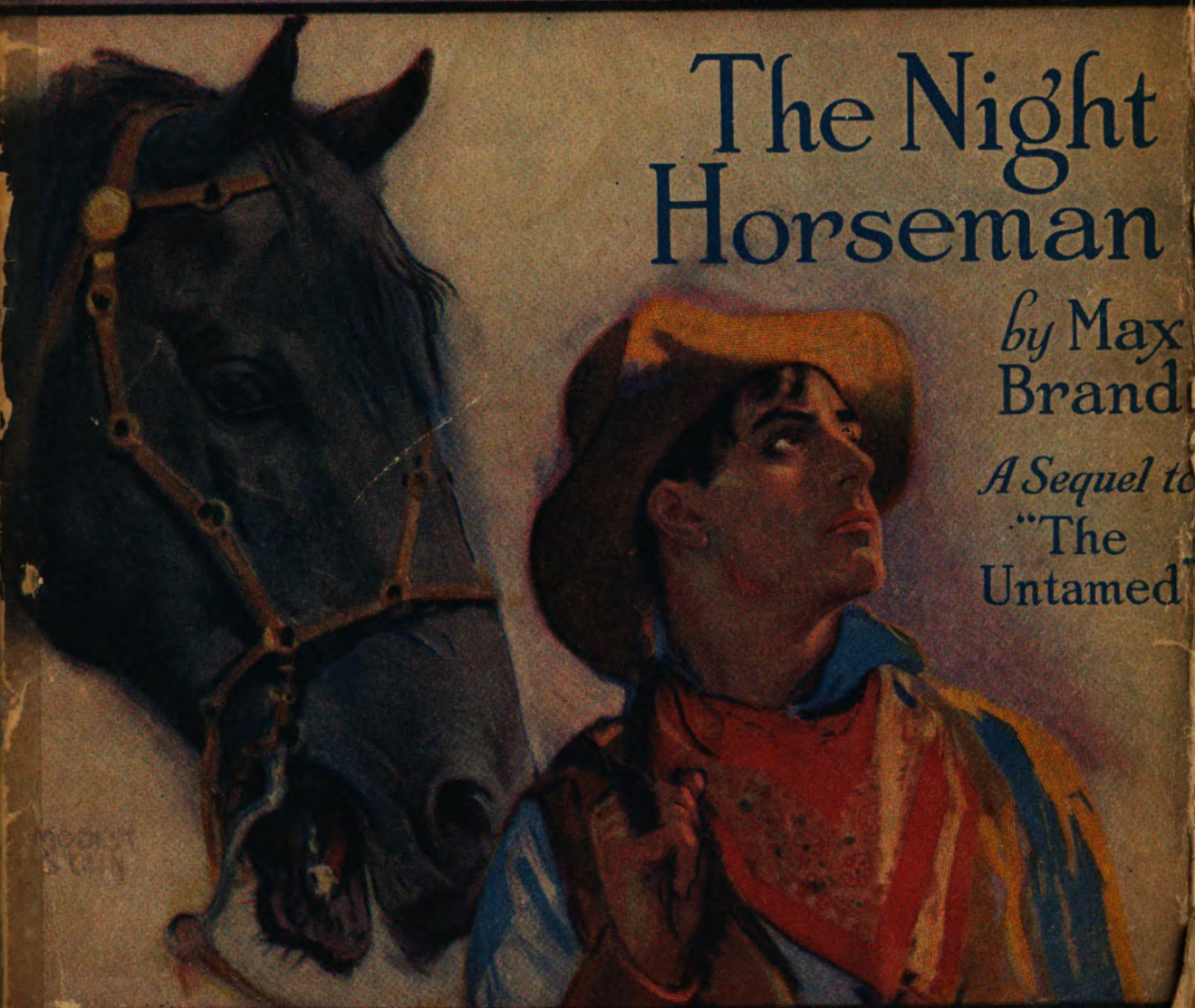
ARGOSY ALL-STORY WEEKLY



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by Max Brand

A Sequel to "The Untamed"

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VOL. CXXV CONTENTS FOR SEPTEMBER 18, 1920 NUMBER 3

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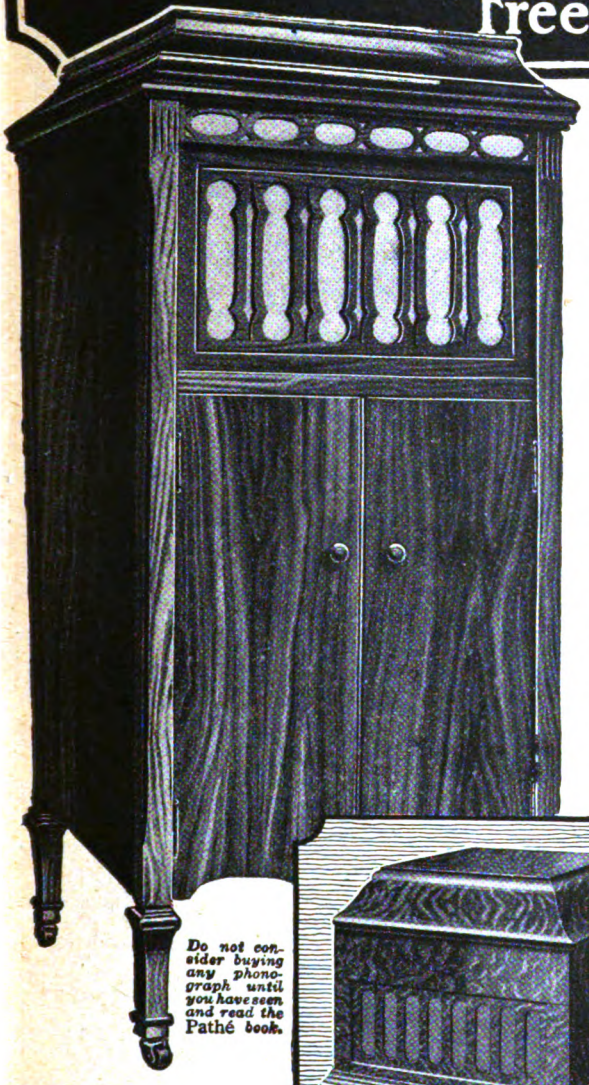

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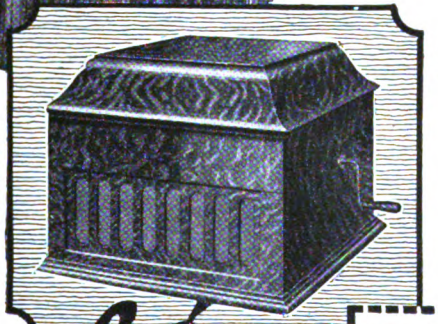

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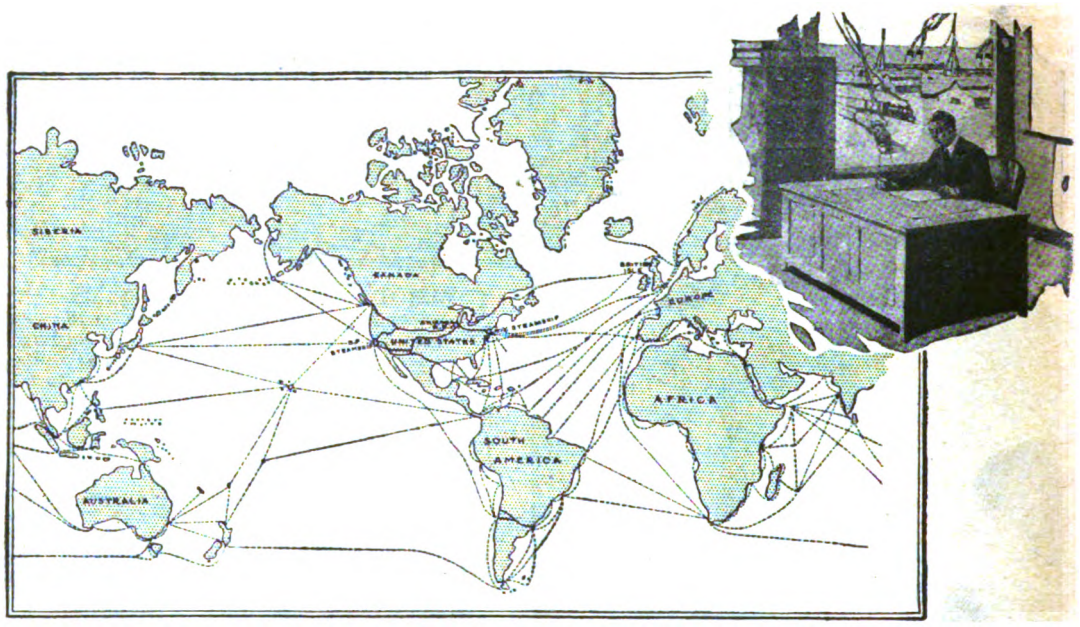

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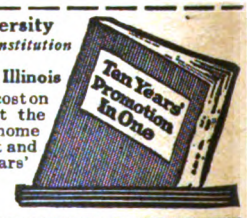

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ARGOSY-ALLSTORY
WEEKLY

VOL. CXXV SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 18, 1920 NUMBER 3

The Night Horseman

by Max Brand

Author of "Clung," "Trailin'," "Children of the Night," etc.

A Sequel to "The Untamed"

CHAPTER I.

THE SCHOLAR.

AT the age of six Randall Byrne could name and bound every State in the Union; at nine he was conversant with Greek and Latin; at twelve he read Aristophanes with perfect understanding of the allusions of the day and divided his leisure between Ovid and Horace; at fifteen, wearied by the simplicity of Old English and Thirteenth Century Italian, he dipped into the history of Philosophy and then passed into calculus and the higher mathematics; at eighteen he took an A. B. from Harvard, and while idling away a pleasant summer with Hebrew and Sanscrit he delved lightly into biology and its kindred sciences; at twenty-one he pocketed his Ph.D. and was touched with the fever of his first practical enthusiasm—surgery.

At twenty-four he was an M.D. and a distinguished diagnostician though he preferred work in his laboratory; at this time he published a work on anthropology whose circulation was limited to two hundred copies, and he received in return two hundred letters of congratulation from great men who had tried to read his book; at twenty-seven he collapsed one fine spring day on the floor of his laboratory. That afternoon he was carried into the presence of a great physician who was also a very vulgar man. The great physician felt his pulse and looked into his dim eyes.

"You have a hundred and twenty horsepower brain and a runabout body," said the great physician.

"I have come," answered Randall Byrne faintly, "for the solution of a problem, not for the statement thereof."

"I'm not through," said the great physician. "You are also a damned fool."

Randall Byrne here rubbed his eyes.

"What steps do you suggest that I consider?" he queried.

The great physician spat noisily.

"Marry a farmer's daughter," he said brutally.

"But—" said Randall Byrne vaguely.

"I am a busy man and you've wasted ten minutes of my time," said the great physician. "My secretary will send you a bill for one thousand dollars. Good day."

Ten days later Randall Byrne sat in his room in the hotel at Elkhead.

He had just written (to his friend Swinnerton Loughburne, M.A., Ph.D., L.L.D.): "Incontrovertibly the introduction of the personal equation leads to lamentable inversions," and so on and so on, closing the letter as follows:

> Your pardon, dear Loughburne, for these lapses from the general to the particular, but in a lighter moment of idleness, I pray you give some careless thought to a problem now painfully my own, though rooted inevitably so deeply in the dirt of the commonplace.
>
> But you have asked me in letter of recent date for the particular physical aspects of my present environment, and though (as you so well know) it is my conviction that the physical fact is not and only the immaterial is, yet I shall gladly look about me—a thing I have not yet seen occasion to do—and describe to you the details of my present condition.

At this point Randall Byrne removed his thick glasses and stared through the window at the view without. He had quite changed his appearance by removing the spectacles, for the owlish touch was gone and he seemed at a stroke ten years younger. It was such a face as one is glad to examine in detail, lean, pale, the transparent skin stretched tightly over cheek-bones, nose, and chin. That chin was built on good fighting lines, though somewhat overdelicate in substance, and the mouth quite colorless, but oddly enough the upper lip had that habitual appearance of stiff compression which is characteristic of highly strung temperaments; it is a noticeable feature of nearly every great actor, for instance.

The nose was straight and very thin, and in a strong sidelight a tracery of the red blood showed through at the nostrils. The eyes were deeply buried and the lower lids bruised with purple—weak eyes that blinked at a change of light or a sudden thought—distant eyes which missed the design of wall-paper and saw the trees growing on the mountains. The forehead was Byrne's most noticeable feature, pyramidal, swelling largely toward the top and divided in the center into two distinct lobes by a single marked furrow which gave his expression a hint of the wistful. Looking at that forehead one was strangely conscious of the brain beneath. There seemed no bony structure; the mind, undefended, was growing and pushing the confining walls further out.

After a moment of staring through the window the scholar wrote again:

> The major portion of Elkhead lies within plain sight of my window. I see a general merchandise store, twenty-seven buildings of a comparatively major and eleven of a minor significance, and five saloons. The streets—

At this juncture a heavy hand knocked, and the door of Randall Byrne's room was flung open by Hank Dwight, proprietor of Elkhead's saloon—a versatile man, expert behind the bar or in a blacksmith shop.

"Doc," said Hank Dwight, "you're wanted."

Randall Byrne placed his spectacles more firmly on his nose to consider his host.

"What—" he began, but Hank Dwight had already turned on his heel.

"Her name is Kate Cumberland. A little speed, doc. She's in a hurry."

"If no other physician is available," protested Byrne, following slowly down the stairs, "I suppose I must see her."

"If they was another within ten miles, d'you s'pose I'd call on you?" asked Hank Dwight.

So saying, he led the way out onto the veranda, where the doctor was aware of a girl in a short riding skirt who stood with one gloved hand on her hip while the other slapped a quirt idly against her riding boots.

CHAPTER II.

WORDS AND BULLETS.

"HERE'S a gent that calls himself a doc," said Hank Dwight by way of an introduction. "If you can use him, Miss Cumberland, fly to it!"

And he left them alone.

Now the sun lay directly behind Kate Cumberland, and in order to look at her closely the doctor had to shade his weak eyes and pucker his brows; for from beneath her wide sombrero there rolled a cloud of golden hair as bright as the sunshine itself—a sad strain upon the visual nerve of Dr. Randall Byrne. He repeated her name, bowed, and when he straightened, blinked again. As if she appreciated that strain upon his eyes she stepped closer, and entered the shadow.

"Dr. Hardin is not in town," she said, "and I have to bring a physician out to the ranch at once; my father is critically ill."

Randall Byrne rubbed his lean chin.

"I am not practising at present," he said reluctantly. Then he saw that she was watching him closely, weighing him with her eyes, and it came to the mind of Randall Byrne that he was not a large man, and might not incline the scale far from the horizontal.

"I am hardly equipped—" began Byrne.

"You will not need equipment," she interrupted. "His trouble lies in his nerves and the state of his mind."

A slight gleam lighted the eyes of the doctor.

"Ah," he murmured. "The mind?"

"Yes."

He rubbed his bloodless hands slowly together, and when he spoke his voice was sharp and quick and wholly impersonal. "Tell me the symptoms!"

"Can't we talk those over on the way to the ranch? Even if we start now it will be dark before we arrive."

"But," protested the doctor, "I have not yet decided—this precipitancy—"

"Oh," she said, and flushed. "There is no other physician within reach; my father is very ill. I only ask that you come as a diagnostician, doctor!"

"But a ride to your ranch," he said miserably. "I presume you refer to riding a horse?"

"Naturally."

"I am unfamiliar with that means of locomotion, and in fact have not carried my acquaintance with the equine species beyond a purely experimental stage. Anatomically, I have a superficial knowledge, but on the one occasion on which I sat in a saddle I observed that the docility of the horse is probably a poetic fallacy."

He rubbed his left shoulder thoughtfully and saw a slight tremor at the corners of the girl's mouth. It caused his vision to clear and concentrate; he found that the lips were, in fact, in the very act of smiling. The face of the doctor brightened.

"You shall ride my own horse," said the girl. "She is perfectly gentle and has a very easy gait. I'm sure you'll have not the slightest trouble with her."

"And you?"

"I'll find something about town; it doesn't matter what."

"This," said the doctor, "is most remarkable. You choose your mounts at random?"

"But you will go?" she insisted.

"Ah, yes, the trip to the ranch!" groaned the doctor. "Let me see: the physical obstacles to such a trip while many are not altogether insuperable, I may say; in the mean time the moral urge which compels me toward the ranch seems to be of the first order." He sighed. "Is it not strange, Miss Cumberland, that man, though distinguished from the lower orders by—"

He broke off short. The smile was growing upon her lips.

"I will put together a few of my things," said the doctor, "and come down to you at once."

"Good!" said the girl. "I'll be waiting with two horses before you are ready."

He turned away, but had taken hardly a step before he turned, saying: "But why are you so sure that you will be ready before I—" but she was already down the steps from the veranda and stepping briskly down the street.

"There is an element of the unexplainable in woman," said the doctor, and resumed his way to his room. Once there, something prompted him to act with the greatest possible speed. He tossed his toilet articles and a few changes of linen into a small, flexible valise and ran down the stairs. He reached the veranda again, panting, and the girl was not in sight; a

smile of triumph appeared on the grave, colorless lips of the doctor. "Feminine instinct, however, is not infallible," he observed to himself, and to one of the cowboys, lounging loosely in a chair near by, he continued his train of thoughts aloud: "Though the verity of the feminine intuition has already been thrown in a shade of doubt by many thinkers, as you will undoubtedly agree."

The man thus addressed allowed his lower jaw to drop, but after a moment he ejaculated: "Now what in hell d'you mean by that?"

The doctor already turned away, intent upon his thoughts, but he now paused and again faced the cowboy. He said, frowning: "There is unnecessary violence in your remark, sir."

"Duck your glasses," said the worthy in question. "You ain't talkin' to a book, you're talking to a man."

"And in your attitude," went on the doctor, "there is an element of offense which if carried farther might be corrected by physical violence."

"I don't foller your words," said the cattleman, "but from the drift of your tune I gather you're a bit peeved; and if you are—"

His voice had risen to a ringing note as he proceeded, and he now slipped from his chair and faced Randall Byrne, a big man, brown, hard-handed. The doctor crimsoned.

"Well?" he echoed, but in place of a deep ring his words were pitched in a high squeak of defiance.

He saw a large hand contract to a fist, but almost instantly the big man grinned, and his eyes went past Byrne.

"Oh, hell!" he grunted, and turned his back with a chuckle.

For an instant there was a mad impulse in the doctor to spring at this fellow, but a wave of impotence overwhelmed him. He knew that he was white around the mouth, with a dryness in his throat.

"The excitement of imminent physical contest and personal danger," he diagnosed swiftly, "causing acceleration of the pulse and attendant weakness of the body—a state unworthy of the balanced intellect."

Having brought back his poise by this quick interposition of reason, he went his way down the long veranda. Against a pillar leaned another tall cattleman, also brown and lean and hard.

"May I inquire," he said, "if you have any information direct or casual concerning a family named Cumberland which possesses ranch property in this vicinity?"

"You may," said the cow-puncher, and continued to roll his cigarette.

"Well," said the doctor, "do you know anything about them?"

"Sure," said the other, and having finished his cigarette he introduced it between his lips. It seemed to occur to him instantly, however, that he was committing an inhospitable breach, for he produced his Durham and brown papers with a start and extended them toward the doctor.

"Smoke?" he asked.

"I use tobacco in no form," said the doctor.

The cowboy stared with such fixity that the match burned down to his fingertips and singed them before he had lighted his cigarette.

"'S that a fact?" he queried when his astonishment found utterance. "What d'you do to kill time? Well, I been thinking about knocking off the stuff for a while. Mame gets sore at me for having my fingers all stained up with nicotin like this."

He extended his hand, the first and second fingers of which were painted a bright yellow.

"Soap won't take it off," he remarked.

"A popular but inexcusable error," said the doctor. "It is the tarry by-products of tobacco which cause that stain. Nicotin itself, of course, is a volatile alkaloid base of which there is only the merest trace in tobacco. It is one of the deadliest of nerve poisons and is quite colorless. There is enough of that stain upon your fingers—if it were nicotin—to kill a dozen men."

"The hell you say!"

"Nevertheless, it is an indubitable fact. A lump of nicotin the size of the head of a pin placed on the tongue of a horse will kill the beast instantly."

The cow-puncher pushed back his hat and scratched his head.

"This is worth knowin'," he said, "but I'm some glad that Mame ain't heard it."

"Concerning the Cumberlands," said the doctor, "I—"

"Concerning the Cumberlands," repeated the cattleman, "it's best to leave 'em to their own concerns." And he started to turn away, but the thirst for knowledge was dry in the throat of the doctor.

"Do I understand," he insisted, "that there is some mystery connected with them?"

"From me," replied the other, "you understand nothin'." And he lumbered down the steps and away.

Be it understood that there was nothing of the gossip in Randall Byrne, but now he was pardonably excited, and perceiving the tall form of Hank Dwight in the doorway, he approached his host.

"Mr. Dwight," he said, "I am about to go to the Cumberland ranch. I gather that there is something of an unusual nature concerning them."

"There is," admitted Hank Dwight.

"Can you tell me what it is?"

"I can."

"Good!" said the doctor, and he almost smiled. "It is always well to know the background of a case which has to do with mental states. Now, just what do you know?"

"I know—" began the proprietor, and then paused and eyed his guest dubiously—"I know," he continued, "a story."

"Yes?"

"Yes, about a man and a hoss and a dog."

"The approach seems not quite obvious, but I shall be glad to hear it."

"Words," said the host, at length, after a pause, "is worse'n bullets. You never know what they'll hit."

"But the story?" persisted the doctor.

"That story," said Hank Dwight, "I may tell to my son before I die."

"This sounds quite promising."

"But I'll tell nobody else."

"Really!"

"It's about a man and a hoss and a dog. The man ain't possible, the hoss ain't possible, the dog is a wolf."

He paused again and glowered on the doctor. He seemed to be drawn two ways, by his eagerness to tell a yarn and his dread of consequences.

"I know," he muttered, "because I've seen 'em all. I've seen"—he looked far, as though striking a silent bargain with himself concerning the sum of the story which might safely be told—"I've seen a hoss that understood a man's talk like you and me does—or better. I've heard a man whistle like a singing bird. Yep, that ain't no lie. You jest imagine a bald eagle that could lick anything between the earth and the sky and was able to sing—that's what that whistlin' was like. It made you glad to hear it, and it made you look to see if your gun was in good workin' shape. It wasn't very loud, but it traveled pretty far, like it was comin' from up above you."

"That's the way this strange man of the story whistles?" asked Byrne.

"Man of the story?" echoed the proprietor, with some warmth. "Friend, if he ain't real, then I'm a ghost. And they's them in Elkhead that's got the scars of his comin' and goin'."

"Ah, an outlaw? A gunfighter?" queried the doctor.

"Listen to me, son," observed the host, and to make his point he tapped the hollow chest of Byrne with a rigid forefinger, "around these parts you know jest as much as you see, and lots of times you don't even know that much. What you see is sometimes your business, but mostly it ain't." He concluded impressively: "Words is worse'n bullets!"

"Well," mused Byrne, "I can ask the girl these questions. It will be medically necessary."

"Ask the girl? Ask her?" echoed the host with a sort of horror. But he ended with a forced restraint. "That's *your* business."

CHAPTER III.

THE DOCTOR RIDES.

HANK DWIGHT disappeared from the doorway and the doctor was called from his pondering by the voice of the girl. There was something

about that voice which worried Byrne, for it was low and controlled and musical and it did not fit with the nasal harshness of the cattlemen. When she began to speak it was like the beginning of a song. He turned now and found her sitting a tall bay horse, and she led a red-roan mare beside her. When he went out she tossed her reins over the head of her horse and strapped his valise behind her saddle.

"You won't have any trouble with that mare," she assured him, when the time came for mounting. Yet when he approached gingerly he was received with flattened ears and a snort of anger. "Wait," she cried, "the left side, not the right!"

He felt the laughter in her voice, but when he looked he could see no trace of it in her face. He approached from the left side, setting his teeth.

"You observe," he said, "that I take your word at its full value," and placing his foot in the stirrup, he dragged himself gingerly up to the saddle. The mare stood like a rock. Adjusting himself, he wiped a sudden perspiration from his forehead.

"I quite believe," he remarked, "that the animal is of unusual intelligence. All may yet be well!"

"I'm sure of it," said the girl gravely. "Now we're off."

And the horses broke into a dog trot. Now the gait of the red roan mare was a dream of softness, and her flexible ankles gave a play of whole inches to break the jar of every step, the sure sign of the good saddle-horse; but the horse has never been saddled whose trot is really a smooth pace. The hat of Dr. Byrne began to incline toward his right eye and his spectacles toward his left ear. He felt a peculiar lightness in the stomach and heaviness in the heart.

"The t-t-t-trot," he ventured to his companion, "is a d-d-d-dam—"

"Dr. Byrne!" she cried.

"Whoa!" called Dr. Byrne, and drew mightily in upon the reins. The red mare stopped as a ball stops when it meets a stout wall; the doctor sprawled along her neck, clinging with arms and legs. He managed to clamber back into the saddle.

"There are vicious elements in the nature of this brute," he observed to the girl.

"I'm very sorry," she murmured. He cast a sidelong glance but found not the trace of a smile.

"The word upon which I—"

"Stopped?" she suggested.

"Stopped," he agreed, "was not, as you evidently assumed, an oath. On the contrary, I was merely remarking that the trot is a damaging gait, but through an interrupted—er—articulation—"

His eye dared her, but she was utterly grave. He perceived that there was, after all, a certain kinship between this woman of the mountain-desert and the man thereof. Their silences were filled with eloquence.

"We'll try a canter," she suggested, "and I think you'll find that easier."

So she gave the word, and her bay sprang into a lope from a standing start. The red mare did likewise, nearly flinging the doctor over the back of the saddle, but by the grace of God he clutched the pommel in time and was saved. The air caught at his face, they swept out of the town and onto a limitless level stretch.

"Sp-p-p-peed," gasped the doctor, "has never been a p-p-passion with me!"

He noted that she was not moving in the saddle. The horse was like the bottom of a wave swinging violently back and forth. She was the calm crest, swaying slightly and graciously with a motion as smooth as the flowing of water. And she spoke as evenly as if she were sitting in a rocking-chair.

"You'll be used to it in a moment," she assured him.

He learned, indeed, that if one pressed the stirrups as the shoulders of the horse swung down and leaned a trifle forward when the shoulders rose again, the motion ceased to be jarring; for she was truly a matchless creature and gaited like one of those fabulous horses of old, sired by the swift western wind. In a little time a certain pride went beating through the veins of the doctor, the air blew more deeply into his lungs, there was a different tang to the wind and a different feel to the sun—a peculiar richness of yellow warmth.

And the small head of the horse and the short, sharp, pricking ears tossed continually; and now and then the mare threw her head a bit to one side and glanced back at him with what he felt to be a reassuring air. Life and strength and speed were gripped between his knees—he flashed a glance at the girl.

But she rode with face straightforward, and there was that about her which made him turn his eyes suddenly away and look far off. It was a jagged country, for in the brief rainy season there came sudden and terrific downpours which lashed away the soil and scoured the face of the underlying rock, and in a single day might cut a deep arroya where before had been smooth plain. In the distance were the spectator mountains.

High, lean-flanked mountains they were, not clad in forests, but rather bristling with a stubby growth of the few trees which might endure in precarious soil and bitter weather, but now they gathered the dignity of distance about them. The grass of the foothills was a faint green mist about their feet, cloaks of exquisite blue hung around the upper masses, but their heads were naked to the pale skies. And all day long, with deliberate alteration, the garb of the mountains changed. When the sudden morning came they leaped naked upon the eye, and then withdrew, muffling themselves in browns and blues until at nightfall they covered themselves to the eyes in thickly sheeted purple—Tyrian purple—and prepared for sleep with their heads among the stars.

Something of all this came to Dr. Randall Byrne as he rode, for it seemed to him that there was a similarity between these mountains and the girl beside him. She held that keen purity of the upper slopes under the sun, and though she had no artifice or careful wiles to make her strange, there was about her a natural dignity like the mystery of distance. There was a rhythm, too, about that line of peaks against the sky, and the girl had caught it; he watched her sway with the gallop of her horse and felt that though she was so close at hand she was a thousand miles from him. He could no more see her naked soul than he could tear the veils of shadow from the mountains. Not that the doctor phrased his emotions in words. He was only conscious of a sense of awe and the necessity of silence.

It was evening: the rolling hills about them were already dark; only the heads of the mountains took the day; and now they paused at the top of a rise and the girl pointed across the hollow.

"There we are," she said. It was a tall clump of trees through which broke the outlines of a two-storied house larger than any the doctor had seen in the mountain-desert; and outside the trees lay long sheds, a great barn, and a wide-spread wilderness of corrals. It struck the doctor with its apparently limitless capacity for housing man and beast. Coming in contrast with the rock-strewn desolation of the plains, this was a great establishment; the doctor had ridden out with a waif of the desert and she had turned into a princess at a stroke. Then, for the first time since they left Elkhead, he remembered with a start that he was to care for a sick man in that house.

"You were to tell me," he said, "something about the illness of your father—the background behind his condition. But we've both forgotten about it."

"I have been thinking how I could describe it, every moment of the ride," she answered. Then, as the gloom fell more thickly around them every moment, she swerved her horse over to the mare, as if it were necessary that she read the face of the doctor while she spoke.

"Six months ago," she said, "my father was robust and active in spite of his age. He was cheerful, busy, and optimistic. But he fell into a decline. It has not been a sudden sapping of his strength. If it were that I should not worry so much; I'd attribute it to disease. But every day something of vitality goes from him. He is fading almost from hour to hour, as slowly as the hour-hand of a clock. You can't notice the change, but every twelve hours the hand makes a complete revolution. It's as if his blood were evaporating, and nothing we can do will supply him with fresh strength."

"Is this attended by irritability?"

" He is perfectly calm and seems to have no care for what becomes of him."

" Has he lost interest in the many things which formerly attracted and occupied him?"

" Yes, he minds nothing now. He has no care for the condition of the cattle, or for profit or loss in the sales. He has simply stepped out of every employment."

" Ah, a gradual diminution of the faculties of attention."

" In a way, yes. But also he is more alive than he has ever been. He seems to hear with uncanny distinctness, for instance."

The doctor frowned.

" I was inclined to attribute his decline to the operation of old age," he remarked, " but this is unusual. This—er—inner acuteness is accompanied by no particular interest in any one thing?"

As she did not reply for the moment he was about to accept the silence for acquiescence, but then through the dimness he was arrested by the luster of her eyes, fixed, apparently, far beyond him.

" One thing," she said at length. " Yes, there is one thing in which he retains an interest."

The doctor nodded brightly.

" Good!" he said. " And that—"

The silence fell again, but this time he was more roused and he fixed his eyes keenly upon her through the gloom. She was deeply troubled; one hand gripped the horn of her saddle strongly; her lips had parted; she was like one who endures inescapable pain.

" Of that," she said, " it is hard to speak —it is useless to speak!"

" Surely not!" protested the doctor. " The cause, my dear madam, though perhaps apparently remote from the immediate issue, is of the utmost significance in diagnosis."

She broke in rapidly: " This is all I can tell you: he is waiting for something which will never come. He has missed something from his life which will never come back into it. Then why should we discuss what it is that he has missed?"

" To the critical mind," replied the doctor calmly, and he automatically adjusted his glasses closer to his eyes, " nothing is without significance."

" It is nearly dark!" she exclaimed hurriedly. " Let us ride on."

" First," he suggested, " I must tell you that before I left Elkhead I heard a hint of some remarkable story concerning a man and a horse and a dog. Is there anything—"

But it seemed that she did not hear. He caught a sharp, low exclamation which might have been addressed to her horse, and the next instant she was galloping swiftly down the slope. The doctor followed as fast as he could, jouncing in the saddle until he was quite out of breath.

CHAPTER IV.

THE CHAIN.

THEY had hardly passed the front door of the house when they were met by a tall man with dark hair and dark, deep-set eyes. He was tanned to the bronze of an Indian, and he might have been termed handsome had not his features been so deeply cut and roughly finished. His black hair was quite long, and as the wind from the opened door stirred it, there was a touch of wildness about the fellow that made the heart of Randall Byrne jump. When this man saw the girl his face lighted, briefly; when his glance fell on Byrne the light went out.

" Couldn't get the doc, Kate?" he asked.

" Not Dr. Hardin," she answered, " and I've brought Dr. Byrne instead."

The tall man allowed his gaze to drift leisurely from head to foot of Randall Byrne.

Then: " H'ware you, doc?" he said, and extended a big hand. It occurred to Byrne that all these men of the mountain-desert were big; there was something intensely irritating about their mere physical size; they threw him continually on the defensive and he found himself making apologies to himself and summing up personal merits. In this case there was more direct reason for his anger. It was patent that the man did not weigh the strange doctor against any serious thoughts.

"And this," she was saying, "is Mr. Daniels. Buck, is there any change?"

"Nothin' much," answered Buck Daniels. "Come along toward evening and he said he was feeling kind of cold. So I wrapped him up in a rug. Then he sat some as usual, one hand inside of the other, looking steady at nothing. But a while ago he began getting sort of nervous."

"What did he do?"

"Nothing. I just *felt* he was getting excited. The way you know when your hoss is going to shy."

"Do you want to go to your room first, doctor, or will you go in to see him now?"

"Now," decided the doctor, and followed her down the hall and through a door.

The room reminded the doctor more of a New England interior than of the mountain-desert. There was a round rag rug on the floor, and chairs upholstered in green, which looked mouse-colored where the high lights struck along the backs and the arms—shallow-seated chairs that made one's knees project foolishly high and far. Byrne saw a cabinet at one end of the room, filled with sea-shells and knicknacks, and above it was a memorial cross surrounded by a wreath inside a glass case. Most of the wall space thronged with engravings whose subjects ranged from Niagara Falls to Lady Hamilton.

One entire end of the room was occupied by a painting of a neck and neck finish in a race, and the artist had conceived the blooded racers as creatures with tremendous round hips and mighty-muscled shoulders, while the legs tapered to a faunlike delicacy. These animals were spread-eagled in the most amazing fashion, their fore-hoofs reaching beyond their noses and their rear hoofs striking out beyond the tips of the tails. The jockey in the lead sat quite still, but he who was losing had his whip drawn and looked like an automatic doll—so pink were his cheeks.

Beside the course, in attitudes of graceful ease, stood men in very tight trousers and very high stocks and ladies in dresses which pinched in at the waist and flowed out at the shoulders. They leaned upon canes or twirled parasols and they had their backs turned upon the race-track, as if they found their own negligent conversation far more exciting than the breathless, driving finish.

Under the terrific action and still more terrific quiescence of this picture lay the sick man, propped high on a couch and wrapped to the chest in a Navaho blanket.

"Dad," said Kate Cumberland, "Dr. Hardin was not in town. I've brought out Dr. Byrne, a newcomer."

The invalid turned his white head slowly toward them, and his shaggy brows lifted and fell slightly—a passing shadow of annoyance. It was a very stern face, and framed in the long, white hair it seemed surrounded by an atmosphere of Arctic chill. He was thin, terribly thin—not the leanness of Byrne, but a grim emaciation which exaggerated the size of a tall forehead and made his eyes supernally bright. It was in the first glance of those eyes that Byrne recognized the restlessness of which Kate had spoken; and he felt almost as if it were an inner fire which had burned and still was wasting the body of Joseph Cumberland. To the attentions of the doctor the old man submitted with patient self-control, and Byrne found a pulse feeble, rapid, but steady. There was no temperature. In fact, the heat of the body was a trifle subnormal, considering that the heart was beating so rapidly.

Dr. Byrne started. Most of his work had been in laboratories, and the horror of death was not yet familiar, but old Joseph Cumberland was dying. It was not a matter of moments. Death might be a week or a month away, but die soon he inevitably must; for the doctor saw that the fire was still raging in the hollow breast of the cattleman, but there was no longer fuel to feed it.

He stared again, and more closely. Fire without fuel to feed it!

Dr. Byrne gave what seemed to be an infinitely muffled cry of exultation, so faint that it was hardly a whisper; then he leaned closer and pored over Joe Cumberland with a lighted eye. One might have thought that the doctor was gloating over the sick man.

Suddenly he straightened and began to pace up and down the room, muttering to

himself. Kate Cumberland listened intently and she thought that what the man muttered so rapidly, over and over to himself, was: "Eureka! Eureka! I have found it!"

Found what? The triumph of mind over matter!

On that couch was a dead body. The flutter of that heart was not the strong beating of the normal organ; the hands were cold; even the body was chilled; yet the man lived.

Or, rather, his brain lived, and compelled the shattered and outworn body to comply with its will. Dr. Byrne turned and stared again at the face of Cumberland. He felt as if he understood, now, the look which was concentrated so brightly on the vacant air. It was illumined by a steady and desperate defiance, for the old man was denying his body to the grave.

The scene changed for Randall Byrne. The girl disappeared. The walls of the room were broken away. The eyes of the world looked in upon him and the wise men of the world kept pace with him up and down the room, shaking their heads and saying: "It is not possible!"

But the fact lay there to contradict them.

Prometheus stole fire from heaven and paid it back to an eternal death. The old cattleman was refusing his payment. It was no state of coma in which he lay; it was no prolonged trance. He was vitally, vividly alive; he was concentrating with a bitter and exhausting vigor day and night, and fighting a battle the more terrible because it was fought in silence, a battle in which he could receive no aid, no reinforcement, a battle in which he could not win, but in which he might delay defeat.

Aye, the wise men would smile and shake their heads when he presented this case to their consideration, but he would make his account so accurate and particular and so well witnessed that they would have to admit the truth of all he said. And science, which proclaimed that matter was indestructible and that the mind was matter and that the brain needed nourishment like any other muscle—science would have to hang the head and wonder!

The eyes of the girl brought him to halt in his pacing, and he stopped, confronting her. His excitement had transformed him. His nostrils were quivering, his eyes were pointed with light, his head was high, and he breathed fast. He was flushed like a Roman conqueror. And his excitement tinged the girl, also, with color.

She offered to take him to his room as soon as he wished to go. He was quite willing. He wanted to be alone, to think. But when he followed her she stopped him in the hall. Buck Daniels lumbered slowly after them in a clumsy attempt at sauntering.

"Well?" asked Kate Cumberland.

She had thrown a blue mantle over her shoulders when she entered the house, and the touch of boyish self-confidence which had been hers on the ride was gone. In its place there was something even more difficult for Randall Byrne to face. If there had been a garish brightness about her when he had first seen her, the brilliancy of a mirror playing in the sun against his feeble eyes, there was now a blending of pastel shades, for the hall was dimly illumined and the shadow tarnished her hair and her pallor was like cold stone; even her eyes were misted by fear. Yet a vital sense of her nearness swept upon Byrne, and he felt as if he were surrounded—by a danger.

"Opinions," said the doctor, "based on so summary an examination are necessarily inexact, yet the value of a first impression is not negligible. The best I can say is that there is probably no immediate danger, but Mr. Cumberland is seriously ill. Furthermore, it is *not* old age."

He would not say all he thought; it was not yet time.

She winced and clasped her hands tightly together. She was like a child about to be punished for a crime it has not committed, and it came vaguely to the doctor that he might have broached his ill tidings more gently.

He added: "I must have further opportunities for observance before I give a detailed opinion and suggest a treatment."

Her glance wandered past him and at once the heavy step of Buck Daniels approached.

"At least," she murmured, "I am glad that you are frank. I don't want to have anything kept from me, please. Buck, will you take the doctor up to his room?" She managed a faint smile. "This is an old-fashioned house, Dr. Byrne, but I hope we can make you fairly comfortable. You'll ask for whatever you need?"

The doctor bowed, and was told that they would dine in half an hour, then the girl went back toward the room in which Joe Cumberland lay. She walked slowly, with her head bent, and her posture seemed to Byrne the very picture of a burden-bearer. Then he followed Daniels up the stairs.

A hall-light guided them, and from the hall Buck Daniels entered a room and fumbled above him until he had lighted a lamp which was suspended by two chains from the ceiling, a circular burner which cast a glow as keen as an electric globe. It brought out every detail of the old-fashioned room—the bare, painted floor; the bed, in itself a separate and important piece of architecture with its four tall posts, a relic of the times when beds were built, not simply made. It was a very comfortable retreat, and the doctor became aware of aching muscles and a heavy brain when he glanced at the bed.

The same gust of wind which rattled the window-pane now pushed, as with invisible and ghostly hand, a door which opened on the side of the bedroom, and as it swung mysteriously and gradually wide the doctor found himself looking into an adjoining chamber. All he could see clearly was a corner on which struck the shaft of light from the lamp, and lying on the floor in that corner was something limp and brown. A snake, he surmised at first, but then he saw clearly that it was a chain of formidable proportions bolted against the wall at one end and terminating at the other in a huge steel collar. A chill started in the boots of the doctor and wriggled its uncomfortable way up to his head.

"Hell!" burst out Buck Daniels. "How'd *that* door get open?" He slammed it with violence. "She's been in there again, I guess," muttered the cow-puncher as he stepped back, scowling.

"Who?" ventured the doctor.

Buck Daniels whirled on him.

"None of your—" he began hotly, but checked himself with choking suddenness and strode heavily from the room.

CHAPTER V.

THE WAITING.

THE doctor took off his coat with absent-minded slowness, and all the time that he was removing the dust and the strains of travel, he kept narrowing the eye of his mind to visualize more clearly that cumbersome chain which lay on the floor of the adjoining room. Now, the doctor was not of a curious or gossipy nature, but if some one had offered to tell him the story of that chain for a thousand dollars, at that moment he would have thought the price ridiculously small.

Then he went down to the dinner table prepared to keep one eye upon Buck Daniels and the other upon Kate Cumberland. But if he expected to learn through conversation at the table he was grievously disappointed, for Buck Daniels ate with an eye to strict business that allowed no chatter, and the girl sat with a forced smile and an absent eye. Now and again Buck would glance up at her, watch her for an instant, and then turn his attention back to his plate with a sort of gloomy resolution; there were not half a dozen words exchanged from the beginning to the end of the meal.

After that they went in to the invalid. He lay in the same position, his lean hands crossed upon his breast, and his shaggy brows drawn so low that the eyes were buried in profound shadow. They took positions in a loose semi-circle, all pointing toward the sick man, and it reminded Byrne with grim force of a picture he had seen of three wolves waiting for the bull moose to sink in the snows: they, also, were waiting for a death. It seemed, indeed, as if death must have already come; at least it could not make the man more moveless than he was. Against the dark wall his profile was etched by a sharp high light which was brightest of all on his forehead

and his nose; while the lower portion of the face was lost in comparative shadow.

So perfect and so detailed was the resemblance to death, indeed, that the lips in the shadow smiled—fixedly. It was not until Kate Cumberland shifted a lamp, throwing more light on her father, that Byrne saw that the smile was in reality a forcible compression of the lips. He understood, suddenly, that the silent man on the couch was struggling terribly against an hysteria of emotion. It brought beads of sweat out upon the doctor's forehead; for this perfect repose suggested an agony more awful than groans and struggles.

The silence was like acid; it burned without a flame. And Byrne knew at that moment the quality of the thing which had wasted the rancher. It was this acid of grief or yearning which had eaten deep into him and was now close to his heart. The girl had said that for six months he had been failing. Six months! Six eternities of burning at the stake!

He lay silent, waiting; and his resignation meant that he knew death would come before that for which he waited. Silence was the key-note of the room. The girl was silent, her eyes dark with grief; yet they were not fixed upon her father. It came thrilling home to Byrne that her sorrow was not entirely for her dying parent, for she looked beyond him rather than at him. Was she, too, waiting? Was that what gave her the touch of sad gravity, the mystery like the mystery of distance?

And Buck Daniels. He, also, said nothing. He rolled cigarettes one after another with amazing dexterity and smoked them with half a dozen Titanic breaths. His was a single-track mind. He loved the girl, and he bore the sign of his love on his face. He wanted her desperately; it was a hunger like that of Tantalus, too keen to be ever satisfied. Yet, still more than he looked at the girl, he, also, stared into the distance. He, also, was waiting!

It was the deep suspense of Cumberland which made him so silently alert. He was as intensely alive as the receiver of a wireless apparatus.

So that Byrne was hardly surprised when, in the midst of that grim silence, the old man raised a rigid forefinger of warning. Kate and Daniels stiffened in their chairs and Byrne felt his flesh creep. Of course it was nothing. The wind, which had shaken the house with several strong gusts before dinner, had now grown stronger and blew with steadily increasing violence; perhaps the sad old man had been attracted by the mournful chorus and imagined some sound he knew within it.

But now once more the finger was raised, the arm extended, shaking violently, and Joe Cumberland turned upon them a glance which flashed with a delirious and unhealthy joy.

"Listen!" he cried. "Again!"

"What?" asked Kate.

"I hear them, I tell you."

Her lips blanched, and parted to speak, but she checked the impulse and looked swiftly about the room with what seemed to Byrne an appeal for help. As for Buck Daniels, he changed from a dark bronze to an unhealthy yellow; fear, plain and grimly unmistakable, was in his face. Then he strode to the window and threw it open with a crash. The wind leaped in and tossed the flame in the throat of the chimney, so that great shadows waved suddenly through the room, and made the chairs seem afloat. Even the people were suddenly unreal. And the rush of the storm gave Byrne an eery sensation of being blown through infinite space. For a moment there was only the sound of the gale and the flapping of a loose picture against the wall, and the rattling of a newspaper. Then he heard it.

First it was a single note which he could not place. It was music, and yet it was discordant, and it had the effect of a blast of icy wind.

Once he had been in Egypt and had stood in a corridor of Cheops' pyramid. The torch had been blown out in the hand of his guide. From somewhere in the black depths before them came a laugh, made unhuman by echoes. And Byrne had visioned the mummied dead pushing back the granite lids of their sarcophagi and sitting upright.

But that was nothing compared with this. Not half so wild or strange.

He listened again, breathless, with the sharp prickling running up and down his spine. It was the honking of the wild geese, flying north. And out of the sound he built a picture of the gray triangle cleaving through the cold upper sky, sent on a mission no man could understand.

"Was I right? Was I right?" shrilled the invalid, and when Byrne turned toward him, he saw the old man sitting erect, with an expression of wild triumph. There came an indescribable cry from the girl, and a deep-throated curse from Buck Daniels as he slammed down the window.

With the chill blast shut off and the flame burning steadily once more in the lamp, a great silence besieged the room, with a note of expectancy in it. Byrne was conscious of being warm, too warm. It was close in the room, and he was weighted down. It was as if another presence had stepped into the room and stood invisible. He felt it with unspeakable keenness, as when one knows certainly the thoughts which pass in the mind of another. And, more than that, he knew that the others in the room felt what he felt. In the waiting silence he saw that the old man lay on his couch with eyes of fire and gaping lips, as if he drank the wine of his joyous expectancy. And big Buck Daniels stood with his hand on the sash of the window, frozen there, his eyes bulging, his heart thundering in his throat. And Kate Cumberland sat with her eyes closed, as she had closed them when the wind first rushed upon her, and she still smiled as she had smiled then. And to Byrne, more terrible than the joy of Joseph Cumberland or the dread of Buck Daniels was the smile and the closed eyes of the girl.

But the silence held and the fifth presence was in the room, and not one of them dared speak.

CHAPTER VI.

THE MISSION STARTS.

THEN, with a shifting of the wind, a song was blown to them from the bunk-house, a cheerful, ringing chorus; the sound was like daylight—it drove the terror from the room. Joe Cumberland asked them to leave him. That night, he said, he would sleep. He felt it, like a promise. The other three went out.

In the hall Kate and Daniels stood close together under a faint light from the wall-lamp, and they talked as if they had forgotten the presence of Byrne.

"It had to come," she said. "I knew it would come to him sooner or later; but I didn't dream it would be as terrible as this. Buck, what are we going to do?"

"God knows," said the big cow-puncher. "Just wait, I s'pose, same as we've been doing."

He had aged wonderfully in that moment of darkness.

"He'll be happy now for a few days," went on the girl, "but afterward—when he realizes that it means nothing—what then, Buck?"

The man took her hands and began to pat them softly as a father might soothe a child.

"I seen you when the wind come in," he said gently. "Are you going to stand it, Kate? Is it going to be hell for you, too, every time you hear 'em?"

She answered: "If it were only I! Yes, I could stand it. Lately I've begun to think that I can stand anything. But when I see dad it breaks my heart—and you—oh, Buck, it hurts, it hurts!" She drew his hands impulsively against her breast. "If it were only something we could fight outright!"

Buck Daniels sighed.

"Fight?" he echoed hopelessly. "Fight? Against him? Kate, you're all tired out. Go to bed, honey, and try to stop thinkin' —and—God help us all!"

She turned away from him and passed the doctor—blindly.

Buck Daniels had set his foot on the stairs when Byrne hurried after him and touched his arm; they went up together.

"Mr. Daniels," said the doctor, "it is necessary that I speak with you, alone. Will you come into my room for a few moments?"

"Doc," said the cattleman, "I'm short on my feed and I don't feel a pile like talkin'. Can't you wait till the morning?"

"There has been a great deal too much waiting, Mr. Daniels," said the doctor. "What I have to say to you must be said now. Will you come in?"

"I will," nodded Buck Daniels. "But cut it short."

Once in his room, the doctor lighted the lamp and then locked the door.

"What's all the mystery and hush stuff?" growled Daniels, and with a gesture he refused the proffered chair. "Cut loose, doc, and make it short."

The little man sat down, removed his glasses, held them up to the light, found a speck upon them, polished it carefully away, replaced the spectacles upon his nose, and peered thoughtfully at Buck Daniels.

Buck Daniels rolled his eyes toward the door and then even toward the window, and then, as one who accepts the inevitable, he sank into a chair and plunged his hands into his pockets, prepared to endure.

"I am called," went on the doctor dryly, "to examine a case in which the patient is dangerously ill—in fact, hopelessly ill—and I have found that the cause of his illness is a state of nervous expectancy on the part of the sufferer. It being obviously necessary to know the nature of the disease and its cause before that cause may be removed, I have asked you to sit here this evening to give me whatever explanation you may have for it."

Buck Daniels stirred uneasily.

"Doc, I size you up as a gent with brains. I got one piece of advice for you: get the hell away from the Cumberland Ranch and never come back again!"

The doctor flushed and his lean jaw thrust out.

"Although," he said, "I cannot pretend to be classed among those to whom physical fear is unknown, yet I wish to assure you, sir, that with me physical trepidation is not an overruling motive."

"Oh, hell!" groaned Buck Daniels. Then he explained more gently: "I don't say you're yellow. All I say is: this mess ain't one that you can straighten out—nor no other man can. Give it up, wash your hands, and git back to Elkhead. I dunno what Kate was thinkin' of to bring you out here!"

"The excellence of your intention," said the doctor, "I shall freely admit, though the assumption that difficulty in the essential problem would deter me from the analysis is an hypothesis which I cannot leave uncontested. In the vulgar, I may give you to understand that I am in this to stay!"

Buck Daniels started to speak, but thinking better of it, he shrugged his shoulders and sat back, resigned.

"Well," he said, "Kate brought you out here. Maybe she has a reason for it. What d'you want to know?"

"What connection," said the doctor, "have wild geese with a man, a horse, and a dog?"

"What in hell d'you know about a horse and a man and a dog—and wild geese?" inquired Buck in a strained voice.

"Rumor," said the doctor, "has been in this instance, unfortunately, my only teacher. But, sir, I have ascertained that Mr. Cumberland, his daughter, and you, sir, are all waiting for a certain thing to come to this ranch, and that thing I naturally assume to be a man."

"Doc," said the cow-puncher sarcastically, "there ain't no doubt you got a wonderful brain!"

"Mockery," pronounced the man of learning, "is a use of the mental powers which is both unworthy and barren and does not in this case advance the argument, which is: Who and what is this man for whom you wait?"

"He came," said Buck Daniels, "out of nowhere. That's all we know about who he is. What is he? I'll tell you easy: he's a gent that looks like a man, and walks like a man, and talks like a man—but he *ain't* a man."

"Ah," nodded the philosopher, "a crime of extraordinary magnitude has, perhaps, cut off this unfortunate fellow from communication with others of his kind. Is this the case?"

"It ain't," replied Buck. "Doc, tell me this: Can a wolf commit a crime?"

"Admitting this definition: that crime is the breaking of law, and that law is a force created by reason to control the rational, it may be granted that the acts of

the lower animals lie outside of categories framed according to ethical precepts. To answer your not incurious question: I believe that a wolf cannot commit a crime."

Buck Daniels sighed.

"D'you know, doc," he said gravely, "that you remind me of a side-hill goat?"

"Ah," murmured the man of learning, "is it possible? And what, Mr. Daniels, is the nature of a side-hill goat?"

"It's a goat that's got the legs of one side shorter than the legs on the other side, and the only way he can get to the top of a hill is to keep trottin' around and around the hill like a five per cent grade. He goes a mile to get ten feet higher."

"This fact"—said Byrne, and he rubbed his chin thoughtfully—"is not without interest, though I fail to perceive the relation between me and such a creature, unless, perhaps, there are biologic similarities of which I have at present no cognition."

"I didn't think you'd follow me," replied Buck with an equal gravity. "But you can lay to this, doc; this gent we're waitin' for ain't committed any more crimes than a wolf has."

"Ah, I see," murmured the doctor, "a man so near the brute that his enormities pass beyond—"

"Get this straight," said Buck, interrupting with a sternly pointed finger: "There ain't a kinder or a gentler man in the mountain desert than him. He's got a voice softer than Kate Cumberland's, which is some soft voice, and as for his heart—doc, I've seen him get off his horse to put a wounded rabbit out of its pain!"

A ring of awe came in the throat of Daniels as he repeated the incredible fact. He went on:

"If I was in trouble, I'd rather have him beside me than ten other men; if I was sick I'd rather have him than the ten best doctors in the world; if I wanted a pal that would die for them that done him good and go to hell to get them that done him bad, I'd choose him first, and there ain't none that comes second."

The panegyric was not a burst of imagination. Buck Daniels was speaking seriously, hunting for words, and if he used superlatives it was because he needed them.

"Extraordinary!" murmured the doctor, and he repeated the word in a louder tone. It was a rare word for him; in all his scholastic career and in all of his scientific investigations he had found occasion to use so strong a term not more than half a dozen times at the most. He went on cautiously, and his weak eyes blinked at Daniels: "And there is a relation between this man and a horse and a dog?"

Buck Daniels shuddered and his color changed.

"Listen!" he said. "I've talked enough. You ain't going to get another word out of me except this: doc, have a good sleep, get on your hoss to-morrow mornin', and beat it. Don't even wait for breakfast. Because, if you *do* wait, you may get a hand in this little hell of ours. You may be waiting, too!"

A sudden thought brought him to his feet. He stood over the doctor. "How many times," he thundered, "have you seen Kate Cumberland?"

"To-day, for the first time."

"Well," said Daniels, growling with relief, "you've seen her enough. I *know*." And he turned toward the door. "Unlock," he commanded. "I'm tired out—and sick—of talking about *him*."

But the doctor did not move.

"Nevertheless," he stated, "you will remain. There is something further which you know and which you will communicate to me."

Buck Daniels turned at the door; his face was not pleasant.

"While observing you as you talked with the girl," Byrne said, "it occurred to me that you were holding information from her. The exact nature of that information I cannot state, but it is reasonable to deduct that you could, at the present moment, name the place where the man for whom Mr. Cumberland and his daughter wait is now located."

Buck Daniels made no reply, but he returned to his chair and slumped heavily into it, staring at the little doctor. And Byrne realized with a thrill of pleasure that he was not afraid of death.

"I may further deduct," said the doctor, "that you will go in person to the place

where you know this man may be found and induce him to come to this ranch."

The silent anger of Daniels died away. He smiled, and at length he laughed without mirth.

"Doc," he said, "if you knew where there was a gun, would that make you want to put it up ag'in' your head and pull the trigger?"

But the doctor proceeded inexorably with his deductions: "Because you are aware, Mr. Daniels, that the presence of this man may save the life of Mr. Cumberland, a thought, to be sure, which might not be accepted by the medical fraternity, but which may without undue exaggeration devolve from the psychological situation in this house."

"Doc," said Daniels huskily, "you talk straight, and you act straight, and I think you *are* straight, so I'll take off the bridle and talk free. I know where Whistling Dan is—just about. But if I was to go to him and bring him here, I'd bust the heart of Kate Cumberland. D'you understand?" His voice lowered with an intense emotion. "I've thought it out sidewise and backward. It's Kate or old Joe. Which is the most important?"

The doctor straightened in the chair, polished his glasses, and peered once more at the cow-puncher.

"You are quite sure, also, that the return of this man, this strange wanderer, might help Mr. Cumberland back to health?"

"I am, all right. He's sure wrapped up in Whistlin' Dan."

"What is the nature of their relations? What makes him so oddly dependent upon the other?"

"I dunno, doc. It's got us all fooled. When Dan is here it seems like old Cumberland jest nacherally lives on the things Dan does and hears and sees. We've seen Cumberland prick up his ears the minute Dan comes into the room and show life. Sometimes Dan sits with him and tells him what he's been doin'—maybe it ain't any more than how the sky looks that day, or about the feel of the wind—but Joe sits with his eyes dreamin', like a little kid hearin' fairy stories. Kate says it's been that way since her dad first brought Dan in off'n the range. He's been sort of necessary to old Joe—almost like air to breathe. I tell you, it's jest a picture to see them two together."

"Very odd, very odd," brooded the doctor, frowning, "but this seems to be an odd place and an odd set of people. You've no real idea why Dan left the ranch?"

"Ask the wild geese," said Buck bitterly. He added: "Maybe you'd better ask Dan's black hoss, or his dog Bart. They'd know better 'n anything else."

"But what has the man been doing since he left? Have you any idea?"

"Get a little chatter, now and then, of a gent that's rid into a town on a black hoss, prettier 'n anything that was ever seen before.

"It's all pretty much the same, what news we get. Mostly I guess he jest wanders around doin' no harm to nobody. But once in a while somebody sicks a dog on Bart, and Bart jest nacherally chaws that dog in two. Then the owner of the dog may start a fight, and Dan drops him and rides on."

"With a trail of dead men behind him?" cried the doctor, hunching his shoulders as if to shake off a chill.

"Dead? Nope. You don't have to shoot to kill when you can handle a gun the way Dan does. Nope, he jest wings 'em. Plants a chunk of lead in a shoulder or an arm or a leg. That's all. They ain't no love of blood in Dan—except—"

"Well?"

"Doc," said Buck with a shudder, "I ain't goin' to talk about the exceptions. Mostly the news we gets of Dan is about troubles he's had. But sometimes we hear of gents he's helped out when they was sick, and things like that. They ain't nobody like Dan when a gent is down sick, I'll tell a man!"

The doctor sighed. He said:

"And do I understand you to say that the girl and this man—Whistling Dan, as you call him—are intimately and sentimentally related?"

"She loves him," said Daniels slowly. "She loves the ground he walks on and the places where he's been."

"But, sir, it would seem probable from your own reasoning, that the return of the man, in this case, will not be unwelcome to her."

"Reason?" broke out Daniels bitterly. "What the hell has reason got to do with Whistling Dan? Man, man! if Barry was to come back d'you suppose he'd remember that he'd once told Kate he loved her? Doc, I know him as near as any man can know him. I tell you, he thinks no more of her than—than the wild geese think of her. If old Joe dies because Dan is away—well, Cumberland is an old man, anyway. But how could I stand to see Barry pass Kate by with an empty eye, the way he'd do if he'd come back? I'd want to kill him, and I'd get bumped off tryin' it, like as not. And what would it do to Kate? It 'd kill her, doc, as sure as you're born."

"Your assumption being," murmured the doctor, "that if she never sees the man again she will eventually forget him."

"D'you forget a knife that's sticking into you? No, she won't forget him. But maybe after a while she'll be able to stand thinkin' about him. She'll get used to the hurt. She'll be able to talk and laugh the way she used to. Oh, doc, if you could of seen her as I've seen her in the old days—"

"When the man was with her?" cut in the doctor.

Buck Daniels caught his breath.

"Damn your eternal soul, doc!" he said softly.

And for a time neither of them spoke. Whatever went on in the mind of Daniels, it was something that contorted his face. As for Byrne, he was trying to match fact and possibility, and he was finding a large gap between the two; for he tried to visualize the man whose presence had been food to old Joe Cumberland, and whose absence had taken the oil from the lamp so that the flame now flickered dimly, nearly out. But he could build no such picture. He could merely draw together a vague abstraction of a man to whom the storm and the wild geese who ride the storm had meaning and relationship. The logic which h loved was breaking to pieces in the hands of Randall Byrne.

Silence, after all, is only a name, never a fact. There are noises in the most absolute quiet. If there is not even the sound of the cricket or the wind, if there are not even ghost whispers in the house, there is the sigh of one's own breathing, and in those moments of deadly waiting the beat of the heart may be as loud and as awful as the rattle of the death-march.

Between the doctor and the cow-puncher such a silence began. Buck Daniels wanted nothing more in the world than to be out of that room, but the eye of the doctor held him, unwilling. And there began once more that eternal waiting, waiting, waiting, which was the horror of the place, until the faint creakings through the windshaken house took on the meaning of footsteps stalking down the hall and pausing at the door, and there was the hushing breath of one who listened and smiled to himself! Now the doctor became aware that the eye of Buck Daniels was widening, brightening; it was as if the mind of the big man were giving way in the strain. His face blanched. Even the lips had no color, and they moved, gibberingly.

"Listen!" he said.

"It is the wind," answered the doctor, but his voice was hardly audible.

"Listen!" commanded Daniels again.

The doctor could hear it then. It was a pulse of sound obscure as the thudding of his heart. But it was a human sound and it made his throat close up tightly, as if a hand were settling around his windpipe. Buck Daniels rose from his chair; that half-mad, half-listening look was still in his eyes—behind his eyes. Staring at him, the doctor understood, intimately, how men can throw their lives away gloriously in battle, fighting for an idea; or how they can commit secret and foul murder. Yet he was more afraid of that pulse of sound than of the face of Buck Daniels. He, also, was rising from his chair, and when Daniels stalked to the side door of the room and leaned there, the doctor followed.

Then they could hear it clearly. There was a note of music in the voice; it was a woman weeping in that room where the chain lay on the floor, coiled loosely like a snake. Buck Daniels straightened and

moved away from the door. He began to laugh, guarding it so that not a whisper could break outside the room, and his silent laughter was the most horrible thing the doctor had ever seen. It was only for a moment. The hysteria passed and left the big man shaking like a dead leaf.

"Doc," he said, "I can't stand it no longer. I'm going out and try to get him back here. And God forgive me for it."

He left the room, slamming the door behind him, and then he stamped down the hall as if he were trying to make a companion out of his noise. Dr. Randall Byrne sat down to put his thoughts in order. He began at the following point: "The physical fact is not; only the immaterial is." But before he had carried very far his deductions from this premise, he caught the neighing of a horse near the house; so he went to the window and threw it open. At the same time he heard the rattle of galloping hoofs and then he saw a horseman riding furiously into the heart of the wind. Almost at once the rider was lost from sight.

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 Ant and the Sparrow

by Maxwell Smith

ROGERS wished he could make up his mind about Emolyn — whether he would be able to get along without her—or with her! Funny he hadn't thought of her in this way until now. They had been such good pals all along. Why the devil— He scowled as he studied her in the light from the rose-tinted clusters among the vines on the roof-garden trellis.

Emolyn smiled questioningly at his scowl. Then she glanced about, her eyes resting on folks here and there, in that tantalizing way she had. You always knew when Emolyn looked your way, but the instant you turned her gaze flitted elsewhere. When you turned abruptly the second time, hoping to catch her interest again in you, it was not. Emolyn liked attention; and she liked to annoy men that way.

The incipient flirtation she provoked—and ignored instantly—always had amused Rogers. It tickled one's vanity to be with a girl who compelled attention—not blatantly but because she was worth it.

Not plump, not thin, with her five feet five; well-modulated both in voice and dress; affecting just the proper shades and the necessary dash of color—no more. That was Emolyn!

Yet, though for a year he had been so very much in her company, he never had thought that he was in love with her; not until now. He ruminated on that.

Emolyn was all right to play round with,

as they had played, but wasn't she rather shallow, superficial?

Unconsciously he found himself reaching for refutation of that idea. She seemed artificial because—well, because she moved in what was ninety per cent an artificial world. Their path always had steered into the gayer places; he always had chosen the lighter plays, never the drama with its problems. She, of course, had judged all that as indicative of his mood and had fallen in with it.

It was his own fault that he never had seen an evidence in her of deeper, more serious interest in the weightier affairs of life. She was fond of him—he knew that—and therefore sought to please him with consistent gaiety.

Yes; it was his own fault. Now he was beset by this fear of loneliness without Emolyn—he blamed himself for never having sounded her depths.

On an impulse he did so, picking at random the handiest weapon. He bemoaned the fate of the Armenians.

Emolyn tugged the silken cord of the shaded electric candle. She was surprised, but he ascribed that to the unexpectedness of his remark; he wasn't given to discussing such things.

"The Armenians—" She echoed it as she might have repeated an inquiry as to whether she preferred coffee dripped or percolated.

Rogers smiled. She believed he was kidding, and no wonder.

"The Armenians—" Her puzzled eyes brightened. "Oh, yes." She had the air of making a discovery. "The Turks kill them, don't they?"

Rogers's smile sickened. He searched her face. Was she kidding him?

"Yes." He was disappointed. "The Turks—kill them." His tone was pitched to leave her an opening.

Emolyn snapped on the light.

"Why bother about that, Harry? It—it's all so far away!" She leaned forward, pouting. "Are you going to take me Friday to—"

"Don't you ever think of what's going on in the world?" he interrupted with a trace of impatience. Didn't she suppose that he ever had anything besides the sort of thoughts that merge with the lights of Broadway? Couldn't she see that his habitual lightheartedness when with her had been inspired by her delightful presence; that it was a relaxation for his nerves and brain?

He hadn't told her that he was going to South America on an engineering job to stay at least six months. That was what had brought him to a standstill about Emolyn, uncertain whether he would miss her too much.

"Don't you ever think of what's going on in the world?" he repeated.

Emolyn laughed.

"Of course I do, silly. How can any one help it as long as they keep on filling the newspapers with—with all the tragedy they can find?"

That wasn't terribly promising. Still, she noticed that there was a wealth of tragedy. Rogers nodded, more hopeful.

"What, for example, impressed you today out of all the—the stuff in the newspapers? Or maybe"—he knew that Emolyn had been to a matinée; to dinner and a show with him—"maybe you haven't read to-day's papers?"

"Oh, yes. I always do. I looked them over while I was dressing."

Rogers groaned mentally. But he didn't give up.

"And what," he asked again, "impressed you among the day's news?"

That fleeting suggestion of a sigh. Emolyn's threadlike brows arched.

"I know!" She came within the candle glow and it enriched the radiance of the bronze hair set off by the single silver ornament and the small hat.

Rogers caught the glint in her eyes and her earnestness. His own half shut, he nodded slightly, as one nods a thought. He prepared to put aside the doubt that had been stealing over him regarding Emolyn.

"Yes?" He coached her softly and was glad that the orchestra had become silent. He wished the merriment at that table over there would cease. He wanted to enjoy to the full this lifting of the curtain from Emolyn's real self.

"I know!" Her hand brushed the cloth

to rest with the shapely forefinger pointing at him. "Did you see about the man in St. Louis who fell from an eight-story window, landed in an upholstered chair, and was arrested for disorderly conduct?" She laughed. "Arrested after falling eight stories—think of it!"

Something—some cog in Rogers slackened. He sagged inside as though he had run down. He decided that he was not in love with Emolyn. The decision brought regret. He had wanted to be. He did not listen as she chattered on. She was just a doll-baby; and when a girl attains that—is it—distinction, it only remains to consider the interior of a doll's head!

Emolyn put aside the man who had been arrested when according to all the dope on past performances he was due in heaven or elsewhere.

"It's a gorgeous night, Harry," she suggested. "Let's motor out the drive."

He touched Emolyn's hand. It was too bad—

"You're an awful gloom to-night," she chided.

He replaced the preoccupied somberness with a grin that wasn't true.

"Yes," he said, "let's motor. I am—blue."

The night before, a week before, any time during their acquaintance he would have enjoyed nothing more than that ride with the moon bright on the Hudson. He was sorry that he had plumbed her for a more serious side. He should have taken her as she was. Hadn't she always pleased him with that same humor? Why hadn't he been content?

They stopped at an inn overlooking the river.

"Cheer up, Harry," she rallied him. "This isn't a funeral."

He dug up a smile.

"No. It's a—wake!"

Emolyn frowned becomingly. She didn't get him.

"How do you mean?"

"Oh," he shrugged; "nothing. Just kidding myself."

He glanced away from her. When she looked like that you'd actually think there was something under the surface — some concern about the existence of the other half. He had been crazy to imagine she had any.

Rogers steered the conversation back to the usual airy, vapid channels. Emolyn smiled approvingly, commented that he seemed more natural when cheered up, and played back at him with her quick light wit.

They simply dallied over the food. He tried to forget what she lacked and to feel the pleasurable glow of her company. That led him to fish again for her soul—the moonlight on the water got him.

"It—it's wonderful, isn't it, Em?" he bromided, his arm sweeping out toward the impressive silhouette of a battle-ship, the rippling reflections of half a dozen rangy destroyers, a couple of dumpy freighters, anchored in the brightly sheened stream. Some of the homesickness he would begin to feel in another week when he sailed out through the Narrows came into his tone: "It sort of gets to you, doesn't it—all this—" He gestured again along the river, then back at the city.

Emolyn ceased her babbling. She followed his motioning arm.

"Ye-es," she conceded; "it does rather—"

He saw that her eyes were softened and experienced another jump of hope. Impulsively he struck to take advantage of her mood.

"I'm going to miss all this," he said abruptly.

She turned to him, puzzled. "Miss it?"

"Yes," he went on with the plunge. "I'm going to South America next week."

"Harry!" Her lips and eyes, rounded in what might have been an expression of hurt, caused his pulse to increase three beats. "Why have you kept it such a—secret?"

At that moment Rogers was sure he felt like a hound. Hadn't he trifled shamefully with Emolyn? Poor kid! And now it had come to the scratch he discovered that she couldn't fit into his scheme as a permanent fixture.

"I didn't, Em," he denied, but he was a little shamefaced as he gave her the details of his trip.

"I'm glad, of course, Harry—it's a big step ahead for you. But," she was soberly sincere, "I will miss you terribly."

Rogers frowned at the table-top. He couldn't meet her eyes just then. He was afraid of what might be in them.

An ant climbing inquisitively over the cloth caught his gaze. Emolyn also watched the insect attack a lump of sugar. Presently it detached a fragment with its powerful mandibles and started off with the burden.

Absently Rogers inverted a plate over the ant. It was an idle action. He wasn't thinking of it but of Emolyn.

"Oh!" Her exclamation and her hand closing on his which rested on the imprisoning plate, startled him from his shadowy reverie. A tinkle of delight ran through him as she shoved his hand away. His heart spurted again at her look as she lifted the plate. "Why did you do that, Harry?" she rebuked. "Don't you see the poor little thing is taking the sugar home to—to feed its babies!"

Rogers glanced back at her from the ant, tracking with fast feet for the precise spot at which it had arrived over the table edge.

Here was an unexpected revelation of that other side of her nature for which he had probed in vain. There *was* something beneath the varnish of frivolity and pleasure.

Without a thought he would have left that harmless little creature cooped under that plate for a waiter to swat—or swatted it himself! But she—Emolyn, whom he had just decided was without real feelings—

Rogers pushed the cloth against the table-leg to save the ant a few score steps on its journey to the floor. He was grateful to that ant for the insight it had given him to Emolyn.

He perceived now why she hadn't responded to his lead about the Armenians—she did not parade her tenderness of heart. It had to be aroused spontaneously—as his cruelty to the ant had aroused it. He warmed again to Emolyn and beat toward her.

"Thanks, Emolyn—I guess I didn't think that that little jigger had a home and all that." He smiled happily. This was the real Emolyn, all right!

She also smiled, then grimaced. "I was afraid you were going to kill it," she said, and shivered prettily. "Look!" She pointed to a tug with a string of barges slipping stealthily down the river. "Isn't it—solemn?"

Rogers laughed softly. There was the spirit. He came within an ace of proposing then and there. The newborn fear that she might reject him, deterred. If she did he would have a hesitancy about seeing her again before he went away. Anything so intimate as a proposal and its refusal would erect a barrier of diffidence between them. No. He'd wait until the last minute before—ah, testing his fate with this wonderful girl at whom he had been privileged to have a peep.

II.

THE day before his sailing Rogers called for Emolyn at her apartment. The last few days had been great.

They had made the rounds of all their haunts together—motoring out over Long Island, up Westchester way, across in Jersey, visited everywhere in the city in a whirlwind prima-donnalike grand farewell tour. And, though he had been vouchsafed no further glimpse of that inner character, he didn't care. He knew it was there.

Once he had attempted to draw her out again by driving the car dangerously close to a child. She had gasped and been startled, but had said nothing.

"Narrow escape for that youngster," he had remarked casually, seeking to stir her.

"Yes," she had nodded. That was all, and he had attributed her silence to a delicacy against voicing what he might have construed as a charge that he was careless. He appreciated that.

As she herself admitted him to the apartment, Rogers was alternately elated and downcast. If Emolyn said yes, these coming months in a foreign land wouldn't be nearly so lonesome. She might even agree to rush down to the Municipal Building for

a license and to the Little Church! He'd urge that. Since it was a city water-works job he was going on she could accompany him to South America. But if she said no—there was the prospect that provoked the stabbing seconds of downheartedness—he must be lonelier than ever.

"Almost time for you to kiss good-by to old New York," she jollied him. "Better have a last look at the park."

"Uhuh," he said gloomily, and followed her into the sitting-room. He slumped into a window-seat and she settled near him.

"I'd hate to leave it," said Emolyn.

He glanced at her, his brows heavy. Her remark wasn't encouraging from his viewpoint.

"You have been away, haven't you—you were abroad?" he inquired naively.

"For two years," she nodded. "That's why I stay so close."

"Wouldn't you"—Rogers's hand edged toward hers on the window-sill—"wouldn't you like to go abroad again? Not for so long, perhaps, but—"

"Some day," she laughed, "maybe I will, but— Gracious!" She started up. "What's that?"

From the alcove there sounded a *thrum-thrumming* and a frantic scratching. Rogers jumped to his feet and stood listening. She shrank away from the draperies which obscured half the alcove.

"See—see what it is, Harry," she begged.

He checked an instinctive movement to take hold of her, to protect her. Of course he had to investigate the source of the noise which after a moment of stillness had grown more clamorous.

"Can't be anything serious." He touched her arm in passing to reassure her. Here was another of those womanly qualities that he had missed because he never before had seen occasion for it to sway her—timidity and dependence. He liked her in that appealing rôle, her hands at her bosom, alarm in the countenance that looked to him for help.

The noise stopped as Rogers crushed the portière aside and examined the alcove. He could see nothing to account for the hubbub.

"Not a thing here," he was saying when it broke out afresh and drew his eyes to the window. He laughed and called her.

"Come see what it is, Em. You'd never think it could make such a racket."

Gingerly she approached to look at the sparrow that had worked its way through a hole in the corner of the window screen and could not escape.

Expectantly Rogers waited for her cry of sympathy. He was just a shade disappointed when all she said was to hurry and let the bird out. He explained that away by her agitation and went after the captive.

Instead of opening the screen he caught the sparrow. With it panting in his hand, its beady eyes twitching, he turned to Emolyn.

"Cute, isn't he? See, Em," he joked, "he's more scared than you were a minute ago."

Emolyn didn't answer, but of a sudden her eyes sparkled. She touched the feathered head with a finger-tip.

Rogers grinned. Her tenderness was an inspiration! Took a situation like this—a creature in distress; an ant or a sparrow, it didn't matter—to shake Emolyn out of that false shell which she chose to wear over her true self. He chirped soothingly to the sparrow and moved to unfasten the screen.

"Wait—wait!" Emolyn clapped her hands and gave an ecstatic jump. Her face beamed. "Wait, Harry. Don't let it go for a minute."

She whirled from the room.

Gently petting the sparrow, Rogers smiled indulgently. Foolish girl. Couldn't she tell that the bird was too frightened to eat the crumbs she had gone to fetch? He hoped she would accede to his program and visit the Little Church—

His thoughts halted with a jar and he blinked. Emolyn was standing before him, laughing. He blinked again, trying to convince himself that he was seeing 'em, although the country was dry. Unable to do that, he admitted the fact that Emolyn had a snake in her hands—a sleepy, slinky reptile a good two feet long.

"What—what—" he stammered as she thrust the snake close to the sparrow.

"Look, Harry—look!" she cried suddenly. "See how Honey hypnotizes it! Loose your fingers—not too much—and see if it's too scared to fly! Don't let it get away." She stamped her foot and added: "We'll watch Honey hypnotize it and have it for dinner!"

Rogers collected his staggered senses. He ducked as though the fragments of an idol, painstakingly reared, were clattering down on his head! He did not let the sparrow get away—not till he had opened the screen.

"You're mean," she pouted. She cuddled the snake at her throat. "Why did you cheat Honey out of a treat like that? It would have been fun to watch—"

"I guess so," interrupted Rogers wearily. Emolyn was smashed forever! But what in the name of Heaven kind of a nature had she anyhow? How could this jibe with her rescue of the ant? He went after enlightenment.

"Don't you suppose"—he was half-sardonic, half-whimsical—"that bird may have a home—like the ant—and babies!"

"Like the ant?" She was perplexed as she raised her face from cooing a promise to go buy a bird for Honey. "What are you talking about? Oh," she laughed, "I remember. What's the ant got to do with it?"

Rogers stared. He couldn't understand.

"Why—why—" He felt stupid, but he went on. "You spoke of its home and—and—"

"Foolish!" She was laughing at him now. "I was just talking. I thought you intended to kill it and"—she patted a nest in a cushion for the snake—"it's horrible to hear them scrunch, isn't it?"

Rogers took a long, long breath.

"I—guess so," he said. "Let's go out."

III.

GOING home late on that last night, Emolyn leaned against him in the dimness of the cab. Her hand closed over his.

"I'm sorry as sorry can be that you're going away, Harry," she declared. "But I'm glad of one thing that I'll always remember about you."

Rogers had another twinge of conscience. He was a cad to go like this after having carried on with her as he had all that time. Perhaps it would be only honorable.

"What's—that?" he asked jerkily.

"When you come back we can be pals again, because"—she squeezed his hand—"because you've always kept away from—from mushiness and never have asked me to marry you!"

"Heaven forbid!" said Rogers, and he chuckled at the knowledge that she didn't comprehend just how much he meant it!

WELL, THEN—

WELL, then—if you want them—
I'm sending your letters;
I'm sending your ring
And your picture, and—yes,
I'm sending your glove,
And the curl that you gave me,
And promising quite to forget your address.
But—
In my heart there burns a flame
That always will be just the same.
I cannot send you back my love,
Nor all the days I'm thinking of;
And oh, a world of heaven this is—
For you can't take back your kisses!

Dixie Willson

The Ghost Road

by George Washington Ogden

Author of "The Bondboy," "The Holy Scare," "The Duke of Chimney Butte," etc.

PRECEDING CHAPTERS BRIEFLY RETOLD

A BLIGHT rested over the town of Vinland, which showed in sterile farms, rotting houses, shiftless humans. It was caused by an incubus of debt, a load which now was greater than the entire wealth of Clearwater County. Nearly fifty years before, at the rainbow promises of glib-tongued strangers, the citizens of the county had sunk one hundred thousand dollars in a railroad, the "Palestine and Gulf," which was to bring to each and every one uncounted fortune; they had given a bond for the amount, and now, after many years, all they could point to was a few yards of unused track, "the Ghost Road," and hanging over them, like a threatening sword, the judgment of the Federal Court. They had long fought this judgment; blood had been spilled; a man had died; the very name of "deputy marshal" was anathema to the people of Vinland. The very judges sought election knowing that such honor carried with it a practical certainty of jail; as it was, at the coming of a deputy the word went forth, and the judge or judges became the hunted. But the county fought a losing battle; in time they would have to pay—to satisfy the bondholders.

And so, when "Thomas Calvert, of Philadelphia," arrived in Vinland what more natural than to suspect him? Left in a driving rainstorm by his wily driver, he sought refuge in the cabin of one Kindred and his wife, from which after a midnight encounter with their half-human son, Rex, he escaped with his life. Then, seeking Judge Richardson, he stumbled upon his house, met his daughter and, at her request, explained his mission.

"If you're not a deputy marshal, what are you?" she demanded.

"Miss Richardson, I am the bondholder," he replied.

CHAPTER VI.

A FRIEND AND ALLY.

IF Calvert had announced himself as judge of the Federal Court, and all of his arms and minions for reaching out and enforcing his decrees, the effect would not have been more startling to the young woman before him, with the sun glinting on the thousand jewels of her hair. She drew back from him, her white face expressive of the utmost aversion, her slender body stiffening like a frozen willow.

"You've come—you've come—come to take everything!" she said, choking on the emotion which all but overwhelmed her.

"I've come to offer everything, to take nothing," he assured her simply, his voice so compassionate that it did not seem possible a doubt of his sincerity of purpose could be admitted even to her prejudiced mind. But she had been schooled too long in distrust and suspicion of all connected with this overbearing burden, this old injustice, to accept any man on his word.

"It's a poor pretense to make to get what you came after," she said, the swift color of anger rushing to her face.

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for September 11.

"If I could see Judge Richardson for a few moments I could prove it's no pretense."

"Of course, if you could see Judge Richardson!" She tossed her head in the expression of high disdain so expressive that no further words were needed. She believed more truly than ever that he was indeed a deputy now.

"I muddle it all up; I make you more suspicious every time I open my mouth," he sighed.

"The bondholder's name is not Calvert," she said, giving him such a look of scorn as she might have given a thief caught in attempt to drive away her cow.

"It isn't the name you've been bred to hate, I know—I'm lucky in that, at least. The troublesome Clearwater bond case has come down to the third generation, Miss Richardson. Daniel Meadows, my grandfather, was the unfortunate man who bought the bonds from the projectors of the railroad that never was built—the ghost road, they tell me you call it here. He wore his life out fighting to collect interest, and principal finally, from you folks down here, passing the trouble on to his son, my uncle, John Adams Meadows, the name best known and hated in Clearwater County today, I suppose.

"I am the sole inheritor of this vexatious bundle of papers and endless contest, but I'm not going to wear out my heart carrying on the fight as they wore out theirs. I've come here to offer a settlement out of court, to cut the strings and brush away the cobwebs of years and legal delays and entanglements, and deal man to man. Surely it would be worth something to Clearwater County to have this old curse lifted and let the sunlight in again."

She was listening intently, her lips half open as she had stood in her fright and surprise at seeing him, the morning-glory bloom crushed in her fingers, a light of eagerness glowing in her eyes.

"If it could be done, if it could be done!" said she.

"So I haven't come to ask much," said he with hopeful eagerness, "but to give a great deal. I haven't got a thing in the world outside of this old claim; I've been brought up to expect it as my fortune on the great day of settlement, but I'm not going to put a shadow on my life in the best years of it to worry through the delays and vexations of this bitter old fight."

She came a little nearer, her hand held out in speaking expression of sympathy, her eyes glowing with the greatest hope that ever kindled in her life. It seemed as if she would touch him, to make certain that he was a palpable man, and not an apparition come out of the dismal woods to plague her with this seemingly impossible dream.

"What are you going to offer, Mr. Calvert?" she asked, her voice almost a whisper.

"I'd like to lay it all before Judge Richardson," he replied, not meaning to be evasive, but appearing suspiciously so.

She turned a swift glance of distrust upon him like a rebuke for violation of her confidence, the eager light fading in her eyes.

"Oh, I'm afraid you're only a deputy!" she said.

"I'm not a deputy, Miss Richardson," he assured her, plainly hurt by her distrust after imposing so much confidence in her. He opened the little brown bag that he had clung to with the tenacity of life itself when he fled Kindred's house, and drew forth a packet of papers, browned with age, broken in the fold. He slipped the elastic band that bound them, unfolded one, put it in her hand.

"Here are the bonds—at least, part of them, the rest are in this bag. Is this sufficient proof of my identity and guarantee of my intention?"

She took with trembling hand the paper that he offered. She never had seen a bond before, but there was no doubting the genuineness of this.

"You are the bondholder!" she said, lifting her luminous brown eyes.

"I am the black beast," said he.

"You'll take everything we've got—you'll take everything!"

"If the United States government couldn't take anything in all these years of trying, it isn't likely that one lone man can take everything, Miss Richardson."

"The debt amounts to more than half a million dollars now—more than every-

thing in the county would bring if it was put up and sold."

"I don't doubt it," he agreed, remembering the brush-grown fields along the road.

"Put them away—quick!" she whispered, giving him back the bond. "Somebody's coming. Don't let him know, don't let anybody know you're the bondholder. If they found it out they'd—they're so bitter, they hate the bonds and everybody connected with them, so they might—"

"Yes, I suppose they would," said he, rather sadly, putting the papers back in the little bag. "I'll let them keep on suspecting I'm a marshal till I can see Judge Richardson and get the proper introduction."

"It will be the safest thing for you, Mr. Calvert. You can't understand the feeling of the people over the bonded debt—they feel as if they'd been robbed."

"They're only *likely* to shoot me if they think I'm a marshal, sure to if they learn the truth." He smiled as he said this, evidently not greatly disturbed by the prospect of becoming a target for other guns than Kindred's.

"You can pretend you've come here to fish; hundreds of people do," she suggested.

"Pretend, or fish?"

"Both," said she, answering his smile.

The horseman, at whose sight she had urged Calvert to conceal the bonds, came riding into the premises after the lazy way of that country, where it is the exception for anybody to dismount at the gate when making only a passing call. As he rode round the house Miss Richardson went to the driveway edge to greet him, probably to keep him from riding up to the kitchen porch across the spongy lawn.

"Good morning, Miss Susie; good morning, good morning," he hailed with a cheerful voice, but an abstracted manner, keeping his eyes meanwhile on the bareheaded, mud-spattered stranger.

She returned his salutation, addressing him as Mr. Hunter, he reining up abruptly—he had kept his horse in a canter to the last rod—bending over his high saddle-horn to shake hands.

He was a lean, spare man of not more than thirty, his narrow face sharpened under the shadow of a broad-rimmed, black hat, which he wore with high crown uncreased and undented. He wore a vest, slovenly unbuttoned, a leather watch-chain looped through the button-hole, restraining it from flapping as he rode.

He was booted and spurred like a cowboy, and there was a certain dark, aloof dignity about him which proclaimed caste, a provincial nobility, a social standing, which held outlanders off as at the edge of a forbidden circle.

This man Hunter was not a good actor. In spite of his volubility, and light chatter on nothing in particular, compliments falling around the young lady's feet like leaves from a dying rose, he kept turning his eyes to watch Calvert, and it was as plain as the hair on his horse that he was being pulled nearly out of his saddle by curiosity to know what a man in that state was doing there.

Whether out of politeness, pity or diplomacy, Calvert could not determine from her face, Miss Susie turned to him directly.

"This is Mr. Calvert, Mr. Hunter; Mr. Hunter, Mr. Calvert. Mr. Calvert is the gentleman Joe Tager left in the woods yesterday evening when the storm was coming up."

This she said in the manner of dismissing something that needed no further explanation. It was evident to Calvert that Hunter knew that story, as all the county with telephone connections must know it by now. Hunter acknowledged the presentation by a nod and word, not offering his hand. Calvert made no warmer approach, standing off in what dignity his rather disreputable appearance could command.

"Mr. Calvert got lost in the woods last night and was out in the storm. I guess he had quite an adventure of it," she said.

"It was quite a considerable of a storm for this time of the year," said Hunter, in that same detached, abstracted manner as at first, his eyes bent on the ground. Then, suddenly looking at Calvert with a keen, cold inquiry in his unfriendly eyes: "Goin' on over to the springs?"

"Yes, I've heard the fishing is good over there."

"A good many come in here fishin', but I don't know what they ketch," Hunter said.

"Well, it's a free country; a man can come and go in it as much as he pleases, I guess."

"I was beginning to think it wasn't," Calvert told him, doubtfully.

"Your ma better, Miss Susie?"

"Just about the same, Mr. Hunter."

"Too bad, too bad, Miss Susie—it shorely is too bad!" Hunter roved his eyes around the pasture and woodlands as if he looked for stray cattle, his thoughts not within miles of his words. For he was a very poor actor, indeed. He looked again at Calvert with that quick turning of the eyes, as if he expected to surprise his secret out of him and take him as a traitor and spy.

"Goin' right on over to the springs this mornin'?"

"I've asked him to stop for some breakfast," Miss Susie interposed, with ready and cheerful word; "it's a long walk from here to the springs."

"Yes, it is a quite a considerable of a little jump. Anything I can do for you this mornin', Miss Susie?"

"Not a thing, thank you, Mr. Hunter."

"Then I guess I'll be rackin' on."

But he didn't rack on right then, nor until he had expended a lot more compliments, all of which she accepted with such a light of good humor and pleasure in her face that it would have called for a sharper man than Mr. Hunter appeared to be to read whether she was bored or entertained. He got himself away at last, and with his going she turned to Calvert, a comical little smile of apology and vexation wrinkling the corners of her pretty eyes.

"Mr. Hunter is as slow as Job's afflictions," she said.

"Or the Clearwater County bond case," he suggested.

"If you want to wash," she suggested, "there's the basin—the towel's behind the door. I'm afraid it's a little too early for you to see mother, and there isn't any particular need, anyway—I'll tell her about you."

When Calvert had refreshed his appearance he presented himself at the kitchen door, out of which the sweet scent of frying ham came streaming. Miss Susie nodded from the stove that he was to enter, and nodded again when he paused at a little table where she had laid his plate.

"It *is* a slow case—as slow as doom," she said, answering his last suggestion.

"It's a second Jarndyce and Jarndyce," he replied, going on with the conversation as if it had not been broken at all.

"Men have grown old fighting it here, and I don't know how many Federal judges have ruled in the case," she said. "Yes, it's like Jarndyce and Jarndyce—it ruins people and breaks their hearts, and makes the young old before their day."

"The end is coming," he said, moving his chair nearer as she put down the platter of ham and eggs.

"It's been the ruination of this county, a county as big as some of the little pink and yellow States you've got back East. Nobody's ever got anything out of it."

"But the lawyers."

"And the deputies that come here on fees and mileage looking for the county judges."

"You know all about the system," he said, smiling across at her.

"I ought to; I've been hearing about it all my life. Father's been a county judge sixteen years—and has spent nearly half of them in jail. It's breaking him, heart and soul. Oh, if there only was a way out of it for us all, Mr. Calvert!"

"There is a way," he said, in firm confidence. "Our feet are entering the path to a new happiness this very hour."

She looked at him strangely one moment, her lips open, her face bright as one who has caught the fragment of some dear melody.

"You must help me in it; I'll rely on you to help me," he pursued, lifting his earnest eyes to her face.

"A new happiness," she repeated, as if the words sounded with a strange gladness in her ears. "I hope the way is open to it, Mr. Calvert, and that there'll be no trees blown down across your road, or floods in the streams to stop you."

"Stop us," he amended, gravely as before.

Miss Susie was as fresh and fair as a hollyhock in her white lawn dress, which had a spray of pink running through it,

warming it to the wholesome fairness of her face.

She sat at the table with him, pouring his coffee with hospitable hand, her face glowing with the hope of the new road to happiness which he had come to blaze for her feet. The door leading out of the kitchen into the rest of the house was closed. Calvert wondered whether there were other eyes watching him, whether even Judge Richardson himself might be behind that door.

When he was leaving, Calvert's fair hostess presented him with a straw hat such as a fisherman might have worn, but an unlikely piece of headgear for a bondholder, in truth. It was a rather old and lop-brimmed hat, and Miss Susie held it up, her strong, useful hand in the crown, surveying it over with a humorous twinkle in her agate-brown eyes.

"Deputies come here trying to fool us with hats like this," she said.

"I hope it isn't all that remains of the last one," he told her.

"No, the last one came without a hat," she replied. Although she said it lightly, Calvert felt that a little distrust of him was expressed in the jest, and bent his head, as if he had been rebuked.

"I don't believe I could make anybody else believe I'm even a deputy," he sighed.

"You brought it on yourself," she reminded him. "I don't believe you are, but you must try hard to act suspiciously and make other people believe it—it will be the safest thing you can do."

"I'll do whatever you suggest, Miss Richardson, counting on it that you believe in me and the sincerity of my purpose and are going to help me."

"I do believe you, Mr. Calvert, and I'll do my best to help you lift this ancient curse from this home of mine, and a thousand others in this county."

"Thank you, Miss Richardson."

"I don't know when father will see you—it may be to-morrow, it may be not for several days. Just go to the hotel and wait. Don't drop a hint of your business there, don't leave those papers around where anybody can see them—for there'll be somebody trying to find out what's in that bag—they're very, very curious over at the springs."

"I'll take your advice in every particular, and thank you sincerely for it, Miss Richardson."

"You can't imagine—I don't believe you do imagine a little bit—the danger you'd be in if anybody happened to see one of those papers, Mr. Calvert. There are a hundred men in this county who would think it a patriotic duty to kill you."

"Well," said he, slowly, his thoughts flashing back to last night, "it isn't so hard to imagine."

"There will be a lot of spies and self-appointed detectives watching every step you take, day and night," she warned, lifting her frank, honest eyes to his, "and especially you want to look out for Mr. Hunter."

"Who is Mr. Hunter? What is he?" Calvert inquired. "I thought you started to address him by some title once."

"He's one of the county judges. Now you see how much I believe in you," she replied.

"I thought he was somebody; I saw a pistol in his boot," said he, reflectively.

"He's one of the old school that believes in pistols; he swears he'll die before he ever spends a day in jail. If you'd tried to arrest him, even said something that would have convinced him you are not what I know you to be, he'd have shot you down without a word. They say of him—I don't know how true it is—that he's got an unholy, horrible ambition to kill a man."

"A deputy preferred," said he, grimly, considering that she had been thinking of this all the time she had stood there chatting, bright, cheerful, and calm, beside that dark, suspicious horseman, not sure at that time but that the stranger might step forward any moment and precipitate a tragedy at the margin of her green lawn. He expressed his admiration for this cool courage in one feeling glance.

"Never speak of him as judge—you're not supposed to know," she warned.

"I'll hardly think of him as judge, Miss Richardson; thank you again for your confidence and promised help. You'll understand how much I trust and depend on you

when I tell you there's not another person in the world knows why I came to Clearwater County. If they were to knock me over and destroy the bonds, the thing would be ended for good. Nobody would know where to look for me."

A flush of pleasure at this proof of confidence rose in her face, spreading to her strong, white neck.

"Not even the Federal judge—you didn't tell him?" she asked.

"The Federal judge, last of all! I'd be afraid even to hint it to him—he might put *me* in jail for trying to take the historic case out of his hands."

She went with him to the gate to put him on the right road. At the point where he must turn again into the forest he looked back, waving his borrowed hat. She lifted her hand to him in farewell with a little motion of grace which seemed a good wish to carry with him on his way. Then she turned and ran back to the house, lightly, as if her feet were already on the path to new happiness.

CHAPTER VII.

BEAUTY BY THE BARREL.

CALVERT hoped to make his arrival at the springs inconspicuous, seek out Joe Tager's barn, where Miss Richardson assured him his baggage would be found, and get himself into more presentable raiment. He was in no haste upon his way, therefore, along the forest road, the ardent sun drawing hot vapors from the ground.

The country was fairly well inhabited along this road, but all of the houses and fields had the aspect of half-abandonment so sadly characteristic of that land.

Many of the degenerate homesteads Calvert passed without indication of being seen, without even a dog lifting its head from its sleep in the sun of the weedy dooryard to bark, but he felt that he was watched by unseen eyes from the chinks of every log hut, the window of every rattle-plank box cabin.

In some instances lean, shaggy-haired men came and stood at the fence, children around their legs, watching him go by with surly curiosity. Some of them returned his greeting, more of them ignored it with blank faces and cold, searching eyes. Why this enmity should pursue one supposed to be a deputy United States marshal, or even a genuine deputy, Calvert was at a loss to understand quite clearly yet.

Here these people were, hanging on without spirit of pride or warmth of affection, it seemed, to their decaying, ruinous houses and brush-grown fields, waiting only the execution of the suspended judgment against the county and all within it to surrender everything to the cursed and hated bondholder.

There could be no pleasure in such an existence, cankered as it was by this old hate, rusted as it was to the heart by this inactivity. It would seem to one who came to that place out of the sun and hope and cheerful progress of the world at its borders, that these people would be glad to let the deputies get the judges, glad to see the decree of the court enforced, and this overhanging, dreadful thing brought to an end.

But no; it was not so. There was a slow fire in the eyes of every man who leaned on the fence and watched him go by that would flash in a moment into murderous hate; there hung weapons on their cheerless walls which they would snatch in defense of the ancient honor of their stubborn cause.

Wrong it was, if wrong ever fell upon innocent heads. Calvert admitted it as he trudged along that tree-hemmed, hot, steaming road that noonday, as he had admitted it ever since he came to have an understanding of the case, long before the trouble fell as his inheritance.

These people had held the bondholders always in the light of receivers of stolen property. Why they should have the aid and protection of the great United States government in their attempt to collect on such securities was beyond their view of justice.

But there was justice on the bondholders' side as well. While they were, in no broad interpretation of the ethics of plain dealing between man and man, receivers of stolen property, they were the innocent

receivers. They had no knowledge of the dishonest intention of the railroad promoters when they went into the market and put their fortune into the Clearwater County bonds, but that they should have made some attempt to give these people their promised railroad away back in those first days when they needed it, Calvert firmly believed.

And because he believed this, and felt the injustice of his claim as these repudiators of it felt it, he had come to make a settlement on some kind of a basis that would be fair to both. How he might progress toward this desire was a question. There was not much hope in the faces of men as they sullenly gloomed upon him when he passed.

Calvert stopped to rest something past midday, when not more than a mile or two from Indian Springs, as he believed, in a grassy glade where a spring broke from a ledge, its sweet waters unswollen and unpolluted by the heavy rain. It was a place of such sylvan beauty, so undisturbed by the presence of man and his attempt to improve the little picture which nature had so happily framed, that Calvert decided to rest there until evening, timing himself to enter the town about dusk. He stretched himself, the little bag with *its* precious contents under his head, relaxing luxuriously his sore limbs.

There was no trace of frequent visits to the spring, no trampled path of man or beast across the lush bluegrass which made such a pleasant bed. He felt that it was a safe place to yield to the demand that sleep was making on his languorous eyes.

When he woke the gray of twilight was in his little glade, the coolness of night was settling in the woods, the damp of early dew was on the grass. He sprang up with the feeling of bewilderment and panic common to one waking in a strange place, laughed when he remembered, took up his bag and went his way.

There was not much to be made out of Indian Springs as Calvert drew down the rocky hill into the valley where the town lay, for it was quite dark. Electric lights had not yet come to Indian Springs, sitting in its ancient isolation among the hills; yellow oblongs of lamp-lighted windows picked out the houses of the village to the stranger's eye as he rested at the end of a little bridge spanning the brook that went tinkling away in the dark among the stones.

A sound of cow-bells, near and distant, beat musically on the warm and quiet air with truly pastoral restfulness; far away under the edge of night a man was calling home his hogs with the *poo-ee, poo-ee-e,* so seldom heard even in rural places any more.

Calvert did not know, indeed, what the wild, mournful call might mean, thinking at first it must be the clamor of some animal that he had never met, but when the squeal of hogs answered with every evidence of coming on the run, all mystery departed.

Calvert was hungry, with the demand of a healthy body, and mind quite cleared of uneasiness by his long sleep. He had put foot on the bridge to push forward into the town to seek the hotel, and Joe Tager's barn, when the quiet of the evening was pierced by a woman's scream. The sound fell suddenly in its full sharpness, startling as a lightning flash, lapsing into gurglings and splashings, as if somebody had fallen into the water.

Calvert ran across the bridge in the direction of the sound, which was close at hand, the scream splitting the night with a wild note of struggling terror. Across the bridge, up-stream a few rods, Calvert ran, guided by the frantic appeal.

Doors opened with the sound of overturned chairs as men rose from their suppers in haste clattering with the rush of sudden feet; voices answered hoarsely as men came running, women gabbled and shrilled in fright. Calvert stopped, turning about in bewilderment, the gurgling appeal, the splitting scream, rising seemingly from the solid ground in front of him.

There was no water at hand save the innocent little brook babbling along in peace under the bridge, nothing at all that he could see to endanger life or set such a note of terror and despair in the woman's voice.

"Where are you?" he called.

"Here—here—down here at the spring!"

Calvert plunged forward, and down into a little ravine, which was so deep it hid

the one in distress completely. There he made out a barrel set in the ground almost to a level, under the iron spout of a spring, and in this barrel stood the woman who had startled Indian Springs with her terrified alarm and brought half the population clattering through the dark in the expectation of a tragedy.

"Help, help! I can't get out!" she called.

"Here—give me your hand!"

"Oh, I'm fast, I'm fast—I can't get out!" she declared, so frantic in her fright she did not seem to hear.

Calvert laid hold of her, hands under arm-pits, and pulled. She was a large, soft woman, as a woman must be to fill a barrel and wedge into it, dressed in a bathing-suit, her great arms bare. She clutched Calvert and clung to him, sobbing now in a new turn of her hysterical panic, while he braced his feet against the barrel and pulled.

The first of the runners from the near-by houses came lunging down the bank, panting and exclaiming:

"Dern you!" said the fellow, breathlessly, fetching Calvert a blow that would have leveled him but for his hold on the fat lady in the barrel.

An avalanche of rescuers poured into the dark little ravine with the spring at its head.

"Here he is—grab him—here he is!" the first comer panted, clutching Calvert as he swayed and staggered to regain his footing in the mud, the burst of sparkles from the man's blow clearing from his eyes.

"He's helpin' me—you leave him alone!" the woman said, panting and snorting as she came clear of the chime, and embraced Calvert to keep from falling.

"Oh, he's helpin' her," the fellow who hit Calvert explained, rather foolishly. "I beg your pardon, mister."

"For what?" Calvert asked, simulating surprise as well as he could express it in that damp and ample embrace.

"For hittin' you side of the head, mister."

"Did you hit me? I didn't know it," Calvert returned, disengaging the embrace, an arm at a time, which immediately replaced itself, like the grasp of a devil-fish.

"That's a good one on you, Plummer," somebody said, as a laugh went round the pressing little crowd. "Didn't know you hit him till you told him! I gash, that *is* a good—"

"What's the matter, what's the matter?" sputtered a woman from the bank.

"Why, it's Mrs. Smith!" said another, prying in through the crowd. "What's the matter, Myrta—what happened to you?"

"I got—I got—I couldn't—I couldn't—"

Here Mrs. Smith's emotions overwhelmed her; she put her face down on Calvert's breast again—she was a short woman, not much taller than the barrel—and shivered and sobbed, unable to say more.

Exclamations of wonder and pity sounded; women came forward, patting Mrs. Smith on the bar arms, offering consolation, peering to see who it was to whom she clung so closely and on such terms of confidence.

"Is that you, Homer?" one of them asked, thrusting her face close to Calvert's, drawing back immediately, as if she had approached a flame. "Oh, I beg your pardon!"

"I'm a stranger here," Calvert said, trying to unwind Mrs. Smith's arms and back out of the rather ridiculous tangle.

At the sound of his voice Mrs. Smith instantly let him go, exclaiming in fresh horrification.

"Oh, I thought it was Homer!" she cried.

"Well, it ain't," said a sharp-voiced woman. "He's a stranger; and you standin' there all this time a-huggin' him!"

At this Mrs. Smith began to weep and wail anew, but with nobody to lean upon, only her female friends around her, soothing her wounded pride and shocked virtue with a spatter of pats on her wet hide, a spatter of words in her apparently heedless ears.

"I'm sorry I hit you, stranger," said the man who had thus distinguished himself, but with more pride than contrition in the apology, in an effort to establish himself as a hero.

"He thought it was a muskeeter kicked him," a dry, old voice allowed, fetching another laugh.

A man with long legs came running, a lantern in his hand. He came so fast, in such great strides, that the light trailed after him like a fiery tail. He was down the bank in a moment, standing close by Calvert and Mrs. Smith, flashing his lantern up and down over them as if he were some kind of a priest with a censer.

"What's the matter, hon-ee?" he asked, puzzled, frightened, white as a fish in his own smoky light.

Mrs. Smith immediately clasped him in her clammy embrace, and reposed her agitated head on his rather thin and unmistakably agitated bosom.

"I was—I couldn't—*in there, in there!*" sobbed Mrs. Smith.

"She was in that there barrel, Homer," said a man, in rather accusing and severe tone, as if he blamed Homer for not seeing it at a glance.

"I reckon she was choked in and couldn't git out," volunteered another.

"I wanted to come with you, hon-ee—I wanted to come!" Homer chided, but with sorrowful gentleness.

"I used to—it never happened before," she said.

"Yes, but you've been away in the city six weeks, hon-ee—you must remember you've been away in the city, hon-ee," Homer reminded her, stroking her back as if she were a horse, speaking with humoring, conciliating small voice.

"I didn't gain a pound!" she resented, "I ain't no bigger—"

"I guess you must 'a' expanded in that cold water," Homer said, hastily, not courting more revelations before that appreciative audience. "Come on home and git on some dry clothes."

She went with him, dripping in the lantern-light, turning her great white face as if to seek out her rescurer and leave him the thanks of at least a grateful glance. One beside Calvert smote him on the back in friendly glee, snorting and chuckling to hold down a loud laugh.

"Now, what do you think of that?" he wanted to know.

Calvert groped under foot in the darkness rather frantically until he found his bag. Relieved, he straightened up and looked round at the dim figures in the crowd, and pushed his way up the bank.

"It was a kind of an unhandy situation for a lady," he allowed.

"Stuck in that barrel like a big, fat sow!" the man chuckled. "How fur out did she git?"

"What the devil was she in there for in the first place?" said Calvert, not disposed to supply any further information.

"Reducin'," some one volunteered, crowding ahead to walk beside Calvert.

"I don't see how jamming into a barrel's going to reduce a fat woman," Calvert returned, wishing he might reduce the fellow that slammed him that crack at the side of the head.

"This here water," explained the old man who hung at Calvert's side, "in that there spring, it 'll reduce a person down to a bone if you bathe in it right along. It wasn't jammin' in the bar'l she was aimin' to do, son; her nat'l shape was to blame for that."

"Oh, I see," said Calvert, touching the lump the bony knuckles of the rustic gallant had raised above his ear.

"All the fleshy ladies around here take a dip in that bar'l ever so often durin' the summer," the old man enlarged; "it beats any kind of drugs and medicine you can swaller to make you slim. Myrt Smith, she's been away—you heard Homer say she'd been away?"

"I heard him mention it."

"She must 'a' took on some meat around her quarters and don't know it," the old man chuckled. "She'll have to sink a hogs'et down there under that spout if she ever expects to sozzle that fat off of her. You're a stranger around here, you said?"

"A kind of a stranger. Is this the hotel?"

"This here's the Springs hotel; Bill Sawyer runs it; he'll treat you right. Come over for the 'campment?"

"Camp-meeting?"

"Confed'rate vet'r'ns annual 'campment opens here to-morrow."

"I hadn't heard of it," Calvert confessed.

"You *must* be a stranger from fur off if you ain't heard of the 'campment. The old vet'r'ns from all over this county 're

collectin' here, camped out in tents like old times back there on the edge of the woods. You couldn't git one of them old fellers inside of a house when they come to the annual 'campment."

"Barbecue and everything?" Calvert inquired, interested as well as polite.

"Yes, a good time with all the trimmin's. Well, it 'll be one of the last a good many of us old Johnny Rebs 'll ever see," the old fellow sighed; "we're a dyin' off fast. But if they could all come here and live at the Springs," he picked up briskly, "and drink these here waters, they'd live longer and be spry to the last."

Most of the crowd that had rushed slip-heel and stub-toe to the rescue of Mrs. Smith had scattered and gone off in the dark, leaving but three or four with Calvert and the old chap who walked beside him. These now drew up in front of the Springs Hotel, where the light of the patent gasoline lamp suspended to the ceiling in the hall fell through the open door and down the steps like the picture of the celestial beam in Jacob's dream. Here Calvert discovered that his chief escort was chewing tobacco with a vigor almost amounting to fury, chopping it in little short jumps of the jaw like a sheep.

He was a tall old man, of lean and bony frame, dressed in great, flapping blue overalls which were at least seven inches too short; blue shirt, plainly home-made, and suspenders contrived out of bed ticking. And he was a man with a bright eye in his head, a twinkling, bright, and inquisitively curious eye, indeed, under his hedgehog brows.

"You aim to stop here in the Springs some time?" he inquired, chopping away on his chew, never missing a stroke for any amount of words.

Calvert pushed his borrowed hat to the back of his head, pausing with one foot on the step, the bright light revealing him in every line to those who stood back of the veteran, expectancy in their tilted faces. Calvert put his bag down, passed his hand thoughtfully over the throbbing lump on his temple, waited a due spell in silence, as if to give weight to his reflections and force to his words.

"We-l-l," said he, slowly, his face thoughtful, his eyes up as if he studied the weather, "just accordin'."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE REBEL YELL.

MORNING revealed Indian Springs a village of perhaps a hundred houses, set about with some regular pretensions of street formation, but with such wide spaces between them, once one was away from the little cluster of hotel and stores, as to appear bewildered of its purpose and lost to its original aim. The little town stood in a charming valley, a deep, brown river on one hand, the little singing brook carrying away the clear waters of the springs on the other. All about the place great forest trees rose in tall and stately beauty, the landscape unmarred by any attempt to improve after the general plans of sequestered watering-places.

Even the springs, half a score of them in number, rose bubbling as nature brought them forth at the beginning for the greater part, only a few of them having retaining basins or curbing walls. Here it was said the Indians came of old time to bathe and drink these mineral-tainted waters, and grew well of their ills. They were perhaps no better and no worse than a thousand mineral springs the world over.

On a pleasant green place bordering the springs and the little stream that bore away their rather strong and vigorous waters, the town had prepared to entertain the Confederate veterans. Here the speakers' platform was raised, decorated about with the national colors, for these people lived loyally under one banner, no matter what their old romantic attachment for another, and here was the great pit over which the roasting beeves and hogs were spitted this morning when Thomas Calvert walked forth.

This trench had been heaped with dry wood the day before, which fuel had been reduced to a bed of glowing coals. An old negro, officious, full of loud commands to his subordinates, was in charge of the roasting of meats, the secret of the pepper-pan containing the basting fluid being his alone.

On this pleasant green, gently sloping down to the brookside, booths for the sale of refreshments, knicknacks, foolishly useless and gaudily frail things, were ranged along one side. Fronting them, a space of perhaps fifty feet between, were the flag-decked stalls of the maids of honor, without whom no Confederate veterans' encampment would be complete.

There were nine camps represented in this reunion, each camp with its maid of honor. The scheme was for everybody to vote for the maids of honor at ten cents a ballot, repeaters encouraged, to choose by popular selection in this manner the one to reign on the last day as Queen of Love and Beauty. So it will be seen how far back into chivalrous usages the Confederate veterans went, and how gallant and sweet-mannered and altogether simple-hearted they were.

These maids of honor were not yet all in their places, it being early in the day, but the town was lively with its own outpouring of inhabitants and the several hundred visitors who had come for the three days' festivities. Wagons were constantly arriving filled with those long, lean specimens of humanity such as Calvert had noted along the road, their flat-breasted women, their shock-headed children, proclaiming them by their appearance as inhabitants of Clearwater County's timbered hills.

But all the people assembled were not of this stamp; far from it, indeed. For the greater part they were straight-standing, clear-eyed, clean-faced men and women, the purest of American stock. They ran somewhat to gaudy raiment and elastic bands around their shirt-sleeves, it is true, but their young men were deep-chested, their young women bright-eyed and fair-skinned, full of health and promise for the future of the race.

Calvert was fitted out in a plain suit of dark flannel out of his reserve stock of clothing, having found his baggage safe in Joe Tager's barn, and a hat supplied by a local store. This was a high-crowned, narrow-brimmed soft black felt, much in favor at Indian Springs and vicinity, where it was worn with crown at full height, dented round with little knocks at the top.

Many greeted Calvert with friendly approach, his hat a passport into their confidence, and inquired whence he came and how the roads were in his part of the county. To all of these he replied, quite truthfully, that he came from Vinland, and that the roads were worse than he had ever seen them.

Calvert pushed about among the growing crowd in the hope of meeting Susie Richardson, his eyes leaping to every pretty face, following every graceful figure, but she did not appear to be present. Along toward midday he met Judge Hunter, but that notable overlooked him, passing without greeting.

Judge Hunter was arrayed, suitable to his dignity and importance in the community, in a long frock coat, white shirt with gleaming, starched bosom, no waistcoat to conceal its luxurious expanse. A narrow black necktie was done in a precise bow, his big black hat was a new one, his boots were of fine leather, designs stitched into their soft tops in colored thread. The judge wore his trousers inside these boots, his spurs buckled on his heels, like a man who spent much of his time in the saddle. Calvert took him to be a drover.

That the judge was not spreading a good report of him Calvert soon became aware. Instead of greeting him with friendly word, people began to stare coldly when they met him, and draw away at his approach, turning backs, talking apart with twisting of heads, making no pretense of covering the fact that they were discussing him. More than once he heard the word "deputy" pronounced with sneering insult of cold challenge from groups of young men who reddened with resentment as they turned fierce looks upon him.

Fearing that his continued presence on the grounds with this libel circulating against him might lead to some open act of insult, which he could not ignore, Calvert turned back toward the hotel. As he passed the booths where the maids of honor were holding court, he recognized Susie Richardson among them.

Miss Richardson was maid of honor for Camp Jackson, which Calvert took to be the local post. He passed near her, hoping

she might see and acknowledge him, and thus lift the cloud that was fast enveloping him in uncomfortable shadow. She was standing behind a little counter across which a large flag was draped, the center of an animated group of young women and men, a spray of gaudy trumpet-flower in her bright hair.

She did not seem to see Calvert, although he walked slowly by, looking at her hopefully, an unaccountable anxiety to have her acknowledge him before those unfriendly people, disturbing him as a man is disturbed who has placed a great deal on a precarious chance.

A little way along he turned and repassed her booth, and now she looked up, nodded, smiled, a gleam as of pleasure at sight of him flushing rosily to her face. But there was something in her eyes that told him it was best it should not go beyond a simple greeting—he understood it as well as if she had spoken in her rich, sweet voice.

But Calvert was lifted on a wave of triumph as he returned her salute, speaking her name as she had spoken his, with grave face and manner of high dignity and respect. His politic desire for keeping his purpose hidden, their little conspiracy to pay him off as a deputy marshal entered into at parting yesterday, all had passed and evaporated out of his mind. He wanted to be made respectable before those people, and it was done. She had given him the benediction of her acknowledgment.

A little way along from Susie Richardson's booth, at one side of the platform prepared for the speakers, was the stand where the voting for the various maids of honor was carried on. This was presided over by three elderly women, who made good-natured appeals to the liberality of all who passed, reminding them that the proceeds of the contest were to go to the Confederate Veterans' Home. Large signs announced the standing of the various candidates.

Calvert was indignant to discover that Susie Richardson, Camp Jackson's maid, and loveliest of all the maids in the world, as he was hot to maintain at that moment, stood lowest in number of votes. He was considering casting a substantial block of them to raise her to her proper place at the head of the list, when a wild burst of music and cheering broke like a riot over the grounds, calling his attention for the moment from his chivalrous object.

With a crowd pressing around them and following admirably in their train, five veteran musicians came marching into the grounds, stepping proudly to their own music of fife and drum. The tune they played was "Dixie Land," but the uniform they wore was not the uniform of the South.

Calvert looked, and looked again, going forward with fixed attention like a man in a dream. These were Federal soldiers, like ghosts risen from some old battlefield, their blue coats faded, their little caps worn with half a century of close keeping among the treasured relics of a glorious past. The emblem of the Grand Army was pinned on each man's breast, and their old fingers danced over the keys and flashed the polished drum-sticks in the sun with all the nimbleness of youth.

Around in front of the speakers' stand they swept, and boomed and shrilled the old marching tune of the South, as strong and clear and true to the melody as ever it was played. They brought it to a close with the abruptness of a soldier's life, without flourish of embellishment, or crescendo or cadenza, just snapped it off at the last note and let it die.

A thousand hands, a thousand voices, joined in the applause, and as it sank to scattered clappings somebody lifted a wild, far-ringing yell. Instantly this was taken up by others and repeated, like the clan call of some ancient tribe.

Somebody behind Calvert joined the salute—it sounded more like a defiance—his voice shrill and cracked, but thrilling with the spirit of old fires which had burned so hot in his young heart long ago. Calvert turned. It was his old friend of last night who chewed tobacco with such animation, and wore his bed-ticking suspenders so tight across his bony shoulders.

He was dressed in different guise to-day, in an old gray overcoat, tattered and patched and threadbare, stained by the clay of many a camp, streaked by the rain of

many a storm, dark in one spot with what may have been a warmer dye long, long ago. This garment shrouded him to the knees, and below it were cavalry boots of the same period, cracked and broken, but serviceable yet for great occasions such as this.

The old man was waving his hat, his face shining with the fierce, wild joy of rekindled memories, giving voice to the peculiar cry with all the heart of a college freshman.

Calvert was greatly surprised, not a little pleased, when the old man turned to him, grinned in recognition, put out his hand, and gave him a wholesome and hearty shake.

"That's the rebel yell, dern 'em!" the old man said proudly. "I guess you never heard it before, but I'll bet a dollar your daddy did, and broke his neck gittin' away from it, too, maybe."

"No," said Calvert, meeting the old fellow's grin with one of his own, "he was on the other side."

"The devil he was!" said the old gray veteran. "Why didn't you tell me last night?"

"I didn't suppose you'd care to know that much about me on short acquaintance, sir."

"You're all right, I'd bet my last dollar *you're* all right," the old man declared. "When Susie Richardson passes a man, I pass him, and I told 'em last night you wasn't no more a deputy 'n I was, and that's puttin' it about as fur off as it can be put."

"Calvert is my name, and I'm sure obliged to you for your good opinion of me." And as he said it Calvert did not recall again the deceit he was to practise on these people for his safety. He had only the healthy human desire to be thought as well of as he knew his intentions toward his debtors warranted.

"Grinnell, old Dan Grinnell, of the Twenty-First Georgia Cavalry, shot five times in the Wilderness," said the old fellow, putting out his hand again.

"I'm proud to know you, Mr. Grinnell, and I'll bet you were wearing that coat in the Wilderness that day."

"You've hit it," said Grinnell; "I wouldn't sell it for its weight in gold."

"How does it come that those Grand Army men are here?" Calvert inquired, puzzled by their presence and rousing reception.

"Them dang old scoun'rels in blue?" said Grinnell tenderly, proudly, glowingly generous. "We invited 'em over from the Vinland G. A. R. post to make us some old-time war music. There ain't a band in this country can touch them boys, no band anywheres in this land, I don't care if it's got a thousand pieces in it."

The veterans in blue were the center of an admiring throng, shaking hands with old friends, making new ones, bobbing off their little caps to the ladies, the sun bright on their white hair and furbished buttons.

"It is a moving kind of music," Calvert agreed; "it's worth coming a long way to see and hear that band."

"I reckon you might find another one in one of the soldiers' homes somewhere, but I doubt if they'd have the spirit to tear into it like them boys. Folks live a long time down here in this country, kind of dry up and concentrate the nerve and heart in 'em, young inside to the last day. Well, I guess the doin's is goin' to open; there comes General Treadmill, the orator of the day."

"I've heard a good deal of talk about him this morning; he seems to be a notable character. Is it his oratory he's so famous for?"

Grinnell looked at Calvert in astonishment, his chewing suspended for a moment, his mouth open to allow the swelling surprise to escape like steam.

"Ain't you never heard of General Treadmill, and your daddy a rebel?" he demanded, so incredulous as to be severe.

"I never did, Mr. Grinnell."

"General Treadmill, sir, he's the man that never surrendered."

"He's still a rebel? Is that what you mean?"

"Unreconstructed, rebel to the gizard. Well, that's carryin' it on too fur, in my opinion; I forgot all about that forty years and more ago. General Treadmill's kind of looked up to and admired around here on

account of bein' so danged stubborn, I reckon, not because folks mostly thinks he's right. He's the only one around here that's got a rebel flag—he's got it there in his hand now; he'll be wavin' it around in a minute."

General Treadmill was a romantic figure in his gray uniform and corded hat, sword by his side, great white mustache, long white hair sweeping down below his collar in curls. He was a tall, broad-shouldered, soldierly man, his eyes bright and quick, his face stern and imperious; and a courtly man, bowing and bowing, hand on his sword-hilt, to the applause that greeted his appearance on the grounds.

"He looks like a general, all right," Calvert said, moved by admiration for the fine straight figure, long gray coat buttoned across the broad, deep chest.

The crowd was gathering fast around the general, who stood with one hand on his sword, the other grasping the flag which he had taken from his pocket at the moment Grinnell called attention to it. It was small, not more than a yard long, faded and yellowed. At sight of it some of the old men took off their hats, some of the old ladies uttered little hysterical cries. The general, lifting it with stately grace, waved it slowly with a long sweep of his arm.

Again the rebel yell rose and echoed back from the mighty trees, under whose branches it had sounded from more lusty throats fifty years before that day. But Dan Grinnell, standing there at the stranger's side, did not raise his voice again in this old defiant shout. Silently he stood, a shadow as of mingled regret and shame passing over his kindly, bearded old face.

"I ain't a cheerin' that flag no more," he said; "that's carryin' it a little too fur."

General Treadmill came marching forward, the flag draped across his shoulder in a fashion picturesquely sentimental, drawing up before the stand where the three ladies were selling votes, hat in his hand.

"Oh, you've brought us the flag, general!" said one, her voice shaken with romantic emotion for this faded banner, perhaps not so much that it was the flag of a once dear and lost cause, as that it moved recollections of a lost and dearer youth.

"I have brought it to hang here," said the general, spreading it on the counter, "once again over the heads of brave women who made sacrifices for it of treasure and blood."

"Where shall we hang it, general?" another asked, all fluttering, touching the flag with reverent fingers as if it were a holy thing.

General Treadmill stepped back from the stand a little way to take its proportions and select the honored place for his treasure. As he stood so, measuring and calculating, he caught sight of Calvert standing beside old Dan Grinnell. Treadmill strode up to him majestically, his big cavalry spurs clinking at every step, their long-barbed rowels trailing in the grass.

"They tell me you're a deputy United States marshal, sir, a cursed hound of a Federal spy!" he said.

"Then they tell you something—"

"If you are"—General Treadmill silenced him with imperious voice, eyes fixed on him sternly, hand on his sword—"carry me before your Yankee judge—I'll defy him to his face!"

"I have neither the authority nor the inclination to carry anybody before a Federal judge, and you least of all men, General Treadmill," Calvert answered calmly.

"You know me; you know my record," said the old general, exultingly defiant. "Drag me before your Yankee judge, and I'll wave that banner in his face—I'll defy him and his tyrannous government!"

"No doubt there's a way to get at it, sir, if you're determined to defy somebody to his face," said Calvert, with dignity equal to the general's own.

"You'll have your opportunity, you hound of a Federal spy!" General Treadmill declared, angrier because of this failure of his bluster and foolish defiance. He turned to face the little stand again, where the three white-haired old ladies stood pale and trembling, fright in their gentle eyes.

"There—we'll hang this banner right there," the general said, pointing dramatically to where a large United States flag hung above the old ladies' heads. "Tear down that insolent bunting, and hang it there!"

"No, not while I'm around you won't!"

The speaker was behind Calvert, and his voice was the voice of an old man; it shook with passion and broke in treble as he lifted it to stay the threatened sacrilege.

CHAPTER IX.

BACK IN THE UNION.

"YOU'RE not goin' to take that flag down to make room for a rebel rag while I'm around, I tell you, gentlemen." The protestant pushed his way into the little open space before the stand, shaking a trembling finger close to General Treadmill's face. "I don't object to you hangin' your flag up, but no man's a goin' to take down my flag to hang it in its place."

The speaker was one of the ancient fifers—his instrument was in the breast pocket of his coat—a tall and slender man, his hair as white as a young hawk's down. There was a flush on his thin face, fire in his old eyes.

"Sir!" said General Treadmill, bristling forbiddingly, but so amazed by this unexpected interference that he seemed to have lost his usual flow of words.

"I say hang it up if you want to, but don't insult the flag I fought for to make room for it. I won't stand for that!"

As the veteran spoke he stretched out his hand toward General Treadmill's treasured relic where it lay spread on the counter before the three old ladies.

"Don't touch it, sir!" General Treadmill interposed, stepping forward hastily.

"I wasn't aimin' to touch it, colonel, or"—studying him with contemptuous eyes, taking in his trappings from heel to head—"major, or sergeant, or whatever you are."

"An enemy never polluted that flag with his touch!" General Treadmill said, glowering at the veteran as if to wither him.

But shriveling as his fierce look may have been in other days in the face of the enemy, effective as it was then before his friends and admirers when he fought his old battles over and hurled defiance from the platform in the Federal government's teeth, the Grand Army man did not seem to quake perceptibly under General Treadmill's eye. He turned away, loftily, making a little snort to express his disdain.

"I'd have my own notion about who was polluted if I did happen to put my hand on that ugly old dish-rag," he said. "Corporal, I wouldn't shine my shoes with it."

"Now, look a here, comrades, there's no sense in you two fellers havin' words over this thing," Dan Grinnell interposed, his manner and voice conciliating, his hands spread out to smooth the way of peace.

"He must not insult this proud banner, sir!" General Treadmill said, gathering up his flag, forcing his heroics not a little, Calvert believed.

"Put the blame old thing away, then," the Grand Army man suggested, his temper falling, his manner more friendly and tolerant.

"I brought it her to hang it where it shall wave to-day as it waved in the past—over the heads of noble women and brave men—and minions of an oppressive government are not going to be permitted to interfere," General Treadmill declared.

"Hang it—hang yourself along with it if you want to—but don't haul down any *honorable* flag to put that in its place," said the Grand Army man.

General Treadmill glanced round, his shaggy eyebrows on end, as if to see the sentiment of those who pressed near to witness this controversy, or to mark the humor of his supporters and admirers, and gage thereby how far he should go.

"Minions—"

"Oh, hell!" the Federal veteran cut him off, with inexpressible disdain. "You make a man sore with your swelled-up talk about minions, mister. There ain't no minions here—they're men that's your equal, yes, and your betters. I know about you, I've been hearin' about you ever since I come to this God-forsaken county. You're the man that sets up the claim and the brag that he never surrendered, one of the fellers that run over to Mexico when Lee surrendered, along with old Joe Shelby.

"But you wasn't man enough to come back like old Joe did, and burn up them old measly gray rags and forget it. Oh, no, you sneaked off down here in the timber

and hid out, like the bushwhacker. I reckon you was in the war, and got rich, they tell me, under the protection of that flag hangin' over your head, all the time a hidin' that disgraceful little old—"

"Sir! I'll not hear your slanders," General Treadmill burst out.

"Gentlemen, gentlemen!" a ministerial-appearing man appealed, laying his hand on Treadmill's arm.

"You'll hear more!" the veteran burst out, firing up. "You'll hear the law on it before I'm through with you. If you go braggin' around here about your war record, and wavin' that little old nose-rag in us old soldiers' faces any more, I'll take it away from you and set a match to it!"

"Stand off! Keep your distance, sir!" General Treadmill warned. He pressed the flag to his bosom in his bent arm, in dramatic, hollow-heroic pose, it appeared to Calvert, hand threateningly on his sword.

The crowd stood silent around the two old men, no word of sympathy on either side. Another of the Grand Army men came edging through, touched his comrade's shoulder, regret for the scene in every line of his fine old face.

"Now, boys, this was all over with, a long time ago," he reminded them with pacific kindness.

"That's right," said a veteran who stood near General Treadmill, a great pistol belted around his faded and frayed gray coat. He laid his hand on the old general's sword-arm as he spoke, with gently restraining touch.

"Unhand me, sir!" the old man commanded sharply. "I'll deal with this Federal hound!"

"Yes, and I'll deal with you!" the veteran in blue threatened, his subsiding anger rising again in a flash. "I'm the man that can take you, I'm the man that can drag you before the Federal judge and make you answer for your treason and sedition, you skulker in the brush!"

"Unhand me, gentlemen, unhand me!" said General Treadmill, shaking his shoulders to throw off their friendly, restraining clasp.

"I'll tramp your old flag in the ground, I'll spit on it, I'll—"

General Treadmill stooped with dramatic flourish, spreading his flag on the ground near the veteran's feet. As he rose his sword flashed out of the scabbard.

"Set foot on it at peril of your life!" he said, withdrawing a step, his old blade trembling in his hand.

No matter what bluster or forced dramatics the old general had put into his previous speech and action, there was nothing but the sternest sincerity in this. He was pale with the passion that blazed in his eyes; his hand shook with the surge of his indignant heart, making his bright blade quiver in the sun. A gasp as of protest swept through the crowd; a choking scream rose from the booth where the white-haired old ladies stood.

And in the pause of that threatened tragedy Susie Richardson came running between the two flaming old men like a dove fluttering down from a long and perilous flight. Outspread in her hands, streaming after her like a flame, was a great flag. It settled as she sank to her knees between the old warriors of a past and forgiven day, covering the general's little, time-worn banner quite out of sight.

Susie looked up with what seemed a tender apology, a tender appeal, which was half smile, half tears.

"It's bigger than your flag, General Treadmill—see, it covers it completely," she said.

"It's bigger than any damn flag that ever waved!" the Union soldier declared, his voice thrilling with pride.

On her knees Susie Richardson was caressing the billows out of her flag, smoothing it with her white hand. The trumpet flower trembled in her hair, hung for a breath by one bright strand, fell, crimson to crimson, like a drop of blood upon the flag. Beside her the old soldier of the Union stood, hand to his cap, as rigid as a figure of allegory representing the unbending defenders of that banner. Susie Richardson's bosom heaved as she looked up into his face; her tears fell down upon the trumpet-flower bloom.

General Treadmill stood with sword-point on the ground, the dying anger of his heart leaving his face very old and gray. But

there was a softening in its stern lines as he sheathed his old sword with click of haft against scabbard that sounded sharply over the strained and silent crowd. He turned quickly, with the movement of a soldier, to face the flag that draped above the three old ladies' heads, hand lifted in the salute that he had denied it for more than fifty years.

"I surrender," he said.

CHAPTER X.

JUDGE HUNTER DRAWS HIS GUN.

"SHE'S already the queen of love and beauty, and all the rest of the bunch," Dan Grinnell declared.

"Queen of them all," Calvert agreed, looking after Susie Richardson as she returned to her booth, escorted by the old Union soldier on one hand, the old rebel general on the other.

"She wouldn't call it a job till they shook hands and buried the old trouble so deep it never will raise its head between them fellers no more."

"She did it like you'd expect it of her," Calvert said, admiration in his eyes.

"It 'll turn this 'campment into more of a rejoicin' over the old general comin' back into the Union than anything else, from the looks of things right now. But I was afraid for a little while we'd have to hold an inquest."

"It did look that way for a minute, Mr. Grinnell."

"Think of her comin' a tearin' there out of breath with her heart in her mouth and coverin' that old feller's flag up with hers, smotherin' the fire between them old ripsnorters under it like a blaze under a blanket. I take off my hat to Susie—well, I've been doin' it right along. Yes, and I'm goin' to buy a chunk of votes for that girl right now; I'm a goin' to put a piece of money down on Susie."

The old man fished into his pocket, pushing back his war-time overcoat to get at it, sweating under the heat of his chivalrous liberality and the garment, for the day had come out a blaze of summer sun. He twisted his head in emphasis of his generous intention, edging up to the old ladies' voting booth with a rather preoccupied expression, hand deep in his jeans.

"I was about to do it when the excitement came up," Calvert confessed, going after his bill-case, drawing out a note with a yellow imprint.

"We'll raise her average, by glory!" said Grinnell, facing the counter, money in his hand.

Two of the old ladies were busy on the other side, but the third came smiling over. Dan Grinnell slapped down his money under his palm with vigorous and promising whack.

"On Susie Richardson—all of it!" he said triumphantly, taking away his hand. There was a fifty-cent piece on the board.

The nice old lady accepted the coin with a light of pleasure in her face scarcely dimmer than Dan Grinnell's own. Calvert saw immediately that Grinnell's contribution was accepted as one of uncommon liberality. He stood hesitating to put down the bill that he held folded between his fingers, when the old lady, smiling and friendly, put out her hand.

"And who are you voting for?" she asked.

"Same as me," said Grinnell, "Camp Jackson's maid."

"Camp Jackson's maid," Calvert repeated, yielding up the money.

The old lady's hands trembled a little in excited pleasure as she unfolded the bill. She looked up at Calvert, down at the money lying in its golden luxuriance before her, and back again into Calvert's face, her breath quite cut off in her surprise.

"Fifty dollars!" she gasped. "Do you want to—I'm afraid—I *know*—I can't begin to change it."

Calvert laughed, coloring in his embarrassment, Dan Grinnell craning his neck to look at the money, his mouth wide open.

"I don't want any change," said Calvert, turning to leave.

"Five hundred votes for Susie Richardson!" shrilled the little old lady, waving the money in triumph. They rushed over to see, spreading the bill before them on the counter in all its golden luxuriance. Dan

Grinnell touched it carefully, with one finger, as a man tests something he fears may burn him. Judge Hunter stepped up to the counter at Calvert's side, flushed and in haste, as if he had come on a run.

"Camp Jackson can take care of its own honor without the help of outsiders," he said.

He reached with a folded newspaper that he carried in his hand, pushing the money toward Calvert as if it were a thing contaminated and despised.

"It isn't a matter for your interference, sir," said Calvert, his slow anger rising. He put the money again in front of the old lady, who stood looking from one to the other of them in blank astonishment.

"I'm makin' it my business to interfere, then," Hunter returned, insolently aggressive, plainly determined to make trouble.

"Now, you look a here, Truman, this gentleman's a friend of mine, and I don't aim to stand around and see you or anybody else insult him," spoke up Dan Grinnell, his beard thrust within two feet of Hunter's face.

"You don't know what you're talkin' about, Dan," Hunter replied, unmoved by the old man's defense of the stranger. There was such an unmistakable portent, such a weight of repression and concealment of a grave and startling thing, in his way of turning his saturnine face upon the old man as to be very impressive and mysterious.

"Well, I don't believe it," Grinnell declared, denying the imputation as though Hunter had put it all in words.

Calvert touched his arm.

"Don't run yourself into any unpleasantness on my account," he requested.

Hunter swept the money from the counter with his paper, his dark face flushed, a scowl in his clouded eyes, and looked at Calvert with insulting sneer. His look and bearing challenged Calvert to carry the quarrel farther, to resent the insult if he had it in him to do it. A moment so, then Hunter turned and started away.

Calvert took a quick step after him, so thoroughly outraged and angry that lights seemed to start and sparkle before his eyes as when the rustic planted that beefy blow at the side of his head at the spring. He laid hold of the collar of Hunter's dignified black coat, spun him round, flung him against the counter, ripping the stately garment to the waist.

"Pick it up, you scoundrel!" he said.

Judge Hunter reeled back from the counter, one hand thrown out to stay himself a fall, the other clapped to his boot.

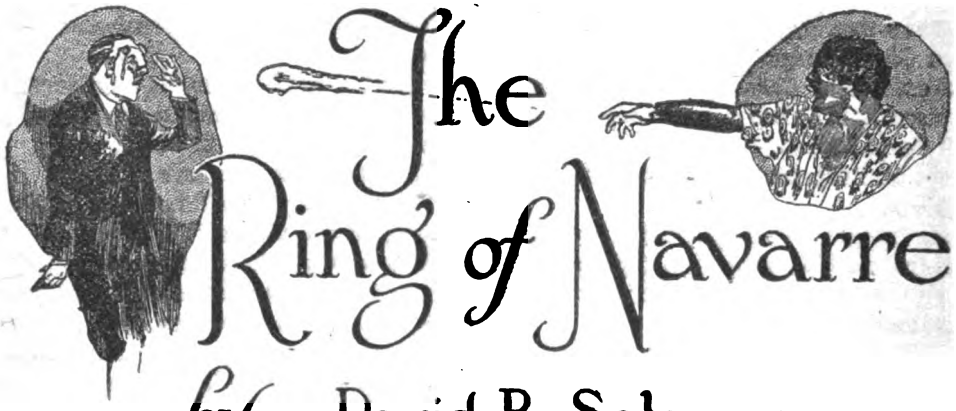
"Look out!" warned Grinnell, jumping aside.

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.

ABILITY

WE do not expect the architect
Who plans the building
To drive every nail;
We cannot take a blacksmith
And put a brush into his hand
And expect him to paint a picture.
But
Everybody in the world
Can do something better
And like it more
Than anything else.
You have a special ability:
Find it.

David Ferris Kirby.



The Ring of Navarre

by David R. Solomon

ONE feels a certain natural delicacy in arresting for speeding a new girl he is most fervently hoping to be very nice to at the next Country Club dance. Especially if it be one's first arrest.

Therefore was the newest motorcycle cop in a most delicious pickle.

Yet it could not be denied that she had had the wicked brown racer doing well over thirty when he raced alongside on his motorcycle. And the new copy in his pocket of "rules and regulations as set forth and promulgated—" left no room for discretion. He wished it had been the fat, young man at her side who had been driving. Then the task might have been worth while.

Kicking the stand under his motorcycle, he stepped up to the sullenly chugging car, cap shoved back on his head, the unruly mop of his flaunting yellow hair waving in the free winds of heaven. The soapy young, fat man swallowed nervously.

"In a hurry?" the newest motorcycle cop inquired very politely.

The level-browed young lady at the wheel gave him one intense look from a pair of imperious brown eyes. Then she snatched the tantalizing, soft motor hat down disdainfully over her chestnut hair and sniffed as disdainfully.

The newest cop was waiting solemnly.

"Pardon me if I detain you," he apologized. "Going for a doctor? Or maybe"—glancing down at the third finger of her left hand as it rested on the wheel—"maybe for a parson?"

The girl's glance followed his to the ring on her finger, a great ruby, cut without facets, like a round pool of fire, set in a most odd manner into a queer, antique setting. Her show of composure left her. Hastily, as if his mere gaze were sacrilege, she snatched the ring from his sight. Her slim form stiffened with anger.

The fat young man edged in an oily attempt to bring peace to a troubled world.

"Officer," he began pompously, ingratiatingly, "perhaps we can arrange this matter. I am Mr. Gleason—Mr. Gleason, of the United Trust Company. Perhaps this can be fixed. Say, a small gift—"

Mr. Gleason stopped very suddenly, though no word had been spoken. The blue eyes had taken on the appearance of the ocean during a winter storm.

"Listen, you!" There was no trace of levity in the cold, stern voice now. The newest cop leaned over, steady blue eyes boring straight into the shifty, podgy face. "Shut that mouth—quick! And keep it shut!"

Uneasily, patiently trying to palm off the unpleasant trend of events as a joke, Mr. Gleason laughed; not a very hearty laugh, nor a very natural laugh—the laugh of a man declining battle.

The newest motorcycle cop turned to the girl. The change in his voice was pleasant to hear.

"I'll have to take your name, miss," he said.

"Brooke Arden."

He had known her voice was going to be just such a clear, cool contralto. For sheer joy of hearing her speak again he pretended to misunderstand.

"I beg pardon?"

"Brooke Arden."

"That's all, now, miss. Some one will have to appear for you to-morrow morning at nine before the recorder." He started toward his motorcycle.

"One moment!" Sharp as a challenge, the warning in her voice halted him. "One word to you before you go. Just fix this little episode in your memory!"

The brown racer sputtered into high, and sped over the hill.

"Gosh!" said the newest motorcycle cop in a heartfelt tone, staring after it. "Gosh! She—that girl—certainly—gosh!"

Down the hill leisurely rolled a dumpy, fat, cut-down car, driven by a young man, sprawling alone on the cushions.

The newest motorcycle cop held up a detaining hand. The young man reached hastily for the emergency-brake. Then, as he caught sight of the newest motorcycle cop's face, his own broke into a wide grin. In much relief he sighed aloud:

"Whe-e-ew! J. W., you scared me. I thought I was arrested again. You know, you look like a regular motorcop in that rig."

"Don't try to trifle with the majesty of the law, young man. I *am* a 'regular motorcop in this rig.'"

"Oh, I know, officially, of course, you are, but—oh, you know what I mean, J. W."

"Nope," cheerfully lied J. W.

"Tommyrot," pronounced the newcomer. "But tell me, J. W., I'm not arrested, am I?"

"Not yet"—tone indicating that even friendship would be sacrificed on the altar of duty. Then, suddenly remembering: "Say, Milt, who are the new girls in town that I haven't met yet?"

"Well, let's see. That fat Rondon girl—giggles all the time—do you know her? And—let me see—there's that tall, dark, Jemison girl—let's see—that's about all of them you haven't met, isn't it?"

"I—suppose—so. But—Milt—seems to me I've seen a slim, little, brown-haired girl, driving a racer around here—"

"In diplomacy, J. W.," Milt assured him, "you have all the airy grace of the hippopotamus. You can omit all those casual references. I saw you talking to her as I drove up. Her name's Arden—Brooke Arden."

"Gee, Milt, that's an odd name, isn't it?"

"Uh-huh. She comes from some sort of an old family—that's where she gets her first name. Some sort of family name, I should say."

"Wel-l-l-l, they've nothing on us. We Burts go all the way back to Adam."

"Mighty weak effort, J. W.; mighty weak. About Brooke, her people moved here during our senior year. She's an only child—an orphan now; her dad left her all kinds of property, too."

"Oh, wel-l-l-l," mused the imperturbable J. W., "of course riches are a dreadful handicap to a girl. Still, Milt, I believe I could love that girl in spite of riches."

"There are quite a few others," dryly, "who seem to have the same opinion about that."

"So-so! I have a rival, eh?"

"Nope, not a rival. You have rivals. That fellow Gleason, for instance—"

"What's that? Gleason?"

"Yep. You see, J. W., her dad died soon after they moved here, and his will appointed the United Trust Company as her guardian. That gave Gleason a chance to meet her."

"United Trust Company—that's our greasy friend, Mr. Gleason, isn't it?"

"Yes. He has visions of the Arden bullion—is making a dead set for it. Still, I don't believe he has a whoop of a chance, J. W. She isn't his sort at all. She's the most capable little devil you ever saw. Tramped up the mountain half the nights last fall with her camera to get a flashlight of a 'possum. She got a peach of a picture before she quit, too. She's that sort."

"She looks like she would be. Where is she living, Milt?"

"Lives in the old Stewart place, with a housekeeper and a fiery-tempered old negro mammy who reared her. That mammy's

a holy terror sometimes, too. You know where the place is, don't you, J. W.?"

"Oh, yes. I'll bet I get better acquainted with it, though."

"Well, young man"—starting his engine—"you'll find plenty of company out there."

The dumpy car began to roll slowly away.

"Milt! Milt! Wait a minute. Is she engaged?"

"Hell, no!" snorted Milt. "Why, she refused *me!*"

The week before Brooke Arden's brown racer had been making thirty when he stopped her. To-day, it appeared to be going nearly twice that fast. J. W. raced his motorcycle alongside and held up a warning hand. He was beginning to be able to do it with something of an air by now.

Angrily, she slid the car to a halt.

"I hope," said J. W. solemnly, "that you will pardon this seeming habit of mine."

The girl took no notice of his levity. Her shining brown hair was tousled about her forehead; her big brown eyes were dark with concern. She was breathing heavily, in short, quick gasps.

"Don't stop me!" she panted. "You know my name. I'm speeding, all right—let me go, I'll pay the fine!"

J. W. sobered instantly. "You seem to be in trouble, miss," he said.

"I—I've lost my ring. I left it—at the Country Club—when I washed my hands after golf. Don't hold me; let me get there as soon as I can."

"You seem to value that ring mighty highly," J. W. observed casually, backing away to let her go.

Instantly she showed the drawing within herself, the sudden flash of anger, at mention of the ring, that he had noted on the first occasion.

"You are impertinent!" she flared. Then, beginning to speed up her engine, she shot one final remark at him:

"Remember, my man, I told you something last week. Just fix this, too, in your memory!" The brown racer hiccuped and roared away.

"J. W.," quoth that young man to that young man, "something seems to hint to me that you are not making such a hit with yon young lady."

"J. W." was John Walton Burt, Jr., the son, naturally, of John Walton Burt, Sr. The latter gentleman had come to town some years before, alone, without money, without friends, with no asset on earth outside his jolly Celtic skin. That, however, had been enough.

To-day he was the politics of the district. When "Jawn Walt'n" spoke men jumped to obey. In any part of the State his word was law.

The years had been good to him. No man could have recognized in the plump, jovial, cultured-looking old gentleman, glasses in hand, wittily staging at the Country Club a defense of Woman Suffrage, the friendless struggler of former years. When he took a seat in the smoking-room or on the veranda he was certain to become the center of a group. He was liked partly for his power to afford freedom from obnoxious legislation—mostly for himself.

J. W. was the apple of John Walton's eye; and that affection was as completely returned by J. W. Since the mother had left the two alone they had been inseparable. When J. W. went to college it had been like cutting an arm off each of them.

"I'm not liking this, lad, any more 'n you are," John Walton had said. "But I'm wanting you, lad, to have more advantages to start on than I had. When you come out, if you're still wanting to mix into the game alongside your dad, get into it you shall. I'll start you at the practical side of the game, on the force; just as Andrews started his boy on a punching-machine in the factory when he came out o' college.

"I'm wanting you, too, lad, to know the actual steps in the game. You can't be getting by without it. There was the time that Terence Clancey had that woman slip the money to him the morning of election day when I'd never have—but never mind that now. If you're still wanting to mix in when you're done with your books, you shall mix in."

"I'll want to, never fear," J. W. had

declared sturdily. "And I'll find some way to practise at politics while I'm in college, too. You see."

He had kept his word. Hardly had he matriculated before he had his finger in half a dozen political pies. By the end of his freshman year, after a series of bitter conflicts, if he had requested the college to indorse him for President the student body would have solemnly done so. Reports from college always made old John Walton nearly burst with pride.

The books were now laid aside. Political science, political economy, public finance, law—everything that J. W. and John Walton had determined would be of aid—all were of the past. True to their plan, John Walton had put J. W. to work on the force, as a motorcycle cop.

"I'm thinking it will be the best way for you to break in, lad," he said. "The outdoors will do you good, and the riding will be a novelty to you."

And so, while during working hours J. W. donned the uniform and was a member of the motorcycle squadron, after working hours he played with the young society crowd: golfed, danced, teased the newest débutantes. Once he was even stopped by a fellow member of the motorcycle squadron for speeding.

Naturally his acquaintances, led by the irrepressible Milt, attempted to have fun with him about his job. They quit soon. The man who tried to slip over a joke on J. W. generally came out at the wrong end of the laugh. He had a very uncomfortable and very invariable habit of squirming on top. By bitter experience they learned to let him alone.

The dance at the Country Club was getting under full way. John Walton shouldered his path through a forest of dress-suits around Brooke Arden. They gave way, grudgingly—but they gave way.

Her eyes sparkled with pleasure as she glimpsed the well-knit old figure. "Hail, Sir Knight!" she said, giving him a welcoming hand.

"Hail, princess!" returned John Walton, neglecting not to take the hand. "I come to pay respects and to take you off for a chat." Despite demurs from the forest he proceeded to do so.

"And how's the faithful family servitor?" he jested as they paused by the rail on the veranda.

"Oh, Mammy Lou's behaving herself since your rescue of us that caused me to knight you. I think that scrape has just about quieted her fervid spirit."

"And faith, I'm thinking, wasn't it enough? The policeman still swears that she fitted a wash-boiler over his head, doused him with soap-suds, besides giving him the wiry edge of a more-than-keen tongue—all because he simply attempted to rescue her very battered-up young husband from her."

"Mercy, Sir Knight! I must defend my sex. What would you do if you were a lady of color, well along in years, with a very youthful, very handsome young husband, if said youthful husband disported himself in gay garments among the much younger ladies of color in a manner not at all befitting a married man with a faithful, even though older, wife at home?"

"Same thing your Mammy Lou did to Philatea, I'm thinking," confessed John Walton. "Only, nothing less than a howitzer could be doing it as thoroughly. But she was in luck, princess. Do you know? It isn't every tale—with due apologies to yourself for my thinking it—that comes into my office I am believing and acting on right off."

"Oh, of course"—leaning over to speak very confidentially—"for my Mammy Lou I would have even told a tiny lie or so—but I didn't. I'll tell you how you can know. Do you remember how I looked?"

"Remember? Yes, princess, every feature of you. But why?"

"It's a funny thing: I've tried and tried to break myself of it. I *al*-ways, every single time, when I'm telling the truth, can keep my eyes wide open; but invariably, when I fib, in spite of all I can do, my eyes narrow at the corners, crinkle up—and I'll know it and be trying to prevent. Now, weren't my eyes wide open when I talked to you?"

"In truth, they were; I am remembering how they pleaded. And thinking of it,

princess, it's wishful I am that I had thirty years off my shoulders. 'Tis then I'd be testing of the truth of your test, with soft words whispered in your pink ear, my dear —and the corner of an eye watching your own."

"Oh, the test is a true test, all right," Brooke laughed up at him, eyes wide open in proof. "And I'm wishful, too, Sir Knight, that the thirty years were not, or that you might be your own son if you had one. Now, wasn't that a nice little speech?"

"As nice, almost, as yourself, my dear. But—"

J. W. bustled up very hastily, his flaunting yellow hair wilder even than usual. His face was lit with pleasure. "I was hunting for you, Miss Arden," he said excitedly. "I'm J. W. Burt. Hi, dad. Milt has this dance with you, Miss Arden, and some gawk backed into his sock the last dance. He's being repaired; and I begged, though I hadn't been formally introduced, to be permitted to bring his apologies to you."

The girl turned to John Walton. "He's my son," the latter admitted, "though at times I'm considering the murdering of him."

She was silent. A touch of color had appeared, high in each cheek; the corners of her lips tightened tensely.

"Well"—John Walton broke the silence —"then I'll be leaving the two of you together."

For a moment after his departure there was no sound. J. W.'s glance fell on the odd ring.

"Do you know," he began, making conversation, "that is a very curious ring you wear. I have seen only one like it before."

There was a quizzical smile of unbelief on her lips. "How very queer!" she remarked softly. "In some jewelry-store, I suppose?"

"Oh, no, not a ring like that. I happened to take a course in ancient and medieval jewelry at college, and there was one like it in the college museum. The hoop was much larger than this one, and the bezel was a sapphire instead of a ruby, cut *en cabachon,* the same as this, though."

"This ring," she remarked, eying him unbelievingly, "is engraved inside: a quotation from Chaucer."

"From Chaucer? Impossible. Why, that ring is either a genuine bishop's ring with cut-down hoop, or a mighty good imitation of one. It dates back to perhaps the tenth century, certainly as far back as the thirteenth. And Chaucer, if I am not mistaken, was prevalent about, say, the fourteenth. Stil-l-l-l—it might have been engraved later—when the posy rings became so popular, about the sixteenth century. Let me have it a moment," stretching out a hand.

As he had spoken, the look on the girl's face had changed from critical unbelief, first to reticence, then, as his hand went out for the ring, to aversion. The hand with the ring on it went to her bosom, as if to save it from contamination.

"No! I—I—please let's drop the subject. There—there goes the band. I've the next dance engaged. Would you mind our going in?"

A half-hour later John Walton felt the pressure of a small hand on his shoulder. He whirled around; then his face broke into a delighted smile.

"It's honored, I am, princess," he said.

"I want to ask you a question, Sir Knight." There was a serious frown on the smooth forehead.

"Ask me anything—even to the half of my kingdom."

"Not that much, Sir Knight. It's only —but they tell me, Sir Knight, that what you do not know about politics simply is not."

"Wel-l-l-l," drawled the wily victor of many a bitter political battle, "I ha-a-a-ve been known, princess, to take a wee part in some such amusement once or twice."

"Suppose, Sir Knight, that a man had done something to you, and you learned that he was—well—connected with politics. What would you do? And don't you tell me to have a meek and forgiving spirit. I don't *want* to turn the other cheek!"

"Wel-l-l-l-l, there are ways and ways, princess. Don't slander him; in politics that always helps the slanderee. Let's see. I tell you. There's only one sure way,

princess. About ten years ago a certain man ran for a certain office in a certain district. The opposition got hold of a picture —nice picture, too—taken of him at a picnic. That picture laughed him out of politics. If you're wanting to kill a political career dead off, make a laughing stock of him. But tell me, princess, who has been incurring your anger?"

"Oh, no one that really amounts to anything, Sir Knight," said the princess lightly, "and you're simply a dear." With a caressing pressure of her hand on his arm she was gone.

The dance was over. The Burt car was speeding homeward.

"J. W.," quoth John Walton, Sr., to J. W., Jr., "she would make a wonderful daughter-in-law."

"John Walton," replied J. W., Jr., to John Walton, Sr., "there is very much in what you say."

J. W. was somewhat in a daze. It was hard for him to believe things like that could be true. Inquiringly he pinched his arm. It felt real. But what the dickens—

For weeks following the dance, every effort that he could think of had failed to make progress with Brooke Arden. He had tried persistently, with every thinkable wile, to be as nice to her as he knew how. Somehow, it hadn't taken; somehow his wooing had not prospered. Always when he was with her there was an indefinable something present and between them; a something that made ever for artificiality. She always seemed to have a mocking light in her eyes. And she had patently, obviously avoided him almost to the point of rudeness.

Then, suddenly, this morning, as he was on his way down to the office, she had whizzed along in the wicked brown racer. Instead of passing by with a bare nod, as usual, she had whirled in to the curb, motioning for him to jump in.

"I'm going to the City Hall myself," she had said, with a smile that was nothing if not friendly. "Come along."

J. W. had come along. He pinched his arm again as the brown racer ate up the blocks.

"You know," said Brooke, scaring a year's growth out of a truck-horse, then pacifying the irate driver with a swift smile, "at first it nearly puzzled me to death, trying to figure out how you could possibly be a member of the police force and of the Country Club at the same time."

"Oh, dad and I have always been bolsheviki," J. W. explained laughingly. "I go one night to a dance at the club, and the next to the firemen's ball—and enjoy the ball more."

"And you're promoted, too! I haven't congratulated you yet. Let me. How does it feel to be a real detective? You know, I've always wanted to know how Sherlock Holmes felt. Tell me, won't you?"

"Wel-l-l-l," confessed J. W., "ever since I've been promoted to the detectives I've had the very definite impression that I'm just a plain, garden-variety fool."

"Oh, I don't see how you can say that!" she protested in honied accents. J. W., being in love, ate it up.

"Oh, I expect the city detective force could limp along without me," he made an ineffectual stab at modesty.

"I don't see how!" she cooed; then as he started to look at her, hastily, biting her lip: "You're going to enter politics, aren't you?"

"Going to? Nope. I'm simply finishing my dear little education in the practical side. I'm already in. When this is over Burt, Jr., will heave his hat into some several rings all at one and the same time."

"Politics—" she mused. "Er, do you ever have your picture taken, Mr. Burt?"

J. W. wondered which one of them had gone suddenly crazy. Then it occurred that perhaps she might be leading up to ask for a photo.

"Once a camera was known to survive the ordeal," he admitted. "May I give you one?"

"Oh, *will* you? I'd dearly love to have one."

"I'll be more than glad—by Jove! There's the spot I first met you. Do you remember the day you had Gleason in the racer with you? I'll never forget that day."

"No-o-o-o, I suppose not. And the future, Mr. Burt"—turning with a sugary

smile—"may bring forth other things that will cause you to remember."

J. W. liked that. Her remark hinted at intimacies in the days to come.

The brown racer whirred along in silence.

"Well, here we are," she sighed, parking the racer in front of the City Hall. "Bye-bye. See you later."

A half-hour later J. W. received a hurry-up call from Commissioner Norton's office. That spruce-looking old gentleman met him at the door; his tie suspiciously straight, his eyes suspiciously bright, his bearing suspiciously erect.

"A-hem, Burt!" he began briskly. "Deuced fine girl in there. Lost some jewelry; case for your department. Use your best efforts, Burt. Also, you may talk to her in my inner office, if you wish. A-hem!" straightening again the already straight tie.

The girl was, as J. W. had suspected and hoped, Brooke Arden. His eyes were shining as he hurried to greet her. A tiny smile lurked in the corners of her lips as she gave him a firm, little, cool hand.

"Why, I didn't know, coming downtown—" J. W. began.

"No. It's simply my good luck to have you assigned to this case. I—may we talk somewhere in private? What I wish to say concerns family affairs, things that I do not wish bandied about."

"Of course," J. W. assured her. "We may use Commissioner Norton's private office. Wait till I close this door," as they entered. "Now, we can talk without fear of being overheard."

"What I am about to tell you," she began in her low, earnest voice, "may seem, in part, very peculiar to you. Of course it does not seem at all that way to me. It concerns a custom that has been observed in my family since the days of feudalism, I suppose. It has become a part of our very family life itself."

J. W. nodded reassuringly to her. She continued:

"As you observed, the ring I was wearing"—J. W.'s glance shot to her hands and found them bare of ornament—"is old, very old; dates back hundreds and hundreds of years. It is called the Ring of Navarre, just why, I am unable to say. I don't even know how long it has been in our family; tradition says for several centuries. And how long the custom has been connected with it and observed no one seems to know."

J. W. rose softly to his feet and began to pace the floor as he listened. He could think better that way.

"You may think the custom queer. I, as I said, do not. I know there is one noble English house which holds its estate from the crown for an annual rental of one red rose, and that seems much more strange to me. There are many of the customs which have come down from feudal days that I find more peculiar."

J. W. turned to her. "I understand," he said simply, helping her with her uncomfortable explanation. "I shall not forget that it means much to you—that it is almost sacred."

"It is! It is close to our hearts. You can't understand—you can't realize what a family rite like this means to us. It becomes almost a religion." She paused a moment, then resumed, the ring of truth in her voice, the light of sincerity in her clear, wide eyes:

"This ring, the Ring of Navarre, has always been worn, as far back as we know, by either the father or the youngest daughter of our family. No one else ever wears it. In each generation he wears it constantly until the youngest daughter is sixteen. On that birthday, as she stands on the very threshold of womanhood, the history and significance of the ring are carefully explained to her, that she may appreciate her honor and her duty in wearing it.

"Then it is given to her; and from then she wears it constantly upon the third finger of her left hand, until—until she has met a man for whom she cares, the man she is very sure she loves. When she is certain, she gives him the ring. Sometimes she explains to him the meaning then; sometimes not till later. And then—then, he gives the ring—to their youngest daughter—when she is sixteen."

J. W. stood, motionless, at the window, gazing unseeingly at the traffic below.

There came a subtle change in the girl's voice. Her eyes, heretofore wide and sure, narrowed as she resumed. She darted a glance at J. W.

"And now," she said softly, eyes narrowing, "some one has stolen it from me. I've let it be taken; a sacred inheritance, handed down from generation to generation."

At the sound of her own words her hand slipped alarmedly to her bosom, where something was suspended from the slender links of a gold chain. Reassured, she cast a look at J. W.'s unconscious back, and resumed:

"I don't know whom to suspect. It is such a peculiar ring that surely no professional thief could hope to dispose of it. Why should any one want it—unless its significance was known? And no outsider save yourself knows that; I have never told it; the parchments about it are securely locked in my vault—"

"Just a minute. Locked up where?"

"In my vault—at the United Trust Company."

"H-m! That's where that—er—Gleason works, isn't it?"

"Y-yes—but of course you *know* that he wouldn't have anything to do with stealing my ring from me."

"In this business, Miss Arden," grimly, "there's very little that you can know. But go on."

"Where was I? Oh, I'd about finished. The housekeeper is really as much upset over the loss as I am myself. Mammy Lou knows the significance of the ring and its value to me—and Mammy Lou was with my mother when I was born."

"Where was the ring the last time you saw it?" asked J. W.

"I took it off my finger last night and laid it on a tabouret in the drawing-room. I have not seen it since."

"There was no one else in the house besides those you have mentioned?"

"No. No one—that is, of course, no one—except Mr. Gleason. He called."

"Uhuh—I see—Gleason. And no one else was there?"

"I'm sure not. We went to a show, and the girls and fellows very often drop in."

"I see. I remember the ring well enough to write the description without troubling you further. Most probably I shall have to come out once or twice for information, but I have enough now to work on. The first thing, of course, is to notify the pawnshops and jewelers. That will be all this morning, thank you."

"I know you're going to find my ring, Mr. Burt," she said, coming up close and looking up at him. "I know you will—for me."

Commissioner Norton hardly waited for her departure to rush up to J. W.

"My boy," he gushed, "my boy, you're in luck. In luck! Do you know, she asked especially that you, and no one else, should be put on this case!"

J. W. wasted no time after Brooke Arden left. To tell the truth, he rather relished the prospect of such a call upon Gleason. Within ten minutes he was at the United Trust Company. Mr. Gleason was leaning back pompously at his desk.

"Y-yes?" he questioned J. W. with a raising of the brows.

J. W. wasted small time in superficial courtesies. "From headquarters," he announced curtly, flipping back the lapel of his coat.

The soapy young man at the desk started.

"Yes, yes," he said nervously. "Yes, yes. And what can I do for you?"

"Miss Arden has lost a very valuable piece of jewelry. I assume you know what I mean."

Mr. Gleason winced openly. "Not—not the—the Navarre ring?" he faltered.

"Where did you learn the name of that ring?" The question fairly crackled in its swiftness.

"I—why—I heard her call it that—in casual conversation."

"H-m! The ring was stolen last night. I understand you were at her house."

"But—but when—when I picked it up from the tabouret I—I gave it back to her. Why, I remember distinctly giving it back; I remember seeing it on her hand when I told her good night."

"I see. You saw no one there?"

"No—not another soul."

"I see. Know anything else about it?"

"Not a thing in this world. I—"

"I see. That's all. Good morning, Mr. Gleason."

Could any man on earth with a clear conscience, wondered J. W., act like that? Still, in their first encounter, Gleason had not distinguished himself for bravery. Late that afternoon, so late that it was early evening, a message from Brooke Arden reached him at headquarters.

"Please call at once. It's about my ring. Brooke Arden," was all she had written.

J. W. hurried to answer her summons.

"I came up on the jump when I got your message," said J. W., holding her hand till she took it from him. He wondered if she had any idea how her dinner-gown exactly suited her.

"I don't know whether I'm a little idiot for thinking it important, or not," she confessed. "I thought it best to leave the decision to your wiser head. Won't you have a seat?"

J. W. imbibed the adulation and settled back to enjoy looking at her. A rose-shaded floor-lamp can do wonders for even a plain girl. But when it has a piquant beauty to work with—

"Have you found out anything about my ring?" Her question called him back to earth.

"Nothing definite. We are having all the pawnshops watched, and have sent warnings around to the jewelers. A unique ring like that simply can't be made away with. But what was it you mentioned in your message?"

"I—I feel foolish for getting you out here just to tell you this," she laughed uneasily, eyes beginning to narrow. "But—but—well—a woman's intuitions, you know."

"Tell me," J. W. encouraged. "It can't hurt, and it may help."

"Something has come up—something new. I don't suppose it amounts to anything. But I didn't feel capable of deciding; I sent for you."

"Yes, yes. Go ahead."

"I left the ring, as I said, on the little tabouret, here in the drawing-room. I told you that I knew only of Mr. Gleason's being here. I have since learned that other persons came in—two more persons."

J. W. leaned forward tensely.

"I do not believe these persons are guilty," she said quickly. "I would almost as soon accuse myself. But I feel that you should know. Last night, Philatea, Mammy Lou's young husband, brought some one"—her eyes closed almost to mere slits—"into this room with him. They have gone somewhere. And that's all."

"It's enough," commented J. W. grimly.

"Oh, I don't think that Philatea would take anything belonging to me. But whoever he brought with him might know something about it. Don't you think," innocently, "that it would be a good idea for you to go out into the kitchen and see what Mammy Lou knows about them?"

"Good idea? It's the only thing to do."

"And don't you think," very earnestly, leaning over closer, "that you ought to ask Mammy Lou where her husband is now, and who his companion was?"

"Oh, of course. I'm going to ask her those very questions."

"You know, I'm *so* glad you don't think I was silly to think it important. I'm dying to see what you find out."

She smiled at his departing back. She herself would have been surprised to learn how much of tenderness there was in that smile.

The sound of singing from within the kitchen greeted J. W. as he entered. Mammy Lou, her plump hands busily molding sticky biscuit dough, was voicing the following tender sentiment:

> Lawd, I'll be in promust lan'
> Wunst when I kin lay my han'
> In dat head o' kinky wool—

"Mammy Lou," began J. W., breaking in on the tribute to the dear departed, "I want to ask you a few questions."

"Whut's dat?" suspiciously, resting hands in biscuit dough to peer belligerently over one fat shoulder at J. W. "Whut's dat?"

"I want to ask you some questions."

"Uhuh," ominously grunted Mammy Lou.

"Mammy Lou, are you married?"

"I is!"

Clouds of black war mounted into Mammy Lou's beady eyes.

"Where is your husband working?"

"He ain't workin'—ef dat's any o' yo' bus'ness! He ain't workin'!" Mammy Lou was not growing calmer.

"Was he here last night? Did he leave here?"

Mammy Lou's eyes began to twitch with anger.

"He wus!" she exploded. "He wus! An' he did—ef you want to keep on pryin'."

"He left, eh? Now, Mammy Lou," smilingly, "didn't he take some one along with him? Who was it?"

The reaction was as if some one had jabbed a spike into Mammy Lou. Anger stiffened her pudgy shape. For the briefest instant she stood still, fairly sizzling. Then came the cataclysm. Mammy Lou ran amuck.

"Yes, he lef' wid somebody!" she fairly shouted, snatching for a dish-pan. "Lef' wid a sneakin' little painted yaller gal, jes' lak he did befo'!"

Bang! the dish-pan hurtled past J. W. and crashed into the wall.

"Come makin' fun o' me, huh!"

Bang! a platter went by on the other side.

"Miss Brooke tol' me you gwine come out here tryin' to make fun o' me. She tol' me you gwine to. An' dis is whut I tol' her I gwine do ef you did—*dis!*"

"Dis!" was the pan of sticky biscuit dough, deposited squarely over J. W.'s frantically retreating head.

Droopy as a wet pullet, his hands raised in abject surrender from the onslaughts of the furious Mammy Lou, his face covered with the sticky mess, J. W. looked up dejectedly just in time to gaze squarely into a lens as a blinding calcium flash went off.

One hand on the camera, Brooke Arden dropped at her feet the burned match that had set off the flash sheets.

"O-oh!" she said.

And yet, somehow, there did not seem so very much of triumph in her voice, after all.

Following that memorable night, there ensued a miserable week for J. W. Burt, Jr. He had one day of respite, with only wonderings and forebodings for the future. Even then, Commissioner Norton summoned him to his office about ten o'clock.

"H-m! Burt," he announced, straightening his tie, "I have just had information about Miss Arden's ring. It seems that it wasn't really lost. She phoned that she has found it; that it was merely misplaced, after all."

J. W. withdrew in silence. He had a mighty good idea how that ring had been misplaced; by whom—and why. Then followed the deluge.

In his mail at headquarters next morning was a plain envelope, addressed in a feminine handwriting. There was nothing on or about the envelope to indicate any possible source. Inside there was no letter; only an unmounted photograph.

J. W. took one look at it ,and groaned aloud in spite of himself.

The flashlight had resulted in a very slight underexposure, making every detail stand out in bold relief. In the right foreground, pudgy hands ready for instant action, poised Mammy Lou, leaning forward with an unmistakable snort of defiance—ready, willing, and eager to renew the fray.

He had hoped most fervently that his own likeness would be spoiled somewhere in the amateur workings of exposure and development. The print showed that he had leaned upon an exceedingly broken reed.

No one could gaze twice upon that photograph and doubt for an instant just whose flaunting light hair it was that was besmeared with dough, whose hands were raised in abject surrender, whose face presented the picture of comic wo as he gazed despairingly into the camera.

Even in his misery he could see how funny it would be.

"Whatcher got, Burt?" demanded the sergeant on the desk, leaning over to see, too.

"Er—nothing," J. W. gulped, pocketing the picture in haste. "Nothing."

A youngster with an envelope was waiting on the steps. "Morning, Mr. Burt,"

he grinned, handing over the white rectangle.

Another picture, of course.

That was the merest beginning. Envelopes containing simply a print—nothing more—greeted J. W. everywhere; at headquarters, at home, at the club, wherever he went. If he dined he was paged to receive another photo. Messenger-boys rang the bell at all hours of the night for him to sign for another picture of J. W. Burt. He became personally acquainted with every special-delivery boy at the central post-office. Friends constantly were handing him plain envelopes "some one had asked them to hand him."

Previously, J. W. had been no mean liar when occasion demanded. Quite often he had blandly, with the meekest of countenances, deceived even the wary and suspicious Milt. He now developed a skill that far surpassed the very best of his former achievements. On the spur of the moment—any moment—without the least flurry of expression, he could contrive an impromptu alibi that rang true at every point.

He wondered where any woman on earth could be getting ingenuity to think up so many and unheard-of ways of confronting him with that confounded picture. Pictures greeted him mornings, pictures greeted him noon; pictures greeted him night.

One evening he took in to dinner a slim little visitor from "Lou-e-ville," as she called it. Staring him in the face, instead of a place-card, was an envelope—larger than usual. He stole a surreptitious look inside. Two photographs posed side by side, pompously entitled, "Before—and After."

"Before" was himself, hand in air, halting a racer. He wondered how she had got that negative from Milt. "After," of course, was that unforgetable flashlight.

The slim visitor wanted to see, too. She did not. She reported, in post-bellum boudoir confidences, that he was "awfully queer—hardly said a single word all night. Was he quite all right?"

J. W. had firmly believed all along that Brooke was intending the whole thing as a joke; that she would never actually let one of those pictures become public, would never really hurt his career. But gradually it began to sift home that, whether she intended it or not, one of those prints was bound eventually to become public. He could not believe that she did not see it. Gradually he realized that she had no intention of destroying the negative or of handing it over to him.

Somehow, the idea hurt like the very devil. He had not associated that sort of thing with his dream of Brooke Arden. The girl he had imagined could have started the thing as a joke, perhaps; but this far—never. She—well, she simply wasn't that sort of girl.

With the conviction his greetings to her changed. Where formerly his whole face had broken into a delighted smile of welcome at sight of her, now his countenance hardened grimly as he raised a hand for a mere touch of the hat brim.

Brooke seemed to notice the difference. Her greetings, too, changed. There had been a touch of whimsical mockery in her bow. Now she merely bowed. And gradually there crept into the brown eyes an indefinable something, a something that puzzled J. W. After days of rumination he suddenly realized that what he had been trying to think of was the look he had once seen in the eyes of a dog that was being whipped for something it could not understand.

Discovering which, he shrugged his shoulders, called himself several profane kinds of fool, and tried—with marked unsuccess—to forget it all.

Their next meeting was by chance, out on the golf links.

J. W. straightened up after sinking a six-foot put on the eighteenth, and saw her as he began taking his clubs from the caddy. She was teeing her ball, preparatory to driving off. Her glance fell on J. W. She gazed elaborately away, then began a rapt conversation with the ubiquitous and omnipresent Mr. Gleason.

That individual was attentively buzzing about her, the incongruous picture of a fat butterfly. Brooke ostentatiously detached a small silver case from a chain about her neck.

"You're going in, aren't you?" she ob-

served in clear, far-reaching tones, drawing a negative half-way out of the case, then returning it and closing the trinket, her face inscrutable. "Won't you keep this for me?"

Mr. Gleason oozed acquiescence and pranced off to the locker-room, ahead of J. W.

Grimly J. W. followed him.

"I've come," he announced bluntly, closing the door behind him, "to get that silver case Miss Arden gave you."

"Oh—did you?" inanely inquired Mr. Gleason, unsuspiciously fishing it up and holding it out. "She wants it, does she?"

"Nope," laconically quoth J. W., taking the case. "I do."

"But—but—but—" spluttered the fat one, advancing in his excitement. "You—you can't—do that! Give it back!"

"Oh, shut up!" wearily interposed J. W., and, placing a palm into the podgy face, shoved—hard. Mr. Gleason stumbled swiftly backward and disappeared suddenly with a fat, muffled sound, into his locker. J. W. waited for him to reappear, then snorted and strode forth.

He found Brooke's caddy close to the third green.

"Sliced deep into the woods," that phlegmatic youngster answered his questionings, and spat unemotionally at a butterfly. "Said she'd hunt it to punish herself for slicin'. She's in there, all right; you can't miss her. Just walk straight in."

Nor did he miss her. She was still hunting for her ball.

Without a word, J. W. strode up close to her; without a word, he held out the case. Wonderingly she stretched out a hand to take it.

"I took that case from Gleason," J. W. said, in tones of quiet repression that showed the inner storm. "I looked inside to make sure it was the flashlight negative. It is, all right. When I first followed that man into the locker-room I intended keeping it if I got it. But I don't want it now."

Brooke looked up, startled. She tried to speak, but the low voice kept remorselessly on:

"When I first saw you, that day in your brown racer, I felt like kneeling down in the dirt of the road and thanking God just for making the girl I had been waiting for all my life. Even when you got angry I didn't think anything of it. All women are like that.

"But when you deliberately, in cold blood, set about planning to ruin a fellow's whole career—when you calmly tried to carry out a hellishly diabolical thing like that—oh, well, the girl I was preparing to worship simply couldn't do that sort of thing. I thought I loved you. I've found—I've found—well, here's your negative. Now go to it!" J. W. turned his back and strode off.

There was a hurried swirl of skirts. A slim, tousled little figure raced around in front of J. W. and blocked his path.

"Wait—wait—a minute—J. W.!" falteringly. "Can't you see? Oh—won't you help? Won't you see that I—I realized I was wrong—that I couldn't go further with it—that I knew you'd take that case from him? Can't you see—won't you see—J. W.—that that was just my way—my way—of surrendering—to you—J. W.?"

The last pleading words were so low that J. W. had to bend close, very, very close to hear.

John Walton picked up a square bit of paper from the floor as J. W. burst in like a well-developed young cyclone. J. W. caught a glimpse of a photograph in his hand.

"H-m!" mused the older man, his eyes atwinkle. "Seems you lost something, J. W. And, lad, you take a good picture, a very good picture. But—er—did the colored lady catch you, J. W.?"

"Sit down, dad." J. W., voice full of suppressed excitement, disdained reply. "I've something to tell you."

"H-m! And it must be good news, by the voice of you," commented John Walton. "But stay, J. W.; that's a mighty queer ruby ring you've got on there!"

"Yes, dad," the joyous young voice fairly lilting. "You see, about this here ring—"

(The end.)

The Purple Limited

by Henry Leverage

CHAPTER XV.

ON PROBATION.

LARK related to the three men everything he could think of concerning his trip. He wound up by stating that none of the gang would ever know he had visited the old house in the woods.

"Oh, hell!" exclaimed Converse. "I'll bet you left tracks enough for a blind man to see. That isn't an ordinary mob. You should have phoned from Five Points or Ardmore, and had me send a detective. Now, you've queered the whole thing!"

Ragan nodded. "That's right," he admitted, turning to Converse. "They'll take warning, and beat it out of the State."

"That safe you saw—" mused the chief of detectives. "That cannon-ball safe! How did you say it was opened?"

"I don't know," admitted Lark. "It was wide open, and there was nothing in it."

Converse picked up the telephone on J. J. D.'s desk.

"We'll rush three operatives out to Five Points right away," he said. "Can you let us have a special engine?"

"Sure!" said J. J. D. "It 'll be ready in ten minutes."

Converse began talking with the chief of police. He startled Ragan, Lark, and J. J. D. by saying:

"Make the pinch at Green Creek Bottoms! Better send five or six of your best men and round up Black Arnold, Big Ed, and Butch. Then send me three men for another job. I've got the rest of the mob located in Ardmore County. We'll jail the whole bunch and give them the third degree."

"Wait," said J. J. D. "It won't do any good to put those men in jail without evidence. What we want is the money from the Limited."

"Who's running this?" queried Converse, after he hung up the telephone receiver. "You or I?"

J. J. D.'s face purpled. "Wouldn't it be better," he suggested, "that you listen to reason?"

"What reason?" asked Converse.

"The three men at Green Creek Bottoms, providing they are in the shack, may get warning in time to escape. Somebody may phone that the detectives are coming out on a trolley-car. Why not surround the house Lark spoke of and arrest any men who come there? Then see if the men you arrest lead to the shack at Green Creek Bottoms."

Converse turned toward the door. He listened. He wheeled and said:

"We're going to pinch them all—right away! We have enough evidence to convict. We have Nan, the red mask, telephone calls, and more than that, we have the prison records of Black Arnold, Butch, and Big Ed Kelly. They dare not stand trial!"

J. J. D. drummed on his desk. "I'd suggest," he said, "that you allow the mat-

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ter to rest for an hour or two. Let's wire the insurance adjuster and the president of the C. M. and W. They may not want those men arrested, unless you are perfectly sure the money will be recovered at the same time. If one man escapes, then the stolen money will be taken out of the State and hidden."

Converse paced the floor. "You're damn sure one is going to escape!" he said. "I'll admit that's possible. What we'll do is this—send all of the detectives west on your line. Let three go south and throw a net around the house in the woods where Lark found the safe. The rest of the detectives can work up river, cross the trolley bridge, and surround the shack at Green Creek Bottoms. If any of the mob escape from the shack they, most likely, will flee to the house near Five Points. It's a double trap."

"That's better!" exclaimed J. J. D. "Phone for the chief to send his men to the water-tank at the west end of the yard. They can get aboard the engine there. I'll have one ready in ten minutes."

Converse lifted the telephone receiver and got in communication with the chief of police of Newhouse. He changed his former orders to fit in with J. J. D.'s plan.

Lark admitted to Ragan that he saw small chance for any of the robbers to escape. Ragan was skeptical. "Aw, there's leaks everywhere," he whispered. "I bet a cigar they don't catch Big Ed Kelly. And," he added, "they won't handcuff Black Arnold without a fight."

"They may have the money at the shack," said Converse to J. J. D. "It looks as if your Purple Limited was hidden in the hills south of Butte Tunnel or Mile Pose 243. But how it got there, I don't know."

"It must have took wings," grinned Ragan when he opened the door and looked out toward the train-despatchers. "Me for the water-tank, now, where I'll wait for the engine. Coming along, Lark?"

J. J. D. motioned for Lark to remain in the office. Converse and Ragan went out after the chief of detectives looked sharply at Darrah, and said:

"You hold down this end. I'll go with the detectives to Green Creek Bottoms. There's a phone or two there in case I want additional men or a special train."

The door slammed. J. J. D. picked up the phone and notified the roundhouse crew to run a fast loco on the turn-table. He sprang from the phone and opened the door. Lark heard him giving orders to the despatchers.

"It looks like the finish," said J. J. D., coming into the office and closing the door. "We ought to know what became of the Purple Limited some time to-day. One of the gang will squeal."

Lark thought otherwise. He recalled the prison records of Big Ed Kelly, Black Arnold, Butch, Morency, and Pop Armstrong. He said: "I don't believe Converse is going to get one cent of the money taken from the safe. Where did that wagon come from? Where are the horses that drew it? The gang has another hiding-place, Mr. Darrah."

"Likely! But if one squeals or turns State's evidence, that place will be discovered."

"They won't talk."

"Well, then, Nan will tell us where the Limited is."

"How is Nan?" Lark asked.

"Fine! My wife and her are hitting it off very well. All that girl needs is kind treatment. She'll make a splendid woman, some day."

Lark changed the subject when he felt J. J. D.'s eyes upon him.

"To get back to the robbers," he said, "I think Converse is acting too hastily. The gang have opened one safe. The money has been divided or sent somewhere. They will use it for bail if they are arrested."

J. J. D. nodded. "It's all chance," he admitted, looking at his watch and giving a nervous little laugh. "Drastic police methods sometimes are the best. Converse is of the old school—of third-degree and wade right in."

The door opened to a crack. A despatcher thrust in his head.

"Extra, west, running light, just cleared Green Creek," he said. "There's twelve detectives, Converse, and Ragan aboard."

"Good God!" exclaimed J. J. D. "That's brass-band methods! The whole county will know what is coming off."

The despatcher closed the door. J. J. D. started pacing before his desk. Lark noticed that the lines on the superintendent's face had deepened to furrows. His manner was jerky. He kept looking at his watch.

"I wanted to clear this thing up through Nan," he said suddenly. "She is the key to the case. I think she knows how the train was stolen."

"She may tell your wife."

"Not while her father is living, Lark!"

A whistle sounded outside the station. Baggage was thrown to the platform. Passengers thronged past the windows of J. J. D.'s office. Lark rubbed the moisture from a pane of glass and looked out. He stood in that position for ten minutes. J. J. D. fingered the papers on his desk, lifted the phone, changed his mind, and revolved his swivel-chair until it squeaked.

"Time's almost up!" he exclaimed. "We ought to have some word from Converse. How far is it from our tracks to the trolley bridge over Broad River, Lark?"

"About three miles," said Lark, turning away from the window.

J. J. D. snapped his watch shut.

"This thing is breaking me down," he declared. "The president and general manager put the blame squarely up to me. The traffic manager even suggests I know something about the robbery. The road has lost revenue. People don't want to ship freight or ride in trains on a line where a train has disappeared. Then the newspapers have been nasty. They have worked out the theory that some one on the road is responsible. I doubt that."

Lark thought of Pop Armstrong and the Bertillon picture he had seen at Rockglen. He described the old crook to J. J. D. "Big ears and a crooked nose," he said. "He's the one who owns the house where the safe was opened."

J. J. D. shook his head. "We'll wait for the photo," he suggested. "I might know him then—I know most of the employees of this division."

The telephone bell rang. J. J. D. wheeled and snatched off the receiver. Lark watched him. The expression on the superintendent's face changed to despair. "Yes! Yes!" he said. "You, Converse! Do you mean that—repeat it! What? I don't know. It wasn't my fault. No, nobody here had anything to do with it."

J. J. D. hung up the receiver and grasped the back of the swivel chair. His face was the color of ashes.

"It's hell!" he exclaimed. "We shouldn't have let Converse go ahead on that wild raid. We—I shouldn't."

"What happened?" asked Lark.

"Enough! Everything went wrong. Big Ed Kelly, Butch, and Black Arnold were warned of the coming of the detectives. They had a large motor-boat in the river. Shots were exchanged when the boat went under the trolley bridge and headed down-stream. Ragan is wounded. Converse declares some one phoned the shack from Newhouse or Green River. He is trying to trace the phone call through the girl at Green Creek Bottoms. She said the call came ten minutes before the detectives reached the shack."

Lark remained silent. J. J. D. brought his hands from the chair and twisted his fingers.

"They blame me for that call!" he added. "They say it was some employee of this office. It wasn't!"

Lark inquired after J. J. D. had cooled down slightly:

"How about the three detectives who started to walk to Five Points and the house in the woods?"

"They're on their way. There is a faint chance that Big Ed, Black Arnold, and Butch may land from the motor-boat and go to the house. If they don't—we're beaten. The crooks are now warned, and will leave the State."

Converse arrived at Newhouse at three o'clock. The chief of detectives was a sorry-looking sight. He charged through the despatchers' room and banged open the door to J. J. D.'s office.

Lark had just returned from getting lunch at the little lunch-wagon near the railroad yards. The sight of the locomo-

tive, which had taken the detectives west, hurried his footsteps.

Switchmen, yardmen, wipers, and newspaper reporters thronged the station platform. The news was out that the supposed robbers of the Purple Limited had fought a winning fight with the police, and escaped down the river in a large launch.

J. J. D. and Converse were going it hot and heavy in the office. The superintendent was at bay, with his back against his swivel chair.

"I tell you!" roared Converse. "I say that we were tipped off from this office. How else could a phone message get to the shack at Green Creek Bottoms? Who knew we were going to raid Black Arnold's place?"

"Some one probably saw your men get aboard the loco," suggested J. J. D. "Or else a spy was located at Green Creek."

"Spy, be damned!"

"Have you traced the phone call?"

Converse turned and saw Lark and three despatchers looking at him through the open door. One of these despatchers, the new man, was his own operative. He turned again to J. J. D.

"We're trying to trace the call. It came from a cigar-store in this town. The girl at Green Creek Bottoms says that a man called up Arnold, said: 'The Hessians are coming,' and that was all. It was enough!"

"Hessians?" queried J. J. D.

"It's an underworld expression for police."

J. J. D.'s frown deepened. "How did any one in the cigar-store know the detectives were on the way?"

"That's what I want to know!" exclaimed Converse. "We're tracing all calls to the cigar-store. We may get news any minute. The warning call about the 'Hessians' raised the very devil. Black Arnold, Big Ed Kelly, and Butch had taken alarm when we reached the west end of the trolley bridge. I saw their boat in the river. They went under the bridge, with us firing at them. Ragan was shot in the left shoulder. The big launch disappeared in the ice down-stream."

J. J. D. paced the floor and glanced at the telephone.

"There was no message sent from this phone," he said. "And none that I know of from the despatchers' office. You say the three crooks had a large launch? I didn't know that?"

"Nobody else knew it. The storekeeper at Green Creek Bottoms told me the launch tied up to the river bank last night, and one man got out. It was kept in waiting for a getaway. Now the three convicts are gone, and they know how to stay away."

Converse dropped a bitter laugh. "What's the use?" he continued cuttingly. "I'm checkmated every move I make. The leak is right in your division."

"On my division, yes," admitted J. J. D., "but not in this office or in the despatchers' room. I told the general manager he could have my resignation as soon as the Purple Limited was found. Until then I stand my ground. It's up to me to clear myself!"

Converse wheeled upon Lark. "Have you seen that damn girl?" he snarled.

"Nan?"

"Yes, Nan!"

"No, I haven't seen her recently," admitted Lark.

"Well, we looked all through the shack. We turned it upside down. There's no trace of any red cloth like the mask was made of. Did she carry any of her dresses away?"

"She had a little pasteboard box."

"Where is it?"

Lark looked at J. J. D. The superintendent tugged at his mustache and ran his hand through his thin hair.

"My wife has it," said J. J. D.

"Oh, your wife, eh?" The detective's thin lips curled into a sneer. "Well, phone your wife and find out if any of that red cloth was carried from the shack by Nan. That mask is the only link connecting Black Arnold with the robbery. Of course we can convict them now—after that fight on the river—but the mask would cinch it with a jury. I expect Nan carried a torn dress with her. Phone, and have her come down here!"

J. J. D. picked up the phone, called his house number, and spoke to his wife. Mrs.

Darrah promised to send Nan to the office immediately. The superintendent hung up the receiver and eyed Converse. Both men were fighting mad.

"We'll see!" growled Converse. "I'm going to make that girl talk or put her in the reform school. She knows where the Purple Limited is hidden. She knows the place where the three ex-convicts were headed for. She's got to talk or take her medicine."

"I don't believe she knows anything!" blurted J. J. D. "And, if she does, she won't talk."

Converse looked past the despatchers and to where the crowd were surging on the station platform.

"She'll talk!" he said grimly. "Let me at that phone."

J. J. D. made way for the detective. Converse started to lift the receiver when the bell rang. "Hello! Hello!" he said. "Who is it? What do you want?"

Lark and J. J. D. stood in the doorway. They watched Converse's lips harden to a straight line. His gray eyes flashed. "Yes, go on," he said. "You're talking to Converse, now. This is the chief."

The detective hung up the receiver finally. He rose from the swivel chair.

"Nobody's arrived at the house in the wood, yet," he mused, half to himself. "I just had a report from Ardmore. The river police have lost trace of the launch. They say the river is filled with ice."

J. J. D. pulled out his watch. "It's almost five o'clock—four fifty-three. It 'll be dark in thirty minutes."

"Yes," said Converse, "and the three crooks are looting the two safes of the Purple Limited right now. They're somewhere between Green Creek Bottoms and Ardmore. They didn't pass the bridge at Ardmore. They'll get away to-night."

Lark realized that both Converse and J. J. D. had little time to clear up the matter of the Purple Limited. Black Arnold and Big Ed Kelly were warned. They had the money from the safe which he had found in the barn near Five Points. They had a fast launch somewhere on the river. There were a number of low islands between Green Creek Bottoms and Ardmore. These islands were covered with snow and frozen rushes. Ducks nested on them in summer.

J. J. D. came out of his lethargy and went into the despatchers' room. He gave an order to a despatcher, looked over the train-sheets, and lifted the receiver from the wall phone in the room.

"Railroad central," he said to the operator. "That you, Alfred? Say, Alfred, check up every call made by railroad employees to-day. See if you can find one—"

J. J. D. turned and asked Converse, who was standing in the doorway:

"What was the name of that cigar-store where the phone call was sent to Arnold at Green Creek Bottoms?"

Converse pulled out a note-book. He rapidly turned over the pages.

"Union Cigar-Store!" he snapped. "The phone number is Newhouse 471. The call was sent from a slot-booth to Green Creek Bottoms at eleven seventeen this morning. I never thought of checking up your railroad calls."

J. J. D. repeated the number to the railroad central. "It's just a chance," he admitted when he hung up the receiver. "You say the gang at Green Creek Bottoms were tipped off from this office or from some railroad employee. We'll see if any one was careless enough to use our private wires."

Lark had a suggestion which he offered to J. J. D.

"There are a number of barges and house-boats on the west bank of the river," he said. "Perhaps Black Arnold and Big Ed are hiding in one of them. I saw two big flat-boats when I was coming up the river from Five Points."

J. J. D. nodded. "What do you think of that idea?" he asked Converse.

"It's as good as any, but the river police are attending to that."

Lark turned and saw Nan opening the half-closed door that led from the despatchers' room. The girl was plainly out of breath. She stared around the room, then came through the gate in the railing, and smiled toward J. J. D. Her hand crept out and clutched Lark's arm.

"Who wants me?" she asked.

"Come here!" commanded Converse.

Nan lowered her fingers from Lark's arm and hesitatingly went into the office. Lark and J. J. D. followed her. Converse slammed the door shut.

"Stand there!" he said to Nan. "Right by that window. Lift up your chin. Don't look at the floor."

The girl twisted a pair of cotton gloves and flushed. She stared at Lark and J. J. D. Her hazel eyes fastened defiantly upon the chief of detectives.

"Now, you!" said Converse, with police brevity. "You come clean with what you know about the Purple Limited robbery. We know what you know. We know the four masks used in the robbery were torn from one of your old dresses. We know that your father, Big Ed Kelly, and Butch, were the three men who held up the engineer. We know that!"

Nan closed her lips firmly. She drew away from Converse's menacing finger and cringed in one corner of the office.

"I won't say a word!" she cried. "I don't know anything!"

Converse changed his tones to soft ones.

"Oh, now, come out with the truth, little girl. Who are you protecting? Your father and the rest of the gang are as good as in State prison. The evidence against them is overwhelming."

"Then why do you want me to say anything?"

"Why?" ejaculated Converse. "Why, because you're going to Milford Reform School if you don't! I'll see that you go there until you're twenty-five years old."

Nan looked appealingly toward J. J. D. She avoided Lark's open stare.

"I don't want to go to reform school," she pleaded. "But I'll go there and rot before I say a word against my father."

The girl's soft eyes flashed. She doubled up her fists. She stamped the worn carpet. Lark and J. J. D. exchanged glances.

"It's best that you tell," suggested J. J. D. "The police have decided that some one connected with my office, perhaps myself, is concerned in the robbery. My wife likes you. You can always have a home with us. I want to clear the name of the second division."

Nan said, pointblank, to Converse:

"Mr. Darrah doesn't know anything about the robbery. I swear to that."

"You seem to know a lot about it. What kind of dresses did you carry away from the shack at Green Creek Bottoms?"

Nan fingered her skirt. "This one," she answered, "and a blue one. That's all. Then I brought a waist and some stockings and a pair of shoes."

"You check that up!" Converse said to J. J. D. "Check it up after she goes to reform school. I'll call the truant officer from police headquarters. He can turn her over to the matron at the jail. This girl," Converse added with heat, "may have phoned that cigar-store. She was her father's spy. She may be yet!"

"I've been with Mrs. Darrah all of the time," said Nan. "You can phone and ask her."

The detective lifted the telephone receiver.

"Police headquarters," he said distinctly.

Nan took one step toward the door. She took another. Converse, out of the corner of his eye, saw the attempt being made to escape.

"Stop her!" he shouted. "Lock that door, Darrah!"

J. J. D. motioned for Nan to go near the window. "I'll lock my own door when I'm ready," he said. "I'm running this office."

Converse bit his upper lip. He moved the receiver's hook up and down. Central, for some reason, was a long while answering him.

Lark watched the detective. Converse plainly showed his irritation over the failure to trap the crooks at Green Creek Bottoms. His penetrating stare was on J. J. D.'s desk and the litter of papers. His eyes darted through the pigeon-holes. He clicked the receiver. "No, this isn't a busy wire!" he exclaimed. "I want police headquarters."

It occurred to Lark that the entire affair of the Purple Limited was a crisis of some kind. He thought of Nan. She had entered his life in a few short days. She was no longer the "Homeless Kate" of the roundhouse. Mrs. Darrah was going to

take care of the girl. And Converse was calling upon a truant officer to arrest her and lock her in a station cell.

Lark dimly saw the situation — Black Arnold, Butch, Ed Kelly, and other ex-convicts fleeing from certain arrest. He knew that Converse had called to his aid every constable, marshal and police officer within twenty miles of Broad River. The hunt was on, but it was a search in the dark where the crooks had every advantage. Ardmore County was wild country land, crisscrossed with trails and roads. The train-robbers could easily escape in an auto.

J. J. D. had suffered more than any one else on account of the robbery. The division superintendent would probably be called on to resign. He had spent the best years of his life working for a corporation. Younger men were taking the railroad jobs.

Lark turned and watched Darrah and Nan. The girl was obstinate. She shook her head at J. J. D.'s whispered questions. She eyed Converse like a wild creature. The color was all gone from her face. Lark expected her to spring on the detective.

There came, suddenly, a startled exclamation from Converse. He pressed the receiver to his ear.

"What's that?" he roared into the transmitter. His knees bumped the desk in his excitement. "Good! Good!" he exclaimed. "No, no. Leave him at Five Points. Sweat him if you can. The others got away, eh? Well, go after them. Which way did they go?"

Converse looked at J. J. D. He allowed his lips to soften slightly. The man-hunter's instinct was gone. He became human.

"Good news!" he said, hanging up the receiver. "Ardmore County authorities report that Black Arnold—"

"My father!" sobbed Nan.

"Your father, yes. He tried to reach the old house in the woods. He was wounded in the river fight—shot through the stomach. Two men with him escaped. They left him on the snow. He's all in. My men got him in that nice little trap. We win!"

Nan covered her face with her hands.

"You see," went on Converse, "I was trying to get police headquarters while the chief of detectives at Ardmore was trying to connect with me. Black Arnold is dying."

"Don't say that!" cried Nan.

Converse lowered his voice. He grasped J. J. D. by the shoulder. "Now we're getting on," he said. "The detectives I sent to the old Armstrong house are trailing the two men men who carried Arnold from the river. The river police have been notified to head them off in case they try to cross the river. The rats are cornered!"

"Arnold will never tell what he knows," suggested J. J. D.

"I think he will. If he don't, we've got the girl. She knows where the Purple Limited is hidden."

Nan dropped her hands to her sides, fingered the hem of her skirt, and moved toward Lark.

"Is it true that my father is shot?" she asked.

"Yes," said Lark.

"And he's going to die?"

"He's dying right now," said Converse. "They got him at the house near Five Points."

"I want to go see him," she said.

Converse shook his head. "I can't take those chances. You might escape."

"Won't you trust me to go with a detective?"

"I haven't one handy. They're all out on the case now."

Lark touched Converse on the sleeve. "I'll take the girl to see her father," he suggested. "I'll go with her."

"Why, she could get away from you!"

Nan shook her head. "I'll promise not to," she said. "I want to see my father before he dies."

Converse raised his gray-thatched brows in calculation. He pulled out his watch and glanced at the time.

"If your father dies," he asked, "will you tell us all you know about the Purple Limited?"

"If father dies I don't care what happens. He was a good father, and I want to go to him."

Converse was insistent. "Do you know where the missing Limited is?"

Nan nodded.

"Do you know how it was stolen?"

The girl hesitated. "Yes, I know!" she blurted.

"And you'll help me out when your father is dead?"

"I'll help Mr. Darrah and Lark out—if they want any information."

"Good!" said Converse, vastly pleased. "You're paroled in care of Larkins. He'll take you to your father."

CHAPTER XVI.

THE SAFE-BREAKERS.

LARK followed Nan through the door of the despatchers' office and hurried with her over the tracks toward a westbound freight that was making up in the yard.

Switch lights glowed with frosty rays. The rails were embedded in snow. Locos stood by the roundhouse with their steam pluming in the night air.

Springing upon a short-coupled switch-engine, Lark asked the engineer how soon the westbound freight would leave.

"As soon as extra east 34 comes through," was the engineer's answer. "The caboose is down at the other end of the yard."

Lark grasped the hand-rail and swung off the switch-engine. He hurried to Nan, who looked cold and forlorn.

"Come on," he said. "We'll get aboard the caboose. There's sure to be a fire there."

The girl glanced toward the red-set semaphore on the station. She turned and followed Lark down the length of the yard.

"I hope father don't die," she said.

Lark shook his head. He realized that it would be better for Black Arnold to die than serve a long prison sentence. The prison authorities at Rockglen had little use for Nan's father.

"He may live," Lark admitted. "But if he does he will serve life imprisonment."

Nan paused by the steps of a little red caboose from whose windows a cheery light shone.

"There was nothing I ever said," she declared, "that hurt my father."

"You stuck!" exclaimed Lark. "I like you better for doing so."

They climbed aboard the caboose, sat down near the stove, and waited for the conductor—who came in finally. He looked from Lark to Nan, and nodded.

"Let us get off just the other side of Broad River bridge," said Lark.

The train was made up. The eastbound passenger glided through the yard. The freight crossed the rails and straightened for the long run to Cotopaxi.

Nan drew on her mittens when Broad River bridge was reached. She rose and went to the rear platform. Lark held her arm. He pointed to the ice in the river. Both banks showed bluish cold.

The freight slowed after crossing the bridge. The conductor waved his lantern. The engine, slipping on frosty rails, whistled.

Lark swung from the caboose steps, braced himself on the frozen gravel, and caught Nan in his arms. They waited, saw the rear lights of the caboose disappear around the curve, then walked south along the river bank until Lark pointed out a lumber trail—faintly discernible beneath the snow.

An hour passed with Nan gamely holding her stride with Lark's. Their breath formed in the icy air. The ground gradually rose to pine-clad hills. The lumber trail gave place to a well-defined road over which wagons had passed that day.

"How far is it to Five Points?" asked Nan when this road was reached.

"Another hour's walking, at least," said Lark. "Getting tired?"

"A little bit."

Lark impulsively pulled off his overcoat and made Nan put it on. "We'll go slower," he said. "There's a chance that we may run into some of the crooks on this road."

Nan lowered her head. "My father got in bad company," she whispered. "He started to drink. Big Ed came—"

The girl's silence was expressive. Lark recalled the shack at Green Creek Bottoms. His last sight of Big Ed Kelly was when

that crook lay across the floor, felled by an empty whisky bottle.

Nan covered her ears with her gloved hands and began to sob. She stopped and looked toward the river. A glint of ice showed between two snow-mantled hills.

"Why do you look there?" asked Lark.

The girl lowered her hands and walked after Lark.

"Why," she said — "why — I don't know."

Lark sensed that Nan recognized a familiar landmark. He grasped her arm, drew her to his side, and half carried her over the frozen road. "You must keep moving!" he declared. "It's below zero."

"I'm getting tired."

Lark pointed his left arm toward a bend in the road. "Beyond that turn," he said, "you can see the hill. Below the hill's top, and to the left, is Pop Armstrong's place. That's where the detectives are watching over your father."

"I hope they got a doctor for him."

"Of course they have!"

Nan's knees bent with fatigue. Lark ran his arm around her waist. It was slender and pliant, despite the heavy overcoat.

"Another mile," said he cheerfully.

Nan timidly walked with her eyes almost closed from the pain of the cold. Her footsteps crunched the frozen snow. Branches brushed her face. A light shone faintly when the curve was reached. She pointed to it.

A burly form, brandishing a rifle, sprang from the shelter of a small shed. "Get your hands up!" a detective shouted.

Lark released Nan's weight and raised his hands.

"This is Larkins from Newhouse," he explained. "Converse sent me to see Black Arnold."

The detective slung the rifle under his arm and came down the road. His frosty breath fanned Nan's cheeks. "Who is this?" he queried.

"Black Arnold's daughter." Lark stamped his feet and turned toward Nan. "Come on," he added. "We may be too late."

The detective led the way through the trees and up to the old house. The lights were lit in the front of the house. A doctor's gig stood hitched to a post by the barn. Two detectives appeared with lanterns. They had been examining the safe that Lark had discovered under the hay.

A constable from Ardmore opened the kitchen door. Nan explained that she wanted to see her father. Lark followed her through the dark kitchen and into the front room.

Black Arnold lay on the mattress, which had been dragged from the top floor. His eyes were shut. A village doctor rose and stared from Lark to Nan.

"Who are you people?" he asked.

A cry came from the girl. She dropped on her knees and pressed her hands against her father's cold cheeks. Wonder came in her hazel eyes. She began rising, swayed, and would have fallen if Lark had not stepped forward and grasped her by the waist. "What is the matter?" he questioned.

"He's dead," breathed Nan.

The doctor stroked a long beard. "Not yet, but soon," said he in an epitaph.

Lark left Nan with the doctor and constable and went through the house to the kitchen. The two detectives were warming themselves before the kitchen stove where a wood fire crackled.

"What did you think of that safe?" asked Lark.

Both detectives raised their hands.

"Think?" one repeated. "It's over our heads—how it was opened. They used to say them kind of cannon-ball, gun-breech boxes couldn't be busted into. That one was!"

Lark warmed his fingers over the fire. He heard Nan sobbing in the front room. The doctor's gruff voice softened. He came with the girl to the kitchen. A nod to the detectives told that it was all over with Black Arnold.

Nan tightened a scarf around her neck with convulsive fingers. She buttoned up Lark's overcoat. Her feet were encased in stout boots. Her hat came close over her ears.

"We'll go," she said to Lark.

He noticed a stronger note in her voice.

She no longer hesitated. Her glance at the detectives and the doctor was followed by a curt little nod of appreciation.

"Thank you," she said when Lark opened the kitchen door.

He led her around the barn. "We'll go to Newhouse by way of Ardmore," he suggested.

She held back and looked toward the road. "No, let's go home the way we came. I want to show you something."

"But we may not be able to catch a train on the C. M. and W. for a long while."

"I want to show you the Purple Limited."

Lark felt a thrill pass through his body. "Oh, all right!" he agreed.

Nan led the way across the field and climbed the fence. They walked rapidly northward. The sky was leaden. Fine flakes sifted through the gaunt branches of the ice-sheathed trees. Lark thrashed his arms and stamped his feet. It was bitter cold without an overcoat.

"Where is the Limited?" he asked.

"I'll show you. We must be careful. I don't think the detectives have discovered it yet."

"Why must we be careful, then?"

Nan stopped and pointed east, where a cut showed between two white hills.

"Big Ed Kelly and the others may be where the Limited is."

Lark followed Nan across a frozen brook and climbed with her up the winding trail that led between the hills. The river showed with its ice-flecked surface churning in the current. The opposite bank rose like a white barrier.

Dully Lark attempted to deduct how the Purple Limited came to be so near the river and so far away from the main line of the C. M. and W. No wonder the searchers had been fooled. No one had ever thought of looking along the river for the missing train.

He believed that Nan was mistaken. "Are you sure you're going to the right place?" he asked.

"Yes. I don't know exactly which quarry it is at—but we'll find it near where this trail meets the river road."

The trail dipped over the hill. Nan held back her hand and grasped Lark's sleeve. "Walk on tiptoes," she warned. "I think I hear something ahead of us."

He stopped and listened. A sound came from the river of huge ice floes grinding against the rocky bank. The blue walls of a slate-quarry showed down-river. Another quarry was up-stream. The two quarries were no more than a mile apart.

Nan walked slowly toward the edge of a cliff. She lay on the snow, grasped a frozen tuft of grass, and looked over the dizzy pit. Her face turned until her eyes met Lark's. He bent.

"Help me up," she said through chattering teeth. "We're in the wrong place. It's further up-river—where that pier runs from the shore."

Lark helped her to her feet. She led the way along the brow of the cliff, went down a hollow, and motioned for him to be careful when she approached a huge rock poised on the brink.

Peering from behind this rock, she looked down. Her hand raised and covered her eyes. She breathed on her fingers. She pointed when Lark crawled to her side.

"See," she said. "There is the Purple Limited."

Lark strained his eyes, rubbed them, and gradually, as the light grew brighter, made out the dim outlines of a mound at the end of a spur track in the quarry.

Dirt, snow, and small stones, interlaced with timbers, covered something that was the general length and width of a locomotive and an express car. The stones and dirt had been thrown on the train from the cliff. The snow was heaped high on the river's side.

Lark felt his blood racing. His heart pounded. Nan's pressure on his sleeve cleared his sight in some manner. The smoke-stack and steam-dome of the loco showed plainly. The Purple Limited lay below him.

"How did it ever get there?" he asked.

"Look!" said Nan. "Don't you see men down there?"

Lark stared at the surface workings of the quarry. A speck moved from a tool-house and stood near the shore-end of the

pier. A man crawled from out the wreckage that covered the Limited. Another man pried a round object loose and started it rolling toward the tool-house.

The three men strained at this object, bent, grasped projections, and heaved it foot by foot.

"That's one of the safes," said Nan.

Lark recognized the larger of the three men. It was Big Ed Kelly. Another was Butch, by his diminutive size. They moved in the gloom of the abandoned quarry like gnomes. They strained and grunted. The safe, although small, was unusually heavy.

"It's filled with gold," Nan said.

Lark raised his glance from the three men and stared at the river and the pier. He saw, beneath the worn track on this pier, the sharp prow of a large launch. It was well hidden.

The Purple Limited, on account of the bank of snow and the dirt and stone covering, could never be detected from the river. It lay close under the cliff.

The entire place—quarry, pier, and short spur track—was an ideal locality to hide a train. There were no well-defined roads on the west bank of Broad River from the C. M. and W. R. R. to Ardmore. Few boats went up and down river in the winter time. Those that did were flat barges, towed by tugs.

Lark again watched the men at work around the safe. Big Ed went into the tool-house. He reappeared with sledges and crowbars. Butch picked up a bucket, up-ended it, and walked toward the river. He went to the end of the pier and lowered the bucket on a line. He carried the water to the safe.

Nan looked at Lark and said in a whisper:

"They're going to open the safe. See, there's another man in the tool-shed. And there's a light across the river."

Lark heard Big Ed's voice raised in a hurried command. It was evident that the crooks were making a desperate effort to secure the contents of the safe before the alarm had spread up-river. The light on the opposite shore resembled a lantern in a window. Nan's eyes were fixed on this light.

"It's a signal," she said. "They're going to open the safe, put the money in the launch, and escape to the point where that light is, Lark."

"Who is over there?"

"One or two more men of the gang. I think they have an automobile."

Lark rose and stood against the rock. He realized that swift action was necessary in order to thwart the men in the quarry. Nan was a willing pal. Her father was dead. She had no use for Ed Kelly or any other member of the gang.

"I'll stay here," Lark said. "You hurry back and get those detectives at the old house in the woods."

"It 'll take too long."

"They can't open that safe in ten hours."

"They'll open it in less than half of that time. Watch! Father told me how Big Ed had discovered a new way to open safes. He does it with water."

Lark watched keenly. He saw the sledges swinging and striking the circular door of the safe. The sound they made was considerable. It was for this reason, he concluded, that the first safe had been moved from the quarry to the house in the woods.

The fourth man of the group came out of the tool-house, struck a match, shielded it with his hands, and examined the safe. He rose and spoke to Big Ed Kelly. The safe was up-ended. Butch lifted the bucket of water and poured it in a funnel, held close to the circular door.

Lark could see no reason for this action. He saw Butch run to the end of the pier and lower the bucket into the icy current of the river. This second bucketful was poured after the first. A wedge was driven in the crack of the safe's door.

"See," said Nan, "they're standing back. Something is going to explode."

No sound came to Lark. He watched and listened. Big Ed Kelly leaned on a sledge, which had once been used for breaking slate. The yegg eyed the river apprehensively.

Nan rose to Lark's side. "It's opening," she whispered. "See, Lark, now they're prying off the door. How did they do that?"

The four safe-robbers attacked the spher-

ical-safe like vultures. They pinched and bent back the door. They ran their hands inside the opening and began piling sacks of money on the pier.

"I know," said Lark. "They've sprung the door with water."

"Yes."

"With water," Lark repeated in wonder. "They made a tiny crack with wedges, poured in water until the safe was filled, then sealed the crack."

"How could that open a safe?"

"By freezing. The water expanded when it froze. Something had to break. The door gave way under the enormous pressure, Nan."

Nan breathed on her cotton gloves. "Does water expand that much?" she asked.

Lark remembered his studies in civil engineering. "Yes," he answered. "Water will expand one-seventh of its volume when it freezes. I'm about right. The water Butch poured into the safe chilled immediately on account of the cold walls. It turned to ice and forced the door."

Nan looked into the quarry. The crooks were gathered near the launch. Butch sprang away from the group, got down on his hands and knees, and began hauling at the painter. Big Ed's voice raised in a bitter oath.

Lark saw the reason. A light moved on the river. A thin pencil of fire circled the slaty bank and steadied near where the Purple Limited was hidden.

"A police-boat!" said Nan. "They will escape unless we send them some signal."

Lark had no revolver. He thought of shouting. It would be useless. He grasped Nan's arm. "Get some wood," he cried. "We'll build a fire. Help me get wood."

There were no sticks nearer the cliff than a clump of trees on a far-off hillside. Lark got down and turned over the snow-crust. He gathered a bunch of dried grass. Nan came running to his side with an old plank. "More! More!" ordered Lark.

The signal-fire was started with grass and splintered wood. It flamed, smoked, then caught the edges of the plank. Lark looked toward the yeggs. They had the launch alongside the pier. Butch cranked the gasoline engine. He strained at the handle on the fly-wheel. Big Ed tossed aboard sacks of gold and bundles of bank-notes. The launch, chugging and missing every other explosion, sheered from the pier. It darted toward the center of the stream.

"They're going to get away," breathed Nan.

Lark waved the burning plank. He singed his hair. His cap was knocked off. Nan picked it up.

"Keep waving!" she said. "The search-light is swinging this way."

A white speck marked the position of the fast-driven launch. It dodged down the river, went around an ice-field, and struck toward the opposite shore in the direction of the single gleam that looked like a lantern.

A sudden swing of the big projector on the police-boat bathed Lark and Nan in a spot-light. Lark dropped the smoking plank and pointed down-river. He waved his hands wildly.

A sergeant in the bow of the boat grasped the handle of the search-light and swept the river's surface. The white launch was revealed. The boat swung, steadied, and started in pursuit.

Crimson flashes stabbed the night. The shots reverberated against the slaty cliffs. An answering fire from the crooks' revolvers sounded like a trap-drum.

"They're catching them!" exclaimed Nan. "See, now they've caught them!"

"Are you glad?"

"Yes, I'm glad, Lark. Now they'll find out that Mr. Darrah wasn't to blame for the loss of the Purple Limited."

CHAPTER XVII.

THE ROUND-UP.

NAN poised on the edge of the cliff and pointed toward the tool-shed.

"I'm freezing," she said. "Will you help me down that path?"

Lark glanced toward the spot on the river where the police-boat had met the launch. The search-light was extinguished—probably by a yegg's bullet.

He offered Nan his arm, and aided her

over the frozen surface until they came to the path. Her teeth chattered uncontrollably.

"Even with this coa-coat on," she said, "I'm cold. I'm awfully cold."

They slid and stumbled through the shale and slate until the bottom of the quarry was reached. Lark hurried Nan past the open safe and into the tool-shed. He found some shavings and an old newspaper. Straw piled on this made a cheerful blaze.

Nan sat down on a doubled-up mattress, took off her gloves, and showed Lark her fingers. They were blue from lack of circulation. He went out through the door and returned with a handful of snow.

"Keep away from the fire," he warned when he rubbed her fingers vigorously. "Lie against that tool-box, where you'll be comfortable."

Nan breathed a tired sigh. The color came back to her face. Her hazel eyes grew large in the light from the burning straw. She watched Lark and said:

"Go see if they have captured the launch."

He went to the end of the pier, stood upon the rails, and looked down the river. Ice obscured his vision. He waited and wondered if the yeggs had escaped. A sudden flash that changed into a blue flare marked the trail of a rocket. It was answered from the bridge at Ardmore.

Lark concluded that the police had captured Big Ed, Butch, and the two other men. He scanned the opposite shore for some sign of the lantern. It was gone.

Slowly turning, he looked at the pile of snow and stones which marked the hiding-place of the Purple Limited. He crossed the quarry and pulled at a beam of wood. A shower of dirt and slate tumbled to his feet. The rear end of the express car showed with its purple varnish undamaged.

Lark thrashed his chilled arms and tried to solve the problem of how the Limited got in that position. It rested on two rusty rails which led to the end of the pier. The pier-head was at least ten feet from the surface of the river.

He was too cold to determine on an answer. It came to him suddenly that Nan knew. Yes, Nan knew! He went to her and asked:

"How did the Limited get in this quarry?"

A sleepy sigh answered him. Nan's head fell against the tool-box. Her square-toed shoes were near the dying fire. A smile parted her lips. Her fingers were no longer blue.

"I'll wait till she wakes," said Lark aloud.

He went out on the pier after replenishing the fire with sticks and straw. He built another fire in the shelter of a rotting pile. The light from this would serve to guide the police-boat to the shore.

Ten minutes passed before the boat appeared with the launch in tow. The sergeant in charge of the searching party swung his repaired projector upon Lark.

"Who are you?" he called across the ice-scattered river.

Lark told him in a frosty shout.

The sergeant of police tossed a painter to the pier. Lark caught it and threw a hitch around an iron cleat on the string-piece.

The big launch drifted down-stream and struck against an ice floe. Police officers brought two handcuffed men ashore. One was Butch; the other was a stranger to Lark.

"Where's Big Ed and the man who was with him?" Lark asked the police sergeant.

"Big Ed's full of lead, in the bottom of the river. It was him that put up the fight. We got him with a rifle. The other fellow is in the launch—shot to pieces! He's a shanty-boatman around Ardmore."

The sergeant barked a score of orders to his men. The injured crook in the launch was carried into the tool-house. Butch, with handcuffs clicking, swore bitterly. The man with him glared at Lark.

"That's Morency," explained the sergeant. "He's an escaped con from Rockglen. We thought he had left the State."

Lark turned from Morency's stare and pointed over the river. "The launch was heading for a light on that bank," he said. "There's more of them over there."

The sergeant rubbed his hands. "They'll get away!" he exclaimed. "We've killed

one, Big Ed. We've fixed one for the hospital. And," he added grimly, "the three we've got will wish they were dead when the judge gets done with them."

Lark counted the police officers. Twelve men had captured the launch. Three went with the prisoners and the wounded man to the tool-house. Nan came out and stood watching the sergeant directing the operation of getting the stolen gold from the launch to the shore.

She pointed toward the hiding-place of the Purple Limited.

"Tell them what is there!" she called to Lark.

Lark went to the sergeant. "Did you recover all the gold they took with them?" he asked.

"Sure, unless Big Ed had some on him when he went overboard. We'll dredge the river when the ice clears."

"There must be another safe. Come, I'll show you where it is."

The astonished police officer ordered one of his men to get a shovel and dig into the pile of snow and dirt covering the express car. The man crawled through a hole and came out on hands and knees. He rose, saying:

"There's an unopened safe in there, chief."

The sergeant stamped his feet and warmed his ears with his ungloved hands. "How did that train get here?" he exclaimed.

Lark shook his head. He pointed to the safe with the open door, near where Nan stood.

"They were ingenious enough to open that," he suggested, "with water. Men who would think of freezing a door off would scheme some way to get the train here. I don't know where it left the main line of the C. M. and W. The ice on the river wasn't strong enough to hold it."

The sergeant shot a snappy glance at the river. "Hell, no!" he declared. "We'll sweat Morency and Butch and find out."

Nan came to Lark's side and drew him toward the tool-house. "You'll freeze," she suggested. "It's almost morning, and the temperature is below zero."

Lark followed the girl into the shed. Morency lay near the fire. Butch sat on the tool-box. Both men's wrists were securely handcuffed. Two police officers worked over the third crook, who had been riddled in the shoulders by rifle-bullets. An orderly pile of bank-notes and gold was arranged near the door. An officer guarded this pile with a repeating rifle.

The sergeant appeared, and announced: "There's another boat coming up-river. You men stay here. I'll take Bill and Blake and cross to the opposite shore. We'll see if we can catch those fellows who lit the lantern."

Lark suggested that J. J. D. and Converse should be notified that the train was found.

The sergeant jerked his head. "Come on," he said. "You and the girl come with us. We can phone across the river. There's no phone around this place."

Leaving the pier, the fast police-boat crushed through the ice and gained midstream. Lark rose in the cockpit and looked toward the quarry. A faint light burned in the tool-house. The big launch lay tied to the ice. A police officer, with a rifle, paced before the mound of snow and dirt that marked the Purple Limited.

Above the quarry, the first rays of the winter sun were striking the snow-clad hills. The trail showed distinctly where Nan had led the way to the Limited. A narrow road cut aslant the cliffs below the quarry. It was over this road that the first safe had been taken on a wagon to the house near Five Points.

Lark recalled the two buckets in the barn near the house. The strong-box had been opened by pouring in water and allowing it to freeze. The money stolen from this safe was missing.

He sat down by Nan's side and asked:

"Who else is in the gang, Nan?"

The girl hesitated. "There's three more men, Lark. There's one I wish would get away—an old man who used to come and talk for hours with father. I think father called him 'Pop.'"

"Pop Armstrong?"

Lark thought of the owner of the house in the woods. Old Pop had thus far eluded the police.

"Yes," answered Nan. "He was called Armstrong. He always used to bring me a box of candy. I don't want to see him get caught."

"Who were the other two?"

"River men, who seldom visited father—but I knew they were plotting something."

The girl shivered and looked at Lark. "See," she said, turning her head suddenly. "There is the C. M. and W. bridge up there. Doesn't it suggest anything to you?"

Lark stared at the bridge. The police-boat had almost reached the east bank of Broad River. It was headed up-stream. The sergeant scanned the shore with a pair of high-powered glasses.

"No," admitted Lark. "The bridge don't suggest anything to me."

Nan huddled close to him. "If I tell you how the Limited was stolen," she whispered, "I'll have to give away on poor old Pop. Pop was so nice to me—and to father, Lark."

The boat crashed into heavy ice. Lark stood erect. He saw that the police sergeant was heading for the bank of the river near the east end of the C. M. and W. R. R.

"You and the girl go to Green River Station!" ordered the sergeant. "Phone Darrah and Converse! Tell them to notify Ardmore River Station that I've captured four members of the band. Tell them two more got away, and are probably heading for Newhouse. Get that?"

Lark nodded. He helped Nan forward, where they stood by the side of the sergeant. The powerful boat cleared the ice near the shore. Its prow struck an old dock. Lark grasped Nan and sprang ashore.

"We'll walk to Green River Station and phone!" he shouted when the police-boat backed water and swung in the icy stream.

A road ran from the dock, which paralleled the C. M. and W. R. R. Lark hurried with Nan along this road, and climbed, after a mile of frosty breathing, upon the railroad-tracks.

He saw the outlines of a tool-shed, and before it a hand-car standing on a short piece of scantling. "We'll take that," he told Nan.

The girl aided him in getting the car on the main line. Lark grasped the handles and looked toward the bridge. No train was coming on the eastbound track. The tower-man, above the draw, was standing watching the police-boat on the river. Lark saw this man go into the little tower-house. Green River Station was reached after a few minutes' work on the hand-car handles. Nan's face flushed with the exercise. She lifted her hands and pulled the muffler from her neck. Opening the overcoat, she exclaimed:

"Tell Mr. Darrah that everything is all right now. Tell him so he won't worry."

Lark grasped the front end of the hand-car, and lifted it from the track. He ran into the station and, dashing past the astonished day operator, picked up a telephone-receiver.

"J. J. D.'s office!" he told central. "Connect me with the division superintendent."

Darrah answered the call after a few seconds' wait. "This you, Lark?" he snapped. "Where are you?"

Lark explained where he was and what had happened. "Two of the train-robbers are headed east—probably in an auto. They have the money taken from the first safe," he concluded breathlessly.

J. J. D. whistled. Lark heard him talking to some one near the phone.

"How did the Limited get in that quarry?" he asked. "Mr. Converse wants to know."

Lark thought of Nan and old Pop Armstrong.

"I'm coming right away," he answered. "Nan knows how it was taken to the quarry. Everything is upset with her—she lost her father, and won't say much."

Lark hung up the receiver and hurried out of the station. Nan helped him put the car on the line. They worked at the handles and reached the water-tank at the west end of the yard at Newhouse. Here Lark turned the car over to a section gang.

He grasped Nan's hand and ran with her toward the station. J. J. D. and Converse were waiting on the platform. The superintendent's face was flushed. His eyes twinkled. He looked at Nan.

"Come in," he said. "We'll all go to my office!"

Converse followed Lark and slammed the door shut. The detective's lips parted in a quick smile. He sat down in J. J. D.'s swivel-chair and lifted the telephone-receiver.

"Go on," he said to Lark. "Did you find out how the Limited was taken from the main line?"

Lark looked at Nan. The girl shook her head.

She watched Converse. The air of the room grew tense.

"Give me police headquarters," said the detective. "Yes! Yes!" he snapped over the phone.

J. J. D. whispered to the girl: "How did they get that train down the river to the quarry?"

Nan fingered the buttons of Lark's overcoat. "I'll not tell yet!" she exclaimed stanchly. "There's one man I want to see escape."

Converse crossed his legs. "Hello," he said. "What's the news? Did you get those fellows who escaped in an auto? You did, eh? Where?"

The detective listened, smiled broadly, and rose from the desk.

"Things are coming fine!" he declared. "Two men were picked up at a garage south of here. They had seventeen thousand in a tool-bag. The constable is holding the men and the bag. It looks like—"

The door opened. A despatcher thrust in his head. He handed J. J. D. three letters. The superintendent tore one open after glancing at the address in a corner. He drew out a letter from Greenlee, the assistant to the warden at Rockglen. Pasted to the letter was the rogues' gallery picture of Pop Armstrong.

J. J. D. read the letter and stared at the photo. He flushed. "Why, I know this man!" he exclaimed. "This is the bridge-tender at Broad River Bridge. We had him on the carpet during the Purple Limited investigation. He was the last man to see the train."

"I got it!" ejaculated Converse. "You hit it, super! There's where the train went."

"Where?" asked J. J. D. blankly.

"It went off the bridge!"

Nan covered her face with her hands. "Poor Pop," she cried. "He will be caught."

Lark remembered the view he had of the bridge-tender watching the police-boat. If the man were one of the gang he would escape. Converse grasped the situation. "Where does that fellow live?" he asked J. J. D.

"He lives at Green River."

The detective snatched up the receiver. "Give me Railroad Central. This you central? Give me any calls made from Broad River Bridge to a cigar-store yesterday—the Union Cigar Company. The number is—". Converse consulted his notebook. "Give me any calls to Newhouse 471. Who made them?"

The receiver clicked on the hook. Converse faced J. J. D. "The trouble was right on your division," he said. "Pop Armstrong, under some other name, got the job as bridge-tender over Broad River. He saw us go west in our attempt to capture the gang at Green Creek Bottoms. He phoned the cigar-store from his station on the bridge. The cigar-store man relayed the call to the shack at Green Creek Bottoms. That's how Arnold and Big Ed escaped me."

"You can capture Pop Armstrong at Broad River if you hurry," suggested J. J. B.

"No," said Lark. "He saw the police-boat. Why don't you try his home at Green River?

"Good idea!" said Converse. "He may have the swag—or part of it—planted there. I'll get that fellow!"

The detective was gone through the door, which slammed shut.

J. J. D. sat down in his chair and looked at Nan.

"Things are looking better for me," he said. "The train is found—the crooks are almost all rounded up—most of the money has been recovered. I guess I owe it to you, Nan."

Nan looked directly at Lark.

"You owe it to him," she said.

J. J. D. leaned back. His eyes closed. "Now, tell us," he asked, "how the Limited was taken off the bridge and moved to the

quarry. I think the case is closed if we know how that was accomplished."

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE ANSWER.

NAN leaned against the wall of the office near the window that looked out upon the back platform of the station, and began speaking in a low voice.

"Father," she said, "came from prison about three years ago. My mother died when he was in the penitentiary. She was a good woman—"

Nan hesitated, looked at Lark, then dropped her long lashes over her hazel eyes.

"Go on, please," said J. J. D.

"When father came—he fixed up the place at Green Creek Bottoms and pretended to take in boarders. I did the housework. Big Ed Kelly and Butch were father's old pals in prison. Then 'Pop' Armstrong came, and three or four more men. They used to talk and drink in the parlor. I heard them."

"The plan was hatched then?"

Nan lifted her glance to J. J. D. "Yes, it was worked out then. Father didn't confide in me. He was afraid of everybody. He had served time for train-robbery, and was always looking for detectives. Once he nearly killed a man who came to the house to see me. He said I was careless."

The girl twisted her gloves and fingered the buttons on the overcoat. "I knew something was wrong," she continued. "First they went down the river in a launch and saw some men at Ardmore. The launch was the one they used last night. It was big enough to tow three or four flat boats.

"Then I heard about the Purple Limited. Pop Alexander was working for the railroad as bridge-tender at the Broad River Bridge. He got that job because he was an old-time railroad man, and knew the way to get it."

"I never suspected him!" exclaimed J. J. D., looking at the photo on the desk. "I never did—but, go on, Nan."

"They made their plans, some of which I didn't hear about. They cut the masks out of an old dress of mine and burned the dress. Then Big Ed Kelly suggested that they wait for a cold night when the Limited would be running without any messenger. They waited, and I went to the roundhouse to find out all about the train. The boys there told me when it was due and how much money was aboard. I told father."

J. J. D. shook his head and stared at Lark. "Well, it's over," he mused heartily. "And you did what you could to right a wrong, Nan."

"I did what I could—after father was dead. I would never have gone back on him. Never!"

Lark stepped to the door and looked into the despatchers' office. He closed the door softly. Nan continued:

"They waited at the water-tank that night, and sent me to the yard to find out how late the train was. I went into the lunch-wagon and found that nobody knew exactly how late it was. I told father and he cursed me. I was standing in the snow near the tank when the Limited whistled. They threw coal at me. I saw them put on the masks and climb aboard the back of the tender."

"Who were the three?" asked J. J. D.

"Father, Butch, and Big Ed Kelly."

Darrah glanced at Lark. "That's what we thought," he said.

Nan went on:

"I didn't see them capture the train. I heard about it next morning. Father let Butch and Big Ed Kelly push the engineer and fireman off the engine. Then they slowed for Broad River Bridge. The train stopped on the draw. Pop swung the draw, and Morency and the others pulled an old car-float so that the rails on the float met the rails on the draw. They got the float from a quarry near the river. They used the launch to tow the float.

"Then they took the engine and car down the river and hid it where it was found last night. I don't know much about it, but father said they had a hard time holding the float against the end of the draw on account of the current in the river. That's how they stole the Purple Limited."

J. J. D. wiped his forehead with a silk handkerchief. He puffed out his cheeks.

"That's how it was done!" he exploded. "Lark, we never thought of that. Why, it was comparatively easy! There's plenty of old car-floats along the river. They used them before the Anamosa and Southern Line bridge was built to carry freight-cars from Ardmore to East Ardmore. All Big Ed and Black Arnold did was to secure the services of shanty-boatmen, like Morency and the others that were caught, and have them tow the car-float up-stream at the right moment.

"Pop straightened the bridge out when the float was gone, and when we questioned him, by phone, you remember, he said the Purple Limited went across the bridge full speed. No wonder the operator at Butte Tunnel and the track-walker weren't sure the train went by their stations. No wonder the other stations didn't report seeing the Limited. It never passed the center of the bridge!"

"No," admitted Lark, "it didn't! The swinging bridge was used as a turn-table. But I'd think it was a big chance. Suppose the bridge had tipped?"

"The car-float, if placed in the right position, would support the end of the bridge. It was a bad night, you remember—snowing and cold. Nobody was around the bridge except Pop Armstrong."

J. J. D. nodded to Nan. "They got away with it!" he exclaimed. "They fooled everybody who investigated the robbery."

Nan looked at the telephone. "I hope Pop escapes," she said. "I'm glad about the others being caught—but Pop was such a nice old man."

Darrah smiled at Lark. "There's some things yet I don't understand. Who was the man who tore the reward notice from the tree near Mile Post 243?"

"Probably Morency," said Lark. "He answers the description of the fellow named 'Jones' who phoned from the drug-store booth at Ardmore. Morency and the river pirates lived at the quarry and at Pop Armstrong's house near Five Points."

Nan went to J. J. D.'s side.

"Now, you are not going to resign, are you?"

"Well, I might hold down the job! You know me, Lark! I've been under suspicion for carelessness, and perhaps worse. It's all over except—"

The telephone-bell rang shrilly. Darrah lifted the receiver. "Hello!" he said. "Yes, this is the superintendent. Who are you?"

Nan moved away from the desk and began taking off the overcoat. "It's warm," she whispered. "See—the sun is out."

Lark shook his head and watched J. J. D. The superintendent hung up the receiver and swiveled in the chair.

"Converse and the station-agent at Green River caught Pop," he said. "Pop was packing up his share of the stolen money when they broke in his house. Armstrong was ready to leave."

"Oh!" exclaimed Nan sadly.

"Not a one got away!" J. J. D. declared.

Lark counted on his fingers. Black Arnold was dead. Butch and Morency, the two men with the auto, Big Ed Kelley, Pop and a river rat, whose name he hadn't heard—were all accounted for. Eight men had figured in the robbery of the Purple Limited. Uncle Add had said there were a lot of men connected with the crime.

J. J. D. went out into the despatchers' room. Nan stared through the window, and said:

"They may put me in the reform school."

Lark was across the floor with a stride. "They'll do nothing of the kind! Why, Nan, but for you we wouldn't have found the Limited in time to prevent the robbery of the safes! Big Ed was all ready to make a getaway across the river where the auto was waiting. The police would have been searching yet if we hadn't lighted that fire above the quarry. Converse won't send you to the reform school!"

"But where am I going? I can't live at Green Creek Bottoms after what happened. I hate that place!"

"You can live with Mrs. Darrah. She needs somebody around. J. J. D. is careless about money matters and all that, but you'll have money, Nan. Part of that reward belongs to you. Maybe I'll get some. You can have my share."

"The detectives will get most of it, Lark."

Lark shook his head. J. J. D. rushed into the office with his face beaming.

"I've ordered two section gangs out," he said. "The river police have found the old barge that was used to float the train away from the draw-bridge on the night of the robbery. It is being towed to the quarry."

"How soon will the Limited be back on the main line?" asked Lark.

"Within two hours!" snapped J. J. D. "Run along now!"

Nan and Lark looked at the superintendent when they left the office. J. J. D. had taken off his coat. There was a set smile on his lips. He acted like a man who was going to hold down a long, hard job.

Mrs. Darrah greeted Nan, and insisted that Lark come in for coffee and cakes. The girl changed her skirt and stockings. Lark munched on the cakes and waited.

Nan appeared somewhat excited. "I'm going with Lark," she told Mrs. Darrah. "I want to see them put the Limited on the draw-bridge. Everybody from Newhouse is going."

J. J. D.'s wife wrapped Nan in a warm coat and went to the door with Lark and the girl.

"How's my husband?" she asked.

"Working hard," said Lark. "He isn't going to resign!"

Mrs. Darrah smiled. She looked from Lark to Nan.

"Come home early," she said. "Remember, Nan, this is your home until somebody gets you a better one."

Nan flushed and dropped her hands to her side. Lark stepped to the gate and held it wide for Nan to pass through.

They waved their hands, and went over the fields in the direction of Uncle Add's house.

The old engineer had learned from his neighbors that the Purple Limited had been found. He stared from Nan to Lark when he opened the front door.

"So it was the bridge-tender!" he chuckled. "I guess Pop was the one who planned the whole job. You want to look out for us old bucks."

Lark changed his wet shoes while Uncle Add showed Nan around the house. He pointed to the model of a locomotive, and explained how the slide-valves worked. Nan pretended to understand the engineer. He whispered to Lark when they were leaving:

"She's a fine little girl, boy. She ain't no 'homeless Kate.'"

Lark nodded. He led Nan to Wentworth Avenue, where they boarded a trolley for Green Creek Bottoms. A detective from Newhouse was in charge of Black Arnold's shack. He allowed Nan to collect the remainder of her books and clothes.

Carrying these articles under her arm, the girl walked across the trolley bridge, and followed Lark down the river road to the railway embankment.

A gang of men from the section houses had made everything ready for the return of the Limited. The draw, in the center of the river, was open. A tug appeared towing a great car-float. On this float loomed the shadowy outlines of the engine and express car. They had been run out on the pier at the quarry, loaded on the barge, and pulled up-stream.

Slow work it was, and dangerous, anchoring the float so that the rails met between the bridge span and the top of the barge. The tug backed and pulled. Chains were thrown around the bridge girders. A platform or shelf on the float supported the bridge when the engine started moving. The weight sagged both float and bridge.

Nan clutched Lark's arm. "See, it's going on," she said. "The engine is on the bridge. Now the express car is moving. How are they doing it, Lark?"

"With pinch-bars!"

"Why don't they make the engine do the work?"

"This way is safer. Your father and Big Ed probably took chances that night they stole the train."

Nan crept to the opening below, which swept the icy waters of Broad River. She watched the span swing slowly. The new towerman, who had taken Pop's place, shouted that everything was clear. The span stopped moving, squeaked under the weight of the locomotive and car, then resumed its slow turning. The bridge closed!

Lark saw Converse, Ragan, and a score

of constables and detectives climb aboard the Limited.

"Where are they going?" asked Nan.

"They're going through to Cotopaxi. Look out, here she comes!"

Nan stepped off the rails and close to Lark.

The Limited's engine whistled defiantly. The wheels revolved, stopped, then ground the rails. The Purple Limited left the span, took the trestle work of the bridge like a cat on a fence, and was gone speeding west.

"Its journey is resumed," said Nan.

Lark glanced from the smoke covering the road-bed to Nan's upturned face.

"And our journey is just begun," he said. "Will you make it with me?"

"Where, Lark?"

Lark gathered the homeless girl in his arms. She did not protest, although the towerman was watching them.

(The end.)

The Sticker

by William Merriam Rouse

OLD Bill Turner's pipe fell out of his mouth, to empty ashes and a glowing heel of tobacco upon the porch of Avery's store. He refilled and lighted it, and steadied it between his front teeth with a gnarled, powerful hand as he settled down upon an empty dry-goods box.

It was an old-fashioned cob pipe, with a straight, round reed stem; of the kind you could buy twenty years ago for a nickel a piece in any country store. As a pipe it was all right, but it did not fit Bill Turner's mouth.

A man has got to have at least two back teeth that meet in order to get along with a reed stem cob pipe. Bill had no back teeth. The last one had gone five years before; at which time, as Ephraim Avery himself had pointed out to Bill, it was the natural and proper thing for a man to give up smoking and turn to chewing fine-cut.

Bill Turner, however, wanted to smoke. Therefore he kept on smoking. When he forgot to hold the pipe it tilted downward and the end of the stem scraped the roof of his mouth; when his fingers shifted from a grip on the stem to the bowl they often got burned. Smoking was a nuisance, but Bill stuck to it.

For, in spite of what some people called a streak of cussedness in his deep-set eyes, he was a power in Raven Hill; respected not alone for the strength of an arm that was firm and hard at sixty-five—he had the ability to mind his own business.

He ran his free hand over thick, gray hair. It was a warm morning; and it was going to be one of those baking-hot moun-

tain days when mere living tries the temper. A dog got up and moved listlessly from the shade of the post-office to the horse-shed back of the Congregational Church. The way that dog moved and his own feelings told Bill all he wanted to know about the weather.

Not a soul in sight anywhere. From Avery's store the village street slanted straight up the hill, and Turner could see fully a third of the buildings in Raven Hill without moving. Next door was Dr. Barton's brick office, beyond that Elbert Lobdell's house, beyond that the Henderson place, and so on. The whang and drone of the sawmill came to him, but aside from that and the ring of the anvil in Duncan Hodgskins's blacksmith-shop, the whole town might have gone back to bed, so far as looks went.

After a while Elbert Lobdell came around the corner of his house and started down the hill. At sight of him Bill was conscious of a hope that he would not stop and talk; on this day when a man needed all his equanimity to get along with the weather. For Elbert was a trying man.

He had an unstable Adam's apple, and a lower lip and chin which, without much to mark the ending of the one and the beginning of the other, sloped down to meet that Adam's apple, wherever it might be. But it was his failure ever to be definite about anything, rather than his configuration, that irritated Turner. And, by that mysterious law which governs personalities, Bill Turner was to Elbert Lobdell as the flame is to the moth.

This morning Elbert carried an ax dangling from one hand. Bill saw as he drew near to the porch that there was a fresh, bright-red stain on the blade. The helve was specked with red and there was a splash big enough to be plainly noticeable on Lobdell's right hand. He hesitated, and turned a pair of pale, round eyes upon Bill. Perspiration stood even upon his neck. It had darkened the collar of his gingham shirt.

"Hello!" greeted Turner. "You act flustered, Elbert!"

"I killed"—Lobdell choked and swallowed—"a chicken!"

"You don't say!" Turner threw back his head and laughed. It was like Elbert Lobdell to get excited over cutting a chicken's head off, and it was pretty sure that he had made a mess of it. "Anybody 'd think you was on the war-path!"

His eyes followed Bill's gaze and rested upon the ax. Then his face turned the color of weathered brick and he started back up the hill with a rocking gait that was almost a run. Bill watched, speculatively, while he turned in at his own house and disappeared rearward.

"The dum fool!" he growled, while his pipe pivoted and almost capsized. "I bet he didn't know he was carrying an ax, nor what he come to the store for!"

It was a couple of hours or more after the vanishing of Elbert Lobdell that Bill Turner awoke from a not-too-comfortable reverie. He felt as though something had happened. His glance swept up and down the street. Nothing had—hold on! There was 'Bijah White, running toward the doctor's office regardless of his spindley old legs. He waved his arms, but no sound came from him.

A man's voice cried out from somewhere near the Henderson house. It was a choked, strange cry; and yet it rang through and through Raven Hill. There was a quality in it that sounded in Bill Turner's brain like the booming of angry waters by night—laden with the portent of evil. He went to his feet, and stood taut for a fraction of a second.

'Bijah White clawed at the locked door of the brick office. Old Bill covered the distance to him with the legs of twenty. He took a bony shoulder in his iron hands and shook White until his shiny, false teeth clocked and rattled. Out of the corner of his eye Bill saw that other men were running now, and shouting.

"What's happened?" he barked. "Talk, you dummed old crowbait!"

"Huh - Henry — Huh-Huh-Henderson's murdered in his barn!"

Old Bill dropped him, and he flapped against the door. Turner cleared his throat.

"Who done it?" he demanded sharply.

"Who done it?" squeaked 'Bijah. "Godfreys mighty, Bill Turner! I don't

know! We ain't had a murder here sense that one on the back road thirty year—"

"Hell!" said Bill. He spun on his heel. Duncan Hodgskins had come down the street, still with his leather apron on, at a dog-trot. His black brows were drawn together; his hairy arms swung grim in the sunlight. Turner spoke to him.

"What's happened, Duncan?"

"It's a bad business, Bill. They've gone after Dr. Barton, but they ain't no use—it's the sheriff we want. Somebody's killed Hen Henderson—with an ax, by the looks of things!"

"When?"

"Don't know much about it, Bill. Ezra Sims went there to borrow a neck-yoke and Mis' Henderson said Henry 'd been to the barn all the morning, working. He always was a great hand to get up and have breakfast early, you know. Then Ezra, he went out there and saw— Henderson's dead, all right. I saw him myself!"

"No ideer who done it?"

"No." Hodgskins shrugged. "There was a tramp around yesterday, but I guess he got out afore night."

"Anybody sent for the sheriff?"

"I got to go get my pacer and start a man after him right now!" The blacksmith moved on.

The village had become alive enough; with a subdued, restless, hushed life. A knot of people stood in front of the Henderson place. The children and dogs were quiet, awed.

Bill started slowly up the street. Henry Henderson had been more than liked in Raven Hill; he had been loved. He had been a good man with mighty few enemies, even if he had lost his temper once in a while. He'd been an old soldier. It would go hard with the man who had lifted a hand against him.

Turner joined a group of men standing in the road in front of the very neat white house that, with its primness and fresh paint and care, suggested nothing of tragedy.

The men were talking in low voices, speculating, telling over and over what they had seen and heard and what they had said to so-and-so.

"Where's Elbert Lobdell?" asked Bill quietly.

"Must be in to Henderson's," answered some one indifferently.

"No, he ain't," volunteered a man who had just come out. "You wouldn't catch Elbert around where they's trouble of that kind!"

"I see him duck into his own place quite a spell afore they found Henry!" 'Bijah White had come up, still in the throes of enjoyable excitement. "Mebbe he ain't got over being scared of Henderson yet, on account of the trouble they had! When I see Elbert he was a-carrying an ax—"

Even Bije White was impressed by the words that had come out of his mouth. An ax—an ax connected with the thing that had been done there in that prosperous-looking barn.

"Shucks!" Ephraim Avery spoke, pulling at his whiskers. "Elbert Lobdell ain't got gumption enough to pound sand into a rat-hole—nor do anything else!"

Duncan Hodgskins had come back from his errand. He seemed to have grown more grim.

"Elbert and Henry ain't spoke to each other since Henry shot his dog," he said. "Everybody knows they had trouble."

"Having trouble with Elbert ain't an easy job," said Turner.

"He made threats when the dog was killed!" retorted the blacksmith. "Everybody laughed then at Lobdell making threats. Henry caught a dog killing his chickens early one morning and fired without seeing who the dog belonged to. Lobdell cried and made threats!"

"Pah!" snorted old Bill.

That exclamation of scorn, coming from Bill Turner, had power; just as the grim hint from Duncan Hodgskins had power. But Bill would have dominated the minds of those who heard him, and stamped out the thing he feared, if it had not been for the little instrument of fate, 'Bijah White.

"Godfreys mighty!" burst from him into the silence. "His ax was all blood! I looked sharp because I wondered what in tunket a man would be carrying an ax into the house for, and—"

"Go and gossip with the women!" barked Turner.

The harm had been done, however. There was a murmur among the listening men. The droning of the sawmill had ceased at twelve o'clock and now mill-hands, leather-brown, sweating, big-eyed, swelled the crowd. Some of them were not of the village.

"Where is this feller?" asked one.

"That's his house!" White pointed to the building, a little shabby, a little unkempt, next door to the Henderson place.

"Let's go and get him!"

"Aw, wait for the sheriff!"

"I've sent for Sheriff John Pomeroy!" announced the blacksmith in a loud voice. "He'll be here inside of an hour."

Duncan Hodgskins dominated the situation now. Men respect a blacksmith, for iron shapes in his hands. Bill Turner said nothing more, but he thought a great deal. He hoped that the pacer would make a quick trip to the county seat. Better than any one else he knew about the shooting of Lobdell's dog, for he had seen it done. He had seen Elbert crying, with the dead dog in his arms. The look that Elbert Lobdell had turned upon Henderson had contained all the hatred of which he was capable.

Bill felt genuinely sorry for Elbert. This feeling was entirely independent of whatever opinion he might come to have as to Lobdell's connection with the crime. He had rather got in the habit of sticking up for the little man when some of the ribald porch-loafers picked on him.

It was a horrid noon hour. The whisper of accusation went like an electric current; from brain to brain it traveled. Something more sinister than death was in the air. When one o'clock came the sawmill remained silent because none of the men went back to work. And through this time Elbert Lobdell did not appear. He was shut up in his house—everybody knew that now.

"The dum fool!" muttered old Bill as he went restlessly from one low-voiced group to another. "If he'd showed up in the beginning nobody 'd thought about him at all."

Hodgskins's leathered pacer came tearing into Raven Hill between one and two o'clock that afternoon. Froth hung from his mouth, and the man who had driven him was not in much better shape.

"Sheriff Pomeroy ain't to home!" he panted, as he climbed out of the skeleton buggy. "He's gone somewheres on business, but nobody knows where!"

Then it was that that which had been in the minds of so many began to take form. They gathered down in front of Avery's store, because Duncan Hodgskins was there, and the sawyer, who was also a man of importance.

Desire for immediate action was now stimulated by more than Henry Henderson's popularity. The citizens had become thoroughly filled with a sense of outrage. The murdered man had just drawn his quarterly pension money. His wallet was gone. Life and property must be safe in Raven Hill. Lobdell might get away—with the sheriff gone no one knew where.

"Boys," said Hodgskins, getting up on a cracker-barrel, "I ain't told all I know, on account of waiting for the sheriff. I got a small mortgage on Elbert Lobdell's place and the interest was due yesterday. He said he couldn't pay it, and wanted more time. This forenoon he come and paid me. *He acted queer!*"

There was a movement among those who heard him. Bill Turner, looking into their flushed faces, felt sure of what was coming. Perhaps they did not know yet—but he did.

"All you want to do is to see he don't get away," spoke up Ephraim Avery, who had once been a justice of the peace, "and let the law take its course."

"We want to know what he's got to say for himself!" growled the sawyer. "Something's got to be done!"

Bill Turner slipped away at that—out back of the doctor's office and up the hill. A majority of those men in front of Avery's store was going to turn into a mob. The heat was stifling enough to press the spirit of man on to insane things. If blood was shed in that way Raven Hill would not be a good place to live in for a long time. To-morrow, and for a great many days, men would avoid each other's eyes.

He knocked upon Lobdell's back door.

There was no answer. He pushed the door open and stepped into a kitchen fundamentally neat, but now somewhat disordered. In the sepulchral dimness of the parlor, where the shades were always drawn, he found Elbert huddled in a big chair. He jerked like a rabbit when Turner stepped into the room.

"Elbert," said Bill, "you get up and come with me. The boys kind of think you killed Henry!"

"Lord!" whispered Lobdell. "Lord!"

"And so do I! But I'm going to see you get a square deal. Get up!"

He took Lobdell by the arm and led him into the kitchen. Then, at a glance out of doors, Bill cursed and turned around. A mill-hand was in the back yard, watching. Turner made for the front of the house, on a chance.

But the crowd had already gathered there. Hodgskins and the sawyer were coming up to the front steps, with 'Bijah White hovering close.

They drummed with the fists of destiny upon the door. Turner shoved Lobdell behind him and opened it, filling the doorway with his square solidity. They stepped back at sight of him, but they did not give ground.

"Well?" he asked.

"Are you taking up for him?" demanded the sawyer.

"I calculate I think about the same way you do, but"—Bill paused and hitched up his shirt-sleeves—"he gets a square deal!"

"We got some questions to ask him," announced Hodgskins. He was determined, and now antagonistic to Bill. The crowd had pressed in from the sidewalk a little way, to hear and see better.

"Go ahead," said Bill. He brought Elbert around beside him with a sweep of his arm. "Here he is!"

Lobdell swallowed rapidly. His hands gripped the door for support. The blacksmith leveled an enormous finger at his face.

"What made your ax all blood? Hey?"

"I—I—killed a chicken!" Lobdell gasped.

"Huh! Where's the chicken? Show it to us!"

Turner had to put out a hand to steady him.

"I—et it!"

"Et a whole chicken for dinner?" The corners of Hodgskins's mouth drew tighter. "Well, the bones and feathers 'll show if you did or not! Where are they?"

"I don't know."

"Don't know?" The blacksmith and the sawyer exchanged glances. "Where 'd you get that money you paid me this morning?"

"I saved it up, Duncan, this summer!"

"Then why didn't you pay the interest yesterday? Hey?"

"I was going to buy—a dog—but I made up my mind Henry would shoot him, anyway."

"He'll lie out of it in court!" snarled the sawyer. "Damn him! They'll never hang a miserable little piece of tripe like him! We got to do it!"

Duncan Hodgskins transferred his gaze from Lobdell to Bill Turner. Bill could see that his mind was made up.

"Something's got to be done," he said. "It's plain as day that he killed Henry, but it ain't so plain what the law would do to him. If you don't like this, Bill, you'd better go home!"

"I ain't going home, Duncan," replied Bill quietly. Now his eye noted how near the crowd had drawn—how nearly ready it was to become a mob. He saw the right arm of the blacksmith twitch.

"Paste him one!" urged the sawyer. "What's the use of talking?"

Old Bill had been balanced and ready. He drove his left foot into the middle of Duncan Hodgskins's apron, pivoted, and landed a crashing fist between the eyes of the sawyer. Then he leaped back into the house and bolted the door.

Elbert Lobdell clutched the sleeve of his shirt, trembling. He seemed to have shrunk to half his former meager stature.

"I didn't!" he croaked. "Honest to goodness, I didn't!"

Bill Turner disentangled himself and sprang to a window. He ripped away the shade. Hodgskins and the sawyer were picking themselves up. The transition had taken place. It was a mob that faced the house now. There came to him that sound

which a mob makes and which is known only to those who have heard it. It has the quality of the voice of a beast that scents blood. Alone he might have fought his way out; but not with Lobdell. And Lobdell was why he was there.

"Come on," he said, and he half dragged Elbert up the stairs. He could make a stand there, and if most of them should crowd into the house at once it was just possible that Elbert might drop out of a window and get away.

"I didn't!" repeated Lobdell stubbornly.

"What's the use of lying?" snorted Bill. He ripped the leg from a table and spun it in his hand.

"It was a chicken I killed, Bill! Honest! Most usually I get Prouty's boy to do it for me, but to-day he wasn't around and I thought I'd see if I couldn't do it. The blood made me sick and that's why I acted so queer! I couldn't bear to eat the chicken and so I buried it out in the hen-yard!"

"Good Lord!" groaned Turner. "This is a hell of a mess to get into for a dead hen!"

That was how it struck him, standing there with death a matter of twenty or thirty paces away. He made the table leg whistle through the air and thought of the sawyer's flat-topped skull.

"You know I had 'em all named," said Elbert. "I've got my chickens all named!"

Bill barely heard this, for he had gone to an upper window to look out again. The window was open and, standing at one side, he could both see and hear.

"Come on!" urged the sawyer. "The old man 'll quit after he gets a couple of wallops!"

"No, he won't, damn him!" growled Hodgskins. "Old Bill Turner's a sticker!"

"Then let him take what he gets!" The sawyer spat on his hands and picked up a stone as big as his head. "Come on, boys!"

He heaved the stone against the front door, and the house rocked. Like unleashed dogs the men flung themselves, yelping broken curses, at the windows. Bill started for the head of the stairs. Ten—twenty seconds and he would be in the thick of it.

He looked curiously at Elbert. A change had come about—the little man was standing almost straight and his Adam's apple was still. Pale, but with unwavering eyes.

"They want to kill me!" he said, as though he had just understood what was going to happen.

"I calculate they do," agreed Turner, grimly.

"I ain't afraid, Bill! Not really afraid of dying myself!"

"Well, I'll be damned!" Turner took a fresh grip upon his weapon. Now there was some satisfaction in fighting for Lobdell.

He heard the mob crashing all over the first floor in its search. Then the two leaders appeared at the foot of the stairs and halted. Bill grinned down at the sawyer, and he could no longer resist a repressed desire.

"You dasn't come up first!" he taunted. "You flat-topped, pot-bellied walrus!"

At that the sawyer had to take the lead, and with a roar he sprang upward, swinging a stick of stove-wood. Six feet away he hurled it at Bill's head and tried to close in. The table-leg broke upon his head and he somersaulted over and over to the bottom of the stairs. There would be no more fight in him that day. Bill's mind was easier—he had wanted to get in one good lick at the sawyer.

Now they came up like a tidal wave, with Duncan Hodgskins on the crest. There was no joke in this; and Bill was left with only his fists and feet to meet them. He flung a sentence over his shoulder to Lobdell.

"Now's your chance to get out!"

Turner kicked the blacksmith in the face and charged into that wave with his thick arms flailing. The wave receded half-way down the stairs, but it did not break—it paused merely to gather more force. None of those younger men were down. Younger and stronger—they could take punishment. The lust to kill had come up out of the depths and into their faces. Even Hodgskins, bleeding but not really injured, was murderous. There was no longer any mercy for Bill Turner. Silence except for rasping breath in many throats. The wave surged.

Into that tense, momentary stillness came the throb and beat of hoofs upon the hard clay road. A shot sounded like the crack of a whiplash. Something attacked the base of the waves on the stairs, forced through it, rocked its foundations.

Sheriff John Pomeroy stood a head above the tallest of the mob, and his booming voice filled the house.

"Come out of here, you fools! Ain't one murder enough!"

They turned upon him uncertainly. He stood among them unafraid, his eyes holding the eyes of Duncan Hodgskins.

"I've got the man that killed Henderson!" cried the sheriff. "He confessed—we found the wallet on him! A convict that broke out a week ago—he was here yesterday and slept in Henderson's barn last night!"

It was over. Bill Turner's fists unclenched. He turned and saw, with surprise, that Elbert Lobdell stood behind him. Elbert sank down upon a chair, trembling.

"Anyway, I stuck!" he gasped. "Like you did, Bill!"

"Of course!" agreed Turner. "You're all right, Elbert!"

He left Lobdell and walked through to the rear of the upper floor. Outside there was no one in sight. He got out upon the wood-shed roof and dropped to the ground. It was a long way to Saturday night, but he felt like going home and taking a bath notwithstanding. And he did.

The shadows had stretched clear across the road and it was beginning to get cooler when Bill Turner settled down again upon his dry-goods box on Avery's porch, alone. Raven Hill was ashamed to show its face, and only the broken windows in Elbert Lobdell's house bore witness to what had been. The whang and drone of the sawmill sounded as usual.

Bill lighted his cob pipe. It wabbled whenever his hand withdrew its guardianship, and the stem scraped the roof of his mouth.

Anybody else would have quit smoking and gone to chewing fine-cut when the last of his back teeth went. But not old Bill Turner.

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WITH FALLING LEAVES

MY love kissed me and rode away—
Let him go!
He and I kept holiday
A week ago.

Laughed and danced and played awhile—
He and I;
Kissed, and watched with careless smile
Love pass by;

With no sadness said good-by
At the end;
Glad I am he did not try
To be my friend.

Thus our love has smiled and died—
Merrily;
But oh, my heart, if he should ride
Back to me!

Kate Kelly

Jungle Love

by Raymond Lester

Author of "Dust to Dust," "Walls of Clay," the *Nan Russell* series, etc.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE MAESTRO'S HOBBY.

"YOU look tired—overtired. Now you must rest. I said I would tell you all about how I have come to know so much concerning you. I will—but we have talked enough for to-day. Keep your mind away from thoughts of the past, and when you are quite well—we will see what is best to be done."

Julie snuggled back in her cushions. "You are good," she said, "but—"

"But what?"

"I shall soon have to go away."

"That," replied the maestro smiling, "is in my hands. For the time being I play the part of fate. Here, I am the maestro, and order you just to—rest."

The master! For a moment Julie contrasted this master who ruled with kindness and good will and the one who kept on his table a whip. But not for long did she allow her thoughts to wander in the direction of Kragen. The maestro had bidden her to rest, and, well—it was time to go to that perfumed pleasant bedroom.

For hours after Julie had retired, Don Salgado sat in his library thinking. The problems before him had more to do with Julie's innate, undeveloped qualities than the question of her good or bad behavior as measured by her actions under the circumstances that had surrounded her before and during the time she had been afflicted with Arthur Falwell's company. All things considered, Don Cæsaro was inclined to think that the girl had behaved rather well. She had been very poorly equipped to act on her own initiative, yet it was clear that onte she began to realize she had been imposed upon, she had not failed to make a stand and keep herself free from further contamination. Of course, it was equally clear to Salgado that Julie had been what is known as looking for trouble, but he very rightly put down her rash impulsiveness to ignorance rather than viciousness.

"Poor child," he thought, "she hungered for some of the beautiful things of life, and the glare of the night lights, the blare of the café music satisfied the need of the moment. There was no one to show her a better, different way. If I send her back—what then?"

Truth to tell, no man can foretell the future; no one can justifiably assert: this youth will turn out a rascal, or that girl will be a lazy, shiftless wife and mother. The boy who succumbs to temptation and premeditatedly commits a theft may only be wild and not fundamentally of criminal tendencies. The girl who "dolls up" and develops a mania for shows and dance-halls may only be passing through a phase of irrationality caused by a surplus of energy.

It is the permanent and basic, not the passing and surface qualities that count, and are the true measure of character. Too often the hypercritical judge by externals.

Salgado was a man of far-reaching influence in the business world. His cotton crop helped to feed the mills in Lancashire. His coffee-beans came by the ship-load to the packers of New York. Three days' continual riding on horseback could not span the length or breadth of his cultivated

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rubber plantations. He dealt in sugar, spices, copra, fruit, and hides; and yet found time to travel and leisure for—a hobby.

This hobby was peculiar, inasmuch that it brought him no material profit, no glory, and did not pander to vanity. Wealthy enough to have been world famed for whatsoever he fancied to buy, such as a collection of pictures, prints, bronzes, or any of those rare, unique works that are best placed in museums and owned by the public; Salgado gave his leisure time to a study more difficult than connoissance of bric-à-brac and postage stamps. The employees on his pay-roll were all known to him by more than name; he regarded them as individual characters, not merely as cogs to be ground and standardized to pattern. He saw to it that the humblest worker on his estates was fairly paid and justly treated, and in proportion to each and every worker's part in production, so did they all receive a share of the profits.

In pursuit of his hobby, Salgado had gone further. The conditions of workers in other countries, in stores and factories as well as in the open field had all received his attention. He knew the wage of the Parisian hat-box girl, and how her frugality enabled her to save money and make a better showing than her higher paid but less economical sisters across the channel. He had talked with welfare workers in all the big cities, and had the faculty for making people trust him and talk—straight. To Salgado the world was a hive, and only the workers were worth while considering. The drones and the parasites were below his contempt, and he regarded the possession of money as an obligation to work beneficially and no excuse for *flânerie*. Salgado could, pedantically, be described as a sociologist; but he was something better than a garnerer of facts, figures, and data. His hobby was constructive, and he sought to read the hearts of men and give them comfort. In the best meaning of the word, he was a practical humanitarian.

Julie had thought, when she had spoken of her office work, that her listener was not really aware of what she was talking about. She was very far from being right. Salgado had stayed over six months in New York, and just as he knew the crudity of its sprouting bohemia, so was he aware of the efficient inner workings of department-stores, offices, and manufacturing lofts. He knew of the opportunities open to those equipped to seize them, and he also knew that competition in New York City was at too high a pressure for the inefficient to thrive.

"There are some boys fitted to guide the plow, others more suited to push a pen, and a few girls adapted to make of business a successful career. Very few. And—Julie is not one of them."

This conclusion helped toward furthering a tentative idea that had been in Salgado's mind for some days. The point now to be settled was: would the girl better develop if he kept her in Brazil? Was there any danger in using her to prove a theory? Did his intentions justify him in holding Julie for experiment? Had he the moral right to pledge his faith in himself and the girl's own future on his hypothetical belief in her underlying good qualities?

To a mind less habituated to weigh a course of action from the standpoint of one who works for the benefit of another and is not obsessed by self interest of an intellectual or material nature, the matter would have been easily decided. The course Don Salgado pondered would have instantly met with the approval of the solely materialistic; but knowing as he did that the human mental machine, more particularly a young girl's mind, is an impressionable and variable quantity, he hesitated to make his final decision.

"I'll wait and see how she responds during the next few days," he thought. "It would be interesting to know how she would behave, given a prolonged tryout; but I dare not risk throwing her into a condition of exaggerated conception of her own self-importance. I must make haste—slowly; leave her better off than I found her, or—let her alone."

To help others help themselves implies more than the donation of money. Salgado could have financed a thousand girls such as Julie, and never felt the drain on his banking account. The bestowal of a

dollar or a million is, in neither case, for they who have money to spare, any evidence of noble charitableness. It is the one who gives personal and sincere attention, the one who *lifts* another to self help who is the good Samaritan.

The next afternoon it was Julie who took the rôle of visitor. She came into the library.

"I have finished with laying around," she declared. "May I stay here a while?"

The maestro wheeled a chair to the side of the big, flat desk.

"I am glad to have you," he said. "It is a good opportunity, too. We can clear up, or as they say over in your busy country, clean up, and start with no hooks dangling around to drag your mind back to that which I want you to forget. Here are some letters and newspaper clippings for you to glance over."

It was the printed matter that Julie first looked at, and she read with devouring interest and some shame, and not a full understanding.

The Mogolia had been raided, closed up; but not at first did the girl realize that the combination of circumstances that had brought about this so desirable event, had been set in motion by her being locked in the disused gambling-room. She could not at once absorb the columns of reports.

"Fancy Ernest Kennedy being mixed up in it!" she cried. "He was so slow—stupid almost. And—this Leila—who was she? It says here that it was through her and Ernest that the investigation started. Why should she bother about me? I never knew her, never saw her, so far as I know."

"You saw her, Julie. She was the woman who tried to prevent you entering the Mogolia, and she persuaded Ernest Kennedy to go with her to Mrs. Ruth Gordon. This lady, however, was too late to prevent you being carried off by Falwell."

"Why did he do that?"

"Because Kennedy and the Leila woman were spied upon. It was known by the Mogolia people where they had gone. To mitigate, to lessen the danger they saw coming you were whisked away. Your landlady also went to the police and reported you missing. That made matters worse for those who were trying to hush things up."

"I see," murmured the girl; "but what does it mean about a conspiracy? It says here"—Julie held up a small cutting—"that some one known as Sid, and *that man,* are suspected of being concerned in—in—inciting the murder of Leila. Why was she killed? How dreadful it all seems. I never knew, never dreamed I could cause any one to suffer. I thought all the time I was the victim. Now—"

The girl began to cry.

"I—seem," she sobbed, "to—to have brought bad luck to every one."

"There is no such thing as bad luck," said the maestro, "and except that you were very foolish, you stand clear of all responsibility. Your intentions were not wicked. As for the rest—you were just the turning point in the lives of others. We cannot even say that the end of Leila was an unhappy one. In that one act—her attempt to save you from her associates—she redeemed an existence that cannot be spoken of. From the furnace of self-sacrifice the wrongdoer emerges as white as snow. She is now free. In this life she suffered; now—she knows peace and is happy."

"You think that?" asked Julie. "You—"

"I believe it, I *know* it," interrupted the maestro. "There is no death; that is why we should try to do our best in this life."

"It is nice to think about—things as you do," said the girl after a while. "I—wish I could."

"In time you will. Faith is the great thing; also"—Salgado continued in lighter vein—"also brains. Ignorance and stupidity are the causes of lack of faith and belief in the good and future—beyond."

Julie looked at the maestro with steady eyes.

It has been remarked that when she was traveling up-town on the "L," those same eyes were blue, very beautiful and unexpressive. Now, there was a difference in them, a nascent earnestness and sincerity of inquiry.

Salgado was a good gardener.

Presently a look of puzzlement came over the girl's face.

Salgado anticipated her question.

"You are wondering who sent me the news cuttings," he stated. "It was Mrs. Ruth Gordon. We are old friends, and she is the head of a society of good women who have banded together to protect innocent girls. You will see by her letter that she asked me to look out for you since she knew that you and—Falwell were headed for this country. I was down the coast when her letter arrived. It came soon after you saw my partner Morton."

Julie did not look very pleased when she read the letter from the "good woman."

"What is it?" asked the maestro, and laughed when the girl candidly replied:

"She wants you to send me back."

Salgado held up his hand.

"Wait. You are not going back. Not yet. I am going to keep you here as—"

When Salgado stopped, Julie sat wondering in what capacity she was to stay. The house was fully equipped with servants, and she didn't think there would be any typewriting for her; so what could she do? It was pleasant to sit in a beautiful room and read, or wander in the garden; but that couldn't go on forever. So—

"I am going to keep you here as—"

Once again Salgado paused, but there was mischief in his eyes.

Julie wriggled with suspense.

"As—as an experiment," finished the maestro.

"O-oh!" Julie did not feel quite sure that she liked being an "experiment."

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE SEED.

DAVID STERN, having gone so far as to provide himself with "good business" reasons for returning to South America, was not one to beat about the bush when it came to satisfying his private intentions.

The fabled marvels of news distribution by the native runners of India are balanced and outdone by the wonders performed in more sophisticated zones. By beat of drum, and word of mouth passed directly from one to another of untiring runners at intervals of fifty or a hundred miles, the Hindu can live on one side of a mountain and know perfectly well what is going on over the top and beyond. The lean, so supposedly ignorant fakir, sitting chanting his prayers by some dust-laden track far inland is in touch with Downing Street. But the rumors that spread through the length and breadth of India, between the rising and setting of the sun, are but scanty bulletins compared with the news that is passed from garrulous tongue to ready ear among the crews of boats traveling up and down the lanes of the sea. A sailor man goes ashore; he talks. Another goes aboard; he talks. The world is criss-crossed with vibrations of whispering voices.

So from one source and another, David had picked up a lot of news concerning Julie; and the chivalry that had impelled him to throw Artie out of the café in Para, now led straight to the offices of Salgado & Morton.

The head of the firm—now, on the surface, Don Cæsaro Salgado, man of business and affairs commercial, but always the student of human idiosyncrasies; always the sympathetic maestro—looked up in surprise when David marched up to his desk.

"Back already?" he exclaimed. "Why, I thought you were not due here for another four or five months?"

"That's right, but I have a particular reason for being here. Personal matter. I've just come in from Para, and I hear you have been in touch with a young lady I'm interested in. Last time I saw her she was—well—she was in the hands of a blackguard. I'm told he skipped. Left her flat. Do you know where she is?"

"May I ask why you want to know?"

Salgado's inquiry was disarmingly courteous.

"Why, certainly, I want to see her safely back in America. This place is all right; but as you know it is no place for a girl even if she—she is married and—and knows her way about."

"What exactly do you mean by that?"

"She wouldn't have been in the com-

pany of the man Falwell if she were not—experienced."

For a moment Salgado thought over these curious remarks and weighed this young man's motives. It was certain that although he knew part of Julie's story, he was not aware of the palliating circumstances. Yet, believing her to be a girl of "experience," he was more than willing to assist her. In all that the tie implied he believed her to be married to Falwell. He was not a chaser of women, a flirtatious butterfly of passing, doubtful attachments, therefore what could be his motive? Did his interest go deeper?

Salgado studied David's clean out features.

"If his interest in Julie does go deeper," he thought, "it is really none of my affair; but I feel sure that whatever he may feel of the primitive, fundamental call, he came here with no other intention except to do exactly what he said, and no more. Good. It's a pleasure to face a gentleman. Question is, shall I let him meet Julie? If I do—my experiment will not have a chance. Friend David must wait. It won't hurt him, and if his interest is well founded, then there is no fear of it withering. I'll give him a peg to hold on to. I'll not halt, but help. Hasten slowly. Contradictory, but it's a good policy sometimes."

"Do you know where Mrs. Falwell is?" asked David.

"I know where Miss Julie Somers is," replied Salgado. "Yes, I am talking of the same young lady, and please note that although there is somewhere on the other side of the ocean a paper that certificated her as Mrs. Falwell, her position is emphatically that of *Miss* Julie Somers. *Voilà!*"

It took some time for David Stern to digest this surprising news. He sat staring dreamily out of the door. Yes, those eyes of Julie were very beautiful, and—knots could be untied.

"Where is—Miss Somers?"

"That," replied Salgado, "I am going to keep secret for—let us say—until you make a return trip. That will be about six months and—ample."

"For what?"

A spark kindled in David's eyes. Salgado was a good fellow, a wonderful handler of men and business; but this was going too far.

"For my experiment."

"I don't get you."

"Then I will tell you something of Miss Julie's case."

Salgado talked earnestly and at length, and when he had finished, David looked very disturbed. He had made many wrong conclusions.

On the maestro's desk was a sample packet of seed. He took one grain and dropped it on the concrete floor.

"Will it grow?" he asked.

"No."

"Supposing I take that same seed and place it in sand and water. Will it—"

"Sure, it 'll grow. Fast."

"And when the sun pours down on it, it will wilt and droop. We know that, do we not?" asked Salgado.

"Surely; but what has this to do with Miss—"

"Everything. Instead of doing either of the alternatives I have suggested, I place the seed in carefully selected earth; I retard its too sudden development by keeping it shaded from the sun. I tend it with great care, and gradually it grows, strong, sturdy, ready and fitted to flower in the sun. That is the summary of my experiment. The seed is Miss Julie, only triplicated. I wish to try and aid her mind to broaden, her heart to feel deeply, and her soul to come to her consciousness."

The maestro held out his hand.

"Will you accept an invitation to meet Miss Julie in a few months' time, or—do you insist on seeing her now and possibly disturbing her already growing poise?"

"I'm not a meddler or a fool," said David huskily. "You've put the case so clearly, so darned pat; and you're so darned decent that—I'm off right away. Why couldn't I—I expected nothing, and now—well, she may look at me and she may not. Only—"

"What?"

"Don't make her too good to give a glance at an ordinary, everyday sort of a fellow."

The maestro laughed softly.

"There's a very human spirit in Julie," he said. "She will never be of the sanctimonious, I-am-superior-to-thee type. Meanwhile, look up the laws of your land concerning the annulment of marriages."

David Stern hurried away as if he were going to walk straight into the registrar's office and do some tearing up.

When he returned to his mountain home, Salgado made no mention of David Stern. Instead, he brought for Julie some new records for the gramaphone, a box full of books, and, better still, a little green bird.

The records and the books were appreciated; but the parrakeet became one of the main factors of the experiment. The maestro remembered how Julie had spoken of the kitten she had hidden under her bed in her hall-room, and he soon had practical demonstration that one of the things Julie needed was something to love.

She talked to her pet off and on all day, and if she became childishly concerned over its comfort, it was what Salgado wanted. But all was not plain sailing. There were moments when the girl sat sullenly silent.

At these times the maestro praised her for the care she was giving to the orchids in the glass-house, and expressed again how helpful she was to him in straightening out his accounts. He soon had her happy and smiling again, for did he not know that the first requisite to content is the knowledge that one is wanted by some one.

The birth of anything, whether it be a gnat or an oratorio, is usually accompanied by some fussing of wings and mental agitation. The antithesis of birth can be an affair of quiet relinquishment, an interlude of peace; but the quickening to life necessitates certain mechanical and technical adjustments to the business of existence. The Julie born unto Julie came at first with soft insidiousness. Indeed, it would have been difficult for the girl to date the first moment of the new arrival's capture of herself. The first days of the consciousness called into being by the persuasive yet so unobtrusive power of Salgado were to Julie a period of vague misunderstanding with herself. She felt like two people. One was a surprised and somewhat resentful girl; the other was self-possessed, placid and entirely certain that the Julie of Sixth Avenue and the Falwell episode was a creature of the past.

At the end of two months, Julie swung over completely to the sway of her new character, and then there commenced for her a time of trial and secret shame. Her mind, slowly reforming itself, remolding standards of conception, and acquiring new points of view, novel angles of perspective, made a sudden leap to a higher, permanent lookout. It hurt her, humbled her pride to see herself as she really had been. Her old-time meagerness of thought appalled her. Memory of her small, empty vanities caused her to wriggle with discomfort, and to shiver with repulsion at the deliberateness with which she had walked arm in arm with shoddy danger.

Her ineffective office life, her adventurous visits to the Mog, Artie — and the night they had ridden out of town — all came back to her with no clarity of pictured scene; but the nauseousness of feeling was all there intensified.

Miss Blonde, smart, tawdy giggler of innuendo—Artie, sly rat of on-the-cheap, nasty pleasures; Kragen, wolfish despoiler; herself, eager, nibbling mouse—ignorant yet not all innocence in avowed intent. All were unpleasant spectres to have to acknowledge as one-time intimates. Again and again Julie bundled them into the closet where we put memories we want to drop out of mind; but again and again they popped out; intensive, annoying and disquieting. Gradually as the days passed, these unwelcome visitants from the past absented themselves at wider-spaced intervals, and for weeks the closet door did not even creak.

The new Julie, once she became accustomed to her rebirth, rapidly grew of stronger will, and more entirely mistress of her ways of thought. She found she could control herself to the avoidance of even nodding to peeping, straying imps of the past. The present began to hold her enthralled. A thousand interesting things seemed to spring from nowhere and claim her attention. And the wonderful part of it all was her complete lack of knowledge concerning the source of her new freedom.

The maestro was selling her a broader conception of life and herself, and his salesmanship was so skilful that Julie thought she was just spontaneously changing. Salgado's experiment was proceeding by wisdom-guided stealth.

Physically, too, she began to develop. Her one-time rather cheap prettiness was merging into beauty of a dainty, vivacious type. Her eyes became expressive. She accomplished more in less time. She did not cease to move quickly; but less haste and flurry marred her actions. Her voice changed, became fuller in tone; and her choice of words broke free from the bondage of inadequate slang. She unknowingly set about acquiring a larger and more varied vocabulary.

In childhood she had been stunted by environment; oppressed by circumstances. So, under the maestro's influence, one of the first things Julie learned was how to be a child again. How to shed the husks of small cynicisms, how to give play to the gentle impulses; how to seize the fleeting moment of esthetic pleasure and extract from it the joy that is lasting, because it is founded on perceptions that are pure and fade not. Herein lays the difference between surface tintillation of the senses, evanescent sensations, artificial thrills, counterfeit enjoyment, and the happiness the poet finds in contemplation of a tiny, wayside flower. Here also is the difference between the slave to conventionalized standardized opinion, and the one who keeps an open mind and adopts no ready-made conclusions.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

BROWN, BLACK AND WHITE.

TO a child, unspoiled by the limiting, and often imagination and inquiry stifling rules and by rules of education by formula, it is no effort for it to see within the limits of its vision, with greater clarity and thoroughness than the average grown person. Children and the poetic-minded are more alive, more inquiring and more sincere in their desire to hang on to the skirts of truth. They want to see the wheels go round, and are nearer to a fourth dimensional grasp of the mysteries than the pedantic and the juggler with eons and ions, and isms and catchy truisms.

From a belief in fairies a child passes to the formation of ideals. Then comes the all but inevitable period of disillusionment. The fairies vanish with varying completeness, and one by one ideals totter and crumble. Out of gossamer, broken wings and fractured wands, from all the débris of shattered beliefs in the honor of all men and the goodness of all women, is formed a makeshift philosophy, an unstable creed of adaptability. Some grow stodgy, and blindly, insanely materialistic, and they cultivate an indifference to all except that which can be bought with money. Gold, selfish ambition, love of power are their goads and goals. Some, weakly failing to cling to dumb rock or swaying branch, let themselves drift into the muddy deeps of cynicism. Still others, and they are legion, seek in drink or drug to recreate their lost power of happiness. Others, and they are few, humbly retrace their steps.

Bit by bit the fallen castles rise again, the long-neglected phantasies of childhood dreams take surer shape and presently comes the blessed knowledge that under the leaf a fairy dwells. In the chaos of semiborn civilization the ideal is rediscovered. The limitations bounded by insistence on cold drawn, rigid proof are removed, and the illimitable realm of faith is entered into. The ego falls, and instead of bowing before the plaster we are, and laying tribute on the altar of a glorified, material self, we stand aside and give the spirit room to move.

But there came a day, after another month of the "experiment" had passed, when Julie stood in front of Salgado with frightened shame in her eyes.

"I can't bear it. I must tell you. You will despise me, send me away; but please take it. I thought of tearing it all up, burning it; but that would have done no good. I could never forget that I had kept something from you; that I had not told you the whole truth."

The maestro slowly examined the bank-notes Julie laid on his desk. There were

two bills of two dollars each. A roll of Brazilian milreis and a sheaf of twenty-dollar notes. He counted them mechanically. There were fourteen.

"Two hundred and eighty dollars," he remarked.

"I—I stole it."

Salgado remained silent. He felt the need of caution. Whatever the facts were, he inferred that the girl was suffering from some exaggerated sense of guilt. Her next words showed he was right.

"I took it from 'that man's' pocket. At the hotel in Para."

"Then," said the maestro quickly, "you are misleading me by accusing an innocent girl. It was not a nice thing to do; but there were circumstances that forced you. The main point is this—the girl that is now standing before me is not the one who, justifiably or not, took that money."

"Then you do not despise me?"

The maestro stood up. He put his arm across the girl's shoulder.

"A father"—his voice shook a little—"does not despise his own daughter. I am glad you have told me. Inform me of one more thing, and we will dispose of the subject once and for all."

"What is it? There is nothing else I have concealed from you."

"It is nothing of that order; I have wondered, though, why you didn't return the two-dollar bill your landlady lent you?"

"But—I couldn't," protested Julie. "That man gave me no time to go back. I wanted to say good-by to Mrs. Bruce and get my things; but he wouldn't let me. He said we had barely time to catch the boat."

"I understand. Well, we will finish with this affair right away. This"—Salgado held up the roll of twenty-dollar bank-notes between thumb and forefinger—"is undoubtedly good American money; but it has come from a tainted source. It does not belong to either you or me. We will make these good Federal notes do work worthy of the imprint they bear, and send them to one who befriended you. The surprice will redeem her faith in human nature."

"You mean Mrs. Bruce?" asked Julie.

"Exactly; we will send her back her two-dollar bill, and the other as tribute to her spontaneous good-heartedness."

Julie's eyes sparkled. "I am sure that is a splendid idea," she agreed. "And what about the other; the change from the note Kragen gave me?"

"I will hand that to Iracema. As for this other, I will keep it, and if I should ever meet 'that man,' I will return it to him with—" The maestro looked down at the toe of his shoe. "My foot itches," he finished.

"You—you don't think he would ever find me, do you?" whispered Julie. "I—I could not bear to even look at him."

"There is not much likelihood of him ever returning to this state without my being aware of it. I have a detective waiting on the pier whenever a passenger boat comes in. Not more than half a dozen persons land in a week, and he would be easy to pick out. But I don't think he will even attempt to come back. Now, let us take a turn in the garden and forget all things that should be forgotten. I have a little surprise for you. It will be here to-morrow."

The farther shore is, for some reason or another, nearly always more desirable and attractive than the one we stand upon. This bent of mind is part of the cussedness of human nature, and operates in various and multifarious ways. The city-born girl dreams of love in the country, the village-bred boy lays in the hay loft and sees pictures of himself as a city magnate. With no respect of the fitness of opposing temperaments or racial differences, infatuation will spread its spell and weave disaster.

The surprise the maestro had in store proved to be a violin. Raphael Pinto, olive complexioned, dark and lustrous of eye, came each day to give Julie her lesson.

One evening the maestro heard the thrumming of a guitar. He smiled, but an anxious look came into his eyes as he went into the garden. David Stern was coming back, and—there were other reasons why serenading under Julie's window was *de trop*.

It was—there was no getting away from that—a romantic scene that the maestro came upon.

With uplifted face, half revealed by the moon's light, Raphael strummed ecstatically. As he moved away a sprig of jasmine dropped at Raphael's feet. He picked it up, kissed it fervently, and bowed ceremoniously.

A form appeared at Julie's window. It was Iracema. "Go away!" she ordered. "You keep Miss Julie from sleeping."

Raphael Pinto rapped out a sibilant, bad word and stalked away.

Chuckling hugely, the maestro went back to his book. It was to his mind a settled affair. Julie was a sensible girl; Raphael had been taught a lesson, sharp and decisive. There was nothing like ridicule to nip a lover's wooing in the bud. The idea of Iracema appearing at the window instead of Julie herself was the finishing stroke.

Oh, wise maestro! Oh, love-tale loving woman!

"I'm glad to observe that Raphael Pinto was not moon-struck the other night," observed Salgado, and found that an incident he had thought closed was still wide open.

"He played to me again last night," replied the girl. "It was lovely."

"He did?"

"Do you mind?" inquired Julie.

"Do you care?" parried the maestro.

"It's nice. He plays beautifully."

Salgado asked no more questions. Not of Julie. She had been candid; therefore he judged it would not be playing the game to ask her to give anybody away. All's fair, within limits, in affairs romantic. Enlightenment was forced from Iracema. She had seen him leave the library, and loath that Miss Julie should be discovered, she had gone to her room and, even at the expense of misleading the beloved maestro, had played the deceiving trick upon him.

"I did not mean harm," she pleaded, and added, "and Raphael is so handsome. Yes?"

Salgado frowned severely.

"Too handsome."

He said nothing more about the affair; but a break occurred in the violin lessons, and Julie accompanied the maestro to his town house.

Under pretext of calling on Angus McBane concerning some business that must be said did not exist, Salgado took the girl to the Scot's house. Angus, as the maestro expected, was not in; but Señora McBane and "the hostages of fortune" were. There were three of them. Two were white and one was kinky haired and chocolate brown.

"I have another visit to make. A social call. You would like to come?" asked Salgado.

"Yes."

Julie was very thoughtful as they drove through the town, and she became still more immersed in reflection when they left the palatial residence. Salgado had introduced her to the mistress of the house, who was as beautifully gowned as she was gracious. The maestro had then taken the girl over the well-kept grounds and showed her an aviary of gorgeous birds. Near by had stood a venerable gray-haired negro. His evident great age had attracted Julie's notice, and she remarked thereon.

"Yes," said Salgado casually. "He is the grandfather of the lady you have just seen."

"But—she is white. Nearly."

"One of her children takes after that old man."

On their return to the mountain house, the violin lessons were resumed; but Julie sat no more at her window at night. Serenaders and tropic glamour are seductive; but Julie could not forget *another* lesson she had received.

Raphael Pinto was the great-grandson of the old man in the garden.

Julie came to the knowledge that although there was much beauty in this tropical land, there was a line to be drawn. For her, like the song of the bird she had heard on the beach, her ripening sense of beingness was unfinished. She was truly and lovingly grateful to the maestro for all he had done for her. But—East is East and—

The musical call of the troupial has its appeal to many, but there is a melancholy note, a suggestion of unsatisfied longing in the song that is never completed. To a heart at unease with itself, to a spirit groping for supremacy and companionship, the

sudden quenching of the bird's outburst of melody brings a sigh to the listener's lips. It is a beautiful vibration of chords in a swelling throat; but hints of sadness and resignation to the apparently inevitable. To some ears the song of this bird means nothing; but to the supersensitive it carries a poignant influence to thoughts that may be allied to pessimism and the relinquishment of hope.

Our brisk, perky little song-sparrow is *par excellence* the cheerful, inspiring optimist. Cold winds and chilling rains may intrude when the trees should be in leaf and the earth aglow with peeping flowers; but our song-sparrow refuses to be dashed. It is his temperament to enthuse, and trillingly proclaim that soon all will be well, so why be miserable and mopey?

The troupial is a song-poet, with a tendency for harping on a sad refrain. The song-sparrow had no gorgeous plumage; but he is a cheery rimester; an unbeatable gloom chaser.

There were moments when Julie wished she could see just an ordinary chirping sparrow.

The story of the crosses, too, rather disturbed her; but it was not her critical faculty that did this. It was nostalgia. Only she did not know it.

"Why is that there?" she asked, pointing to a cross that stood on a slope beyond the limits of the maestro's garden.

"It marks a resting place. A little history is attached to every one of those crosses you will find scattered about on the mountains. For the most part they are the stopping places of men who come here with the wrong idea; a misconception of the temper of my people. The natives are mostly ignorant, lazy, and improvident. Properly treated they are docile and good-tempered; but they fiercely resent all interferences with their liberty as citizens of a republic, and trespass on their private code of honor is dangerous. We South Americans are not a tame people. I remember—"

Salgado broke off with a smile of reminiscence.

"Generally speaking," he went on, "these men of the mountains settle their differences out of court. An Austrian came here as overseer on a neighboring rubber plantation; he also thought to rule with a riding whip. He struck one blow, and the native afterwards boasted that he repaid that blow with twenty-one slashes of his knife. *M'sieu'* sleeps over there under that bunch of bananas. Further up the hill lies another who did not know how to treat a child. Down there by those rocks is an Algerian who was overfond of absinthe and promiscuous lovemaking. Lots of foreign adventurers come to Brazil and thus save their countries the legal expenses of limiting their activities."

"You mean—"

"They never return to their home land," said Salgado. "We welcome the arrival of the beneficent and kindly disposed, and we grieve their departure; but the rascal who comes here to inflict us with a surplusage of exploitation usually digs his own grave. Talking of good men, though, reminds me of one who is now due to visit us."

On the morrow David Stern arrived.

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.

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YOUR TOUCH

I LOVE your touch, it's cool as rain,
And strong as it is fine;
I quite forget my life's dark stain
When your clean hands touch mine.

Le Baron Cooke.

The Stray-Man

by Charles Alden Seltzer,

Author of "Riddle Gawne," "Square Deal Sanderson," "The Trail Horde," etc.

CHAPTER XXIII.

SHORTY STARTS IN A HURRY.

"I THOUGHT you was Stewart," said Shorty, after a short silence.

"Was that what made you reach for your guns that suggestive?" inquired Knable. There was cold incredulity in his voice.

"Knable, that's a habit, an' you know it."

"Reachin' for your guns so's you could shoot your boss, eh? Sounds like lyin' to me."

Shorty reddened. His passionate gaze met Knable's; held it.

"Knable, that's the way you repay a friend. Get the drop on him an' insult him."

"You're workin' for Stewart, ain't you?"

"I ain't denyin' it, Knable."

"An' when you heard me, you thought I was him; an' you was figurin' to work your guns."

He stood, his eyes gleaming with contempt, his lips curving cynically.

"What was you ransackin' Stewart's desk for?" he went on. His gaze was level. It seemed to Shorty that back of his deadly earnestness was a secret knowledge, and a determination to corroborate that knowledge before he acted.

But Shorty was not intimidated by the menace of Knable's attitude. He answered the man's cynical look with a low laugh.

"When a man bends a gun on me I get powerful nervous, Knable," he said. "When he's got two in his hands, I ain't aimin' to be responsible for my actions. If you're figurin' to use them guns, get goin'. If you're tryin' to run a whizzer on me, put them away. No man is goin' to palaver with me while he's got the advantage."

For an instant Knable held Shorty's defiant gaze, noting his earnestness despite the cold humor in his voice. Then he deliberately sheathed the guns.

"I reckon you've got as much right here as I have," he said. "Kelton told me last night you was figurin' to work for Stewart. That was bad enough; but when I seen you goin' through his desk that intimate, it sort of made me see red." And now some feeling came into his voice—a deep emotion which he tried to conceal.

"It ain't playin' the game square, Shorty," he said. "Kelton an' Kelton's daughter gave you a mighty square deal—takin' you in an' nursin' you. Both of them think a hell of a lot of you. An' I'd got so's I was takin' pride in referring to you as my friend. An' then you come over here an' hook up with a guy that ain't fit to live in the same world with Kelton an' his daughter." He paused and looked at Shorty appealingly.

"I reckon when I bent my guns on you I was lookin' for an answer for your comin' here, Shorty," he added.

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for August 14.

"I'm givin' it to you, Knable." Shorty's voice was low. He divined that Knable thought he had acted the ingrate in leaving Kelton so abruptly. But he could not disclose to Knable the real reason for his departure. However, the latter's scathing reference to Stewart indicated a knowledge of the man not possessed by himself—a reference made doubly significant by Shorty's discovery of Larry Dillon's belt in the drawer.

"I reckon you know somethin' about Stewart that I don't know, Knable," he said. "Mebbe we'd understand better what's back of all this if you'd tell me why Stewart don't measure up."

He was wondering if by some chance Kelton had learned of Stewart's deadly intentions regarding him, and had spoken to Knable about it. That would explain Knable's presence here; it would explain his action in drawing his guns just a few minutes ago.

"Meanin' you don't know?" questioned Knable. His eyes were narrowed incredulously. And when he saw incomprehension in Shorty's eyes he stiffened.

"Stewart's the boss of the old Antrim gang, Shorty!" he said.

Shorty's eyes flamed with a passion that had not been in them in many days—the light that had burned in his eyes in the old days when he had stood on the crest of the hill above the mighty valley in which sat the buildings of the Lawler ranch, brooding over the death of his friend.

Helen Kelton's influence had made him forget for a time; but the finding of the belt in the drawer of Stewart's desk, coupled with Knable's declaration, had aroused the dormant passion, so that it now seethed through him in all its old fury.

His leap toward Knable was so swift that the latter involuntarily felt for his guns, instantly alert and suspicious. But Shorty's hands made no hostile movement; they descended upon Knable's shoulders with a force that staggered the other; the fingers biting deep into the flesh.

"Come clean, Knable!" His voice was hoarse; his eyes were pools of cold fire. "Talk, man!" he said, when Knable, astonished at the change in him, stood speechless, watching him wonderingly. "Talk, damn you! How do you know Stewart is runnin' Antrim's old gang?"

And now, seemingly convinced by Shorty's earnestness, Knable's actions were not less astonishing than Shorty's. He peered closely at the passionate eyes that were looking into his; he slipped from the clutch of Shorty's iron fingers, threw an arm about the other and yelled:

"Damn it—you didn't know it! You old son of a gun! An' here I was figurin' the damned old world had all gone wrong when a man like you would throw in with that measly bunch!"

He paused, seeing that Shorty was glowering at him, not responding to his enthusiasm.

"You remember when you bought me the ham an' aigs? I told you I'd been offered a job. It was Blandell that did the offerin'. I held off, to see how far they would go. They went in, plenty. Took me to their chief—Stewart.

"I saw him with that bunch of plug-uglies that hangs around Loma. I heard them talkin' to him about deals they had on—cattle rustlin' an' such. I heard more, Shorty. I heard them talkin' about a fight they'd had with the Lawler outfit last year. An' I heard Blandell tellin' another guy how Stewart had cut up a Lawler man, named Larry Dillon, in that fight, pinnin' a note on him, sayin' it was Brail Kelton that done it!

"Accordin' to the talk it appears all them guys know there is bad feelin' between Stewart an' Kelton—Stewart wantin' to marry Helen Kelton, an' Kelton bein' against it. Stewart's a schemer, Shorty—"

He would have said more, but Shorty's big arms had come up again, the fingers gripping Knable's shoulders. Shorty's face was dead white; his eyes were terrible in their cold ferocity. But his voice was low, steady.

"Knable," he said while he held the other in the grip of his big hands, "I'm seein' things pretty clear now. An' I'm thankin' you. I shot a man this mornin'—one of Blandell's friends. You'll find him in the first bunk-house. There's bandages in one of the drawers of the desk, there."

He laughed, and the sound of it made Knable's cheeks whiten. And then, saying nothing more, he walked past Knable, out through the dining-room and the kitchen; leaped off the porch and ran to the stable. A few minutes later Knable saw the big horse racing east, his flying hoofs spurning the earth lightly, his rider sitting astride him; a grim figure on a grim mission.

CHAPTER XXIV.

KELTON'S ALIBI.

HELEN KELTON covered the distance to the ranch-house with the same high courage that had sustained her during the last few minutes of her interview with Stewart. She managed to get inside and close the door behind her before she yielded to the terrible weakness that had weighted her down during the walk to the house.

She did not have strength enough to move after she closed the kitchen door; she leaned against it, her shoulders shaking with the dry sobs that she could not suppress.

She had been brave enough when she had been facing Stewart out there beneath the juniper tree, showing him that her faith in her father had not been shaken by his story; but now that she was where Stewart could not see her she understood how easily the world would be convinced of Kelton's guilt.

She did not believe him guilty—she could not. She would not have lied to Shorty concerning Kelton's whereabouts on the day Larry Dillon had been killed, if she had not been convinced that her father had had nothing to do with the murder. It had required all her courage to tell Shorty the lie, and greater courage would be required to acquaint her father with the story Stewart had told her, to tell him what she herself knew of the seemingly damning web of circumstances that seemed to have enmeshed him.

But she decided that she must tell him, to give him a chance to prove his innocence. For she now feared that Shorty, having discovered how she had lied to him, and convinced—through finding the watch that Stewart had spoken about—of Kelton's guilt, would no longer be influenced by considerations of her. In fact, she felt that at this minute Shorty must loathe her for her references to God's laws that night when she had entered his room to find him looking at the stars and talking of Larry Dillon. He must consider her references to the Book as hideous subterfuges, and herself as a moral coward hiding behind the divine commands. She cringed from the mental pictures she drew, and at last went to her room and threw herself on the bed, where she covered her eyes with her hands to keep the mental pictures from torturing her.

But some time later, when Kelton rode to the door, she had regained her composure. He dismounted, but she noticed that he did not proceed immediately to put his horse in the corral. Instead he threw the reins over the animal's head and crossed the porch, standing in the open door of the kitchen, looking at her.

"I saw some one ridin' away when I was crossin' the level," he said. "Who was it?"

"Stewart," she answered evenly.

She walked to him, kissed him, and then stood back a little, gazing straight into his eyes.

"Father," she said, "there is something I must tell you."

"About Stewart?"

She saw his lips straighten and his eyes glow with sudden passion.

"Has Stewart been botherin' you again?"

"Stewart has never bothered me, father. I have never liked him in the way you seemed to think. And I have told him so, many times."

Kelton's eyes gleamed with satisfaction. He smiled affectionately.

"Well, get goin' with your talk," he said; "I'm powerful hungry."

She placed her hands on his shoulders and smiled.

"Father," she said, "can you prove where you were on the 10th of June last year?"

Kelton looked keenly at her for an instant, a half smile on his face. Then his gaze became meditative, serious. Suddenly his eyes lighted.

"Why, that was about the time you went East—wasn't it?"

"I was already East, then," she said. "If you remember, you didn't join me until the 15th."

"Right," he smiled. "I remember now. I was in Chicago. On the 10th of June I was in the office of Carter & Miller—my buyers."

"Can you prove it, father?" she asked eagerly.

"I reckon. I don't think Carter will forget givin' me that check I showed you when I got East. It was for forty thousand—remember. Out of it I squared things with Stewart. Yes, I reckon I can prove it. Why?"

"Thank God, daddy!" She had thrown her arms around him and was hugging him with all her strength. "Oh, daddy, I've been so afraid," she sobbed into his shoulder; "they've been saying such awful things about you!"

He held her back from him a little, so he could look into her eyes.

"Who's been sayin' things about me, honey?"

She told him, then, punctuating her story with revelations of her emotions; relating what she had learned through Shorty's ravings; how she had lied to Shorty, fearing his vengeance; and expressing her apprehension that Shorty would do what he had intended to do before she was able to dissuade him.

When she spoke of the watch in the tobacco jar, Kelton betrayed passion for the first time.

"Stewart put it there—the damned polecat!" he declared grimly. "That night when he was here lookin' at Shorty—while Shorty was unconscious—I saw him in my room, monkeyin' with things. He was standin' near the jar. Honey," he went on, making an effort to control the passion that lurked far back in his eyes, "it's mighty plain to tell what's happened.

"Stewart is the head of the old Antrim band. I've known it for a long time. That was why I didn't want him foolin' around you. I've heard that he was with Antrim when Antrim had that fight with Lawler. From a word he dropped to me one day last year I know he thought Lattimer was in this section. It's likely he knew Larry Dillon was Lattimer. He killed him, an' tried to make it appear I did it, hopin' that some of Dillon's friends would avenge him.

"I've always thought there was somethin' mighty wrong with the Lattimer deal—it didn't seem to me that Lattimer could do a thing like that. I reckon Stewart killin' Lattimer proves Stewart was afraid of him."

"But it's all right now, daddy!" she cried, holding tightly to him. "You can prove you weren't there. Oh, I knew you *couldn't* do such a thing!"

Kelton was staring into the southern distance while Helen clung to him, and his eyes were somber, steely.

"So that's why Shorty left so sudden," he said slowly. "I reckon, him thinkin' what he did, he had a hard time keepin' his hands off me." He looked down into the girl's face and smiled understandingly. "An' that's what was botherin' you, too," he added. "You knew, but you was afraid to mention it. You didn't think, honey—" He paused, his voice hoarse.

"No, no, no—daddy! I didn't think *that!* But I was afraid you might not be able to prove that you didn't—that you weren't there—that you were somewhere else."

He held her tightly to him, saying softly: "I reckon it's been hell for you, honey—knowin' what you did, an' tryin' to keep still."

His face was very white; a great calmness seemed to have settled over him. He led her to a chair, placed her in it and patted her back reassuringly.

"You needn't mind cookin' anything for me, honey—I wouldn't enjoy it a heap now. I'm ridin' over to Stewart's place to have a talk with him—an' Shorty."

"Daddy," she said breathlessly, "you won't—"

"I reckon not," he said, answering the unspoken question. "Not unless I'm forced. I saw Stewart headin' for town; but he'll go back to his place. This thing has got to be straightened out, honey. Not that I think Shorty would shoot me in the back, thinkin' what he must. He ain't that

kind of a man. Don't you worry, honey; there ain't goin' to be any shootin'."

He went out and climbed into the saddle, heading the horse southward.

"No shootin'," he muttered. "I reckon not. There's other ways to scotch that kind of a snake!"

CHAPTER XXV.

REVELATION.

STEWART did not ride very far eastward after he left the Kelton ranch-house. He went straight ahead until he reached a depression in the plains—a shallow, dry arroyo which ran in sinuous curves southward. Nor had Stewart traveled fast away from the ranch-house, fearing that Kelton would see him and suspect something had gone wrong. Therefore when Stewart reached the arroyo Kelton was still some distance from home.

Once out of Kelton's sight in the arroyo, however, Stewart frenziedly drove the spurs into the flanks of his horse. He remembered a day when he had seen Kelton's right hand drop to the butt of his pistol when Kelton had been talking about his daughter—warning Stewart to cease his attentions—and he knew from the expression of Kelton's eyes then that he had no intention of repeating the warning.

More, Stewart was aware that Kelton knew him for what he was—the leader of the remnant of the old Antrim band of outlaws. On the day Kelton had warned him away from his daughter, Kelton had expressed his disgust for him in terms that still rankled.

Stewart had hated Kelton from that time, and though the hatred was strong, it was overshadowed by his fear of the man. He knew that when Helen Kelton told of his visit and related what had been said, Kelton would attempt to carry out his threat of punishment.

Stewart might have ridden to Loma; he would have gone there had he not known that the members of his band—including those who had been at the Stewart ranch with Blandell when the latter was shot to death by Shorty—had gone north on a raid under his orders, and would not return for several days. Stewart, ever mindful of Kelton's rage, decided he would return to the Bar S. Later he would join the few men of his outfit who were working far south of the ranch-house.

Stewart made good time down the arroyo. He held to it until the rolling character of the country made it safe for him to emerge; and then he sent his horse out of it and rode more boldly.

When he reached the timber grove that surrounded the ranch-house he rode down a narrow aisle among the trees. This trail took him to the front of the house, where he dismounted, walked to the door and pushed it open.

The room into which it gave Stewart used as his office, and he halted on the threshold and scowled. For his desk had been rifled. The drawers were out, their contents scattered all about; the drawers themselves were gaping emptily from various parts of the room; and the roll top—which he had locked that morning—was splintered, as though an ax had been used on it.

Diving forward to the floor, Stewart searched in the débris, scattering it in a frantic effort to find something that, apparently, he valued highly. He had not hunted long before he came upon the object, for he exclaimed sharply with satisfaction; only to curse profanely an instant later. The thing he held in his hand was a small metal box. But it gaped mockingly at him, its lid twisted, the lock broken.

He had been on his knees during the search; he was rising when from the open dining-room door a voice drawled:

"Lookin' for somethin', Stewart?"

Stewart got up. He dropped the metal box as he backed away from the speaker, who was leaning a little forward, watching him with narrowed eyes, a cold, amused grin on his face. Stewart moved backward until he brought up against the front wall of the room, where he stood, his lips loose, his eyes large and expressing apprehension, watching the man, his flesh cringing at sight of the two guns held by the other, their dark muzzles trained steadily upon him.

It was some minutes before Stewart could

trust his voice. Then he said, trying to speak gruffly:

"What in hell are you doing here, Knable?"

Knable laughed deep in his throat—a sound that conveyed mingled contempt and mockery. But he did not move, and the menacing pistols seemed rigid as the door jambs near them.

"Just projectin' around, Stewart," he said. "I had a curiosity to see what was in your desk—especially in that little safe."

He nodded his head toward the metal box Stewart had dropped. There was a saturnine glint in his eyes as Stewart started.

"What in hell did you want to get into that box for?" asked Stewart.

"Interested, I reckon," drawled Knable. "It looked kind of familiar."

"Familiar!" Stewart gasped the words. His face was now ashen, and his eyes were slowly dilating as he intently watched Knable.

The smile had left the latter's face; his lips had straightened; and his eyes, with a light in them like the beams of a powerful lamp, seemed to be penetrating Stewart, searching, probing.

"I found something in it that interested me, Stewart. A confession, written by a man who, evidently, had suffered a twinge of conscience. It is remarkable to what a degree one's conscience will influence one, isn't it, Stewart? In this case it drove you to commit an indiscretion, didn't it, Stewart?"

The voice was soft and seemed to carry no threat or menace. But in this minute Stewart was not paying so much attention to the voice itself as he was to the words the voice was uttering.

For he had talked with Knable once in Loma, when Blandell and some others had tried to induce him to join the band. On that occasion Knable's speech had been the idiomatic jargon of the West, with its picturesque flavor and its colorful broadness. His speech now was in the easy, smooth-flowing, refined language of the East.

"The confession concerns a man named Lattimer, accused of the theft of a sum of money from a firm called Stewart & Kelton," Knable went on. "According to the confession, Lattimer is innocent. To make the confession complete, it is signed 'Morley Stewart,' in the handwriting that distinguishes the signature on any number of your personal letters—of which I have a dozen or more in my pockets."

Knable paused. His steady gaze was boring into Stewart, who was now watching him with bulging eyes. His lips were moving as they attempted to form words that would not come.

"Stewart," went on Knable, his voice vibrating with earnestness, "if I hadn't found that confession I would have killed you when you came into this room!"

At last Stewart's voice came—jerkily, huskily:

"Who—are—you?" he said, flattening himself against the wall.

Knable left the door and moved toward the other; while Stewart, the terrible light of dawning recognition in his eyes, stared at him in dread fascination. Then, suddenly, as though some mighty power had forced the words through his stiffened lips, he blurted out:

"Lattimer!"

Then, his eyes filling with the terrible passion that he had betrayed in the presence of Shorty the night before—a passion that convulsed his face, making it hideous with bitter malignance—he reached for the pistol at his hip.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE MOVING DOT.

DOMINATING Shorty's astonishment over Knable's revelation of Stewart's connection with the Antrim band; overshadowing his grim satisfaction at his success in at last securing convincing evidence that delivered Larry's murderer into his hands, was a fierce exultation that ran through his veins like fire.

Kelton was not guilty. It seemed to him that he had known all along that Kelton was innocent. The feeling had lurked in him since one day, soon after he was able to get up and move around, he had studied

the man. Circumstances had seemed to point to Kelton's guilt, but, though Shorty's mind had been forced to accept what had seemed to be unassailable evidence, his heart had doubted.

The doctrine of obedience to the commandments, preached to him by Helen Kelton, had affected him—affected him, he now felt, because he had not wanted to believe Kelton guilty.

As he rode eastward, the big horse covering the ground with amazing speed—seeming to realize that his master was abroad upon a mission that required his best efforts, and seeming to have become imbued with something of the exultation that reigned in the heart of the man who rode him—Shorty was again experiencing the vengeful passions that had rioted in him before he had yielded to the persuasions of Helen Kelton. He was an apostate to the creed of forbearance, to which he had lately bowed; but that creed, no longer seeming to be applicable to one in whom he had a deep, personal interest, had lost its power to control his actions. Helen Kelton could not blame him for what he intended to do. Stewart was nothing to her.

The big horse reached the end of the level and shot into an upland section like a live flame before a gale, his red coat gleaming in the sun. He went up the slope with huge, catlike bounds, struck the crest and stretched out, running with tremendous strides.

Shorty had not seen Stewart leave the ranch-house; he did not know what direction the man had taken. But when he had leaped on Red King to begin his search for the man, he had chosen Loma because it had seemed to him that Stewart must spend much of his time there.

Certainly, if Stewart had contemplated sending Shorty south to join the outfit, he would not have gone in that direction without apprising Shorty of his decision. The chances were against his visiting the Circle Star, for Helen Kelton had expressed to Shorty her complete indifference to the man. So Shorty had decided that Stewart had gone to Loma. But wherever Stewart went, Shorty would find him.

After he had ridden several miles the savage, tumultuous passion that had seized him upon listening to Knable, began to wear off. It was succeeded by a sinister coldness—a forbidding calmness that told of a fixed, unalterable purpose.

He rode on, more slowly. Until now, having yielded to the great tide of passion that had surged over him, he had kept his gaze straight ahead, seeing nothing but that which was directly in front of him, feeling nothing but the terrible yearning for vengeance.

Now, however, he kept his head well up, scanning the country around him, thinking that perhaps Stewart, having visited Loma, might decide to return by a roundabout trail.

Fifteen minutes later, while he was crossing a little level that surmounted the valley where on his ride to Loma on another day he had caught a glimpse of the waters of a river—and had stopped there to bathe—he saw far behind him, a little distance to the north, a moving dot on the sky line.

He halted Red King, shaded his eyes with his hands against the glare of the sun, and sat motionless, watching the dot. The distance was great, but after centering his gaze upon the object for some time, he could make out a horse and rider. And a little later, when the horse moved for some distance along the crest of a high ridge, Shorty was impressed with a distinct familiarity in the figure of the rider. He had seen Stewart once before, from a distance, and the impression of the man's appearance had been strong.

Shorty took note of the direction in which the man was riding, and made some rapid calculations.

"He's 'way this side of the Circle Star. He ain't from there. An' he's ridin' straight for the Bar S, anglin' off from the main trail from town. King," he finished, exultantly, "it's Stewart!"

He wheeled the big horse, spoke softly to him. And the next instant the animal was running over the back trail with a speed equaling that with which he had come; while Shorty, grimly estimating the distance between him and the other rider, spoke aloud, as though to some one who

rode beside him—his voice vibrant with feeling:

"I reckon it won't be long now, Larry."

CHAPTER XXVII.

FEARS.

FOR several minutes after she had waved a hand to her father, Helen Kelton stood on the rear porch, watching him. She noted that he rode slowly until he was some distance from the house, and that a little later he urged the horse to greater speed.

The calmness that had settled over Kelton after she had told him what she knew had not misled her. She had feared then that the calmness was a mask, to conceal the rage he felt over his knowledge of Stewart's scheme to destroy him; and that fear grew as she watched the long, heavy dust cloud that trailed Kelton's horse as the animal fled southward.

But still she felt that she might be mistaken, for Kelton had given his promise not to "shoot," and she had faith in him. Yet the speed of Kelton's mount worried her, and she carefully scrutinized the country east and west of him for some sign that would provide a reason for his evident haste.

South of Kelton—perhaps two miles—she saw another horseman. It was Stewart; she recognized him, even at that distance. But to make certain—for Kelton had told her he had seen Stewart riding toward "town"—she looked out over the Loma trail from the front porch.

There was no horseman on it.

Trembling, apprehensive, she ran back to the rear again, to stand there for a little time, watching the two riders, Stewart and her father, as they grew smaller in her vision.

When her father had spoken of going to the Bar S she had only mildly objected. She supposed, of course, that he would meet Shorty—if Shorty had not been sent to join the Bar S outfit; but she had felt that her father would explain matters to Shorty, and she had faith that Shorty would at least be sufficiently impressed to delay action until Kelton had an opportunity to prove his innocence. She felt that Shorty would do that much for *her*.

However, Stewart's arrival at the ranch before Kelton would make Kelton's visit there extremely hazardous. Stewart, enraged over her refusal to accept him, would poison Shorty's mind against Kelton. Stewart might add enough to what he had already told Shorty to provoke him to action the instant he caught sight of Kelton, not giving the latter a chance to explain.

Those thoughts created a great fear in her heart that increased as the minutes fled and she stood there, inactive, feeling the imminence of tragedy and realizing her inability to prevent it.

She felt, though, that she could not stay at the ranch-house; she had a presentiment that somehow Stewart would influence Shorty to some dread action—Stewart might even decide to kill Kelton himself before Shorty had an opportunity to do so.

Obeying an irresistible impulse, she ran to the stable, not even stopping to remove her apron. She got a bridle and saddle, grabbed a spare rope that always hung from a peg near the door, and ran to the corral. She roped the first horse she saw, conquering him after a terrific battle; led him to the fence, where she threw the saddle and bridle on him. Then, not even taking time to loosen the quirt that was tied around the pommel, she rode in the direction taken by her father, urging the horse with voice and hand, her hair flying in the wind, her eyes reflecting the only emotion she felt—a fear that she would be too late to avert the tragedy that seemed already to be casting its shadow over her.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

ANOTHER SCORE TO SETTLE.

LEFTY KNABLE, intensely interested in watching the effect upon Stewart of the pronouncement of the name "Lattimer," had involuntarily relaxed. His pistols had sagged a little in his hands, the muzzles drooping. They were in that position when Stewart made his flashing, hostile move.

At that instant—just as Stewart's hand went for his gun—Knable heard a sound behind him, felt a presence in the doorway at his back. Simultaneous with Stewart's movement toward his hip, Knable had a swift divination that the presence he felt back of him was one of Stewart's men, coming to the latter's assistance.

Like a flash Knable threw himself sidewise, away from the door and toward the wall on his right. He tried to swing the gun in his left hand toward Stewart as he moved; but he had forgotten the litter on the floor, and as he leaped his right foot struck one of the drawers he had previously thrown down in his search among Stewart's effects, and he tumbled awkwardly, landing on his right shoulder.

As he fell he snapped a shot at Stewart. The thunderous report of his weapon was preceded by the flame-spurt of Stewart's.

Knable's fall saved his life. On his back, having twisted around in order to get a shot at the newcomer with the gun in his left hand, while he swung the muzzle of the other weapon toward Stewart, Knable saw Kelton standing in the doorway he had just left.

The big man's knees were sagging. One huge hand was pressed to his chest; the other was at his right side, limp, the fingers feebly trying to grasp the butt of the pistol in the holster. Stewart's bullet, intended for Knable, had struck Kelton just as he entered the door.

He had come inside, searching for Stewart, having seen the man dismount a short time before near the front door of the ranch-house. Entering through the dining-room he had heard Stewart's hysterical cry: "Lattimer!" And that sound, awakening his curiosity sharply, had drawn him swiftly forward, to be shot down on the threshold. At the instant Knable looked at Kelton, the big man pitched forward, his gun clattering to the floor the fraction of a second before he himself plunged face downward in the débris.

Disconcerted, having lost a precious second by reason of giving his attention to Kelton, Knable, on his back, again missed a shot at Stewart. For the latter, his face hideous, moved at just the instant Knable fired. Knable's gun roared once more. This time the bullet went into the ceiling, as Knable's right arm, shattered by a leaden missile from Stewart's gun, was knocked upward with resistless force.

Scrambling, his feet and left hand slipping on the mass of papers with which the floor was littered, Knable essayed to twist his body around in order to use the gun in his left hand.

Stewart shot him again. In the act of turning, Knable doubled forward as the bullet struck him. He was hit badly evidently, for he shuddered at the report of Stewart's pistol. But with dogged courage he straightened, grinned derisively at the snarling, malevolent face above him, and, steadying himself, brought up the pistol in his left hand slowly.

This picture Helen Kelton saw as she reached the door where Kelton had fallen. She had gained on her father during the ride across the plains; and when a little distance from the ranch-house had heard the shooting. Her father's horse was standing at the edge of the rear porch, and she instinctively rode toward it, dismounted, and ran into the house.

She had entered the dining-room just in time to witness Stewart's final shot at Knable. The latter saw her at the instant she reached the door, and he was in the act of leveling his weapon at Knable again, when she stooped, picked up a pistol that lay in the doorway and hurled it at him with all her force.

The heavy object struck him fairly in the face. He rocked sidewise, off balance from the shock.

Knable, after heroically settling himself for a shot, swaying blindly as he sat, his eyes half closed, again missed the target. He realized it, too, for he grinned with a mighty embarrassment as he half turned his head and saw the girl. Then, while the latter, her face gray with horror, screamed some unintelligible words at Stewart, and flung herself at the pistol Knable had dropped, Knable deliberately steadied himself for another shot at Stewart.

However, the girl's aim had been better than she or Knable had thought. The heavy pistol had struck Stewart across the

eyes, blinding him. Blood was streaming thickly down his face; but he saw the girl's leap toward the fallen weapon.

He sprang out of the front door, and had taken only two or three steps when the gun in Knable's hand roared, followed instantly by the girl's. Neither shot took effect, however. For Stewart ran to his horse, leaped into the saddle, wheeled the animal on its haunches and sent it southward, shouting derisively at the girl who stood in the doorway, watching him.

Pale, trembling, nerveless, Helen turned again to the room. She saw Knable still sitting on the floor, swaying back and forth weakly; but when her gaze met his he smiled and said thickly:

"I reckon your dad's hit worse than me, Miss Kelton."

She was sure of it, for her father was lying as he had been when she had first seen him. She thought she must surely faint when she went to him, to note the ghastly paleness of his face and the limp way in which his left arm was doubled under him. There was a blotch of blood on his forehead, reaching into the hair. She wiped it away with a towel and some water which she found in the kitchen, to discover that the wound was hardly more than an abrasion, the bullet having merely grazed the flesh, seemingly.

She turned him over, holding her breath with dread expectancy. But her searching fingers, driven by the stern urge of necessity, could find no other wound. With a hope so great that it choked her, she listened to the beating of his heart, and at last stood up, her eyes shining with gratitude.

Knable, watching her, spoke weakly:

"Creased him, I reckon. I'd have swore he got it in the chest—he put his hand there." He swayed and would have pitched forward had not Helen dropped to her knees beside him and lent her support.

"He was mighty lucky. He'll have a headache—that's all. But I reckon"—he paused and smiled up at her—"you don't remember me? Seems like I'm goin' out; an' I'd like to have things squared. There's a confession in my pocket—an' some letters. I'm Eugene Lattimer, Helen, an' I want you to know I didn't do it. Shorty—he's—Miss Helen—there's a man! He knows Stewart killed his friend Larry, an' he's—"

Knable lurched forward, as though dropping off into a deep sleep. And Helen, after laying him gently down, got to her feet and stood looking down at him, unaware that Shorty had dismounted at the door, that he was standing just inside the threshold, gazing at her.

His voice roused her. She looked at him in bewilderment; then she ran to him and gripped his arms as though to make certain it was really the man she had known.

She had not heard his first words, so he repeated them; and it seemed to her that his voice sounded like snapping steel:

"Who did it?"

"Stewart!" Then, as though the sound of her own voice had awakened all the pent-up passion that she had repressed during the last hour or more, as though what had been done had stirred the primitive emotions to their depths, she cried, her face buried in Shorty's arms.

"He's gone south, Shorty—not more than five minutes ago! Oh, the beast, the beast, the beast!"

She looked up, feeling Shorty move. She saw what was in his eyes, and she would have thrown her arms around him, to hold him there. But his big hands came up and gripped her arms, forcing them gently but firmly down to her sides.

He spoke no word, but she knew what he was going to do, and she pleaded with him.

"Please don't, Shorty; please, please! There has been enough, Shorty!" And then when she saw that her words did not move him, she turned to the wall near the door and stood there; her cheek against the rough plaster, her back toward him.

When she finally turned he had gone. With trembling steps she walked to the door. Shorty was already on Red King; and as she watched, the big horse leaped and went thundering past the near corner of the ranch-house.

She ran through the house and went out on the rear porch. Red King and Shorty were already far down the basin, the big horse running like a greyhound. And far

ahead of Red King—outlined for an instant on a ridge—was another horse and rider. But Red King, his great, red, sinuous body, flaming past the green of the trees and brush of the basin, was closing the gap with startling rapidity.

CHAPTER XXIX.

RETROSPECT AND ANTICIPATION.

FROM the flat rock on the edge of the butte where on another day that seemed remote, as though belonging to a past over which memory had drawn a veil to dim its vividness, Shorty and Helen Kelton could look into the haze of distance southward—that distance out of which on that other day Morley Stewart had ridden, a sinister element, seemingly sent by Providence to test their faith and their courage.

But Stewart would ride no more. It must have been that both Helen and Shorty were influenced by the memory of Stewart's coming on that other day; that both could see him as they had seen him, coming toward them over the level. It would be the first time, as it would be the last, that they would ever speak of him. For Shorty had never related what had happened the day he had ridden after Stewart, with Helen watching him from the porch of the Bar S ranch-house.

"It was odd about him," said Shorty as he gazed into the southern haze with steady eyes.

She knew he was speaking of Stewart. She gave a little gasp, for she had been dreading to hear the story of how he had killed the man. It had been that dread which had seemed to hold her off from Shorty, while she yearned to bridge the gulf that yawned between them. For though Stewart had been a despicable creature, she could not forget that she had once looked upon him as a friend. And her Eastern training had made her look with horror upon violence of any kind.

"Odd," repeated Shorty. "I reckon he was an accident—like a black sheep; or a locoed steer. He didn't fit in, seems like. He saw other folks around him. Mebbe he thought the other folks was better than him, or thought better thoughts. It kind of soured him, I reckon, makin' him mean. I felt sort of sorry for the cuss—just before he died."

"Died?" she said, breathlessly. "Shorty, do you mean—"

"That I killed him?" He smiled gently. "I reckon not. Do you know where that big red butte is, at the edge of the mesa beyond the basin south of the Bar S ranch?" When she nodded quickly, he went on:

"He saw me comin' on Red King. I reckon he knowed what I was after. Seems as though it sort of confused him—I don't know. He rode straight over the edge of the butte. There's a hundred-foot drop there. After a while I found him. He was still breathin', but pretty well smashed. He talked a little."

Between them came a long silence, during which both gazed southward.

"He thought Larry was Lattimer," Shorty went on. "Said he'd seen Larry around Willets, an' thought—him still believin' Larry was Lattimer—that he'd come to hunt him. He'd got scared of your dad, an' hated him. So when he an' the others had that fight with Lawler's men on the mesa, he made sure he got Larry. After he got Larry he pinned that note on him, sayin' your dad did it. He knowed me an' Larry was friends, an' he figured I'd come right on to find your dad, not askin' any questions. Me sort of hangin' off made it awkward for him, an' he tried to make it strong. That's why he put Larry's watch in the tobacco-jar. He hadn't give Lattimer any watch—the initials bein' the same was just an accident. He made a mess of it all around."

"He died there—at the butte?" she asked.

He nodded, saying shortly: "Him an' his hoss."

Her hands were clasped, tightly, with thankfulness. And her eyes were brilliant. But a shadow crossed them.

"Shorty," she said, "if he hadn't ridden over the butte would you—" She paused, and looked at him.

"I was pretty well stirred up," he interrupted. "I reckon I don't know what

I'd have done." He turned and gazed straight at her, his eyes reproachful.

"Don't you reckon you're goin' a little too fast, Helen—tryin' to make me say what I would have done? I reckon I don't know. I was pretty mad, but I was thinkin' of the commandments, an' you. Mebbe the commandments wouldn't have bothered me much. But I kept seein' you the way you looked at me in Stewart's house. An' mebbe—"

It was she who interrupted this time, with a gesture that told she was forever dismissing the matter from her mind.

"Well," she said, her eyes shining, her voice vibrating with happiness; "he has gone, and no one is to blame but himself. And Knable—Lattimer—is getting well, and I have father—"

"An' me," he interrupted, grinning.

She blushed. "Oh, Shorty," she said in a low, vibrant voice; "father just *loves* you!"

"Well," he said, brazenly, turning to her; "your dad lovin' me is all right. But I'd a heap rather hear—"

She placed a hand over his lips. He seized it and held it tightly, so that she could not withdraw it. And he went on, quietly, confidently:

"We'll leave here early in the mornin'—makin' out first camp at Kelso, where I met you the first time. The next mornin' we'll cross the desert, which made me so thirsty that I had to find Kelso. We'll camp that night in the hills—I know a daisy place. There's a little stream of water, an' grass, an' a little level stretch where we can pitch our tent. We'll take two pack-hosses an' a lot of grub an' things. Though I expect we won't be needin' much grub. On the third day we'll—"

"Shorty!" she reproved, her face aflame. "What are you talking about? I couldn't—I wouldn't go with you—that way!"

"Didn't I mention it?" he said, smiling. "We'll get married in Loma. The trip I'm talkin' about will be our honeymoon. All married folks have them. Some think ridin' on the cars is a honeymoon—an' stayin' in stuffy little hotel rooms. But I reckon a honeymoon like I'm talkin' about will be different. An' there won't be no crowds around—to see you blushin' an' me actin' like I had too many legs an' arms. An' there—"

"Where do you intend to go?" she questioned.

Her face was crimson, though there was a light in her eyes which revealed her complete acquiescence.

"I was thinkin' of Lawler's ranch," he said. "I've been gone a little while, an' they'll be wantin' to know. We needn't stay long. We'll come back whenever you say."

Red King, grazing far back in a depression of the mesa, raised his head and gazed at the spot where his master had been. There had been two figures—there now seemed to be only one. Red King looked long. Then he seemed to be satisfied, for he snorted contentedly and went on with his grazing.

(The end.)

MY HILL

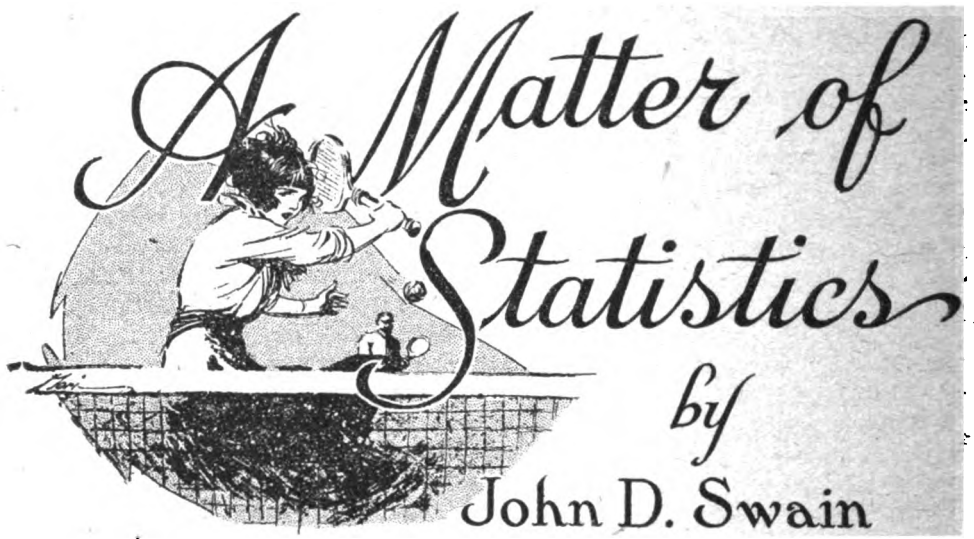
IN summer-time I always go
To see a lovely hill I know;
A lovely green and gracious hill,
So cool, and wonderfully still.

I stand and see the early sun
Caress its top, then downward run;
Throughout the day I see the cows
Climbing about my hill, to browse.

But when the sun is in the west,
'Tis then I love my hill the best;
I watch the glory-red, until
It sinks away behind my hill.

At last vacation days are flown;
I hedge myself with brick and stone;
And because of the hill I hold so dear,
My heart keeps green another year.

Mella Russell McCallum.



THE microscopic rattle of Milton's watch-alarm roused him just as the sun lifted an appraising eye above the Atlantic. He glared venomously at the timepiece, noted that it lacked ten minutes of five, and, warned by experience of the insidious danger of a final cat-nap, clambered from his bed and padded into the bathroom, where he viciously turned on the cold water. Late hours in bed propagate fatness.

The gay summer youths with which the inn teemed would not rise for two hours and a half yet. They had danced and philandered upon the moon-drenched lawns until long past midnight. Milton had danced, too, although it bored him; and had lingered in the shadow of a ponderous hydrangea, which did not bore him, since his companion was Sallie de Lancey.

Sallie was about to celebrate her twenty-third birthday. Milton had already passed his forty-sixth, but without celebration. Pink from his cold plunge, he now inspected himself in the mirror before which he stood preparing to shave.

A well-cared-for body, inclined to mid-age plumpness, but with plenty of smooth muscles properly disposed along his five feet ten of barefoot frame; clear eyes of blue-black; hair not yet thin, and only revealing gray in a close-up; free from any hereditary or acquired ailment, and features agreeable to both men and women in general, for which he cared little, and to Sallie, for which he was duly grateful.

A right-thinking, right-living man at the zenith of his powers, the mirror said; but a wrong-living man, as he perfectly well knew. For William Milton, statistician, was engaged in one of the oldest and most futile occupations in the world: the endeavor to "kid" Father Time, turn back the clock, and become, or remain, "Bill" Milton, sportsman.

He had arrived at the inn with a modest wardrobe, a bushel of reference books, and a portable typewriter. He had remained to order from his surprised and gratified tailor repeated consignments of outing flannels, golf togs of heather and Scotch mist, a riding suit, hobnailed mountain boots, a smart dinner-suit, hectic shirts, sport hats; while the portable typewriter remained stationary, and the dust gathered on his books.

The yearning to plunge into intricate thickets of totally uninteresting facts, to cover foolscap pages with the mathematically correct deductions for which certain publications clamored, and whose editors paid him surprising sums to furnish, was as strong as ever; but having, like many another mariner upon the dangerous seas of the late forties, been beguiled by a mermaid when almost within sight of port, he had lacked the cunning foresight of Ulysses, and listened to the fatal song of twenty-three with fixings.

William Milton was still a statistician; but *Bill* was addled with the germ of a late afternoon love, all the more fatal because he had avoided it in his young manhood.

Sallie de Lancey was mostly ivory above her deliciously rounded neck—but very lovely and distracting ivory, topped by hair that laughed and rippled in the sun, with every tone of gold and amber and frank red. *Chryselephantine* might have described her. She danced and played and laughed as joyously as a child, and gave no hint of the finishing school where she had taken a little of everything, including domestic science. She was neither domestic nor scientific. Nor would Milton have had her so.

She played whatever it was everybody played this season, upon both piano and steel guitar; sang with the pretty affectation of temperament which characterizes the young ladies of her particular school; spoke French nearly as well as her old governess used to, and read Elinor Glyn.

Bubbling over with vitality, she excelled in all the sports of the day, beat many of the elder men at golf, and nearly all the youths at tennis, rode like one whose fifth birthday present was a Shetland pony, and was eminently fitted to boggle up the statistics of a serious-minded young man who regarded a tennis racket much as he did a rattle, and had been accustomed to foregather with bewhiskered thinkers, and to relax by playing chess in quiet corners of the piazzas.

When a woman attempts to juggle the encroaching years, she at least has able assistance from masseurs, coiffeurs, beauty doctors and reducers. But mere man must do most of the job himself. In Milton's case it entailed first of all the tedious removal of comfortable layers imposed by some years of physical inactivity. He had been an unusually clever tennis player in college, and fair at golf. He could have made the football team had he not, even in those days, preferred the laboratory to the training table. He had played golf and tennis at week-ends ever since; but mostly to be agreeable. Now, smitten overnight with the dazzling vision which is bound to be vouchsafed to every normal man somewhere in the uncharted forties, his very first mixed doubles as Sallie's partner had horrified him.

Not that he had disgraced himself; it was, in fact, because he had cleverly pulled out an up-hill set from the acknowledged inn champions, a giddy pair of youngsters that had first attracted the admiration of Sallie. Milton had been commandeered because some youth had failed to show up. Prior to this she had merely noted that he was a fine-looking chap, of the age which often appeals to young girls, who take delight in ensnaring an occasional captive of ripe years, just to show that their frivolous selves appeal to the mature eye.

After the game she called him "Bill," and never relaxed her clutch. Nor did Milton, statistician, even squirm. He alone realized the truly terrible state of his game. He had wheezed like a porpoise; dark specks had danced before his eyes for an hour afterward. And when the following day he had, at Sallie's insistence, taken on a promising boy in singles, it was only because of his heady work in solving the younger man's one weakness, and playing desperately to it, that he had managed to win out. And then he had been too stiff and sore to dance that evening.

Without hesitation, he took the only remedy. He left the inn for a period of two weeks, pleading a sudden business call. Returning to the hot city, he put up at the neighboring country club where he had been so rare a visitor, and placed himself unreservedly in the hands of the Scotch professional, and the old tennis groundsman. Every forenoon, brier clenched in his teeth, he played his eighteen or twenty-seven holes of golf, and the afternoons he spent on the courts. He ate only the simplest and most wholesome food, avoided the card-room, and retired before midnight, after taking a few lessons in the latest variations of the one-step from the young women who held forth for the purpose on the roof gardens.

Between times he dug up from his rusty memory such parlor tricks as he had been locally celebrated for in glee club days. He bought a ukulele, and, having been a fair banjo and mandolin player, easily

managed the diminutive musical fad. His fingers once more learned to pluck the right card from a properly stacked deck, and to remove a ring from a knotted handkerchief.

Hobbs, the old racket and tennis pro', tabooed match tennis.

"Wot you needs, sir," he propounded, "is to loosen up, like. You 'ave the form, but you've gone seedy."

Whereupon he posted the bored statistician before the blank brick wall of the garage, upon which was painted a white stripe at the height of a tennis net from the ground, and kept him for hours at a time returning the white balls from every possible angle, overhead, back hand, under hand, cut and chop, Lawford and Renshaw.

One match a day in singles, two out of three sets, he was permitted to play against the best of the younger men available; and Milton was astonished to find how rapidly his old cunning returned.

"Don't you go to gettin' cheeky now!" warned Hobbs. "You're nearer fifty nor twenty, and you've got to stick to the back court. You carn't wear your shoes out a runnin' up to the net like you inclines to on every serve. Use yer 'ead, and wait for the other lad to make a net or an out, and you'll beat most of the young uns yet! But don't try to play *their* game — play your own!"

McLaren, the golfer, was equally sage in his counsel. He grimly threw away five of Milton's set of beautifully nickeled clubs, left him but a putter and niblick, and made him buy a driver, midiron and mashie of his own make, at an exorbitant price.

"Ye dinna need a' them toys," he growled. "Use a few clubs, and get weel acquaint' wi' 'em!"

William Milton left the inn a plump, complacent and studious man, mildly in love with a lot of golden hair and big eyes and youth and lace and silk. Bill Milton returned, a brown, alert, muscular young man, weighing some ten pounds less, and with more physical confidence than he had felt in years. Also, he was more in love with his divine futility than ever, after his fortnight's absence. His unsuspected powers of imagination had tortured him every night as he composed himself to sleep, with the vision of Sallie floating about the ballroom in the anemic arms of some callow prep. school youth.

She was perched upon the hotel rail, slim legs dangling, waiting her turn on the courts, when Milton arrived—on foot—from the station; and she greeted him with affectionate familiarity, waving him to an undignified seat by her side.

"You look tired, sort o'," she commented. "But better, too."

She scrutinized his clear eyes and tanned face.

"Your *business* must have been pitching hay. Hope it hasn't put you off your game. There's a Bryn Mawr girl here—captained her team last year—with her brother, Denny, Harvard '17, who won the 'varsity doubles three times running."

"Well, how about it?" grinned Milton.

"Nothing—only I was wishing you were here to team up with me. They've been cleaning up properly the past week. I wouldn't take them on till I was *sure* I had a *real* partner. We'll play this afternoon at four, when the sun's behind the garage."

Milton nodded, fatuously happy to be ordered round.

"I'll call this match off, so as not to overplay," decided Sallie. "Get into your walking things, and take me to Singing Sands. I'll be right here."

And Bill hurried up to his room to swab off the dust of travel from a twenty-hour ride, and hike the ten odd miles with her.

That afternoon, before an inspiring audience, the colors of Bryn Mawr and Harvard were trailed in the clay. Not in years had Milton played so irresistibly. His disciplined mind cast out all disturbing thoughts, forgot the time, the place, and as far as humanly possible the girl, fixed itself sternly upon a solitary garage wall striped with a white band and, playing well near the base line, he sent terrific fore and back hand Lawfords burning down the side lines, passing the opposing youngsters every time they strove to take the net.

"Gee—but you certainly are a wonder!" gasped Sallie after the final handshake.

Even her youthful lungs were heaving for once; but Milton was breathing easily through his well-shaped nose. His style of game had entailed comparatively little exertion save from shoulder to wrist.

That night he sent a special-delivery letter to his tailor.

"For Heaven's sake, man, a little less mid-age and a bit more midsummer in the next trousers!" he implored. They were wearing them eel tight and ankle length this year.

Ironically, Milton's physical betterment showed up his years more than ever. It is the habit of encroaching age to camouflage itself behind a specious plumpness, which does not eradicate wrinkles and lines, but puffs them out. Now, trained down to a leaner hardness, they reasserted themselves. Also, from much blinking in the sun, pale marks about mouth and eyes showed indoors against the tan, which also accentuated the tinge of gray in his hair. He looked at once infinitely better, yet older.

"Never noticed how gray Milton is getting to be!" was a not unusual comment from the rocking-chair fleet; and the footprints of the crows were noted as often as the attractive eyes they encircled.

He was accepted now as one of the younger set, and included in all their childish pastimes. Once more he sat cross-legged upon bug-infested turf, and ate things he didn't like, and chatted about Princeton's great finish in the last year's Yale game, and "good old Jacobi," of Columbia (who might have been Milton's son, by the almanac), and blithely greeted infant frat. brothers from far-flung fresh-water colleges, and, of an evening, plucked whining rag-time in company with youths who shaved once a week, and indicated unerringly the Queen of Hearts, blindfolded, amid shrieks of treble applause.

"Disgusting!" agreed the perfect forty-sixes of the porch; and strong men who found equal difficulty in lacing their shoes or climbing two flights of stairs without a rest, sneered as they chewed their black cigars or gray mustaches. This can be done with practise.

There were little foxes within his own vineyard, also. Sinister suitors who had never voted, cursed him for a "cradle robber." But Sallie herself seemed never conscious of any disparity in their ages. Whether on the golf course, or clinging damply to his bronzed arm after a plunge in the ocean, or cuddled against him in the foxiest of trots, she was as much a part of his daily life as his wrist-watch. And nothing else mattered to him now.

That she never gave utterance to an idea that would have seemed out of place in a Sunday supplement, or seemed aware of a day after to-morrow, let alone a hereafter (although correctly devout every Sunday morning), or appeared to read anything but serials and fashion notes, meant nothing in his young-old life.

It is not to be supposed that the old, well-disciplined William resigned without a struggle to the new Bill. Even as he passed the olives with a clever *bon mot*, the suppressed but not defunct statistician would murmur solemnly in his inner consciousness—"in the cement industry, basing our estimate on the prevailing prices, we have been throwing away as dust from cement kilns, more than sixty million dollars worth of potash each year." Or, "domestic production of mercury has jumped from six thousand to thirty-eight thousand flasks annually. It is essential in drugs, dental amalgam, barometers, storage batteries, and antifouling paint for ship's bottoms."

But these complexes Bill sternly repressed.

It might have appeared ominous to a more experienced lover that Sallie seemed to admit no rivals to her shapely, if useless hand. She danced with everybody, of course, and included as large a circle as possible in the glittering silver-gilt of her observations; but the only male, other than Bill, upon whom she deigned to bestow any attention, was a solemn ass of about his age, or a trifle more, who dwelt in a miasma of psychoanalysis, upon which subject he was collecting data for a book, and who looked patronizingly out upon the festivities in which he never joined, from imitation tortoise-shell spectacles. He never took any exercise, drank a prodigious amount of black coffee, was reputed

to study half the night in his room, and had about as much small talk as an usher.

For some inscrutable reason, Sallie liked to hear him talk, when she happened to have an idle half-hour; possibly because he knew a good deal about dreams, for which all women have an open or secret passion. He gazed ponderously upon her pink and gold and white perfection, from eyes as expressionless as Jackson balls, and discoursed in broad Harvardese upon Freud, and Brill, and repression, and the subliminal. In a lucid interval as *William,* Milton gathered a lot of statistics from him one day, carried out to the fifth decimal, and judged that he was a man of a narrow but abysmally deep type.

De Lancey, Sallie's father, spraddling in his wrinkled Palm Beach suit, beheld over the top of one of the periodicals which contained the latest of William Milton's sprightly articles, the author, clad in billowy riding breeches and ox-blood boots, tipped with silver spurs, give his offspring a hand-up onto Boris, prince of saddle-horses.

His heavy-lidded eyes turned to the magazine.

"Last year," he read, "the United States produced one hundred and thirteen thousand tons of manganese ore. Prior to the war we imported eighty-one per cent from Brazil. The price has advanced from twelve to sixty dollars per ton. Fourteen pounds are needed in the manufacture of one ton of steel."

He looked up, witnessed Bill touch the glossy flank of his mare with a flashing spur, and saw the young couple canter off down the circling gravel drive. A puzzled frown, but with no trace of displeasure, gathered upon his brow.

"Beats the Old Harry!" he wheezed. "But it's all right, I guess. I can use that young man in my business! But what he sees in Sal—or why he wears the clothes he does—or when he finds time to gather his facts—"

He returned to his periodical with a grunt. "Ninety-five per cent of the world's output of vanadium comes from Colorado and Peru."

That very night, as the sleepy musicians were putting up their jazz instruments of torture, Bill and Sallie were seated upon their own private bench beneath their particular hydrangea, hands clasped, white flannel and white satin blended, the incense of Sallie's Angel Kiss perfume murdering the gentle efforts of Mother Nature along more nonsynthetic lines.

"Sallie, you *know* I'm crazy about you! I don't know what you can see in me, and of course I've not right to hope for anything so wonderful to happen—but could you—"

Mumbling indicated a fair hand pressed over Bill's mouth.

"Billie, you are a perfect dear! Haven't I been with you *all* the time, and haven't we been the *best* little pals in the world?"

"Well, then," persisted the released lips of Bill, "why not make it for life, just as it has been this summer—the happiest one I ever knew—"

Once more she stopped him, this time because the thin figure of the psychoanalyst crunched past their retreat. He slept in the annex, which was less expensive, and was now, with studiously bowed head, proceeding to his room, a book under each arm.

When he had passed beyond the veranda, unconscious of their presence, Sallie whispered: "Just give me a little time, Bill, dear!"

"How much?" gloomed Bill.

She hesitated.

"Only twenty-four hours!"

The submerged William chose this unseemly opportunity to hazard: "A single plant in the United States consumes every twenty-four hours, 6,675,000 pounds of sulphur."

Bill squelched him, and murmured: "Please, Sallie, seal the promise?"

A subtler wooer would have taken the kiss, rather than risk a refusal; but Bill got his, and in the delirium of his first real salute from the soft lips of twenty-three, was dissuaded from forcing an immediate decision.

Half an hour later he stood before his mirror, clad in violet pongee pajamas, and

gazing upon his ecstatic mouth, which had received the accolade.

His dreams that night were a riot of music, color, and perfume. He wandered, a jeweled raja, in a garden of houris, each one the image of Sallie. The vision was broken by a page, who after assuring himself that Milton was awake, thrust a sealed missive beneath his door.

Still intoxicated by his dreams, Bill stepped across the room and bore the letter to a window through which the sunrise was streaming. A familiar aroma—Angel Kiss—advised him of the sender, even before he noted the angular sprawl of Sallie's hand.

Could it be that she had sent her answer in this way, and at such an hour? Vaguely troubled, he ripped it open and read:

MY DEAR, GOOD BILLIE:

Please do believe me when I tell you that I *do* care a whole lot for you, and that you have been just the dearest pal a girl ever had! I can never forget our good times together; but Bill, dear, when a girl gives herself to a man utterly, she has *so many* things to consider. Life is not all golf, you know, nor every meal a picnic! I have eloped with Professor Hodge, who is writing that wonderful book on psychoanalysis. He is mad about me, and *of course* I love him, too, or I should not be writing this. If only you had been a little more serious, Billie! But somehow I cannot help feeling that when a man of your age never has settled down, but still plays tennis and the ukulele, and fox-trots and does coin tricks, and *never* thinks about anything but play—even if he *is* the dearest, jolliest pal in the whole world, I'm afraid to give my poor silly little self into his keeping! I need some one just my opposite. Professor Hodge says so. You and I are too much alike. But *promise* me that we can *always* be friends, or I shall be heartbroken. Your foolish little summer playmate,

SALLIE.

At once the dry voice of William commented: "Statistics show that a majority of those affected seem to regard so-called daylight, or time-saving devices, as in some manner affecting time itself. It should be borne in mind that time is an astronomical fact, and as such, not subject to legislative caprice. Turning the clock hands backward, or forward, is strictly a subjective act, valuable merely for its effect upon the mind. Time, as a concrete fact, is not affected in any way whatsoever."

THE LOON

UNDER the dark o' the moon,
While the ragged clouds blow by
And the wind-tossed waters croon
'Neath the blur o' the cupping sky,
I loose my mirth o' the loon
In the squall of a goblin cry.

Bird o' Bedlam am I
Whose wits have whirred askew;
Piercing the night I fly,
The clown of the feathered crew,
While my raw throat flings on high
Mad laughter that chaos knew.

Over the storm-lashed lake
And the plumes of pines, I laugh,
Winging while waters quake
As the strong winds sweep and quaff,
And the peals of my jeers awake
Ghosts of night's black epitaph.

Paul Steele.

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.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

NORHALA VOWS.

THE ebon pools of eyes were clarified of their ancient shadows by his terror; age was wiped from them by fear, even as it was wiped from his face. The wrinkles were gone. Appallingly youthful, the face of Yuruk prayed to us.

"What I did—I did for worship of her," he moaned.

"Slay him," said Norhala. "Slay him—one or both of you. It is your right."

"I can't," Drake half sobbed. "Goodwin—I can't. It's murder."

"Why do you wait?" she asked. "Time presses, and even now we should be on the way. When so many are so soon to die, why tarry over one? Slay him!"

"Norhala," I answered, "we cannot slay him so. When we kill, we kill in fair fight—hand to hand. The maid we both love has gone, taken with her brother. It will not bring her back if we murder him through whom she was taken. We would punish him—yes; but slay him we cannot. And we would be after the maid and her brother quickly."

A moment she looked at us, perplexity shading the high and steady anger.

"As you will," she said at last; then added, half sarcastically: "Perhaps it is because I who am now awake have slept so long that I cannot understand you. But Yuruk has disobeyed *me*. That of *mine* which I committed to his care he has given to the enemies of me and those who were mine. It matters nothing to me what *you* would do. Matters to me only what *I* will to do."

She pointed to the dead.

"Yuruk"—the golden voice was cold—"gather up these carrion and pile them together."

The eunuch arose, stole out fearfully from between the two stars; they did not move, shining imperturbably. He slithered to body after body, dragging them one after

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the other to the center of the chamber, lifting them and forming of them a heap. One there was who was not dead. His eyes opened as the eunuch seized him, the blackened mouth moved.

"Water!" he begged. "Give me drink. I burn!"

I felt a thrill of pity; lifted my canteen and walked toward him.

"You of the beard," the merciless chime rang out, "he shall have no water. Drink he shall have, and soon—drink of fire!"

The soldier's fevered eyes rolled toward her, saw and read aright the ruthlessness in the beautiful face.

"Sorceress!" he groaned. "Cursed spawn of Ahriman!" He spat at her.

The black talons of Yuruk stretched around his throat.

"Son of unclean dogs!" he whined. "You dare blaspheme the Goddess!"

He snapped the soldier's neck as though it had been a rotten twig.

At the callous cruelty I stood for an instant petrified; I heard Drake swear wildly, saw his pistol flash up.

Norhala struck down his arm.

"Your chance has passed," she said. "And not for *that* shall you slay him."

And now Yuruk had cast that body upon the others; the pile was complete.

"Mount!" commanded Norhala, and pointed. He cast himself at her feet, writhing, moaning, imploring. She looked at one of the great Shapes; something of command passed from her, something it understood plainly.

The star slipped forward—there was an almost imperceptible movement of its side points. The twitching form of the black seemed to leap up from the floor, to throw itself like a bag upon the mound of the dead!

Norhala threw up her hands. Out of the violet ovals beneath the upper tips of the Things spurted streams of blue flame! They fell upon Yuruk and splashed over him upon the heap of the slain. In the mound was a dreadful movement, a contortion; the bodies stiffened, seemed to try to rise, to push away—dead nerves and muscles responding to the blasting energy passing through them.

Out from the stars rained bolt upon bolt! In the chamber was the sound of thunder, crackling like broken glass! The bodies flamed, crumbled. There was a little smoke—nauseous, feebly protesting, beaten out by the consuming fires almost before it could rise.

Where had been the heap of slain capped by the black eunuch there was but a little whirling cloud of sad gray dust. Caught by a passing draft, it eddied, slipped over the floor, vanished through the doorway! Motionless stood the blasting stars, contemplating us. Motionless stood Norhala, her wrath no whit abated by the ghastly sacrifice. And paralyzed by what we had beheld, motionless stood we.

"Listen," she spoke abruptly. "You two who love the maid! What you have seen is nothing to that which you *shall* see—a wisp of mist to the storm-cloud, a falling leaf to a forest stripping bare beneath the tempest!"

"Norhala"—I found speech—"can you tell us when it was that the maid was captured?"

It had come to me that perhaps there was still time to overtake the abductors before Ruth was thrust into the worse peril waiting where she was being carried. Crossed this thought another—puzzling, baffling. The cliffs dead Yuruk had pointed out to me as those through which the hidden way passed were, I had estimated then, at least twenty miles away. And how long was the pass, the tunnel, through them? And then how far this place of the armored men? It had been past dawn when Drake had frightened the black eunuch with his pistol. It was not yet dawn now. How could Yuruk have made his way to the Persians so swiftly—how could they so swiftly have returned?

Amazingly she answered the spoken question and the unspoken.

"They came long before dusk," she said. "By the night before Yuruk had won to Ruszark, the city of Cherkis; and long before dawn they were on their way hither. This the black dog I slew told me!"

"But Yuruk was with us here at dawn of yesterday," I gasped.

"A night has passed since then," she

said, "and lo! another night is almost gone."

Stunned, I considered this. If this were true—and not for an instant did I doubt her truth—then not for a few hours had we lain there at the foot of the living wall in the Hall of the Cones—but for the balance of that day and that night, and another day and part of still another night.

"What does she say?" Drake stared anxiously into my whitened face.

I told him. His eyes widened incredulously.

"Yes." Norhala spoke again. "The dusk before the last dusk that has passed I returned to my house. The maid was there and sorrowing. She told me you had gone into the valley, prayed me to help you and to bring you back. I comforted her, and something of—the peace—I gave her; but not all, for she fought against it. A little we played together, and I left her sleeping. I sought you and found you also sleeping. I knew no harm would come to you, and I went my ways—and forgot you. Then came I here again, to find Yuruk and these the maid had slain."

The great eyes flashed.

"Now do I honor the maid for the battle that she did," she said, "though how she slew so many strong men I know not. My heart goes out to her. And therefore when I bring her back she shall no more be plaything to Norhala, but sister. And with you it shall be as she wills. And wo to those who have taken her!"

She paused, listening. From without came a rising storm of thin wailings, insistent and eager.

"But I have an older vengeance than this to take," the golden voice tolled somberly. "Long have I forgotten—and shame I feel that I had forgot. So long have I forgotten all hatreds, all lusts, all cruelty—among—these—" She thrust a hand forth toward the hidden valley. "Forgot—dwelling in the great harmonies. Save for you and what has befallen I would never have stirred from them, I think. But now awakened, I take that vengeance. After it is done"—she paused—"after it is over I shall go back again. For this awakening has in it nothing of the ordered joy I love—it is a fierce and slaying fire. I shall go back—"

The shadow of her far dreaming flitted over, softened the angry brilliancy of her eyes.

"Listen, you two!" The shadow of dream fled. "Those that I am about to slay are evil—evil are they all, men and women. Long have they been so—yea, for cycles of suns. And their children grow like them—or if they be gentle and with love for peace they are slain or die of heartbreak. All this my mother told me long ago. So no more children shall be born from them either to suffer or to grow evil."

Again she paused, nor did we interrupt her musing.

"My father ruled Ruszark," she said at last. "Rustum he was named, of the seed of Rustum the Hero even as was my mother. They were gentle and good, and it was their ancestors who built Ruszark when, fleeing from the might of Iskander, they were sealed in the hidden valley by the falling mountain. Then there sprang from one of the families of the nobles, Cherkis! Evil, evil was he, and as he grew he lusted for rule. On a night of terror he fell upon those who loved my father and slew; and barely had my father time to fly from the city with my mother, still but a bride, and a handful of those loyal to him. They found by chance the way to this place, hiding in the cleft which is its portal. They came, and they were taken by—Those who are now my people. Then my mother, who was very beautiful, was lifted before Him who rules here and she found favor in his sight and he had built for her this house, which now is mine.

"And in time I was born—but not in this house! Nay—in a secret place of light where, too, are born my people!"

She was silent. I shot a glance at Drake. The secret place of light—was it not that vast vault of mystery, of dancing orbs and flames transmuted into music into which we had peered and for which sacrilege, I had thought, had been thrust from the City? And did in this lie the explanation of her strangenesses? Had she there sucked in with her mother's milk the enigmatic life of the Metal Hordes, been transformed

into half human changeling, become true kin to them? What else could explain—

"My mother showed me Ruszark," her voice, taking up once more her tale, checked my thoughts. "Once when I was little she and my father bore me through the forest and through the hidden way. I looked upon Ruszark—a great city it is and populous, and a caldron of cruelty and of evil.

"Not like me were my father and mother. They longed for their kind and sought ever for means to regain their place among them. There came a time when my father, driven by this longing, ventured forth to Ruszark, seeking friends to help him regain that place—for these who obey me obeyed not him as they obey me; nor would he have marched them—as I shall—upon Ruszark if they had.

"Cherkis caught him. And Cherkis waited, knowing well that my mother would follow. For Cherkis knew not where to seek her, nor where they had lain hid, for between his city and here the mountains are great, unscalable, and the way through them is cunningly hidden; by chance alone did my mother's mother and those who fled with her discover it. And though they tortured him, my father would not tell. And after a while forthwith those who still remained of hers stole out with my mother to find him. They left me here with Yuruk. And Cherkis caught my mother!"

The proud breasts heaved, the eyes shot forth visible flames.

"My father was flayed alive and crucified," she cried. "His skin they nailed to the City's gates. And when Cherkis had had his will with my mother he threw her to his soldiers for their sport!

"All of those who went with them he tortured and slew—and he and his laughed at their torment. But one there was who escaped and told me—me who was little more then than a budding maid. He called on me to bring vengeance—and he died. A year passed—and I am not like my mother and my father—and I forgot—dwelling here in the great tranquillities, barred from and having no thought for men and their ways!

"*Aie, aie!*" she cried; "wo to me that I could forget! But now I shall take my vengeance—I, Norhala, will stamp them flat—Cherkis and his city of Ruszark and everything it holds! I, Norhala, and my servants shall stamp them into the rock of their valley so that none shall know that they have been! And would that I could meet their Gods with all their powers that I might break them too, and stamp them into the rock under the feet of my servants!"

She threw out white arms, in a fury.

Why had Yuruk lied to me? I wondered as I watched her. The Disk had not slain her mother. Of course! He had lied to play upon our terrors; had lied to frighten us away. How much truth had been in the rest of his tale?

The wailings were rising in a sustained crescendo. One of the slaying stars slipped over the chamber floor, folded its points and glided out of the door.

"Come!" commanded Norhala, and led the way. The second star closed, followed us. We stepped over the threshold.

For one astounded, breathless moment we paused. In front of us reared a monster—a colossal, headless Sphinx! Like fore legs and paws, a ridge of pointed cubes and globes thrust against each side of the cañon walls. Between them for two hundred feet on high stretched the breast.

And this was a shifting, weaving mass of the Metal Things; they formed into gigantic cuirasses, giant bucklers, corselets of living mail! From them as they moved—nay, from all the monster—came the wailings. Like a headless Sphynx it crouched—and as we stood it surged forward as though it sprang a step to greet us!

"*Hai!*" shouted Norhala, battle buglings ringing through the golden voice. "*Hai!* my companies!"

Out from the summit of the breast shot a tremendous trunk of cubes and spinning globes. And like a trunk it nuzzled us, caught us up, swept us to the crest. An instant I tottered dizzily; was held; stood beside Norhala upon a little, level twinkling eyed platform; upon her other side swayed Drake.

Now through the monster I felt a throbbing, an eager and impatient pulse. I turned my head. Still like some huge and grotesque beast the back of the clustered

Things ran for half a mile at least behind, tapering to a dragon tail that coiled and twisted another full mile toward the Pit. And from this back uprose and fell immense spiked and fan-shaped ruffs, thickets of spikes, whipping knouts of bristling tentacles, fanged crests! They thrust and waved, whipped and fell constantly; and constantly the great tail lashed and snapped, fantastic, long, living!

"*Hai!*" shouted Norhala once more. From her lifted throat came again the golden chanting—but now a relentless, ruthless song of slaughter!

Up reared the monstrous bulk. Into it ran the dragon tail. Into it poured the fanged and bristling back.

Up, up we were thrust—three hundred feet, four hundred, five hundred! Over the blue globe of Norhala's house bent a gigantic leg. Spiderlike out from each side of the monster thrust half a score of others.

Overhead the dawn began to break. Through it with ever increasing speed we moved, straight to the line of cliffs behind which lay the city of the armored men—and Ruth and Ventnor.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

RUSZARK.

SMOOTHLY moved the colossal Shape; on it we rode as easily as though cradled. It did not glide—it strode!

The columned legs raised themselves, bending from a thousand joints. The pedestals of the feet, huge and massive as foundations for sixteen-inch guns, fell with machinelike precision, stamping gigantically.

Under their tread the trees of the forest snapped, were crushed like straw beneath the pads of a mastodon. From far below came the sound of their crashing. The thick forest checked the progress of the Shape less than tall grass would that of a man.

Behind us our trail was marked by deep, black pits in the forest's green, clean cut and great as the Mark upon the poppied valley. They were the footprints of the Thing that carried us.

The wind streamed and whistled. A flock of the willow warblers arose, swirled about us with manifold beating of little frightened wings. Norhala's face softened, her eyes smiled.

"Go—foolish little ones," she cried, and waved her arms. They flew away, scolding. A *lammergeier* swooped down on wide funereal wings; it peered at us; darted away toward the cliffs.

"There will be no carrion there for you, black eater of the dead, when I am through," I heard Norhala whisper, eyes again somber.

Steadily grew the dawn light; from Norhala's lips came again the chanting. And now that pæan, the reckless pulse of the monster we rode, began to creep through my own veins. Into Drake's too, I knew, for his head was held high and his eyes were clear and bright as hers who sang.

The jubilant pulse streamed up through the hands that held us, throbbed through us. The pulse of the Thing—sang!

Closer and closer grew the cliffs. Down and crashing down fell the trees, the noise of their fall accompanying the battle chant of the Valkyr beside me like wild harp chords of storm-lashed surf. Up to the precipices the forest rolled, unbroken. Now the cliffs loomed overhead. The dawn had passed. It was full day.

Cutting up through the towering granite scarps was a rift. In it the black shadows clustered thickly. Straight toward that cleft we sped. As we drew near the crest of the Shape began swiftly to lower. Down we sank and down—a hundred feet, two hundred; now we were not more than two score yards above the tree tops.

Out shot a neck, a tremendous serpent body. Crested it was with pyramids; crested with them too was its immense head. Thickly the head bristled with them, poised motionless upon spinning globes as huge as they. For hundreds of feet that incredible neck stretched ahead of us and for twice as far behind a monstrous, lizard-shaped body writhed.

We rode now upon a serpent, a glittering blue metal dragon, spiked and knobbed and scaled! It was the weird steed of Norhala flattening, thrusting out to pierce the rift!

And still as when it had reared on high

beat through it the wild, triumphant, questing pulse. Still rang out Norhala's golden chanting.

The trees parted and fell upon each side of us as though we were some monster of the sea and they the waves we cleft!

The rift enclosed us. Lower we dropped; were not more than fifty feet above its floor. The Thing upon which we rode was a torrent roaring through it. A deeper blackness enclosed us—a tunneling.

Through that we flowed. Out of it we darted into a widening filled with wan light drifting down through a pinnacle fanged mouth miles on high. Again the cleft shrunk. A thousand feet ahead was a crack, a narrowing of the cleft so small that hardly could a man pass through it.

Abruptly the metal dragon halted.

Norhala's chanting changed; became again the arrogant clarioning. And close below us the huge neck split! It came to me then that it was as though Norhala were the over spirit of this chimera—as though it caught and understood and obeyed each quick thought of hers.

As though, indeed, she were a *part* of it—as *it* was in reality a part of that infinitely greater Thing, crouching there in its lair of the Pit—the Metal Monster that had lent this living part of itself to her for a steed, a champion! Little time had I to consider such matters.

Up thrust the Shape before us. Into it raced and spun Things angled, Things curved and Things squared. It gathered itself into a Titanic pillar out of which, instantly, thrust scores of arms.

Over them great globes raced; after these flew other scores of huge pyramids, none less than ten feet in height, the mass of them twenty and thirty. The manifold arms grew rigid. Quiet for a moment, a Titanic metal Briareous, it stood.

Then at the tips of the arms the globes began to spin—faster, faster. Upon them I saw the hosts of the pyramids open—as one into a host of stars. The cleft leaped out in a flood of violet light.

Now for another instant the stars which had been motionless, poised upon the whirling spheres, joined in their mad spinning. Cyclopean pin wheels they turned; again as one they ceased. More brilliant now was their light, dazzling; as though in their whirling they had gathered greater force!

Under me I felt the split Thing quiver—*pant*—with eagerness.

From the stars came a hurricane of lightnings! A cataract of electric flame poured into the crack, splashed and guttered down the granite walls. We were blinded by it; were deafened with thunders.

The face of the precipice smoked and split; was whirled away in clouds of dust!

The crack widened—widened as a gulley in a sand bank does when a swift stream rushes through it. Lightnings these were—and more than lightnings; lightnings keyed up to an invincible annihilating weapon that could rend and split and crumble to atoms the living granite!

Steadily the cleft expanded. As its walls melted away the Blasting Thing advanced, spurting into it the flaming torrents. Behind it we crept. The dust of the shattered rocks swirled up toward us like angry ghosts—before they reached us they were blown away as though by strong winds streaming from beneath us.

On we went, blinded, deafened. Interminably, it seemed, poured forth the hurricanes of blue fire; interminably the thunder bellowed.

There came a louder clamor—volcanic, chaotic, dulling the thunders! The sides of the cleft quivered, bent outward. With the roar of falling worlds they split; crashed down! Bright daylight poured in upon us, a flood of light toward which the billows of dust rushed as though seeking escape; out it poured like the smoke of ten thousand cannon.

And the Blasting Thing shook—as though with laughter!

The stars closed. Back into the Shape ran globe and pyramid. It slid toward us—joined the body from which it had broken away. Through all the mass ran a wave of jubilation, a pulse of mirth—a colossal, metallic—*silent*—roar of laughter!

We glided forward—out of the cleft. There was a burst of sunlight, strangely yellow after that incessant violent volleying. I felt a shifting movement.

Up and up we were thrust. Dazed I

looked behind me. In the face of a sky climbing wall of rock, smoked a wide chasm! Out of it the billowing clouds of dust still streamed, pursuing, threatening us. The whole granite barrier quivered with agony. Higher we rose and higher.

"Look!" whispered Drake, and whirled me round.

Less than five miles away was the place of the armored men—Ruszark, the City of Cherkis. It was like some ancient city come into life out of long dead centuries; a page restored from once conquering Persia's crumbled book; a city of the Chosroes transported by Jinns into our own time.

Built around and upon a low mount, it stood within a valley but little larger than the Pit. The plain was level, as though once it had been the floor of some primeval lake; the hill of the City was its only elevation.

Beyond, I caught the glinting of a narrow stream, meandering. The valley was ringed with precipitous cliffs falling sheer to its floor.

Slowly we advanced.

The city was almost square, guarded by double walls of hewn stone. The first raised itself a hundred feet on high, turreted and parapeted and pierced with gates. Perhaps a quarter of a mile behind it the second fortifications thrust up.

The city itself I estimated covered about twenty square miles. It ran upward in broad terraces. It was very fair, decked with blossoming gardens and green groves. Among the clustering granite houses, red and yellow roofed, thrust skyward tall spires and towers. Upon the mount's top was a broad, flat plaza on which were great buildings, marble white and golden roofed; temples I thought, or palaces, or both.

Running to the city out of the grain fields and steads that surrounded it, were scores of little figures, ratlike. Here and there among them I glimpsed horsemen, arms and armor glittering. All were racing to the gates and the shelter of the battlements.

Nearer we drew. From the walls came now a faint sound of gongs, of drums, of shrill, flutelike pipings. Upon them I could see hosts gathering; hosts of swarming little figures whose bodies glistened, from above whom came gleamings—the light striking upon their helms, their spear and javelin tips.

"Ruszark!" breathed Norhala, eyes wide, red lips cruelly smiling. "Lo—I am before your gates. Lo—I am here—and was there ever joy like this!"

The constellations in her eyes blazed. Beautiful, beautiful was Norhala—as Isis punishing Typhon for the murder of Osiris; as avenging Diana; shining from her something of the spirit of all wrathful Goddesses.

The flaming hair whirled and snapped. From all her sweet body came white-hot furious force, the withering perfume of destruction! She pressed against me, and I trembled at the contact.

Lawless, wild imaginings ran through me. Life, human life, dwindled. The City seemed but a thing of toys. On—let us crush it! On—on!

Again the monster shook beneath us. Faster we moved. Louder grew the clangor of the drums, the gongs, the pipes. Nearer came the walls; and ever more crowded with the swarming human ants that manned them.

We were close upon the heels of the last fleeing stragglers. The Thing slackened in its stride; waited patiently until they were close to the gates. Before they could reach them I heard the brazen clanging of their valves. Those shut out beat frenziedly upon them; dragged themselves close to the base of the battlements, cowered there or crept along them seeking some hole in which to hide.

With a slow lowering of its height the Thing advanced. Now its form was that of a spindle a full mile in length on whose bulging center we three stood.

A hundred feet from the outer wall we halted. We looked down upon it not more than fifty feet above its broad top. From that vantage-point I could see hundreds of the soldiers crouching behind the parapets, companies of archers with great bows poised, arrows at their cheeks, scores of leather jerkined men with stands of javelins at their right hands, spearsmen and men with long, thonged slings.

Set at intervals were squat, powerful engines of wood and metal beside which were heaps of huge, rounded boulders. Catapults I knew them to be; around each swarmed a knot of soldiers, fixing the great stones in place, drawing back the thick ropes that, loosened, would hurl forth the projectiles. From each side came other men, dragging more of these balisters; assembling a battery against the prodigious, gleaming monster that menaced their city.

Between outer wall and inner battlements galloped squadrons of mounted men. Upon this inner wall the soldiers clustered thickly as on that between us and it, preparing as actively for its defense.

The city seethed. Up from it arose a humming, a buzzing, as of some immense angry hive.

Involuntarily I visualized the spectacle we must present to those who looked upon us—this huge incredible Shape of metal alive with quicksilver shiftings, this—as it must have seemed to them—hellish mechanism of war captained by a sorceress and her two familiars in form of men. There came to me dreadful visions of such a monster looking down upon the peace-reared battlements of New York—the panic rush of thousands away from it.

There was a blaring of trumpets. Up on the parapet leaped a man clad all in gleaming red armor. From head to feet the close linked scales covered him. Within a hood shaped somewhat like the tight-fitting head coverings of the Crusaders a pallid, cruel face looked out upon us; in the fierce black eyes was no trace of fear.

Evil as Norhala had said these people of Ruszark were wicked and cruel—they were no cowards, no!

The red armored man threw up a hand.

"Who are you?" he shouted. "Who are you three, you three who come driving down upon Ruszark through the rocks? We have no quarrel with you?"

"I seek a maid and a man," cried Norhala. "A maid and a sick man your thieves took from me. Bring them forth!"

"Seek elsewhere for them then," he answered. "They are not here. Turn now and seek elsewhere. Go quickly, lest I loose our might upon you and you go never!"

Mockingly rang her laughter—and under its lash the black eyes grew fiercer, the cruelty on the white face darkened.

"Little man whose words are so big! Fly who thunders! What are you called, little man?"

Her raillery bit deep—but its menace, its sinisterness passed unheeded in the rage it called forth.

"I am Kulun," shouted the man in scarlet armor. "Kulun, the son of Cherkis the Mighty, and captain of his hosts. Kulun—who will cast your skin under my mares in stall for them to trample and thrust your red flayed body upon a pole in the grain fields to frighten away the crows! Does that answer you?"

Her laughter ceased; her eyes dwelt upon him—filled with an infernal joy.

"The son of Cherkis!" I heard her murmur. "He has a son—to slay!"

There was a sneer on his wicked face; clearly he thought her awed. Quick was his disillusionment.

"Listen, Kulun," she cried. "I am Norhala—daughter of another Norhala and of Rustum, whom Cherkis tortured and slew! Now go, you lying spawn of unclean toads—go and tell your father that I, Norhala, am at his gates! And bring back with you the maid and man! Go, I say!"

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

CHERKIS.

THERE was stark amazement on Kulun's face; and fear now enough. Swiftly he dropped from the parapet among his men. There came one loud trumpet blast.

Out from the battlements poured a storm of arrows, a cloud of javelins! The squat catapults leaped forward. From them came a hail of boulders! Before that onrushing tempest of death I flinched, cowered.

I heard Norhala's golden laughter and before they could reach us arrow and javelin and boulder were checked as though myriads of hands had reached out from the Thing under us and caught them! Down they fell!

Forth from the great spindle shot a gi-

gantic arm, hammer tipped with cubes. It struck the wall close to where the scarlet armored Kulun had dropped.

Under its blow the stones crumbled, fell crashing! With the fragments fell soldiers, writhing as they dropped; were buried beneath them. A hundred feet in width a breach gaped in the battlements. Out shot the arm again; hooked its hammer tip over the parapet, tore away a stretch of the breastwork as though it had been cardboard. Beside the breach an expanse of the broad flat top lay open like a wide platform! The arm withdrew.

Out from the whole length of the spindle thrust other arms, hammer tipped, held high aloft, menacing!

From all the length of the wall arose panic outcry. Abruptly the storm of arrows ended; the catapults were still. Again the trumpets sounded; the crying ceased. Down fell a silence, terrified, *stifling!*

Kulun stepped forth again, both hands held high. Gone was his arrogance.

"A parley," he shouted, and there was tremor in his voice. "A parley, Norhala. If we give you the maid and man, will you go?"

"Go get them," she answered. "And take with you this my command to Cherkis —that *he* return with the two!"

For an instant Kulun hesitated. Up thrust the dreadful arms, poised themselves to strike.

"It shall be so!" he shouted. "I carry your command!"

He leaped back, his red mail flashed toward a turret that held, I supposed, a stairway. He was lost to sight. In silence we waited.

On the further side of the city I glimpsed movement. Little troops of mounted men, pony drawn wains, knots of running figures were fleeing from the city through the opposite gates. Norhala saw them too. With that incomprehensible, instant obedience to her unspoken thought a mass of the Metal Things separated from us; whirled up into a dozen of those obelisked forms I had seen march from the cat eyes of the City of the Pit!

In but a breath, it seemed, their columns were far off, herding back the fugitives!

They did not touch them, did not offer to harm them—only, grotesquely like dogs heading off and corraling frightened sheep, they circled and darted. Back came rushing those they herded.

From the watching terraces and walls arose shrill cries of terror, a wailing. Far away the obelisks met, pirouetted, melted into one thick column. Towering, motionless as we it stood, guarding the further gates.

There was a stir upon the wall, a flashing of spears, of drawn blades. Two litters closed with curtainings, surrounded by triple rows of swordsmen fully armored, carrying small shields and led by Kulun, were being borne to the torn battlement.

Their half-naked bearers stopped well within the platform and gently lowered their burdens. The leader of those around the second litter drew aside its covering, spoke. Out stepped Ruth and after her—Ventnor!

"Martin!" I could not keep back the cry; heard mingle with it Drake's own cry to Ruth. Ventnor raised his hand in greeting; I thought he smiled. The cubes on which we stood shot forward; stopped within fifty feet of them. Instantly the guard of swordsmen raised their blades, held them over the pair as though waiting the signal to strike.

And now I saw that Ruth was not clad as she had been when we had left her. She stood in scanty kirtle that came scarcely to her knees, her shoulders were bare, her curly brown hair unbound and tangled. Her face was set with wrath hardly less than that which beat from Norhala. On Ventnor's forehead was a blood red scar, a line that ran from temple to temple like a brand!

The curtains of the first litter quivered; behind them some one spoke. That in which Ruth and Ventnor had ridden was drawn swiftly away. The knot of swordsmen drew back.

Into their places sprang and knelt a dozen archers. They ringed the two, bows drawn taut, arrows in place and pointing straight to their hearts!

Out of the litter rolled a giant of a man. Seven feet he must have been in height; over the huge shoulders, the barreled chest

and the bloated abdomen hung a purple cloak glittering with gems; through the thick and grizzled hair passed a flashing circlet of jewels.

The scarlet armored Kulun beside him, swordsmen guarding them, he walked to the verge of the torn gap in the wall. He peered down it, glanced imperturbably at the upraised, hammer-handed arms still threatening; examined again the breach. Then with Kulun he strode over to the very edge of the broken battlement and stood, head thrust a little forward, studying us in silence.

"Cherkis!" whispered Norhala — the whisper was a hymn to Nemesis! I felt her body quiver from head to foot.

A wave of hatred, a hot desire to slay, passed through me as I scanned the face staring at us. It was a great gross mask of evil, of cold cruelty and of callous lusts. Unwinking, icily malignant, black slits of eyes glared at us between pouches that held them half closed. Heavy jowls hung pendulous, dragging down the corners of the thick lipped, brutal mouth into a deep graven, unchanging sneer.

The face was the lair of every beast of sensuality; it was ravened with cynic wickednesses. As he gazed upon Norhala a flicker of lust shot like a licking tongue through his eyes; his lips writhed, vulpinely.

Yet from him pulsed power; sinister, instinct with evil, concentrate with cruelty—but power indomitable. Such was Cherkis, descendant perhaps of that Xerxes the Conqueror who three milleniums gone ruled the known world.

It was Norhala who broke the silence.

"Tcherak! Greeting—Cherkis!" There was merciless mirth in the buglings of her voice. "Lo, I did but knock so gently at your gates and you hastened to welcome me! Greetings—gross swine, spittle of the toads, fat slug beneath my sandals!"

He passed the insults by, unmoved—although I heard a murmuring go up from those near and Kulun's hard eyes blazed.

"We will bargain, Norhala," he answered calmly; the voice was deep, filled with sinister strength.

"Bargain!" she laughed. "What have you with which to bargain, Cherkis? Does the rat bargain with the tigress? And you, toad, have nothing."

He shook his head.

"I have these." He waved a hand toward Ruth and her brother. "Me you may slay—and mayhap many of mine. But before you can move to slay my archers shall feather their hearts like the birds."

"God!" muttered Drake. "He can do it!"

She considered him, no longer mocking.

"Two of mine you slew long since, Cherkis," she said slowly. "Therefore it is I am here."

"I know," he nodded heavily. "Yet that is neither here nor there now, Norhala. That was long since, and I have learned much during the years. I would have killed you too, Norhala, could I have found you. But now I would not do as then—quite differently would I do, Norhala; for I have learned much since then. I am sorry that those you loved died as they did. I am in truth sorry!"

There was a curious—*lurking*—sardonicism in the words, an undertone of mockery. Was what he really meant that in those years he had learned to inflict greater agonies, more exquisite tortures? If so, Norhala apparently did not sense that interpretation. Indeed, she seemed to be interested, her wrath abating.

"No," the hoarse voice rumbled dispassionately. "None of that is important—now. *You* would have this man and girl. *I* hold them. They die at my nod. They die if you stir a hand's breadth toward me. If they die, I prevail against you—for I have cheated you of what you desire. I win, Norhala, even though you slay me. That is all that now is important."

There was doubt upon Norhala's face; I caught a quick gleam of contemptuous triumph glint through the depths of the evil eyes.

"Empty will be your victory over me, Norhala," he said; then waited.

"What is your bargain?" she spoke hesitatingly; with a sinking of my heart I heard the doubt tremble in her throat.

"If you will go without further knocking upon my gates"—there was a satiric grimness in the phrase—"go when you have

been given them, and pledge yourself never to return—you shall have them. If you will not, then they die."

"But what security, what hostages, do you ask?" Her eyes were troubled. "I cannot swear by your Gods, Cherkis, for they are not my Gods—and in truth I, Norhala, have no Gods. Why should I not say yes and take the two, then fall upon you and destroy—as you would do in my place, old wolf?"

"Norhala," he answered, "I ask nothing but your word. Do I not know those who bore you and the line from which they sprung? Was not always the word they gave kept till death—unbroken, inviolable? No need for vows to Gods between you and me. Your word is holier than they—O glorious daughter of kings, princess royal!"

The great voice was harshly caressing; not obsequious, but as though he gave her as an equal her rightful honor. Her face softened; she considered him from eyes far less hostile. A wholesome respect for this gross tyrant's mentality came to me; it did not temper, it heightened, the repulsion I felt for him. But now I recognized the subtlety of his attack; realized that unerringly he had taken the only means by which he could have gained a hearing; have temporized. Could he win her with his guile?

"Is it not true?" There was a leonine purring in the question.

"It *is* true!" she answered proudly. "Though why *you* should dwell upon this, Cherkis, whose word is steadfast as the running stream and whose promises are as lasting as its bubbles—why *you* should dwell on this I do not know."

"I have changed greatly, Princess, in the years since my great wickedness; I have learned much. He who speaks to you now is not he you were taught—and taught justly then—to hate."

Could she not realize this Satanic unctuousness, this Machiavelian humbleness, this Judas hypocrisy? It was plain to *me*.

"You may speak truth! Certainly you are not as I have pictured you." It was as though she were more than half convinced. "In this at least you do speak truth—that *if* I promise I go and molest you no more."

"Why go at all, Princess?" Quietly he asked the amazing question—then drew himself to his full height, threw wide his arms.

"Princess?" the great voice rumbled forth. "Nay—Queen! Why leave us again—Norhala the Queen? Are we not of your people? Am I not of your kin? Join your power with ours. What that war engine you ride may be, how built, I know not. But this I do know—that with our strengths joined we two can go forth from here where I have dwelt so long, go forth into the forgotten world, eat its cities and rule!

"You shall teach our people to make these engines, Norhala, and we will make many of them! Queen Norhala—you shall wed my son Kulun, he who stands beside me. And while I live you shall rule with me, rule equally. And when I die you and Kulun shall rule.

"Thus shall our two royal lines be made one, the old feud wiped out, the long score be settled. Queen—wherever it is you dwell it comes to me that you have few of men. Queen—you need men, many men and strong to follow you, men to gather the harvests of your power, men to bring to you the fruit of your smallest wish—young men and vigorous to amuse you!

"Let the past be forgotten—I too have wrongs to forget, O Queen! Come to us, Great One, with your power and your beauty! Teach us! Lead us! Return and throned above your people rule the world!"

He ceased. Over the battlements, over all the city, dropped a vast expectant silence—as though the city knew its fate was hanging upon the balance. Through my veins ran prickling terror. *Not* this hidden city, *not* its forgotten people; *not* us four from the outer world concerned me—what lay upon the scales was the fate of the whole outer world, the destinies of humanity.

With these fierce legions behind her and the Things—these warriors without ruth or stay, these living mechanisms of inhuman powers—what in that outer world of ours could withstand Norhala? Reason whispered to me—the Metal Emperor, the sullen fired Keeper, the cones, all the vast phantasmagoria that was the Metal Monster itself, the incredible colossal Enigma upon

one of whose puniest, borrowed claws we stood—could Norhala bring *It* to heel, obedient to her whistle? Not for a moment could I believe it. And yet—

"No! No!" It was Ruth crying. "Do not trust him, Norhala! It's a trap! He shamed me—he tortured—"

Cherkis half turned; before he swung about I saw a hell shadow darken his face. Ventnor's hand thrust out, covered Ruth's mouth, choked her crying.

"Your son"—Norhala spoke swiftly; back flashed the cruel face of Cherkis, devouring her with his eyes. "Your son—and Queenship here—and Empire of the World!" Her voice was rapt, thrilled. "All this you offer? Me—Norhala?"

"This and more!" The huge bulk of his body quivered with eagerness. "If it be your wish, O Queen, I, Cherkis, will step down from the throne for you and sit beneath your right hand, eager to do your bidding!"

A moment she studied him.

"Norhala," I whispered, "do not do this thing. He thinks to gain your secrets."

Her hand dropped, caught me by the wrist, pressed it fiercely.

"Let my bridegroom stand forth that I may look upon him," called Norhala.

Visibly Cherkis relaxed, as though a strain had been withdrawn. Between him and his crimson-clad son flashed a glance, demoniacally exultant; it was as though a triumphant devil sped from them into each other's eyes.

I saw Ruth shrink into Ventnor's arms. Up from the wall rosé a jubilant shouting, was caught by the inner battlements, passed on to the crowded terraces. Ruszark rejoiced!

"Take Kulun." It was Drake, pistol drawn and whispering across to me. "I'll handle Cherkis. And shoot straight!"

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE VENGEANCE OF NORHALA!

NORHALA'S hand that had gone from my wrist dropped down again, held it; I glimpsed the other fall upon Drake's.

Kulun loosed his hood, let it fall about his shoulders, a smirk upon his cruel face he stepped forward, held out his arms to Norhala.

"A strong man!" she cried approvingly. "Hail—my bridegroom! But stay—stand back a moment. Stand beside that man for whom I came to Ruszark. I would see you together!"

The smirk fled from Kulun, his face darkened. But Cherkis smiled with evil understanding, shrugged his shoulders and whispered to him. Sullenly Kulun stepped back. The ring of archers lowered their bows; they leaped to their feet and stood aside to let him pass.

Quick as a serpent's tongue a pyramid tipped tentacle flicked out beneath us. It darted through the broken circle of the bowmen. It *licked* up Ruth and Ventnor and—Kulun!

Swiftly as it had shot forth it returned, coiled, and dropped those two I loved—their eyes tight closed, their bodies quivering—at Norhala's sandals. It flashed back on high with the scarlet length of Cherkis's son sprawled along its angled end!

The great body of Cherkis seemed to wither. Up from all the wall went a tempestuous sigh of horror.

Out rang the merciless chimes of Norhala's laughter.

"Tchai!" she cried. "Tchai! Fat fool there! Tchai—you Cherkis! Toad whose wits have sickened with your years!

"Did you think to catch me, Norhala, in your filthy web? Princess! Queen! Empress of Earth! Ho—old fox I have outplayed and beaten, what now have you to trade with Norhala?"

Mouth sagging open, eyes glaring, the tyrant slowly raised his arms—a suppliant.

"You would have back the bridegroom you gave me?" she laughed. "Take him, then!"

Down swayed the metal arm that held Kulun. And glad, glad was I that Ruth's eyes were closed against Drake's breast. For the arm dropped Cherkis's son at Cherkis's feet; and as though Kulun had been a grape—it crushed him!

Before those who had seen could stir

from their stupor the tentacle hovered over Cherkis, glaring down at the horror that had been his son. It did not strike him—it drew him up to it as a magnet draws a pin! And as the pin swings from the magnet when held suspended by the head, so swung the great body of Cherkis from the under side of the pyramid that held him. Hanging so he was carried toward us, came to a stop not ten feet from us—

Weird, weird beyond all telling was that scene—and would I had the power to make you who read see it as we did. The animate, living Shape of metal on which we stood, with its forest of hammer-handed arms raised menacingly along all its mile of spindled length—the great walls glistening with the armored hosts—the terraces of that fair and ancient city, their gardens and green groves and clustering red and yellow-roofed houses and temples and palaces—the swinging gross body of Cherkis in the clutch of the unseen magnetic grip of the grotesque tentacle, his grizzled hair touching the side of the pyramid that held him, his arms half outstretched, the gemmed cloak flapping like the wings of a jeweled bat, his white, malignant face in which the evil eyes were burning slits flaming hell's own blackest hatred—beyond the city, from which pulsed almost visibly a vast and hopeless horror, the watching column—and over all this the palely radiant white sky under whose light the encircling cliffs were tremendous stony palettes splashed with a hundred pigments.

Norhala's laughter had ceased. Somberly she looked upon Cherkis, into the devil fire of his eyes. Yet quiet as she was I sensed behind that exquisite cold face the gathering of the lightnings.

"Cherkis!" she half whispered. "Now comes the end for you—and for all that is yours. Until the end's end you shall see!"

The hanging body was thrust forward a yard; was thrust up; was brought down upon its feet on the upper plane of the prostrate pyramid tipping the metal arm that held him. For an instant he strove to escape, to break from what must have been to him an incredible restraint; I think he meant to hurl himself down upon Norhala, to kill her before he himself was slain.

If so, after that one frenzied effort he realized the futility, for with a certain dignity he drew himself upright, turned his eyes toward his city.

Over that city a dreadful silence hung. It was as though it cowered, hid its face, was afraid to breathe.

"The end!" murmured Norhala.

There was a quick trembling through the Metal Thing. Down swung its forest of sledges. Beneath the blow down fell the smitten walls, shattered and crumbling, and with it glittering like shining flies in a dust storm fell the armored men.

Through that mile-wide breach and up to the inner barrier I glimpsed confusion chaotic. And again I say it—they were no cowards, those men of Cherkis. From the inner battlements flew clouds of arrows, of huge stones—as uselessly as before.

Then out from opened gates poured regiments of horsemen, brandishing javelins and great maces, and shouting fiercely as they drove down upon each end of the Metal Shape. Under cover of their attack I saw cloaked riders spurring their ponies across the plain to shelter of the cliff walls, to the chance of hiding-places within them. Women and men of the rich, the powerful, I knew, flying for safety; after them ran and scattered through the fields of grain a multitude on foot.

The ends of the spindle drew back before the horsemen's charge, broadening as they went—like the heads of monstrous cobras withdrawing into their hoods. Abruptly, with a lightning velocity, these broadenings expanded into immense lunettes, two tremendous curving and crablike claws! Their tips flung themselves past the racing troops; then like gigantic pincers began to contract.

Of no avail now was it for the horsemen to halt dragging their mounts on their haunches, or to turn to fly. The ends of the lunettes had met, the pincer tips had closed. The mounted men were trapped within half-mile-wide circles. And in upon man and horse their living walls marched! Within those enclosures of the doomed began a frantic milling—I shut my eyes.

There was a dreadful screaming of horses, a shrieking of men. Then silence.

Shuddering, I looked. Where the mounted men had been was—nothing!

Nothing? There were two great circular spaces whose floors were glistening, wetly red. Fragment of man or horse—there was none. They had been crushed into—what was it Norhala had promised — had been stamped into the rock beneath the feet of her—servants!

Sick, I looked away—stared at a Thing that writhed and undulated over the plain; a prodigious serpentine Shape of cubes and spheres linked and studded thick with the spikes of the pyramids! Through the fields, over the plain its incredible coils flashed.

Playfully it sped and twisted among the fugitives, crushing them, tossing them aside broken, gliding over them. Some there were who hurled themselves upon it in impotent despair, some who knelt before it, praying. On rolled the metal convolutions, inexorable.

Within my vision's range there were no more fugitives! Around a corner of the broken battlements raced the serpent Shape. Where it had writhed was now no waving grain, no trees, no green thing. There was only smooth rock upon which here and there red smears glistened wetly.

Afar there was a crying, in its wake a rumbling. It was the column, it came to me, at work upon the further battlements. As though the sound had been a signal the spindle trembled; up we were thrust another hundred feet or more. Back dropped the host of brandished arms, threaded themselves into the parent bulk.

Right and left of us the spindle split into scores of fissures. Between these fissures the Metal Things that made up each now dissociate and shapeless mass geysered; block and sphere and tetrahedron spike spun and swirled. There was an instant of formlessness.

Then right and left of us stood scores of giant, grotesque warriors! Their crests were full fifty feet below our living platform. They stood upon six immense, columnar stilts. These sextuple legs supported a hundred feet above their bases a huge and globular body formed of clusters of the spheres. Out from each of these bodies that were at one and the same time trunks and heads, sprang half a score of colossal arms shaped like flails, like spike-studded girders, Titanic battle maces, Cyclopean sledges! From legs and trunks and arms the tiny eyes of the Metal Hordes flashed, exulting!

There came from them, from the Thing we rode as well, a chorus of thin and eager wailings like hounds at cry; pulsed through all that battle-line a jubilant throbbing—with a rhythmic, *jocund* stride they leaped upon the city!

Under the mallets of the smiting arms the inner battlements fell as under the hammers of a thousand metal Thors. Over their fragments and the armored men who fell with them strode the Things, grinding stone and man together as we passed.

All of the terraced city except the side hidden by the mount lay open to my gaze. In that brief moment of pause I saw crazed crowds battling in narrow streets, trampling over mounds of the fallen, surging over barricades of bodies, clawing and tearing at each other in their flight from the nightmare invaders.

There was a wide, stepped street of gleaming white stone that climbed like an immense stairway straight up the slope to that broad plaza at the top where clustered the great temples and palaces—the Acropolis of the city. Into it the streets of the terraces flowed, each pouring out upon it a living torrent tumultuous with tuliped, sparkling little waves, the gay coverings and the arms and armor of Ruszark's desperate thousands seeking safety at the shrines of their gods.

Here great carven arches arose; there slender, exquisite towers capped with red gold—there was a street of colossal statues, another over which dozens of graceful, fretted, mysterious bridges threw their spans from feathery billows of flowering trees; there were gardens gay with blossoms in which fountains sparkled, green groves; thousands upon thousands of bright multicolored pennants, banners, fluttered—a fair, a lovely city was Cherkis's stronghold of Ruszark!

Its beauty filled the eyes; out from it streamed the fragrance of its gardens—the

voice of its agony was that of the souls in Dis, that black and flaming city of the lost that Dante saw.

The row of destroying shapes lengthened, each huge warrior of metal drawing far apart from its mates. They flexed their manifold arms, shadow boxed—grotesquely, dreadfully.

Down struck the flails, the sledges. Beneath the blows the buildings burst like eggshells, their fragments burying the throngs fighting for escape in the thoroughfares that threaded them. Over their ruins we moved.

Down and ever down crashed the awful sledges. And ever under them the city crumbled. There was a spider Shape that crawled up the wide stairway hammering into the stone those who tried to flee before it.

Stride by stride the Destroying Things ate up the city!

Swift upon the first great shock of horror, the agonized revulsion against this slaughter, a sense of unreality numbed me. Or rather was it a film upon my consciousness through which could not pierce realization that these who died were men and women and their children, nor that this which was being annihilated was the work of human hands.

I felt neither wrath nor pity. Through me began to beat a jubilant roaring pulse—as though I were a shouting corpuscle of the rushing hurricane, as though I were one of the hosts of smiting spirits of the bellowing typhoon. Through this stole another thought—vague, unfamiliar, yet seemingly of truth's own essence. Why, I wondered, had I never recognized this before? Why had I never known— That these green forms called trees were but ugly, unsymmetrical excresences? That these high projections of towers, these buildings were—deformities? That these four-pronged, moving little shapes that screamed and ran were—hideous?

They must be wiped out! All this misshapen, jumbled, inharmonious ugliness must be wiped out! It must be ground down to smooth unbroken planes, harmonious curvings, shapeliness—harmonies of arc and line and angle!

Something deep within me fought to speak—fought to tell me that this thought was not human thought, not my thought—that it was the reflected thought of the Metal Things!

It told me—and fiercely it struggled to make me realize what it was that it told. Its insistence was borne upon little despairing, rhythmic beatings—throbbings that were like the muffled sobbings of the drums of grief the Marquesans beat only for the passing into death of a virgin princess. Louder, closer came the throbbing; clearer with it my perception of the inhumanness of my thought.

The drum beat tapped at my humanity, became a dolorous knocking at my heart!

It was the sobbing of Cherkis!

The gross face was shrunken, the cheeks sagging in folds of wo; cruelty and wickedness were wiped from it; the evil in the eyes had been washed out by tears. Eyes streaming, bull throat and barrel chest racked by his sobbing, he watched the passing of his people and his city.

And relentlessly, coldly, Norhala watched him—as though loath to lose the faintest shadow of his agony.

Now I saw we were close to the top of the mount. Packed between us and the immense white structures that crowned it were thousands of the people. They fell on their knees before us, prayed to us. They tore at each other, striving to hide themselves from us in the mass that was themselves. They beat against the barred doors of the sanctuaries; they climbed the pillars; they swarmed over the golden roofs.

There was a moment of chaos—a chaos of which we were the heart. Then temple and palace cracked, burst, were shattered; fell. I caught glimpses of gleaming sculptures, glitterings of gold and of silver, flashing of gems, shimmering of gorgeous draperies—under them a weltering of men and women. We closed down upon them—over them!

The dreadful sobbing ceased. I saw the head of Cherkis swing heavily upon a shoulder; the eyes closed.

The Destroying Things touched. Their flailing arms coiled back, withdrew into

their bodies. They joined, forming for an instant a tremendous hollow pillar far down in whose center we stood. They parted; shifted in shape; rolled down the mount over the ruins like a widening wave—crushing stone and human fragments as they passed.

Afar away I saw the gleaming serpent still at play—still writhing among, still obliterating the few score scattered fugitives that some way, some how, had slipped by the Destroying Things.

We halted. For one long moment Norhala looked upon the drooping body of him upon whom she had let fall this mighty vengeance.

Then the metal arm that held Cherkis whirled. Thrown from it the cloaked form flew like a great blue bat; fell upon the flattened mound that had once been the proud crown of his city. A blue blot upon desolation the broken body of Cherkis lay.

A black speck appeared high in the sky; grew fast—the lammergeier!

"I have left carrion for you—after all!" cried Norhala.

With an ebon swirling of wings the vulture dropped beside the blue heap—thrust in it its beak!

CHAPTER XL.

"THE DRUMS OF DESTINY!"

SLOWLY we descended that mount of desolation; lingeringly, as though the brooding eyes of Norhala were not yet sated with destruction. Of human life, of green life, of life of any kind there was none.

Man and tree, woman and flower, babe and bud, palace, temple and home—Norhala had stamped flat! She had crushed them within the rock — even as she had promised!

The tremendous tragedy had absorbed my every faculty; I had had no time to think of my companions; I had forgotten them. Now in the painful surges of awakening realization, of full human understanding of that unhuman annihilation with all that lurked within it of colossal menace to our own world, our own race, I turned to them for strength. Faintly I wondered again at Ruth's scantiness of garb, her more than half nudity; dwelt curiously upon the red brand across Ventnor's forehead.

In his eyes and in Drake's I saw reflected the horror I knew was in my own. But in the eyes of Ruth was none of this—sternly, coldly triumphant, indifferent to its piteousness as Norhala herself she scanned the waste that less than an hour since had been a place of living beauty.

I felt a shock of repulsion. After all those who had been destroyed so ruthlessly could not *all* have been wholly evil. Yet mother and blossoming maid, youth and oldster, all the pageant of humanity within the great walls were now but lines within the stone. According to their different lights, it came to me, there had been in Ruszark no greater number of the wicked than one could find in any great city of our own civilization.

From Norhala, of course, I looked for no perception of any of this. But from Ruth—

My reaction grew; the pity long withheld racing through me linked with a burning anger, a hatred for this woman who had been the directing soul of that catastrophe.

My gaze fell again upon the red brand. I saw that it was a deep indentation as though a thong had been twisted around Ventnor's head, biting to the bone. There was dried blood on the edges, a double ring of swollen white flesh rimming the cincture. It was the mark of—torture!

"Martin!" I cried. "That ring? What did they do to you?"

"They wakened me with that," he answered quietly. "I suppose I ought to be grateful—although their intentions were not exactly—therapeutic—"

"They tortured him!" Ruth's voice was tense, bitter; she spoke in Persian—for Norhala's benefit I thought then, not guessing the deeper reason. "They tortured him. They gave him agony until he —returned! And they promised him other agonies that would make him pray long for death.

"And me — me" — she raised little

clenched hands—" me they stripped like a slave! They led me through the city and the people mocked me. They took me before that swine Norhala has punished—and stripped me before him—like a slave! Before my eyes they tortured my brother! Norhala—they were evil, all evil! Norhala—you did well to slay them!"

She caught the woman's hands, pressed close to her. Long Norhala gazed at her; from great gray eyes in which the wrath was dying, into which the old tranquility, the old serenity was flowing. And when she spoke the golden voice held more than returning echoes of the far-away, faint chimings.

" It is done," she said. " And it was well done—sister! Now you and I shall dwell together in the peace—sister! Or if there be those in the world from which you came that you would have slain, then you and I shall go forth with our companies and stamp them out—even as I did these!"

My heart stopped beating—for from the depths of Ruth's eyes shining shadows were rising, wraiths answering Norhala's calling; and, as they rose, steadily they drew life from the clear radiance summoning them—drew closer to the semblance of that tranquil spirit which her vengeance had banished but that had now returned to its twin thrones of Norhala's eyes.

And at last it was twin sister of Norhala who looked upon her from the face of Ruth! The white arms of the woman encircled her; the glorious head bent over her; flaming tresses mingled with tender brown curls.

" Sister," she whispered. " Little sister! These men you shall have as long as it pleases you—to do with as you will. Or if it is your wish they shall go back to their world and I will guard them to its gates.

" But you and I, little sister, will dwell together—in the vastnesses—in the peace. Shall it not be so?"

With no faltering, with no glance toward us three—lover, brother, old friend—Ruth crept closer to her, rested her head upon the virginal, royal breasts.

" It shall be so!" she murmured. " Sister—it shall be so. Norhala—I am tired! Norhala—I have seen enough of men!"

An ecstasy of tenderness, a flame of unearthly rapture, trembled over the woman's wondrous face. Hungrily, defiantly, she pressed the girl to her; the stars in the lucid heavens of her eyes were soft and gentle and caressing.

" Ruth!" cried Drake—and sprang toward them. She paid no heed; and even as he leaped he was caught, whirled back against us.

" Wait!" said Ventnor, and caught him by the arm as wrathfully, blindedly, he strove against the force that held him. " Wait! No use—now!"

There was a curious understanding in his voice—a curious sympathy, too, in the patient, untroubled gaze that dwelt upon his sister and this weirdly exquisite one who held her.

" Wait!" exclaimed Drake. " Wait—hell! The damned witch is stealing her away from us!"

Again he threw himself forward; recoiled as though swept back by an invisible arm; fell against us and was clasped and held by Ventnor. And as he struggled the Thing we rode halted. Like metal waves back into it rushed the enigmatic billows that had washed over the fragments of the city.

We were lifted—rode high; between us and the woman and girl a cleft appeared; it widened into a rift. It was as though Norhala had decreed it as a symbol of this her second victory—or had set it between us as a barrier.

Wider grew the rift. Save for the bridge of our voices it separated us from Ruth as though she had stood upon another world.

Higher we rose; the three of us now upon the flat top of a tower upon whose counterpart fifty feet away and facing the homeward path, Ruth and Norhala stood with white arms interlaced.

The serpent shape flashed toward us; it vanished beneath, merging, I knew, into the waiting Thing.

Then slowly the Thing began to move; quietly it glided to the chasm it had blasted in the cliff wall. The shadow of those walls fell upon us. As one we looked back; as one we searched out the patch of blue with the black blot at its breast.

We found it; the precipices hid it. Si-

lently we streamed through the chasm, through the cañon and the tunnel—speaking no word, Drake's eyes fixed with bitter hatred upon Norhala, Ventnor brooding upon her always with that enigmatic sympathy. We passed between the walls of the further cleft; stood for an instant at the brink of the green forest.

There came to us as though from immeasureable distances a faint, sustained thrumming—like the beating of countless muffled drums. The Thing that carried us trembled—the sound died away. The Thing quieted; it began its steady, effortless striding through the crowding trees—but now with none of that speed with which it had come, spurred forward by Norhala's awakened hate.

Ventnor stirred; broke the silence. And now I saw how wasted was his body, how sharpened his face; almost ethereal; purged not only by suffering but by, it came to me, some strange, new knowledge.

"No use, Drake," he said dreamily. "All this is now on the knees of the gods. And whether those gods be humanity's or whether they be—Gods of Metal—I do not know.

"But this I do know—only one way or another can the balance fall; and if it be one way, then you and we shall have Ruth back. And if it falls the other way—then there will be little need for us to care. For man will be done!"

"Martin! What do you mean?"

"It is the crisis," he answered. "We can do nothing, Goodwin—nothing. Whatever it is that is to be steps forth now from the womb of Destiny."

Again there came that distant rolling—louder, now. Again the Thing trembled.

"The drums," whispered Ventnor. "The drums of destiny! What is it they are heralding? A new birth of Earth and the passing of man? A new child to whom shall be given dominion — nay, to whom has been given dominion? Or is it—taps—for Them?"

The drumming died as I listened—fearfully. About us was only the swishing, the sighing of the falling trees beneath the tread of the Thing. Motionless stood Norhala; motionless Ruth.

"Martin!" I cried once more, a dreadful doubt upon me; I searched his face for sign of weakened sanity. "Martin—what do you mean?"

"Whence did—They—come?" His voice was clear and calm, the eyes beneath the red brand clear and quiet, too. "Whence did They come—these Things that carry us; that strode like destroying angels over Cherkis's city? Are they spawn of Earth—as we are? Or are they foster children—changelings from another star?

"These creatures that when many still are one—that when one still are many! Whence did They come? What are They?"

He looked down upon the cubes that held us; their hosts of tiny eyes shone up at him, enigmatically—as though they had heard and understood.

"I do not forget," he said. "At least not all do I forget of what I saw during that time when I seemed an atom outside space—as I told you, or think I told you, speaking with unthinkable effort through lips that seemed eternities away from me, the atom, who strove to open them.

"There were three—visions, revelations—I know not what to call them. And though each seemed equally real, of two of them, only one, I think, can be true; and of the third—that may some time be true but surely is not yet."

CHAPTER XLI.

THE GATHERING STORM.

THROUGH the air came a louder drum roll—in it something ominous, something sinister. It swelled to a crescendo; abruptly ceased. And now I saw Norhala raise her head; listen.

"I saw a world, a vast world, Goodwin, marching stately through space. It was no globe—it was a world of many facets, of smooth and polished planes; a huge blue jewel world, dimly luminous; a crystal world cut out from aether! A geometric thought of the Great Cause, of God if you will, made material! It was airless, waterless, sunless.

"I seemed to draw closer to it. And then I saw that over every facet patterns

were traced; gigantic symmetrical designs; mathematical heiroglyphs. In them I read unthinkable calculations, formulas of interwoven universes, arithmetical progressions of armies of stars, pandects of the motions of the suns. In the patterns was an appalling harmony—as though all the laws from those which guide the atom to those which direct the cosmos were there resolved into completeness—totalled!

"The faceted world was like a cosmic abacist, tallying as it marched the errors of the infinite.

"The patterned symbols constantly changed form. I drew nearer—the symbols were alive! They were, in untold numbers—These!"

He pointed to the Thing that bore us.

"I was swept back; looked again upon it from afar. And a fantastic notion came to me—fantasy it was, of course, yet built I know around a nucleous of strange truth. It was"—his tone was half whimsical, half apologetic—"it was that this jeweled world was ridden by some mathematical god, driving it through space, noting occasionally with amused tolerance the very bad arithmetic of another Deity the reverse of mathematical—a more or less haphazard Deity, the god, in fact, of us and the things we call living.

"It had no mission; it wasn't at all out to do any reforming; it wasn't in the least concerned in rectifying any of the inaccuracies of the Other. Only now and then it took note of the deplorable differences between the worlds it saw and its own impeccably ordered and tidy temple with its equally tidy servitors.

"Just an itinerant demiurge of supergeometry riding along through space on its perfectly summed-up world; master of all celestial mechanics; its people independent of all that complex chemistry and labor for equilibrium by which we live; needing neither air nor water, heeding neither heat nor cold; fed with the magnetism of interstellar space and stopping now and then to banquet off the energy of some great sun."

A thrill of amazement passed through me; fantasy all this might be but—how, if so, had he gotten that last thought? He had not seen, as we had, the orgy in the Hall of the Cones, the prodigious feeding of the Metal Monster upon our sun!

"That passed," he went on, unnoticing. "I saw vast caverns filled with the Things; working, growing, multiplying. In caverns of our Earth—the fruit of some unguessed womb? I do not know.

"But in those caverns, under countless orbs of many colored light"—again the thrill of amaze shook me—"they grew. It came to me that they were reaching out toward sunlight and the open. They burst into it—into yellow, glowing sunlight. Ours? I do not know. And that picture passed."

His voice deepened.

"There came a third vision. I saw our Earth—I knew, Goodwin, indisputably, unmistakably that it was our earth. But its rolling hills were leveled, its mountains were ground and shaped into cold and polished symbols—geometric, fashioned!

"The seas were fettered, gleaming like immense jewels in patterned settings of crystal shores. The very Polar ice was chiseled! On the ordered plains were traced the heiroglyphs of the faceted world! And on all Earth, Goodwin, there was no green life, no city, no trace of man! On this Earth that had been ours were only—These!"

"Good God!" I whispered.

"Visioning!" he said. "Don't think that I accept them in their entirety. Part truth, part illusion—the groping mind dazzled with light of unfamiliar truths and making pictures from half light and whole shadow to help it understand.

"But still—*some* truth in them. How much I do not know. But this I do know—that last vision was of a cataclysm whose beginnings we face now—this very instant!"

A picture flashed behind my own eyes—of the walled city, its thronging people, its groves and gardens, its science and its art; of the Destroying Shapes trampling it flat—and then the dreadful, desolate mount!

And suddenly I saw that mount as Earth—the city as Earth's cities—its gardens and groves as Earth's fields and forests—and the vanished people of Cherkis seemed to expand into all humanity!

"But Martin," I stammered, fighting against choking, intolerable terror, "there was something else. Something of the Keeper of the Cones and of our striking through the sun to destroy the Things—something of them being governed by the same laws that govern us and that if they broke them they must fall! A hope—a *promise,* that they would *not* conquer!"

"I do remember," he replied, "but not clearly. There *was* something—a shadow upon them, a menace. It was a shadow that seemed to be born of our own world—some threatening spirit of earth hovering over them.

"I cannot remember; it eludes me. Yet it is because I remember but a little of it that I say those drums may not be—taps—for us but for the Things."

As though his words had been a cue the sounds again burst forth—no longer muffled nor faint. They roared; they seemed to pelt through air and drop upon us; they beat about our ears with thunderous tattoo like covered caverns drummed upon by Titans with trunks of great trees.

The drumming did not die; it grew louder, more vehement; defiant and deafening. Within the Thing under us a mighty pulse began to throb, accelerating rapidly to the rhythm of that clamorous roll.

I saw Norhala draw herself up, sharply; stand listening and alert. Under me the throbbing turned to an uneasy churning, a ferment.

"Drums?" muttered Drake. "*They're* no drums! It's drum fire. It's like a dozen Marnes, a dozen Verduns. But where could batteries like those come from?"

"Drums!" whispered Ventnor. "They *are* drums! The drums of Destiny!"

Louder the roaring grew. Now it was a tremendous, rhythmic cannonading. The Thing halted. The tower that upheld Ruth and Norhala swayed, bent over the gap between us, touched the top on which we rode. Gently the two were plucked up; swiftly they were set beside us!

Came a shrill, keen wailing—louder than ever I had heard before. There was an earthquake trembling; a maelstrom swirling in which we spun; a swift sinking.

The Thing split in two! Up before us rose a stupendous, stepped pyramid; little smaller it was than that which Cheops built to throw its shadows across holy Nile. Into it streamed, over it clicked, score upon score of cubes, building it higher and higher. It lurched forward—away from us!

From Norhala came a single cry—resonant, blaring like a wrathful, golden trumpet. The speeding shape halted, hesitated; it seemed about to return. Crashed down upon us an abrupt crescendo of the distant drumming; peremptory, commanding. The shape darted forward; raced away crushing to straw the trees beneath it in a full quarter-mile-wide swath.

Great gray eyes wide, filled with incredulous wonder, stunned disbelief, Norhala for an instant faltered. Then out of her white throat, through her red lips pelted a tempest of staccato buglings.

Under them what was left of the Thing leaped, tore on. Norhala's flaming hair crackled and streamed; about her body of milk of pearl—about Ruth's creamy skin—a radiant nimbus began to glow.

In the distance I saw a sapphire spark; knew it for Norhala's home. Not far from it now was the rushing pyramid—and it came to me that within that shape was strangely neither globe nor pyramid. Nor except for the trembling cubes that made the platform on which we stood, did the shrunken Thing carrying us hold any unit of the Metal Monster save its spheres and tetrahedrons—at least within its visible bulk!

The sapphire spark had grown to a glimmering azure marble. Steadily we gained upon the pyramid. Never for an instant ceased that scourging hail of notes from Norhala—never for an instant lessened the drumming clamor that seemed to try to smother them.

The sapphire marble became a sapphire ball, a great globe. I saw the Thing we sought to join lift itself into a prodigious pillar; the pillar's base thrust forth stilts; upon them the Thing stepped over the blue dome of Norhala's house!

The blue bubble was close; now it curved below us. Gently we were lifted down; were set before its portal. I looked up the bulk that had carried us.

I had been right—built it was only of globe and pyramid; an inconceivably grotesque shape, tall as Times Tower, it hung over us. Out from its base swirled a half score of spheres, a half-dozen pyramids.

Throughout the towering Shape was awful movement; its units writhed in it. Then it was lost to sight in the mists through which the Thing we had pursued had gone.

In Norhala's face as she watched it go was a dismay, a poignant uncertainty, that held in it something indescribably pitiful.

"I am afraid!" I heard her whisper. She tightened her grasp upon dreaming Ruth; motioned us to go within. We passed, silently; behind us she came, followed by three of the great globes, by a pair of her tetrahedrons.

Beside a pile of the silken stuffs she halted. The girl's eyes dwelt upon hers trustfully.

"I am afraid!" whispered Norhala again. "Afraid—for you!"

Tenderly she looked down upon her, the galaxies of stars in her eyes all soft and tremulous.

"I am afraid, little sister," she whispered for the third time. "Not yet I know can you go as I do—among the fires." She hesitated. "Rest here until I return. I shall leave these to guard and obey you."

She motioned to the five shapes. They ranged themselves about Ruth. Norhala kissed her upon both brown eyes.

"Sleep till I return!" she murmured.

She swept from the chamber—with never a glance for us three. I heard a little wailing chorus without, fast dying into silence.

Spheres and pyramids twinkled at us, guarding the silken pile whereon Ruth lay asleep—like some enchanted princess.

Beat down upon the blue globe like hollow metal worlds, beaten and shrieking!

The drums of Destiny!

The drums of Doom?

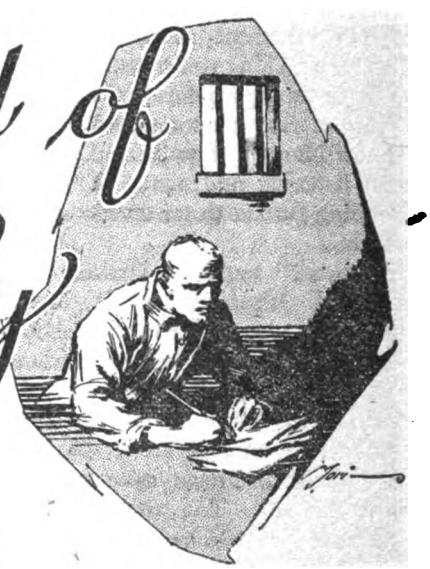
Beating taps for the world of men?

Or for the Metal Monster?

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 Head of the Family

by Roy W. Hinds



LETTER-DAY in the big prison came once every two weeks. An envelope and writing-paper were delivered to each prisoner, and he could write to a relative or a friend about anything he chose—as long as he didn't choose to criticise the administration of the prison or to ask for saws and firearms.

For the most part the prisoners wrote about paroles and pardons. They beseeched their relatives and friends to quicken their activities. Many wrote directly to

the Governor of the State, who of course never saw their letters. Hundreds of these sad epistles were addressed to his excellency every two weeks.

The days following letter-day were times of tense expectancy. Each prisoner assured himself that he had couched his latest appeal in terms which it were impossible to ignore. Hope rose high the day the letters were known to have left the "front office"; wavered uncertainly for two or three days, and then gave way to despair. The prisoners, among themselves, had various opinions as to why their appeals were denied or ignored.

One man—he had been in something like fourteen years—had an idea that some one in the Governor's office, a clerk perhaps, was plotting against him. He felt sure that some underofficial had concentrated the machinery of his job on the task of keeping him inside. He knew this because neither the Governor nor any of the Governor's clerks ever answered his letters. He felt sure that some one kept them from the Governor. The Governor couldn't ignore the justice of his appeal!

This man had no one else to write to, so once every two weeks he wrote to the Governor. Years and years ago, another Governor's clerk had notified him briefly that his application had been received and placed on file. That letter of three lines, so inspiring at the time, was the only word this man had ever got in reply.

Other prisoners laid their plight on the general cussedness of the Governor himself; others to powerful politicians who were afraid to have them at liberty; others to the intervention of the warden. All were sure, or at least said they were sure, that they were the victims of plots.

Midway between letter-days hope in the prison was at a low ebb, but with the approach of another chance to write appeals spirits began to ascend until the highest point was reached again. Once more the old story—and so on through the endless years.

Tobacco-day at the prison came once a week, upon which a small plug of chewing-tobacco was rationed out to each prisoner. If he wished, a prisoner could exchange his two plugs of tobacco for material enough to write an extra letter.

Thus once every two weeks a prisoner who didn't use tobacco could write two letters.

That was what "Old" Jeffrey did during the seven years and four months he had spent inside the somber walls.

Jeffrey was his name, but the "Old" had been prefixed to that because he wasn't young any more—because everything about him was old. He was old in his shuffling gait, in his pinched face, in his thin white hair; in his bent leanness, in his feeble movements, in his trembling voice—in everything. And all the prisoners and keepers knew him as Old Jeffrey.

Old Jeffrey was doing fifteen years. He had something like five years to go, counting off good time.

One day he was taken sick at his job in the shoe-shop and removed to the hospital. He was feverish and delirious, and talked a great deal about his boy; but Old Jeffrey had been talking for seven years about his boy. He had bored other prisoners with innumerable stories on the subject, and whenever he could catch the ear of a guard—as he often did, for he was a harmless and beloved character of the prison—he talked about his boy.

He told in detail of the boy's infancy, his boyhood, his young manhood. He described his appearance at all these stages and related volumes of bright things the boy had said. Old Jeffrey's boy came to be as well known in prison as among his friends on the outside.

Some of the prisoners listened to the stories of Old Jeffrey, and asked him kindly questions, which delighted him; but after a time his talk grew wearisome, and he could hardly find a man to listen to him.

Thus when he fell sick it was natural that he talked of the boy. And it was also natural that the prison nurses who attended him, and the prison physician should not take an absorbing interest in the rambling talk of Old Jeffrey.

But there was one man in the big prison who took more interest in Old Jeffrey. He was a young clerk in the office of Warden Dick. His name was Tom Reynolds.

The prison, to young Tom Reynolds, was always an interesting place. From the day he began work there he sought opportunity to mingle with the prisoners. He knew them all, or most of them, by name. He had an agreeable personality and abundant sympathy. He helped the prisoners whenever he could.

Tom Reynolds had grown very fond of Old Jeffrey and went to the hospital to see him.

"Wouldn't you like to see your boy?" he asked the old man.

Old Jeffrey glanced up quickly.

"Am I going to die?" he demanded in a weak, frightened voice.

"No—I don't know as you're going to die," Tom Reynolds answered evasively. "But you're pretty sick, and I thought you might want to see the boy."

The old man meditated. "I don't want him brought here," he said finally. "You see, he—he don't know where I am; and I don't want him to know."

"But he'll know some day, won't he?"

"How will he know?"

"Well, he'll—I don't know; it seems that—"

Tom Reynolds finished lamely, for he had it in his mind to say that the boy would be notified when Old Jeffrey died; and he didn't want to talk about death to Old Jeffrey.

Old Jeffrey begged Tom Reynolds not to seek out the boy, but Tom got away without committing himself to a promise. The young clerk went back to his work in the administration building.

One of Tom Reynolds's tasks, his principal task, in fact, was reading the letters written by prisoners, as well as reading their incoming mail. In that way he knew a great deal about their personal affairs. All that forenoon Tom Reynolds meditated upon the sad case of Old Jeffrey. He recalled all his letters of the last three years, and then he went to Warden Dick.

"Mr. Dick," said he, "have you got time to listen to a sad story?"

"Is it about the prisoners?" the warden inquired.

"It's about a prisoner—Old Jeffrey."

The warden studied his clerk thoughtfully. Warden Dick was a kindly man, and he admired Tom's interest in suffering humanity.

Presently the warden said: "Fire away."

"Old Jeffrey is sick," Tom began, "and Dr. Echols thinks he's going to die."

"Dr. Echols told me that," said the warden, "and I've been going to look into his case."

"I'm glad to hear you say that. And maybe there's a phase of his case that I can enlighten you on. Old Jeffrey has a boy—a young man now."

"Every one in the prison knows that. Old Jeffrey has told every one about his boy."

"Yes, I know," Tom Reynolds agreed, but you see I've been reading Old Jeffrey's mail for three years now. Every two weeks he writes two letters, and every two weeks he gets one letter. One letter he writes to a friend, another old man, I guess—named William Fane. The other letter is also addressed to William Fane, but it's written to the boy. It's written on blank paper, and Fane apparently mails it to the boy. The boy doesn't know where Old Jeffrey is, but he writes back to Fane, who in his letters to Old Jeffrey tells most of the things the boys says.

"They've got a scheme some way to keep up intercourse between Old Jeffrey and the boy without the boy knowing where his father is.

"Fane never mails the boy's letters to Old Jeffrey, and I have an idea that they don't want us to know the boy's address, or to get any indication as to his business. Undoubtedly he's a long way off, but Fane lives in Washburn, only fifty miles away from the prison."

Tom Reynolds paused. He and the warden exchanged glances.

"Well," the warden asked, "what do you want me to do about it?"

"I thought," Tom replied, "that it might be a nice thing to let Old Jeffrey see the boy before he died."

"You mean bring the boy to the prison?"

"Yes—bring him here."

"But maybe it would be better to keep

the boy in ignorance of the fact that his father is in jail."

"That's what Old Jeffrey thinks," Tom argued, "but the boy is bound to find it out some day. Isn't it a rule that you have to notify relatives of prisoners who die in prison?"

"Not unless the prisoner has given the name of the relatives for his records."

"That's right," Tom recalled, "and Old Jeffrey never has given the name of the boy, or his address. The letters always start out: 'Dear Son.' But," he added, "I think the boy ought to know. He'll know some day—when Old Jeffrey's letters stop—and then he'll start an inquiry. I think Old Jeffrey would die easy if the boy walked in on him, told him everything was all right, and that he'd always—always—well, you know!"

"Yes, I know," Warden Dick reflected. "If the boy amounts to anything, I don't see why he shouldn't wish to ease the old man's last hours; if he doesn't want to do that, I don't know as it makes much difference whether he knows where his father is."

"The boy, apparently, is the only relative Old Jeffrey has," Tom suggested. "The boy's mother, Old Jeffrey told me, died twenty-five years ago, when the son was a baby. The old man won't talk about the mother—much; except to indicate in a general way that it was a perfect love affair. It may be, you know, that the wife's death was what sent Old Jeffrey to the bad. He's got quite a record; but he's a lovable old man for all that."

"Yes," the warden agreed; "every one likes Old Jeffrey."

"And Old Jeffrey," Tom went on enthusiastically, "is the only man in this prison who hasn't written letters asking for a parole or a pardon. Of course, he doesn't mention anything like that in his letters to the boy; but in his letters to his best friend, William Fane, he never asks that any one try to get him out. His life, I tell you, is wrapped up in that boy. Why, Mr. Dick, you ought to read some of the letters Old Jeffrey writes to that son of his!"

"'Good letters, are they?"

"They're the finest letters a father ever wrote to a son! There never is a word in 'em that doesn't reflect in some way the old man's great love for the boy. He counsels him about his companions and the dangers a young man runs. He seems to live for just one thing—and that's to keep the boy straight. Those letters, I tell you, are classics in advice from a father. And through every line is a burning desire to see the boy and spend his last days with him."

"It's tough, isn't it?" the warden sighed sympathetically.

"Tough is no word for it. And that old man is bound to put in all his time simply because he's afraid the boy will find out the truth if the newspapers print anything about a parole or a pardon. The boy was pretty much of a kid seven years ago, and a long way away, I guess; but now Old Jeffrey is afraid he might be more observing of the newspapers. And Old Jeffrey is afraid the papers will dig up his past, if an application is made for a parole or pardon. That's what I gather from his letters to this William Fane."

"And William Fane writes him what the boy says, eh?"

"Yes, but he doesn't write him half enough. Old Jeffrey begs and begs for more news, and then cautions Fane not to send any of the boy's letters to the prison. Fane then writes as much as he can, or as much as he thinks best, and lets it go at that. Never a word does he say about the boy's business, but he always lets him know that the boy is going straight and making a man of himself."

The young man gazed appealingly into the eyes of Warden Dick.

The warden smiled. He liked Tom's enthusiasm and his sympathy.

"It might be well for us to know the boy's address, anyway," Warden Dick said presently. "I'll let you take a trip over to Washburn, Tom, and see this man Fane. If you can get the address out of him, communicate with me, and I'll tell you what to do. In the mean time, I'll watch Old Jeffrey, and if it is a certainty that he's going to die soon I'll let you go and have a talk with the boy."

"Thanks, Mr. Dick!" Tom exclaimed.

And Tom Reynolds called upon William Fane at Washburn. He found him apparently a well-to-do old man living with his wife in a small cottage. Mrs. Fane was white-haired and motherly, but neither would give the address of Old Jeffrey's son.

"It's something that I've sworn not to do," said Mr. Fane.

"But Mr. Jeffrey is going to die," Tom finally told them.

"Die?" the old man inquired numbly.

"Yes," said the young man. "He's very sick."

Then Mrs. Fane suggested: "I think, William, that you ought to tell him; and tell him all you know."

William Fane meditated a long time, and asked many questions, to assure himself that his old friend really was near death, and that Tom Reynolds had no motive other than sympathy.

Presently he said: "There isn't much to tell about Charley Jeffrey. He and I were young men together. He came of a good family, and early in life fell in love with a young woman. She met another young man and married him. It broke Charley's heart. He really loved her, and loved her so much that he never could love another woman. Then we lost sight of him for years. He turned up finally as a middle-aged man, and stories got around that he had served time in prison.

"He had become a swindler, and all the rest of his life went to prove that the old unfortunate love affair made of him a crook—or unsettled his mind to such an extent that he didn't care what became of him.

"His friends tried to get him back on his feet, but he alternately went to prison and crime—from one to the other he went for years; until seven years or so ago he was sentenced to fifteen years, and I guess that will be the end of Charley Jeffrey. He never married. I sometimes think that he should have married another girl and raised a family."

The old man spoke very sadly. Mrs. Fane wept quietly. Tom Reynolds was bewildered.

"But you say he never married?" Tom inquired finally. "How about this son—this boy he talks about and writes to?"

"My boy," William Fane answered, "Charley Jeffrey never had a son. He never married—and never had a son."

"Never had a son!"

Whereupon Mrs. Fane interjected:

"Don't you see, Mr. Reynolds, that was what Charley Jeffrey wanted more than anything else in the world? He wanted to be the head of a family, but he didn't realize it until he was sent to prison for the last time. That was what his heart craved—a son. He would have made a splendid father, if he had married."

"But the letters he wrote to—to—"

"That was the thing he did to satisfy a craving that he couldn't satisfy any other way," said Mrs. Fane. "We helped him make believe, and I think he got to believe that he really did have a son. He talked to his make-believe boy just as a father would talk to a real son. Don't you see what a son would have been to him? Poor Charley Jeffrey!"

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A NURSERY RIME

A NURSERY'S the place where the cry-babies cry,
And the bath-babies bathe, and the bye-babies bye.
And all through the day there is dandling and din,
Bright flowers peep out, and bright sunshine pours in.
And all through the night-time the night-light burns clear,
And white wings of angels are hovering near.

So creepy-crawl babies must creep in the sun,
And toddle-tot babies must learn how to run,
And wee little babies who weepy-bye weep
Must shut up their peeps and go sleepy-bye sleep.

A. M. Devoore.

IF they had ever put a water-meter in Uncle " 'Bim's " house, he would have died of thirst. He was so close he was almost adjacent.

And he had something to hoard. There are misers who hoard for the principle of the thing, without anything worth while to hoard. But Uncle 'Bim's roll was of the size proverbially said to be sufficient to asphyxiate a cow.

Money and whiskers—they were Uncle 'Bim's stock in trade, and he had an abundance of both. His chin served as the point of suspension for a perfect Niagara of golden-grizzled curtains that rendered unnecessary a necktie and almost made a shirt a luxury. In cold weather, especially if it were windy, he would ensconce the precious hangings inside his vest and button them snugly there to avoid the buffetings of cruel and disrespectful blasts and let them serve as a cheap home-grown chest-protector. Hours at a time he would sit and figure up the cost of thrice a week shaving, and compute the interest on it for twenty years. The sum always made him chuckle and regard his whiskers gratefully and caress them lovingly. Thus it will be seen that his two fads were more than sentimentally related to each other. The foliage had contributed largely to the roll.

Now, a rich uncle without poor nephews or nieces or both is an impossibility, literally, dramatically, traditionally, and every other way. To begin with, if he had no nieces or nephews he wouldn't be an uncle, would he? 'Course not. And if none of the nepotists and nepotistes were poor, how would it be noticed, and why should it be mentioned as a distinction that the uncle was the " rich " uncle? And here you have it. As the English say, that's that.

Among the most hopeful of the whiskered 'Bim's nephews was his namesake, 'Bim Boyd, who lived and moved and had his being together with his family of wife and four children, wherever 'Bim could rent a house. They moved only as often as they were compelled, and had their various impoverished beings in a city a hundred miles from the abode of the fringed and financial uncle. Many a night did 'Bim Boyd and Celesta, his wife, sit in the darkness after the crowded children had been bedded down, and discuss in hushed whispers what they would do if Uncle 'Bim really should kick out and leave them the wad of which, as the lawyers say, they knew him to be " seized." Beautiful homes they built, beautiful cars they bought, lovely educations they gave their children, with the money they expected to get some day when their vessel, shaped like Uncle 'Bim, and with every stitch of whis-

kery canvas spread, should be warped into port and tied to the snubbing post.

So when it became known, through a letter written by himself, in a cramped and crabbed handwriting, that the golden uncle was about to visit the namesake nephew and his family, excitement ran high in the tribe of Boyd. Furbishing and other preparations began. Every effort was made to render the modest little rented cottage as neat and trim and as attractive as it could be made. Signs of poverty must not be hid—no, no! But it must be made to appear that the Boyds were "doing marvels on what they had; and that if they just had the means," oh, wowie!

"I understand," said Mrs. Boyd to her husband, as they were looking over the field for weak spots in their preparatory reception-committee work, "that the best housekeepers nowadays eat on a bare table, with just doilies and things instead of a table-cloth."

"Uhuh," said her husband doubtfully. The little niceties and amenities were not clear in his mind. But Mrs. Boyd was a woman, and had learned and absorbed far more of such matters, even with her limited observations, than her husband had. But he was a game guy, and had the most profound regard for and confidence in his wife's judgment and taste. So he chirked up and said:

"Hop to it, kid! Whatever you say goes."

"But our old table-top looks so punk! It needs polish and varnish and everything to make it appear as tables do where they don't use table-cloths."

"Well, I'll bite. Now, tell me what's the answer?" asked the nearly perturbed husband.

"Some kinds of varnish will dry over night. And as it is almost a day and a half before dear Uncle 'Bim is to arrive, why can't you get me a can and we will fix the old table up to look like a new baby grand piano."

"You said it. I'm going down past the paint-shop and I'll get it."

He did.

The wife washed the table thoroughly, dried it completely, and proceeded to apply the sticky stuff, which she laid on swiftly in long, smooth, skilful brushfuls. Within half an hour the table-top was ready to dry and become a thing beautiful and mirrorlike.

The family ate off a dry-goods box and a card-table for lunch, dinner, and breakfast, leaving the table-top undisturbed.

"We want to give it plenty of time," said the practical Mrs. Boyd.

But as luncheon time approached, and the time for Uncle 'Bim's arrival did ditto, she tentatively touched the top with her fingers, finding it apparently hard. She got out her nicely ironed doilies of dainty pattern and put one at each place, a large one in the center. Then she stood off and surveyed her handiwork, the survey resulting in a sigh such as comes from the chest of an artist who has wrought well and effectively. That finished, she bent her energies to the preparation of the luncheon itself. A dainty menu she had prepared—dainty but substantial. For Uncle 'Bim had been reared on a farm where something sustaining was supposed to be put before family and guests at every meal. When she got the viands all lined up and going right, she felt as if any dereliction on the part of Uncle 'Bim with regard to his money could not be laid at her door, at least. She had done her part. She had Marthaed all over the place.

Uncle 'Bim's train was not to arrive till twelve thirty. It was a holiday, and the children were not in school. About twelve or earlier they began gathering about the kitchen and dining-room asking the time-honored question as to the time when dinner would be served. They were zealously shooed away from the nice, shiny table-top, on which lay the dainty circlets to which they were all but total strangers.

Finally Uncle 'Bim arrived from the train, in tow of the poor, proud and palpitant nephew-namesake. An elaborate introduction all around was followed by whispered conversations and poorly screened snickers behind their hands, among the children. The exuberant growth of spinach upon the old man's prognathous lower jaw had not escaped their attention, you may rest assured. In these days of

almost total smooth-shavedness, their uncle was a freak. The parents anxiously suppressed the titters among their disrespectful, untactful and unthrifty progeny, and the scene was saved, temporarily at least.

When they were seated at the table, Mr. Boyd requested Uncle 'Bim to say grace, knowing the old gentleman to be somewhat religiously inclined. As he bent his head, reverently, the long, silken whiskers dragged the table, and one of Uncle 'Bim's heavy hands lay upon the gold-grizzled strands. At the mumbled "Amen," the others raised their heads. Uncle 'Bim did not. He started to, true enough, but his head bent quickly back toward the table while a clearly audible "Ouch," followed by some words that had nothing whatever to do with the blessing he had just asked, broke the churchlike silence.

With downright horror that left them cold through and through, the nephew and niece noted that the old gentleman's lambrequins had adhered firmly to the tabletop. The weight of his hand had pressed the beard down just hard enough to make them stick firmly and neatly. With tender care while the elder Boyds stood about and wrung their helpless hands and proffered timid and heart-broken assistance, the old man struggled with the clinging tresses. He tried first to detach individual strands; that proving a hopeless, endless and futile plan, he grew desperate, blurted out a few round, mule-driving cuss words, leaned back, braced both his hands upon the surface of the table, palm down, and heaved. Most of the whiskers came loose, some from their anchorage on the table, some from the other and more sensitive region. Some still clung. But the old man's hands were there to stay. His bodily heat and the slight perspiration that had been increased vastly by pain, anger and excitement, now made the union between flesh and wood complete and well-nigh permanent.

Finally one hand wrenched loose, leaving some of its cuticle upon the table. With the freshly freed hand he grabbed such of his beard as still clung to the sticky surface, and gave a great pull. That resulted successfully so far as releasing most of the remaining locks from their moorings was concerned, but his hand would not let go of the whiskery skein.

Now all this time, had you been a child-witness to this affair, what should you have done? You know! The Boyd children were normal, healthy children inured to poverty and not carried away with vivid dreams of pomp and glitter and acute prosperity. They were eager for fun. They knew a funny thing when they saw it. The time to laugh is when you are tickled. So while they stood and watched the new-found and hirsute relative fight with the table, with his whiskers and with his own hand, and use the most terrible language just on the heels of his own devout supplication, and make fearful faces and snarl and whoop and glare, they laughed until they wept; till they were weak; till they fell down in their tracks; they laughed loudly, unrestrainedly, so as to bring in the simple neighbors, who knew that so much hilarity must be sharable and certainly held no family secret.

Finally, in the midst of a crowd of total strangers, interspersed with the laughing Boyd children and the all-but-weeping Boyd adults, Uncle 'Bim got his whiskers and his hands and the table identified and separated with some degree of permanence. Mrs. Boyd, at his request, took her scissors and cut away such portions of the treasured tresses as were hopelessly engooed.

"Give the table a hair-cut, too," yelled the eldest Boyd boy, aged ten, while the delighted neighbors applauded.

As the neighbors laughed, the other children screamed, the elder Boyds *sh-sh-ed*, and Uncle 'Bim scowled.

"Where's my carpet-sack at?" was Uncle 'Bim's first utterance after he had become extricated.

Nephew 'Bim brought it to him, wordlessly, his sympathy and hopelessness showing in his face.

The wife was sobbing her heart out on her bed, two rooms away, the goo-smeared scissors, some whiskers clinging to them, still in her hand.

Uncle 'Bim went away, looking back only once. There were malediction and

hate and poisoned darts in that one malevolent glance. The whoops of the children's laughter serenaded him out of the block, while the neighbors went home wiping the tears of mirth from their eyes.

Abimilech Jeffries had had a romance in his life. It had not always been all money and whiskers with him. In the heyday of his youth he had been a lover and had had a real, honest-to-goodness sweetheart. They had fallen out, partly on account of Abimilech's set ways, and partly through an ordinary lover's quarrel. Never since that day of their separation had Abimilech felt so wretchedly as he felt on his way back from his ill-begun, soon-ended visit to his relatives' home. He had had a selfish sense of triumph—a very petty one to be sure—in the magnificent growth of facial adornment or concealment as the case may be. He knew his former sweetheart detested these whiskers, and he had glorified the more in flaunting them before her since she would not have the man behind them.

And now it was his wretched luck to encounter her, on the way from the railroad-station to his own house, in the town where he lived.

The whiskers were torn and disheveled, as if birds had built nests in them and been clubbed out. Their exit had left a gory depression on his face. His eyes were bloodshot, his face was crimson with shame—he was a changed Abimilech from the proud and bewhiskered man who had departed in a cloud of glory and lilacs for the neighboring city.

Did she laugh? Uncle 'Bim could hardly be sure, but he felt that she did, and he groaned inwardly with humiliation. The madness had nearly all effervesced. Rushing home he seized a razor, and soon the entire camouflage was wiped away. He even felt so discouraged and so discourteous toward the former object of his worship as to dump the whole dashed red-grizzled crop into the ash can. Then he washed and soothed his tortured face with healing lotions and ventured to look in the glass.

What he saw surprised him. He was almost incredulous. Could that good-looking, well-preserved man of scarcely middle age be the same one who had been going around in ambush and thinking himself old, all these years? Surely not! Why, he was almost handsome! He saw now why the objections of Eliza Polk to his unshavedness had been so strenuous and so bitter.

He would put on his Sunday-go-meetings once again and march forth to conquest. He would ask permission to call on Eliza Polk that very evening. She had looked as charming to-day as she had on the day they separated in anger fifteen years previously.

When he came back to his own home that night about eleven, he was walking with the springiness of youth. He was whistling a gay tune. He lit a lamp and took a look at himself in the glass—a roguish, rosy-cheeked look; and he smiled—nay, he laughed. He thought of the scene at his nephew's, but that had not been he who had cut such a ridiculous figure—no! That was an old gink with long, funny pappy-guys down to here! How those kids did laugh, God bless them; and who could blame them? He sat down and laughed until there were tears in his own eyes. Leaned away back in his chair, utterly relaxed, and laughed and laughed until he was helpless.

Fine folks, those Boyds! Smart kids, too! And if they hadn't invited him to eat at their freshly varnished table, he would still be an old man with long whiskers, getting ready to die. He owed them—how much? Well, he owed them a few years of his life, and that was worth something, wasn't it? And he owed them herself, didn't he? And wasn't she—well, Uncle 'Bim would say she was worth all of that and more!

Hunting up his fountain pen, he refilled it, got his check-book out from his desk, and when he arose the blotter on his desk showed the reverse English of five figures, four of them ciphers. One couldn't quite tell what the first one had been.

But the name of the payee was Abimilech Boyd.

A Speck in the Night

by Stephen Allen Reynolds

ON the flat-topped desk of the local manager of the Southwestern Smelting & Refining Company, weighted with an ornamental ingot of annealed copper to keep the current of the electric fan from wafting out of the open window and strewing them over El Paso's suburbs, lay a pile of double-checked assay reports awaiting the signature of the manager before mailing to the various clients whose ore had been tested that day.

It was a sultry evening in July, and despite its altitude, El Paso was experiencing a hot spell which kept the soda fountains busy and the bars lined two deep with thirsty customers.

Damning the weather, the flies, the carboy of acid which had spilled and practically burned the leg off a Mexican laborer, the manager dashed into his office and attacked the pile of reports. Blotter in hand, a clerk stood near while the manager scratched his signature on form after form.

"I see these are all for Arizona and New Mexico points, Charley," the manager said as he finished and looked at the clock. "The last Western mail has gone by this time, and if you want to lock up and run along home it 'll be all right if you get down early in the morning and send these off in the first mail."

"Thank you," the appreciative clerk said smilingly. "That'll give me just time to make dinner without getting bawled out. I'll get this batch off the first thing in the morning."

Good nights were exchanged, the buzz of the electric fan died away, and there followed the sound of closing doors and windows and the clicking of a key being turned in a lock.

The office now lay in semidarkness and a silence disturbed only by the distant hum of trolley cars and the dying buzz of flies settling for the night.

II.

FORTY-TWO miles southeast of Frio City, some seven or eight days before the bursting of the carboy of acid in far-off El Paso, Mr. Rodney Brill sat before his prospector's tent and puffed thoughtfully at his after-supper pipe. The sun had long since disappeared behind the saw-toothed peaks of the rugged Chiricahuas, but the twin heads of Dos Cabezos still glowed with the yellow light of late afternoon, and the reflected rays lit dimly the cactus-studded cañons and narrow valleys. A burro poked disconsolately among the mesquite shrubs near by; and close to the camp-fire, his head between his paws and his eyes on his master's face, lay an Airedale terrier.

"Rags, old boy," Brill said, addressing the dog, "the work's about done here. We'll pack up and hit the trail for Frio City in the morning."

At each word the dog's tail wagged. As the master ceased speaking and commenced cutting up a second pipeful of plug, the dog got up and moved sedately nearer his idol. With his shaggy head resting on the worn moleskin of Brill's knee, Rags awaited further particulars.

"Yes," the prospector went on, "we'll go up to town and see the bright lights and listen to the three-piece orchestra in the Silver Grill. And maybe we'll have a dance and a bottle o' beer to wash the dust out of our throats. And we'll have two big steaks at Gow Loon's place—one steak for you, one for me."

At the word "steak," the big terrier pricked up his ears and wagged his tail violently. He may not have known the purport of the other words, but he knew steaks of old. He had eaten them with his master in the dormitory of the college, he had enjoyed them hot from the dining-car while chained to a pile of trunks in the baggage-car of a rushing train, and on many occasions during his two years of dog life in Southern Arizona he had squatted before his master's table in the Frio City restaurant of one Gow Loon and wolfed a juicy T-bone sirloin from a pan loaned grudgingly by the Chinese proprietor.

"Yes," Rodney Brill resumed after he had gotten his second pipe lighted, "you and Amigo and I will all go to the city to-morrow. And we'll fetch along some of this beautiful rock I've found. It holds copper and lead and silver and gold. But how much I don't know. We're all out of testing chemicals."

Brill puffed away at his pipe. Rags, stiff and mute, pressed hard on his knee and devoured him with his yellow eyes.

"And it may be, old pal," the prospector continued after a time, "that the rock will be rich enough for us to go back East and live there for a while. Stranger things have happened, but we'll know after a few days whether we're to sell Amigo and take the train or pack up and hike back here into these mountains."

The dog sensed that plans of some sort were being formulated. He listened until Brill patted his head, knocked the ashes out of his pipe, and then went on about certain camp duties.

Abreast of the tent the prospector had sunk a horizontal shaft into the cañon wall. It was a test shaft, an irregular hole barely high enough for a man to enter in a crouching position. Now Brill crept into his tunnel, leaving Rags on guard at the entrance.

It was but a few moments later that the master came backing out, a sack of samples over one shoulder and some tools over the other. It had grown darker, but there was still light enough for Brill to see what he was about. He stowed drills and hammer in one of Amigo's panniers, and balanced the other with the ore samples. He prepared as much as he could for an early morning start, and then turned his attention to the fire.

He heaped it high with mesquite branches, for he needed live coals for the Dutch oven pit. Now he sliced bacon and lined the heavy kettle with thick rashers of it. Rags stood by and saw the soaked beans put in, the thick cover placed on, and the whole lowered into the fire-pit. Live coals and earth were then heaped over the oven, and as Amigo came up with jangling bell to nose over the bits of bacon rind, Brill crept into his tent and rolled himself up in his blankets.

Dos Cabezos had grown black, but by the time Rags had finished his nightly prowl around the camp, its twin peaks were silvered by the rising moon and the cañon had become a purple gash in a mystic world all white and gray.

Long before the sun climbed above the range to the eastward Rodney Brill rolled out of his blankets and soused his head in the water-hole fully five minutes' walk from camp. Next he dug out the Dutch oven and shared the beans with Rags. Coffee with canned milk topped off the feast, and while he smoked his pipe Brill knocked down the tent and packed the patient burro.

It was a long hike that day. On the level Brill and his four-footed companions might have covered thirty miles. But the trail to town wound up and around

boulder-strewn slopes where the way had to be picked carefully; it crossed the Chiricahuas and plumbed the depths of a cañon where a giant spiked saguaro stood guard at the entrance. It led by the home ranch of the Chiricahua Cattle Company—the "3-C" outfit—and there, after twenty-two miles of tough going, Rodney Brill spent the night.

Next morning the trail debouched into a broad valley. Better time was made, and as the valley narrowed and the whistle of a locomotive was heard, the twinkling lights of Frio City came into view. Soon Amigo was placed in a corral and regaled on alfalfa and soaked barley. Brill and Rags ate their steaks at Gow Loon's, and then came the momentous duty which had brought the prospector to town.

Ore sack slung over his shoulder, the terrier stepping sedately after him, Brill walked down the main street and entered the combined dance-hall, saloon and gambling place conducted by one Henry Laroque, backer and "grub-staker" of itinerant prospectors for the hidden metal wealth of western New Mexico and southern Arizona.

Things were a bit quiet at the Silver Grill as Rags and his master entered the resort. It was still early in the evening, and save for a railroad man at the faro table in the rear room and a pair of half-drunken cow-punchers draped over the bar, the place was practically deserted. But presently Laroque came in from supper.

"Hello, Brill!" he rumbled. "What brings *you* to town?"

"I've got something here for you to look over," the prospector answered. He tapped the sample sack.

Henry Laroque was a cadaverous individual with bushy eyebrows and sunken cheeks. Avaricious, a hard man to work for and with, he was none too popular in Frio City. Yet, by reason of his wealth, his position as chief caterer of diversion and amusement, he dominated the Arizonan town and usually had his own way.

"Come in," he bade the prospector, and forthwith led the way to his "private office," a five-by-five space partitioned off at one end of the bar.

Brill followed Laroque into the tiny office and squeezed himself onto the stool jammed between the big safe and a battered roll-top desk. The resort owner sank into his swivel chair and glanced up inquiringly at the younger man.

"Think yuh got somethin' good, eh?" he asked.

"Yes. No question about it," the prospector made reply as he fished in his sample sack and drew out several specimens of ore.

Laroque "hefted" the pieces of mineral and then proceeded to scrutinize them closely. Not satisfied with what his naked eye told him, he produced a magnifying glass and went over at least ten of the samples very minutely.

"Humph!" he grunted as he laid the last specimen down, "it's about time yuh found somethin' worth while. Our year expires next month and you and your outfit cost me a good many hundred dollars since yuh last located anything."

A hot retort came to Rodney Brill's lips as he thought of the unfairness of Laroque's assertion. Late in the preceding year he had located a small high-grade silver proposition in the far recesses of the Arivaipas.

Laroque, his grub-staker, had sold this claim to a third party for the nominal sum of ten thousand dollars, and of this sum Brill had received his half. There had been considerable talk around Frio City about the meagerness of the sum paid, but Laroque made much of the fact that the location was too far away from the railroad for the mine to ever amount to much. But, curiously and suspiciously enough, within sixty days the property passed into the possession of the Muschenheim Syndicate at a recorded price of fifty thousand dollars, and it was rumored quite openly that the seller was merely a dummy acting in behalf of Laroque, and the first sale a subterfuge to trick the prospector out of his proper share of the selling value. And shortly after Brill had renewed for another year his grub-staking agreement with Laroque a spur had been built in to the Arivaipa prospect, and Rodney Brill had every reason to believe that he had been cheated out of his half of a small fortune.

"*This* time," Brill stipulated, "if this stuff proves worth while, we'll sell to the syndicate *direct*."

There was a bite to the words which Laroque felt and which he could not very well overlook. He wheeled in his chair and attempted to stare down the young Easterner. But it was no use. Rodney Brill's pale blue eyes, slightly narrowed now, burned straight into the muddy brown eyes of the resort-keeper.

"What d'yuh mean?" the latter asked somewhat thickly.

"I mean just what I say," Brill returned evenly. "I mean that when this second year is up that you and I are to dissolve partnership, and that I'm to have a voice in the sale of the claim represented by these samples."

"So it's that old rumor about the Ariviapa business?" Laroque growled, more for the purpose of masking his feelings than to draw a reply.

And Rodney Brill made none. Tight-lipped, his eyes fastened on the shifty ones of Laroque, he stood for a few moments, and then stuffed the samples one by one back into the bag.

"I'll express 'em off to El Paso the first thing in the mornin'," Laroque said as Brill tossed the sack into a corner. "We oughta get a report inside o' four days."

"I'll be around town," Brill rejoined shortly.

And without further ado, and followed closely by Rags, he stepped into the dance-hall where the three-piece orchestra was tuning up and some early stragglers were commencing to arrive.

"Hello, Rod!" a girl called out at the sight of him.

She slid across the polished floor and seized his calloused hand between both her own. "Now you can teach me that side-rock move to the two-step. Where 've you been hiding yourself these last four months?"

Brill laughed and made some light rejoinder. "Tucson" Lil was light of foot and "easy to look at." But she was different from most of the other girls, and in a way reminded the prospector of girls he had known back East. No breath of scandal had ever been connected with this hazel-eyed desert lily. She was a "pal," a frank worker on percentage, and the main support of a bed-ridden mother. Those who knew the girl danced and jested with her and held aloof from taking further liberties. Strangers who didn't know her were quickly set aright.

It had been one of Brill's greatest pleasures to dance with the right sort of a partner. Tall, lithe and graceful, he was a skilled dancer, and now entered into full enjoyment of the evening. Lil's eyes sparkled as the Easterner whirled her around the room. Never had she experienced the same sensation when dancing with other men: the roustabouts from the railroad yard, the cattle and sheep men from the hills, the half-drunken miners out on a monthly spree. There was a dignity in his movements lacking in the others. No lady of the land could have been treated with greater politeness as between dances Brill escorted her to a table and ordered refreshments. Thoughtfully she sipped her ginger ale and almost sheepishly pocketed her percentage checks.

And Brill, for his part, forgot the hardships of the trail, his labors in the mountains, the grilling rack of daily toil. Watched lovingly from a far corner by Rags, he enjoyed every dance. And as time after time he circled the floor he was a college boy again, an undergraduate of the School of Mines, a youth who took his studies seriously and his amusements lightly.

Several times as the evening wore on the waiter whispered to Lil, and on each occasion she shook her head in a decided negative. Brill was conscious of the interruptions, but had no inkling of their import until Henry Laroque approached their table shortly before midnight.

"Colonel Hardy is waitin' for yuh in box 5," he said rudely, after a poisonous glance at Brill.

The girl flushed. "I'm engaged," she said. "Furthermore, as I've told you before, I won't work boxes or have anything to do with Colonel Hardy. The last time he sat with me he thought that because he bought a bottle of wine he had a right to

insult me. I don't ever want to see him again."

Brill knew Hardy by reputation. He was general manager of a large copper mine near by, a lavish spender and a hard and steady drinker. Now the prospector looked along the row of curtained boxes on the gallery overlooking the dancing-floor. He located box 5, and saw a red-faced man with a gray mustache peering through the partly drawn curtains. But now Laroque was speaking again.

"You're workin' for me," he said angrily. "You're no better 'n any o' the other girls, and when I tell yuh to do a thing, yuh *do* it. I can get a hundred dollars out o' Hardy 'tween now and mornin' if yuh handle him right, and out o' that yuh get your twenty per cent. So unless yuh aim to marry Brill here"—Laroque indicated the young prospector with an exaggerated flourish of his hand—"you'll march up to box 5 and entertain one o' my best customers."

Anger burned dully in Rodney Brill's breast at Laroque's sarcastic reference to him, at the resort keeper's high-handed methods with his employee. And as Lil refused indignantly to either join the colonel or leave her companion and Laroque seized her brutally, anger burst into flame.

"Take your hands off that girl," Brill snapped, rising to his feet, "or I'll lay you out!"

Laroque obeyed in a sense. His clutching fingers left the arm of the girl, then knotted into a fist and struck out savagely. Brill parried the blow and got one in on his own account, but before either of them could harm the other a tawny streak seemed to appear from no place in particular and fifty-five pounds of dog bore Laroque to the floor.

Rags uttered no sound, but a yell of anguish came from his victim as the Airedale buried his tushes to the gums in the armpit of Laroque. Women screamed, dog and man rolled over and over on the floor, and before Brill could separate them a mild panic ensued.

By the time Laroque scrambled to his feet and roared for iodine and a pistol, Tucson Lil and half the women had fled. And now the crowd watched curiously the dénouement of the affair. For Laroque's wounds had been roughly dressed and he stood facing Brill, a pistol in his hand.

A low word to the dog, who stood crouching with bared fangs, and then Rodney Brill addressed himself to his grub-staker.

"You can't shoot me, because I'm unarmed," he said with a smile. And then the smile faded and a stern note came into his voice as he added: "And if you shoot my dog I'll kill you—even if I have to swing for it!"

Face to face the two men stood for a few moments. Close observers saw the pistol hand of Laroque tremble slightly, his eyes waver, and then Brill chose the moment to turn his back and walk away.

He knew that Laroque would not fire.

III.

THREE days passed, and the evening train, California-bound, left mail and passengers at Frio City. A letter bearing the El Paso postmark was later handed to Laroque, and in one corner of the envelope he noted the return card of The Southwestern Smelting & Refining Company. Unquestionably, the grub-staker told himself, this was the assay report on Rodney Brill's samples.

In the privacy of his retreat in the Silver Grill, Laroque slit the envelope and drew forth its enclosure. And then, after casting his eyes over the signed and checked report, a snarl of rage came over him. For the mine prospect was practically worthless. Thirty-two ounces of copper per ton of ore, a fraction over eighteen ounces of silver, a modicum of gold and lead and a trace of other metals, might have made the mine a paying low-grade proposition in some favorable locations; but situated forty-two miles away in the fastnesses of the rugged Chiricahuas, the prospect was out of the question. Better shafts containing richer ore—properties nearer town—had been abandoned after costly experiments in transportation.

Again Laroque read:

In the twenty-three samples submitted by you on the twelfth instant we find proportionate per

ton: Copper 32.05 oz., Antimony 7 oz., Gold .07 oz., Silver 18.05 oz., Lead 3.3 oz., Bismuth, a trace. Very truly yours,

J. K. Earle,
Manager.

Checked:
William F. Blue,
Chief Assayer.

A curse issued from the lips of the resort-keeper as he went on to reflect that his backing of Rodney Brill had been a dead loss to him in so far as the last few months were concerned. And the partnership with this promising young graduate of the School of Mines was to come to an end within a few weeks.

On the point of calling out to his bar-keeper to send some one to find Brill, Laroque stayed his tongue. For a brilliant idea had occurred to him. On the strength of it, and with the object of getting advice, he sent instead for his roulette wheelman, a sharper with a dyed mustache and many schemes for getting money.

"Mine for revenge," Laroque said vaguely when the wheelman had taken his seat under the window which overlooked the gaming-hall.

The man of roulette asked no questions, but cocked a willing ear for particulars which he knew would be forthcoming.

"Here's the case," Laroque went on to say. "I want tuh trim Brill again. I believe he's got three thousand stowed away in his sock somewhere, and I want him tuh buy me out o' my share in the last prospect he staked and worked. It ain't worth a damn. I just got the reports from El Paso, and she carries less'n nineteen ounces o' silver. Now, *he* don't know that I got the report to-night. D' yuh think there's any way o' gettin' him tuh roll the dice and see whether *he* buys me out for three thousand, or I buy *him* out for the same amount?"

"And you want the dice to roll so he buys *you* out?" the wheelman asked with a wink.

"O' course!" Laroque affirmed, almost angrily. "The claim ain't worth a *'dobe* dollar. Three thousand would be all velvet."

The wheelman spent some time in thought, then wagged his head doubtfully. "I dunno," he said presently, "Brill played high when he first came here from the East. He was a dead game sport and often asked me to take the limit off. But I haven't seen him touch a card or a chip in a year. He takes his bottle o' beer with the boys, and when he hits town he gives Tucson Lil a whirl in the dancin' department. But that's about all. I've heard it said that he was a high-roller back East and came from a good family that kinda gave him the go-by for hittin' the cards too hard. Maybe he's swore off."

"Well," Laroque said, after brooding for a space, "there's no harm in my tryin' tuh tempt him. And if he falls I want you to fix the dice so the low man has tuh bury the other feller out."

"All right, chief," the other grinned, "I'll hand you 'sliders' in a smooth cup so you'll be sure to throw high. Lemme know when you're all set."

IV.

To Rodney Brill, at supper in Gow Loon's, came a message from Henry Laroque that the latter wished to see him right away on business.

"The assay report has come," the prospector told himself, and prepared to meet the grub-staker he had come to dislike so intensely.

For the sake of general peace he locked Rags in the room where he lodged and forthwith made his way toward Laroque's place. He had almost reached it, when in the dusk a slight form stole up to him and drew him into the shadows. It was Tucson Lil.

"Listen, Rod," she said breathlessly. "I sneaked out to warn you. Laroque is going to do you if you don't look out."

"What do you mean?" Brill demanded. He stiffened himself and began to regret that he had come unarmed to meet the man who hated him so cordially.

"You know the two little windows in Laroque's office?" the girl asked.

Brill nodded. He recollected that Laroque's chair commanded not only a view of the bar, but that through one window he could see what was going on in the dancing-hall, and through another the gambling tables in the "Hall of Chance."

"Well," the girl proceeded, "I came down a little early to-night because the lights are better in the hall than in my room at home and I had a waist to darn. I sat on that settee under Laroque's window and heard him tell the roulette dealer to fix up some dice so's he could make you buy out his share in the last claim you located. The report came in to-night's mail, and the claim isn't worth anything. If there was only some way of getting him out of that office for a moment you could see the report for yourself, for I took a chance and saw him lay it on top of some papers in the upper right-hand corner of his desk."

Brill whistled his surprise. "Good little girl!" he said. "I'd like to get a peep at that paper before I make any plans."

"Suppose," she suggested, "that soon after you sit down in his office I ask him to come outside on an important matter? Maybe I couldn't hold him for more than a minute, but that would give you time to see the report."

"That's the ticket!" Brill exclaimed with enthusiasm. "And now you run along and creep in the back way."

Masking his feelings, Rodney entered the resort a few moments later, and headed straightway for Laroque's retreat. The latter looked up with what he probably intended for a conciliatory grin.

"Well," he said, "I ain't dead o' hydrophobia yet, and I've cooled down a bit. And as long's we're goin' tuh dissolve partnership I thought I'd like tuh make you a proposition about this last claim yuh located. Ain't heard anything from the samples yet, but I'm sport enough to buy *you* out. Also I'm sport enough to sell out *my* half interest to *you*. And *that* for a song."

"What's your proposition?" Brill demanded, sliding into the seat between the desk and safe.

"That we throw dice. The low man buys the other man out for three thousand dollars. Yuh may lose, yuh may win, but it's as fair for one as 'tis for the other. That hole in the ground may be worth a fortune. It may not be worth the powder yuh used."

"But how do I know you've not heard already from El Paso?" Brill hazarded.

"That's easy," Laroque bluffed. "If yuh haven't any confidence in the claim I stand ready tuh pay you over three thousand for your half. If you're willin' tuh gamble that the claim's valuable yuh can produce three thousand and I'll sign the papers over to yuh. You've got three thousand planted away, haven't yuh?"

"Yes. Banked at Tucson."

"Well, then, how about—"

Abruptly Laroque left off speaking and faced the girl who stood in the doorway.

"What is it, Lil?" he asked, annoyed.

"Something very important," the girl said. "I want to show you something you ought to see right away."

With an impatient grunt Laroque rose to his feet and followed the dancing girl outside. And like a flash Brill's hand moved toward the desk and slipped out the upper right-hand drawer.

The report was there. It was, as Lil had said, on top of a heap of other papers. Quickly Brill scanned it, and as his eyes drank in the unwelcome particulars his jaw dropped in disappointment. For it seemed his labors in the mountains had been all in vain.

Again he looked at the figures dealing with copper and silver, his chief hopes, and then a peculiar thought came to him. It might be too good to be true. He listened to Laroque's voice rumbling petulantly in a far corner of the dance-hall, and then he searched in a drawer for the magnifying glass he knew was usually kept there.

He found it and applied it to various points on the report.

"Great God!" he breathed not irreverently, and then thrust the paper and glass away just as Laroque returned.

"I've thought the matter over," Brill greeted him, "and I've decided to either buy you out or let you buy me out—for three thousand dollars. I'll shake the dice with you to-morrow after the Tucson train pulls in. I'm leaving on the midnight freight, and I'll fetch back the cash with me."

Laroque would have offered some comment, but Brill gave him no opportunity. A brief glance at his watch, and the prospector hastened from the place.

There followed some hasty preparations involving a visit to the corral and a searching of Amigo's panniers. Then Rodney Brill left Rags disconsolate over a huge bone and a pan of water. The master was just in time to swing aboard the caboose of the west-bound evening freight.

V.

"WELL, we're all set," Laroque said, dice-box in hand.

It was noon of the day following, and the resort-keeper leaned over the guard-rail of the deserted crap table.

"Yep," Brill said shortly. "If you throw higher than I, I buy you out for three thousand. And if the report comes in to-night's mail the loser mustn't cry."

Laroque nodded. "One flop," he stipulated, and rolled a pair of sixes backed up with a pair of fives.

An experienced gambler might have objected to the manner in which the dice "slid" rather than rolled from the box, but Brill offered no complaint.

Carelessly seizing the box he threw a pair of fours.

"So I buy *you* out," he said nonchalantly, and presently followed Laroque to the office of Frio City's leading and only notary.

An iron-clad document was signed, sealed and witnessed, and by virtue of it Mr. Rodney Brill became sole possessor of the claim and shaft in the Chiricahuas.

It was shortly after the night mail arrived from El Paso that Henry Laroque came fuming into the restaurant of Gow Loon and found a contented man munching a huge steak. Beside him on the floor, a companion steak was fast disappearing between the jaws of a big Airedale.

Laroque thought twice at the sight of the dog, and cooled off somewhat when he addressed the master.

"What's this I hear?" he demanded, "about you takin' a sample of that ore over to Tucson last night and claimin' tuh find upwards o' eighteen hundred ounces o' silver to the ton?"

"It's true," Brill admitted, coolly helping himself to a mouthful of French fried potatoes.

"Then how do yuh account for this?" Laroque said, as he produced the El Paso report which had been in his possession since the day before. "This just came in to-night's mail. It shows that the ore only runs eighteen ounces and a fraction o' silver to the ton."

The angry man pointed to the characters "18.05" after he had laid the report beside Brill's platter.

"I don't account for anything," the prospector said. "I took a sample of the ore over to Tucson last night and an old college chum of mine in the smelter there helped me out with an independent assay. The claim's probably worth two hundred thousand of Muschenheim money whenever I get ready to sell. You lose, and I win. That's all."

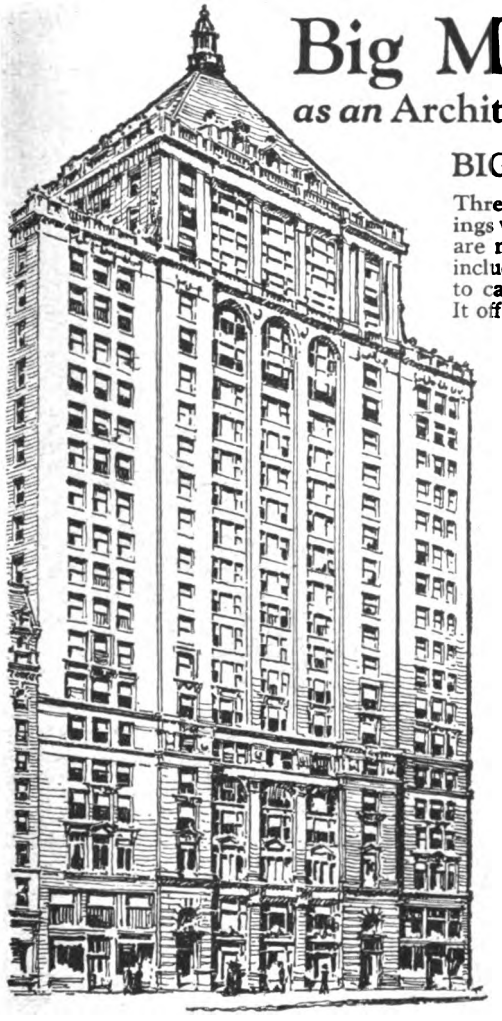
"But how do yuh account for this report?" Laroque bristled. "They double-check everything. They never make a mistake."

Calmly, with exaggerated deliberation, Rodney Brill bent his head and looked over the report he had last seen in the private office of his former grub-staker. Long and closely he scrutinized it.

"I declare," he said after a time, "you never can tell where a fly will alight. It's funny. Here it says 'Silver 1805 oz.,' a trifle less than we found in Tucson. See how close the figures 8 and o are. But why should a fly light there *between* those important figures? And why should a document of such importance lay around so long that the flies get a chance at it?"

One poisonous look Henry Laroque gave his former partner. His hand itched to get at the gun in his pocket, but on second thought and particularly after a glance at the watchful dog, he picked up the delayed and defiled report and stamped out of the restaurant.

And it needs only to be added that Tucson Lil no longer works at the Silver Grill, and that soon after Rodney Brill's departure for the East a registered parcel containing a handsome diamond bracelet came to her, together with a check large enough to enable her to start a rival restaurant to the excellent establishment conducted by one Gow Loon.



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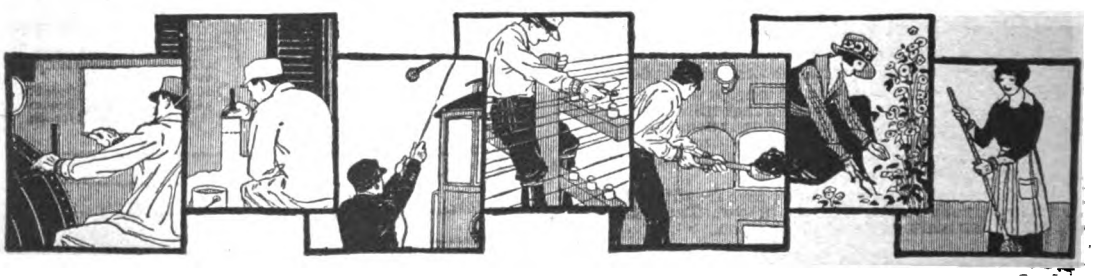

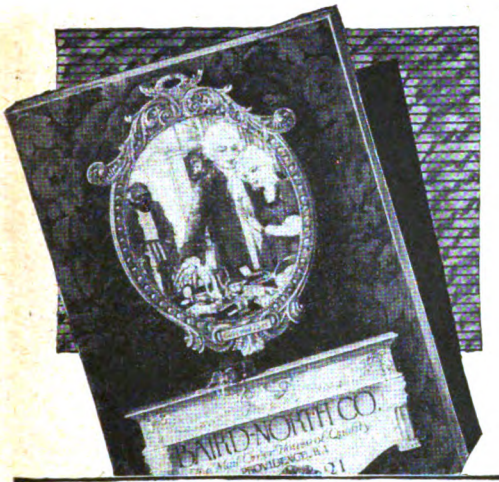

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.....Civil Engineer. $5,000 to $15,000	.....Steam Engineer. $2,000 to $4,000
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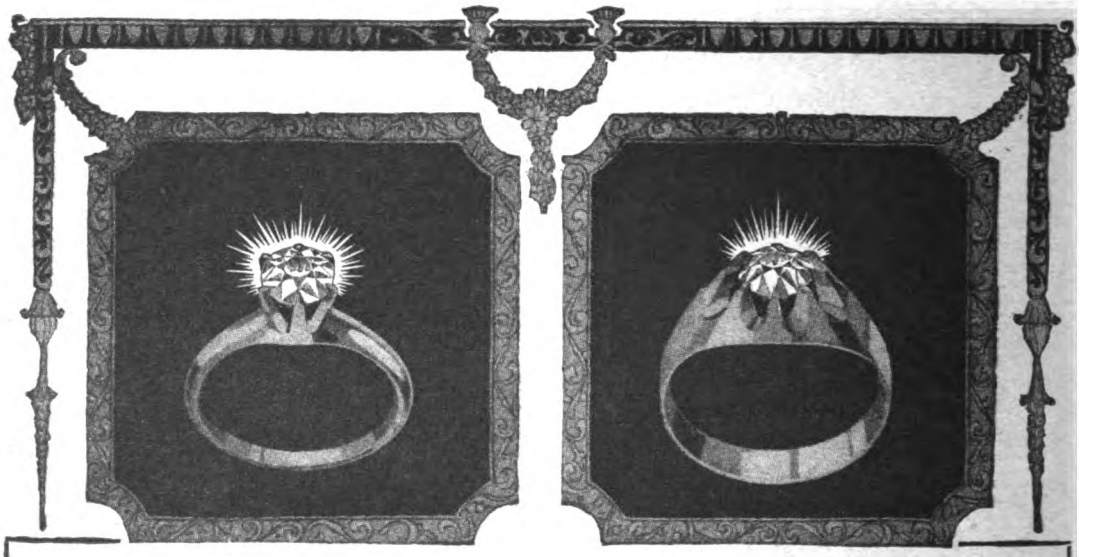
.....Business Manager. $5,000 to $15,000	.....Photoplay Writer. $2,000 to $10,000
.....Certified Public Accountant $7,000 to $15,000	.....Sanitary Engineer. $2,000 to $5,000
.....Accountant and Auditor. $2,500 to $7,000	.....Telephone Engineer. $2,500 to $5,000
.....Draftsman and Designer. $2,500 to $4,000	.....Telegraph Engineer. $2,500 to $5,000
.....Electrical Engineer. $4,000 to $10,000	.....High School Graduate. In two years.
.....General Education. In one year.	.....Fire Insurance Expert. $3,000 to $10,000

Name..... Address.....



Send the Coupon

No.7A1410
This solid gold solitaire is the most popular ladies' ring in the world. Beautifully finished, the essence of good taste. Setting is a flashing Lachnite Gem weighing about one carat.
Price..... $18.75
Deposit..... 4.75
Monthly.... 2.50

-we'll send you a Lachnite

No.7A1504
This solid gold ring is shaped and finished by hand. No finer or more fashionable ring could be made. It is set with a brilliant Lachnite Gem weighing about 3-4 carat.
Price..... $18.75
Deposit..... 4.75
Monthly.... 2.50

SEND NO MONEY. Just send us your name and address and we will send you, prepaid, on 10 days' trial, a genuine Lachnite Gem mounted in a solid gold ring. These sparkling gems have the eternal fire of diamonds. Their brilliance and hardness are guaranteed forever. We want you to select one of the rings from this advertisement and wear it ten full days at our expense. ***Then, if you can tell it from a diamond, send it back.*** Over 150,000 people have accepted this offer—and have found a way to own exquisite jewelry at a trifling cost.

Pay As You Wish

When the ring comes just make the first small deposit ($4.75) with the postman. This is only a deposit. It is not a payment. The money is still yours. Put the ring on your finger and wear it everywhere for ten full days. Then if you decide to keep it, pay the balance at the rate of $2.50 a month without interest. But if, during the trial, you decide to send the Lachnite back, your deposit will be refunded instantly. You run no risk.

Harold Lachman Co.
12 North Michigan Avenue
Dept. 8276 **Chicago, Ill.**

Send me prepaid Ladies' Men's Ring on 10 days' free trial. When it comes I will deposit $4.75 with the postman. After 10 days I will either return the ring or send you $2.50 a month until the balance has been paid. Total cost to me, $18.75. If I return the ring within 10 days you will refund me $4.75 immediately. **I enclose my finger size.**

Name.....

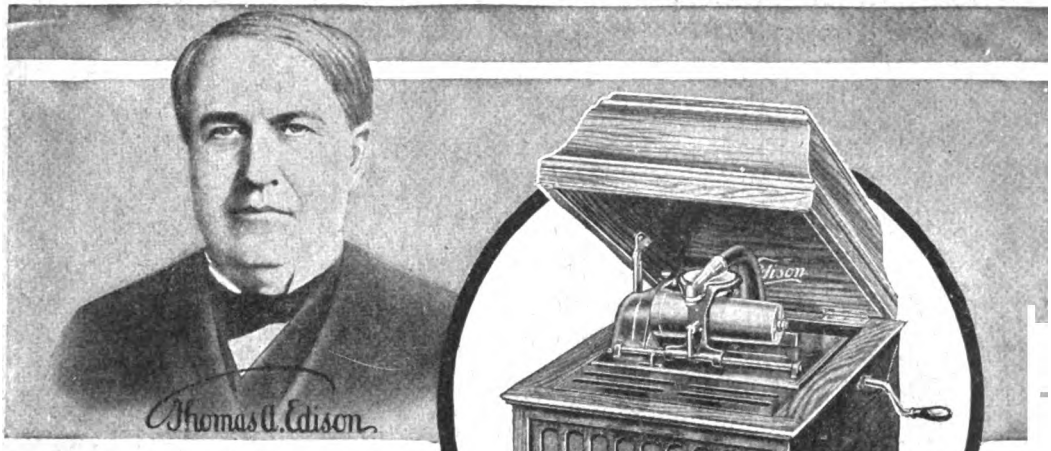
Address.....

.....

Send the Coupon!

Don't send us a penny. Just put your name and address in the coupon and tell us which ring you prefer. Be sure to send us your finger size. To get it cut a strip of paper that will just meet around the middle knuckle of your ring finger. Send the coupon now. You will be under no obligations to buy.

Harold Lachman Co. **12 No. Michigan Ave.** Dept. 8276—**CHICAGO**



Only $1.00

Puts Mr. Edison's New Amberola in Your Home!

An Astounding Offer:

You pay only $1.00 down—then the balance in easy monthly payments. Remember, this is Mr. Edison's genuine new phonograph with the great Diamond Stylus Reproducer. Besides the phonograph you receive 12 wonderful Blue Amberola Indestructible Four-Minute Records. Set the phonograph up. Invite in your friends and neighbors. Play everything over and over. We want you to have a genuine free trial before you make up your mind. Then, if for any reason you do not want to keep the outfit, send it back at our expense. If you do keep it, pay the balance in small monthly payments.

Order From This Ad

Send only $1.00 and this coupon. Then we will send you the complete outfit immediately. Of course, we do *not* want to ship an outfit to a person who can not afford to, at least, pay on easy payments (and when you get a free trial it must be understood that you can *afford* to keep it). *Yet*, no one is *under any obligations* to keep an outfit if it is not entirely satisfactory. If it is not just what you want for your home, return it *at our expense; you*, not we, must judge what the Edison phonograph means to you and we accept your decision cheerfully, and without question. But send coupon today — *now.*

F. K. BABSON, Edison Phonograph Distributors, 1456 Edison Block, Chicago

CANADIAN OFFICE: 338 Portage Avenue, Winnipeg, Canada

F. K. BABSON, Edison Phonograph Distributors, 1456 Edison Block, Chicago, Ill.

Dear Mr. Babson:—Please ship Mr. Edison's Wonderful New Amberola to my home on trial. Also send me 12 new Amberol Records. As per offer I am enclosing $1.00 and this coupon. If I decide to keep the outfit, I will have the privilege of the rock-bottom price, $48.20, direct from you on your special offer. I agree to take the outfit direct from the depot and pay the small express or freight charge. If I do not find it thoroughly satisfactory, I reserve the right to return it in 10 days at your expense and you will refund my money. Otherwise I will make the first monthly payment not less than one month after receiving the instrument, and pay for it at the rate of $4.00 a month for 11 months and $3.20 for the 12th month – total $48.20. (This offer is not open to anyone under 21 years of age. If you are under 21 ask your father, mother or guardian to fill in and sign this coupon for you. **Write or print your name and address very plainly.**)

Name.....Address or R. F. D. No.....

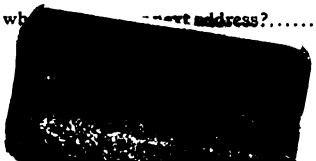
Post Office.....State.....Shipped by.....Express

Shipping Point..... Occupation.....

Age.....Married or single.....If steadily employed at a salary please state.....

How long a resident in your neighborhood and your vicinity?.....If there is any possibility of changing

your address during the next year, wh... ...ent address?.....



Direct From Factory

$4.69 FOR THIS STUNNING EMBROIDERED Serge Dress

Yes—only $4.69 but we can send only two to a customer at this special introductory price. Absolutely the biggest bargain in years.

You could not match this dress even at $8 to $10. The picture gives only the faintest idea of its beauty and style. Has beautiful white pique collar and cuffs. Pearl buttons run down front. Pleasing patch pocket intensifies the charming effect. White buttons at pockets add wonderfully to its beauty. Belt embroidered in delightful colored design. A daintily designed dress, handsomely trimmed, beautifully made. An opportunity you cannot afford to miss. Think of it. Only $4.69. Direct to you from factory.

You simply must see and try on this dress to realize its wonderful charm and style and the rare bargain it is. Remember, we can make this unheard of low price only because we are manufacturers and you do not deal with **middlemen.**

Send No Money!

Just send a post card or letter and we will mail you this wonderful, stunning embroidered serge dress. Pay the postman only $4.69 and postage, then try the dress on. If you are not completely satisfied with the style, fit, material and workmanship, if you are not absolutely convinced that this is the biggest value ever offered by any reliable concern, return the dress at our expense. Send no money now. Just mention whether you want Blue or Black dress and give size. Sizes 16 to 20 for misses and small women, 34 to 46 for women. Extra sizes 48 to 54, 40c extra. Order by number 112-SD.

WHOLESALE PRICES

2 Wonderful Flannel Shirts $3.69 Only -

SEND NO MONEY

Two wonderful Susquehanna Broadcloth Flannel Shirts only $3.69. Direct from factory. No Middlemen's profits. Would cost $6 or more elsewhere. Perfectly tailored. Cut extra full. Comfortable fitting. Winter weight. Coat front style. Soft turn down collar. Two extra strong, large button-down flap pockets. Double stitched throughout. Thoroughly shrunk. For work or semi-dress. An amazing bargain. Send no money. Pay postman only $3.69 plus postage after arrival. Then try them on. If not pleased, return at our expense; your money returned at once. Order by number 112-FS. State size. Specify Gray or Blue. Only two shirts to a customer on this special offer

Send No Money!

Order either dress or shirts on this remarkable special offer and pay postman the low price and postage, then try on your purchase. We guarantee the refund of your money if you are not pleased in every way. Send no money now. These are the greatest values you have ever seen!

WAREWELL COMPANY, Dept. 112, Philadelphia, Pa.