginners or experienced players, old or young. You advance as rapidly or as slowly as you wish. All necessary music is supplied without extra charge. A diploma is granted. Write today, without cost or obligation, for 64-page free booklet, "How to Learn Piano or Organ."



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Please send me, without cost or obligation, your free booklet, "How to Learn Piano or Organ," and full particulars of your Course and special reduced Tuition offer.

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Address .....

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THOUGHTS and THINGS

The business of living, when boiled down to its clearest essence and all the froth skimmed off, is just a matter of thinking.

Each of us is continually thinking ideas of our own and swapping them for the ideas of others. If there is a famine of outside ideas we shrivel up ourselves. Children with "nobody to play with" are unhappy and unmanageable.

From thinking with our heads to doing with our hands is but a little step and then our thoughts become things.

It is because men of America are so unfettered in their thinking and doing that this country is such a fine place to live in. It is also because these thoughts are freely radiated and spread broadcast, in the distribution of manufactured things and in the distribution of the facts about them (advertising), that this country is such a fine place to live in.

The originator of an idea is not much better off than before he originated it till he gets some one else to absorb it and enjoy it and benefit by it.

The man or woman surrounded by better thoughts and things but who pays not the slightest attention to them is not much better off than the one with "nobody to play with."

Advertisements are thoughts—telling you about the ideas that other men and women have thought out for your happiness. Read the ads. They are the voices from hundreds of thousands of looms, shops, foundries, studios, laboratories, where millions of minds are turning pleasant thoughts into worth while things for your comfort.

No. 6

I Dreamed This Dress

And Then I Made My Dream Come True

An inspiring story of how one girl is beating the high prices of fashionable shops

By Louise Cutter

"From now on I mean to have heaps of dresses. They won't cost me nearly so much because I've learned to do them myself, every last stitch of them.

"But I haven't learned just the sewing. That would be too commonplace to talk about.

"I've learned to DESIGN!

"By creating my own designs, I can now be sure to have something thoroughly original, instead of a style that I am likely to see on every third girl who passes by. Meeting your own style on other people gets to be humiliating.

"Of course, I don't need dressmakers any more. For now I can draft my pattern in fifteen minutes and make the dress from beginning to end more beautifully than any dressmaker I have ever had.

"Incidentally, I saved at least $50, for the materials of this beautiful embroidered silk dress cost me just $20.96.

"I learned it all from Fashion Academy, and I haven't yet completed my course."

Design and Make Your Own Costumes

Don't you want to gown yourself beautifully in costumes exactly suited to your figure, complexion, and personality?

Don't you want to have morning dress, afternoon costume, and evening gown for the price of *one* dress that you buy in the store?

Don't you want to have a wonderfully beautiful hat for each occasion instead of the *one* hat that you must pay so much for in the millinery shop?

Learn in 3 Months at Home

In from 3 to 4 months, you can learn to design costumes on paper, or draft patterns and design in actual materials; or you can learn to design and make out-of-the-ordinary hats.

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