ARGOSY ALL-STORY WEEKLY

Trail's End

by Edwin L. Sabin

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ARGOSY-ALLSTORY WEEKLY

VOL. CXXVI | CONTENTS FOR OCTOBER 16, 1920 | NUMBER 3

NOVELETTE

FIVE CONTINUED STORIES

SIX SHORT STORIES

DON'T FAIL TO BE IN AT THE START OF

THE MYSTERIOUS QUEST

in next week's issue. The lure of its devious ways is always skilfully maintained by **Frederick R. Bechdolt,** who engineers the pursuit of —his hero knows not what—except that it is something he must find.

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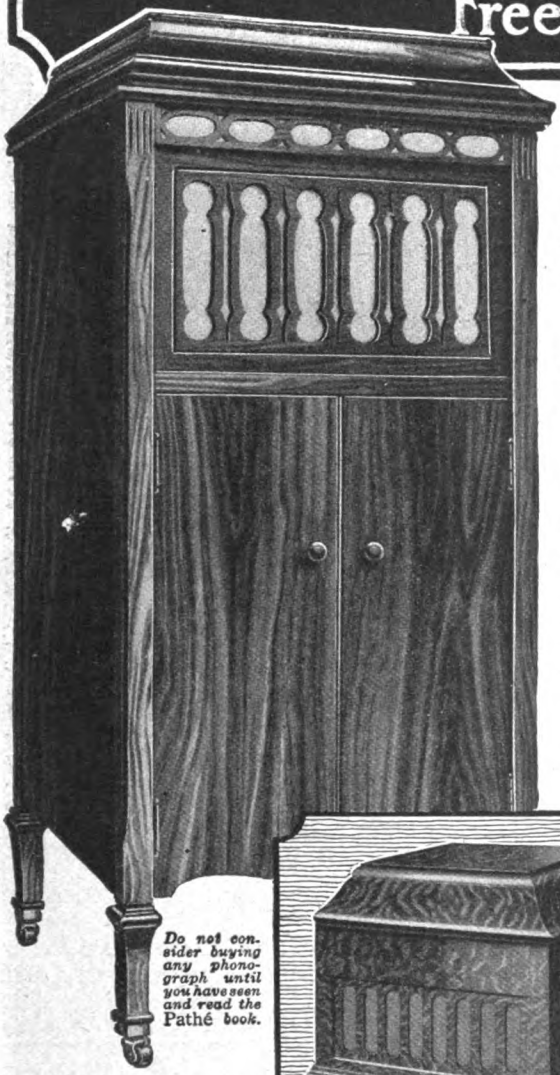

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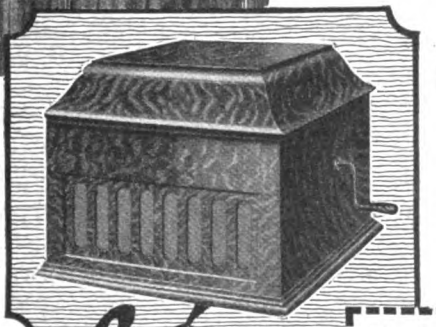

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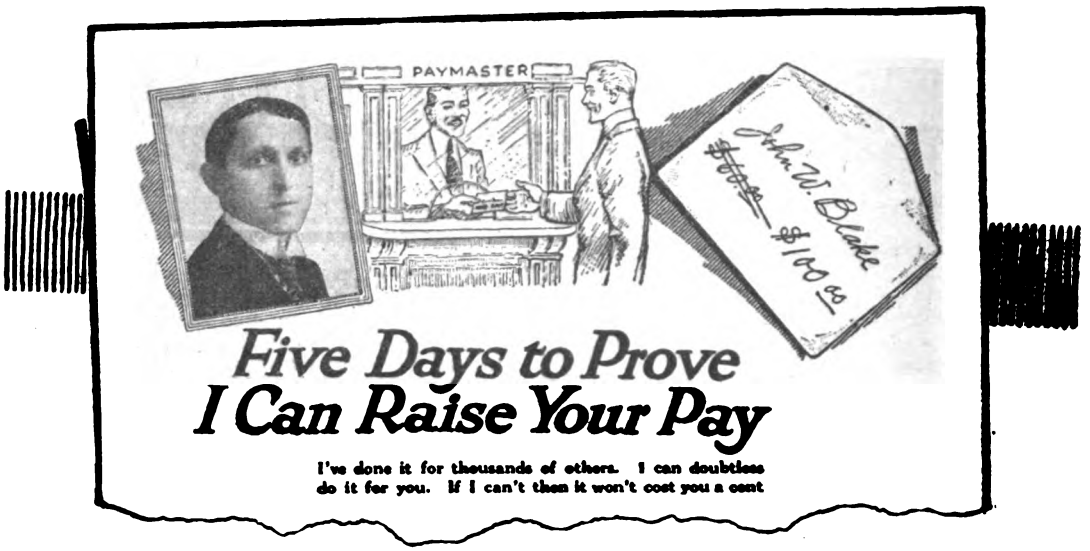

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I've done it for thousands of others. I can doubtless do it for you. If I can't then it won't cost you a cent

400,000 Men Took Me Up —Here's What Happened—

YOU have probably heard of me. My name is Pelton. Thousands call me "The Man Who Makes Men Rich." I don't deny it.

Since first announcing that I could raise a man's pay quickly, over 400,000 men have taken me up. More than 400,000 men and women sent for my "secret" on free trial, examined it for five days, tried it out and tested it, and only a comparatively few out of all the number sent it back. All the rest returned the unanimous verdict—"this man Pelton surely does what he says."

Perhaps you are one of those who read the above announcement. And perhaps you, like many others, thought me either a tremendous boaster or a lunatic.

It does sound like a pretty broad statement, I admit. To raise any man's pay regardless of education, training, or ability seems like a big claim. Nobody ever made such an offer before, but then nobody had discovered the amazing "secret" of mine. And moreover, had I myself not experienced the astounding results that I had, if I had not raised myself from poverty, debt and discouragement, to riches, happiness and independence, I would never have dared to offer to show others the way.

I am not a genius. There is nothing unusual about me. I am just a plain, everyday sort of chap. True, I have found most of the good things in life. I have every comfort and luxury my heart could desire. But I claim no personal credit for these things. Everything I have I owe to this wonderful secret which a man who *is* a genius gave to me. It changed my whole life, and when I made the statement that I could raise anyone's pay, I knew that I was taking no risk.

I figured that what would work for me would work for others just as well. And I was right.

One man wrote: "In 5 days' time it has made me $500 and I have other profitable things in sight."

Another said: "Since taking up the study have increased my salary 400%."

A third: "If anyone offered me $10,000 to give up what I have learned from it, I would refuse the offer."

And still another: "Jumped from $100 a month to $3,000 the first month and won a $250 prize for the best salesmanship in my state."

I could go on and quote thousands of similar experiences of what this "secret" has done, but it is not necessary—for I am willing to tell you the "secret" itself. Listen carefully.

The All-Important Factors of Success

Training, brains, "pull," position, money, health—all these things *help* men up the ladder to the goal—but *not one of them is the MAIN thing.* What good are brains if you can't make them work for you? What does "pull" get you if you can't fill the job efficiently? Position, money or health amount to nothing if you have not got that indomitable, all conquering, irresistible *something,* the distinguishing mark of every leader, which is the motive power of your own self!

True, you may slowly and laboriously advance in the course of years to a fairly well-paid position. You may—and you may not. But that isn't what I call success—nor do you. When I say that I can raise your pay, I don't mean increases of ten, twenty or thirty dollars a week—that's just play. There is nothing very remarkable in that. But financial independence, friendship, luxuries—these are what you want out of life, and these are what you can have if you work on the right principle.

These Big Men Have Bought It

Among the 400,000 purchasers of "Power of Will" are such men as Judge Ben B. Lindsey; Supreme Court Justice Parker; Wo Ting Fang, Ex-U. S. Chinese Ambassador; Assistant Postmaster General Britt; Gov. McKelvie of Nebraska; General Manager Christeson, of Wells-Fargo Express Co.; E. St. Elmo Lewis, former Vice-Pres. Art Metal Construction Co.; Gov. Ferris of Michigan; Rex Beach, Author, and many others of equal prominence.

Straight Talk to You

The point of it all is this, my friend. You are using only about one-tenth of that brain of yours. Your will is not making it work. Mind—that doesn't mean you have no will. It simply means that through lack of proper exercise, your will is undeveloped. Just as you must exercise and train to have hard, strong, useable muscles, just so it is necessary to train mentally to have a strong, indomitable will. That's the whole thing in a nut-shell.

Develop your will-power and money will flow in on you. Rich opportunities will open for you. Driving energy you never dreamed you possessed will manifest itself. You will thrill with a new power—a power that nothing can resist. You'll have an influence over people that you never thought possible. Success—in what ever form you want it—will come as easy as failure came before. And these are only a few of the things the "secret" may do for you.

Five Days Free Trial

And because I *know* this is true, because I *know* what it has done for me, and many thousands of others, I am willing to make to you the same proposition that I have made to all the rest. I am going to give you the same free trial.

The whole thing is fully explained in that amazing book, "POWER OF WILL."

Simply fill in the coupon below, mail it to me now, and "the greatest book in the world" will come to you by return mail. *It doesn't cost you a red cent to examine it.*

Keep it five days. Look it over in your home. Apply some of its simple teachings. If it doesn't show you how you can increase your income many times over—as it has for thousands of others—mail the book back. You will be out nothing. But if you decide to keep it, just send $4.00 in complete payment.

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ARGOSY-ALLSTORY WEEKLY

VOL. CXXVI SATURDAY, OCTOBER 16, 1920 NUMBER 3

Trail's End

by Edwin L. Sabin

Author of "Bad Medicine," "The Pass of Painted Rocks," etc.

CHAPTER I.

I MEET THE LONG AMERICAN.

"*QUÉ hay, compañero?*"

These words were uttered by the strangest looking man that I had yet seen—although Independence town, the depôt at the States' end of the Santa Fé Trail, was a hodge-podge of curiosities.

A lean, tall man, with grotesque turkey neck rising wrinkled and scrawny above unusually broad shoulders, he wore the bullet-pouch and powder-horn of the mountain-man, and a sheathed knife attached to his belt.

Leathery and unshaven though he was, and a type foreign to me save through brief contact in this far-Western country, something in his greeting, "What's the matter, comrade?" and in the twinkle of his bright blue eye put a sudden glow of gratitude into my chilled veins.

"You look at outs with luck, friend."

A gulp of acrid realization almost choked me. These were the first kind words that I had received in several days. Independence, this bustling frontier mart where the river trail and the two great land trails to the mountains and New Mexico joined, was no place for a weakling. Its one main street, from day to day hub-deep in mud or ankle-deep in dust, was thronged with strident, brimming life: the teamsters, trappers, voyageurs, fur-hunters, river-men, Mexicans, and Indians; with a sprinkling of white-faced young men, like myself, going out upon the prairies to seek health and adventure; but rarely a woman, except the squaws.

"By Gawd, you look like a drowned-out prairie dog," laughed the long-necked man. "Sick, are you?"

"Yes, sir. I've had the fever. It's left me, but—"

"The shakes, too, I reckon."

Chills? There is no chill like to that of being a stranger, and ill, and penniless in a new country.

"Yes, sir. But they've left me, I think. So has everything else. But that can be of no great interest to you, sir. I'm not asking —I—I—" And to my intense shame I burst flatly into tears.

Down he plumped, that tall, long-necked giant, his arm clapped around my shoulders, and he buoyed me firmly while I choked and shook.

"Pshaw, pshaw!" he said. "Chills and fever is enough to lay any man out. I'd as soon be tied to the stake for the Comanche squaws myself. But you've suffered with worse than plain chills and fever, I reckon. Tell me all about it, son. What are you doing here? Where's your party?

I'm a master hand at reading signs, and chances are I can help you on the trail."

Then I explained how I had foolishly come out from a law clerkship in Cincinnati to make my venture upon the prairies with a caravan; how I had had a letter to Mr. Ceran St. Vrain, care of Messrs. B. Pratte & Co., at St. Louis; how Messrs. B. Pratte & Co. had informed me that Mr. St. Vrain was about to set forth from Independence on his last trip of the year to Santa Fé, but that with haste I might catch him; how on the way up-river I had been stricken with fever, and scarce had any recollection of being carried ashore at the Independence landing and stowed in some room over a grog shop; how, minus money, letters, weapons, everything except my single suit of garments, I had been turned out as soon as I had been sucked dry; and how now I had not the means of traveling west, north, nor south—nor the facilities to regain my rights.

"Sho'!" he muttered. "I'd rather take my chances out on the prairies with the Injuns than in one of these 'civilized' towns. Even a sick snake could enter a Blackfoot lodge, and he'd be well treated before they killed him. But you're far from being gone coon, yet," he added. "Are you still of mind to try the prairie life—or do you hanker for your home folks, under roof?"

"I had meant to try the prairie. I hate to go back. But with Mr. St. Vrain gone, sir, I see no hope, especially when I have not even a rifle, nor the strength to point it."

"Yep, St. Vrain's gone; he's been gone a fortnight, I hear tell, and he'll not be back until spring. He'll winter at Taos and Bents' Fort, I reckon, where he has interests. But listen now: have you handled a rifle? Have you ever had to depend on it, or on your native wits?"

"I've hunted along the Ohio. My father was a Daniel Boone man in Kentucky, and I've used a rifle ever since I was a small boy. But as for fighting Indians—no, sir. I am used to the timber; I am not used to the prairies yet. And if my treatment here is a sample of prairie manners I fear I shall never get used to such life." And with unexpected rush of anger I swore roundly.

"By the eternal, you're still a man. You have the spark. Had St. Vrain known of you he might have done worse than waited for you. Can you ride?"

"When I have strength enough to sit a horse," said I, speaking bravely.

"Once on the buffalo range we can put a lining in your stomach, and you'll have the strength," he assured. "There's nothing like buffalo meat as a steady diet. Listen: I'm setting out with a caravan myself to-morrow morning. I know of a place open in it. If you say 'Yes,' I'll stake you to your outfit, for I have a curiosity to see how you'll turn out—I rarely mistake a man. If you say 'No,' I'll lend you enough to get you back into the States and you can repay me from your clerkship at pen and ink. So which is it, the rifle or the ledger?"

A great rush of confidence infused me.

"I choose the prairie."

"*Bueno!* A year on the prairie is worth a thousand in town," he enthused. "Stand up; you're a man. When I've filled your belly and you've one of Sam Hawkens's pets in your hand, you'll think no more of dying out yonder. People don't go out yonder seeking death—they seek life, and there 'tis."

I rose giddily; and when my weak head cleared we strode off to a squalid little eating-place served by a small, dark foreigner who wore a dirty apron. My long-necked friend brought his hand heavily down upon the bare, stained table at which we sat—his rifle carefully leaned against the rough board wall beside it.

"Hi, Andrew! *Vite! Pronto! Ven acá!* Stir your stumps. Beaver tails an' buff'ler hump for two."

The dingy room contained a modicum of other guests, either at the tables or the short bar which closed the end: a couple of trappers in leather; a trio of voyageurs in head kerchiefs and capotes; a St. Louis merchant in broadcloth and prospective customer in linsey-woolsey; a squad of Mexicans in blankets, and another Mexican, evidently of the better class—a slender youth, in silvered hat, velvet jacket similar to a dragoon's in cut, tight, slashed pantaloons, and high heels enormously spurred. The butt of a long pistola projected from the folds of his sash.

He posed negligently against the bar, while he smoked a cigarette and surveyed nothing. But his eyes flashed in our direction as we sat.

Mine Host Pedro came hastening.

"Your order, *señores?* I have beef, pork, fish, *señores;* and very good rum."

My long-necked friend snorted. "I tell you, we want something to tickle our guts. Beef, then, and coffee, and don't forget the sugar."

The negligent young Mexican gentleman strolled across to us. "*Buenos días, señores.*"

"*Muy bueno, amigo mío,*" responded my friend. "Will you do us the favor of joining us?"

"Many thanks, but I have eaten." And he glanced with inquiring, even boldly staring, black eyes at me.

"Another friend of mine—and your comrade on the journey," remarked my friend. "I have engaged him as Don José requested." A faintly amused smile penetrated the caballero's courtesy as he slightly bowed and murmured. My long-necked patron hastily set him aright. "Once he is supplied with the proper inside and outside, and rides gun in hand, I will answer for him as a *muy hombre, amigo mío.* Have no fear. He is only recovering from an illness."

"*Stá bueno,*" the caballero replied politely. "Horse and saddle will be waiting. He will come well armed?"

"With the best. From here we go to the Hawkens's shop. Shall we see you there?"

"*Quién sabe*—who knows?" And he shrugged his shoulders. "Maybe yes, maybe no, *señor.* But I will see you at the caravan. Until then, *á Dios.*"

"Your *compagnon de voyage,* young man," said my friend. "Don Antonio Garcia y Alarid is his handle. But fall to; you will have plenty of him later."

As we emerged into the pale sunshine he congratulated. "That's fetched the color into your cheeks already. A few days in the buffalo country will make you feel half hoss and half alligator. There's nothing like meat. Now we'll see what Sam Hawkens has in the way of a meatgetter."

"May I have the honor of your name?" I asked.

"To the Injuns I am Leather Neck, in their lingo. To the Santa Feans I am the Long American. On the up-river and in the mountains I am Old Hoss and Old Jack to the whites. Are you by chance a college man?"

"Ohio University."

"I see. I went through William and Mary myself—in by the front and out by the back, and took my diploma on the prairie. So say no more about obligations. We college men must help each other."

"By your permission, sir," I proffered, "I will call you Jack." But "Long American" struck me as more pat.

"At your pleasure," he uttered. "Jack, Old Jack or Old Hoss—I answer to all. *Y su gratia quál es*—what is your name—*señor?* You speak the Spanish?"

"Indifferently." And I told him my name, of which he made small account, although it was a family name well-known in the Ohio country.

"Dick will do," he observed. "Now step in with me and we'll have a word with Sam Hawkens."

The Hawkens's gun-shop had recently been removed from St. Louis to Independence. It was modest in appearance and contained no great supply—for the making by hand of a Hawkens rifle was slow work.

"This is the lad," he began. "He will take the standard drop, I fancy. As for me, I need something as crooked as a buffalo's hind leg to suit my own style of build."

"No, sir." Mr. Sam Hawkens had been scanning me with small, wrinkle-meshed, gray eyes; the eyes of a marksman. "But I have the very gun, friend. We're getting away from your sixty-to-the-pound bullets, in a thirty-six-inch barrel—like that rifle of mine in your hands. I have the very gun, and I'd like him to try it."

He stepped back to the rear of the shop, and returned with a rifle.

"This gun I finished only yesterday. You see the bore—it carries a ball forty to the pound, in a thirty-two-inch barrel. I've reduced the twist, and sighted it a bit high; and I'll guarantee that in the proper hands

it will put bullet after bullet into the space the size of a dollar at two hundred paces. But you must draw very fine."

"He goes with you, or up-river?" queried Mr. Hawkens.

"In the caravan. But he rides as guard for the old don's outfit."

"Ah!" Mr. Hawkens lifted his bushy brows interrogatively.

They two retired aside, leaving me to examine my new arm. Fragments of their conversation reached me. I heard the words "treasure," "trunk," "Who knows?" "sly old cuss," "the *señorita*," "gold-mine, they say," "mere trail talk" when the young caballero, Don Antonio entered.

"I have been at gun-making all my life. My father was gunsmith at Harper's Ferry in 1812. I envy you your trip," Hawkens declared. "I see that you love a good gun. If I may add powder-flask and bullet-pouch to it—"

The long American, accompanied by Don Antonio, approached us.

"With your permission, Don Antonio would like to heft that new coup-counter of yourn," spoke my friend. "As you share guard with him, he has an interest in it."

I extended the weapon to the Mexican. He accepted with a bow and murmured: "*Gracias*—Thanks—*señor*," and, turning it over and over, inspected it—lock, stock, and barrel.

"Well made. There is no flint, *señor?*"

"No. It is percussion lock."

"That is so. The Americano notion. It will shoot true, *señor?*"

"It is a Hawkens rifle," I replied shortly, for his light manner was nettling.

"And you also are a Hawkens—yes?—so that it will shoot true for you?"

"My name is not Hawkens, and I never have shot the rifle, *señor*," I answered. "But I will shoot it against you or any other man, at any time or place."

"*Bueno, bueno!*" cheered the long American. "That's tall talk. How's your range, Sam? Either I or Don Antonio will have to take the crow out of this young cock. Fill flask and pouch for him, give us a fist of caps and patches, and set us up a mark."

In the mud-fenced enclosure behind the gun-shop the Hawkens firm had laid out a target range with which to test their pieces. At the hither end there was an adjustable rail, upon which to rest the barrels, and at the farther end there was a well-scarred butt of heavy planks backed with sand. Mr. Hawkens joined us almost instantly, bearing the essentials; and, handing them over, bustled onward to tack a square of brown paper upon the face of the butt. With a bit of charcoal he drew a small cross upon the paper, and returned, smiling.

Still smiling, Mr. Hawkens, deftly loaded with powder charge and patched ball, placed cap upon nipple, cocked the piece and, with a faint click, set the hair-trigger. The shot-gun-style butt to his shoulder and his jowl pressed against the cheek-piece, he slowly raised the muzzle—for a second it steadied at the level—and then spoke smartly.

"Dead center!" exclaimed the long American of keen eye, while we peered through the smoke whiff.

"A hair's breadth to the left, if anything," Gunsmith Hawkens alleged. "But with this breeze the ball would have gone true at one hundred yards. At a short distance there is apt to be a slight drift."

Don Antonio impulsively ran forward.

"Exactly, exactly, *señor!*" he called. "*Dios!* Neither to the right nor to the left. What shooting!"

"Will you take your turn first, Señor Don?" inquired Gunsmith Hawkens. "I will load for you."

"For the honor of New Mexico, then." And Don Antonio took aim.

Crack!—and simultaneously the bullet-hole appeared on the paper a hand's breadth wide of the other.

"A paunch shot!" cheered the long American. "Missed the heart and hit the gizzard. You've lost your meat, *amigo*. A critter with that kind of a wound will run ten miles and die to-morrow."

Don Antonio was staring at the mark, as if incredulous. "*Nombre de Dios!* It is the gun," he said. "I held exact, but the gun throws to the left. There is a trick."

"The only trick lies in hand and eye working together," reproved Mr. Hawkens.

"Just clear the mark with the upper edge of the sight, young man," spoke Gunsmith

Hawkens to me as he reloaded. "The bullet obeys the bead and not the muzzle, and from a Hawkens rifle never varies when the powder measure is used. You will find that this is a true gun."

"For the honor of the Ohio country, then," I laughed with a bow to the caballero as I took the piece.

I set the trigger, and leveled the piece. for a moment the sight wandered hitherthither across the paper, leaving a blurred trail, and I was fain to lean backward, to uphold the weight of the heavy barrel. Amidst the tense silence it was a derisive chuckle from Don Antonio which nerved my arms and put fire into my veins; and indeed now with thought of my Ohio country and the father who had taught me to bark squirrels like the Kentucky hunters I cuddled the stock to my cheek and balanced the barrel upon my extended left arm.

The thin silver segment of the sight was just about to enter the center of the charcoal cross when I touched the trigger.

Forward we went. "Count the holes, *señores*," challenged Don Antonio. "One, two, three!"

"Two holes, but three bullets, sir," Gunsmith Hawkens pronounced. "He drove my ball with his. Aye! He barely scraped the entrance—see, the hole is a little large, a little elongated; but the one hole serves both bullets. If we dug in we would find them together, fused. It was a fine shot."

"Dead center, by Gawd!" the long American ejaculated. "The sign is plain—you can see the track of the second ball. There 'tis. Hooray!" Don Antonio was unmistakably chagrined.

We took our leave of Mr. Gunsmith Hawkens; achieved the purchase of some necessary clothing and next encountered a messenger evidently looking for my friend.

"The caravan is waiting to start," reported the long American. "Stanley's in a hurry, I reckon. *Bueno!* Let us cock our tails for the open. You'll get your animal and riding trappings at the camp. That's the arrangement."

"But the prime arrangement—my province in the caravan," I made bold to suggest.

"Oh!" And he frowned as if annoyed by so trivial an interruption. "There's an old don and a bit of petticoat in a carriage, bound from the States for Santa Fé and taking advantage of the caravan. You're to ride as guard for the same, along with Don Antonio. The old don commissioned me to find your like. The wages are a peso a day, mount and keep."

"A 'petticoat'—a woman?" I pressed. "Spanish? Young—or old?"

"Younger than you'd think natural without knowing the old boy; but his daughter, and the last leaf of his family-tree. A pretty piece of baggage, too. Come on and I'll introduce you to your employer. After that you'll doubtless get the dark side of the carriage and the cold side of the fire for a spell, thanks to that damned sprig of an Antonio; but I look to you to have introduced yourself in round fashion to the Señorita Rosa before we reach Arkansas, or I'll have missed my guess farther than Tony missed the bull's-eye."

CHAPTER II.

I ENTER UPON MY DUTIES.

THE caravan camp lay about a mile out. As we drew near we could see that the dingy white-topped wagons were stringing into a semblance of order.

There were some twenty of the Conestoga freighting wagons, their wagon-sheets drawn taut, their spans of six or eight mules or oxen coupled to the chains, their drivers afoot, whip in hand, and the hunters and other horsemen sitting their saddles. A caballada or herd of loose animals was being rounded to, in readiness.

The long American led straight to a high-wheeled, partially curtained carriage—an American Dearborn, evidently. To this was harnessed a spike team, of one span of mules and a single animal before with a Mexican astride it.

Don Antonio, mounted on a horse, was beside the vehicle. Opposite from him the long American halted and becked me forward.

"*Buenos dias, señor,*" he addressed to the interior of the carriage. "I have brought your man. Do me the favor of

receiving for yourself and the *señorita* your daughter my friend the Señor Ricardo Andrews, who will share with Don Antonio the guard upon your journey."

It was an apparently very old Spaniard who leaned and surveyed me sharply out of the keenest of piercing black eyes in a sallow face.

"*Gracias. Su servidor, señor,*" he said. And he added quickly: "*Dios!* He is sick? Do you know him? Does he speak the language?"

"Sufficiently. I will vouch for him, *señor*. He has been sick, but he is *muy hombre*—he is of the *gente fina*, and you will see."

"Can he use the rifle to good purpose?"

"Ask Don Antonio," laughed the long American. "And you have my word."

"Then—*'stá bueno,*" muttered the old Spaniard. "I engage him. He knows the terms? *Sí*. You may pick the best mule, and be quick. The start is ordered. Time is short. Pedro!" he called. "The saddle and bridle."

The Mexican peon had dismounted to remove from atop the baggage behind a huge Spanish saddle. So I stood ill at ease and forlorn, conscious that I made no great impression. From against the side curtains beyond the old don another pair of eyes were scrutinizing me between the folds of a black shawl that completely enveloped the figure.

A woman, this—and by the term "*señorita*" a girl, the don's daughter. The eyes, lustrous, and the figure, small, piqued my curiosity as I had piqued hers; but in the shadow the concealment was perfect.

Young Don Antonio galloped around and stopped at full speed, in gallant fashion. He now carried a clumsy escopeta—a flint-lock smoothbore about on a par with our American fusils—and seemed in excellent humor.

"*Bueno, amigo mío,*" he welcomed, flashing his devilish smile. "It is you, after all? *Por Dios!* I did not think you would get this far." His banter stiffened me.

"I will go as far as you, *señor,*" I replied. "Maybe farther." And my Spanish failed me. "Damn it, sir!" I said. "With a mount and a gun I ask no favor, sir, of you or anybody else." From the interior of the carriage I heard a slight laugh in a feminine tone.

"Well spoken," hailed the long American. He was back upon his own horse and leading a raw-boned black mule on a hide halter. He was accompanied by a heavy-set, bronzed American, in broad hat, blue flannel shirt, and belted trousers tucked into stout boots. "This is Cap'n Stanley, lad; the train boss. And here's your mula."

I shook hands with Captain Stanley—a brisk, resolute man, and, as I afterward ascertained, a veteran upon the Santa Fé trail. "Just keep a stiff upper lip, and you'll do," he encouraged. "I've had many an invalid in my trains; and by the time we struck the plains they were eating their meat raw and sleeping sound under a blanket, same as the rest. There's something in the air that makes red blood." The Mexican servant had saddled and bridled my mule. I clambered aboard with what speed I might muster.

"You've got a good gun in your hands and a good critter under you," my friend vouchsafed; and Captain Stanley nodded. "You ride guard for this don outfit, you understand. Eyes open, mouth shut—that's your privilege. The don will pay you at the end of the trip. Don José Gonzales is his handle complete. He's of the gentry out yonder, and a rare old bird besides. I trust you to warm his blood toward you in proper time. He possesses what may or may not be worth while to know of better." The long American appeared strangely solicitous that I win favor. "As for the girl—" And he smiled broadly. "Luck to you there, *compañero.*"

"You guard that side; I will guard this, Señor Americano?" called Don Antonio. "Good."

"This," I observed, was the side of the *señorita.*

"Are you ready, Don José?" demanded Captain Stanley.

"*Adelante*—forward—Señor Captain."

Captain Stanley went galloping to the head of the train. "All set?" I heard him shout. "All set! All set!" the cries answered him, amidst the cracking of whips, and yells and American curses. "Hooray for Santy Fee!" We were off.

Naturally it was a slow progress, at a methodical gait adapted to the toiling spans hauling their loads of three tons. Captain Stanley and two aides rode in the van; the hunters and other mounted attachés rode the flanks; but the teamsters trudged beside their fore wheels, just within striking distance of their lead yokes. The *caballada* jostled behind, in charge of the two vaqueros upon diminutive horses almost covered by the great, long-skirted saddles. At the very rear there was a little squad of horsemen, closing our trail—their talk and laughter drifted forward to mingle with the talk and laughter drifting back.

The old don had lowered the carriage curtain on our side; the *señorita* must have lifted hers, for I caught the subdued notes of her voice as now and then she exchanged sentences with Don Antonio. He rode showily, with numerous caracoles whilst he held his steed under firm bit; and admitting his skill, it seemed to me that he would do better to save his animal.

Dull though it might have appeared, for me, reduced to a walking pace and to no conversation, there was an exhilaration in being fairly embarked upon the long trail. Santa Fé was near eight hundred miles, or fifty days, and much might happen.

Being still within the borders of so-called civilization, the camp this night was loosely pitched. While waiting for Pedro to build a fire, the old don and his daughter remained in the carriage. Don José had raised his curtain; his grizzled head poked out inquiringly, like that of a turtle. Pedro spread an Indian blanket upon the ground; and at his summons, "Ready, *señor*," it was my duty to assist the don to emerge. He climbed out laboriously, with many a grunt at his cramped limbs, and with muttered "*Gracias*" for my services. A mere bundle of bones encased in a dried skin; he had the air, nevertheless, and I felt not the least hesitation in offering him my arm.

"*Gracias; muy gracias*," he again muttered, as I ensconced him upon the blanket by the fire, and Pedro muffled him in a heavy red-and-black striped sarape. "Youth must attend upon age. You have parents, my son?" he asked.

"They are dead, *señor*." He crossed himself. "God has them. That is well. You may leave me. I need nothing more. My camp is yours. *A Dios*." His sharp eyes followed me as I returned to my mule. The *señorita* was coming, under excessive escort of the young don. Wrapped from ankles to crown of head in a black, fringed shawl, she scurried by me—and through token of those trim ankles and her lithe movement I sensed that the shawl concealed something worth while. Romance accompanied her; so did Don Antonio.

I stripped my mule and turned her out to graze, upon the picket rope. The wagons were already rudely lined, and their mules and oxen were being staked to grass and water. Fires were smoking. From one, the long American jovially hailed me. "*Cómo 'stá, amigo?* You walk as if the prairie was putting some life into you. Feeling wolfish?" "I feel fine, thank you," I assured, admitting also to a great emptiness in the stomach region. "You'll be clinching your teeth in the buffalo hump, all right, before many days; yes, and sucking marrow, too. Sit in, man. What's your hurry?" I joined his group. The mess cook was preparing a stew of beef; several of the men, my friend among them, were roasting slices of the raw meat, held on ramrods to the blaze. What was my hurry, in fact—except, of course, hunger, and, I must inwardly confess, a desire to see beneath the black shawl. "Cut your own hunk and fall to," I was invited. "It's every man for himself, and damn the cook."

"I have guard duty, thank you, gentlemen," I apologized, tortured by the odor of crisping beef. "Another time."

"And soft duty, too," hazarded one of the men. "By thunder, I'm not so old but that I'd like to swap jobs with you."

"Yes, an' get the wrong side the carriage an' the wrong side the fire, b' gorry!" laughed an Irishman.

"Well, I'll have no loose talk about the don, boys," warned the long American.

"Sure, a man can envy him his luck in ridin' the trail within touch of a pretty gal, even if there's the old man between," replied somebody.

"Specially if there's a gold mine a-makin' the carriage spring easy in the ruts," put in another.

"Sure an' has he his gould mine in his trunk?" blurted the Irishman.

"Ask Old Hoss, here. Yes, an' ask the greenhorn. There's something in the wind if not in the trunk, you bet. I wasn't born yesterday, myself. To my thinkin', that carriage totes what would excuse a white man for turning Mexican."

I heard the long American growl renewed warning at the free talk; but the servant, Pedro, was approaching, and with a "Good night, gentlemen," I withdrew.

"Don José sends word that he would have *El Señor Americano* eat at his fire."

"*Gracias, amigo,*" I acknowledged, and followed him back.

The trunk had been removed from the carriage; probably had been placed within the tent erected facing the fire. The old don and the *señorita* were seated at the doorway of the tent, Don Antonio close at one side, his escopeta in his lap. The *señorita* had dropped her shawl from her head, and was neatly retouching her smooth hair, so that by the flicker of the flames I saw her unveiled. She was beautiful—white and black, punctured by the red of full lips—very white, very black, and temptingly red, and of a roguishness of countenance that boded a lively spirit.

Only a brief sight I had; far too brief, for when her wide round eyes under curved, tapering brows espied me, she quickly lifted her shawl upon her head again; and as I arrived I saw, in the flesh, merely the long lashes and the piquant little nose framed by the mysterious rebozo.

"Our fire is yours, *senor,*" the old don greeted gravely. "Do us the favor to be seated. All here is yours. Pedro will serve you with such little as we have. We are poor, but we are of the *gente fina* (better class)."

Despite the hospitality I was still the stranger, and my unfamiliarity with rapid Spanish kept me silent. Amidst the conversation the girl now and then laughed musically; she opened her shawl only enough to admit food into those lips; and when ever she caught my furtive glances (for I could not but gaze), she abruptly lowered her eyes and kept them down until— But I tried my best not to act the boor.

"You have had sufficient, *señor?*" spoke the old don across. "It was little, but our all. Maybe in the buffalo country—you hunt the buffalo?"

"Not as yet, *señor,*" I answered "When we reach the buffalo country I hope to repay your courtesy with that meat, if you desire."

"Oh, the ciboleros!" exclaimed the girl. "Santa Mariá! It will be many days yet."

"What do you wish, *señorita mía?*" Don Antonio inquired. "If it is buffalo meat you require, buffalo meat you shall have. This Americano will guard the carriage. I will kill buffalo with my pistola. It is easy, when one knows. There is no fear of lacking buffalo meat while I am with you. I, indeed, am a buffalo hunter."

"*Gracias á Dios,*" muttered Pedro under his peaked hat, as he replenished the fire."

"*El Americano* can shoot. I think he can ride. Maybe when we reach the buffalo country he will be strong enough to try, Don Antonio," the girl lisped rather mischievously.

"With your permission, *señorita* and *señors,*" I hastily craved, rising. The talk was growing too personal for my pride. Whereupon I strolled to the edge of the darkness. I caught Don Antonio's indignant retort.

"He is a greenhorn; he has never hunted the buffalo, Señorita Rosa. I have hunted them with escopeta, pistola and lanza. I have won at the cock-racing and the bull-tailing. He is hired to guard the carriage. That is well. I am glad to ride at your side, but you shall see me also hunt the buffalo like a caballero—"

"*Basta* (enough)," spoke Don José. "We shall have meat without quarreling over it. Of that I am sure. The young American is recommended by Don Juan to help Don Antonio guard us. And Don Antonio will show these teamsters and those other Americanos how a gentleman of New Mexico kills the buffalo."

But I resolved, as I lingered bitterly in the shadows, that a certain American green-

horn should prove to them his father's blood. The camp-fires of the caravan gleamed in a bevy beyond us. Night had settled upon the prairie. Through the darkness the voices of the various messes pierced blatant, as the rough-and-ready men sang, boasted and bantered. Oxen lowed, mules hee-hawed, the fewer horses snorted at the slinking forms of the small prairie-wolves. Amidst all this I was the alien, yet somehow felt at home.

When I turned back to our fire, from within the tent a slender voice issued, with—"*A Dios, señores. Buenas noches.*" She has used the plural address! "*Muy buenas noches, señorita,*" we responded, Don Antonio and I together.

"By your leave, *señor,* we have arranged the night guard," said Don Antonio, politely, to me. "You are tired. You shall sleep first for three hours, while Pedro watches. Then you will do us the favor of keeping watch for three hours—the mid watch. I will then be on the alert till the morning, through the danger hours."

"There are no Indians yet," muttered old Pedro, who seemed privileged to vent his private opinions.

"That will do," Antonio rebuked. "Where there are no Indians, they are most to be expected. We have precious treasure in that tent, *amigos.* We are men; we must guard it. As for you, Señor Americano, should you hear prowlers about, awaken me. The caravan is composed of —who knows? Maybe *ladrons* (bandits) among them."

"I will take care of my watch; do you take care of yours," I answered. "Americans do not harm old men and girls."

He and I rolled ourselves in our blankets, our feet to the fire, leaving Pedro importantly on guard with the escopeta. I speedily fell asleep, to dream many things, through which the *señorita* figured — and was rescuing her from a charge not of Indians but of buffalo, when Pedro's hand upon my forehead aroused me.

"It is your hour, *señor.*"

The mid watch passed uneventful. The stars shone brightly, the cool prairie air wafted in gentle gusts. The wolves, scouting for refuse, occasionally vented shrill yappy chorus. The animals coughed and snorted. The camp-fires had died, and from the caravan there was no sound. The caravan had not yet mounted guard save over the caballada to prevent its members from straying back toward Independence; and I somewhat wondered why these precautions of ours, almost as severe as if the tent had been pitched in the very Indian country.

At the proper hour by my father's watch I awakened Don Antonio. "*Alerta!*" he instantly responded, springing up. No sluggard, he. So I resigned my charge to him, and slept again until daybreak and the general movement that betokened preparations for the onward march.

Pedro was building the fire. Don Antonio was nodding, enveloped in his sarape, his flint-lock between his knees. Within the tent there was a slight stirring, and the murmur of low voices. Soon Pedro passed in a vessel of warm water. The old don emerged with courteous "*Buenos días, señores,*" and advanced to spread his withered hands to the blaze. Up the line the breakfast fires were smoking in the misty air, and men were busy among the wagons and the animals. I waited as long as I dared; then mindful of my assumed duties, I went and fetched in the two saddle brutes, that we should not be delayed. From Don José this won an approving nod; and Antonio sprang to his feet, still drowsy, to utter a hasty "*Pardon, señor,*" as I returned from having driven the picket pins afresh. But the sly rascal had been watching me, I knew.

"This establishes no precedent, Mr. Tony," thought I. "I serve not your interests, but mine own."

By grace of fortune, not until now did the tent flaps open and the *señorita* step out, brightening the day, although enwrapped as she was in that black shawl. She uttered her musical "*Buenos días,*" and modestly seated herself upon the blanket by her father's side, her small feet well under her. Served by Pedro, we breakfasted as we had supped, and almost in silence; finished by eating our tortilla plates, which left few dishes to be washed.

Pedro supplied corn-husk cigarettes to

father and daughter; Don Antonio smilingly proffered me husk and tobacco; and at my clumsy efforts the girl exclaimed: "Señor Pedro! The American does not know. Here—I will do it."

She skilfully rolled, from her own stock, mysteriously produced, and with eyes downcast held out to me the brown cylinder, moistened by her own lips.

I could not but accept—shamed until I heard Don Antonio's reproachful: "Ah, Señorita Rosa! Would that I had never learned, either." He leaped up, as if to show his mettle. *"Adios!* I go to bring in the animals for the carriage. It is time." He was all agility as he ran for his horse. Pricked by his forehandedness, I ran after. Such was his quickness and such was the obstinacy of my mule, that he had already saddled ere I had clapped on the sweat-pad. The heavy, cumbersome saddle required my utmost strength.

With a wave of hand he dashed away at full speed, as though bound for Santa Fé instead of for the team grazing only a score of rods out. And by the time I had mounted, leaning from his stirrup he had pulled their pins. Shouting freely, he turned them for the carriage, while Pedro shambled to head them and put them to the vehicle.

"A true *caballero* who rides like a *vaquero,"* he addressed them. "Whoa, now! Do you think he is still after you.

Thereby I was given to understand that my brief sun had suffered eclipse.

"Ketch up! Ketch up!" welled the order along the line. Order in apparent confusion reigned. Still smiling at his exploit, with hat doffed Don Antonio escorted the *señorita* to the carriage; I attended upon the old don; and the now much satisfied Antonio stationed himself, in cavalier pose upon the saddle, at the head of the spike mule, while Pedro bore out the trunk, tied it and the other baggage behind.

Captain Stanley galloped back. "All set?"

"At your service, *el capitan. Vamos á marchar* (Let us march), *señor,"* Antonio replied.

The fore of the caravan moved; wagon after wagon wheeled into line. Pedro climbed upon the spike mule, and we also were off—Don Antonio at the girl's side, I at the side of Don José. But this day the curtains were not drawn. I could watch her profile.

CHAPTER III.

I HUNT THE BUFFALO.

THE prairie was working its miracle. The long American viewed me unreservedly. "Half wild hoss, half alligator, eh?" he appraised. "I told you, you weren't wolf meat yet, *compañero.* How goes it with you and *el señor?"*

"There's no smarter *hombre* in Mexico—talks little and knows much. I expect, in a scrimmage, you'd grab the gal and leave the old man and trunk?"

"That I would," I declared.

"Antonio wouldn't," he countered.

"What's in that trunk, if you know?" I demanded.

"The more I don't."

We had put far behind us the so-termed border of which Council Grove and the forking of the two great trails—one to the Oregon, one to Santa Fé—were the western limit, and had entered upon the wide reach of uninhabited prairie that stretches to the Valley of the Arkansas.

Each day was much like its predecessor; at night corral was being formed by parking the wagons, aslant, their tongues outside, their fore wheels almost touching rear wheels, in a compact circle, with an opening for men and beasts in case of alarm.

The hunters officiating for the caravan had little to do, save now and then chase, for exercise, a stray wolf or fetch down an antelope or two. But on the second morrow after my conversation with the long American we observed that the hunters ranged farther upon either flank, and that the teamsters trudged with an expectant air intensified at every distant gunshot and at every peering by some mounted figure on a distant rise.

This evening "buffalo" was the current topic.

"To-morrow night, and we shall have buffalo meat, Señorita Rosa," vaunted Don Antonio.

"Really? Shall we meet with the buffalo hunters?"

"Really, *señorita mía.* But you need not look so far for a *cibolero*—not when you have with you a *caballero* ready to lay at your feet anything that you desire! A buffalo? One? Two? Three?"

"My poor feet would not accommodate so many, thank you, *amigo mío,*" she laughed. Besides, you may wish to leave one buffalo for El Señor Americano and the other Americanos. Some one must guard you and your father, and some one must bring the meat. With your permission, then, to-morrow I shall turn *cibolero*—but I will be on guard, in my heart, *señorita mía.* A call, and I shall come."

"And you, Señor Andrews? We may depend upon you for company while the wild *ciboleros* are out?" Don José queried, with courteous inflection, across at me.

"It shall be my pleasure, *señor,* as well as my duty, if such is your own pleasure. I claim to be no buffalo hunter, like Don Antonio, although I hope to learn a little. The trail is long yet."

About ten in the morning the sudden loud cries of "Buffalo! the buffalo!" broke from the head of our column and traveled at lightning speed down the toiling line. The long American had signaled with his hat. You could see him, now, running his horse in curious figures, far to the left of the route, and flourishing an arm exultantly. "Buff'lo! Hooray! Meat in the pots, boys!"

The excitement seized upon every man and seemed to infect the beasts also. Riders galloped pell-mell, tearing over the sandy swells amidst which the trail wound, and all focusing upon the long American. The teamsters grabbed their guns from the wagons, lashed their animals, and oxen and mules quicken pace.

"Hasten, Pedro," bade the old don, anxiously craning. And our teams ambled, pressing on in the dust of the Conestoga before; the carriage jolted; from her side the *señorita,* dropping her shawl, peered eagerly.

"Oh, they are coming! *María Madre!* The *cibolos!*" uttered the *señorita.*

A great dust cloud had arisen against the horizon before and to the left. And now a blackish mass moved forward from under it; rolling over a bare ridge and pouring down as if to cross our very trail ahead. The buffalo! Yes, and the hunters, fringing the edges, swerving in and out, while their guns puffed drab smoke. A dull thunder boomed through the clear air and filled our ears.

"Corral! Corral!"

Herd and hunters were coming. The uproar swelled—a bellowing, a thundering, punctuated by the gunshots.

"God help us," prayed the old don, clutching the carriage post with trembling hand; but he breathed fast, there was fire in his sharp black eyes.

"Those Americans are crazy. The devil is in them," Pedro called back.

"See! If that is to run the buffalo—" the girl faltered. "You must not go, Antonio." And she cried out with quick fervor: "Oh, it is grand! How they ride! How they shoot! They are killing. They are indeed men. But look! What is happening now?"

For the assistant wagon-master and two others had spurred right forward into the face of the onward thundering herd. They waved their hats, their guns belched—again and yet again. Forward ran the leading teamsters, leaving their wagons. Splitting, the herd flowed by the three and was shunted farther apart by the dancing, gesticulating, volleying teamsters; the gap widened, and in a moment the brutes were streaming on, in two divisions, to right and left, while the caravan animals plunged and cringed in frenzy.

The foremost buffalo had arrived opposite us; and suddenly all the near vista was alive with the shaggy forms, with the horsemen veering after, with the teamsters running aside, aiming, firing—buffalo staggered, dodged, lumbered, bleeding; the wagon teams were in torment of fear; Pedro appealed with Spanish oaths as he tried to control his spike mule; and Don Antonio blurted shrilly:

"Take my gun, Pedro! *Adios, señorita.* To the hunt! I will tail one for you—I am a *cibolero!*"

He dashed out like an arrow launched

from a bow. That was too much. The hunt was in my blood also. I must have stiffened, with clenched hand, and whirled my mule, for the voice of Don José rang in my ears: "Go, *señor!*"

I was away. There were buffalo upon my side, too—plenty of them, their matted forelocks and bulging eyes plain as they tore on through smoke and dust or recoiled from the teamsters' muzzles; but I made after Don Antonio. Thank God, my mule had legs; she showed that she could run like a deer, and I urged her hard. The young don had the start, but the gap between the two currents of buffalo ever widened, and we had some little distance to go.

An old bull, slightly wounded, seemed to be Antonio's aim; doubtless because it was a giant of a bull and worthy the attack of a *caballero*. Now all the prairie was the scene of single combats, as the hunters endeavored to down their meat within easy distance; several were butchering, their arms red to the elbows as they slashed and hacked. Through the ever-shifting fantasy of shout and shot and bloody forms snorting pain and defiance, Don Antonio raced madly, I in his wake.

The bull, fighting hot, had stopped, confused, challenging the foe, one and all. Magnificent he stood there, braced, glaring right and left; and at him charged Don Antonio, riding like an Indian, the leathery wings of his stirrups sweeping the ground. He pulled short, with a high cry, to curb his fretting horse in the bull's very face, while he waved his arm at the carriage, from which the *señorita* was gazing. With astonishing spryness for such bulk, the bull also charged—sprang forward with the agility of a huge cat; and so quickly that his horns fairly grazed the haunch of the sidewise leaping horse.

He turned with the horse; face over shoulder young Antonio raced in flight, the monster closely pursuing; suddenly veered his mount, and reined; the bull sped by, and now spurring to gain his flank the don reached for his tail.

I did not wait to see the feat. A smaller beast, plunging unmolested, caught my eye. My mule answered to spur and rein. The buffalo was tired; she was a fat heifer and better meat by far than the bull. We overhauled her. Soon my mule's nose was at her flank. The froth from her hanging tongue had spattered her sleek brown hips. At every lunge of her heavy fore quarters she exhaled gruntingly. Her eye rolled back at me and her tail quirked with her efforts.

Inch by inch we gained. 'Twas now or never, and I wondered if the *señorita* was looking. I had chosen the proper side. The short-barreled Hawkens lay across my saddle; I cocked it and set the trigger. The mule ran so easily that the muzzle hardly jarred. I dropped reins, slightly depressed the barrel, sense of touch and eye told me that the ball was going true, and I touched trigger. *Crack!*

Instantaneously a dull red spot appeared back of her shoulder and the heavy ball had plowed on through her lungs. She sprang convulsive—no, her heart, her heart! The shot was a little low, but enough; for her mouth gushed blood, the dull-red spot brightened and spurted crimson, and with a groan down she pitched, sending the sand flying. She was mine!

Our momentum carried us by. I wheeled the mule, to leave my hat as token, for I must have another of the animals; the lust of ambition possessed me. And as I paused, to reload my piece, I sought for the carriage, for Don Antonio, and for fresh conquest. Then I heard—I was certain that I heard, although I was nowhere near to her—a scream from the *señorita*. I heard also shouts. I strained with roving eye for the cause.

The train was still in confusion of surging mules and oxen, careening wagons, and running, swearing men; the prairie was dotted with grotesque carcasses, toiling butchers, reeling beasts, among which horsemen darted hither-thither, poising eager rifle and pistol. Then I glimpsed the young don.

They filled my vision—he and the bull. They were not far, but they were clear of the slackening mêlée, and with answering shout I jabbed in the spurs and rode to the rescue.

He had not thrown the bull by the tail—a *vaquero* trick to be applied to a domestic if untamed animal with good chance of success, but foolhardy in the case of a rampant beast like this one, bred to the free life. His horse's flank was reddened from a horn gash; he was clinging in desperate flight, the bull at his very sash ends; he had lost his silvered hat—but his dragoon pistol was out, and now as he swerved his mount aside just in time, and the burly monster bored past, he fired. At the impact of the ball the bull flicked tasseled tail; Don Antonio cheered, threw away his pistol, and snatched loose his coil of riata. He pursued, the while I tore in at a tangent.

'Twas another foolhardy play; but swinging loop, as his horse ate the distance, he cast. The loop widened and settled, and he drew taut. His horse braced feet and held stanch; the bull momentarily staggered, to the tug of the tether; his head twisted about, his eyes bulged farther and his tongue dripped bloody slaver. All the time—but no great time—I was trying to reload. The powder spilled, the bullets refused to seat, the deuce was sporting with my hasty fingers. The bull whirled end for end; he set himself, and the braided hair rope stretched until it hummed. The braced hoofs of the horse slipped, slipped—

"Cut that rope! Cut it!" bawled the chorus.

Others were coming, but I was to be the first. Don Antonio's teeth flashed whitely; he fumbled for his knife, and the rope broke with rifle report. To the rebound the bull lurched one way; the lighter horse overturned, the other way, hoofs threshing, and Don Antonio went sprawling across the sandy sod. The bull gathered himself, first. He charged redly for the things upon the ground. But the don was up, the horse was up; which would it be? And near at hand I shouted wildly. God be praised, the bull chose the larger thing—the horse. Away they raced again, pursuer and pursued— *No!* The horse continued; not the buffalo, for after a few short plunges he reversed course as if by a feint. He had bethought of an easier enemy.

"Lay flat! Lie flat, man! Don't run."

There were a dozen warnings, coupled with oaths; but the don had scrambled to his feet and, stumbling in his urgency, was trying for his pistol. I caught glimpse of his pale, sweat-smeared face as he agonizedly glanced my way, and now, almost but not quite arrived, I must shoot. The bead was rapidly drawn; the ball slapped smartly and a waft of dust flew from behind the shuttling shoulder. The bull hunched at the shock—barely long enough for me to dash in between him and Don Antonio and toll him if I might.

The mule was true to rein and spur as I swung her well-nigh into his very breath. He saw red, down went his head, on he came, in new direction; and clinging with my knees I let her go while I reloaded. Again the shouts; again—I thought—the scream! The bull was about, on a pivot, questing the don. "Down, man! Lay down!" But no use; the young fool could not understand. I also turned. How I had reloaded so quickly I did not know; the gun had been charged, capped, and cocked by a miracle. Other figures were rushing in; the long American loomed large; there were shots, a scurry, and suddenly I was beside the bull once more, seeking a vital spot. He veered before I had set trigger; his horn hooked under the mule's shoulder and down we all crashed together, as seemed to me, in the reek of dust and hot animal smell.

Over and over I rolled, thinking mainly of holding fast to the rifle. They say that I was catapulted clear across the bull's back and that his blind fury carried him straight across the struggling mule. At any event, from my knees I saw him, the first of objects; and next, Don Antonio running for me.

The bull saw—saw him, not me; he launched again, head on. It was now or never, but of what avail was a ball against that matted skull?

There were shouts renewed—"Lay down! Down, both of you!"—and converging of horsemen, while the sight on my rifle steadied an instant, and as the panting don passed I fired and fell aside. Well it was that I had flung myself as far as I might. The huge bulk plowed the very

place where I had knelt. There it lay, dead before crushing my extended foot almost to bursting; and there was Don Antonio, halted wonderingly; and here was the long American, arrived, cursing exultant.

"An eye shot! By God, see for yourselves."

And here I lay, staring giddily from an elbow, with the scene apparently distant but sharpened as by a spy-glass. The long American vaulted off and strode to me. "Hurt, lad?"

I searched myself. "No, sir." The foot was twinging. "I think not. I could get up, if—"

"We'll roll him clear. You lay still. By thunder, but you shot center that time."

Young Don Antonio stood, still panting, over me. "My life is yours, *señor,*" he gasped. "*Por Dios,* and yet you were no *cibolero!*"

"Luck was with me, *señor,*" I answered.

They were prying the carcass free of me, and I might withdraw my foot. It came—it followed directions; and I arose, to limp. A hunter stuck his grimy finger into the bull's eye-socket.

"The loan of your mule a moment, *señor.*" That was Don Antonio, looking altogether wretched. Somebody had caught my mule; she was standing by, seemingly sound. "I shall be further your debtor, if such is possible."

"Certainly," I replied.

He nimbly mounted, took down the riata which hung from the high pommel, and was away instantly, with ruthless spur, riding as, after all, only he could ride. A moment more and he was in chase of his horse; another rider—Pedro, coming from the carriage on the spike mule—headed the animal; and swooping in Don Antonio neatly placed his noose.

He bade Pedro retrieve hat and pistol, and returned, leading his captive. His eye was brighter.

"*Dios!* If my rope had not broken, *amigo!* I would have played him, I would have tailed him, I would have dragged him to the carriage and the feet of the *señorita.* But no matter. God sent you. We will go back. They ask it. Pedro will butcher. You have killed a cow? *Bueno!* She shall be our meat. From this bull we shall take only the trophy." He sprang from the saddle, and with two slashes of his knife had cut the tassel from the short, slender tail.

The long American and fellows already had scattered, to wield knives themselves. Everywhere the butchers were busy. The don and I trotted for the carriage, and he ever waxed the more gay.

When we arrived at the caravan the twain in the carriage gazed expectant at our approach, and I noted that the old don's hands were atremble as he leaned to peer. The *señorita's* face was very white, making her wide, lustrous black eyes the wider, the blacker, the lovelier. She was uncovered. "You are safe? You are unharmed? We saw you—oh, *Maria Santisima,* what a sight!" And I could have vowed with bitterness that she gazed full at Don Antonio. He accepted, as was his right. I was nothing.

"We saw all, and that is enough. It was terrible—the running, the dodging, the shooting, and at the last, the bull close upon you, the American to his knees, the demon coming— Holy angels!" She pressed her hands to her eyes; and he soothed her with the light words of a *caballero.* Suddenly she bared her face and gazed straight at me as I awkwardly sat my mule, my foot paining cruelly.

"El Señor Americano says not a word, for all that he was there. He is a brave man indeed, and a *caballero.* He has not been presented to me. Will not my father present me to *el señor,* Don Ricardo, whom I desire to know?"

"Pardon. I kiss your feet, *señorita mia,*" stammered Don Antonio, flushing. "Come, *mi amigo,*" he called to me. "The Señorita Rosa asks for you." He presented me in due form. For an amazing instant the little hand lay in my rough palm—and I realized that the custom was foreign to her upbringing.

"I kiss your feet, and your hands too, *señorita,*" I blurted.

"But your deeds are greater than your words, we find, *señor,*" she demurely said. "My father and I are glad to have you with us. We shall fear nothing."

I might only murmur confusedly and retire, with a tremendous thumping of the heart, to help Pedro bring in the meat from the cow. My foot no longer pained; as matter of fact, it had been protected by the heavy boot and the soft sandy soil. The caravan made dry camp for the rest of the day and for the night.

In the morning, well content with its swaying festoons of meat strips, and every man full to the nozzle, the caravan resumed its march up the Valley of the Arkansas, for the Cimarron Crossing. The *señorita* and her father remained gracious toward me, so that I was now contented also

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CHAPTER IV.

I DO MY "POSSIBLE."

AS we moved on by steady stages the caravan discipline grew more strict: a squad of the hunters rode the advance, and other horsemen squads patrolled out upon either hand, searching the near country. At night Don Antonio, Pedro, and I alternated watches, as before. Never an Indian was sighted, nor scarce any moving object whatsoever except small game. Where there were no buffalo, there would be no Indians.

"Thanks to God, we are half-way," spoke the old don when, twenty-four days out of Independence, we were safely arrived at the Cimarron Crossing of the Arkansas. "From here on we shall be in my own land. *Dios y libertad!*"

"*Dios y libertad!*" the *señorita* echoed. "My heart is waiting for a sight of Santa Fé.

"A beautiful city, *señorita?*" I queried.

"It is home, *señor,* and home is always beautiful. My father was born there, and my mother; and his parents and her parents."

"Ah, Santa Fé!" cried Don Antonio, capering his horse. "Those American cities—bah! It is only in Santa Fé that one really lives."

Captain Stanley had elected to take the short cut southwest from the Arkansas, instead of proceeding on west up-river to Bents' Fort. The Arkansas was low, as good omen, and the carriage crossed without difficulty in the muddy swirl left by the Conestoga just before; the water scarcely to the hubs of the high wheels, Pedro belaboring his mule and Don Antonio and I tugging with our riatas attached to the front axle.

"God be thanked," again praised the old don. "We are on Mexican soil and good dry land. It will be dry enough for the next three days, too," he cackled.

Camp was made this evening here upon the sandy south bank of the Arkansas, but I could not see that this land of the Province of Northern Mexico looked vastly different from the land of the United States, a rifle-shot across the shallow current. According to the talk, there now lay ahead of us a desert stretch of some sixty miles, barren of vegetation and virtually waterless. By orders every water-cask was filled. Captain Stanley announced that we should achieve the dry march in three days—he dared not extend the time farther. We had forded the Arkansas none too soon. During the night we heard heavy thunder to the west; and in the morning the current was running muddy and swift.

"The saints are good to us, even if we travel with heretics," Pedro triumphantly declaimed. "By their help we shall avoid even the Comanches. I dreamed last night of Our Lady of Guadalupe—she had a face like the Señorita Rosa, and she smiled."

The long American stopped at gallop, as we were loading up.

"*Buenos días, señorita y señores.* And you also, you young buck," he added at me. "It is well we are not upon the other side of the river; no?"

"It is well, *señor.* And naturally we are glad to be back into our own country again," replied the old don.

"Comanche country, this, say the Injuns," the long American laughed. "They respect no flag, *señor.*" Turning to me: "Ride along a piece with me, *compañero.* You need exercise." We cantered forward. "Enough," he bade. "We're out of earshot of that damned Antonio. Your party knows nothing about the dead bull, as yet, I reckon?"

"The dead bull? There's been only the one dead bull—"

"He's more than dead; he's wolf-picked, by this time. Served you handsomely, he did. But there's another bull, of service, too. One of the hunters found him, early, on this side of the river, just above us. Dead he was, with an Injun arrow sticking in his ribs; but he hadn't been wolf-picked. Too fresh for that. The arrow was Comanche feathered, and the blood scarce dried."

"Shall I tell Don Antonio?" And I felt a cold little quiver at the word "Comanche."

"No, or I'd have told him myself. He could no more keep the news than if the Comanche scalp was at his belt. He'd be bragging from here to Santa Fé, for the ears of the *señorita*. But I want you to sit tight, and ready to jump at the first whoop, so you'll not be late into the corral. Get your party and baggage in; then you can use your Sam Hawkens."

"But—Don Antonio," I stammered—"I can depend on him?"

"Oh, he'll fight. He'll have to. You take care of the girl and the old man, and he'll watch out for the trunk, you bet. You'll find Mr. Tony sticking as close as the scalplock to a drowned Injun. But we're liable not to glimpse a painted face, specially if Pedro keeps praying. So *adios*."

"*Adios*. Wait—I'd like to know more about that trunk," I appealed.

Whereat he grinned. "So would I, *hombre*. And some day we may, you and I."

During this first day out from the Arkansas we moved cautiously; and then, fears having been tossed to the breeze, under the stress of the next dry stage the compact formation weakened into more of open order. Camp-fire talk had agreed that the wounded bull could not have traveled far with the arrow point working in his lungs. We had missed the savages by perhaps a narrow margin, but missed them we had, or they us; and accustomed to such misses, the teamsters waxed buoyant.

And the Comanches came down upon us in mid-morning, when the sun was very hot and the animals were pulling sluggishly through a long sandy bottom bordered by ridgy, bare hills. They probably had been dogging us for the day and a quarter.

"Injuns, boys! Close up! Close up! Corral, men! On right and left—hurry!" Captain Stanley and assistants were galloping, ordering, urging; the teamsters were lashing with their whips, shouting curses and imprecations; the *caballada* herders were shrieking for help; the horsemen, our guard, were holding an undaunted but thin and inward driven line close pressed by a very horde of whooping, gesticulating, hither-thither scurrying savages.

The girl had uttered one little cry and now sat rigid, smitten mute by horror. So sudden had been the change in the peaceful landscape.

"*Los bárbaros!*" had spoken the don, with surprising composure. "But by God's help—" And he waited. A single gasp had issued from Don Antonio, and he seemed momentarily paralyzed by the apparitions arisen as if from hell. His jaw had dropped.

The foremost wagon was supposed to turn broadside and halt, with its oxen swung to rear. Alternating, the succeeding wagons should join themselves to it, right and left, to form an oval, their teams inside, until there was only an opening left at the end for the *caballada*. We had done this in practise; but now in time of need the Old Nick himself actuated the brutes; and what with the yelling and the cursing and the popping of whips, the rearing and cringing and blundering of the confused animals, a pandemonium reigned for ear and eye.

I leaped my mule forward, to assist Pedro. The *caballada*, with difficulty controlled by the frightened herders, was hemming us behind and upon either side, the great Conestoga immediately before had turned half across our way, the mules of the next wagon were plunging and balking, and our own team, blocked, were getting restive. Out upon our flanks the savages never ceased, never relaxed. Galloping and swerving, they were ringing about us with yell and shot and shaken bow and lance, and still more dreadful threat of painted visage.

With the corner of my eye I noted that our fringe of fighters were being sorely put to retire in good order upon the caravan; they seemed only to await the forming of the sheltering corral.

"To the right! To the right!" I shouted. "Around that wagon!"

Pedro tugged upon the bit and hammered lustily with his heels. Don Antonio also spurred forward—and at the instant a half-dozen of the savages came pelting down upon the *caballada*, waving their robes and screeching, for stampede. There had been a gap; now the guard dared not fire—emptying their *escopetas*, the herders fled wildly or were swallowed in the rush of the terrified beasts, and at once an avalanche of snorting, plunging, fear-mad brutes overran us.

Don Antonio disappeared; I was shunted aside like a chip; the old don and the *señorita* cried out together—the carriage was engulfed—and then, ramming frantically again into the hurly-burly, I saw it, beyond, being twitched into the clear by the bolting team. To the jab of the spurs my mule launched herself obediently after; and away we all raced at headlong speed, out from the jumble of careening Conestogas and insensate stock. What had become of Don Antonio I did not know—and did not pause to ascertain.

There was no heading us; I was gradually drawing up on the carriage, and had only brief vision of the useless bridle-grabbing by the fighting horsemen as we charged through. The circling savages gladly opened to us. A portion of them broke in pursuit.

The carriage team ran free, Pedro hugging fast but helpless. We had left the broad trail; the mules rose and fell over the uneven ground, and amidst the hillocks the carriage jolted fearfully. Pedro's voice, again beseeching all the saints, unreeled adown the breeze; the old don and the *señorita* sat silent and clinging. My good mule cut the space short and shorter. Now we were at the rear wheels, now at the carriage step, and I might answer the white countenances of the passengers. I briefly glanced backward. About a score of the Comanches were in chase, at rear and upon either side. The mule lengthened to prick of rowel and shake of rein. We were past the step, we were at the tails of the wheel span, we were creeping up on the spike mule and were almost at Pedro's tightly clasping shanks.

"*Señor!*" he gasped appealingly.

"You fool!" I shouted. "Haul on the bit—haul!" He could not, or would not. I reached for the bridle, and—

"*Señor!*" It was a cry from the carriage. "*Señor!* The trunk! *Dios!* The trunk!"

With fingers laced into the spike mule's cheek-strap I twisted in the saddle. The trunk had jolted loose; towed by one thong, it was tumbling along in our wake, while the scouring savages yelled in glee.

"*Señor!* The trunk!" the *señorita* had entreated. Veering in, a Comanche was casting for it with his riata. The noose slipped harmlessly across it; and as I dropped bridle to turn for a shot he darted away, laughing, but cowering behind his daubed shield. And I permitted him to go, while I grasped for the bridle again. "*Señor!* The trunk!"

I looked. The thong had parted, the trunk was still rolling onward, and the old don was half-way over the carriage edge, as if to dive out. With all my strength I reined the spike mule. She whirled so quickly that the wheel span were thrown from their feet, the Dearborn tilted on two wheels, well-nigh was over, the *señorita* screamed, it righted, we completed the short half-circle— "After me, Pedro!" I yelled, and forged on in succor of Don José, now scrambling to the trunk.

A Comanche met him; they came together there; the poor old don threw up protesting arm, and at full speed the devil lanced him. I saw the blade sink; brandishing blood-tipped shaft, the savage swerved in flight. My mule seemed to stop of her own will—only a second, but long enough for the low blade sight of the Hawkens to outline against a dingy, tensely bent back; and I pulled trigger. The ball cleaned the saddle. Dragging a writhing, bounding carcass, the pony galloped into the desert.

Amid a tremendous outburst of whoops

I reached the trunk, with the body of the old don doubled upon it. The lid was askew; and strange to say, I marked a sheepskin shirt and a red flannel petticoat. There was no time to marvel. A few of the Comanches had continued after the *caballada* animals, and here came the vengeful others, like fiends of hell. The arrows hissed and pattered. And here came Pedro, vigorously encouraging the spike mule, while the carriage, with the *señorita* leaning from it, rocked behind.

That next minute was an eternity. Somehow I had reloaded; somehow I was off my mule and standing over the old don crumpled upon the trunk and running red; somehow I was praying to the saints myself, that the carriage arrive.

They were upon us—the Comanches! I dared not hazard empty piece, and the rifle muzzle only sent them dodging. There was one, close to the carriage. He gained rapidly, extending dirty claw for the headstall of a mule, and I drew down upon him. The arm of the *señorita*, also, extended; it pointed with a tiny pistol; the pistol exploded, and straightening in his seat, the savage scudded away, swaying, and turned not back.

But another seized the bit of the spike mule; and so near they wrestled that I might hear the grunts. Kill him I must—when Pedro, plucking knife, stabbed him again and again, and he toppled, howling. The team and carriage were arriving; and suddenly, warned by something unseen, I whirled about. The trunk bristled with arrows, a cast lance whistled over my shoulder, and I looked full into the bended bows of two warriors, their arrows leveled, the one at me, the other at the don. The The Hawkens cracked, and the bows twanged together; the lead caught the one rascal just as he released, and the arrow only grazed the don; simultaneously a fiery pain shocked all my shoulder, as the other arrow landed true.

Pedro uttered a Spanish oath; and as the Comanche who had struck me rushed forward to the finish, the *péon's* knife thudded into his broad, sweat-glistening chest. Then I had tumultuous dream of another hurly-burly—of the *señorita* screaming tigerishly, of Pedro swearing and dragging at the don, of myself flailing with rifle-barrel, beating aside lance and bow stroke and thrust of knife—of painted forms careering, hooting, fighting to keep us from the carriage—of mules rearing and biting—and of a hearty cheer which instantly resolved chaos into order as rescue from the caravan tore in.

Down I was sitting, exhausted. The face of the long American I recognized the first; and next, that of Don Antonio, bending over the *señorita* and Don José. "*Dios!* If I might only have got here sooner," he was saying. "You! The trunk! *Dios!* Had I been here, myself! But the *caballada* trampled me under hoof." Pedro was blubbering and wringing his hands.

"You're all right, son," was speaking the long American, to me. "We'll quit you of this arrow"—and he did, by snapping the shaft and drawing it through—"and put a hunk o' tobacco on. "'Tisn't pizened, Lord be thanked."

"How's Don José?" I managed.

"He wants the Señor Americano," I was told.

Supported by Pedro, he gave me his hand. "If I am called, guard *mi señorita hija*. You are brave—an American and a heretic, but brave. Take all, but guard my daughter."

"No! *Por Dios!*" Don Antonio spoke quickly. "She shall be mine to guard, El Señor Don José. I am her *primo*."

"*No importa* (it does not matter)," the old don sighed wearily. "Guard her, one or both. I look to the American; he has twice proved himself. *Adios*, my children. *María Santísima*—" and he was gone.

The long American put the don into the carriage, when— "The trunk!" exclaimed Antonio! "Wait! The trunk!" Sure enough, the trunk.

"A hell of a pother about such scurvy baggage," uttered a man at my elbow. "And somebody said it contained a goldmine!"

"Come on, come on, or there'll be hair missing yet," impatiently ordered the long American, while with Don Antonio's assistance Pedro again secured the trunk. At last we started, the carriage in our midst,

Don Antonio and I riding at the panels, the hooting savages keeping safe distance from the flanking horsemen. The old don rested without semblance of life against the *señorita.*

She stroked his bared head. She leaned to speak across to me. "You are wounded, Don Ricardo, but without you we all should have been dead. You saved Pedro and me, and you saved my father's body, if not his life. God will surely repay you."

"I did only what any man would do, *señorita,*" I replied. "I desire no pay." And with that I had lied. But I would claim no pay.

"That cursed *caballada!*" deplored Don Antonio. "I was knocked down, trampled under. El Señor Americano has the luck. If the Comanches should attack now, then you would see how a *caballero* Mexicano can fight. I am of the *sangre azul,* of the *conquistadors* from Spain, Señor Americano," he proudly added.

The Comanches did not molest us, the turmoil at the caravan had died away. Content with the major portion of the *caballada,* the savages only shook their bows and lances at us, and with a parting yell rode into the hills, herding the stock before them. When we reached the caravan all was peace.

We did not lose Don José. He had a marvelous amount of vitality housed in his scrawny frame. My own wound proved trivial. In five days I was able to level my rifle without discomfort. We crossed the desert of the Cimarron and approached the more rolling, brushy country which should usher into Santa Fé. The trail consistently waxed plainer, until at the end of the second week it had become a fairly well-traveled road, winding among high hills and fording sparkling streams, although still without a sign of human habitation.

CHAPTER V.

I AM FAVORED BY THE DONA.

"SANTY FEE to-morrow, boys! Hooray for Santy Fee! To-morrow night we'll be shaking our feet with those black-eyed gals. Whoopee!" We had passed the first settlement, named San Miguel: a curious and, to me, a mean collection of boxlike mud huts, around a square, and altogether shamed by the lovely valley in which they were squatted.

"It is only a settlement of *paisanos* (country folks)," explained Don José to me. "In Santa Fé you will see a true city of the *gente fina.*"

We passed an ancient Indian town, named Pecos, where a few tame Indians and Mexicans were living near a ruined chapel. That night we made camp within striking distance of Santa Fé, which lay, I learned, to the northwest, across a high plateau, under the guardianship of the snow-peaks shimmering whitely, in the same direction.

Captain Stanley, the long American, and a squad of others had ridden on to inquire into the market for the goods, and to prepare for our reception. This evening all was bustle and excitement around the fires; men were shaving and cutting one another's hair, even scraping the mud from their wagons and cleaning the harnesses—much as if for a Sunday trip into town, in the States.

"Slick up, young feller," was their advice, as I gazed amused. "Slick up, or you won't shine amongst them gals at Santy Fee."

At our own fire Don Antonio laughed softly. "The fools," he asserted. "They think that the *señoritas* will be all eyes and hearts for the Americanos. It will be but a fancy of the moment; when the Americanos go they leave only their money and are forgotten. No Señorita Mexicana bestows her heart upon a heretic. It is all play—a little *fiesta.* And afterward—hah! The *caballero* stays; the American is no more."

Señorita Rosa answered gently. "My father and I will not forget one Señor Americano. He shall be remembered in our prayers, Antonio."

"And God will reward him," old Pedro reiterated.

Only our party had not joined in the festal overhauling. At the final cries of "Stretch out! Stretch out!" we moved on with the long line, we presented rather a

shabby appearance: the grimy carriage with the dilapidated trunk, the patched rusty harness, old Pedro astride one unkempt mule, Don José gaunt and shriveled underneath his soiled blanket, the *señorita* in her sober black, Don Antonio in garb now dulled and with sharp face sparsely bearded, and I a veritable backwoodsman.

We proceeded briskly. The sandy road undulated through deep dry washes, and up again, and down. The snow-peaks before gradually lifted. The hill slopes and the flats were covered with low cedar and dwarf pine. This country of New Mexico was strangely monotonous, yet strangely fascinating; one was constantly gazing into vast, inviting spaces, containing nobody knew what.

About noon we commenced to toil up a long rise, frequently cut by the paths of the mountain freshets which had coursed through the gravelly soil. The dust floated chokingly. Don José leaned slightly forward.

"On top the mesa, Don Ricardo; then across it, and we shall sight Santa Fé. May God grant, I am nearing home; I am very tired."

The foremost of the wagons was disappearing upon the mesa. In due time our own carriage topped the last rise. A level plain of the cedars and piñons spread before. To the west there were bluish mountains, huge and mysterious. To the east there were high brushy hills, extending north until they terminated in the snow crests; and in the direction toward which we trended there seemed to be a tinge of wood smoke, exhaled maybe from a valley.

The *señorita* pointed, her eyes sparkling. "Santa Fé! You see it, Don Ricardo?" I could see no city, but the advance horsemen evidently could, for a great shouting drifted back to us, and riders and teamsters were swinging their hats.

Rood by rood we advanced, in the wake of the caravan which became ever more excited. The valley was unfolding; we passed a mud hut, from whose doorway shawled women and black-eyed little children stared, motionless. The leading wagons were dipping down again, at the other edge of the mesa; and in the eastern or upper end of the valley I glimpsed isolated fields of corn stubble. The valley opened farther—the shouts and the popping of whips were increasing. We passed the next hut; Don Antonio swung his own hat joyously.

"Santa Fé! The city of Santa Fé! There it is, *mi amigo!* There it is! *Viva Santa Fé!*"

The valley was opened full and broad, running down from the snowy range to the northeast, between our mesa and another far across. But city? I saw indeed a scattering of the same low, square-cornered, one-story mud huts about the size of brick kilns; I saw the cupolas of a church; and I saw what might be orchards and cornfields; but as respecting anything beautiful —save for the setting—why, the meanest block in Cincinnati or St. Louis would have scorned the whole assemblage.

We descended from the mesa by a continuation of the trail, which speedily took on the features of a narrow street bordered by the mud boxes. We crossed an irrigating ditch, where women were washing their clothing, and along which pattered an influx of tattered children, screaming welcome. A hundred dogs barked. Our coming seemed to have aroused the town.

"*Los Americanos!*" "*Viva! Los carros* (Hurrah! The wagons)!" Such a hubbub —such a running and screaming, shouting and lash-cracking. Our horsemen capered and waved their hats; our teamsters popped valorously and leveled rude sallies right and left; even the wagon animals enthused, and, pricking their ears, tugged bravely. Accompanied by a foot cavalcade we proceeded, our wagons towering higher than the houses, on down the narrow crooked street hedged by the mud walls and wooden shuttered windows, until the way opened into a public square or plaza.

The crowd of townspeople had thickened. While the wagons were being arranged at the customs warehouse—a tedious job—our carriage had halted at a cross-street. As I sat suddenly homesick and forlorn amidst the strangeness of the sights and sounds, Don José spoke to me.

"We leave you, *señor*," said Don José,

" to go to our house. I am tired. With your permission, then—and when I am rested I will ask the favor of your presence in my poor quarters. Pedro will find you. All that I have is yours. *Vaya con Dios.*"

"*Adios, señor,*" bade the *señorita;* and she extended her hand.

"*A casa, Pedro,*" ordered the old don; and as Pedro kicked his mule in the ribs Don Antonio hastily spurred to clear passage through the gaping rabble. He turned his horse from side to side; the carriage trundled after, importuned by beggars.

I was left in a small space beset about by the staring populace: closely shawled old women, scarf-covered young women, their faces crimsoned with a sort of ruddy stain or plastered with white, large-hatted, fancy-blanketed men eternally rolling their corn-husk cigarettes, big-eyed little boys and girls, and all the leprous, lame, and blind of Mexico, as would appear.

To my vast relief, since I did not know exactly what to do nor whither to go, the long American came at a trot down the waiting line, and hailed me jovially. We emerged at the plaza, and, turning into the street fronting it on the south, we threaded passage amidst the idlers crossing back or forth or standing in knots. As fast as they discharged at the customs warehouse the wagons drove through the plaza, to the tune of the incessant whip-popping, and corraled as directed by Captain Stanley. At the next corner we tied our mounts to a hitching-rail.

" You're to have a shirt and other trappings," declared the long American. " And then you're to scrape your face. I'd as soon pull my own bristles out with bone tweezers as go under the knife of El Señor Barber, here. But in your present rig you're a regular white Injun, and no *caballero.* You have money coming to you. Yon's the American store, and I have credit coming to me there. *Bueno!* But first for the *fonda,* to wash the dust from our throats."

The *fonda* proved to be the great mud-walled inn only a dozen steps onward. The floor seemed to be occupied chiefly by gaming-tables and a bar and a patronage of all colors and descriptions; our own flannel-shirted, booted teamsters and buckskin hunters jostling elbows with their fellows drawn from the trail, and with Mexicans, Indians, breeds, who may say? The uproar of voices in many languages sounded like a babel. We pushed through to the bar, and cut the dust from our throats with whisky so raw and fiery that it made me gag. I felt a hand upon my shoulder, and turned to face young Don Antonio. He was flushed with drink and blatantly noisy.

" *El Americano—carajo!*" he gabbled, swaying. " I find you. We are well met. Here; you are paid." And he thrust at me a leather bag in which coins jingled. " Four reales a day. They are sent by Don José. You may count them, or take the word of a *caballero.* You are paid off, Americano. *Sí.* With this bag I pay you. Now I do not say '*Adios*'; it is to the devil with you and all Americans. You brought me nothing but ill-luck on the trail, but here I am in my own country."

" Did Don José send me no other word?" I asked.

" Don José? A don of the *sangre azul* send word to an American heretic?" And Antonio laughed. " No. You were hired, you are paid, there is nothing more. He was sick and weak and of a soft heart; but he shall have good care without stranger hands. To the devil with you, Señor Americano!"

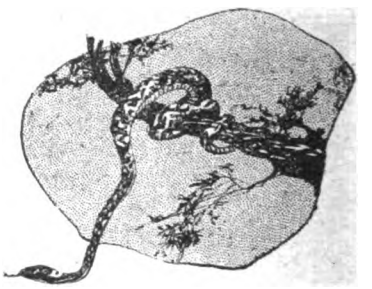
" And to your drinks with you, Don Big Talk," I angrily retorted; and I emptied the sack upon the bar. The silver pieces rolled and slithered and jingled upon the floor. " Here is enough to drown your jealousy, Señor Jackanapes. And I will see Don José for myself. I do not want his money."

Beggars dived for the coins; there was a hustling and a crowding. Antonio flashed a knife—the long American hurled me backward as I clubbed my rifle, he sprang between us, and ready hands dragged the young don, mouthing many oaths and struggling furiously but unavailingly away through the mob.

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.

Fear

by



L. Patrick Greene

TROOPER JENNINGS opened his eyes wearily. Every bone in his body ached, and he groaned with pain as he moved.

Thompson and Andrews, his two comrades on the Border Guard Patrol, came over to his bed as he threw off the covers and gingerly essayed to stand on his feet; he was still weak, and would have fallen had they not supported him.

"Better take it easy for a while, Jennings."

"Oh, I'll be all right in a minute." He tenderly fingered his bruised face. "Where's that beast Peters?"

The two men looked at each other significantly.

"Peters said that he would be down this afternoon," replied Thompson. "He's going to demand an apology from you."

"Well, he'll never get it. He cheated last night, and you know it." The boy, —Jennings was little more—looked appealing at the two men.

"Yes, he cheated, and you accused him of it. Well, see what you got. The man would have killed you, unconscious as you were, if Andrews here had not pulled a revolver on him."

"And suppose I don't apologize?"

"He said that he was going to bring a sjambok down with him and beat you till you do. And he'll do it."

"And you mean to tell me that you'd stand by and let him do it?"

Andrews flushed.

"See here, youngster! This is not our quarrel. Peters is all you say he is, and then some more. He's a bad man—but he's a strong bad man. Why, he could wipe the floor with the three of us. I know he could. I saw him clear out 'Joburg's' saloon—you remember that, don't you Thompson?"

"Yes. He caved in three of big Dutch Lockner's ribs—with his fist, Jennings. You know what his native name is, don't you? The Schelm—the Bad One. Natives are pretty apt in their naming, and there's not a negro in this district but would gladly kill him; but they are all afraid of him. He beats them viciously, yet there's not one that will lodge a complaint against him. I don't think he knows what fear is."

"And here's another thing—" Andrews took up the tale. "We are dumped on this Border Patrol and aren't likely to be relieved for another six months. The rainy season is coming on and the place will be a fever trap. We can't afford to quarrel with our only white neighbor, 'specially when he happens to be the storekeeper on whom we are dependent for our provisions. Besides, he could make things mighty unpleasant for us with the natives. It's up to you to apologize."

"Why should I?" he demanded. "I was in the right. I can't back down—you surely wouldn't have me do that."

"Why not? No one would know but we three, and we are not likely to talk about it," said Thompson. "After all, it was only a little thing."

"Well, I'll apologize if he'll do the same. He called me a—"

"Peters apologize! Boy, you must be mad. He'll never do that."

"Then neither will I." There was a note of finality in the boy's tone.

Thompson and Andrew looked at each other in despair. "Well, just remember that we're neutral, though we'll try to stop him from using the sjambok on you."

Jennings buried his face in his hands, striving to overcome the fear that all but sickened him. "Will he really beat me with a sjambok," he said after a while, "if I don't apologize?" Andrews nodded. "And if you tried to stop him—what then?"

Andrews shrugged his shoulders. "There will be some blood shed. Possibly his, but more probably ours," said Thompson. "He shoots from the hip."

"Well, I won't be beaten."

"That's the way to talk, Jennings. We knew you'd see this thing in the right light."

Jennings held up his hand. "And I won't apologize. See here," he went on hurriedly, "if there's going to be any fighting I'll see that I get a fair chance; and if there's to be any blood shed it 'll either be mine or his. I'm going to challenge him to a duel."

"Don't be a fool, Jennings. This is the twentieth century.

"Besides, how'll that help you? You're only a fair shot with a revolver or rifle—you don't propose to fight with carving-knives, do you?"

"I'm not joking. If you'll agree to my plan it 'll put me on even terms with him. That's all I ask. Let's go to scoff—I'm hungry—and I'll tell you all about it while we are eating."

Peters, rising from his midday siesta, yawned and stretched his arms lazily above his head. A big man, fully six feet in height when he stood erect; his usual posture resembled that of a gorilla. His brutal head, set on a short, thick neck, was bowed forward, and he gazed constantly from side to side through shaggy brows. His eyes, set wide apart, were green at times of repose, but when anger roused him they contracted to pin-points and had in them the baleful, hypnotic glare of a snake's. His arms were abnormally long and mightily muscled. His body was covered with coarse red hair.

As he stretched himself one of his hands hit the low-thatched roof of the hut and dislodged a small grass snake. It fell on his bare chest, hung there a second, then dropped squirming to the floor. Cursing furiously he jumped up and down like a maniac on the harmless thing, then, satisfied it was dead, sat down heavily in a chair, his mighty chest heaving convulsively, his muscles twitching. His face showed ghastly pale through the red beard of several days growth, and his eyes dilated with terror as they fell upon the dead snake.

Reaching for the whisky bottle, he drank deeply, and then called, in a voice thick with anger: "Thuso! Come here, you black—"

A native came running in reply to his call.

"Throw that away," he said, pointing to the snake, "then come back here." After Thuso had left the hut to carry out his master's bidding, Peters rose from the bed and took down a heavy sjambok. "On your knees, dog!" he commanded when Thuso returned.

Abject terror was in the native's eyes as he groveled at Peters's feet.

"*Swish.*" The sjambox came down on Thuso's naked back, leaving a scarlet weal. "Didn't — I — tell — you — to — beat—out — the — roof — of — my — hut—every—day?" Each word was punctuated by a blow. Thuso screamed for mercy, but still the sjambox rose and fell. When the screams ceased he ordered two of the natives, who had gathered round the door of the hut, to enter. "Take this carrion and tie him to a tree—but first rub salt on his back. So shall he learn to obey my orders."

"Yah, Inkosi!" They picked up Thuso.

"When that is done, return here and beat out the thatch of this hut lest perchance other snakes are hidden there."

"Yah, Inkosi!"

Singing an obscene song, Peters left his hut and walked toward his store, a rough, galvanized shack. He had not gone very

far when he was hailed by Thompson. He turned quickly round and waited for the policeman to come up with him. "Well, what is it? Does Jennings want to apologize?"

"He says he'll apologize if you'll apologize to him for calling him a—"

Peters's answer was a stream of curses. "Where's this Jennings?"

"He's down by that patch of elephant grass yonder." Thompson pointed toward the river which flowed at the foot of the hill. The veldt all around was devoid of vegetation save for this patch of elephant grass about four hundred yards square. Then he continued:

"His plan is this. He's waiting now on the other side of that elephant patch with Andrews; I'm to take you to a place, opposite him, on this side. When you're located I'm to fire a shot. That will be the signal for Andrews to get out of harm's way. Five minutes later you'll hear another shot; that 'll be the signal for you to enter the patch from this side, and for him to enter on the other side. You are to keep on walking—as much in a bee-line as possible—and shoot on sight. If you don't sight each other on your first passage through you are to keep on until you do."

"And what happens after I kill him? Do you other two fools try to arrest me for murder?"

"No; here's a signed statement from Jennings testifying that the shooting was accidental. You keep that, and he expects one from you."

"You've thought it all out, haven't you?" sneered Peters. "What weapons?"

"Revolver—and as many cartridges as you please."

"All right, I'm ready. Give me the paper."

"I want one from you first."

"You don't think you'll need it," Peters laughed. "What shall I say?" He took a note-book from his pocket and wrote, at Thompson's dictation:

> I, Buck Peters, realizing that I must soon meet my Maker, testify that I was shot accidentally, and that Wilfred Jennings is in no way to blame.
> (Signed) BUCK PETERS.

"I'll have that back before the day's over," he said. "Now let's go."

Andrews looked uneasily at the slender figure of Jennings. The boy was pacing restlessly up and down the bank of the river, puffing furiously at a cigarette.

"For Heaven's sake stand still, man, and try to compose your nerves. You'll be easy game if you go on this way."

Jennings checked his pacing. "Do you think he'll agree to my plan, Andrews? Isn't it about time we heard Thompson's shot?"

"We'll hear it soon enough. There's no chance of Peters backing out. Are you sure you want to go through with this thing, Jennings? No one will blame you if you back out, and we can easily find a plan to get you out of Peters's way."

Jennings hesitated a moment before he answered. "No. I've got to go through with it." He shivered as though with a cold.

"Well, don't forget all we've told you. Don't expect to hear any noise. Peters is an expert hunter, and he'll move as quietly as a cat for all his big bulk. Keep your eyes peeled for the slightest movement in the grass, and when you sight him, fire; then drop to the ground and stay there, even if you think you've hit him. He may be bluffing."

"Yes, I know, I know. You and Thompson have been over that with me so many times that I'm not likely to forget it. Phew! It's almighty hot. I'm going to take my tunic off." He started to unbutton the coat of his khaki uniform.

"You keep that on, you silly young fool. Your white shirt 'ud be a nice target!"

Jennings sat down impatiently on a large boulder, and lighted another cigarette.

The air was oppressively still, and the ground seemed to dance in the heat waves; nothing stirred. Even the chattering "Go-away" birds seemed to have been lulled to sleep by the torrid heat. The sun was slowly sinking, casting mysterious, ever-changing shadows on the elephant grass patch. A strong smell of musk filled the air. Jennings sniffed and looked at Andrews inquiringly.

"Cross!" explained Andrews. "Pity

you didn't challenge Peters to a swimming race across the river."

A wisp of smoke floated lazily in the still air. Then the sharp report of a revolver came to their ears. Jennings sprang to his feet alert. "He's ready!"

"Yes. I'm going to leave you now, boy. Good luck, old man. We'll be waiting for you up the hill." They shook hands, and a moment later Jennings was alone.

He threw away the half-smoked cigarette and nervously examined his revolver. The impulse to run was strongly upon him. But that was no way out; he couldn't go back—to be pointed out by every one as a coward. That was impossible.

The grass patch before him seemed to loom up larger and larger; it seemed to become suddenly impregnated with a mysterious terror. Fantom shapes had their being there—shapes changed as the grasses swayed slightly in the newly awakened breeze.

A second shot sounded.

Jennings hesitated for a fraction of time, then rushed headlong into the thick elephant grass. His mad rush was abruptly halted as, catching his feet in the entangling vines that entwined themselves round the thick stems of grass, he fell to the ground. His revolver flew from his hand and he lost much precious time before he finally recovered it. When he went forward once again his progress was much slower. As he got deeper into the patch he had to force his way through the grass.

Occasionally he would come to a bare clearing. Then he would cautiously work his way round the fringe. To cross it would have exposed him needlessly. Excepting such places he could scarce see more than three yards ahead of him; the grasses towered high above him, and for all the brightness of the sun he was forced to feel his way forward as one surrounded by a dense fog. At every few yards he would stop and listen; no sound came to his ears save the droning of mosquitoes and the gentle swish of the wind among the grass. Once a giant bustard flew out somewhere ahead of him.

"Peters must have put it up," thought Jennings. A shot rang out and the bustard, turning slowly over and over, fell to the ground.

He attempted to locate the direction from which the shot came, but in vain. The grass was over ten feet high and there was no tree or rock near upon which he could climb in order to take his bearings. Unexperienced in the art of trekking, his progress was a noisy one, though he practised an almost exaggerated caution. The knowledge that he could not disguise his movements filled him with a sudden terror, and dropping to the ground, he tried crawling along on his belly. Finding that this narrowed his field of vision, he soon gave it up.

Strange noises sounded all around him. A dry twig snapped under his foot and he jumped back, expecting to feel the hot searing pain of a bullet. Again, cursing himself for his folly, he went forward. A harsh croaking came to his ears from the sky overhead. He knew it was a vulture, and wondered at its presence. Then the grass became thinner and suddenly ceased. He was out on the open veldt. A strange elation seized him. He had passed through the lurking peril of the patch. He drew a deep breath as though he would take in courage from the light and cleanness of the open before turning to face the peril once again.

On the hill before him he could see Thompson and Andrews. They waved to him, and he could almost hear what they were shouting. He knew they were words of encouragement. He waved back to them, then turned toward the patch. Again the harsh croaking of the vulture sounded clearly, and looking up he shook his fist savagely at it. Even as he did so the scavenger of the veldt folded its wings and dropped like a stone into the patch.

He scouted for a while along the fringe of the grass until he came to the place where Peters had entered. The trail was plain, and throwing caution to one side, he followed it quickly, hoping to come up on Peters unawares. He gave no thought to the chance that Peters had doubled on his tracks and was lurking in ambush beside his trail. Or if he thought of it, it did not imbue him with caution. He was only con-

scious of seeing the thing through to a speedy conclusion. After a while he came to a large open space, in the center of which was a stunted tree with low wide-spreading branches.

A vulture perched in the topmost branch of the tree, and in the shade of its branches was Peters. He was lying on his back, stretched at full length.

Cautiously Jennings approached him, his finger trembling on the trigger of his revolver. As he came nearer he saw that Peters's face was distorted with terror—a fearsome sight. His eyes were wide open, but the glaze of death was already creeping over them. Something moved on his chest, and a small black momba—that deadliest of snakes—lifted its wicked head and menaced Jennings. The vulture croaked hoarsely, and Jennings, steadying his shaking hand, fired.

The repellent-looking bird tumbled grotesquely down from the tree, landing with a thud close to the body of Peters; the snake, taking alarm, uncoiled itself and vanished into the tall grass. Jennings then fled from the place.

When he came again to the tree, Thompson and Andrews were with him. Marfwe, one of the police boys and a cunning hunter, came with them. They carefully examined the body of Peters, but could see no telltale puncture hole, nor was the body at all swollen as would be the case had he been bitten by the momba.

"What do you make of it, Thompson?" Andrews asked in wonder. Thompson shook his head. He was watching Marfwe, who was closely examining the tree and the ground around it. "Can'st read us this riddle, Marfwe?"

"Aye, Inkosi. Somewhat is written plainly here, the rest—because I well knew this dead one—I can tell ye.

"To this place came the Schelm—the Bad One. He rested awhile in the shade of the tree—see ye, he smoked a while"—Marfwe pointed to a cigar stub. "Anon he rose to his feet and went back a few paces from the tree. He sprang suddenly for the branch that hangs low, catching it with his hands; ye can see where his feet left the ground, and see ye here where his nailed shoes sought a footing on the trunk.

"And then, Inkosi, this man who feared not the Spirits of Good or Evil, met Fear face to face. A snake—if thy nose is keen ye can sense his scent; if thy eyes are open ye can see his slime—lay along the branch to which the Schelm hung. And the Schelm suddenly loosing his hold, fell heavily to the ground, and the branch, thus freed of his great weight, shook violently, so that the snake also fell. Onto the Schelm's naked chest it fell, and there, feeling the warmth of the man, coiled itself and was well content.

"Then. What then? See ye here."

Marfwe pointed to Peters's tightly clenched hands; showed how the nails had cut into the flesh. He did that, Inkosi, to prevent the jumping of his muscles. Had he moved but a little, look ye, the snake would have struck." He pointed to the blood-stained lips almost bitten through in the struggle to keep back the screams that sought utterance. "Aye, white men," Marfwe concluded, "so this man died; but first he died the death of the spirit many times. It was not the snake that killed him, nor yet the fall from the tree. Nay! But it was the fear that killed him—the fear born of evil that was within him."

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FANCY AND IMAGINATION

FANCY scarce wings above the mountain height,
Where clouds and mists the upper ether bar;
Imagination is the eagle-flight
That in the empyrean seeks the star!

G. A. Delap.

What Was That?

by Katharine Haviland Taylor

Author of "Yellow Soap," etc.

PRECEDING CHAPTERS BRIEFLY RETOLD

A PARTY of Greenwich villagers had rented a bungalow near the scene of the killing of Rudolph Loucks, whose murderer had never been found.

But Loucks's ghost had been seen and blood appeared upon the walls and the stairs of the bungalow. Noises assailed the new occupants and, following the visit of Frank Lethridge, whose pistol had been used to kill Loucks, two of the girls at the bungalow, Nan and April, saw the ghost.

CHAPTER V.

BENEATH THE TIDE.

NAN turned and sank down on a wicker settee and sobbed. I sat down by her, and put my arm around her.

Then we heard Nathan's voice, and jumped as if we had been shot.

"He was carried off into them woods," he said, staring toward the spot. "The coroner, he up and done it hisself. Now, Rudolph, he don't need no help. Don't you take on so; 'tain't nothing to worry yuh. See, it's gone.

"It ain't nothin' to be skairt of," he continued in a weak, shaking voice. "He wouldn't go to hurt yuh none. Now, now—don't you care!"

But Nan would not be comforted.

"I can't stand it," she confessed, "I have always been afraid. As a child I know that I saw a ghost! It came to me when I slept alone in a big bedroom of my grandmother's house. Suppose—" Her voice failed her, but her gaze, turned in the direction of the hillside, finished what she could not say.

"He won't come pesterin' yuh none *here*—" said Nathan, his voice none too steady.

"Doesn't he—ever?" she managed to ask after she moistened her lips.

Nathan fingered his beard. "He ain't been seen more'n once or twice," he answered slowly, "and if he should, he wouldn't *hurt* yuh none—"

"I won't stay," said Nan. "I won't! I *won't!* I *hate* things like that."

I told old Nathan to go, for he wasn't helping any, although I thought he meant to. I bent over Nan and scolded her. "If you want Midgette in hysterics," I said, "and all of our plan, which *is* making money, to fail; if you want this awfully jolly crowd to break up, and poor Gustave to go back to restaurant cooking, go in and blab this; otherwise, keep quiet and stick it out. It was horrible "—I paused and swallowed hard about eighteen times—"but suppose it never happened again this season, wouldn't you hate to give up, be beaten after one exhibition of a thing that, after all, couldn't hurt you?"

She sobbed again, and tried to say "Yes."

"Come on, we'll go rowing," I said. She nodded, and together we went down to the landing, my knees shaking like castanets, and poor Nan sobbing at every step.

"I wouldn't mind so much," she confided after we'd pulled off and were headed down-stream, "but as a child—" She gave up after that and began to gasp.

"I know," I said. "Forget it!"

Then she screamed, her eyes fixed behind me, and all her color fading. I dropped

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for October 9.

an oar, put a hand over my heart, and, frozen with fear, slowly managed to turn. What I saw was a large and amiable Jersey cow wading in the water at the edge of the creek. She gave us but a passing glance. I could have killed Nan.

"Do you think they can swim?" she asked, teeth chattering. "Oh, I wish I were dead. I do, I do! Let's go home; I want *Laurence!*" What was left of my ebbing patience broke.

"Shut up, you fool!" I ordered, reaching for the oar, and the boat, a mean, tippy thing, went over. We could have waded easily, but I had a hard time doing it, for Nan clutched me, clung to me, pulled on me, and yelled: "That cow, that cow! *God help us!*"

How I knew what I stepped on at that excited time, I don't know. But—I was aware that my feet touched wood that rang hollow, even under water, as I stepped on it. I had stirred things up, as I tried to sustain Nan, who was pulling off something that seemed like a cross between a hootchy-kootch and a good old mid-Victorian faint, and—during the struggle I loosened wood, which rang hollow even under water.

"What the dickens—" I thought as I dragged Nan, the boat, and oars to the cowless side of the stream, and then: "What next?" for it was several thousand too many for me!

That night Nan said she would not sleep with Midgette, because she was the jumpy sort. Jane suggested that we put up extra cots in my big room, and all sleep there. Nan warmly embraced this suggestion.

"Remember," she said as she and I sat huddled up on our cots waiting for Jane and Midgette to appear, "I said there was safety in numbers. I don't think anything would bother four of us. Oh, April! *What was that?*"

"I don't know," I answered as I slipped out of my bed and into my slippers, "but I'll go see, and—if you say 'What was that?' once more I'll go back to New York to-morrow morning!" But I knew I wouldn't, because — frankly — I hadn't enough money for the fare, and I knew that almost every one else was in the same boat.

We were making money, Laurence's books proved it, when he didn't forget to keep them; but somehow no one ever seemed to see any of it. A great deal of it went for food, boats were always having to be repaired and kerosene bought for that stove; or a load of firewood hauled in by old Nathan.

I went out in the hall. I was not frightened, for the up-stairs lantern which hangs at the head of the steps was going brightly, and the men were all up.

"What happened?" I asked.

Laurence answered me. "Gustave has been calling on Judge Harkins," he replied in the snippiest tone imaginable. "The judge is an art critic, it seems, and Gustave has evidently tried to be an alcohol critic—or lamp. He's lit, and he has the fuel with him. He is quite sure that Midgette's sweater, which hangs on the newel-post, is a flying alligator."

Nan had gathered enough courage to join me by that time, and she heard enough of the affair to sense it. "Simply disgusting!" she said as she trailed back to my room. "I think it's *very* hard on Laurence!"

"What's the matter?" asked Jane, who joined us in front of my door.

"Gustave is drunk," Nan replied.

"I don't believe it!" Jane said hotly, but after she listened from the head of the stairs for a few moments, she had to admit that he didn't seem "quite himself." "He's had a headache all day," she explained, "we mustn't blame him. I think the pain was too great for him to bear!"

Midgette didn't help by laughing at that point. But she had seen Gustave when he came up from the cellar. Jane glared at her and then went on: "You all seem to forget," she said coldly, "that Gustave is an artist, and that his nerves are as intricately balanced as a Swiss watch; he says that when he looks at some of his work he positively aches!"

"I don't wonder," said Nan, and the way she said it didn't help to smooth things.

"Well, he sells his stuff, which is more than some people in this crowd do!" retorted Jane.

"He hasn't sold any lately," responded

Nan. "He even tried to borrow five dollars of me yesterday. Offered me that unfinished 'Snoring Eve' or whatever it is, as security. It's a mess."

Jane was incensed. She could hardly speak, her voice quivered, and her burning cheeks showed anger as well as nerves. She had been brushing her hair, and she waved her brush so wildly that I was sure Nan's face would suffer from it.

"A mess?" she echoed. "A mess? You don't know *tones,* you don't know *form.* Ask April. Why that—that would have been a *masterpiece,* if he had finished it. But wood ticks, just where it was difficult to retrieve them, made my going on impossible—and, Gawd, girls, that log was hard—and he—he *needed* my help! I failed him! We have all failed him, and he *needs* stimulus—"

"Well, he got it to-night," said Midgette.

Then we stopped because going on was impossible—rather, useless. The stimulated was making his way up-stairs, loudly singing "Old Black Joe" as he came. He had pitched this down at the bottom of the bass, and sobbed so that we heard him through several closed doors, because he couldn't reach the low notes.

Nan allowed her face to express the great contempt she felt. Midgette opened her eyes and looked like a sleepy kitten, and Jane allowed herself to don a pensive droop.

After some shufflings down the passage, and the slam of doors, there was quiet.

"I don't blame him," said Jane. "He has not had the understanding here that he should have had. This leads me to be frank." Again she waved the hair-brush and again at Nan: "Do you know," she went on, "that Laurence sifted ashes on him to-day?"

Again Midgette giggled. Then she tried to pretend that her giggle had been a cough, but she deceived no one. I think this noise from her irritated Jane even more, for her voice grew more shrill, and her color deepened. "I suppose it is *funny,*" she said witheringly, "to see a grown man so overworked that he has to hide in the ash-bin to get away from it!"

"But it was his day to wash boats," said Nan.

"His day!" said Jane—she almost screamed it. "*His* day! And I suppose yesterday was? And the day before—"

"Well," temporized Nan, "Laurence had an inspiration—"

"And went off and left his work undone," said Jane. "Undone! And then when that simpering crowd of schoolgirls came out, their lordly escorts complained that the boats were full of mud and bait, and poor Gustave, because he was around, had to do Laurence's work. So to-day, when those old maids complained about the flat boat, and Laurence *was* around, Gustave hid.

"And then Laurence sifted ashes on him. No one ever *knew* him to sift *any* ashes before. He *knew* Gustave was crouching in that horrid, dirty place, *hounded* there by work, and did it on *purpose!*" She ended this with a whirlwind of arms, and her brush slipped from her hand, hit the mirror, and shattered it to a thousand pieces.

"Oh, damn!" said Jane.

"Seven years' bad luck," Nan vouchsafed cheerfully, after which she yawned. Jane glared at her; Midgette said it was a watery mirror, anyway, and I suggested going to bed. I thought that was a good idea, for I hoped we could escape a real blowout.

Midgette reopened it. Midgette would; not intentionally, but simply from stupidity. "Those men don't seem to like each other," she offered in a vapid tone.

"Can you blame him?" both Jane and Nan said at once, each having arrived at the point where that simple pronoun 'him' meant a certain man, and that man alone.

"I'm sick of this," I broke in. "We came out here to run this place on a business basis; not to let our personal feelings spoil the whole thing; and you girls are making it very hard for everybody! I'm *sick* of it." I have a reputation for being gentle, why, I do not know; but when I really grow angry, other people usually stop.

"All right, dear," said Nan. "We'll turn in. It's all unfair, but I'll ignore it."

"Unfair?" said Jane from her cot. "Does she think she has a monopoly on the stuff. Why, I could—"

I sat up, reached down for my slippers,

muttered of going somewhere else to sleep, and there was quiet. Then Midgette blew out the candle, and we all tried to sleep; but anger kept Jane busy. I suppose she rehearsed all she might have said and didn't, as every one does; wrongs kept Nan thinking, and—the affair of that afternoon, and only Midgette slept. I heard her. She is a beautiful girl, and it's too bad, but of course there is no rose without its thorns.

CHAPTER VI.

ENTER: GLORIA.

THE night was miserably noisy. Things banged against the landing, boats hit each other, grated and generally acted as if fifty people were shunting them this way and that. An owl hooted way off in the woods, and a dog howled. And of course that wicker furniture snapped. Everything would be as quiet as only a black, moonless night in the woods can be, and then something would *snap!* You'd jump, think: "What was that?" give it an answer, and lie back and try to unwind your tight-drawn muscles. The stairs creaked, and an andiron amused itself by falling over and clanking on the stone hearth.

"Oh, *Heavens!*" I heard Nan moan.

Jane coughed. Then she whispered: "I'm —I'm so *nervous!*" and I knew she'd been crying. Then I whispered: "*Hush!*" for some one was coming along the passage; stealthily creeping along without a light, for no crack of yellow showed beneath the door, and a sliding hand on the wall outside revealed that some one felt his or her way falteringly, and—as silently as possible.

"The flashlight!" I whispered. Of course it was lost. No one could remember where it was, or ever having seen it. I cautioned them to be quiet, and I lay back trying to listen. The pound of my heart made hearing almost impossible, and Nan's swift, sobbing breathing helped to hinder. But—I heard, whatever it was, pause before our door, and then I heard a tap.

"What is it?" I managed to gasp.

"What rimes with 'remorse'?" we heard Laurence ask.

"Dead horse!" yelled Jane hysterically.

Laurence snorted. "Have you no respect for *Art?*" he asked in a hollow, wronged, and misunderstood tone. "I have a poem here, epic poem, that will make me famous and my friends proud that they have *known* me. I give them an opportunity to help—to have themselves represented in it by a word—and—they *jeer!*"

"What time is it?" I asked, quite disregarding his remarks about Art.

He scratched a match—the doors are paper-thick, one can hear anything that happens on the other side of them—looked at his watch, and told me that it was two fifteen. It seemed as if I had been in bed nine hours.

"I can't stand this," I said, sitting up. "Let's go down-stairs. We'll make some chocolate and poke up the fire and see if we can't feel a little better."

Every one agreed. I found matches, lit the candle, we twisted up our various hairs, put on bath-robes, kimonos, and negligees, and went tripping down. It did help. Before long we had cocoa, some crisped crackers, and macaroons on the small table which stood near the fire, and as we ate, the whole unpleasant atmosphere seemed more a joke than tragedy. Even the afternoon's happening seemed so unreal and far away that I could hardly believe it had occurred.

"What geese we were," said Nan.

"You know I like you," Jane put in quickly.

"Of course, and I do you," Nan answered. Temporary peace seemed assured.

"What frightened us so?" asked Midgette. Nan and I looked at each other and then away.

"Nerves, I suppose," said she.

"Nerves," I echoed.

"Aren't they silly things?" asked Midgette. "Thank Heaven I don't get upset easily." Every one of us knew that she would have hysterics if a fuzzy caterpillar as much as arched his back at her from across the street. "I like a calm existence, and I think that maintaining calm lies largely with the individual," she added.

Then we all grew quiet, for the leaping fire had a hypnotic spell, and we were tired.

"This is a funny business," said Jane, after some moments of silence. "Every-

thing is a step. I wonder where this one leads to?"

Then Midgette asked: "If you could, would you look ahead ten years?" We were divided about that. I knew that I wouldn't, for my mother's death had been sudden, and it had left me alone. I knew that the horrible want for her was bad enough to bear afterward, and if I had seen it coming—well, her going had taught me the great mercy that lies in the one-sighted life that is given to us.

"I would," said Jane, "and then, if I didn't like it, I'd suicide."

"Well, I wouldn't," I put in. "I wouldn't even look ahead a month here"—every one was amused—"for one never knows what is in store, what horror may be."

Then we heard a noise, and I got up. We weren't frightened, for the approach was too definite to be made in the spirit of harm, and the rap on the door was decided and quick. I opened it.

"Is this the Beasley house?" asked the girl who stood before me; a ravishingly pretty girl she was, if one could ignore the hard look that lay in her eyes.

"No," I answered, "that is fully two miles on."

"So I thought," she began, and then she flushed, and her voice changed. "My man's gone," she went on. "Some fool from town who didn't know the country roads. This didn't look like a farm to me, although I couldn't see much—awful night—and—he's gone!"

"Well, we can put you up," I offered. "Plenty of room here, and it's so late it will only be a matter of a few more hours, anyway."

"Good of you," she answered, stepping in. She was pretty. She would have made a perfect model, if one could have ignored her eyes. As I said, those were wrong. She was one of those dark-toned girls, whose eyelids are heavy and whose mouth always looks moist. She made me think of a tropical flower that is beautiful and gorgeous, one that you cannot help looking on, and yet—rather longing, as you look, for a simple hollyhock.

I don't express this well, but she seemed to have an odor that was heavy and stifled; and, although you wanted to touch her skin, the very silky ivory tint of it that drew you made you draw away. All of us felt it.

"I am a nurse," she said. Her voice was low and unusually sweet, and it matched her. "I was sent for because there is a shortage here, I believe. I am due at this farmhouse. The old gentleman is paralyzed, isn't he?"

"Had a stroke last Sunday," said Midgette, who always seems to know all the news about the town and countryside.

"Well," said our visitor, "I won't get there to-night. However, it won't make much difference. Pretty place you have here. Belong to one of you?"

Midgette told her we were renting it, and making it a business proposition. Her tone changed, and I felt that we all dropped several degrees in her estimation. "I'll turn in, if you please," she said briskly, "and if one of you will show me my room and give a lift to one of my bags, I'll be grateful. I have three. Thank you. Good night."

Jane was the bag-lifter, and after she and our visitor disappeared around the turn of the stairs, Midgette spoke: "What's her name?" she asked.

"She didn't tell us," answered Nan.

"A cat," said Midgette, "perfect cat. Noticed how we dropped when we were were known to belong to the 'working classes'? But—wouldn't the gents fall for her?"

"Oh, no!" said Nan, and at the same time Jane, who at that moment appeared on the landing. And each again was thinking of a simple pronoun. I knew it. But I believed more in Midgette's remark than in their protest.

The next morning the lady, whose name was Gloria Vernon, warmed up, and even Gustave came out of his ham and eggs and forgot to swear about the coffee.

"Dearest place," said Miss Vernon. "I love it, and this country. Don't be surprised if I trespass on your property."

"You—you *must*," said Laurence. "We *all* want you." And my, how we all began to dislike that girl!

"Yes, indeed," Gustave added with a

dark look at Laurence, "we all want you. And the boating would do you good."

"You look as if you needed some," she said softly.

"Frightful head last night," he explained. "I painted too long." Jane sniffed so that one could have heard her in town. Nan smirked, but her joy was short-lived.

"I'm going to take you up to the Beasley farm," said Laurence. "I told old Nathan to get me a team before breakfast. Now, don't thank me, it *is* a pleasure!"

"But—ought I to let him?" she appealed, looking around at us. Oh, how we hated her! But—of course we had to say "yes," and every one of us had walked to town, which was twice as far, for weeks! Laurence and Gustave got her in the rig after she had eaten a very substantial breakfast without looking as if she were eating at all, and Laurence and she drove off.

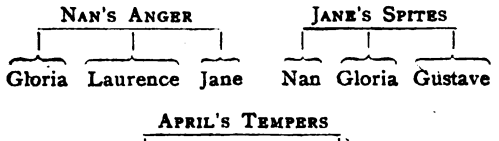
"Beautiful thing, sympathy!" said Gustave, and then: "Oh, my *gosh*, my head!"

"It's all your own fault!" said Jane. "You made yourself into a blotting-pad for poor whisky, and—"

"I want you to remember that I'm not married to you!" he said, so loudly that the rafters almost shook. "And—"

"Are not going to be," added Jane, but she didn't have the last word. He put that on, and in a mean way, I thought, although it told.

"You're dead right!" he ended simply, and then went out and sat on a sunny corner of the porch and glared ahead of him. No one worked or talked that day. We were all too busy sulking. In the evening Midgette made out a chart like a family-tree of who was angry with whom, and putting in all angers, little and big. Here it is:



But that didn't half cover it.

I *was* angry with the crowd she had put under my spite-tree; angered with Nan and Jane for making an unpleasant atmosphere and doing their best to wreck our bark; angered with the men for making them act that way; and—angered with Midgette, who had omitted her name in all cases, for telling the tale that made Nan get us into the box and that started the whole affair.

Again I felt that miserable sensation that I had had in March when the whole thing started. I knew that something very unpleasant, if not worse, was going to happen soon. Knew it! And the thing I'd found that morning when I swept had not helped soothe me. It was a little thing, but—coming as it did, on top of that girl's arrival, and then having Jane immediately recognize it—well, everything was mixed, everything was upset. I knew that something unpleasant was going to happen—and it did!

CHAPTER VII.

THE LOCKET.

THE morning of the day when sulks cornered the market, I lingered over my porch sweeping. Several things made me do this; among them my wish to tell Gustave that I thought he was a pig, and that I hoped for every one's sake he would buck up, and my desire to stay outdoors. Fluffy clouds were chasing each other across the sky, and a smart, little, almost cold breeze made the trees shiver, the shadows dance, and tired leaves flutter off to go to sleep on the ground. I loved it.

"Beautiful day," I said to Gustave as I slammed aside the table and began to sweep up the relics of somebody's yesterday's tea. "Pity this affair of ours is going to fall through."

"Fall through?" he queried. "It *can't*. I haven't got a damned cent, and I haven't done a thing that would sell all summer. Expected to work up here, but *every one* prevented it. I ask you frankly, April, isn't Laurence O'Leary the poorest excuse for a man that you ever saw? Never does a stroke of work if he can get out of it."

"He sifted the ashes yesterday," I said as I bent above a table to straighten a cloth

some one had forgotten to take in the night before.

At that Gustave exploded in profanity.

I swept on, now and again looking toward Gustave, who sat with his head in his hands, looking as " The Thinker " would if he were clad in a worn suit, and an indescribable, but unmistakable, morning-after flavor.

" What made you think we might go on the rocks?" Gustave questioned.

" Every one's quarreling so," I explained. " Some day some one will get really mad and pull out; some one else will sympathize, and pull with them, and then one or two some ones will find themselves with the place on their hands, a lot of work, and a lot of bills that won't appear till the end of the season. Now," I went on, after I dusted the railing with Nan's sweater, which she had forgotten to take in the night before, " if every one was pleasant, we might go through with it all right, but as it is—"

" Mean anything?" asked Gustave somewhat viciously.

" You can decide that yourself," I answered. " But—as you say you're dead broke you'd better try to Pollyanna it for a while. You see, you'd have to stick it out unless you borrowed from some one in town, and so—you'd be one of the fellows that would be left on the raft. Midgette hung up a lot of stuff in town, I know it."

" Oh, Gawd! These women!" said Gustave, after two more groans. As I went toward the end of the porch I saw the locket, a gleaming bit of gold, in the center of the floor. I picked it up. The initials on it were " F. L.," but I knew that Frank Lethridge had not dropped it in the afternoon, since some one would have picked it up. In fact, that part of the porch had been swabbed off by old Nathan at seven o'clock. A troop of children had come up after their boating and had tracked that soft, yellow river mud all over the place. The thing must have been dropped some time after seven.

I tried to pry it open, but Gustave had no knife. I went indoors.

" Look," I said, when I reached the kitchen, " what Santy left on the fire-escape!"

Nan looked up from the dish-pan, and Midgette drew near. " Where did you get it?" she asked. I told her. " Let's take a look inside," she suggested. I nodded and, getting our best potato-paring knife, pried it open. When she viewed the works she said, " Oh, *Rudolph!*" which surprised me, since the picture was of a woman; a woman who had evidently been photographed some years before, for her hair was unmercifully frizzed, and one shoulder, which was half visible, showed the big stuffed sleeves that were so much worn in the eighteen nineties.

" Why did you say ' Rudolph '?" I questioned Midgette. She flushed, and then answered. " She looks like Rudolph Loucks."

" Thought you said he was fat and bald?" Nan put in.

" I mean the son, of course," Midgette answered, shortly.

" Isn't this Mrs. Loucks?" I asked. " Don't you remember her?"

" Not well," said Midgette, " and this was taken years before I knew Mrs. Loucks—you can see that; those fringes and sleeves and the whole thing give it away, but—I believe it is!"

" Why is it in Frank Lethridge's locket?" I asked.

" Why do you think it's his?" Nan questioned. I told her. " But," she objected, " there are other people on earth whose initials are F. L." I agreed to that, and stood wondering until Jane came in. When she saw the locket she fixed it as his.

" Don't tell me," she said, in an effort to be light—Gustave had really hurt her, I know—" that my woman-hating beau has been around here courting you!"

" His?" said I.

" Yes," she responded. " Let me see what is going on behind the curtain, will you? He wouldn't let me look at it the last time I saw him. Pretty nearly had a spasm when I got hold of it. He said, ' Don't open it, I *must* protest! I beg of you, Miss Jane, I *entreat*—' and so on. It sounded like the big scene from the heavy drama of some barn-storming company. I did want to see—thought maybe he'd gotten one of mine."

"You know, I don't trust him," said Jane. "There is something wrong with a man who doesn't try to kiss you when he has a chance; something abnormal, fishy. Now I took him down the creek, and hung up under some willows, most divine spot, and—" she faltered, "sort of quiet and—well, uninterrupted, you know—and I said something about the bough and the wilderness being there, but missing the jug. Thought maybe he'd suggest bringing some of it around, but he only asked me if I were one of those Omar enthusiasts, and then quoted Omar in the raw, I mean in direct translation, and then contrasted what he said was the poetry of Fitzgerald and not Omar. It was fierce!"

We all laughed. Jane is undeniably attractive in an elfin, mischievous, follow-me fashion that leaves very few males untouched. "I feel," she stated surely, "that he is not attracted to me, but using me in some way—for some purpose."

"Don't allow yourself to imagine a lot that isn't so," said Midgette, who had just screamed her head off because she saw a piece of wool on Nan's shoulder which she thought was a bug. "This place is sort of eery, and it makes one hysterical."

"Yes," agreed Jane, "but—when we go rowing—he's always sounding the creek bottom with his oar. Jams it down like this, and says, 'How deep do you think it is here, Miss Jane?' with a sort of would-be-sprightliness that makes me crawl. And once, when he did that, there was a whistle from the shore, and he turned absolutely white. I don't like it—"

"I don't like it," Jane repeated, and I didn't either. For—I recalled the queer way the creek bottom had felt to me that day when Nan and I had fallen in. I decided to do some creek-bottom poking on my own. But not before the next week, for the fair weather brought every one out to boat, and the tea business certainly looked up. We actually had some profits that we saw and shared, and every one began to feel better. Jane owed some bills, but she felt that her soul would be more benefited if she spent her share on a broad shade hat, which really was a bargain at fourteen dollars. She borrowed the four from Laurence, as we only pulled ten apiece.

Nan bought a wonderful bargain in old books, two tooled leather volumes of Keats; Midgette said she *had* to get a new sweater, and that there wasn't anything decent in town for less than fifteen dollars, and since we had all made her enrage her father, and Gustave had ruined her other sweater, she considered that it was up to some one to help her out. And, of course, Gustave did, being, for the most part, responsible. He said, "Damn the judge!" as he forked out the lacking bucks, and then went off toward the woods, muttering unpleasant things about women.

I kept my share because I knew I might need it to go back to New York some time, and I didn't think that there would be another dividend declared. However, there was. Things looked up wonderfully in a financial way after the horrible occurrence.

Nan, Midgette and I slaved that week. Jane was with Frank Lethridge constantly, and why, since she said he did not attract her and wasn't any more affectionate than a hunk of cold tripe, we could not see. But every day after the bank closed he came out, and they would boat, walk, or simply sit in the sun on the steps that led to the boat landing, and talk in low tones, always stopping their talk if some one crawled past them to go down to the boats. Jane acted strangely at that time; avoided us all, and wrote notes which she posted herself and would hide if any one came near. It was all very baffling.

"If you will tell me," said Nan, "why she moons around with him on an average of seven hours a day I will be grateful!"

"I can't see it," Midgette admitted.

"Said she hated him," I contributed. We were all working together getting ready for the afternoon rush, Nan cutting bread, Midgette spreading it, and I making a sandwich paste out of a piece of old omelette flavored with some tuna that was left from the night before. It was not very bad, and it *was* very cheap. We learned lots about managing those days.

"Gustave doesn't seem jealous," I said, after I had managed to get up enough courage to taste what was listed on the bill

as "Anchovy paste sandwiches, .20"—Midgette said none of the natives had ever met it, so that it was safe.

"You bet he's jealous," Nan contradicted. "The other day I was hunting him and I came upon him standing at the edge of the creek, shielded by bushes; and looking through these, by his head, I saw Jane and Frank Lethridge. They were sitting together on the middle seat of the punt, if you please, talking as if they had met after fifteen years' separation. When Gustave saw me he snarled, 'Look at 'em!' and just at that moment I heard Jane say: 'Oh, Frank, you wouldn't? *Promise* me you won't!' It floated across water, as voices sometimes do. We heard nothing more."

"Isn't it *queer?*" said Midgette. "Well, what did Gustave say?"

"He made his usual remark about women, showed his teeth in something that approached a snarl, and then asked why he was favored by my company. 'Kindling?' he asked. I said it was. 'And traveled over the swamp to find me!' he went on. 'Is there *no* privacy?' And then—" Nan paused.

"What?" I prompted.

"Well," she went on slowly, "of course, he didn't mean it, and somehow I don't think I ought to repeat it."

"What?" Midgette and I both said at once, for that sort of a confidence is just the sort that means everything to a woman.

"He said, 'If he hurts her, I'll kill him!'"

"Nan!" we both exclaimed.

"He did!" asserted Nan, and then she stopped abruptly, bit her lips and looked rattled. The door which she faced was on a porch which is long and narrow and the steps which lead to this are not to be seen from the door. So—how long old Nathan had been on the porch none of us knew. But he was in plain sight when she looked up, his hand raised as if he were about to knock.

"Got a lot of green wood here," he said, beaming on us all. "It ain't so purty to smell, but then there's a wood pussy loose yonder, and I guess she'll kill that smell if she lets loose. Seen her last night, with her kittens. Cutest little critturs yuh ever seen, but I wasn't minded to stroke 'em none. How's business?"

"He didn't hear," Midgette whispered. Nan looked relieved. "Come in and have a sandwich?" she invited. Old Nathan entered, took off his hat after he had plenty of time to acclimate, settled on a chair, and surveyed our work. "I reckon you ain't so stuck on sandwiches no more?" he asked, in his usual slow drawl.

"If I go to hell," said Nan, "it'll be paved with 'em, and I'll have to do the paving and make the material to do it with." Nathan was pleased with this.

"The gents ain't so handy, be they?" he asked, after a shift of his cud.

"Gustave isn't," answered Nan. "That is, Mr. Gerome. Laurence is more anxious to help. When he fails it is simply because he is full of a poem and doesn't see what is to be done!"

And old Nathan actually favored me with a wink. "Well, I ain't afeared that either of 'em will get into a sweat from work," he said. "I noticed they was the settin' variety. I thank yuh kindly fer this here, and I guess I'll be gettin' on," and picking up the sandwich Nan gave him, he toddled off.

"Suppose it's silly, but I'm glad he didn't hear me say that," said Nan. "That sort of thing sounds so horrible when repeated, while, if it's said in a spurt of silly anger, it means nothing."

"I know," I answered, and then I hurried out, for I had heard a motor stop by the side steps to the porch, and then some one's footsteps. I knew it was Judge Harkins by old Nathan's greeting.

It was the first time I had seen the judge. He was dignified and imposing. To see him cowed by the crude old woodsman was strange; it made me wonder. I looked at Nathan in surprise and then at the judge, who, after a curt response, had picked up the menu. And I saw, with more surprise, that his hands shook as if he had the most severe of chills.

"Tea?" I asked. He looked up at me, very evidently tried to pull himself together, but he answered in a wavering, uncertain, unsettled way, "E-r-r—yes," and

then, "Yes, certainly, and some anchovy paste sandwiches. My, my—the last time I ate them was when I was in Naples!" Then he turned to Nathan. "Where's Lethridge?" he asked.

"Boatin'," answered Nathan. "He's sparkin' one of these here girls. There ain't no fool as big a fool as an old bald-headed fool!" And then, spitting loquaciously, he withdrew.

"Quite a character," said the judge.

"Indeed, yes," I answered.

"Look here," said the judge, peering around apprehensively. "I want to tell you something, but no one must overhear it. Sure no one's around?" I nodded. "Then sit down," he ordered curtly. And I did.

But the judge didn't tell me anything after all.

CHAPTER VIII

"INDIGESTION"—AND A VAMPIRE.

THE judge didn't tell me anything; and his eyes, for some reason which I did not then fathom, had wandered to a certain spot of a rolling, peaceful looking hill, that spot seen over the tops of white birches. He moistened his lips, swallowed so hard that I saw it happen, and I knew that he saw what Nan and I had seen before. I felt sick, dizzy, and ready to faint, but I almost forgot myself in my pity for the white-haired gentleman who sat opposite me. He was gasping as if he had run up the steepest hill on earth, and in the middle of his gasps he first said, "Loucks!" and then—after a tremendous intake of breath, "*God,* Jo!"

Then—with a queer look at me, he picked up the menu and began *to read it.*

"Indigestion," he offered in a moment, "catches me that way, and I think I'm a step nearer heaven—then—vanishes, and I'm as fit as a fiddle."

I looked at him in utter bafflement.

"Beasley pasturing his cows up on that hillside you see over the birches?" he asked, after he had added to his order.

"Occasionally a Jersey," I answered. "None too friendly, either. He just sold her calf, and she mourns a good deal. Depressing to hear."

"Yes," he said, looking at the hill again and again breathing hard. "Ever—ah—bothered up here by tramps—or ah—strange noises?" he asked further.

"We're only bothered by customers," I replied, "and we expect and want that."

"To be sure, to be sure," he said, glancing back toward the hillside. I could see that he couldn't help looking in that direction, and yet—didn't want to. And I could see that for some reason he thought he was the only person who saw the fantom. I wondered why he felt that he was entitled to the exclusive right; what had made him feel that he should be haunted, would see—what others did not?

Shaking, I got up and went toward the kitchen. Here I got the judge his tea, and after I had fixed it on the tray, went back to the porch. I found old Nathan had returned and was mending a spot of the railing which I had been at him to fix for weeks. It was quite like him to fix it when we had customers.

"I came here," said the judge severely, "for—for *quiet!*" And then he mopped off his damp forehead with a large handkerchief and again began to gasp.

"Nathan," I said, going over to where he was alternately pounding and planing off a rough railing that had torn more than one good skirt, "the judge wants quiet, and—couldn't you do it to-morrow morning?" I tried to be very appealing, but he was not softened. He only changed the angle of his hat, spit over the edge of the porch, began to use the plane, and succinctly remarked, "Nope."

"*That's* all right," I said, kicking aside some shavings and wishing for a moment that I was again small enough to pin them on my hair and dream myself a fairy princess with long, golden curls. "Your planing doesn't disturb any one, but the hammering does. I don't see why you have to do that, anyway."

Nathan didn't waste words on explaining; he merely bent, and moved two palings that were ready to fall at a touch, and then he began to hammer with positive viciousness. I was annoyed and asked

sharply, "Why can't you do it to-morrow morning?"

"Gotta monkey with liniment," he replied. "Good for man *or* beast. I do a lot o' that there. Beasley's woman, she wants it for her heifer."

I turned in time to see the look the judge cast toward Nathan. It was murderous. And under it, Nathan smiled!

"The judge wanted quiet," I said weakly.

"Well, it ain't what-he's a goin' to *git*," said Nathan, smartly, "unless he wants to git hisself off of these here premises. Mebbe—" Nathan paused to make his usual offering to the river—"mebbe he'd get a nice spell of quiet, if he went an' set in that there green field yonder. Think so, jedge?" Nathan turned with this, and smiled again in the judge's direction. But his eyes, which I saw clearly, since he peered over and not through his glasses, did not smile. They seemed to hold a threat.

Judge Harkins grew red, his face seemed to swell, and his collar either grew smaller or his neck enlarged. And then—I saw the judge grip his rage, push it aside and smile, in the way a woman does who has played all afternoon for a bridge prize and seen it go to her worst enemy; he smiled too sweetly.

"Nathan's right," he said, "it won't hurt my nerves. Nothing does!—I just think so. Go right on, Nathan, don't let me disturb you!"

The judge had no opportunity to tell me his story that day. I didn't see him for a week, and then—but I must preface it by the affair which started at about that time between Gustave and this Gloria Vernon. She was a devil. I have to say it, even though affairs ended as they did the following month. She made a dead set for Gustave, played Laurence on the side, and generally raised what a woman does when she wants at least nine male stars to play opposite her lead.

She did it well. I'll hand her that. Gustave really hadn't a chance to escape, for he was not a strong man, and it would have taken genuine solid, two-yards-thick character to withstand her attack. Billy did, but then, of course, he is one in ninety-seven million; I know it now. I sent for Billy the following week, but other things preface his coming.

As I said, I'd had little opportunity to do creek-bottom-poking, and when I did, I saw some of the more intimate display of Gloria's art. I am pretty used to the free expression of anything that wants to be expressed, but even I was jarred. It was a Sunday afternoon; most of the natives thought boating devilish on Sunday, and so we were almost alone.

"Going up the creek," said Gustave, as he passed Jane and me, who were playing double Canfield on one of the porch tables.

"Alone?" asked Jane, and with a pathetic hint in her tone.

"Yes, I am," he replied, in a very solid way, and it left no doubt that Gustave intended to go alone, even if he had to use force to do it.

"Give my love to the mosquitoes," I put in, merely to relieve an awkward pause. He knocked the contents of his pipe out against the railing, and without reply went on. I began to talk about the new silhouette that I'd seen in a Moneymaker ad, and I was surprised on looking up to see that Jane was crying. She smiled mistily as she met my eyes, and then said: "I don't care who knows it; I do and he doesn't," she went on, as she wiped away her tears. "He did—but something's changed him. He doesn't now."

"He's a fool!" I said sharply. She didn't reply, and I saw that her lips were unsteady. She dealt the cards too swiftly, nervousness making her hands shake, and her rows anything but even. "Probably only a little jealousy," I said. "You know, Frank Lethridge's coming here bothered him, probably does now, and he's taking this way of showing it."

"He said he didn't care," Jane answered. "I asked him. Said I'd never speak to Frank again, if he didn't want me to."

I saw that she was pretty far gone, and—that she'd done the most foolish thing any woman can do. "But he did care for you," I assured her, and my statement came from wonder as much as anything.

"Yes. He did, he told me so. But—" Jane waved her hands, sighed deeply, and then got up. "Haven't you noticed that Vernon woman? She came here until he was interested, then she stopped."

"Why, I thought Laurence was the one," I said.

"He was her bait," said Jane. But at that time she did not convince me. I thought she imagined that the perfect "He" was chased, sought after, and pursued. Billy has been, a lot, although he will never admit it, but it is utterly idiotic to think that any one except a girl who was frankly bored sick with the country would chase either Laurence or Gustave. She did come to care for Gustave, but I know she wasn't really stirred at first.

After Jane stood up, she stretched with elaborate carelessness, said that I mustn't take her little upset too seriously, that she was going driving with Frank Lethridge at two and so she supposed she'd have to change her clothes. She left me, and I, alone for the first time that week, thought of my search plans. I took one of the canoes, because I swim well, and like the way they glide through the water. I thought I could manage the sounding without tipping the thing and didn't care very much if I did go in. It was a hot, heavy day.

When I reached the spot where I wanted to poke, I saw a man whom I'd never seen around there before, sitting at the creek's edge. He was smoking and staring rather absently across the water, and he seemed startled when he saw me. Naturally, I couldn't stop and poke then.

Then I butted into the first act of Gloria's vamping. She and Gustave were in a flat-boat which they had moored below willows, and she was sitting in the bottom of the boat by his feet, sprawled all over the place, and yet close held in his arms; and—as I drew near, I heard her say, "Suppose she does care—are two lives to be ruined? You know how I feel, and you—" she drew off, looked at him, and the inquiry she put in her eyes was wonderful.

"*God!*" I heard Gustave whisper, "you know! You know—*Gloria*—"

Then I did a cat trick! I deliberately slid closer, and then—when I was within ten feet of them, began to whistle. I'll say for Gustave's nerve that he didn't jump, but she did. And when she looked at me, I knew I had gained a real hater, and not for my team, either. "Your day to bring in the wood," I sang out to Gustave.

"You go to hell!" he answered. Now we're used to saying that sort of thing down where I live in New York. We make it a point not to differ in what we say to women or men. But this was different. If I had been able, I would have licked Gustave for that. I had not started out to spy on them, and it was not my fault that I came upon them as I did. I didn't reply, but I saw Gloria veil her eyes, and smile as if the enjoyment were all her own. I turned and paddled off up stream.

The man whom I'd passed had gone, and so I stopped and poked, but there wasn't a thing but sand to be felt. I tipped over, and after that, stayed out, dragged the canoe, and investigated thoroughly. I could not understand it, until, suddenly—I stepped off the edge into a deeper hole; the drop was four feet.

Now I understood; whatever had been there had been removed, and it was into the spot where the box had been that I had fallen—

Then I saw another thing. At the side of the creek where the man had been sitting was a clearing and a sloping beach over which anything could be dragged with ease. Some one had built a fire on a bank the night before, I imagined, and the ashes, which lay over everything, quite covered any tracks that the drag of a water-soaked box would have made. It would have left tracks, because the river was mud-edged at the spot, and not with sand and pebbles as it was in some other places. Every year it ate into the meadows as the rains made it high, and each year its course varied, sometimes by feet, and again only by inches. These changes kept the banks always in the process of making, and few of them were the matured, water-seasoned, pebble-trimmed edges that the firm, true river grows.

I went over to look at the ashes. I poked around them, but could find nothing. Then I went over to a pile of dead wood from which the fire had been made, and here I again found Frank Lethridge's locket. I looked at it in some surprise. Then I tied it in a corner of my handkerchief, put that in the front of my blouse, pulled my canoe as near shore as I could, and managed to get into it. Jane had returned that locket to Frank Lethridge, who accepted it without explanations. Evidently he had dropped it; probably he had made the fire. But why—should he cover the tracks of the box? And why, if he had dragged it out, didn't he know where it was without going all over the creek?

After paddling for perhaps fifteen minutes, I came on old Nathan fishing. "Them big ones," he said, "is careless about bitin' because they knows it's Sunday." He unhooked a huge fish, as he spoke, flung it in a basket where it flopped until all my pity was present and crying for rest. "That there'll make a swell fry," he announced. I nodded, and then I told him about the fire and warned him about watching for trespassers. He spit, scratched his head, then readjusted his hat and cast again. "Might as well try agin, though I s'pose you've spiled the fishin'," he said. "I built that there fire. I was a-frawgin' last night."

"Were you alone?" I asked, thinking of the locket. Old Nathan bent a sharp, quick look at me. It said, as plainly as if he had spoken, "How much do you know?"

"Ain't I generally alone?" he asked, after the interval that almost invariably preceded his remarks.

"I don't know," I replied. "We really know very little about you."

After I left him I encountered Gustave. He was alone, and he pulled his punt up by me and spoke. "I suppose you think I'm a cad?" he asked, through set teeth.

I looked at him and didn't reply. He knew what I must think, so words were futile.

"Well, if you understood—" he said uncertainly, and then, "but—I don't myself. I'm suffering more than Jane is!"

"But you're making hers, she's not making yours," I reminded.

"Oh, I know all that," he answered wearily. "I know every side of the problem, and—no answer. I tell you, *I can't help it.* I asked Jane to marry me, and I'll stick to that, but—but—*I can't help this!*"

"That is the chant of a good many weak men and women," I replied scornfully, "and I think Jane is well rid of you. Do you know," I demanded, "that I saw Laurence coming down the lane with Miss Vernon last week, acting a good deal as you did, and without any protest from the kissed?"

He grew white. Then he said, "She told me."

"When you loved Jane, you said you'd kill any one who hurt her. Doesn't it teach you anything?" I asked.

"Oh, I know—" he answered. "I tell you, I know all of it. But—I *can't help it.* My God, the *call* of her, April!"

"You *cad!*" I flung out, and I left him, paddling as fast as I could to get out of earshot of him.

He called after me. "I'd kill any one who hurt Jane to-day," and he almost sobbed on that. Then he positively shouted: "I love her—but—April, wait—" However, I didn't; I went back to the bungalow, so angry that I could hardly see. In the first place both he and Jane had cheated, for we had all of us sworn that we would not complicate the summer by any affairs; that, even if we did find that we cared, we would be quiet; that no engagements, promises, or anything else were to be made; and this—was the result of that solemn vow.

On reaching the house I learned that Jane and Frank Lethridge had gone off together. Judge Harkins had been there, asked for me, and then had gone wandering off up the creek. I'd missed him because I had gone down. But I wasn't sorry; I wasn't ready to receive guests. I sang as I slipped out of my wet things and hunted dry duds.

It was the last time I sang for a long time.

Nathan, who had turned toward his

home, when I paddled off toward mine, had heard Gustave say he'd kill any one who harmed Jane. It was the second time he heard Gustave say that, for we were mistaken and he had heard our talk from the back porch that day; it all came out that following week. But Judge Harkins had been up the creek that afternoon, old Nathan said, and also, he had heard him say to Frank Lethridge, " Keep your hands off of it!" which the judge did not deny.

Almost every one was involved. No one could be convicted, yet no one entirely escaped suspicion. Jane and Gustave, perhaps, caught most of it, although my wet clothes were put up against me. I sent for Billy when Gloria Vernon told the detective that she had seen me that afternoon, and that I had evidently been out late since Nathan had seen me later. Certainly she gave me a mighty unpleasant day or two. I knew, for an absolute certainty, that none of our crowd did it. How —I don't know; but I was sure of this—absolutely sure.

Then—Frank Lethridge's body was found the next evening, floating around in some weeds that grow in shallow water opposite the bungalow.

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.

by Lyon Mearson

OSWALD DRIGGS bent morosely over the A to H. ledger and considered the fact that he was a worm —a worm of the first magnitude, or first water, or something.

" An A to H worm," he pondered glumly. " And besides," he muttered savagely to the account of Abr. Cohen & Co., Inc., " whoever heard of a man by the name of Oswald ever getting any place?"

Naturally enough, there was practically no answer to the question thus propounded —at least, there was no inspiration for an answer in the A to H ledger.

A rapid review of his connection with Walters & Co. gave him small chance for comfort; sixteen years in one place, and he was nothing but a cog that functioned on the A to H ledger. He had not always done that; from a start as an office-boy he had worked in practically every department of the vast business.

He knew the business, and he also knew that if his knowledge would only assert itself above his constant fear of losing his job, he might have been higher in the Walters scale than he was now.

" Probably on the S to Z ledger," he

joked bitterly, dipping his black-ink pen in the red ink by way of expressing his revolt. Nevertheless, he recognized the fact that he was a worm who was so afraid of his job that it had prevented him from making the progress that he should have made. He was meek and overanxious to please; above all, he feared Mr. Walters.

"Old John J. Statistics," the office staff called Driggs—he was only thirty, but he already gave the impression of being old—because he was always ready with some statistics concerning the firm's output or the volume of a customer's buying power, or some other point that somebody higher up needed in a hurry and consequently asked Oswald Driggs for.

And Oswald was always ready to furnish it; it was something that was hardly ever noticed, because it was always there, like bread, or the landlord. Take it away and you miss it horribly—that is, bread, anyway—but present, it never obtrudes itself upon your notice. Oswald's statistics and knowledge of the details of Walters & Co.'s business were like that.

To-day was a day of portent in the affairs of the office force. The impression had somehow become current—Heaven only knows how these things seep into a clerical force—that this was the day on which the successor to the credit manager would be named.

The credit manager, Billy Howe, had gone into business for himself, leaving a gap in the Walters forces big enough to drive a blimp through. It was the custom of the firm to advance the men of their own staff, if they could possibly do it, rather than to go outside for the big jobs—a custom that seemed to apply to everybody but Oswald Driggs.

Billy Howe himself had been an office-boy when Oswald was already a veteran on the ledgers, and now he had resigned from a ten-thousand-dollar-a-year job and gone in on his own. That was just one case; there were plenty of others. All around him they had grown up along with their jobs; or they had left for better. Except Oswald; when they were looking for men for bigger jobs the visibility, so far as he was concerned, had been extremely low.

And right here, lest the reader have too much sympathy for the poor simp who is the central figure of this yarn, it might just as well be admitted that it was his own fault. He had no confidence in his own ability; a crime in business, and a disease that is so catching that finally everybody about you begins to believe the same thing.

He was unobtrusive and retiring; always withdrawing from notice lest some one in power take more than a passing glance at him and make it harder for him to hold on to his job.

"If diffidence was a grain of yellow sand," Billy Howe had once said to him, "Driggs would be the Sahara desert." And it was even so.

He had sidled in unostentatiously this morning, glancing around apprehensively to note whether the boss had made his triumphal progress through the office as yet. He had not, evidently, and Oswald's entrance was not to pass unnoticed. The office wit opened on him.

"Morning, grandpa," he chortled. "Is this the day you're going to ask for Howe's job?"

You know his kind; he wears clothes wherein the pockets are cut diagonally, and his plated watch-chain is slung fetchingly across his vest, also diagonally, from the left lower pocket to the right upper pocket; he reads the funny section of the paper before going on to yesterday's murders; he knows the inside dope about the moving-picture stars, and he thinks the World's Series baseball games are fakes; altogether, he is the life of the party.

Such was Elmer Brown, and Oswald hated him even as he feared him for his cruel and obvious shafts of cumbersome humor.

The shadow of Mr. Walters appeared on the ground-glass door, and spared him the necessity of a reply. The office staff bent industriously to its work, and as the ponderous bulk of the Walters rolled majestically, with all its pomp and circumstance, through the office, Oswald Driggs shivered a little at the thought of what he had contemplated doing this day.

The mistress of the boarding-house where Oswald exchanged most of his week-

ly wage for food and lodging had last night called his attention to the fact that hereafter she would exact an additional three dollars from him each and every week. It was characteristic of the way people held him that whereas his landlady apologized to the other boarders when she informed them of the raise, she simply told Oswald.

A great resolve, born of a night of intensive thinking, had come upon him.

"Yep, this is the day I'm going to put it up to the big stiff," he promised himself.

"I'm going to say, in a firm and yet dignified manner: 'Mr. Walters, I've been here sixteen years, now; I've given faithful and efficient service. In this time everything has gone up except my salary.' That's where I pause calmly, waiting for that to sink in. 'Yes, Mr. Walters, everything has gone up but my salary. Eighteen dollars a week! Why, I have been paying twelve dollars a week for my board, and now they've raised that to fifteen. You know, Mr. Walters, a man can't live on eighteen dollars a week—'"

And so on to the point where he demands a raise to twenty-five dollars. If it was refused, well, he had not yet formulated what he would do in that event. But it would be drastic.

That's what he had on his mind this morning, and his determination felt badly shaken when the stern and mountainous Walters made his entrance. And yet, it had to be done. It was clearly impossible for him to live on his salary.

II.

"I DON'T know just what to do about it, Joe," rumbled Walters, later in the morning.

"The job must be filled, and it doesn't look to me as if there's anybody in the place big enough to fill it without rattling."

"You might advertise," suggested the general manager tentatively.

"Oh, piffle!" dismissed the boss impatiently. "No good credit man is out of a job these days—and I don't want a habitual job hunter. If there was only one of these deadheads in the office who knew enough about the business—"

"There is," grinned the general manager. "That's all he knows, but—"

"You mean—" broke in Walters.

"Yes. Driggs is the man I mean. He knows more about this business, past and present, in a minute than the rest—"

"Yes, of course," grinned the boss in his turn. "Imagine that human doormat trying to hold down a man's job. And yet—" he went off into a train of thought for a moment or two.

"You know," he said at last, "if there was only some way of injecting some pep and spirit into that man—putting a little fight into him—but there's no use discussing that. I've been watching him for years, and pretty soon he's going to find himself among the missing when the office roll is called here some fine morning. I can't stand such humility around me; it gives me the willies."

A timid knock happened on the door, just under the gold sign that announced that this was the office of the president. That's just what it did—it happened. It was not the knock of one accustomed to knocking, or to entering; it had no body to it, no purposeful determination, no authority. It was more like a chance knock that was wandering around the world with no intention of impinging on any door; a knock that had unintentionally and apologetically parked itself on this august door.

"Come!" boomed Walters ill-naturedly.

The door opened a little, and the scared figure of Oswald Driggs sidled through the opening.

It was a super-scared Driggs who stood inside the door, registering fright in all its various degrees. He looked at Walters and at the general manager, and then down at the baggy knees of his shiny pants and examined the toes of his shoes closely as though he saw something there of importance for the first time. And he did a good job of shivering while he stood there, trying to find his voice. Any shimmyist would have been proud of such an exhibition. For plain and fancy shivering we may say that it has seldom been equaled and never excelled.

His face went rosy red and then white, and repeated *ad lib*. His Adam's apple

broke all known records for altitude, and almost got on speaking terms with his front teeth—both of them. And all in all, the point to be brought out here is that, scared to death as he was, nevertheless he had managed to drag himself here; his fear was choking him, yet he had come, and he would have his say. It might be funk—and it might be bravery. Call it anything you like; the writer doesn't know any name for it.

Walters was thoroughly irritated at the sight of him, and his irritation showed in his manner and his tone when he spoke. The man's abnormal fear of him disgusted Walters.

"Well, well, what is it, Driggs?" his voice thundered impatiently.

Even in his panicky dread Driggs could not help noticing the fine little purple lines on the end of the boss's nose, and commenting on the fact that apoplexy would some day claim him for its own; and who would be the boss, then, and who the clerk? He hobnobbed with Omar in his spare moments. He managed to speak.

"I—you see—my—" he stammered.

"You see—what do you see?" put in the boss contemptuously, shifting his cigar from one corner of his mouth all the way over to the other corner without touching it with his hand.

"My landlady," said Driggs, finding a connected phrase at last. "My landlady has raised my rent, and—"

"Why don't you find a new landlady, instead of bothering me about it?" interjected Walters.

This was a poser for Driggs, and he was silent for a space. He had doped out an answer for every possible question, and here was an impossible one; there just was no answer to it. So he finally went on as if it required no answer.

"So I thought that maybe, if you could do it, my salary might be—be—might be—" he repeated over and over, his heart afraid to take the leap that his brain prompted and counseled.

"You thought what? What about your salary—aren't you satisfied with it?" It was a staccato from Walters, and it filled the room.

"Why, yes, sir, very well satisfied. I thought—"

"Well, if you're satisfied, what are you bothering me for when you see I'm busy?" Walters's well-fed body turned to his desk, but Driggs held his ground.

"Yes, I am satisfied, but I thought, being that I am with Walters & Co. so long, that I might ask for a little raise—"

"Raise?" Walters's eyebrows went up. "Raise nothing," he said decidedly. "You're getting more than you're worth now. D'ye get that?" He leaned forward, and emphasized his words with his flat palm on the desk.

Here is where a queer and unaccountable reversal of form occurred; a reversal of form inexplicable even to Driggs himself. All he knew was that something happened inside him, and in a moment nothing seemed to matter much, even his job, as he gazed at this mountain of a rich man who faced him, bursting with good food and good living, and told him that he, Oswald Driggs, was getting more than he was worth.

Eighteen dollars a week!

The refrain echoed and echoed through the corridors of his mind, rising to a great shout and shutting out everything before his eyes except a general red color in which the porcine face of Walters was somehow mingled. Eighteen dollars a week! Eighteen dollars a week!

"Eighteen dollars a week!" He shouted it aloud finally. The clerks outside listened, aghast. Oswald Driggs was raising his voice in the private office of the boss.

"Eighteen dollars a week!" he shouted again. "You fat slob, I've been here sixteen years, and now you tell me I'm not worth what I'm getting."

He darted around the edge of the mahogany table, and stood face to face with the great Walters, and he did not look so great to him then.

"That's all I'm worth, hey! Well, all I got to say to you is that you're a liar, and you know it!"

He snapped his fingers under the boss's nose, with the fine little purple lines in it.

"That's for your job," he said. "I wouldn't work for you now if you offered

me twice the raise I was going to ask for. And moreover, before I go, I'm going to hand you just one for luck."

He drew back his hand, and before the startled employer had time to realize what was about to happen, Oswald had handed him a wallop on the jaw that jammed him back into his seat, from which he was at that moment struggling to arise.

The door slammed with a crash of splintered glass, and Oswald Driggs collected his hat and coat on his way out, and was in the street. The clerks bent low to their ledgers, as though nothing out of the ordinary had occurred.

Oswald Driggs had had his moment. For the rest of his life he might be a worm, he might be a doormat, he might be a punching-bag for life, but there was a pinnacle of glory he had reached. He had slammed his boss in the jaw. Life held little else for Oswald. He had lived.

III.

MR. J. DILLINGWORTH WALTERS, sole owner of Walters & Co., leaned back in his mahogany swivel chair and a curious mixture of emotion dwelt in his keen eyes, to say nothing of a bright red spot that dwelt on the right side of a rather sore jaw.

He was not much hurt physically, but his knowledge of human nature had received more or less of a jolt. It was as if a corpse had thrown off his winding sheet and climbed to the top of his granite rock of ages and was making a Bolshevist oration. Mr. J. Dillingworth Walters was mildly annoyed; as annoyed as a bulldog would be if a rabbit had stopped to give battle.

He was annoyed, but, queerly enough, it was not at the blow; Mr. Walters prided himself on knowing humans—it was the secret of his success, he often told himself. And now a human being whom he knew thoroughly had demonstrated that the human equation is not something that can be solved by logarithms or anything in your text-books.

The general manager had quietly found his way out some time before, and Mr. Walters sat alone in all his purple and fine linen, and pondered the riddle. Finally he grinned. His words of the afternoon came back to him.

"If he only had a little fight in him—" You see, this man was a pretty decent sort, if his employees but knew it. Some of them did—those were the ones who had got ahead. But you had to show something to get ahead with Walters.

"Yes, if he only had a little fight in him!" he said again.

He passed a tender hand over a tenderer jaw, and sat for a long time in thought.

It is not for the present historian to chronicle the sequence of that train of thought. Any student of psychology will understand how it came to pass that Mr. Walters arrived at a momentous and weighty decision. It requires but the knowledge that Mr. Walters was a man of vision and one who placed his business interests in advance of his personal feelings.

Given such a one, and given the incident that had just transpired, and given the need, the immediate need, of a new credit man with pep and fight, the aforesaid student of psychology would have no difficulty in deciding on the same thing decided upon by this employer of men.

Mr. J. Dillingworth Walters came to his office at nine thirty the next morning, and immediately buzzed for his stenographer.

"Driggs hasn't come in, has he?" he fired at her.

"No, sir," she replied.

"Take this letter, then," he commanded. Her pencil poised itself over a blank page in her book, like a swallow hesitating before flight. Dillingworth dictated:

"MR. OSWALD DRIGGS:

"In view of your conduct yesterday, Walters & Co. no longer feel justified in retaining you in your position as assistant to the bookkeeper.

"From this date, therefore, you will assume the duties of credit manager. Salary to start at four thousand, and—"

He was interrupted by an evanescent knock on the door; a chance knock that seemed to have wandered around the world before dying, spent, on the outside of the splintered glass of his door.

"Yes?" he said gruffly.

The door opened to admit Oswald Driggs; the real Oswald Driggs, as differentiated from the embattled one of less than twenty-four hours previous.

It was an abject and scared Oswald Driggs; gaunt and haggard from a night of remorse at his deed, and terror at the probable loss of his job.

"Mr. Walters," he opened, "I—I—I want to apologize for what I did yesterday. I was not myself," he almost wailed.

Mr. J. Dillingworth Walters looked at him in silence, a prey to a mixture of emotions again—a mixture in which a sickening revulsion was uppermost. So this was the man whom he was making his credit manager! This—this yellow rabbit!

"I hope you'll overlook it, Mr. Walters. I assure you you'll not get a man who can work so faithfully on the books as I've done. If you'll give me another chance—just one more chance, Mr. Walters, I'll try to prove myself worthy of remaining in your employ."

As he stood there, cringing before the employer's direct and overpowering gaze, Walters's feelings got the better of him.

"Aw, get to hell out of here!" his voice shot out contemptuously, like a sudden lash. Still cringing, Driggs walked out, backward, and closed the door softly.

All of which proves nothing except that sometimes when a worm turns he crawls back into the same hole he just came out of.

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THE PHENOM

THERE was a busher wonderful,
Not errorful or blunderful,
But pep-possessed and plunderful—
He was the candy kid!
He found a groove to pour 'em through,
With all his steam he tore 'em through—
You should have seen him bore 'em through!
When charleyhorsed, he swore 'em through—
He ack-chewally did!

He was the great invincible;
Convinced folks unconvincible—
He winced not nor was wincible,
This tosser from the shrubs.
He struck out every batter up;
And (while we have the matter up—
Why keep this constant chatter up?)
He used his bat to fat 'er up—
His average, you dubs!

Game after game he easily
Won all alone; and breezily
He talked of pennants measle-y—
He was a lucky pup!
The grand stand shook with cheers for him,
The captain had no fears for him,
The bleachers gave no jeers for him,
All nifty janes had ears for him—
And then this guy woke up.

Strickland Gillilan.

Black and White

by J.U. Giesy *and* Junius B. Smith

Author of "Stars of Evil," "The Black Butterfly," "Solomon's Decision," etc.

(A SEMI DUAL STORY)

PRECEDING CHAPTERS BRIEFLY RETOLD

GORDON GLACE, of the detective firm of Glace & Bryce, was sitting in his office when he received a call on the private wire connecting him with the tower on top of the building where lived his friend the Persian mystic, Semi Dual. Going up at once, Glace was amazed to learn that Dual's life was threatened by agents of the Black Brotherhood, an association designed to bring discontent and anarchy into the world, elevate evil and out of the chaos achieve power for themselves. Literally the representatives of the spirit of evil—the devil—on earth.

The first attempt was made by Lotis Popoff, a daughter of Michael Popoff, a member of the band and a so-called "Red," who had killed himself in attempting to escape capture in Dual's last encounter with the brotherhood ("House of the Hundred Lights," *All-Story*, May 22, to June 12, 1920). But Dual disarmed and subjugated her, finally hypnotizing her, and sending for Connie, Glace's wife, to take care of the unconscious girl. For as he explained to Bryce she herself was not wholly evil yet. She was under the influence of the powers of evil and had been molded to their desires, but as yet had committed no overt act and could be saved.

Later while Glace and his partner were sitting in their office they became aware of a presence, a floating something in the air; but just then Dual came in, and as it attacked him he exerted his mental force against it and it burst. It was as he explained, a psychic bomb. An emanation sent from the brain of the leader of the Brotherhood, like wireless power is sent through the ether, to search him out and read his mind.

While of course Dual, by his powers of divination, *et cetera*, knew what his enemies were plotting, it was equally necessary to have some material proof of their criminal intent. And this the three set themselves to find.

Time and again while Lotis remained in the tower, the mysterious Otho sent his strange mental power against her in an attempt to destroy an instrument that had failed of its purpose and might prove dangerous, but each time Semi Dual thwarted him, finally succeeding in convincing the girl that her soul was not hopelessly lost and she could still hope to be saved.

CHAPTER XII.

TEMPORARY VICTORY.

"MASTER," she called him for the second time, save that now there was no mockery in the word as she said it, such as there had been on that other occasion.

And as quickly as she knelt, Dual bent above her, lifting her up again, raising her in his strong yet gentle hands.

"Nay," he said. "Nay, Lotis, there is no mastery over thee any longer save only one, and that thy own. None is the master of his soul save him to whom that soul belongs, unless he himself surrenders it to another. Yet in the mastery of the soul, the soul itself gains strength, and he who is master of his soul is very strong."

"But"—strangely she put out a hand and touched him on the arm and stood so searching his face for a space of what seemed many seconds before she went on—"thou wilt teach me to gain that strength?"

"I and another shall teach thee, Lotis," he said slowly.

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for October 2.

"Another?" she questioned.

"Aye. One who as a bridegroom cometh."

I saw her gasp. I saw her body swell with a caught-in breath. I felt my own comprehension quicken, catch up his remark of the other afternoon concerning a new element to be drawn into this matter—the element of love—and I wondered if it were possible that now in this hour of beginning understanding between himself and the girl, he could possibly refer to that—and—if she understood.

For she trembled. I saw her draw back slowly, step by step, and gather her robe about her and seat herself on her cot. I saw her mouth begin to quiver.

And I heard Dual once more speaking. "I and he, Lotis, when he cometh, yet in a greater measure must strength come to thee out of Life."

"Life?" she repeated.

"Life and what its living shall teach thee."

Her eyes did not waver by a hair's breadth from his. "I think I understand you," she made answer. "I shall live—as perhaps I once thought to. I thank you, Abdul. I do not understand yet fully, but—I thank you, and—I am tired—very, very tired. May I sleep?"

"Aye." Dual walked to the window and closed it, drew the curtains.

"Safely?" she questioned as he turned back.

His assurance came as benignly soothing as that of a parent to a nightmare-ridden offspring: "As safely as any child of the All in All—the All Knower—the Blessed One, whom men call God." He smiled and his smile was a benediction. It included Lotis, Connie, myself.

"Come, Gordon," he said, and moved toward the stairs.

I followed. Not once did it occur to me to question his positive assurance to the girl that she could rest in perfect safety, and as I left Connie with a good night pressure of the hand, it was with a feeling that she, too, was safe. That was the thought back of my first remark after Dual and I were down-stairs again and he had seated himself beside his massive desk.

"Well," I said then, "I suppose that's the end of Otto's interference for the present."

"For the present," Dual repeated, "yes. In so far as Lotis is concerned, his domination is broken."

I could scarcely fail to note the nature of his answer. "But you think he is apt to try something else against you yourself?"

"Against both of us, unless I am very much mistaken," he replied.

"Both of you?" I exclaimed, because the statement surprised me more than a little in view of the fact that he had told Lotis in such unequivocal fashion that she was safe.

And I think he must have understood the reason for the tone I employed because his succeeding words were somewhat in the nature of an explanation:

"Yet not at once—nor in the same way. It was not so much in a physical way as in a spiritual sense that I reassured the troubled victim of his craft that she was safe."

"So that the danger is not past even yet and we must still be on our guard?"

He turned to the desk and rapidly leaved through a pile of symbol-written pages, selecting one and swinging back to me with it in his hands before he rather cleverly reversed his former declaration. "But more in a physical than a spiritual sense. Some such condition is shown in the horary figure I set up as dealing with this matter. In the beginning, our adversary placed his hope of effecting my physical destruction on what we may well describe as a complex of individually physical and psychic force. From that he stepped far more wholly into the matter than at first he had intended, solely because of the fact that I succeeded in apprehending his agent and keeping her closely in contact with myself. Had he succeeded the other day or to-night in his purpose, he would both have destroyed the source of a possible danger, should I eventually win her confidence and trust, and through it elicit a better understanding of him, and at the same time have left me in a more or less difficult position myself. Doubtless he believed I would find trouble in explaining the presence of a young and beautiful woman's body in my hands."

"I know," I said. "Bryce and I were speaking of that ourselves. And we couldn't have helped you very much. The only explanation we could have offered would not have proved of much advantage in a modern court."

"A detriment rather than any advantage," Dual replied. "And had such a possibility transpired, my antagonist might well have succeeded in bringing disaster upon me, even if he failed to achieve my physical destruction, since what we alleged would have been incapable of any concrete proof, and he could scarcely have been connected in any way with Lotis's death. Necromancy is not a thing of common belief in these days and none is more fully aware of the fact than the necromancer himself. Having failed in his attempt to accomplish either my death or hers, however, he finds himself now in a different case. And having resorted to both the purely psychic and the psycho-physical in combination, it is my opinion that he will now find himself driven back to an employment of a purely physical means rather than anything else."

"Physical means?" I exclaimed, considerably surprised by the suggestion. "A resort to material force?"

"In my judgment," Semi returned without any hesitation.

I glanced at the paper in his hand. "You arrive at that judgment from your study of the figures you have set up as well as by a process of deduction?"

"Yes. Oddly enough, the indication exists in both Lotis's chart and mine. The meaning can scarcely be mistaken."

"But how?" I began, no longer merely surprised, but actually startled.

"By some means which will destroy us both," he told me calmly. "It is that at which he aims. He who is outside the moral law is at least freed from all scruples as to the means employed so long as his object is gained."

I think that complete exasperation would best describe my sensations as I sat there and heard him almost didactically set forth his estimate of the further progress of the matter. There fumed up within me a resentment amounting to little less than a sort of baffled rage. That this—this demonologer, this black magician—who used his knowledge of natural law not as the man before me, but in a perverted, a corrupted form, to bring about the destruction of minds and bodies, of even the very souls of his fellow man—could so continue to play his nefarious art, in a seemingly impregnable safety and without let or hindrance, filled me with emotions demanding an expression for which I could not seem to find adequate words.

I glanced about the room as on the afternoon when my present companion had called me up and in very much the same fashion informed me of what was about to happen, and asked my aid. I got up and walked the length of the room, to the windows beyond which twinkled the night lights of the city, and returned.

"It's diabolical—hellish," I said at last. "I think I begin to sympathize with Bryce's feelings when you told us the proper course lay in waiting."

"The proper course does lie in waiting. For, through it, our opponent's purpose shall be made plain," Dual returned. "Let not the matter disturb you, for the past is past and this thing is of the future. Beaten once more as in his own way he must perceive that he is beaten, even Otto himself must again take time to formulate his further plans."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE UNKNOWN DANGER.

ONE thing about Dual's predicted happenings was that they always fell out in the most matter-of-fact way in the world, so that if it had not been for his statement that they would or were about to occur, they would have appeared no more than any other incident in the complex occurrences of life.

Take those events which had held us during the past few days—events which on the face of them were, to say the least, weird in their hint of potent force currents in operation at the will of a plainly criminal mind—analyze them in retrospect, and it was amazing to find how largely they lost their uncanny seeming, even in so far as

Bryce and I, who had been to some extent actors in them, were concerned.

Jim brought the matter up in conversation the succeeding day in the abrupt manner he frequently used in broaching a subject he had been thinking over. "Darn it all, m'son, all this stuff is mighty strange if you take it like it looks, an' then again if you don't it ain't. Darned if I can tell just how to look at the thing."

He had drifted into my private room as by custom, and was sitting in a chair with his cigar clamped between his teeth.

"Meaning?" I prompted, knowing very well he was merely assuring himself of my attention before unloading whatever was on his mind.

"Well, here, now," he said, "is this Lotis kid, an' Otto—only he ain't here, of course, but he's somewhere around, an' here is Dual, an' us. An' there's been some funny things if, as I said, you take 'em on their face. But if you look under th' surface, what has there been but a lot of big talk about devils an'—something else

"What else?" I urged.

"That's it!" said Bryce. "What is it? Is it what it looks like or ain't it? Barrin' that afternoon when we went up there an' found Semi fightin' th' devil—as he as good as said—there ain't nothin' to th' whole works that can't be explained as easy as a lot of these here tricks you see on th' stage."

I eyed him. I didn't quite see what he was getting at first. "Are you trying to intimate that Dual is misled in his opinion of the matter?" I inquired.

He shook his head quickly. "No, I ain't. But I been thinkin'—I been thinkin' a lot. Didn't you tell your own wife that when Lotis made her see that snake she had her hypnotized?"

I had told him already of my conversation with Connie and I nodded.

"Well then—Dual says all Force is one, don't he? He does. An'—where does that get us? He says Lotis is obsessed with a notion that she's lost her soul, an' it don't matter what she does. She can commit murder or anything else so far as she's concerned herself. Why, isn't that the same as sayin' th' girl is hypnotized by this here Otto, as much as anything else?"

His question struck me like a blow between the eyes, and for a moment I made no reply. I was thinking. He had opened up a field of speculation which filled me with amaze. And the odd thing about it was that merely as an explanation of what had occurred, it did not seem an implausible proposition. Rather than combating it, I finally carried it forward.

"Presuming that you're right," I said, "I'm not sure but the same thing might apply to the one exception you make. There is such a thing as a post-hypnotic suggestion as well as the more direct command to which a subject will yield. Lotis may have been instructed before she came to the tower that if anything went wrong, and she were apprehended, she would sink into a state of suspended animation in which she would have appeared to have died—and Dual, by throwing her into a state of partial catalepsy, would then have only been carrying out the first stages of Otto's previously given orders—"

"Instead of Otto's trying to carry on what Semi had started. Holy smoke!" Bryce stared at me out of actually popping eyes. "At that rate, what Dual did the other afternoon was nothing more than make her come back, instead of carrying out th' suggestion she had already received. My aunt's cat, m'son—that plays th' devil with all this devil talk, don't it? It brings th' whole thing down to stuff we're all more or less familiar with these days. Gosh—I—wonder if Otto ain't had all of us sort of hypnotized?"

"I don't think he's hypnotized Dual," I said.

Jim frowned. "No—that's the devil of it. I don't—"

"Exactly," I cut him short. "That *is* the devil of it, Bryce—the diabolical element of the whole infernal thing. It has a most remarkable quality of looking like two things at once—what it is and what is isn't. That's where Otto's particular devilishness comes in. It looks like one thing and it may be another. It's hard to tell which is which, or what is the truth.

"From a purely material standpoint there literally isn't anything at all that can be proved. You pointed out the same thing

when you said Dual would have been in a pickle if he'd been left with Lotis's body on his hands. The size of the matter is that we're actually dealing here with things we don't fully understand and the best thing we can do is to leave the whole thing in the hands of the one man who seemingly does understand it, rather than try to measure it by the standard of our own or the popular mind."

"Whoa—" said Jim. "Whoa, m'son. That's what we're doing, ain't it? I saw Johnson yesterday, but I didn't tell him a thing—not a thing—and that in spite of th' fact that I'd sure like to get a line on George. But a man can't help thinkin'."

"No," I said, "I suppose not."

He nodded. "Well, I ain't tried. An' th' result is that I got to th' point this mornin' where it looks to me as if what's happened th' last few days an' nights could have been brought about in two ways."

"The main thing is that it *has* been brought about," I said rather shortly.

Bryce grinned. "An' now Dual thinks Otto's goin' to try a little violence for a change?"

"So he says."

Jim's grin widened at my tone and manner, which, to tell the truth, were that of jangled nerves.

"Oh, well, I don't know as it makes much difference how he pulled it; either way Otto sure seems to be the Devil," he said.

I changed the subject. "How was Johnson when you saw him?"

"Oh, about th' same," Jim replied. "Said he'd been busy tryin' to run down some skirt who had managed to get mislaid."

"Find her?" I asked without any real interest in his answer.

"Nope, not yet." He got up. "Well, while Otto's restin' up for th' next round, an' you're nursin' a grouch, I guess I'll take a walk."

"Help yourself," I agreed, and he went out, leaving a trail of smoke.

And even then, in the very fact we had last held under discussion, events were shaping, although we were too blind to see it, and I mention those last few remarks of ours now, merely to emphasize the extremely casual manner in which so many of Semi's predictions reached their culminating point.

Nothing more happened that day, however, and about four o'clock, having finished the routine tasks that had held me in the office, I put on my hat and went up to the roof.

There I met a surprise. Connie was seated beside the little fountain, protected from the sun by the shade of the tower at her back, and Lotis was bending beside one of Semi's bushes covered with late summer roses, a little way off.

I took the whole scene in at a glance. I had certainly not looked for Dual to give the girl the freedom of his garden, but seemingly he had. At that rate there must have been a striking change in her, indeed. I eyed her as I advanced, marking, as on the first day, the grace of her figure, the whiteness of her skin, the darkness of her hair and brows.

Connie greeted me with a smile, edging over a trifle to give me a seat at her side on the bench whereon she was sitting.

"Dual and she must have come to a pretty sudden understanding," I said in a lowered voice.

She nodded. "She is changed, Gordon. She and I had a long talk this morning, and afterward Mr. Dual had her down-stairs. She asked me a great many things, and I told her all I could, even about her father's death. She is a lady by instinct and breeding, and she's been through a terrible ordeal—but—she's going to find her real self. I—honestly, I think it has been a modern example of the casting out of a devil, at which you and I have been privileged to assist. I—I feel strange about it, and I don't believe there is any other man who would have been big or strong or noble or unselfish enough to do what Mr. Dual has done for her, on earth."

I became conscious that the girl had turned and was watching us from beside the flower-nodding bush. And as she saw that I noted the fact she came slowly toward us. I rose that she might be seated, and she acknowledged my act with a slight inclination of her head.

"How do you do, Mr. Glace," she said.

As she sat down, it struck me that her pallor was marked and her dark eyes very wide; that there was something almost tragic in her face.

"Very well," I replied. "And you, Miss Lotis?"

"Better," she said, as though she felt very sure I would understand her. "Very much better than I have been for a long, long time. I—I think I must have been—mad." She caught her breath.

Quite evidently from the nature of her reply she meant to meet the situation frankly and without any attempt at evasion. I found myself thinking that her stand would indicate a very fair measure of sound common sense. I perched on the rim of the fountain and met her suggestion.

"At least the madness passes, Miss Lotis, and where better than in this garden, with its atmosphere of safety and peace?"

She gave me a piercing glance. "Peace and safety," she said slowly. "Ah, yes—for the time being at least. I have promised not to leave it."

"Eh?" I was none too securely seated on the fountain edge and I nearly fell over backward. Either there was a veiled meaning behind her words or I was imagining things. I decided to put the matter to test. "How do you mean for the time being?" I asked.

She answered by another question: "Do you think it will be either safe or peaceful for long, Mr. Glace?"

I fancy I narrowed my eyes. Dual had stated that we were not done with danger, but it was somewhat disconcerting to sit there and hear this beautiful little demonologist voice what amounted to the same opinion.

"Just what do you mean by that, Miss Lotis?" I inquired at last.

She took a deep and somewhat unsteady breath before she spoke with a passion that could come only from a depth of feeling almost too deep to express.

"There isn't any need of our fencing with words or mincing matters, is there Mr. Glace? You know what I have been; why I came here, and all that has happened since. To-day—I am different. I know it; I feel it. All day long I have been like one who has been asleep and has wakened in a strange room. I—I have been trying to find myself. And I have done it—in a measure at least—thanks to the man I came to kill and the God in whom he believes."

She broke off, hesitated, went on. "God! Mr. Glace do you know how long it seems since I could speak that word with the feeling that I was naming the name of a friend; of one who cared? And to-day—since last night—the right to do so has come back to me who fancied it forever lost. Mr. Dual says that was because I was obsessed by another's purpose, another's thought; that I was enthralled. He made me believe it. I didn't want to but I did, and whether it was true as I thought or false as your friend assures me, I suffered none the less. I looked on myself as an outcast; as one who had forsworn her immortal birthright; he had all but destroyed me—and then—then I came to this; to this garden of peace where I can gather up the poor, broken bits of the soul I fancied lost and mend them together with the help of one such as I never dreamed could exist. I have been picking up the bits of my broken soul all day and putting them together, and in some ways it has been a dreadful task. But to answer your question, I said what I did, because the best way to know a man, his true nature, is to have been his slave."

"You mean Otto?" I said, the words fairly startled out of me, I may as well confess.

She shuddered. "Yes."

"Well," I reassured her, "you're safe from him as long as you're here at least."

"My soul," she countered quickly. "Oh, yes, his domination over that is broken, or I feel it is. I'm accepting that because I want to so—so very much. It appears that I've been very weak and foolish and wicked, and that now a part of my punishment is that my soul is given back to me from the hands of the one I came to murder; and yet even so, I want it, and I'm taking it back, but the soul is not the body; and if one has been the slave of a man's thoughts, she may feel them, beating, beating about

her even though she no longer obeys. It's —it's what you would call telepathy, Mr. Glace."

"Since you don't want to mince matters, Miss Lotis, and have been so very frank about it, you think then that this man intends making another attempt against your life?" I said.

She looked into my eyes. Her own were dark and steady. And after a moment she smiled in a somewhat wistful fashion, before she answered: "You're very easy to read, Mr. Glace. Oh, I don't blame you for not being wholly able to trust me, after all you've seen occur. But I've been giving you frankness. I wanted to be sure—sure that you knew. I wanted you and the man I came to injure to be warned. It isn't just that I myself wanted to live. I want to repay; to do my part in undoing some of the wrong I have done at least. You know what is written on the plate down there that rings his chime of bells—the plate I avoided the other night by walking about it, and killing and breaking his flowers — that whoever comes against him must pay to the uttermost for their evil intent. I laughed at it then; laughed at it to his face, but I'm not laughing any longer, Mr. Glace. I—the girl to whom he has given back her soul—I want to repay to the uttermost."

She broke off again and sat regarding me still with her wistful smile and a falling and rising breast.

I got up from the rim of the fountain.

"I hardly think you're justified in saying I do not trust you, Miss Lotis," I said. "But—a man finds it necessary to be careful in what he says at times—"

She nodded quickly. "And of what he thinks. I understand, Mr. Glace, and whether I have read your thoughts or not —whether I am sure that you are forewarned or not—I will give you what proof I can, that I meant what I just said. Otto will not stop now; not when he is beaten. It isn't like him. He will try again—something else—some other thing. All day his thought has beaten about me; he is thinking of me, and his thoughts are far from kind. I am no longer his slave and he knows it. He is plotting my death, and that of your friend. So much he has told me. I am to die because I have turned from him. I think he meant to frighten me, Mr. Glace, but I am not frightened; not really, I think."

"How?" I leaned toward her. "How is this thing to be accomplished? Girl, if you're sincere—if you're in earnest in this warning—what is it he means to attempt?"

Lotis drew back. The color drained from her vivid lips. Her eyes widened again under my direct staring, grew darkly troubled.

"Gordon," Connie interposed.

I shook my head.

"How is it to be done?" I repeated.

"I—don't know; oh, I don't know, really," Lotis faltered. "I've been trying to learn and I can't find out. You don't know him. He is a—a fiend. He knows how to mask his thoughts when he wishes. I think I only know this because he was thinking so strongly of me. And after that I think he knew I was trying to learn; that he felt me trying to read his plan. I can't read Prince Abdul's mind either unless he wishes. You don't believe me, do you?"

I reached a decision. "I'll tell you this much," I said; "Dual knew this thing was going to happen before you said a thing."

"Thank God!" The words faltered off Lotis Popoff's lips; they quivered. She shut her eyes. Connie slipped an arm about her and gave me an almost reproachful glance. I turned away and left the two of them together and went on inside the tower. I found Dual in his usual place and told him without any reservation what had occurred.

For a time after I had finished, he said nothing, and then: "Trust begets trust, and faith, faith, and honor, honor, and well-doing a wish for well-doing at least, my friend. Like begets like; hence distrust—its counterpart. Ponder upon it. What is past is past, and what is to come will arrive. Man has but the present at his disposal; and the present is but a heart's beat in time. In it man must profit by the past and pave the way of the future. Knowing these things, it behooves man to so act as to preserve not only his well being but that of his fellow man, in so great a

measure as he can. If he has done this, he may await the future without alarm."

In a way it was a remark as cryptic as any of the symbolic means of expression he was so wont to use, and I sensed in it not only a rebuke for my lack of a full faith in Lotis' good intentions, but an answer to my own desire to learn in how full a measure he was prepared against that further danger to himself and her he had himself foretold. But I didn't know what that answer was, except, of course, that I judged him ready. I lay back in my chair and eyed him.

His eyes met mine. In them there was a meaning I could not fathom—an expression that vividly recalled Lotis' statement that she could not read his mind, unless he wished it.

"Patience," he said. "Let Otto plan. Already have I told you to let him dig the pit of his undoing in whatever fashion pleased him. And a man may think clearly of no more than those things he knows."

CHAPTER XIV.

THE ELEMENT OF LOVE.

JOHNSON dropped into the office the next day. My first intimation of his presence was when Danny Quinn, the youthful, red-headed genius who presided over our outer office, tapped on the door of my private room and announced:

"Say, Mr. Glace, that there bull Johnson is outside with another guy an' he wants to know can he see you an' Mr. Bryce."

"Show him in," I directed, buzzed a call for Jim to come over from his own room, which he could very well do through a narrow communicating passageway without entering the general office at all, and watched Danny retire.

Jim showed up just about the time his former team-mate on the police appeared.

"Why, hello, look who's here," he exclaimed, eying the inspector in some surprise, since no matter how often he saw him, it was seldom he came to our office.

"Hello, Jim; hello, Glace," said Johnson nodding. He bulked large in the small room and it struck me as I faced him that he seemed a trifle less than wholly at his ease. "How are you?"

"Well enough," I replied, putting out my hand which he took, while Jim pushed forward a chair.

Johnson sank into it and sighed.

"Hot," he remarked, removing his cap and running his finger about the moisture-dampened sweat band inside. "Busy?"

I shook my head. Plainly the inspector had something beside the heat on his mind, but even then I didn't remotely foresee what it was.

He waited for a moment or two after my tacit answer, balanced his cap on a heavy knee, glanced about the room and brought his wandering gaze back at last to my partner and myself.

When he spoke at last his words came abruptly. "I got a man outside"—he jerked his head toward the door—"name of Edward Garston—"

"Interesting if true," Bryce interrupted. He and Johnson were always given to ragging one another despite the fact that they were the very best of friends.

Johnson eyed him.

"Shut up till I get done," he rumbled. "Maybe it's a lot more interestin' than you think for. This here Garston has lost track of th' girl he's been tryin' to marry."

"Huh?" Jim opened his eyes. "That th' same girl you was tellin' me you'd been huntin' th' other day?"

The inspector nodded. "Yes, it is. This boy blows in three days ago an' tells me he's sure she came to this burg, an' asks me to find her for him. That was easy enough up to a certain point. I run it down an' found out he was right in thinkin' she'd been here—found th' place where she'd been livin' but—she'd disappeared."

"Just how do you mean disappeared?" I inquired.

"Why—disappeared," said Johnson. "Accordin' to her landlady, she seems to have just walked out an' forgot to come back—went off leaving all her personal belongings an' her clothes. It looks sort of funny."

I nodded. "Naturally it does. Nothing been heard of her since?"

"Not a thing." Johnson shook his head. "She might just as well have stepped off th' earth."

"But see here," I said, "why did you have to hunt for her room? Didn't this sweetheart of hers have her address?"

"No, he didn't." Johnson sighed. "It seems she'd broken with him before she came over here, but he found out where she'd gone."

"Did she know he was coming?"

Johnson hitched himself up in his chair. "How could she when he didn't know where she was?"

"Then what's the notion?" I inquired.

The inspector took a full-chested breath. "I reckon I'm a fool," he remarked, "but I thought maybe you boys would be interested in helpin' to clear up the matter if you knew who she was. You see she was old Popoff's daughter, an' you was mixed up in—"

He got no farther, for the simple reason that whatever he might have meant to say was blocked by Bryce.

"What's that!" he fairly yelled and got out of his chair and stood glaring at Johnson with a most peculiar expression on his face. "D'ye mean you've been huntin' Lotis Popoff these last few days?"

"Why — yes," Johnson admitted, "though to tell th' truth, I didn't know Mike had a daughter till this Garston showed up an' said he had. Say what's th' matter with you, Jim—"

"Hold on," I said before Bryce could answer. Frankly I was about as much surprised as he was, but with my surprise was blended something else; that something Dual had said about a new element; the element of love soon to be interjected into the situation we confronted.

Well, if the man Johnson had brought up with him to the office, this Edward Garston, were in love with Lotis; had cared enough to follow her and seek to find her; then seemingly Semi had been right.

"Wait a minute, both of you," I went on as I realized exactly what had happened; "Johnson, just what *did* you have in mind in bringing Garston up here? Did you expect us to help you or—did you think we might enlist the services of some one else?"

He knew Dual fairly well, had more than once seen him clear up some baffling human tangle, and had actually worked with him at several times in the past, particularly in the case which had begun with the murder of Judge Cahill and ended with Michael Popoff's death, so I had no doubt but he would understand.

And plainly enough he did, because for just a moment his face went a sort of bricky red.

"That's puttin' th' cards on th' table, ain't it, Glace?" he accepted my remark with a none too assured laugh. "But I guess we might as well get down to cases first as last. Of course, I wasn't expectin' you boys to do anything more for this here Garston than I could myself—"

"You wasn't," Jim cut in again. "Well, I'll say this—you're damned frank."

Johnson grinned. "'Struth," he declared. "But I know your side kick is th' sort of a man would be pretty apt to move if he thought even Mike's daughter had come to any harm, an'—well, I've seen him do some mighty queer things. There was th' way he took of gettin' Mike, an' tyin' up McDowd."

Jim nodded. He chuckled as though something was amusing him immensely. I looked up sharply at the sound and found his brown eyes dancing and his color heightened. Instinctively I knew that he saw the whole thing; knew exactly what had happened at last and was thoroughly enjoying himself at the prospect of what Johnson would think and feel before this affair was ended. But—

"Yes, an' if you live long enough you're goin' to see a lot of things that you'll think queer, old hoss," was all he said. I had to give him credit for knowing when it was time to sit on the lid.

For in a way the whole affair was funny. It made me feel like laughing myself, to see the heavy-framed inspector sitting there in my little private office, on his now confessed errand of trying to induce Bryce and me to enlist the services of Dual in finding the very woman who at that identical instant was quite possibly strolling about the garden something more than thirteen stories directly above his head.

But I controlled the impulse. I decided that I'd learn a bit more of what had been actually done by Johnson and Edward Garston, in whose person, as it would now seem, the element of love was entering the life of Lotis Popoff, before, as I felt sure now I should, I went up to the roof and interviewed Semi himself.

"But is there any definite reason for thinking she may have come to harm?" I asked.

"Well—" Johnson glanced again at the door, "Garston out there thinks there is. It's this way; he met her when she was at college, an' they got engaged. Then after her father died, there was some feller what had been her father's friend, come on an' took her to live with him, an' after that I guess things got sort of strained. Anyway this chap didn't seem to cotton to Garston or somethin', an' Garston lays what happened to him.

"Th' upshot of it was she broke off th' engagement in a letter she wrote, tellin' him she'd made up her mind she wouldn't ever marry, an' Garston says he'll bet this chap was back of her doin' that. He says he's a crook though he can't prove it yet. Anyway it seems like somebody he knowed saw her a coupla weeks ago an' told him, an' that's how he found out she was here, instead of where he thought she was.

"Up to then he'd just thought she was livin' with this guy an' had been lyin' quiet, but after his friend comes an' says she's workin' here in th' city—like she tells him when they met, Garston goes to where the friend of her father's lives an' gets told to mind his own business an' get to hell out. Nacherally that gets his wind up an' he comes over here instead, only he can't find her an' after tryin' for a few days, he comes in an' tells me what's what. Well, I put out some lines an' I find she's been here, an' been workin' all right. She'd been workin' for a feller by the name of Pitkin right here in this buildin'."

Bryce apparently choked on the smoke of his cigar or something. "She was workin' for Pitkin, was she?" he said in a strangled sort of gasp.

"Yes." Johnson gave him a glance. "You know anything about him?"

Jim put up his knuckles and wiped his eyes. I knew what was ailing him and I couldn't blame him. "Chemist, wasn't he?" he asked.

"Yes," said Johnson, "he was."

Jim nodded. "There was a man by that name was one of Popoff's gang, accordin' to McDowd."

Johnson gaped. "The hell there was. Say—" His expression grew suddenly speculative.

"George Pitkin," said Bryce.

"That's him," the inspector declared. "He had an office here, but it seems th' last few days he ain't been on th' job—an' th' funny thing is th' last time anybody around here seen him was th' same day this here girl disappeared. That's one thing and here's another. We dug up th' place where she roomed, like I've told you, an' we had a talk with th' woman what runs th' dump. Seems like th' girl didn't have many friends, an' didn't go out much at all except that sometimes a fellow come to see her or took her out ridin'. Th' landlady says this here man's name was Kahn, an' Garston hops onto that at once, because, as he wised me up right afterwards, that's the name of this friend of her father's who he thinks has put th' skids under his love affairs."

"Kahn," I repeated in a voice I found trouble in keeping steady. "That's a German name, isn't it, Johnson?"

He nodded. "I reckon it is, an' th' rest of it's just as German. It's Otto—"

"What's that?" Bryce said sharply.

"Otto Kahn." Johnson put the whole name together. "Say, what's the matter with you boys?"

"Nothing," I replied and caught Jim's eye. He controlled himself by an effort.

"Oh, Otto Kahn. Well, I'm not sure I ain't inclined to agree with Garston. A man with a name like that ought to be capable of almost anything, don't you think?"

"Name?" Johnson turned his gaze from one of us to the other. "What's th' name got to do with it unless you know him. Say—you two are actin' sort of funny? What's th' joke?"

I told him the literal truth, though not

quite as he understood it. "There isn't any joke, old man, but—well, I'm a good deal surprised at your coming here like this."

For I was. I was more than surprised. I was literally amazed at the way in which things were turning out; that with all his craft and cunning, all his diabolical knowledge, his fiendish control of natural forces to his own perverted aims, Otto the devil's name should have been brought to us in such fashion; to think that in the outer room of our office at present there was sitting a man who knew this modern necromancer; not only his name, but his appearance, the place where he lived, all that and possibly many other intimate details of importance; to realize that to such an extent this past master of evil was being unveiled to us through the element of love—

And even as those things ran through my mind, I heard Bryce speaking. "Yes, it's sort of odd for you to come up here an' ask us to get Dual to help you locate Mike Popoff's girl. I'll say it is."

Johnson flushed a trifle before he said gruffly: "Well, maybe. I'll admit I can't understand him, but I know he's a friend of you boys, an' I know he's on th' level an' straight. This here Garston now seems like a mighty nice clean feller, an' he's a lot upset over what he's afraid may have happened to Mike's kid, an' if she was mixed up with a man that was one of Mike's bunch, I ain't sayin' but he's right. So—well—dang it—I thought—"

"That's enough," I cut him short. "It doesn't matter whose daughter she is, Dual would be ready to help her, if she was needing help. Now you stay here with Jim and I'll go up and put the thing to him and see what he says. I'm glad you brought Garston with you, because I've a notion he'll want to see him as soon as he knows he's here. Jim, if I happen to telephone down, you bring Johnson and Garston up."

"I'll do that little thing under the circumstances, m' son," he assured me, and had the audacity to wink.

I walked out without even troubling to take my hat. I crossed the outer office, passed through the rail which cut it into half, and so by a light-haired young fellow who sat there on a bench. He was well dressed, with a clean-cut air about him, although now, with the clue of the past conversation to guide me, I thought there was an undue tenseness about the corners of the blue eyes he turned upon me, and the angles of his firm-lipped mouth.

This then was Edward Garston, I told myself as I went out and caught a cage—this was the man who from now on in the complex of coming events was cast for the rôle of lover—and—he knew Otto Kahn; Otto the devil; knew him and named him a crook—viewed him as the possible source of danger to the woman he had come here to find. A sense of something like exultation seized me. He had looked like a man of courage and determination. Had Otto then, for all his evil wisdom, fallen into the error of taking too little account of love?

The car stopped on the twentieth floor. I left it and walked up the stairs. And at their head I paused.

Dual and Henri were at work among the flowers and shrubs through which on the night she came to kill, Lotis had walked in order to avoid giving any hint of her coming by crossing the annunciator plate. So far as I could see, they were engaged with a number of little sticks and some strands of wire. I smiled. His flowers as much as the doves that cooed about his tower, the tiny gold fish in the fountain basin, were the pets of Semi Dual. Small wonder then that he should seek to brace their stalks and twigs bent and broken by the feet of the passing girl.

He saw me and straightened from his task, standing there before me in his white-and-purple robes.

I said something about first aid to the injured.

"Say rather that I seek to preserve life against what might otherwise destroy it," he replied. "But you come not thus hatless on a mission no more urgent than my endeavors, I think."

"As a matter of fact," I said, "I fancy my mission is not so much urgent as important."

He turned and spoke to Henri. "No

more for the present. We take up our task again at a later time."

Henri gathered up his wire and sticks and went off up the path.

"Come," Dual invited, and led me to the tower and into his inner room.

And there I told him of Johnson's visit to our office and all I had learned.

"The parallel between the mythological story and Lotis Popoff would not seem to end with her name," he said when I was done. "Lotis fled from Priapus to escape him and was changed into a flower. Thus far the similarity holds, but in the instance of this more modern flower, I foresee a different end. Suppose that you ask Mr. Bryce to bring Inspector Johnson and Mr. Garston up at once."

I rose. There was a little telephone box on the wall not far beyond his desk. It was the upper end of the line from my private office. I went toward it and lifted the receiver from the hook. I buzzed for Bryce.

And as I did so and he answered, and I gave him Semi's message, it came to me that very much like a theatrical call-boy, I was giving the signal which should bring into the action of this drama of life, the man who, as it now seemed, had been cast by fate from the very first to play the part of love.

I hung up and returned to my seat. Dual said nothing. He appeared lost in a silent contemplation there beside his desk. I waited. Presently I heard the chimes.

CHAPTER XV.

THE TEST OF FAITH.

THEY were like the bells in some mystic temple. Their sound filled all the room with a silvery cadence and died. Footsteps followed in the outer room. A tapping of heavy knuckles fell upon the door. Dual lifted his head and rose.

"Come," he gave permission.

Bryce, Johnson, and the man I had seen in our outer office, filed into the room. There was a look of something like bewilderment on the latter's finely featured face and in his eyes.

Dual spoke without waiting for an introduction. "You are welcome, Mr. Garston, for it is written that those who seek with a pure intent shall find, and there is no emotion which in its higher phases may work a more purifying influence on the mind of man than a true and abiding love. Wherefore let me offer you a seat."

Garston inclined his head. His glance swept Dual, who made a commanding figure, as he stood there in his white-and-purple robes, with his strong inscrutable face. He sank into a chair as Semi resumed his own.

"You make more easy a somewhat delicate position, sir," he said. "It would seem that you are already in possession of the reason for my coming."

"My friend Glace has told me briefly what Inspector Johnson explained concerning yourself and Miss Popoff," Semi returned with a glance in my direction. And while the more exalting, the more refining influences of the feeling which actuates your present movements are seldom mentioned between members of our sex, yet there are times when like any other thing, sacred or holy, it is essential that they be discussed. Permit me to ask you, Mr. Garston, exactly how much you know concerning Miss Popoff's life?"

I became conscious that he was watching Garston closely as he spoke, and I saw that his question seemed to fill the younger man with surprise. It showed in his somewhat stumbling answer:

"Why, very little, sir, save what I knew of Miss Lotis herself. I met her while she was at college. I understood that her father was a scientist, and that he died suddenly in this city. I'm afraid I can tell you very little more about her—no more intimate details that is."

"Mr. Garston." Dual spoke with what seemed a thought-out deliberation. "Were you or were you not aware that her father was a dangerous man; one of a group who have labored and are laboring to bring about a state of dissension, of unrest and turmoil in the world; who do not hesitate to take human life in the furtherance of their plans; that he was closely involved in the assassination of Judge Cahill in this

city last April, and that it was in an endeavor to escape arrest that he was killed? Were you informed of this, or has Inspector Johnson told you since?"

"I—good God, no!"

Consternation, horror, wrote themselves large across Garston's face. He cried out his denial and caught his breath and sat silent, studying Dual, looking straight back into Semi's steady gray eyes before he turned his troubled glance on Johnson in almost accusing fashion.

And Johnson nodded.

"It's true, Garston," he said. "I wasn't spillin' any info I didn't need to when you showed up with a line of questions on Mike Popoff's kid—not till I knew you was on th' level, that is. He was a scientist all right, Mike was, an' mighty clever; but he was a crook; one of these here reds."

Garston was shaken. Some of his normal color drained out of his cheeks. I saw the jaw muscles knot into little bunches as he fought for control. I saw the fingers of one hand slowly clench. And then he rallied. Into his face there crept a mounting flush. A flash leaped into his eyes.

"Mr. Dual," he began speaking quickly, "that's a dreadful bit of information, but I'm glad you told me. I think it explains —well, several things that bear on the present. There was a man came to the college where Lotis was a student after her father's death. Before that she didn't know that he was dead. But this man came and told her and said he had been a friend of her father's and offered her a home, and took her away from the school. Mr. Dual, I don't believe Lotis knew her father was a criminal unless this man told her."

"Otho Khan," said Dual.

"*Otto* Kahn," Garston corrected Semi's pronunciation.

"Otho or Otto, K-h-a-n, or K-a-h-n," Dual replied. "The one is of the East, the other of the West, and both are a man's name. You saw him, Mr. Garston?"

"Yes." Garston leaned a trifle forward, his manner that of a rising excitement. "But what do you mean, sir, by what you just said?"

Semi answered by a suggestion: "Tell me how this man appeared."

And Garston nodded. "He was dark, close-cropped hair, brown eyes, rather heavy-set in figure, a trifle over medium height. His skin was sallow."

"And his eyebrows, Mr. Garston? Did he wear a beard or mustache?"

"No, sir. He was clean shaven. And his eyebrows were not as heavy as you'd expect in a man of his age. They were rather thin and exceedingly dark. I know I thought he had a rather peculiar appearance, but I never thought—"

"That his appearance was that of a high-caste Mongol type?"

"I—no, sir." Garston was literally gasping. His blue eyes were wide, now staring. He was grasping the arms of the chair in which he was sitting with his hands. "Lotis told me he was her father's friend. I never dreamed—"

"Nay," said Dual, interrupting his visitor's startled stammer, "you dreamed no more, Mr. Garston, than many others, that Otho Khan, the Mongol, Michael Popoff, the Russian, were brother members of an association of men like themselves, who by means of the knowledge in their possession and the power which it gives them, seek in their evil purpose to gain what in the broadest scope of their scheming amounts to no less than a mastery of the world.

"Knowledge is theirs, and with it they seek to use ignorance and the ambitions of the ignorantly selfish as means to their end. Perhaps in speaking to Michael Popoff's daughter, Otho Khan—Mongolian prince and evil worker—had been nearer the truth had he said *associate,* rather than friend; for there is neither love nor friendship in the army of the damned."

Plainly now Garston was laboring under intense excitement. He rose and paced back and forth beside his chair. His features were set, drawn. Abruptly he paused and stood facing Dual.

"And you mean that the girl I love has fallen into the hands of such a man; a criminal in every sense of the word; a human fiend?"

"Under his influence, Mr. Garston, for a time," Semi told him. "He and his fellows seek largely to gain their object through an actual perversion of the mental

processes, the thoughts of men; to bring about unrest, violence, bloodshed, an overturning of the established measures of social safety by their ability to sway a multitude of minds."

Garston nodded. "As I've felt that he must have swayed her all along. After he came to her there at the college, she never was the same, and after he took her away, she wrote me a letter saying she was devoting her life to a work which would not harmonize with either love or marriage, and sent back my ring. I felt his influence behind her action, but of course I didn't know of any such devilish association then. Still I felt he was responsible for what she had done."

"Mr. Garston," Semi questioned, "did you know that Michael Popoff was possessed of considerable means?"

Garston threw up his head. He stiffened.

"I was hoping you wouldn't go into that, sir," he said in an almost embarrassed fashion. "As a matter of fact, however, I did. But I want you to believe it didn't matter, except that it made it seem strange when I heard Lotis was over here working, and because I instinctively disliked him, I did think it might have been one reason for Kahn's trying to turn her against me."

Dual waited for a moment before he made any comment and then he said slowly: "And in such a suspicion, I am not saying you were wrong. Wealth, power, domination, are the things at which Otho Khan and his fellows aim. Hence behind each and every one of their actions may be found a thought of selfish gain. It is their cant blasphemy that life is of God and belongs to Him. Thus they justify their murders in that they but do their duty in returning to God that which belongs to Him."

"You know that; you know their philosophy, their teachings," Garston stammered.

"Aye, Mr. Garston," Semi answered. "So much I know and also other things. Wherefore I know that these men are as deadly as a serpent; that they seek to instil into the world of to-day the poison of evil which like the lethal fluid secreted by the serpent, drips from their impious lips as from the serpent's fangs."

Garston sat down slowly. He was breathing deeply. "You think that is what Lotis meant in her letter? That this man had induced her to become a party to his schemes? That she referred to some such intent in saying she was devoting her life to something that precluded marriage? You think she meant that?"

"I think so—nay I know so, Mr. Garston," Semi told him. "For as their work is based on deception and delusion, a perversion rather than a revealing of the truth, it follows that a great percentage of their actual agents are no more than slaves and dupes, drawn into the meshes of these men's power, inspired to do their bidding, without a full or definite understanding of their ulterior aims."

"But isn't there any way to fight them?" Garston got up again. He stood there, the stalwart figure of a man, young, vibrant with a suddenly rebellious courage born of the danger Dual had pictured, the possible fate of the woman he loved, for whom he was searching. "If you know so much about them, isn't there some way to combat them?"

"They may be combated best by knowledge, by dissemination of knowledge among those over whom they are seeking to gain their power, by truth, by love, not only the love of man for woman and woman for man, but the greater love—the love of man for God, my son, and the love of God for man."

Garston started as Semi answered. An expression of bewilderment more than anything else swept across his face. For a moment he seemed confused, shaken, baffled in an effort to understand either the man before him or the position in which he found himself. And then: "Who are you?" he asked.

"I am one who at present is fighting Otho Khan, Agent of the Silent Towers, Worker of Evil, Legionary of Darkness, Corrupter of Truth, Creator of Unrest and Dissension, Taker of Life, Despoiler of Souls—Otho Khan, Prince of Mongol and Worshiper of Erlik, Commander of the Hosts of All Evil," Semi said.

Garston drew back. No question now but he was startled beyond all measure. His eyes roved about the apartment, from the face of Dual to mine, and on to those of Johnson and Bryce.

"In the name of God—" he began hoarsely.

"Aye, in the name of God," Dual replied. "In the name of the One All Powerful, who is opposed to all those things for which Otho Khan the Mongol stands."

"You're fighting him?" Garston spun around. "See here, Johnson, did you know this? Is that why you brought me up here? Just what—"

Johnson answered him thickly. "On th' level, Garston, I didn't know a thing. I know Mr. Dual here, but—"

Semi interrupted the denial. "Mr. Johnson knew nothing when he brought you to my friends' office, Mr. Garston."

Garston breathed again deeply. "Then if you're fighting this man; if you know such a lot about him; if he's taken the girl I love and made her the tool of his evil purpose, duped her, tricked her, gained enough of his hellish power over her to make her no better than his slave, let me into the thing with you; give me something to do; let me work with you, help you, till he either gets us or we get him."

Dual eyed him. He neither spoke nor moved. Simply he fixed him with those terribly searching eyes of his and held him. I felt the tenseness of the moment. Dimly I began to understand to what my inscrutable friend had been leading up; to appreciate that what I was witnessing was a test; that he was trying Garston's manhood, appraising it, seeking to learn the metal of which it was made.

And then, as the man neither faltered nor flinched nor wavered, but seemed rather to grow more determined in his purpose under that unwavering regard, he spoke:

"Mr. Garston, how great is your love?"

"How great?" the man repeated. "Why—I don't know how to answer that sort of a question. I—don't know how to explain it—except to say—you're a very direct man, sir, in your questions, and I want to be equally frank. Lotis means more to me than any other thing I can think of on earth."

"More than life?"

"If it were a choice between hers and mine or her welfare, yes." There was no hesitation in the answer.

"Love," said Semi Dual, "true love asks not but gives rather; seeks not self, but the welfare of its object, questions not but gives an abiding faith; cursed be he by whom that faith is destroyed."

"I don't know, sir," Garston said, and his tone was vaguely troubled. "I don't know how I match up to the standard there, because I want Lotis—entirely for myself."

"Mr. Garston," Dual returned, "how great is your faith?"

"It's this great, at any event," the man replied in a way that subtly seemed a challenge, "that no matter what your Otho Khan may have made of her, I don't believe it was with either her knowledge or consent—that is, her conscious knowledge. There was nothing about the girl I knew and meant to marry that would lead me to think she would do anything wrong if she knew what she was doing, and I don't believe she did."

I felt a thrill of admiration as he voiced the avowal, and paused and stood staring straight back again at the one to whom he gave it. But for any emotion he may have felt at so manly an answer, there was no least sign in Semi's face.

"Mr. Garston," he went on with his interrogation. "Is it strong enough to withstand the absolute knowledge that the woman you love has been recently apprehended in the attempted commission of a crime involving the deliberate and prearranged taking of human life?"

"Murder—you mean—murder?" Garston grew pallid to the lips.

"Murder, yes, Mr. Garston," Dual inclined his head.

I heard Bryce catch his breath. I heard Johnson shift in his chair. I felt my own heart laboring in my breast as I sat there and watched what I now knew were the final stages of the man's testing—and found myself hoping, hoping that he

would pass it as he had thus far passed the rest. For this was the climax—there could be nothing more beyond it, and if he passed it, no man could doubt the sincerity of his love.

"Apprehended," he voiced the single word at last.

"Apprehended, yes, Mr. Garston," Dual repeated.

Garston struggled. His lips were no longer firm but parted. He panted rather than breathed. There was a little dew of moisture on his forehead. All at once he put up a hand and wiped it away.

"It wasn't Lotis—not her real self," he began in a broken tone of emotion. "God knows how they made her do it, but she didn't know what she was doing. I'm certain of that much. She didn't know—they'd done something to her. Where is she? If you know she's been apprehended, you must know where she is being held. Tell me and let me go to her." He broke off, clenching his teeth to strangle the sound of a sob.

Here then was the end. Here in the final equation Garston had proved himself a man. And all at once Dual's face lighted, softened, became no longer an inscrutable mask, but a thing benign.

"There is no need for you to go to her, Mr. Garston," he said. "For not only is the test which I have applied to the sincerity of your love and faith, thus ended, but, as I hope, the way for your meeting with her you are seeking is prepared. Faith is the soul of love, Mr. Garston, and Love is supported, kept steadfast, by it. Think on these things and let them give you understanding when you gaze again on the face of the woman you love. For the search which has brought you thus far need go no farther. She is here."

"Here?" Garston cried out as one who hears and cannot believe his ears. "Here?" he faltered again with a contracting throat as though he sought to swallow the emotions that clogged his speech. "Man—don't play with me any longer. Do you mean Lotis Popoff is here, in this building, on this roof?"

"Here, aye," Dual said, rising. "I am the man by whom she was apprehended. I am the man against whom Otho Khan sent her—whose life she attempted."

"You! Good God! Where is she?" Garston sprang to his feet.

"Patience, my son," Semi stayed him. "I shall bring her to you."

Garston sank into his seat like a man in a daze.

"Well, I'm damned," Johnson rasped.

Dual turned toward him and addressed me.

"Gordon, if you and Mr. Bryce will explain to the inspector, outside."

He moved toward the door.

"Come on, boys," I prompted, rising.

As we filed out, I saw Semi cross the outer room and begin to mount the narrow stairs.

CHAPTER XVI.

FREE.

As to what occurred during the next succeeding hour, I can do no better than set down Connie's account of what actually took place.

Dual came upon the two women in the upper room, to find Connie reading and Lotis sitting silent, her hands folded in her lap, with the expression of one who daydreams more than anything else, upon her face. Connie had noticed it as she afterwards told me for some time when in the midst of a conversation Lotis had suddenly caught her breath and showed an immediate disinclination for further talk. The thing had not disturbed her, however, since now and then as she sat Lotis had smiled in a way indicative of pleasure. Consequently she had respected her mood and taken up a book.

Now, however, as Semi appeared, the girl started up and turned toward him, her face lighted.

"I know! I know! I have heard you! I have been sitting here listening to you, reading your thoughts, and his, as you intended I should. And now you've come to take me to him," she exclaimed and put out her hands. "You're going to give me back not only my soul—but love."

Of course, Connie did not understand

and she sprang up somewhat startled, but Dual smiled.

"Aye, Lotis," he said. "He awaits you, with a love and a faith that are proved."

"I know," she laughed. She clasped her hands across the breast of the garment she was wearing. She looked very young, very fresh, and virginal as she stood there and threw back her head, and then she sobered. Her lips moved.

"He knows—you have told him."

Dual inclined his head. "He knows, aye, Lotis."

She sighed. "I heard you, but—" she turned her eyes to Connie. "Come with me," she said in a tone of pleading, and to Semi: "You knew. It was this you meant the other night when you spoke of the bridegroom's coming. You felt him searching for me—as I have felt his soul crying to me."

"Aye, Lotis, I knew," Dual said gently again.

"You, too, then," she prompted. "Be to me as a second father in this."

"I and thy sister woman;" Semi accepted. "Come, Mrs. Glace."

Together the three of them passed down the stairs. And in that moment, my wife's brain was in something of a whirl. Plainly something had happened—something which both Lotis and Dual understood. The girl had been sitting there listening in as it were on thought currents; gaining positive information by her uncanny ability to read them, if she was to believe her ears.

It was almost a shock to find the power so greatly developed in one of her years; a woman who in appearance and speech, and actions, save in those periods when she chose to exercise her somewhat weird powers, was little more than a child. Something of all that she was thinking as she accompanied Lotis and Semi to that meeting with one the girl had not named, save as she spoke of love with the lighted eyes of a woman who goes toward the one man to whom she is ready and willing to yield all that she has to give.

They reached the foot of the stairs and crossed the outer room, and Semi opened the door to the room beyond it.

Lotis passed through it and paused.

Garston had walked to the windows at the far end of the room and was looking out. He turned.

Lotis's lips parted. "Ed," she faltered, and stretched out her arms, the palms of her little hands upward, her head tilted a trifle backward again. She was slender, supple, vibrant, like some young priestess in her white, white robes.

"Lotis!" Garston started toward her, his fingers reaching for those outstretched hands.

And they dropped before his advance, one of them flew inward to press itself against the swelling bust of the woman, the other lifted again, bent back on its slender wrist, brought its palm up to a line practically parallel with his approaching body, in an arresting, an almost repelling gesture.

"Stop!"

Garston obeyed both word and movement. He checked himself and stood regarding her with a slow consternation waking in his face.

"Lotis," he said again, thickly at last.

"Aye, Lotis, beloved," she answered. "Lotis who loves you, and has loved you, and will love you while she shall live; who sent you from her and has heard your soul crying to her in the weary hours of the night; who heard and might not answer, because in that time she deemed her own soul lost, so that it might not answer yours—"

"What madness is this?" Garston demanded interrupting.

Lotis shook her head. "Lotis who came to slay a man, and found through him her soul again her own; who will give it to you if you wish it, but not, dear heart, before you understand."

"But I do understand," the man protested, still held from her as it seemed by that back-tilted hand at the end of her slender arm.

"I know," she said. "For while you spoke here in this room with the man who has made me again a woman, I found your thoughts and his beating into my brain, and I listened to them, and they told me many things; and because of that, my own soul told me that I could not return to you

until I myself had told you what I have done, and been; that then and then only should you open them to me, might I lay the body of Lotis in your arms."

Garston's eyes ran past her and found Dual and Connie. "In the name of God, what has Otho Khan done to her?" he began.

"He has done many things," she herself answered. "He has blinded the eyes of my soul, so that it wandered in darkness. He has clouded my mind so that it thought not its own thoughts but his. He has made me the tool of his hatreds and his plannings. He has robbed me of conscience, by making me think myself already damned. He sent me to slay the man who has proved his master, and my more than friend, who has preserved the life of one who came to destroy him. These things has Otho Khan, of the Silent Towers, done to Lotis, because she was a child and listened to his lying words."

Dual came forward. "She wishes to tell you, my son," he suggested. "The burden still rests upon her. Her lips are the lips of truth. Let them give her ease."

Garston sat down dumbly. Connie slipped to Lotis and threw an arm about her. The girl smiled slightly.

"Sit down, dear friend, while I cast the burden from me," she prompted.

Connie found a seat, and Dual resumed his own at the desk.

"And now, Lotis, whose name is that of the symbol of the awakening soul as well as that of a flower, speak," he said.

She stood there as graceful as a flower, slight, swaying a little but with her chin lifted on her slender throat.

"To you, and to him," she began. "Since my soul came crying back to me, from the darkness into which Otho Khan, with his foul arts, had sent it, I have thought of many things—so that I, who came for vengeance, remain to atone if there be any way in which I can. For years I have known Otho Khan, the trickster, the false one, who posed to me while a child, as my father's friend. Only I knew him not as he was, and I fancied him no more than any man, for I knew not then what I was afterwards to learn. But I knew even then that my father and he did strange, what I know now were unholy things. Then, though, they told me they were students of the powers of the mind, telling me half-truths, which I did not question further, since my father was my father, who I even think loved me despite the fact that he had fallen under the power of Otho Khan."

For a moment, she paused, and her red lips quivered, as it seemed, with the thought of the parent she had lost, before she went on:

"Otho Khan came to me at the school after my father died. He knew his death would have left me all alone. At the time he told me he had been accidentally killed, and he offered me a home. I accepted because I had nowhere else to go. I placed myself in his hands. Only after we had returned to his house did he tell me my father had been slain by those who did not understand him nor his aims. Then he pictured him as a martyr who had fallen in the task of seeking to befriend his fellow man.

"Then he told me he had been his disciple—his, Otho Khan's—and explained to me some of the things I knew he and my father had done when as a child I had seen him in our home. Only he told me they were experiments in the powers of the mind, just as before they had told me the same thing. And he asked me to take up the work with him, where my father had laid it down. I—may the One God forgive me—I accepted, because it seemed to me then a holy thing, and he began to instruct me as I thought.

"In reality I know now he but sought to gain control of me, though he actually taught me many things. And in so doing, he made himself master of my mind. Then and then only did he compel me to break my engagement with Mr. Garston, telling me marriage was out of the question in the work that must be done. And I did it, because I thought it a sacrifice of myself to the welfare of my fellow beings. Or so I thought at the time. And after that it was that he began speaking of revenge, telling me I was the instrument by which my father's death should be atoned. And

when I cried out that it was murder he had in mind, he laughed at me, told me that the things I had studied, the rituals, the formulæ he had taught me, and which I had repeated, had already lost my soul to me—that it was forfeit to Erlik who would seize it when the breath went out of my body—that I was already of the damned."

She paused again and her body swelled inside its snowy garment, lifting the virginal bust within it, and she closed her eyes. She clenched her hands. The white of her teeth bit down on the red of her nether lip and held through a long, tense moment.

"And then," she said at length slowly, "then I went down into hell I think. I was like one lost; caught in a quagmire into which she had blundered, sinking, sinking, and struggling not to sink, and knowing that the struggle only made the sinking more dreadful, until at last it seemed I could no longer think—that I ate and moved and slept and waked like a mere shadow of myself—that there was something really gone from me—the something that had been myself.

"I knew—or I thought I knew at least—what it was that made the terrible difference in me, and I knew that it made no difference what I did, now or ever; that I had lost the power to *sin;* that if I did what would be a sin in another; if I were base, or low; if I committed any crime whatever; if I even performed a murder, it would be no more than the work of a machine, which crushes out the life of one who stands in its path. The machine kills but it does not murder. And when I knew that—I knew I had lost my soul indeed—and that the world, the sunlight, the birds and flowers, and everything in it were mine only so long as I could keep my body alive.

Even so, I wanted to live—I wanted to go on living—and I no longer struggled, but simply obeyed what Otho Khan said, because he told me that if I did, he would teach me other and more dreadful things, which would help me to keep alive."

"Stop!" Garston's voice came strangled. "Is the man a devil?"

Lotis started. It was as though she had forgotten all save the horrible picture she painted. But as he spoke, she turned her eyes.

"He worships him and fears him," she said. "Otho Khan himself is afraid. I know now why he sent me to commit murder. It was because he was afraid; because he, too, has lost his soul, and knows it, and that when he dies, it will be utterly destroyed, and his soul will go to Erlik the Spider and be devoured. He knows it—he knows—and so he told me to come and kill one who stood in the path of our work, and opposed our efforts; and being what I then was, I obeyed; I came here, and—and—Oh, Ed—Ed—Ed!"

Abruptly she broke off and flung herself toward him, down before him, on her knees.

"Oh, Ed," she panted. "I came and—my soul was given back to me—and I'm alive again—really alive—I've come back from hell to you, beloved—"

Garston reached out and caught her to him with a yearning gesture, crushed her inside his arms, drew her up until her dark-crowned head was pillowed on his breast. "Lotis," he whispered, "Lotis."

Connie was weeping. She says she says she doesn't know why, because certainly there was no cause of sorrow in that moment of reunion between the girl and the man who now held her in his arms. So she says she thinks she was crying because it all seemed so very wonderful and she was glad. And she rose, as Carston got to his feet, lifting Lotis with him, and she took the girl as he released her, and drew her across to a seat on the couch, and slipped an arm about her, leaving Garston facing Semi-Dual.

He began speaking in a somewhat unsteady voice—a rather broken fashion—yet with a manifest determination of purpose behind his words:

"I don't quite understand all about Otho Khan, I suppose, because no matter how much I've distrusted him, I've always thought of him as a man, and I never dreamed there were any individuals living who could do such things as Lotis has just said he has done. And I don't understand you either, sir, except that I recognize you

as one who knows a lot more about such things than I do, and one who would seem to have done a wonderful thing for her; but isn't there some way in which such a person can be punished, made to answer for his crimes?"

Dual answered him directly. "Before he can be made to suffer for his misdeed, in the sense you mean it, Mr. Garston, one must have proof of his misdoing—and wherein is there proof?"

"Proof? Why—" Garston turned his head toward where Connie and Lotis were sitting.

"In the story she has told us?" Semi went on without waiting for him to continue. "Would any modern body of men, hearing, give credence to it, or would they say, rather, that she raved? Save for what has gone before it, would you, Mr. Garston, have believed yourself? What had been your attitude to such a narrative if told by the lips of one you knew less well, no longer ago than the span of a few brief days?"

"But," clearly impressed by Dual's question, Garston still persisted, "if it could be shown he sent her to attempt your life?"

"How, Mr. Garston? By her word? Who would believe it, if he denied?"

Garston turned again to Connie and her companion. "Did you come alone or was there some one with you, Lotis?"

"There was a man named George Pitkin, one of his agents—"

"Pitkin?" Garston said sharply. "The man for whom you said you were working —that chemist?"

"Yes." Lotis framed the word rather than spoke it.

Garston spun about again. "Find Pitkin—one of Otho Khan's men—arrest him —make him confess it—"

"How, Mr. Garston? How, if Pitkin were minded to deny her assertion that he knew anything about an intended crime? Or even though he confessed a connection with it, think you his word or hers, or both of them unsupported, would be enough to turn the balances of man-made justice against Otho Khan?"

"But—" Baffled, the man was yet unwilling, in his just horror of what had been done, to admit it.

Lotis rose and came to stand beside him. "Ed, dear, you do not understand."

"But you do."

"I, yes—because I have been the slave of Otho Khan."

Garston winced. "Don't say that," he broke out tensely.

She smiled upon him. "But I am free. I no longer fear him. I, who was his slave, were I to meet him now, would laugh in his face. I am strong again, stronger than ever before. My soul is my own again, and I am feeding it on love."

Garston stared back into her flowerlike face and turned again to Semi. "Still isn't there some way to reach him? Good Lord, can he go on without any interference, playing these devil's tricks, laying these schemes of his? You told me you were fighting him, a bit ago—"

"Aye, I am fighting him," Dual said calmly, "in that those things he plans and attempts are by me opposed. And he knows, in his own way—hence he has attempted to destroy me, and will again."

Lotis stiffened in all her slender length. "You know," she exclaimed. "I tried to find out, but it is not easy to read your mind. I questioned Mr. Glace and he would not tell me—save as I read his thoughts and felt that you did."

Dual's eyes softened. "You would have warned me?" he said.

"It—it were perhaps presumptious," Lotis lowered her lids. "But do you know the time—the means?"

"The time, aye," Dual returned. "Otho Khan, defeated of his purpose, chafes in the delay of its fulfilment. He will not wait beyond tomorrow night. Of this I am warned by the signs and portents set forth in an astrological chart I have erected. As to the means, means of violence—such means as will, if unloosed against us without hindrance, destroy us both."

"You mean he's going to try something else?" Garston demanded harshly as Semi paused.

"Aye, he will try," Dual made answer.

And suddenly Lotis laughed and her laughter was like the ripple of a silvery

chime of bells. "Aye, he will try," she mimicked.

Semi fixed his glance upon her. "Lotis, was not your father possessed of considerable property when he died?" he asked.

"Ah, yes." She lifted a hand to her breast. "He left me a great deal of money, and there was other property, which after my death was to go to the Society for Spiritistic Research."

"Of which Otho Khan was a member?"

"Otho Kahn, and my father, George Pitkin, and Barney McDowd, whom they put in prison."

"And the money?" Semi prompted.

The girl breathed deeply. She set her lips. "Already I have given a part of it to the carrying on of what I considered my father's interrupted work. Otho Khan induced me to make a will leaving the society the rest."

Dual's voice came on the heel of hers. It was freighted with meaning: "So that Otho Khan and his agents would have been the first to profit, had you died."

"Wait." Lotis threw up her hand in that strange arresting gesture she had used with Garston. She knit her brows. "There is something! In sending me against you, he told me that if anything should happen, I would do something—but—I can't remember what it was."

"He told you that you would die," Dual said. And as Connie gasped, remembering the night wherein he had sat beside the form of this girl now full of vibrant life, and battled for her existence against what seemed unseen forces, he rose.

"In such fashion, even though you failed to destroy me, he hoped to bring about your death and protect himself. And now, Mr. Garston, since Inspector Johnson has been drawn into the course of this matter, I think we shall call him back."

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 man had been awakened by the first searching rays of the summer sun. He arose from his bed of boughs, stretched his six feet of hardened muscles and then gingerly picked his way through the willows to the edge of the stream. From the root of a gnarled cottonwood overhanging the pool, he dove into the cool depths. For several minutes he disported in the refreshing water, and when he emerged he looked a splendid specimen of manhood—eyes shining, skin glowing, muscles rippling in rhythmic smoothness. As he dressed the impression vanished. For his clothing was the tattered garb of a hobo.

The crunch of pebbles attracted his attention. Peering through the willows he saw a woman on the opposite side approach-

ing the stream with a basket in her bared arms. She deposited the basket upon the gravelly shore and began washing the clothes which she had dumped upon the ground.

There was something about the procedure which fascinated the hobo. It may have been because the woman was young and lithe and her posturings over the water were graceful and vigorous. Or that he had never seen another woman wash linen in this manner since his boyhood days when he had helped his own mother carry the laundry down to a creek not unlike this identical stream.

Whatever the cause, the hobo sat in absolute rigidity behind his screen of willows till the young woman wrung out the last garment and spread it upon the bushes to dry. She then sat down in the shadow of a cottonwood and drew from the bosom of her dress a letter, which she pored over for several minutes.

There sounded the clatter of a horse's hoofs. Both the woman and the hobo heard the noise. The hobo clearly detected the change of expression which passed over the woman's features: the reading of the letter had brought a smile to her lips and when she had glanced up from the pages, hope and happiness illumined her countenance and the hobo's lips had twitched in sympathy. Now hope and happiness were displaced by fear and cunning. She hastily thrust the letter beneath a flat stone at the base of the cottonwood and hurried over to the empty basket, which she picked up and started for the path through the willows which fringed the bank of the stream. She had got past the first clumps bordering the trail when the hobo caught a glimpse of a broad-brimmed hat and the outlines of a horse dimly visible through the masses of shrubbery.

A man's voice burred above the rippling song of the brook; the words were not distinguishable, but the intonation bespoke anger. And then came two words—"letter" and "money." At first the import of these words did not sink into the hobo's consciousness, for the voice had a familiar cadence which flooded his memory with bitter thoughts.

Then the two words which he had caught suddenly became freighted with significance. When the thud of the horse's hoofs was but an echo, he slipped from his retreat and ran lightly down the bank till he came to a shallow place dotted with stones. With the agility of a panther he skipped over these and made a straight dash for the cottonwood tree. Stooping, he raised the flat rock which hid the letter.

It was a legal-looking document, encased in a long, thick envelope. The letter between his fingers, the hobo paused. There flitted across his mind the expression of hope and happiness which he had seen upon the woman's face while she had read the letter. He recalled the memories of his carefree days which had been aroused by the sight of her washing clothes in the creek. Stronger than these sentiments was the bitter train of thoughts stirred up by the familiar twang of the man's voice.

The name on the envelope, Mrs. Hazel Drensil, confirmed his impression of the man's voice—it could be none other than Chris Drensil, his old-time "bunkie," the heroic figure of those glad, carefree days when he, Edgar Kinley, known as the "Kid Bronco Buster," had ridden range with Drensil on the big Luxton Cattle Ranch.

The hobo's eyes narrowed to slits beneath narrowed brows. He drew forth the contents of the envelope; there were bonds, three of them, and their face value amounted to three thousand dollars. A strange smile quirked the corners of the hobo's mouth. It was the exact amount of the loot for the stealing of which he, Kinley, had served five years in prison. There flashed across his mind the vivid recollection of the day he and Chris Drensil were riding over the wind-swept hill of the Luxton Range and Chris had swapped horses with him and laughingly loped away in the direction of the mining-camp over the ridge.

Kinley was to await his return at the salt lick two miles from the ranch-house. It was dark when Drensil joined him and the older man was strangely silent during the ride back to the ranch. The next day he had confessed what he had done—held up the stage, the express box of which contained the pay-roll for the mining-camp

beyond the ridge. He had made a haul of three thousand dollars and was fearful that the posse was on his trail. There was a girl waiting for him. It was for her that he had done this thing. He wanted to buy a little ranch, marry his girl, and settle down. Now he would undoubtedly be arrested, disgraced for life, lose his sweetheart, break his old mother's heart. He didn't care a rap for himself, if he were alone and unattached, he would laugh at the sheriff, call the whole thing a lark, and go to jail with a smile on his lips.

Kinley had been thrilled to lay down his reputation, his life, even, for his daring, dashing hero. Drensil had protested at first, then he rapidly sketched what he had done, where he had concealed the loot; that he had a drag with the sheriff, and if Kinley were arrested he could easily arrange for a light sentence. He would use his influence at the trial, explain to the judge and jury that it was Kinley's first offense.

And Kinley had believed him. He had believed in him till after the sentence, even though Drensil had done nothing at the trial, save to testify that Kinley had ridden back to the ranch on a pretext of getting a forgotten rope, and that he had not turned up again till late that night. And the three thousand dollars could not be located. Kinley's sentence would have been lighter had the loot been recovered. When he had realized how he had been tricked and deserted by his heroic idol, his own " bunkie," he was more hurt than resentful. But the five years in prison had hardened him, the desire for revenge had smoldered into a fierce flame of hatred, and the first thing he had done on gaining his liberty was to make inquiries about Drensil. No trace of him could be found, and Kinley wandered about enjoying his freedom and harking to the call of the great outdoors.

In the year of his hoboing he had forgotten, at times, his desire for vengeance, but now Fate had juggled the cards plump into his hands. There was a certain poetic justice in the turn of events.

There was a note, penned in cramped letters, folded between the bonds. Kinley hastily scanned it. It was addressed to " My dear niece Hazel," and expressed the sentiment that " The legacy to be used in paying off those mortgages on that wild little ranch which, heaven only knows why, you seem to love so fondly."

Kinley crushed the bonds and the note back into the envelope and tucked it into the pocket of his ragged coat. Then he followed the path up which the woman had disappeared.

He came to a clearing on the high bank of the creek. An unpainted cottage stood in the clearing near the growth of poplars and willows: a lean-to shed and a small barn enclosed by a rude fence of poplar poles were the only outbuildings. There was evidence about the cottage of attempts to make the place attractive: a rose-vine clambered over the tiny front porch, a tangle of hops shaded the entrance to the kitchen and a small patch of ground had been spaded and planted with vegetables. Otherwise the premises showed sad neglect and the general atmosphere was that of shiftlessness.

Kinley crept to a clump of willows within a hundred feet of the cottage. From this vantage point he could look directly within the kitchen window, the sash of which was raised a few inches. He could see the woman standing by the stove, her hands clasped in front of her, her face drawn and pitiful, her eyes staring at something across the room. That something must have been Drensil, for Kinley could hear the familiar burring of his voice, cursing, threatening. But the woman shook her head decisively and murmured something which Kinley could not hear.

Then something happened which brought the hobo to his feet, eyes flashing and hands clenched. Drensil's figure darkened the window, he towered over the woman, whose face was turned toward the light and was uplifted to receive the heavy blow which fell. She crumpled and dropped from Kinley's line of vision. Drensil slid from the room and even while Kinley stood, his every muscle tingling with the desire to avenge this cowardly blow, the slam of the front door sounded and Drensil rushed out to his horse, mounted, and rode away from the house.

Once more Kinley focused his eyes upon

the kitchen window. He imagined he could hear moans issuing through the opening and he started forward when a hand fluttered to the window-sill and the woman drew herself to her knees and leaned her head upon the sill.

The rays of the sun flecked the rumpled, yellowish-brown hair with shimmering patches of gold. Sobs shook the bowed head, but diminished rapidly, and soon the woman looked up, her blue eyes staring straight toward Kinley's place of hiding. He knew that she could not see him, yet so conscious was he of that pitiful gaze that he felt the blood burning his cheeks and neck.

He was relieved when she arose and he could relax his tense muscles. When she entered the front room, he stole to the lean-to shed and through a crack secured a better view of the kitchen and discolored welt across the woman's forehead and right eye.

She went about her household duties and the hobo admired her for not giving way to sobbing. Kindling a fire in the stove, she tossed a batch of dough upon a floured board and molded it into loaves. Then she twisted some of the dough into small bits and fried them in a skillet filled with boiling lard. Kinley was fascinated and the odors wafted from the kitchen were maddening to the man who had eaten nothing since the night before. He had to fight hard to prevent himself from going to the back door and begging for a hand-out; but he must not show himself about the premises. He would slip back to his camp by the stream. There was a broken loaf of bread and a little stew left over from his supper. He would snatch a mouthful and hurry back to his vigil.

While he lit a fire of twigs to heat the remnants of the stew, Kinley contrasted his crude cookery with the domestic art of the woman. Every homely act of her had penetrated to depths that had long been sealed over with a hard crust; from these awakened depths there surged a terrible passion of rage against the brute who had struck her, and for whom he had sacrificed five good years of his own life.

He was so engrossed in his passion, so intent upon solving the most satisfying manner of wreaking vengeance upon Chris Drensil that he did not see the woman steal up to the cottonwood tree, nor hear her moan of anguish when she lifted the stone and found the letter gone. And neither seeing nor hearing her, he could not know that a passion far surpassing his own had taken full possession of her.

Half an hour later, when Kinley left his crude camp in the willows, he had decided what steps to take. He would go straight to the woman and lay the situation squarely before her and it was for her to decide between her husband and the three thousand dollars. Kinley hoped that she would choose the money, for every nerve in his body was craving a fight to the brutal finish with Chris Drensil.

He saw her at the kitchen window, and he did not tarry. He wanted to have his say and give her ample time to make a decision before Drensil returned.

She caught sight of him before he reached the lean-to shed and he was shocked at the cold, unfaltering expression in her blue eyes as she watched his every movement. The softness, the feminine qualities he had admired in her as she washed the clothes at the creek, baked the bread in her spotless kitchen, were missing. This was a different person from the woman who had crumpled and wept pitifully beneath the heavy blow of Drensil's fist.

"Who are you? What are you doing here?" The questions were harshly launched.

Kinley halted, for when the woman arose from her seat by the window, he caught the glint of a rifle-barrel against her skirt.

"Did your husband ever talk to you about Ed Kinley, 'Kid Bronco Buster,' or just plain 'Buster'?" asked Kinley without preamble of any sort.

"No, and if you've got anything to say, be quick about it and clear out!" She stepped past the window and stood in the open doorway of the kitchen, the rifle grasped firmly in her right hand. There were hard, strained lines about her mouth, her eyes wore the look of a creature hunted to its last stand.

Without wasting words, Kinley told of

his meeting with Chris Drensil, of his boyish hero worship, his imprisonment for Drensil's crime, and all the while he was speaking, the woman's eyes grew harder, her lips tightened to a bloodless line.

"Why do you tell me these things? Don't you think I know my husband? Maybe you'll understand just how well I know him when I tell you if I was given my choice again I'd rather serve your five years in prison than live over again my past five years with Chris Drensil."

"You would? Well, I reckon it ain't goin' to cut much figure with your feelin's then when I tell you I've come to get Chris Drensil, but I'm—"

"You've come to get him!" came the sharp interruption. "You get out of here—quick! There ain't no one going to get Chris Drensil but me. Do you think I'm going to step aside, now, and stand for this last dirty trick he's played me? I've stood for his rottenness, his drunkenness, even his running after other women. He—he's beaten me before and I've cried my eyes out and done his cooking and mending and washing. I've mortgaged this ranch three times so's he could keep out o' jail for rustling cattle. I've stood by him through all his rottenness for five hellish years—but now I'm through being a sniveling thing a-crawling to his feet for another beating. He's coming back to sneer at me, to give me the laugh. Oh, I know Chris Drensil. I know he'll never be happy 'less 'n he comes back here and crows over me because he's got them bonds which meant my freedom from him—which I swore he'd never lay hands on."

"Bonds—but he ain't got 'em. It's me that's got them bonds!" said Kinley decisively, but somewhat puzzled.

"You? You're lying. You're stalling for Chris Drensil. The pair of you are trying to put something over on me. Get out of here before he comes or I'll kill the both of you, you coward!"

"Listen, woman— I was down by the creek when you was washin', and I seen you hide that letter under that flat stone—see—here it is," Kinley pulled a corner of the thick envelope from the pocket of his coat. "I was aimin' to make a getaway with it, but I had a hunch it was Drensil who rode down the trail, so, to make sure, I follows the two of you and I watches you through the window and I—I seen him strike you and I knew he was tryin' to work you for that money. If it 'd belonged to him I wouldn't be here now—I'd 'a' beat it and sent him a note lettin' him know who'd got his stake. It 'd been no more 'n fair, bein' as how that was the sum o' money he stole and I went to jail for. But, somehow, I got to thinkin' it over after I seen how he was doin' you dirt and it was your money, so I've come here to tell you I'm givin' you a chance to name which you want the most—your husband or your three thousand dollars."

Kinley paused, for the woman took a step toward him.

"If you'd 'a' come to me before I thought it was Chris Drensil who took that money, I'd maybe hesitated how to answer that; but what I thought he'd done is exactly what he would 'a' done if he'd known where I'd hid that money, and it's woke me up—it's made all the things I've suffered in silence so long come to the surface. It's made me understand how he's treated me like a dog and worse. And now, when you come and tell me it was you who stole that money and not Chris Drensil, it ain't changing my feelings a mite. And my answer to you, if I *was* afraid to kill him myself, would be—you kill him and I'll *give* you that three thousand dollars for doing it! But that money is mine, it's meant my freedom, I tell you. Neither you nor Chris Drensil has any right to it, and I've got past thinking his rotten debts is for me to pay—I've paid them before and what've I got for thanks? So you throw them bonds at my feet and get out of here before I shoot—understand?" The woman brought the gun to her shoulder and there was not the slightest quiver of the rigidly held barrel as she covered Kinley.

"You're game, all right," he muttered, realizing that the situation was not to be treated lightly.

"It's time I was. Give me them bonds!" she commanded tersely.

Before Kinley had an opportunity to loosen the cumbersome letter from his

ragged pocket, the thud of horse's hoofs sounded.

"Quick—he's coming. Get into that shed!" she ordered.

Kinley made a move toward the lean-to. The woman swung about, gun in readiness, and faced the corner of the house around which the horseman must appear. Kinley, with the spring of a panther, leaped to her side and in the twinkling of an eye had wrested the rifle from her grasp.

"Here—here's your money! Take it. D'you think I'm goin' let a good woman like you bloody your hands on a brute like him. I come here to get him and I'm goin' to do it!"

He shoved her roughly away from him and sent her reeling against the side of the house just as the horseman cantered around the corner. Kinley had him covered, his finger pressing the trigger.

"Don't shoot—that ain't Chris!" screamed the woman.

"What's up?" The man jerked his horse to a sliding halt.

Kinley lowered the rifle to his hip and stared at the horseman.

"No, I sure ain't Chris," he said grimly. "But it looked for a holy minute like I was gonna get what Chris did." He glared at Kinley, then turned to the woman, lifted his hat and spoke more gently.

"Well, they got him this time, Mrs. Drensil, and he'd been warned time and again to mend his ways. I'd told him myself he'd get what was coming to him some day. He held up the stage carrying the Buckskin Mine's pay-roll. The shotgun messenger was quicker on the trigger than Chris. They've tooked—him over to Buckskin. I'm right sorry, Mrs. Drensil, but he'd been warned." The horseman pulled his hat low over his brows, but before he turned to go he saw that Kinley and the woman were drawn to each other by a subtle sympathy which he did not understand.

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THE OLD STORY

SHE dropped her glove;
I knelt to lift the dainty thing,
And, as I gave it, felt the sting
Of love.

She dropped a glance
Before my stammered words of praise;
Then sought anew my ardent gaze,
Askance.

She dropped a sigh.
Who could, by eager love made bold,
The old, old story long withhold?
Not I!

She dropped a tear,
And turned her lovely face away;
Her trembling hand in mine still lay,
So dear!

Ah, can you guess
The little word she shyly dropped—
The one sweet word with kisses stopped?
'Twas "Yes!"

Willis Boyd Allen

Sleeping Acres *

by Brayton Norton

WHAT HAS ALREADY HAPPENED

"TERRY," a penniless wayfarer and ex-boxer, rescued Myron Masters at the "Pico Ramblers" masked dance from a Mexican with a knife. Becoming young Masters's chauffeur, Terry went with his new employer into banishment at the San Miguel Ranch, owned by Masters, senior, universally detested by the ranchers, who called him a "land hog," and worse. Here Terry realized that Klune, the manager, was interested more in keeping Myron idle than in his reformation from the dissipated habits so distasteful to his father. But he was courtesy itself, sending Terry and Myron on a rabbit hunt, and in this way they met Benson, a rancher, and his family, including Helen, his daughter, in whom Myron appeared much interested. And while Myron occupied himself with the girl, Terry, hunting alone, discovered that his gun had been plugged by some one. From Benson they learned the true story of the San Miguel oppression, crookedness, and the ruin of the small ranchers who rented its teeming acres.

Back home, James Masters was reading several letters from his son, a grim smile upon his face. And the burden of the letters, at first querulous and complaining, later changed to the one note: "Please come, dad—I want you to learn how the San Miguel is run. Don't throw me down, dad—please come, just for my sake."

CHAPTER XVI.

A DOUBLE-BARRELED REPORT.

THE letter dropped from Masters's fingers as he sat gazing at a small picture-frame upon the desk. From the frame smiled the eyes of his baby boy. A picture taken the summer before his wife died. The past floated before his eyes and mingled with the wreaths of smoke which curled upward from his pipe.

For a long time he sat motionless, staring at the photograph, dreaming. Then he took up a very different letter, and read a part of it again. It was the last he had received from Terry.

I've told you how your ranch is being run. You don't believe, or say you don't. I've told you how your manager is double-crossing you. If you didn't believe that, you could have found out from Smitherman. But you didn't even take the trouble to do that. You only tell me to stick to my business, and you'll 'tend to yours.

This is the last letter I intend to write. And I'll stick to my own business. My business is trying to make a man out of your son. That is why I came here.

I've done my best. Myron is on the right track. He's headed straight, but I don't claim the credit. It belongs to a woman. Everybody here knows what Helen Benson has done for your son. Klune most of all. That is why he is trying to run the girl's father off the ranch. He'll do it, too, if you don't stop him. Then Myron will go with the woman, or to the devil. You don't seem to care which. You say you take all this talk of Benson with a grain of salt. That he is perhaps making it worth my while to write for him. I wish you were not Myron's father, and that you would say that to my face.

I told you about the frame-up on the Bolsa grade, and you call it an accident and say it simplifies matters to have the Mexican girl out of the way. You thought the affair at Casa Blanca was an accident, too. Why do you suppose your son is so unlucky?

I've appealed to your love for your son. You say I've been going to too many picture shows, and imagine things that don't exist. Maybe you're right. I never knew my father, but I've always liked to imagine that if I was up against it, he'd see me through. I always imagined that was what a father's

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love was. But I guess I'm wrong, and, as you say, am only imagining things that don't exist.

Well, I've come to the end of my string. I've tried every way to make you see. But you won't. You won't come down here to save your only son. I don't expect you to, now. It is easier to stay where you are, or go to Honolulu. It is safer, too. The San Miguel is no place for a coward.

James Masters was still reading the letter when a servant entered and announced Mr. Hazlett.

"Show him in," said Masters, "and see that we are undisturbed."

A moment later his visitor entered. He was a small, nervous looking man, clad in a close-fitting blue suit. He nodded to Masters from the doorway, and hurried to a chair near the desk. With a quick, jerky movement he opened a small hand-bag he carried and produced a note-book and a sheaf of papers. He plunged at once into the object of his visit.

"Just got in," he announced. "Will make verbal report now, and mail papers connected with case later."

Masters nodded, and settled back in his chair. Hazlett glanced at his note-book and began:

"Method of farming San Miguel. Found it to be unpopular in the extreme. Tenants claim no chance for profit with year-to-year leases. Won't farm your land if they can get any other. Few will re-lease. Comparison of your leases with San Juan and Santa Paula ranches shows claim of farmers justified. Samples of other leases enclosed. Sentiment against San Miguel strong in surrounding counties as well. Talk of raising your assessment to make you improve or sell. Also passage of act of Legislature to break up yours and other big holdings of real estate."

Masters followed the man's spasmodic utterances closely. Then he interrupted:

"Go on to the next point."

Hazlett flashed a glance at his note-book, and continued:

"Threatened eviction of tenant Benson. Unfair from evidence obtained. Also radically different from ranch policy in the past. Proposed action liable to increase sentiment against ranch."

"Motive?" suggested Masters.

Hazlett shrugged.

"Can't say. Personal prejudice, most likely. Apparently of short duration. Tenant in the dark concerning it. Had been promised renewal of lease a month ago."

"The next," prompted Masters.

Hazlett drew out a small sketch and handed it to Masters as he went on:

"Extensive plans for development under way for some time. Several surveys already made in various sections. Prospects for oil and water apparently good. Learned indirectly Mr. Klune much interested in scheme. Extracts of consulting engineers enclosed."

Masters was scanning the map while Hazlett was speaking.

"Go on," he said. "I'll go over the data later."

Hazlett continued:

"Personal report on Thomas Burke Slade, private secretary to the general manager. Duties confidential in character. Couldn't determine exactly what. Employee loyal and close-mouthed. Well known in city and county. Addicted to excessive use of alcohol, and an inveterate gambler. Several times arrested for drunkenness and speeding. Once arraigned for manslaughter. Case dismissed, lack of evidence. Record of arrests and previous history enclosed."

Masters again interrupted.

"What were you able to learn concerning the friendship of this man for my son?"

Hazlett looked up quickly.

"Wouldn't bank on it if I was your son," he said shortly. "The man only has one friend in the town, apparently. That's Klune. Common gossip about town Slade playing your son as a sucker. Only hearsay. Two men have been seen little together of late."

Hazlett whisked a bag of tobacco from his pocket and hastily made a cigarette. Then he glanced again at his notes, and continued:

"Personal report on Mr. Terry. Name may be alias. Antecedents little known. Supposed to be orphan. Came to ranch with your son June 24. Well known only in sporting circles. Creditable lightweight this vicinity and San Francisco."

Hazlett stopped abruptly, and his manner changed.

"Saw him fight myself a couple of times," he said. "Always liked his style. He made the other fellow fight. The fans were always sure of a good mill."

Masters nodded slightly.

"Saw him perform once myself," he admitted. "What have you been able to establish concerning his character?"

"Seems to be good. Doesn't drink, and never seen to gamble about Masters. He is an aggressive friend of your son, and his friendship is apparently sincere. Is a good worker, according to the foreman of the warehouse where he is employed."

"Did you establish any grounds for the existence of trouble or friction between Mr. Terry and the general manager?"

Hazlett shook his head.

"No," he answered. "They are never thrown together in a business way, and as far as I know, bear no grudge of any kind."

Hazlett again consulted his note-book, while Masters took up a letter from the desk and scrutinized it carefully. Then the detective went on:

"Answer to question five is all hearsay. Wouldn't hold as evidence. It is only an opinion."

"All right," said Masters. "Let's hear it."

"From all accounts," began Hazlett, "the San Miguel has in the past used its money and influence to dispossess small holders of their land. We looked up a lot of cases cited, but couldn't establish anything that looks like evidence. An account of the different cases is enclosed."

"You may as well pass over that," Masters observed. "I have pretty conclusive evidence that there is no legitimate ground for such a statement. My acreage has remained unchanged on the assessment-roll for a number of years."

Hazlett's eyes opened a trifle wider.

"That's the queer part of it," he said. "In our investigation we have been unable to establish the San Miguel's interest. If the small holders were dispossessed it would seem as if somebody else profited by the transaction."

"What do you mean by that?"

Hazlett looked deep into Masters's eyes.

"Just this," he said. "The deeds to the properties in question were recorded in the names of persons not connected with the ranch."

Masters regarded the detective intently as Hazlett closed his book.

"That's about all, Mr. Masters. You'll get the written reports, vouchers, and authorities in a couple of days. Any questions?"

Masters roused himself from the lethargy into which he had fallen. He considered for a moment, then asked:

"Are you familiar with the accident which occurred a few days ago on the Bolsa grade?"

Hazlett nodded.

"Not directly. Learned of it from the proprietor of the garage where I kept my car."

"Have you formed any opinion as to the cause of the accident?"

"No," answered Hazlett, "I haven't. There are plenty of rumors, but no proof."

"What is the general consensus of opinion locally?"

"Can't say. Only talked with the man who furnished the car and farmers who served on the coroner's jury."

"What did they think?"

"That it was a frame-up. The garage man says he's willing to swear the car went out in first-class shape. He says the wheel couldn't have come off without somebody tinkering with the lock-nut. The two ranchers also think the steering-gear was tampered with. There was talk of an investigation, but the father of the girl was out of his head, and Mr. Klune said the Mexican did not care to press matters. So the affair was dropped."

"Did you hear of any one in particular being suspected?"

"No."

Masters was silent for some time. Then he raised his head with an abrupt gesture.

"In view of what you have told me," he said, "would you consider it necessary or even advisable for me to investigate further, personally or otherwise?"

Hazlett answered promptly.

"Would depend entirely on what you

figured to do. You haven't anything but a cloud of smoke so far. There may be fire, but you haven't any proof. You might think it good enough to fire your manager. Then again you may not. I could tell you mighty quick what I would do if I owned the San Miguel Ranch."

"What?"

"I would get some experienced men, absolute strangers. Men who knew how to find out things. I'd send those men down to the ranch to watch this Sawyer deal."

"What is that?" asked Masters, showing new interest.

"It is current gossip," said Hazlett, "that the San Miguel likes the look of a certain homesteader's land in Mocking-Bird Cañon. A man by the name of Sawyer took it up, and he told himself the San Miguel had made an offer on it, but it was less than half of what it was worth. He is worried quite a bit over it. He is a poor man, and hasn't much fight in him from his talk. If they did intend to crowd him off, I figure he'd be an easy mark."

"Would you suggest my going down to the ranch?" asked Masters, after a moment.

Hazlett shook his head emphatically.

"Absolutely not," he said. "You wouldn't be able to learn anything except what they wanted you to. You'd be helpless, and the things that otherwise might happen, wouldn't happen. No, Mr. Masters, in this matter you will have to be content with seeing through the eyes of some one else and taking his word for it."

James Masters smoked for some minutes in silence. Then he roused himself abruptly and sat upright.

"How long are you going to be in town?" he asked.

"Leaving to-night."

"Make it to-morrow. Come and see me here to-night at eight."

When the detective had left Masters turned again to his desk and took up a letter.

The San Miguel Rancho,
Masters, Cal., Sept. 22, 191....

DEAR MR. MASTERS:

In reply to yours of the 19th inst.

There is no reason I am able to see why you should come to the ranch before you leave for the Islands, though of course I should welcome a visit at any time as a rare occurrence. Also I should like very much to meet your daughter.

Concerning your question regarding the development of the San Miguel I will say that I can suggest no project which would appear feasible. The ranch offers no inducement for the further outlay of any additional capital for the present, at least. It is better to proceed along lines we have followed in the past.

If you do not decide to take Myron with you I would suggest that you endeavor to persuade him to give up his friendship for the boy, Terry. His influence over your son is not for the best.

Wishing you a pleasant trip and with kindest regards, I am,

Sincerely,
WILLIAM G. KLUNE.

Masters stared at the letter for a moment. Then he pressed the bell beneath the desk.

"Tell Miss Cenith I should like to see her here at once if convenient," he ordered the servant who answered the summons.

CHAPTER XVII.

DOWNED, BUT NOT DISCOURAGED.

"I'M through with the name of Masters," Myron exclaimed. "From now on it's Streeter."

He glanced angrily at the photograph of his father on the dresser before him and tore the letter he had just received into little bits.

"What did he say?" asked Terry.

"Said he was leaving with Cenith for San Francisco. Going to sail in a day or two for Honolulu. He's leaving some money with Klune in case of emergency. Klune's to be the judge."

"What was the date of the letter?" asked Terry.

"Yesterday," Myron replied. "He's leaving to-day. He doesn't even care enough to put off his trip a few days to come down."

After a prolonged silence, Terry observed:

"I wonder if my last letter had anything to do with it. You see, I kind of figured he wouldn't come and maybe I made it a little too strong. I even called him a coward."

Myron interrupted bitterly.

"No. Nothing would make any difference. He made up his mind to take this trip to the Islands, and he just didn't want to be bothered, that's all. He's always trusted Klune, and always will, I guess. He'd believe him any time before he would his own son. We have written him all summer and told him how things were going, but he thinks we don't know what we are talking about. He'll find out, though, and I hope he does." Myron turned about and faced Terry. "I'm going to throw up my job here," he announced.

"What are you going to do?" Terry asked in amazement.

Myron shook his head.

"I don't know," he answered. "All I do know is that I'm not going to work for an outfit that is trying to freeze Benson out. I'm through, and I'm going right down now and tell Klune. After that I'll go out to the ranch and help Benson, I guess. I want to get out of here."

Terry thought the matter over.

Perhaps it was best after all. Myron was doing no good where he was. Klune was willing he do even less. If Benson left and Myron stayed it would be the beginning of the end. If he left the ranch that would be just what Klune wanted. Klune was playing safe. There didn't appear to be any way to head him off.

"Well," replied Terry at last, "I guess you're right at that. I'll quit the warehouse, too, and go out and try to land a job with some of the farmers."

Myron's face brightened.

"Come on," he said. "You won't have any trouble. You might help Benson out, too, though he's up against it, and couldn't pay much. Let's go and tell Klune now."

Terry rose. There was another matter he wanted to take up with Klune. He wanted to find out why the manager had interfered with his arrangements for Reinita's funeral. The undertaker had merely returned his fifty dollars and told him Mr. Klune had taken charge of everything.

Together they went to the ranch building and were ushered at once into the presence of the general manager.

"What's all this?" inquired Klune genially as he noted the grave faces of his visitors. "You look like you were plotting against the whites."

"I've come to tell you I'm going to quit," said Myron stiffly.

"Going to the Islands with your father?"

"No, I'm going to the ranch with Benson."

Klune smiled.

"Don't you think," he said, "that you are rather foolish to give up permanent employment for what is very likely to prove only a temporary job?"

"If I do it is my own business."

Klune's genial humor was only increased by Myron's words.

"Absolutely," he drawled, still smiling. "You are free, white, and of age, and can therefore do as you see fit." He turned to Terry. "How about you?"

"I'll go with Myron," Terry said.

Klune sensed the note of finality in his visitors' tones, but he made no effort to conciliate or argue. He pressed a button, and when his secretary appeared, he ordered:

"Have Jenson make up these gentlemen's accounts to date inclusive. They are leaving us."

Slade's watery eyes opened a little wider, but he said nothing, and hurried out.

"It will take about ten minutes, more or less," Klune announced.

Myron rose.

"I'll call again," he said. "I'm in a hurry."

Klune leaned back in his chair and folded his hands.

"Suit yourself," he replied easily. "If you don't care to come back I'll send the check to the hotel."

Myron stopped on his way to the door.

"I wish you would," he said.

Klune looked inquiringly at Terry as Myron went out.

"What do you want?" he asked. "I'm busy. Speak fast."

"The night of the accident on the Bolsa grade I made arrangements with an undertaker here to bury Reinita." Terry looked hard at Klune. "Then you changed my plans and made different ones."

Klune nodded.

"Yes," he said. "What of it?"

His calm assurance nettled his auditor.

"I don't like that way of doing business," said Terry bluntly. "I don't like to have other people butt in and change my plans."

"Neither do I," snapped Klune. "What are you going to do about it?"

Terry realized Klune had all the best of it. He was a fool to have brought up the matter at all. Still, he didn't want Klune to think he quit so easily. He controlled himself with a great effort.

"Nothing—now," he said, and walked to the door.

Terry returned to the hotel to find Myron packing. When he related his conversation with Klune, Myron exclaimed:

"There is no use trying to go against the man. He has things stacked up just about the way he wants them."

When the two boys arrived at the Benson ranch in a hired car with their luggage, Benson greeted them soberly.

"I'm afraid you'll just have to be moving again before long," he said, "though it is mighty good of you to come out here and help me out. I haven't a chance, though. All I'm trying to do now is to clean up what I can while I'm waiting to hear from a friend who may see me through."

Myron took up his duties on the ranch with a zest which was a constant surprise to Terry. Benson put Masters's son at work repairing a light tractor and, although the job was done in the open fields, young Streeter never complained of the heat, but labored with an enthusiasm which was as new to himself as it was to others.

The day following Myron was despatched to Masters on an errand and returned with a telegram. Drawing Terry aside he thrust the message savagely into his hands.

"Read that," he snapped.

Terry took the yellow slip in silence. It was from San Francisco and bore the current date.

Sailing to-day on Koshi Maru. Address Royal Hotel, Honolulu.

JAMES MASTERS.

Terry handed the telegram back with a sober face.

"He wins," he announced, "and loses at the same time." He looked moodily across the dry fields. "That's just about the first time I was ever beaten on a thing I really set my heart on doing, and it hurts," he said. A feeling of intense bitterness assailed him. Then his indomitable fighting spirit asserted itself. For some time he was silent. Presently he went on in a low voice: "I won't admit I'm beaten yet. Whenever people think a fellow is down and out that is just the time he may get a chance. Klune will think I've quit now. He may get careless because he has everything his own way. That is just the time to fool him. And I'm going to do it. I won't quit. I'm going to get the dope on Bill Klune and I'm going to have it ready when your dad comes back. I fell down this time, but the next time I'm going to show even James Masters."

When Benson came in from the south field a few days later he announced at the dinner-table:

"Well, the fools aren't all dead yet. I was over Mocking-Bird Cañon way this morning and I met a brand new sucker. A fellow by the name of Sackett, whose brother bought out the Sawyer homestead. Old Sawyer told me about him a few days ago. Said he sold out bag and baggage to a regular tenderfoot. He got cash, too. The man is a college professor from the East."

Terry was interested.

"Why was Sackett foolish?" he asked, seeking to draw Benson out. "Isn't it good land?"

Benson smiled.

"Sure, it's good land," he replied. "None better. There is water all over it and a strong trace of oil-bearing strata on the north slope of the cañon. Sackett bought it mighty cheap, too, though Sawyer said it was twice as much as the ranch offered. He was mighty glad to get from under. That is just the trouble. The land is too good. The better it is the harder it will be for Sackett to hang on to it. Klune knows as much about that land as Sawyer, I reckon, and if this fellow Sackett uncovers anything, Klune will sick Carson on the title and it is a good bet that between the two of them, they'll find some-

thing wrong with Sawyer's proving. The old man was pretty careful, but they had him scared to death. He has been advertising the property for sale for some time."

Benson paused and looked at his wife.

"I reckon if the ranch outfit don't get that land away from Sackett, it will be about the first time they have failed to get what they went after, won't it, mother?"

Mrs. Benson nodded in affirmation and her husband went on:

"They'll try to bluff him at first and if they can't make it stick, then they'll fight him anyway that comes the handiest. If they can't run him off they'll pull it through the courts and with the judge they own body and soul, and Masters's money, they'll come pretty near winning out. You see," he concluded, "nobody around here ever has the sand or the money to make a fight against the San Miguel."

Terry's interest grew. If Klune tried to get possession of the Sawyer homestead the chances were he would do it as Smitherman had told him. If he did there was chance to get Klune "with the goods." If he couldn't do that maybe he could beat him. That would be nearly as good. Terry resolved to make the acquaintance of Sackett at the first opportunity.

His chance came sooner than he expected. The following day another breakdown on the harvester in mid-afternoon left him free to do as he liked, so leaving Benson's at once, Terry set out across the hills for Mocking-Bird Cañon and the Sawyer homestead.

Pushing his cap back on his head and whistling a merry tune, Terry took his way down into the cañon. Then he stopped and listened. A dog was whining dismally from the bed of a dry ravine which traversed the path. He was evidently suffering, thought Terry, as the sound changed to sharp yells of agony. Straightway he turned from the trail, forcing his way through the underbrush, climbing over the rocks and down into the gulch. Pushing aside the scraggly branches of a scrub-willow he peered through, started and stood staring, holding the bough back with his hand.

Lying upon the ground, licking its cactus-covered paws and howling with pain, was a huge bloodhound. Bending with tender solicitude over the suffering animal was a young girl dressed entirely in white. Her hat had fallen from her head and her thick, black hair gleamed in the sunlight against the soft whiteness of her neck.

She turned her head and looked into his eyes and Terry beheld a face which he had only seen in his dreams of the Indian princess.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THANKS TO NERO.

"WHY do you stare at me like that? Why don't you do something?"

The sharp tone of command in the girl's voice caused Terry to emerge from his cover, red-faced and grinning.

"I was only trying to make out what was the trouble," he said.

"My dog has something in his foot. Will you help me get it out?"

Terry approached the big bloodhound cautiously. He was an ugly looking brute and appeared none too pleasant. Terry examined his paw and looked about for something he could convert into a tool to remove the cactus. The dog whined piteously.

"What are you going to do?"

"Find something to pull the cactus out with."

Terry stole a quick glance at the girl's face, which was flushed with exertion or anger, perhaps both.

"And I suppose if you don't find anything the poor dog will have to suffer. You needn't bother. I will pull it out myself."

She grasped the paw and caught hold of a prickly ball of cactus and tried to pull it loose, but the needles only stuck in her fingers.

Terry watched her silently as he searched the ground about. Fighting back an "I-told-you-so" grin, he returned with two flat stones, which he held chop-stick fashion in his hand.

"You can't pull cactus out bare-handed," he announced, looking at her fingers to demonstrate the truth of his assertion.

The girl's brown eyes flashed and she closed her mouth tightly with determination, and renewed her efforts without deigning to notice Terry's presence.

He watched her with a sober face. She had a very decided chin, he thought. It would dimple if she only gave it a chance. Her eyes were quite the most expressive he had ever seen.

The girl continued her unsuccessful attempt. Her fingers began to bleed, but she only set her lips tighter, and the dimple in her chin became more pronounced.

"Let me try this," Terry said, stepping closer.

The girl looked at him for a moment, then she surveyed her bleeding hands and he noticed that her lips were twitching with pain. She stood aside slowly, with evident regret that she was forced to receive his assistance.

Terry dropped at once to his knees, and with his improvised forceps, bent over the dog. The bloodhound growled ominously and exposed a row of long, sharp teeth.

"He'll probably try to bit me," he said. "Will you hold his head?"

The girl knelt by the dog and stroked his big head gently.

"Poor old Nero," she said. "He won't hurt you."

Terry caught hold of a big cactus-ball and deftly jerked it loose while Nero narrowly missed taking his entire hand in his dripping jaws.

"You see, the needles are barbed," he explained. "They tear the flesh like an arrow. If they are allowed to stay in, they work right through until they are liable to cause trouble." He worked steadily on, keeping a sharp lookout for the teeth of his patient. At length he paused and glanced up at the girl.

"That is about good for his feet," he announced. "Now comes the ticklish part." He cautiously advanced his hand to the dog's head and patted it softly. "His mouth is probably full of the stuff, too, for the chances are he has been picking at it with his teeth."

He grasped the dog by the nose. "You had better let me handle him," he said. "He is apt to get mean."

The girl withdrew silently and watched him wrestle with the bloodhound. When he had succeeded in ridding the dog of most of the thorns, she regarded Terry with more respect.

"Now we must get your fingers fixed up," Terry announced.

The girl's eyes met his and for a moment she hesitated. Then she extended her hand. It was quite the daintiest, softest little hand he had ever had the pleasure of holding. With great care, he painstakingly removed the cactus from the slender fingers, being careful to make no undue haste with the operation. At last when his keen eyes could detect no further cause to do otherwise, he released the hand with great reluctance and exclaimed:

"I guess it will be all right now. When you get home you might put something on it to keep it from getting sore."

"Thank you."

The girl's voice reminded him in a vague sort of way of the Indian princess when she had thanked him for saving her from the annoyance of the Blue Bird at the costume dance.

"You are very welcome. I am glad I happened to be coming along in time to help you out. I was going over to Mocking-Bird Cañon to see the Sawyer place."

The girl's eyes opened a little wider, but she said nothing. Then she caught sight of Nero limping about and her white forehead wrinkled in a frown.

"How in the world am I ever going to get him home?" she asked, nodding at the big dog. "If he walks he will only get more cactus in his feet, for he will chase all the rabbits and birds he sees."

An inspiration smote Terry with irresistible force.

"I—I might carry him," he suggested.

A smile left the girl's face radiant.

"Oh, I wonder if you would," she said. "You see, I think so much of him and he is a regular baby. But I'm afraid you will find him very heavy."

Terry considered Nero's avoirdupois judiciously. He hesitated and looked again into the face of the girl. Then Nero's ample bulk melted away into the diminutive proportions of a dwarfed Chewawa. He

patted the big bloodhound lovingly, and gathered him into his arms.

"How far away do you live?" he asked in a voice muffled by the dog's body.

"At the Sawyer place."

Terry almost dropped the dog.

"Excuse me for asking," he said. "Your name isn't Sackett, is it?"

The girl nodded, and Terry felt called upon to introduce himself.

"My name is Terry," he said, wondering if the girl would be particular about his other name.

The girl acknowledged the introduction with a slight smile and started for the trail with Terry hastily following in her wake.

"You'd better let me go ahead," he said. "There might be snakes."

The girl stopped in her tracks and let him pass. Then she shrank closer to his side and he was glad he had thought to mention the snakes. They went up the trail in silence and Terry began to realize that he had a man's-sized job on his hands. Nero leaned back in his arms in great contentment, quite as if it was the usual thing for him to have such a mode of conveyance. As the ascent became steeper, the bloodhound's weight increased proportionally and he was forced to hold him high up in his arms to keep from stepping on his long tail. At the top of the hill, Terry was obliged to pause for breath and, placing the dog upon the ground, he stretched his cramped arms with a sigh of relief.

"He is very heavy, isn't he?" inquired Miss Sackett.

Terry shook his head with exaggerated emphasis.

"Oh, no," he said. "He is not so heavy, but the trail was pretty steep and my wind gave out."

"It is surely good of you to do this," she said in a more friendly tone, and Terry forgot his aching arms and again took up his burden.

At the next resting place, after depositing Nero in the path, he essayed further conversation.

"You are from the East, are you not?"

"Yes. We have only been here just a few days. It seems like months to me already."

"You will like this country when you get used to it," said Terry with all the spirit of a Native Son. "There is really no place like it."

"I could not dislike it more than I do. I have never seen a place to match it. I hope I never will."

When they arrived at the ranch-house Terry's arms were numb and his back ached. He placed Nero carefully upon the ground and realized with regret that the girl would now have no further need of his services. Then he remembered his intention of becoming acquainted with Sackett.

"Will you wait a minute and rest?" the girl said. "I want you to meet my father. I am sure he will wish to thank you for all you have done."

Terry watched her disappear in the direction of the house and a moment later she returned accompanied by a tall, broad-shouldered man clad in a gray suit. He stooped slightly as he walked in order to catch his daughter's words and Terry noticed that he was highly amused over what she was telling him.

"This is Mr. Terry, father. He carried Nero ever so far for me. I am sure he is tired and would like to rest."

Sackett put out his hand.

"I am glad to meet you, I am sure, Mr. Terry," he said, gripping the other's hand. "It was very kind of you to take so much trouble."

At Sackett's invitation Terry followed him to the porch of the ranch-house where a number of rustic chairs were scattered about. There he was introduced to a small, white-faced, gray-headed man whom the girl called "Uncle Billy."

Sackett was more communicative than his daughter. Terry learned that he was a stranger in the West, having arrived recently from the East, where he suffered a nervous break-down teaching in one of the large universities. Banished to a life of complete isolation, he came to Pico, where he heard of the bargain on the Sawyer property. He knew nothing about farming, save in a theoretical sort of way connected with the analysis of soils, but had always had a liking for a life in the open.

He was fond of hunting and fishing and had evidently traveled extensively, for he spoke intimately of all parts of the country as well as foreign lands.

"I think I have a very fine little property here," he said. "One which will afford me much pleasure in looking after, besides giving me a sufficient competence for my old age."

Terry was an interested listener to Sackett's conversation. He didn't have the heart to inform the new owner of the Sawyer property of the grave difficulties he might be obliged to encounter. There was no use of appearing a bird of ill-omen upon the first visit. At times he was forced to exert all his powers of concentration to keep his mind on what Sackett was saying, for his thoughts would stray to the girl. Did ever a woman have such hair as that before?

Darkness was beginning to creep into the cañon and Terry rose with great reluctance.

"I must be going," he said. "I have quite a long way to walk." He took Ruth's hand in his, wishing that the girl would at least suggest that he need not hurry away. But as she only inclined her dark head and thanked him again for carrying the dog for her, he started for the gate with Sackett walking by his side.

"When can you take me out to see those salt-water marshes you spoke of?" Sackett inquired.

Sackett's brother objected.

"Better take it easy, Henry," he called from the porch. "You might meet a bunch of people down there and you know what the doctor told you about keeping quiet."

"How about it?" Sackett asked Terry, apparently paying but little attention to the admonitions of Uncle Billy.

"You wouldn't meet any one that I know of," Terry replied.

Sackett nodded briskly.

"All right," he replied. "We'll try and get an early start. I'll be ready with my car at seven o'clock."

Terry promised to be on hand and bidding Sackett good-by, he took his way up the trail. When he reached the top of the hill he turned and looked back. The ranch-house was only dimly visible in the shadows which swallowed up the cañon, but it was not too dark for his eager eyes to catch a flash of white upon the porch.

CHAPTER XIX.

NOT WORTH A FIGHT.

SUNDAY came at last. Terry arose with the first faint streaks of day, and pawed over his scanty wardrobe. He brushed his chauffeur's suit carefully and held it up. He hadn't mended that rip any too well.

"What's the idea of 'dolling up'?" Myron asked with sleepy interest when wakened to be asked for the loan of a shirt and tie. "I thought you were only going with Sackett to the mud-flats."

"I am," Terry admitted, "but this is Sunday and a fellow might as well clean up a little."

"Better come to the beach. Helen and I are going down a little later."

Terry completed his toilet at last and started off in the clear morning air toward Mocking Bird Cañon. As he walked across the fields he wondered exactly what kind of a man Sackett was. Would he fight or just give up like all the others and let the Ranch bluff him out? If he was like his daughter, the chances were he'd fight.

An automobile was approaching and his face beamed as he recognized its occupants.

"We are a little early," Sackett explained, holding open the door of the roadster. "We thought maybe we could pick you up further on and save you the walk."

Terry took a seat by Ruth's side and straightway experienced the novel sensation of having but little to say.

"I've been told one man owns all this land through which we are passing," Sackett observed after they had ridden some distance.

"Yes, sir, he owns over two hundred and fifty thousand acres."

"That would cover several counties in some parts of the East," Sackett commented. "Will we pass his house on our way down?"

"He doesn't live on the ranch," explained Terry. "He travels a great deal and spends most of his time in San Francisco, though he stays a few weeks at his summer home in Pico every year. He hasn't been on his ranch for over seven years and he wrote his son the other day he was leaving for the Hawaiian Islands."

"Does his son live here?" Ruth inquired.

Terry nodded. It was the first time he had seen her betray any interest.

"I came to the ranch with him and we've been together ever since."

Ruth's interest grew. "What kind of a man is he?" she asked.

Terry described his friend in glowing terms, feeling, however, that he could be more enthusiastic had the girl not appeared so interested. Myron was already deeply in love, or at least thought he was. But you never could tell about young Masters.

"What kind of a man is this Masters I hear so much about?" questioned Sackett.

"I don't know him," Terry replied. "I was only chauffeur for his son. I never saw him."

Sackett turned the car into the coast road at Terry's direction. Then he said:

"I had a classmate at Harvard by the name of Masters. He was captain of the football team, quite a bright sort of chap as I remember him, though rather quiet."

"That description might fit him very well," Terry answered. "I have heard that he is very bright and I can sure testify to the fact that he is quiet." He paused and looked earnestly at Sackett. "That is just the trouble," he said. "He is too quiet."

"What do you mean?" asked Ruth quickly.

"I mean that everything about him is quiet," Terry continued. "His ears are too quiet to hear the truth. His eyes are too quiet to see the big chance he has of doing something with this ranch. His heart is too quiet to listen to his own son." He waved his hand over the broad fields. "Even his land is quiet," he concluded.

Sackett slowed down the car and looked about him with interest.

"I don't quite see that," he said. "It appears to me as if the harvest would scarcely justify your assertion. The land is undoubtedly producing, I should say."

"Yes," admitted Terry, "it is, but this stuff is almost growing wild. He is only scratching the surface. If he'd dig deeper he'd find water, and you know what that means in California. I heard an engineer say the other day that there was water enough in Meadow Lark Cañon alone to irrigate all the land from there to the ocean, if Masters would build one dam. If you'll stop for a minute, I'd like to show you something."

Sackett halted the machine and followed Terry's finger as he pointed to the range of hills in the direction of Meadow Lark Cañon.

"Look at that slope," he said. "Have you seen anything like it anywhere before? Can you imagine what it would look like with water on it? All you see now is dry land with a few shacks scattered about. The men who live there grow a crop about one year in three. If there was water they would plant fruit trees and crops it would pay them to grow. They would build homes instead of bunk-houses and as the country developed there would be towns spring up on land that now doesn't produce enough stubble for sheep to graze on."

"Why don't the men develop the water?" Ruth asked.

"They can't," Terry answered. "All they have is a year to year lease. Boring wells costs money. It takes more than one year to get it back. They would be afraid to take the chance, even if they had the money. If they could buy the land it would be different, but they can't do that either."

"Development seems to be rather a favorite theme of yours," Sackett observed, and Ruth looked at him curiously.

"It is," Terry admitted. "I like to see things and people go ahead. I've always been interested in anything or anybody who didn't have a chance. I guess maybe that's because I never had any too much of a chance myself. Nothing has a show here. The land is asleep and the farmers can't wake it up for they are beat before they start. There is only one man in all

the world that has a chance to make these sleeping acres come alive, but he is too busy cutting the coupons off his bonds to listen," he concluded bitterly.

Terry lapsed into silence as Sackett drove on. Why should an Easterner be interested in the San Miguel? He would only come to hate it as all the others did. When they arrived at the next cross road Terry announced:

"Here is where we turn off to the marshes."

Sackett stopped the car and Terry noticed Ruth slide over and take the wheel.

"I'm going to run down to the beach while you are poking around in those dirty marshes," she announced.

Sackett demurred.

"I wouldn't, Honey," he said. "Better come with us."

Ruth insisted and as usual had her way, so promising to return at three o'clock, she drove off.

Terry watched the car regretfully as it rolled away. If he had known this would happen he wouldn't have wasted so much time talking about the San Miguel, he reflected as he led Sackett toward the bay.

When they reached the edge of the bluff they halted and Sackett inhaled the acrid air of the marshes. Below them the shallow waters of a land-locked little bay glinted in the sunlight, fringed with tulies and spotted here and there by patches of rank swamp grass. To the seaward a winding channel gleamed like a thread of silver against the dull background of the mud-flats and to their ears came faintly the hoarse cry of a marsh-loon.

"Well, this is fine," said Sackett at last. "I had no idea there was such a body of water away up here. Is it all salt?"

Terry nodded.

"That's the beauty of it," he answered. "There is no fresh water emptying into it. No rivers to fill it up if it was only once dug out. There are over forty miles of shore-line and the finest dredging bottom you ever saw. I'll show you when we get down there."

When they reached the base of the cliff Sackett stopped again and looked over the water.

"It must be two or three miles across there," he observed.

"It's over four," Terry corrected, "by nearly three long." He picked up a piece of driftwood and walked out on a small ledge of rock which jutted into the water. "Watch this," he said, and exerting no effort, allowed the stick to sink out of sight into the soft mud. "Try it," he said.

"Do you see what I am trying to get at?" he asked when Sackett had essayed the experiment.

"Dredging?"

"Exactly. Imagine what a big suction dredger would do in one day in a bottom like this. This is the shallowest part here. Down below there is plenty of water. If the inlet was jettied it would fill up here enough to give a depth of twenty-five feet if it was dug out. At least that is what the government engineers say, according to the people at the beach."

Sackett looked dreamily out over the water and Terry went on:

"Do you see what all this would mean to anybody but a blind man? Why, it would mean a harbor, with docks, ships and railroads. There are a half a dozen of the richest counties in the state lying beyond that range of hills. This would be their sea-port." He stopped abruptly and shrugged his shoulders. "But what does it mean to James Masters? Nothing but a private shooting club."

Sackett said nothing though his eyes still continued to rove over the water as he followed Terry around the shore-line. As they reached the extreme end of the body of water, a man with a gun appeared from the marshes and barred their progress.

"This is private property," he said, "No shooting is allowed."

"We haven't been shooting," Terry retorted. "Besides it's tide-water land, isn't it?"

The man exposed an irregular line of yellow teeth.

"I reckon maybe it is," he admitted. "But that don't make no difference to the outfit I'm working for. The San Miguel Ranch says: Keep out, and they pay me to make people do it."

Terry noticed that Sackett was gripping

his gun and looking belligerently at the care-taker.

"I do not understand," he observed quickly, "why the ranch keeps people out if it is not against the law."

The man laughed outright.

"Then you must be a tenderfoot," he said. "After you've lived round here as long as I have, you'll not try to understand why Klune's outfit does anything. And when they tell you not to do something why you just won't do it, that's all. I learned my lesson. It cost me all I had, too. I'm a good dog now with a good job and I get along better. I don't like 'em any better than some others," he grinned, "but it's payin' me to be good."

Sackett fingered his gun nervously and glared at the care-taker.

"It's an outrage," he burst out. "I won't submit to it."

As he stepped forward the ranger blew a couple of sharp blasts on a whistle. Then he drawled:

"Don't pesticate, mister, I ain't alone. The ranch gives me plenty of help. There'll be a couple of the boys down pretty quick," he added, as an answering whistle sounded up the ravine. "I'd advise you to beat it before things is apt to get unpleasant."

Sackett looked inquiringly at Terry.

"What do you say?" he asked.

"They have all the best of it," replied Terry. "There is no use bucking them now. The odds would be too much in their favor, and it isn't good enough."

Sackett acquiesced sullenly and it was some time after they reached the top of the bluff that he said:

"I hate to have anybody bluff me."

Terry saw his chance to make Sackett acquainted with the hazards he would encounter in Mocking Bird Cañon.

"I used to fight," he began, "just for the fun of the game. I formed the habit, and I cashed in on it and fought for money. Then I cut it out and quit fighting except for one reason."

"When is that?"

"When it is worth while. Sometimes it is better to lay down," continued Terry. "Fighting isn't what it is cracked up to be and it takes a lot out of a man, even when he wins. So I made up my mind to fight only when I thought it was worth it." He paused and looked straight at his companion, then he added: "You are going to have a chance to put up a fight before long, Mr. Sackett, unless I guess things wrong, which will be worth it, and if you need any help I guess you can count me in to the show-down."

Sackett stopped with surprise and looked at Terry.

"What do you mean?" he asked.

Terry outlined the situation briefly, sketching the experience of other men who had homesteaded lands adjacent to the San Miguel and making his listener acquainted with Sawyer's real reasons for selling. He pointed out the possibilities of development in the cañon and the added risk of so doing, calling attention to the fact that the covetous eye of Klune was already directed to the Sawyer homestead. Sackett listened attentively as they walked along, occasionally asking a question which invited more detailed information.

"You may have to fight the San Miguel outfit later on to protect your interests," Terry concluded, "and I figure that fight would be worth it."

"It sounds like a fairy tale," said Sackett at last. "It is hard to believe that such things could happen in any civilized community."

"Yes," Terry admitted. "It does. But if you stay around here long enough, you'll see that they do happen. When one man owns a whole county and has the money and such men as Klune and Carston to do his dirty work, he can do things that would be impossible anywhere else."

Terry wondered if his companion would commit himself upon the subject of actively opposing Klune's aggression, but Sackett appeared to have forgotten the matter entirely so interested did he become in observing a small pleasure launch which rounded the point and made its way to a tiny wharf close by.

"Where does that go?" he asked.

"It is one of the launches from the boat-house at the beach," Terry answered. "It stops here to let picnickers off. Would you like to ride down?"

Sackett considered.

"I'd like to first rate," he said. "But you know I have to be careful. I'm under doctor's orders. He expressly forbade any excitement. Would we be apt to meet many people down there?"

"Not at this season of the year," Terry assured him. "The summer season is about over and there is a big carnival up at Seal Rocks to-day. Most every one in Masters will be there."

Sackett looked at the launch enviously.

"I'll take a chance," he said. "I want to see more of this water."

During the ride down the bay Sackett sat with his muffler drawn close about his neck, his eyes playing over the blue water and the tulie-covered swamps and islands which dotted the shining surface.

When they arrived on the other side and walked down the main street of the little beach town they noted everywhere signs of great excitement. People were coming out of the stores and houses and rushing in the direction of the beach.

"Somebody's drowning in the surf," was the cry.

Terry and Sackett hurried with the crowd to the ocean-front where the waves were pounding on the beach. All eyes were turned to the surf and through the mist Terry caught sight of the floundering figure just beyond the last line of breakers. Somewhere a girl was crying hysterically for some one to save the drowning man. A number of men were already in the water striving to reach the unfortunate swimmer, but the big waves tossed them back.

Terry tore off his coat and shoes.

"I'm going to help," he called back to Sackett and as he ran down the beach a white-faced girl rushed after him crying:

"Oh, save him, Terry! It's Myron."

CHAPTER XX.

"LET'S GO."

"THERE'S a woman, too."

The crowd took up the cry and Sackett, peering through the spray-clouds, saw the flash of a red cap amidst the foam.

"She's all right. She's going out to get him."

The crowd murmured its commendation, and a voice cried:

"Say, she can swim, too; see her climb through that one."

Sackett stood on the wet sand looking in vain for Terry. The red cap was nearly at the last line of breakers with a scattered field of swimmers trailing far behind her. He shaded his eyes with his hand and searched the gray water. Then he caught sight of the boy fighting his way through the swirling current. He was almost abreast of the other man already.

"They haven't a chance. Good Lord, look at that one coming!"

Sackett was so intent upon watching Terry's progress that he failed to note the huge wall of water which crept silently inward. Swelling ominously it caught the figure of the drowning man and flaunted him before the eyes of the people on the beach. Then it rolled on to claim its next victim. The red-capped swimmer sensed her peril and her arms flashed faster as she raced hand over hand to meet the giant wave before it broke.

"It'll break every bone in her body if it falls on her," Sackett heard a man mutter at his elbow.

"She'll never make it. It's capping now."

Heaving and staggering with its own weight, the white-crested breaker mounted higher and gathered itself for its downward crash. As it towered above her, the red cap shot forward and borne by the surge of the back swell, climbed upward through the green wall. For a moment she poised like a gull upon its trembling crest, then disappeared suddenly from view.

With a sullen roar the great wave broke and the spray flew upward in dense white clouds, and the frothing, swirling water tumbled on to wreak its vengeance on the other swimmers. An array of waving arms and legs appeared above the surface as the churning foam passed over them, and buffeted about; the rescue party were beaten backward to the shallow water.

Sackett saw Terry's head emerge at last. For a moment he stood dazedly flicking the

water from his eyes. Then he staggered on alone while the other swimmers rested upon the beach before making a second attempt.

"She's got him."

A loud cheer broke out and Sackett saw the red cap merge with the dark figure beyond the breaker line.

"She can never bring him back without help—why doesn't that fellow hurry; he acts like he had all day—now he's doing better—he'll make it now if the quiet spell holds."

A girl standing next to Sackett cried:

"Oh, he'll drown and it was all my fault. I should have stayed with him."

Sackett lowered his eyes and beheld a young woman with dark-brown hair and glistening blue eyes, sobbing by his side. He placed a hand on her shoulder and strove to quiet her while he watched Terry fight his way over the last breaker.

"See," he said. "The man is there now. Together they will bring him in all right."

Helen Benson raised her eyes and looked into Sackett's face—she must tell somebody. She'd die if she didn't. Surely this kind-looking gentleman would understand how she felt. As she made up her mind to speak she heard a man exclaim:

"He was stewed and you knew it when you let him go into the water."

Sackett turned at the sound of the voice and saw that the speaker confronted a watery-eyed youth with taffy-colored hair.

"If he drowns, they ought to drown you, too," the man continued, "for you were filling him up."

Helen began to cry again.

"It's all my fault," she repeated. "I should have gone with him when father drove him away, but Myron—"

"What's that?" Sackett whirled at the sound of the name. "Myron who?" he cried, gripping the girl by the arm.

"Myron Masters, you see he—" She looked up and saw that her tall companion had suddenly disappeared. Then she covered her face with her hands and a woman led her away.

When Terry neared Myron's side, he glanced with admiration at the girl in the red cap. She raised her head and he found himself looking into the face of Ruth Sackett.

"Ruth," he gasped, the name coming unconsciously to his lips.

"Is he dead?" the girl asked quickly. She spoke with a great effort and Terry noticed that her voice trembled.

"I can't tell," he answered, looking into Myron's white face. "It's a bad sign to find them floating." He rolled Myron on his back and grasped him by the shoulder with his left hand, while he swam free with his right.

"Put your hand on my other shoulder."

Ruth shook her head.

"I'm all right. I tried to hold him too high out of water. Will he live?" Her words came in gasps.

"Don't talk till you get your wind," cautioned Terry, as he propelled Myron slowly through the water. Then he answered Ruth's question. "He has a good chance. The pulmotor will bring him out unless his heart's gone."

They swam for a few minutes in silence, with the girl assisting on the other side. Then Ruth said:

"I saw him struggling and I heard him cry out. He was unconscious when I reached him."

Terry reasoned that he had better not acquaint the girl with Myron's identity. It was better that they talk as little as possible. They were almost at the first line of breakers when he paused and looked backward.

"We'll have to watch our chance to get in," he said. "We'd better wait until those big ones go by."

Upon the beach the crowd watched the struggles of a big man in gray flannel trousers fighting his way through the surf.

"There'll be another one ready for the pulmotor if that fellow don't look out," a man remarked as Sackett went down before a curling wave. "He might be all right to swim if he once got out there, but he doesn't understand the surf."

"It's his daughter," a woman cut in. "She told me her name before she went in in case anything happened to her, and like a fool I told him. He was crazy

enough before, but he's clear gone now. Somebody ought to stop him. He can't get through those breakers."

"We'd better work in a little closer now," Terry advised, and shoving Myron ahead of him, they swam a few yards in silence. He must be careful that Ruth didn't tire herself out before they reached the surf.

"When we reach the breakers," he said, "you cut loose and go it alone, I'll be all right."

"I'll do nothing of the sort."

Her answer caused Terry to glow. He liked a game girl. He realized her determination, however, was not commendable from the common sense view-point. They were getting to the place now where it was necessary to go one way or the other with all possible speed. If they could only get a wave just right, it would carry them almost to safety. If they got one just wrong—

"Wait," he exclaimed, and treading himself high up in the water, he looked over the on-coming swell. Then he settled down again and whirling Myron about, said in a low voice:

"We've got to go back. There's a big one coming."

Together they raced to meet the great wave which rushed upon them and plunged into its capping crest with only a small margin of safety.

"Keep going," Terry cried, "so the back-wash won't get you. Here comes another."

When they gained the quiet water beyond reach of the breakers, Terry noticed that Ruth's lips were turning blue.

"You must go in next time whether I do or not," he said firmly. "You're getting cold. You may get a cramp. Then there would be just one more."

"There'll be one more then," panted Ruth. "I won't leave you out here alone."

Terry realized that the girl did not understand the seriousness of the situation.

"But you may never get in unless—"

"Neither may you."

She smiled faintly and her wonderful brown eyes glowed with a light which thrilled his soul and gave new energy to his tired body. Ruth was going to stick by him to the finish. His blood pounded through his veins and he whirled about.

"If you're ready, we'll go," he said. "This time we'll go clear in. Swim slow and take it easy."

When they arrived again in the danger zone he noticed that Ruth was swimming with difficulty.

"We'll rest once more. Then we'll go straight in and take a chance. Don't be afraid of getting ducked. That's the safest way." They rested.

"Are you ready?"

Ruth nodded and smiled.

"Here's our chance, then," Terry exclaimed. "Let's go."

Redoubling his efforts for a last rally, he swam slow and put every ounce of his remaining strength into each stroke. Ruth's face was white and set and her blue lips were taking in the water in great gulps. They were nearly half-way and in a few minutes they would be within reach of help or beyond it.

"Go back—come ahead, you're all right—hurry, there's a big one behind you—Great Heavens, it's going to break on them!—can't some one help?"

The crowd shrieked above the roar of the surf.

Sackett staggered about in the water like an insane man watching the great wave creep silently upon the struggling swimmers.

"I'll give a thousand dollars to the man who brings them in," he cried. "Five thousand, ten thousand—"

"There isn't a man here, mister, but what's doing his best without anything," some one at his side replied. "They couldn't do any more if you made it a million."

A deep hush settled over the people on the beach as they watched the mountain of water tower with relentless fury above the heads of its helpless victims. Then the wave broke and the swimmers were engulfed beneath the avalanche.

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 Night Horseman

by Max Brand

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

A Sequel to "The Untamed"

CHAPTER XXIV.

DR. BYRNE LOOKS INTO THE PAST.

THE black head of Barry, the brown head of Randall Byrne, the golden head of Kate Cumberland, were all bowed around the limp body of Black Bart. Buck Daniels, still gasping for breath, stood reeling near by.

"Let me attempt to resuscitate the animal," offered the doctor.

He was met by a blank look from Barry. The hair of the man was scorched, his skin was blistered and burned. Only his hands remained uninjured, and these continued to move over the body of the great dog. Kate Cumberland was on her knees over the brute.

"Is there no hope for Bart?" she asked.

There was no answer from Barry, and she attempted to raise the fallen, lifeless head of the animal; but instantly a strong arm darted out and brushed her hands away. Those hands fell idly at her sides, and her head went back as though she had been struck across the face. She found herself looking up into the angry eyes of Randall Byrne. He reached down and raised her to her feet; there was no color in her face, no life in her limbs.

"There's nothing more to be done here, apparently," said the doctor coldly. "Suppose we go back to the house."

She made neither assent nor dissent. Dan Barry had finished a swift, deft bandage and stopped the bleeding of the dog's wounds. Now he raised his head and his glance slipped rapidly over the faces of the doctor and the girl and rested on Buck Daniels. There was no flash of kindly thanks, no word of recognition. His right hand raised to his cheek, and rested there, and in his eyes came that flare of yellow hate. Buck Daniels shrank back until he was lost in the crowd. Then he turned and stumbled back toward the house.

Instantly, Barry began to work at expanding and depressing the lungs of the huge animal as he might have worked to bring a man back to life.

"Watch him!" whispered the doctor to Kate Cumberland. "He is closer to that dog—that wolf—than he has ever been to any human being!"

Her only answer was to turn her head away.

"Are you afraid to watch?" challenged Byrne, for his anger at Barry's blunt refusals still made his blood hot. "See how his eyes are fixed on the muzzle of the beast as if he were studying a human face!"

"No, no!" breathed the girl.

"I tell you, look!" commanded the doctor. "For there's the solution of the mystery. No mystery at all. Barry is simply a man who is closer akin to the brute

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forces in nature. See! By the eternal heavens, he's dragging that beast—that dumb beast—back from the door of death!"

Barry had ceased his rapid manipulations, and turned the big dog back upon its side. Now the eyes of Black Bart opened, and winked shut again. Now the master kneeled at the head of the beast and took the scarred, shaggy head between his hands.

"Bart!" he commanded.

Not a stir in the long, black body. The stallion edged a pace closer, dropped his velvet muzzle, and whinnied softly at the very ear of the dog. Still, there was not an answering quiver.

"Bart!" called the man again, and there was a ring of wild grief—of fear—in his cry.

"Do you hear?" said Byrne savagely, at the ear of the girl. "Did you ever use such a tone with a human being? Ever?"

"Take me away!" she murmured. "I'm sick—sick at heart. Take me away!"

Byrne slipped his arm about her and led her away, supporting half her weight. They went slowly toward the house, and before they reached it he knew that she was weeping. But if there was sadness in Byrne, there was also a great joy. He was afire, for there is a flamelike quality in hope.

Loss of blood and the stifling smoke, rather than a mortal injury or the touch of fire, had brought Black Bart close to death, but now that his breathing was restored to almost normal he gained rapidly. One instant he lingered on the border between life and death; the next, the brute's eyes opened and glittered with dim recognition up toward Dan, and he licked the hand which supported his head. At Dan's direction, a blanket was brought, and after Dan had lifted Black Bart upon it four men raised the corners of the blanket and carried the burden toward the house. One of the cow-punchers went ahead bearing the light. This was the sight which Dr. Byrne and Kate Cumberland saw from the veranda of the ranch-house as they turned and looked back before going in.

"A funeral procession," suggested the doctor.

"No," she answered positively. "If Black Bart were dead, Dan wouldn't allow any hands save his own to touch the body. No, Black Bart is alive!"

The procession drew nearer, heading toward the back of the big house, and now they saw that Dan walked beside the body of Black Bart, a smile on his lifted face. They disappeared behind the house.

Byrne heard the girl murmuring, more to herself than to him: "Once he was like that all the time."

"Like what?" he asked bluntly.

She paused, and then her hand dropped lightly on his arm. He could not see more than a vague outline of her in the night, only the dull glimmer of her face as she turned her head, and the faint whiteness of her hand.

"Let's say good night," she answered at length. "Our little worlds have toppled about our heads to-night—all your theories, it seems, and God knows all that I have hoped. Why should we stay here and make ourselves miserable by talk?"

"But because we have failed," he said steadily, "is that a reason we should creep off and brood over our failure in silence? No, let's talk it out, man to man."

"I must say you have a fine courage," said the girl. "But what is there we can say?"

He answered: "For my part, I am not so miserable as you think. I feel as if this night had driven us closer together; and I've caught a perspective on everything that has happened here."

"Tell me what you know."

"Only what I think I know. It may be painful to hear."

"I'm very used to pain."

"Well, a moment ago, when Barry was walking beside his dog, smiling, you murmured that he once was like that always. There was a time, I surmise, when Dan Barry lived here with you and your father. Am I right?"

"Yes, for years and years."

"And in those times he was not greatly different from other men. You came to be very fond of him."

"We were to marry," answered Kate, and Byrne winced.

He went on: "Then something happened —suddenly—that took him away from you, and you did not see him again until tonight. Am I right?"

"Yes. I thought you must have heard the story—from the outside. I'll tell you the truth. My father found Dan Barry wandering across the hills years ago. He was riding home over the range, and he heard a strange and beautiful whistling, and when he looked up he saw on the western ridge, walking against the sky, a tattered figure of a boy. He rode up and asked the boy his name. He learned it was Dan Barry—Whistling Dan, he was called. But the boy could not, or would not, tell how he came to be there in the middle of the range without a horse.

"He merely said that he came from 'over there,' and waved his hand to the south and east. That was all. He didn't seem to be alarmed because he was alone, and yet he apparently knew nothing of the country; he was lost in this terrible country where a man could wander for days without finding a house, and yet the boy was whistling as he walked! So dad took him home and sent out letters all about—to the railroad in particular—to find out if such a boy were missing.

"He received no answer. In the mean time he gave Dan a room in the house; and I remember how Dan sat at the table the first night—I was a little girl then—and how I laughed at his strange ways. His knife was the only thing he was interested in, and he made it serve for knife, fork, and spoon, and he held the meat in his fingers while he cut it.

"The next morning he was missing. One of dad's range riders picked up Dan several miles to the north, walking along, whistling gaily. The next morning he was missing again and was caught still farther away. After that dad had a terrible scene with him—I don't know exactly what happened —but Dan promised to run away no more, and ever since then dad has been closer to Dan than any one else.

"So Dan grew up. From the time I could first distinctly remember, he was very gentle and good-natured, but he was different, always. After a while he got Black Bart, you know, and then he went out with a halter and captured Satan. Think of capturing a wild mustang with nothing but a halter! He played around with them so much that I was jealous of them, So I kept with them until Bart and Satan were rather used to me. Bart would even play with me now and then when Dan wasn't near. And so finally Dan and I were to be married.

"Dad didn't like the idea. He was afraid of what Dan might become. And he was right. One day, in a saloon that used to stand on that hill over there, Dan had a fight—his first fight—with a man who had struck him across the mouth for no good reason. That man was Jim Silent. Of course you've heard of him?"

"Never."

"He was a famous long-rider—an outlaw with a very black record. At the end of that fight he struck Dan down with a chair and escaped. I went down to Dan when I heard of the fight—Black Bart led me down, to be exact—but Dan would not come back to the house, and he'd have no more to do with any one until he had found Jim Silent. I can't tell you everything that happened.

"Finally he caught Jim Silent and killed him—with his bare hands. Buck Daniels saw it. Then Dan came back to us, but on the first night he began to grow restless. It was last fall—the wild geese were flying south—and while they were honking in the sky Dan got up, said good-by, and left us. We have never seen him again until tonight. All we knew was that he had ridden south—after the wild geese."

A long silence fell between them, for the doctor was thinking hard.

"And when he came back," he said, "Barry did not know you? I mean you were nothing to him?"

"You were there," said the girl faintly.

"It is perfectly clear," said Byrne. "If it were a little more commonplace it might be puzzling, but being so extraordinary it clears itself up. Did you really expect Black Bart to remember you?"

"I may have expected it."

"But you were not surprised, of course!"

"Naturally not."

"Yet you see that Dan Barry—Whistling

Dan, you call him—was closer to Black Bart than he was to you?"

"Why should I see that?"

"You watched him a moment ago when he was leaning over the dog."

He watched her draw her dressing-gown closer about her, as though the cold bit more keenly then. She said simply: "Yes, I saw."

"Don't you see that he is simply more in tune with the animal world? And it's really no more reasonable to expect Black Bart to remember you than it is to expect Dan Barry to remember you? It's quite plain. When you go back to the beginning man was simply an animal, without the higher senses, as we call them. He was simply a brute, living in trees or in caves. Afterward he grew into the thing we all know. But why not imagine a throw-back into the earlier instincts? Why not imagine the creature devoid of the impulses of mind, the thing which we call man, and see the splendid animal? You saw in Dan Barry simply a biological sport—the freak—the thing which retraces the biological progress and comes close to the primitive. But of course you could not realize this. He seemed a man, and you accepted him as a man. In reality he was no more a man than Black Bart is a man. He had the face and form of a man, but his instincts were as old as the ages. The animal world obeys him. Satan neighs in answer to his whistle. The wolf-dog licks his hand at the point of death. There is the profound difference, always. You try to reconcile him with other men; you give him the attributes of other men. Open your eyes; see the truth: that he is no more akin to man than Black Bart is like a man. And when you give him your affection, Miss Cumberland, *you are giving your affection to a wild wolf!* Do you believe me?"

He knew that she was shaken. He could feel it, even without the testimony of his eyes to witness. He went on, speaking with great rapidity, lest she should escape from the influence which he had already gained over her.

"I felt it when I first saw him—a certain nameless kinship with elemental forces. The wind blew through the open door—it was Dan Barry. The wild geese called from the open sky—for Dan Barry. These are the things which lead him. These the forces which direct him. You have loved him; but is love merely a giving? No, you have seen in him a man, but I see in him merely the animal force."

She said after a moment: "Do you hate him—you plead against him so passionately?"

He answered: "Can you hate a thing which is not human? No, but you can dread it. It escapes from the laws which bind you and which bind me. What standards govern it? How can you hope to win it? Love? What beauty is there in the world to appeal to such a creature except the beauty of the marrow-bone which his teeth have the strength to snap?"

"Ah, listen!" murmured the girl. "Here is your answer!"

And Randall Byrne heard a sound like the muted music of the violin, thin and small and wonderfully penetrating. He could not tell at first what it might be. For it was as unlike the violin as it was like the bow and the rosined strings. Then he made out, surely, that it was the whistling of a human being.

It followed no tune, no reasoned theme. The music was beautiful in itself. It rose straight up like the sky-lark from the ground, sheer up against the white light of the sky, and there it sang against heaven's gate. He had never heard harmony like it. He would never again hear such music, so thin and yet so full that it went through and through him, until he felt the strains take a new, imitative life within him. He would have whistled the strains himself, but he could not follow them. They escaped him, they soared above him. They followed no law of rhythm. They flew on wings and left him far below. The girl moved away from him as if led by an invisible hand, and now she stood at the extremity of the porch. He followed her.

"Do you hear?" she cried, turning to him.

"What is it?" asked the doctor.

"It is he! Don't you understand?"

"Barry? Yes! But what does the whistling mean; is it for his wolf-dog?"

"I don't know," she answered quickly. "All I understand is that it is beautiful. Where are your theories and explanations now, Dr. Byrne?"

"It *is* beautiful—God knows!—but doesn't the wolf-dog understand it better than either you or I?"

She turned and faced Byrne, standing very close, and when she spoke there was something in her voice which was like a light. In spite of the dark he could guess at every varying shade of her expression. "To the rest of us," she murmured, "Dan has nothing but silence, and hardly a glance. Buck saved his life to-night, and yet Dan remembered nothing except the blow which had been struck. And now—now he pours out all the music in his soul for a dumb beast. Listen!"

He saw her straighten herself and stand taller.

"Then through the wolf—I'll conquer through the dumb beast!"

She whipped past Byrne and disappeared into the house; at the same instant the whistling, in the midst of a faint, high climax, broke, shivered, and was ended. There was only the darkness and the silence around Byrne, and the unsteady wind against his face.

CHAPTER XXV.

WERE-WOLF.

DR. BYRNE, pacing the front veranda with his thoughtful head bowed, saw Buck Daniels step out with his quirt dangling in his hand, his cartridge-belt buckled about his waist, and a great red silk bandanna knotted at his throat.

He was older by ten years. To be sure, his appearance was not improved by a three-days' growth of beard. It gave his naturally dark skin a dirty cast, but even that rough stubble could not completely shroud the new hollows in his cheeks. His long, black, uncombed hair, sagged down raggedly across his forehead, hanging almost into his eyes; the eyes themselves were sunk in such formidable cavities that Byrne caught hardly more than two points of light in the shadows. All the devil-may-care insouciance of Buck Daniels was quite gone. In its place was a dogged sullenness, a hang-dog air which one would not care to face of a dark night or in a lonely place. His manner was that of a man whose back is against the wall, who, having fled some keen pursuit, has now come to the end of his tether and prepares for desperate, even if hopeless, battle. There was that about him which made the doctor hesitate to address the cow-puncher.

At length he said: "You're going out for an outing, Mr. Daniels?"

Daniels started violently at the sound of this voice behind him, and whirled upon the doctor with such a set and contorted expression of fierceness that Byrne jumped back. "Good God, man!" cried the doctor. "What's up with you?"

"Nothin'," answered Buck, gradually relaxing from his first show of suspicion. "I'm beating it, that's all."

"Leaving us?"

"Yes."

"Not really!"

"D'you think I ought to stay?" asked Buck with something of a sneer.

The doctor hesitated, frowning in a puzzled way. At length he threw out his hands in a gesture of mute abandonment. "My dear fellow, I've about stopped trying to think."

At this Buck Daniels grinned mirthlessly. "Now you're talkin' sense. They ain't no use in thinking."

"But why do you leave so suddenly?"

Buck Daniels shrugged his broad shoulders.

"I am sure," went on Byrne, "that Miss Cumberland will miss you."

"She will not," answered the big cow-puncher. "She's got her hands full with—*him.*"

"Exactly. But if it is more than she can do, if she makes no headway with that singular fellow—she may need help—"

He was interrupted by a slow, long-drawn, deep-throated curse from Daniels. "Why in hell should I help her with—*him?*"

"There is really no reason," answered the doctor, alarmed, "except, I suppose, old friendship—"

"Damn old friendship!" burst out Daniels. "There's an end to all things and my friendship is worn out—on both sides. It's done!"

He turned and scowled at the house. "Help her to win *him* over? I'd rather stick the muzzle of my gun down my throat and pull the trigger. I'd rather see her marry a man about to hang. Well—to hell with this place. I'm through with it. S'long, doc."

But Byrne ran after him and halted him at the foot of the steps down from the veranda. "My dear Mr. Daniels," he urged, touching the arm of Buck. "You really mustn't leave so suddenly at this. There are a thousand questions on the tip of my tongue."

Daniels regarded the professional man with a hint of weariness and disgust. "Well," he said, "I'll hear the first couple of hundred. Shoot!"

"First: the motive that sends you away."

"Dan Barry."

"Ah—ah—fear of what he may do?"

"Damn the fear. At least, it's him that makes me go."

"It seems an impenetrable mystery," sighed the doctor. "I saw you the other night step into the smoking hell of that barn and keep the way clear for this man. I knew, before that, how you rode and risked your life to bring Dan Barry back here. Surely those are proofs of friendship!"

Daniels laughed unpleasantly. He laid a large hand on the shoulder of the doctor and answered: "If them was the only proofs, doc, I wouldn't feel the way I do. Proofs of friendship? Dan Barry has saved me from the—rope!—and he's saved me from dyin' by the gun of Jim Silent. He took me out of a rotten life and made me a man that could look honest men in the face!"

He paused, swallowing hard, and the doctor's misty, overworked eyes lighted with some comprehension. He had felt from the first a certain danger in this big fellow, a certain reckless disregard of laws and rules which commonly limit the actions of ordinary men. Now part of the truth was hinted at. Buck Daniels, on a time, had been outside the law; and Barry had drawn him back to the ways of men. That explained some of the singular bond that lay between them.

"That ain't all," went on Buck. "Blood is thick, and I've loved him better nor a brother. I've gone to hell and back for him. For him I took Kate Cumberland out of the hands of Jim Silent, and I left myself in her place. I took her away and all, so's she could go to him. Damn him! And now on account of him I got to leave this place."

His voice rose to a ringing pitch.

"D'you think it's easy for me to go? D'you think it ain't like tearing a fingernail off'n the flesh for me to go away from Kate? God knows what she means to me! God knows, but if He does, He's forgotten me!" Anguish of spirit set Daniels shaking, and the doctor looked on in amazement. He was like one who reaches in his pocket for a copper coin and brings out a handful of gold pieces.

"Kind feelin's don't come easy to me," went on Daniels. "I been raised to fight. I been raised to hard ridin' and dust in the throat. I been raised on whisky and hate. And then I met Dan Barry, and his voice was softer 'n a girl's voice, and his eyes didn't hold no doubt of me. Me that had sneaked in on him at night and was goin' to kill him in his sleep—because my chief had told me to! That was the Dan Barry what I first knew. He give me his hand and give me the trust of his eyes, and after he left me I sat down and took my head between my hands and my heart was like to bust inside me. It was like the clouds had blowed away from the sun and let it shine on me for the first time in my life. And I swore that if the time come I'd repay him. For every cent he give me I'd pay him back in gold. I'd foller to the end of the world to do what he bid me do."

His voice dropped suddenly, choked with emotion.

"Oh, doc, they was tears come in my eyes; and I felt sort of clean inside, and I wasn't ashamed of them tears! That was what Dan Barry done for me!

"And I did pay him back, as much as I could. I met Kate Cumberland, and she

was to me among girls what Dan Barry was to me among men. I ain't ashamed of sayin' it. I loved her till they was a dryness like ashes inside me, but I wouldn't even lift up my eyes to her, because she belonged to him. I follered her around like a dog. I done her bidding. I asked no questions. What she wanted—that was law to me, and all the law I wanted. All that I done for the sake of Dan Barry. And then I took my life in my hands for him—not once, but day after day.

"Then he rode off and left her, and I stayed behind. D'you think it's been easy to stay here? Man, man, I've had to hear her talkin' about Dan Barry day after day, and never a word from me. And I had to tell her stories about Dan, and what he'd used to do, and she'd sit with her eyes miles away from me, listenin' and smilin' and me there hungerin' for just one look out of her eyes—hungerin' like a dyin' dog for water. And then for her and Joe I rode down south, and when I met Dan d'you think they was any light in his eyes when he seen me?

"No, he'd forgotten me the way even a hoss won't forget his master. Forgot me after a few months—and after all that had gone between us! Not even Kate—even she was nothin' to him. But still I kept at it and I brought him back. I had to hurt him to do it, but God knows it wasn't out of spite that I hit him.

"And when I seen Dan go into that burnin' barn I says to myself: 'Buck, if nothin' is done that wall will fall, and there's the end of Dan. There's the end of him, that ain't any human use, and when he's finished after a while maybe Kate will get to know that they's other men in the world besides Dan.' I says that to myself, deep and still inside me. And then I looked at Kate standin' in that white thing with her yaller hair all blowin' about her face—and I wanted her like a dyin' man wants heaven! But then I says to myself again: 'No matter what's happened, he's been my friend. He's been my pal. He's been my bunkie.'

"Doc, you ain't got a way of knowin' what a partner is out here. Maybe you sit in the desert about a thousand miles from nowhere, and across the little mesquite fire there's your pal, the only human thing in sight. Maybe you go months seein' only him. If you're sick he takes care of you. If you're blue he cheers you up. And that's what Dan Barry was to me. So I stands sayin' these things to myself, and I says: 'If I keep that wall from fallin' Dan 'll know all about it, and they won't be no more of that yaller light in his eyes when he looks at me.' That's what I says to myself, poor fool!

"And I went into the fire and fought to keep that wall from fallin'. You know what happened. When I come out, staggerin' and blind and three parts dead, Dan Barry looks up to me and touches his face where I'd hit him, and the yaller comes up glimmerin' and blazin' in his eyes. Then I went back to my room and I fought it out.

"And here's where I stand now. If I stay here, if I see that yaller light once more, they won't be no waitin'. Him and me'll have to have it out right then. Am I a dog, maybe, that I got to stand around and jump when he calls me?"

"My dear fellow—my dear Mr. Daniels!" cried the horrified Byrne. "Surely you're wrong. He wouldn't go so far as to make a personal attack upon you!"

"Wouldn't he? Bah! Not if he was a man, no. I tell you, he ain't a man; he's what the Canucks up north call a were-wolf! There ain't no mercy or kindness in him. The blood of a man means nothin' to him. The world would be better rid of him. Oh, he can be soft and gentle as a girl. Mostly he is. But cross him once, and he forgets all you done for him. Give him a taste of blood and he jumps at your throat. I tell you, I've seen him do it!"

He broke off with a shudder.

"Doc," he said in a lower and solemn voice, "maybe I've said too much. Don't tell Kate nothin' about why I'm goin'. Let her go on dreamin' her fool dream. But now hear what I'm sayin: If Dan Barry crosses me once more, one of us two dies, and dies damned quick. It may be me, it may be him, but I've come to the end of my rope. I'm leavin' this place till

Barry gets a chance to come to his senses and see what I've done for him. That's all. I'm leavin' this place because they's a blight on it, and that blight is Dan Barry. I'm leaving this place because—doc—because I can smell the comin' of bloodshed in it. They's a death hangin' over it. If the lightnin' was to hit and burn it up, house and man, the range would be better for it!"

And he turned on his heel and strode slowly down toward the corral. Dr. Byrne followed his progress with staring eyes.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE BATTLE.

THE chain which fastened Black Bart had been passed around the trunk of a tree that stood behind the ranch-house, and there the great dog lay tethered. Dr. Byrne had told Whistling Dan, with some degree of horror, that the open air was in the highest degree dangerous to wounds, but Whistling Dan had returned no answer. So Black Bart lay all day in the soft sand, easing himself from time to time into a new position, and his thoughtful eyes seemed to be concentrated on the desire to grow well. Beside him was the chair in which Dan Barry sat for many an hour of the day and even the night.

Kate Cumberland watched the animal from the shadow of the house; his eyes were closed, and the long, powerful head lay inert on the sand, yet she knew that the wolf-dog was perfectly aware of her presence. Day after day since he lay there she had attempted to approach Black Bart, and day after day he had allowed her to come within reaching distance of him, only to drive her back at the last moment by a sudden display of the murderous, long fangs; or by one of those snarls which came out of the black depths of his heart. Now, a dog snarls from not far down its throat, but the noise of an angered wild beast rolls up out of its very entrails—a passion of hate and defiance. And when she heard that sound, or when she saw the still more terrible silent rage of the beast, Kate Cumberland's spirit failed, and she would shrink back again to a safe distance.

She was not easily discouraged. She had that grim resolution which comes to the gambler after he has played at the same table night after night, and lost, lost, lost, until, playing with the last of his money, he begins to mutter through his set teeth: "The luck *must* change!"

So it was with Kate. For in Black Bart she saw the only possible clue to Whistling Dan.

There was the stallion, to be sure, but she knew Satan too well. Nothing in the world could induce that wild heart to accept more than one master—more than one friend. For Satan there was in the animal world Black Bart, and in the world of men Dan Barry. These were enough.

For all the rest he kept the disdainful speed of his slender legs or the terror of his teeth and trampling hoofs. Even if she could have induced the stallion to eat from her hand she could never have made him willing to trust himself to her guidance. Some such thing she felt that she must accomplish with Black Bart. To the wild beast with the scarred and shaggy head she must become a necessary, an accepted thing.

One repulse did not dishearten her. Again and again she made the trial. She remembered having read that no animal can resist the thoughtful patience of thinking man, and hour after hour she was there, until a new light in the eye of the wolf-dog warned her that the true master was coming.

Then she fled, and from a post of vantage in the house she would watch the two. An intimacy surpassing the friendships and devotions of humans existed between them. She had seen the wolf lie with his great head on the foot of his master and the unchanging eyes fixed on Barry's face—and so for an hour at a stretch in mute worship. Or she had watched the master go to the great beast to change the dressing—a thing which could not be done too often during the day. She had seen the swift hands remove the bandages, and she had seen the cleansing solution applied. She knew what it was: it stung even the unscratched skin, and to a wound it must be torture, but the wolf

lay and endured—not even shuddering at the pain.

It had seemed to her that this was the great test. If she could make the wolf lie like this for her, then, truly, she might feel herself in some measure admitted to that mystic fellowship of the three—the man, the stallion, and the wolf. If she could, with her own unaided hands, remove the bandages and apply that solution, then she could know many things, and she could feel that she was nearer to Whistling Dan than ever before.

So she had come, time and again, with the basin and the roll of cloth in her arm, and she had approached with infinite patience, step by step, and then inch by inch. Once it had taken a whole hour for her to come within a yard of the beast. And all that time Black Bart had lain with closed eyes. But at the critical instant always there was the silent writhing up of the lips and the gleam of hate—or the terrible snarl while the eyes fastened on her throat. Her heart had stopped in mid-beat; and that day she ran back into the house and threw herself on the bed, and would not come from her room till the following morning.

Now, as she watched from the shadow of the house, with the basin of antiseptic under her arm, the gambler's desperation rose stronger and stronger. She came out at length and walked steadily toward Black Bart. She had grown almost heedless of fear at this moment, but when she was within a pace once more the head reared back, the teeth flashed.

And the heart of Kate Cumberland, as always, stopped. Yet she did not retreat this time. All the color left her face, so that her eyes seemed amazingly blue and wide. One foot drew back, tremblingly ready to spring to safety; yet she held her place. She moved—and it was toward Black Bart.

At that came a snarl that would have made the heart of a lone grizzly quake and leave his new-found nuts. One farther pace she made—and the beast plunged up, and braced itself with its one strong fore leg. A devil of yellow-green gleamed in either eye, and past the grinning fangs she saw the hot, red throat, and she saw the flattened ears, the scars on the bony forehead, the muscles that bulged at the base of the jaw. Aye, strength to drive those knifelike teeth through flesh and bone at a single snap. More—she had seen their effect, and the throat of a bull cut at a single slash. And yet—she sank on her knees beside the monster.

His head was well-nigh as high as hers, then; if he attacked there could be no dream of escape for her. Or she might drag herself away from the tearing teeth—a disfigured horror forever. Not one iota of all these terrors missed her mind. Yet—she laid her hand on the bandage across the shoulder of Black Bart.

His head whirled. With those ears flattened, with that long, lean neck, it was like the head of a striking snake. Her sleeve was rolled up to the elbow, and over the bare skin the teeth of the wolf-dog were set. The snarl had grown so deep and hideous that the tremor of it fairly shook her, and she saw that the jaws of the beast slavered with hunger. She knew—a thousand things about Black Bart, and among the rest he had tasted human blood. And there is a legend which says that once a wild beast has tasted the blood of man he will taste it a second time before he dies. She thought of that—she dared not turn her head lest she should encounter the hellfire of Bart's eyes. Yet she had passed all ordinary fear. She had reached that exquisite frenzy of terror when it becomes one with courage. The very arm over which the wolf's teeth were set moved—raised—and with both hands she untied the knot of the bandage.

The snarling rose to a pitch of maniacal rage; the teeth compressed—if they broke the skin it was the end; the first taste of blood would be enough!—and drew away her arm. If she had started then, all the devil in the creature would be loosed, for her terror taught her that. And by some mysterious power that entered her at that moment she was able to turn her head slowly and look deep into those terrible eyes.

Her arm was released.

But Black Bart crouched and the snakelike head lowered; he was quivering

throughout that steel-muscled body to throw himself at her throat. The finger was on the hair-trigger; it needed a pressure not greater than a bodiless thought. And still she looked into the eyes of the wolf-dog; and her terror had made her strangely light of body and dizzy of mind. Then the change came, suddenly. The yellow green changed, swirled in the eyes of Black Bart; the eyes themselves wavered, and at last looked away; the snarl dropped to a sullen growl. And Black Bart lay down again.

His head was still turned toward her, to be sure. And the teeth were still bared, as with rapid, deft fingers she undid the bandage; and from instant to instant, as the bandage in spite of her care pressed against the wound the beast shivered and wicked glances flashed up at her face. The safe-blower who finds his "soup" cooling and dares not set it down felt as Kate felt then.

She never knew what kept her hands steady, but steady they were. The cloth was removed, and now she could see the red, angry wound, with the hair shaven away to a little distance on every side. She dipped her cloth into the antiseptic; it stung her fingers! She touched the cloth lightly against the wound; and to her astonishment the wolf-dog relaxed every muscle and let his head fall to the ground; also the growl died into a soft whine, and this in turn ended.

She had conquered! Aye, when the wound was thoroughly cleansed and when she started to wind the bandage again, she had even the courage to touch Black Bart's body and make him rise up so that she could pass the cloth freely. At her touch he shuddered, to be sure, as a man might shudder at the touch of an unclean thing, but there was no snarl, and the teeth were not bared.

As she tied the knot which secured the bandage in its place she was aware that the eyes of Black Bart, no longer yellow-green, watched her; and she felt some vague movement of the wonder that was passing through the brute mind. Then the head of the wolf-dog jerked up; he was staring at something in the distance, and there was nothing under heaven that Black Bart would raise his head to look at in this manner except one thing. The fingers of Kate grew stiff and trembled. Slowly, in a panic, she finished the knot, and then she was aware of some one who had approached without sound and now stood behind her. She looked up at length before she rose to her feet.

Thankfulness welled up warm in her heart to find her voice steady and commonplace when she said:

"The wound is much better. Bart will be well in a very few days now."

Whistling Dan did not answer, and his wondering eyes glanced past her own. She saw that he was staring at a double row of white indentations on her forearm, where the teeth of Black Bart had set. He knew those marks, and she knew he knew. Strength was leaving her, and weakness went through her—water where blood should have been. She dared not stay. In another moment she would be hopelessly in the grip of hysteria.

So she rose and passed Dan without a word, and went slowly toward the house. She tried to hurry, indeed, but her legs would not quicken their pace. Yet at length she had reached shelter; and no sooner was she past the door of the house than her knees buckled; she had to steady herself with both hands as she dragged herself up the stairs to her room. There, from the window, she looked down and saw Whistling Dan standing as she had left him, staring blankly at the wolf-dog.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE CONQUEST.

THERE was no star-storming confidence in Kate Cumberland after that first victory. Rather she felt as the general who deploys his skirmishers and drives in the outposts of an enemy. The advantage is his, but it has really only served to give him some intimation of the strength of the enemy. At the supper-table this night she found Whistling Dan watching her—not openly, for she could never catch his eye—but subtly, secretly, she knew that he was measuring her, studying

her; whether in hostility, amity, or mere wonder, she could not tell. Finally a vast uneasiness overtook her and she turned to the doctor for relief. Dr. Byrne held a singular position in the attention of Kate. Since the night of the fire and her open talk with him, the doctor knew "everything," and women are troubled in the presence of a man who knows the details of the past.

The shield behind which they hide in social intercourse is a touch of mystery—or at least a hope of mystery. The doctor, however, was not like other men; he was more like a precocious child and she comforted herself in his obvious talent for silence. If he had been alert, strong, self-confident, she might have hated him because he knew so much about her; but when she noted the pale, thoughtful face, the vast forehead outbalancing the other features, and the wistful, uncertain eyes, she felt nothing stronger toward him than pity.

It is good for a woman to have something which she may pity, a child, an aged parent, or a house-dog. It provides, in a way, the background against which she acts; so Kate, when in doubt, turned to the doctor, as on this night. There was a certain cruelty in it, for when she smiled at him the poor doctor became crimson, and when she talked to him his answers stumbled on his tongue; and when she was silent and merely looked at him he was unable to manage knife and fork and would sit crumbling bread and looking frightened. Then he was apt to draw out his glasses and make a move to place them on his nose, but he always caught and checked himself in time —which added to his embarrassment.

These small maneuvers had not lasted long before the girl became aware that the silent attention of Whistling Dan had passed from her to the doctor—and held steadily upon him. She did not go so far as to call it jealousy, but certainly it was a grave and serious consideration that measured the doctor up and down and back again; and it left her free to examine the two men in contrast. For the first time it struck her that they were much alike in many ways. Physically, for instance, there was the same slenderness, the same delicacy with which the details were finished; the same fragile hands, for instance. The distinction lay in a suggestion of strength and inexhaustible reserve of energy which Dan Barry possessed. The distinction lay still more in their faces. That of Byrne was worn and pallid from the long quest and struggle for truth; the body was feeble; the eyes were uncertain; but within there was a powerful machine which could work infallibly from the small to the large and the large to the small. With Whistling Dan there was no suggestion at all of mental care. She could not imagine him worrying over a problem. His knowledge was not even communicable by words; it was more impalpable than the instinct of a woman; and there was about him the wisdom and the coldness of Black Bart himself.

The supper ended too soon for Kate. She had been rallying Byrne, and as soon as he could graciously leave, the poor fellow rose with a crimson face and left the room; and behind him, sauntering apparently in the most casual manner, went Whistling Dan. As for Kate, she could not put all the inferences together—she dared not; but when she lay in her bed that night it was a long time before she could sleep, for there was a voice inside her, singing.

She chose her time the next day. Dan alternated between Black Bart and old Joe Cumberland during most of the day, and no sooner had he left the wolf-dog in the morning than she went out to Bart.

As always, Black Bart lay with his head flattened against the sand, dreaming in the sun, and not an eyelid quivered when she approached, yet she understood perfectly that the animal knew every move she made. She would have attempted to dress the wound again, but the memory of the ordeal of yesterday was too terrible. She might break down in the midst of her effort, and the first sign of weakness, she knew, was the only spur which Black Bart needed. So she went, instead, to the chair where Dan often sat for hours near the dog, and there she took her place, folded her hands on her lap, and waited. She had no particular plan in mind, more than that she hoped to familiarize the great brute with

the sight of her. Once he had known her well enough, but now he had forgotten all that passed before as completely, no doubt, as Whistling Dan himself had forgotten.

While she sat there, musing, she remembered a scene that had occurred not many a month before. She had been out walking one fall day, and had gone from the house down past the corrals where a number of cattle newly driven in from the range were penned. They were to be driven off for shipment the next day. A bellowing caught her ear from one of the enclosures and she saw two bulls standing horn to horn, their heads lowered, and their puffing and snorting breaths knocking up the dust while they pawed the sand back in clouds against their flanks. While she watched, they rushed together, bellowing, and for a moment they swayed back and forth. It was an unequal battle, however, for one of the animals was a hardened veteran, scarred from many a battle on the range, while the other was a young three-year-old with a body not half so strong as his heart. For a short time he sustained the weight of the larger bull, but eventually his knees buckled, and then dropped heavily against the earth. At that the older bull drew back a little and charged again. This time he avoided the long horns of his rival and made the unprotected flank of the animal his target. If he had charged squarely the horns would have been buried to the head; but striking at an angle only one of them touched the target and delivered a long, ripping blow. With the blood streaming down his side, the wounded bull made off into a group of cows, and when the victor pursued him closely, he at length turned tail and leaped the low fence—for the corral was a new one, hastily built for the occasion. The conqueror raised his head inside the fence, and bellowed his triumph, and outside the fence the other commenced pawing up the sand again, switching his tail across his bleeding side, and turning his little red eyes here and there. They fixed, at length, upon Kate Cumberland, and she remembered with a start of horror that she was wearing a bright red blouse. The next instant the bull was charging. She turned in a hopeless flight. Safety was hundreds of yards away in the house; the skirts tangled about her legs; and behind her the dull impacts of the bull's hoofs swept closer and closer. Then she heard a snarl in front, a deep-throated, murderous snarl, and she saw Black Bart racing toward her. He whizzed by her like a black thunderbolt; there was a roar and bellow behind her, and at the same time she stumbled over a fence-board and fell upon her knees. But when she cast a glance of terror behind her she saw the bull lying on its side with lolling tongue and glazing eyes and the fangs of Black Bart were buried in its throat.

When she reached this point in her musings her glance naturally turned toward the wolf-dog, and she started violently when she saw that Bart was slinking toward her, trailing the helpless leg. The moment he felt her eyes upon him, Bart dropped down, motionless, with a wicked baring of his teeth; his eyes closed, and he seemed, as usual, dreaming in the sun.

Was the brute stalking her? It was worse, in a way, than the ordeal of the day before, this stealthy, noiseless approach. And in her panic she first thought of springing from her chair and reaching a distance which the chain would keep him from following. Yet it was very strange. Black Bart in his wildest days after Dan brought him to the ranch had never been prone to wantonly attack human beings. Infringe upon his right, come suddenly upon him, and then, indeed, there was a danger to all saving his master. But this daylight stalking was stranger than words could tell.

She forced her eyes to look straight ahead and sat with a beating heart, waiting. Then, by slow degrees, she let her glance travel cautiously back toward Bart without turning her head. There was no doubt about it! The great wolf-dog was slinking toward her on his belly, still trailing the wounded fore-leg. There was something snakelike in that slow approach, so silent and so gradual.

And yet she waited, moving neither hand nor foot. A sort of nightmare paralysis held her. Yet it was not all pure terror. There was an incredible excitement as well—her will against the will of the dumb brute—which would conquer?

She heard a faint rustling of the sand beside her and could hardly keep from turning her head again. But she succeeded. Waves of coldness broke on her mind; her whole body would have shuddered had not fear chilled her into motionlessness. All reason told her that it was madness to sit there with the stealthy horror sliding closer; even now it might be too late. If she rose the shaggy form might spring from the ground at her. Perhaps the wolf had treasured up the pain from the day before and now.

A black form did, indeed, rise from the ground, but slowly. And standing on three legs, Bart stood a moment and stared in the face of the girl. The fear rushed out of her heart; and her face flushed hotly with relief. There was no enmity in the steady stare of the wolf-dog. She could feel that even though she did not look. Something that Whistling Dan had said long before came to her: "Even a hoss and a dog, Kate, can get terrible lonesome."

Black Bart moved until he faced her directly. His ears were pricking in eagerness; she heard a snarl, but so low and muffled that there was hardly a threat in it; could it be a plea for attention? She would not look down to the sharp eyes, until a weight fell on her knees—it was the long, scarred head of the wolf! The joy that swelled in her was so great that it pained her like a grief.

She stretched out her hand, slowly, slowly toward that head. And Black Bart shrank and quivered, and his lips writhed back from the long, deadly teeth, and his snarl grew to a harsher, hoarser threat; still he did not remove his head, and he allowed the hand to touch him between the eyes and stroke the fur back to between the ears. Only one other hand had ever touched that formidable head in such a manner! The teeth no longer showed; the keen, suspicious eyes grew dim with pleasure; the snarl sank to a murmur and then died out.

"Bart!" commanded the girl sharply.

The head jerked up, but the questing eyes did not look at her. He glanced over his shoulder to find the danger that had made her voice so hard. And she yearned to take the fierce head in her arms; there were tears she could have wept over it. He was snarling again, prepared already to battle, and for her sake.

"Bart!" she repeated, more gently. "Lie down!"

He turned his head slowly back to her and looked with the unspeakable wistfulness of the dumb brutes into her eyes. But there was only one voice in which Bart could speak, and that was the harsh, rattling snarl which would have made a mountain-lion check itself mid-leap and slink back to its lair. In such a voice he answered Kate, and then sank down gradually. And he lay still.

So simply, and yet so mysteriously, she was admitted to the partnership. But though one member of that swift, grim trio had accepted her, did it mean that the other two would take her in?

A weight sank on her feet and when she looked down she saw that Black Bart had lowered his head upon them, and so he lay there with his eyes closed, dreaming in the sun.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE TRAIL.

NATURE took a strong hand in the healing of Black Bart. The wound closed with miraculous speed. Three days after he had laid his head on the feet of Kate the dog was hobbling about on three legs and tugging now and again at the restraining chain; and the day after that the bandages were taken off and Whistling Dan decided that Bart might run loose. It was a brief ceremony, but a vital one.

Dr. Byrne went out with Barry to watch the loosing of the dog; from the window of Joe Cumberland's room he and Kate observed what passed. There was little hesitancy in Black Bart. He merely paused to sniff the foot of Randall Byrne, snarl, and then trotted with a limp toward the corrals.

Here, in a small enclosure with rails much higher than the other corrals, stood Satan, and Black Bart made straight for the stallion. He was seen from afar, and the black

horse stood waiting, his head thrown high in the air, his ears pricking forward, the tail flaunting, a picture of expectancy. So under the lower rail Bart slunk and stood under the head of Satan, growling terribly. Of this display of anger the stallion took not the slightest notice, but lowered his beautiful head until his velvet nose touched the cold muzzle of Bart. There was something ludicrous about the greeting—it was such an odd shade close to the human. It was as brief as it was strange, for Black Bart at once whirled and trotted away toward the barns.

By the time Byrne and Barry caught up with him, the dog was before the heaps of ashes which marked the site of the burned barn. Among these heaps he picked his way, sniffing hastily here and there. In the very center of the place he sat down suddenly on his haunches, pointed his nose aloft, and wailed with tremendous dreariness.

"Now," murmured the doctor to Dan, "that strikes me as a singular manifestation of intelligence in an animal—he has found the site of the very barn where he was hurt—upon my word! Even fire doesn't affect his memory!"

Here he observed that the face of Whistling Dan had grown grim. He ran to Bart and crouched beside him, muttering; and Byrne heard.

"That's about where you was lyin'," said Dan, "and you smell your own blood on the ground. Keep tryin', Bart. They's something else to find around here."

The wolf-dog looked his master full in the face with pricking ears, whined and then started off sniffling busily at the heaps of ashes.

"The shooting of the dog is quite a mystery," said Byrne, by way of conversation. "Do you suppose that one of the men from the bunk-house could have shot him?"

But Dan seemed no longer aware of the doctor's presence. He slipped here and there with the dog among the ash-heaps, pausing when Bart paused, talking to the brute continually. Sometimes he pointed out to Bart things which the doctor did not perceive, and Bart whined with a terrible, slavering, blood-eagerness.

The dog suddenly left the ash-heaps and now darted in swiftly entangled lines here and there among the barns. Dan Barry stood thoughtfully still, but now and then he called a word of encouragement.

And Black Bart stayed with his work. Now he struck out a wide circle, running always with his nose close to the ground. Again he doubled back sharply to the barn-site, and began again in a new direction. He ran swiftly, sometimes putting his injured leg to the ground with hardly a limp, and again drawing it up and running on three feet. In a moment he passed out of sight behind a slight rise of ground to the left of the ash-heaps. He did not reappear. Instead, a long, shrill wail came wavering toward the doctor and Dan Barry. It raised the hair on the head of the doctor and sent a chill through his veins; but it sent Whistling Dan racing toward the place behind which Black Bart had disappeared. The doctor hurried after as fast as he might and came upon the wolf-dog making small, swift circles, his nose to the ground, and then crossing to and fro out of the circles. And the face of the master was black while he watched. He ran again to Bart and began talking swiftly.

"D'you see?" he asked, pointing. "From behind this here hill you could get a pretty good sight of the barn—and you wouldn't be seen, hardly, from the barn. Some one must have waited here. Look about, Bart, you'll be finding a pile of signs around here. It means that them that done the shootin' and the firin' of the barn stood right here behind this hilltop and watched the barn burn—and was hopin' that Satan and you wouldn't ever come out alive. That's the story."

He dropped to his knees and caught Bart as the big dog ran by.

"Find 'em, Bart!" he whispered. "Find 'em!"

And he struck sharply on the scar where the bullet had plowed its way into Bart's flesh.

The answer of Bart was a yelp too sharp and too highly pitched to have come from the throat of any mere dog. Once more he darted out and ran here and there, and Byrne heard the beast moaning as it ran.

Then Bart ceased circling and cut down the slope away from the hill at a sharp trot.

A cry of inarticulate joy burst from Dan, and then: "You've found it! You have it!" and the master ran after the dog. He followed the latter only for a short distance down the slope and then stood still and whistled. He had to repeat the call before the dog turned and ran back to his master, where he whined eagerly about the man's feet. There was something horrible about it; it was as if the dumb beast were asking the life of a man. The doctor turned back and walked thoughtfully to the house.

At the door he was met by Kate and a burst of eager questions, and he told, simply, all that he had seen.

"You'll get the details from Mr. Barry," he concluded.

"I know the details," answered the girl. "He's found the trail and he knows where it points now. And he'll want to be following it before many hours have passed. Dr. Byrne, I need you now—terribly. You must convince Dan that if he leaves us it will be a positive danger to dad. Can you do that?"

"At least," said the doctor, "there will be little deception in that. I will do what I can to persuade him to stay."

"Then," she said hurriedly, "sit here, and I shall sit here. We'll meet Dan together when he comes in."

They had hardly taken their places when Barry entered, the wolf at his heels; at the door he paused to flash a glance at them and then crossed the room. On the farther side he stopped again.

"I might be tellin' you," he said in his soft voice, "that now's Bart's well I got to be travelin' again. I start in the morning."

The pleading eyes of Kate raised Byrne to his feet.

"My dear Mr. Barry!" he called. The other turned again and waited. "Do you mean that you will leave us while Mr. Cumberland is in this critical condition?"

A shadow crossed the face of Barry. "I'd stay if I could," he answered. "But it ain't possible!"

"What takes you away is your affair, sir," said the doctor. "My concern is Mr. Cumberland. He is in a very precarious condition. The slightest nerve shock may have—fatal—results."

Barry sighed. "Seemed to me that he was buckin' up considerable. Don't look so thin, doc."

"His body may be well enough," said the doctor calmly, "but his nerves are wrecked. I am afraid to prophesy the consequences if you leave him."

It was apparent that a great struggle was going on in Barry. He answered at length: "How long would I have to stay? One rain could wipe out all the sign and make me like a blind man in the desert. Doc, how long would I have to stay?"

"A few days," answered Byrne, "may work wonders with him."

The other hesitated. "I'll go up and talk with him," he said, "and what he wants I'll do."

CHAPTER XXIX.

TALK.

THE hours dragged on slowly for Kate and the doctor. If her father could hold Dan it was everything to the girl, and if Barry left at once there might be some hope in the heart of Randall Byrne. Before evening a not unwelcome diversion broke the suspense.

It was the arrival of no less a person than Marshal Jeff Calkins. His shoulders were humped and his short legs bowed from continual riding, and his head was slung far forward on a gaunt neck; so that when he turned his head from one to another in speaking it was with a peculiar pendulum motion. The marshal had a reputation which was strong over three hundred miles and more of a mountain-desert. This was strange, for the marshal was a very talkative man, and talkative men are not popular on the desert; but it had been discovered that on occasion his six-gun could speak as rapidly and much more accurately than his tongue. So Marshal Calkins waxed in favor.

He set the household at ease upon his arrival by announcing that "they hadn't

nothin' for him there." All he wanted was a place to bunk in, some chow, and a feed for the horse. His trail led past the Cumberland ranch many and many a dreary mile.

The marshal had early in life discovered that the best way to get along with any man was to meet him on his own ground.

"How's your patient, doc?" inquired the marshal. "How's old Joe Cumberland? I remember when me and Joe used to trot about the range together. What's the matter with him, anyway?"

"His nerves are a bit shaken about," responded the doctor. "To which I might add that there is superimposed an arterial condition—"

"Cut it short, doc," cried the marshal good naturedly. "I ain't got a dictionary handy. Nerves bad, eh? Well, I don't wonder about that. The old man's had enough trouble lately to make anybody nervous. I wouldn't like to go through it myself. No, sir! What with that Dan Barry—ain't steppin' on any corns, Kate, am I?"

He smiled vaguely, but the marshal accepted the smile as a strong dissent.

"They was a time not so long ago when folks said that you was kind of sweet on Dan. Glad to hear they ain't nothin' in it. 'S a matter of fact—"

But here Kate interrupted with a raised hand. She said: "I think that was the supper gong. Yes, there it is. We'll go in now, if you wish."

"They's only one sound in the world that's better to me than a dinner gong," said the profuse marshal as they seated themselves around the big dining-table, "and that was the sound of my wife's voice when she said 'I will.' But comin' back to you and Dan, Kate—we was all of us sayin' that you and Dan kind of had an eye for each other. I s'pose we was all wrong. You see, that was back in the days before Dan busted loose. When he was about the range most usually he was the quietest man I ever sat opposite to, barrin' one—and that was a feller that went West with a bum heart at the chuck-table! Ha, ha, ha!" The marshal's laughter boomed through the big room as he recalled this delightful anecdote. He went on: "But after that Jim Silent play we all changed our minds some. D'you know, doc, I was in Elkhead the night that Dan got our Lee Haines?"

"I've never heard of the episode," murmured the doctor.

"You ain't? You sure ain't lived in these parts long! Which you wouldn't think one man could ride into a whole town, go to the jail, knock out two guards that was proved men, take the keys, unlock the irons off'n the man he wanted, saddle a hoss, and ride through a whole town—full of folks that was shootin' at him. Now, would you think that was possible?"

"Certainly not."

"And it *ain't* possible, I'm here to state. But they was something different about Dan Barry. D'you ever notice it, Kate?"

She was far past speech.

"No, I guess you never would have noticed it. You was livin' too close to him all the time to see how different he was from other fellers. Anyway, he done it. They say he got plugged while he was ridin' through the lines and he bled all the way home, and he got there unconscious. Is that right, Kate?"

He waited an instant and then accepted the silence as an affirmative.

"Funny thing about that, too. The place where he come to was Buck Daniels's house. Well, Buck was one of Jim Silent's men, and they say Buck had tried to plug Dan before that. But Dan let him go that time, and when Buck seen Dan ride in all covered with blood he remembered that favor and he kept Dan safe from Jim Silent and safe from the law until Dan was well. I seen Buck this morning over to Rafferty's place, and—"

Here the marshal noted a singular look in the eyes of Kate Cumberland, a look so singular that he turned in his chair to follow it. He saw Dan Barry in the act of closing the door behind him, and Marshal Calkins turned a deep and violent red, varied instantly by a blotchy yellow which in turn faded to something as near white as his tan permitted.

"Dan Barry!" gasped the marshal, rising, and he reached automatically toward his hip before he remembered that he had

laid his belt and guns aside before he entered the dining-room, as etiquette is in the mountain-desert. For it is held that shooting at the table disturbs the appetite.

"Good even'," said Dan quietly. "Was it Buck Daniels that you seen at Rafferty's place, Marshal Calkins?"

"Him," nodded the marshal hoarsely. "Yep, Buck Daniels."

And then he sank into his chair, silent for the first time. His eyes followed Barry as though hypnotized.

"I'm kind of glad to know where I can find him," said Barry, and took his place at the table.

The silence continued for a while, with all eyes focused on the newcomer. It was the doctor who had to speak first.

"You've talked things over with Mr. Cumberland?" he asked.

"We had a long talk," nodded Dan. "You was wrong about him, doc. He thinks he can do without me."

"What?" cried Kate.

"He thinks he can do without me," said Dan Barry. "We talked it all over."

The silence fell again. Kate Cumberland was staring blankly down at her plate, seeing nothing; and Byrne looked straight before him and felt the pulse drumming in his throat. His chance, then, was to come. By this time the marshal had recovered his breath.

He said to Dan: "Seems like you been away some time, Dan. Where you been hangin' out?"

"I been ridin' about," answered Dan vaguely.

"Well," chuckled the marshal, "I'm glad they ain't no more Jim Silents about these parts—not while you're here and while I'm here. You kept things kind of busy for Glasgow, Dan."

He turned to Kate, who had pushed back her chair. "What's the matter, Kate?" he boomed. "You ain't lookin' any too tiptop. Sick?"

"I may be back in a moment," said the girl, "but don't delay supper for me."

She went out of the room with a step poised well enough, but the moment the door closed behind her she fairly staggered to the nearest chair and sank into it, her head fallen back, her eyes dim, and all the strength gone from her body and her will. Several minutes passed before she roused herself, and then it was to drag herself slowly up the stairs to the door of her father's room. She opened it without knocking, and then closed it and stood with her back against it, in the shadow.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE VOICE OF BLACK BART.

HER father lay propped high with pillows, among which his head lolled back. The only light in the room was near the bed and it cast a glow upon the face of Joe Cumberland and on the white linen. All the rest of the room swam in darkness. The chairs were blotches, indistinct, uncertain; even the foot of the bed trailed off to nothingness. The bedclothes never stirred, the old man lay in the arms of a deadly languor so that there was a kinship of more than blood between him and Kate at this moment. She stepped to the side of the bed and stood staring down at him.

So cold was that settled gaze that her father stirred at length, shivered, and without opening his eyes, fumbled at the bedspread and drew it a little more closely about his shoulders. Even that did not give him rest; and presently the wrinkled eyelids opened and he looked up at his daughter. A film of weariness heavier than sleep at first obscured his sight, but this in turn cleared away; he frowned a little to clear his vision, and then wagged his head slowly from side to side.

"Kate," he said feebly, "I done my best. It simply wasn't good enough."

She answered in a voice as low as his, but steadier: "What could have happened? Dad, what happened to make you give up every hold on Dan? What was it? You were the last power that could keep him here. You knew it. Why did you tell him he could go?"

The monotone was more deadly than any emphasis of a raised word.

"If you'd been here," pleaded Joe Cumberland, "you'd have done what I done.

I couldn't help it. There he sat on the foot of the bed after he told me that he had something to do away from the ranch and that he wanted to go now that Black Bart was well enough to travel in short spells. He asked me if I still needed him."

"And you told him no?" she cried. "Oh, dad, you know it means everything to me—but you told him no?"

He raised a shaking hand to ward off the outburst and stop it. "Not at first, honey. Gimme a chance to talk, Kate. At first I told him that I needed him—and God knows that I *do* need him. I dunna why—not even Doc Byrne knows what there is about Dan that helps me. I told Dan all them things. And he didn't say nothin', but jest sat still on the foot of the bed and looked at me.

"It ain't easy to bear his eyes, Kate. I lay here and tried at first to smile at him and talk about other things—but it ain't easy to bear his eyes. You take a dog, Kate. It ain't supposed to be able to look you in the eye for long; but s'pose you met up with a dog that could. It 'd make you feel sort of queer inside. Which I felt that way while Dan was lookin' at me. Not that he was threatenin' me. No, it wasn't that. He was only thoughtful, but I kept gettin' more nervous and more fidgety. I felt after a while like I couldn't stand it. I had to crawl out of bed and begin walkin' up and down till I got quieter. But I seen that wouldn't do.

"Then I begun to think. I thought of near everything in a little while. I thought of what would happen s'pose Dan should stay here. Maybe you and him would get to like each other again. Maybe you'd get married. Then what would happen?

"I thought of the wild geese flyin' north in the spring o' the year and the wild geese flyin' south in the fall o' the year. And I thought of Dan with his heart followin' the wild geese—God knows why!—and I seen a picture of him standin' and watchin' them, with you near by and not able to get one look out of him. I seen that, and it made my blood chilly, like the air on a frosty night.

"Kate, they's something like the power of prophecy that comes to a dyin' man!"

"Dad!" she cried. "What are you saying?"

She slipped to her knees beside the bed and drew his cold hands towards her, but Joe Cumberland shook his head and mildly drew one hand away. He raised it, with extended forefinger—a sign of infinite warning; and with the glow of the lamp full upon his face, the eyes were pits of shadow with a stirring orb of fire in the depths.

"No, I ain't dead now," he said, "but I ain't far away from it. Maybe days, maybe weeks, maybe whole months. But I've passed the top of the hill, and I know I'm ridin' down the slope. Pretty soon I'll finish the trail. But what little time I've got left is worth more'n everything that went before. I can see my life behind me and the things before like a cold mornin' light was over it all—you know before the sun begins to beat up the waves of heat and the mist gets tanglin' in front of your eyes? You know when you can look right across a thirty-mile valley and name the trees, a'most the other side? That's the way I can see now. They ain't no feelin' about it. My body is all plumb paralyzed. I jest see and know—that's all.

"And what I see of you and Dan—if you ever marry—is plain—hell! Love ain't the only thing they is between a man and a woman. They's something else. I dunno what it is. But it's a sort of a common purpose; it's havin' both pairs of feet steppin' out on the same path. That's what it is. But your trail would go one way and Dan's would go another, and pretty soon your love wouldn't be nothin' but a big wind blowin' between two mountains—and all it would do would be to freeze up the blood in your hearts."

"I seen all that while Dan was sittin' at the foot of the bed. Not that I don't want him here. When I see him I see the world the way it was when I was under thirty. When there wasn't nothin' I wouldn't try once, and all I wanted was a gun and a hoss and a song to keep me from tradin' with kings. No, it ain't goin' to be easy for me when Dan goes away. But what's my tag-end of life compared with yours? You got to be given a chance; you got to be

kept away from Dan. That's why I told him, finally, that I thought I could get along without him."

"Whether or not you save me," she answered, "you signed a death warrant for at least two men when you told him that."

"Two men? They's only one he's after—and Buck Daniels has had a long start. He can't be caught!"

"That Marshal Calkins is here to-night. He saw Buck at Rafferty's, and he talked about it in the hearing of Dan at the table. I watched Dan's face. You may read the past and see the future, dad, but I know Dan's face. I can read it as the sailor reads the sea. Before to-morrow night Buck Daniels will be dead; and Dan's hands will be red."

She dropped her head against the bedclothes and clasped her fingers over the bright hair.

When she could speak again she raised her head and went on in the same swift, low monotone:

"And besides, Black Bart has found the trail of the man who fired the barn and shot him. And the body of Buck won't be cold before Dan will be on the heels of the other man. Oh, dad, two lives lay in the hollow of your hand. You could have saved them by merely asking Dan to stay with you; but you've thrown them away."

"Buck Daniels!" repeated the old man, the horror of the thing dawning on him only slowly. "Why didn't he get farther away? Why didn't he ride night and day after he left us? He's got to be warned that Dan is coming!"

"I've thought of that. I'm going into my room now to write a note and send it to Buck by one of our men. But at the most he'll have less than a day's start—and what is a day to Satan and Dan Barry?"

"I thought it was for the best," muttered old Joe. "I couldn't see how it was wrong. But I can send for Dan and tell him that I've changed my mind." He broke off in a groan. "No, that wouldn't be no good. He's set his mind on going by this time, and nothing can keep him back. But—Kate, maybe I can delay him. Has he gone up to his room yet?"

"He's in there now. Talk softly or he'll hear us. He's walking up and down now."

"Aye, aye, aye!" nodded old Joe, his eyes widening with horror. "And his footfall is like the padding of a big cat. I could tell it out of a thousand steps. And I know what's going on inside his mind!"

"Yes, yes; he's thinking of the blow Buck Daniels struck him; he's thinking of the man who shot down Bart. Good save them both!"

"Listen!" whispered the cattleman. "He's raised the window. I heard the rattle of the weights. He's standing there in front of the window, letting the wind of the night blow in his face!"

The wind from the window, indeed, struck against the door communicating with Joe Cumberland's room, and shook it as if a hand were rattling at the knob.

The girl began to speak again, as swiftly as before, her voice the barely audible rushing of a whisper: "The law will trail him, but I won't give him up. Dad, I'm going to fight once more to keep him here—and if I fail, I'll follow him around the world." Such words should have come loudly, ringing. Spoken so softly, they gave a terrible effect; like the ravings of delirium, or the monotone of insanity. And with the white light against her face she was more awe-inspiring than beautiful. "He loved me once; and the fire must still be in him; such fire *can't* go out, and I'll fan it back to life, and then if it burns me—if it burns us both—the fire itself cannot be more torture than to live on like this!"

"Hush, lass!" murmured her father. "Listen to what's coming!"

It was a moan, very low-pitched, and then rising slowly, and gaining in volume, rising up the scale with a dizzy speed, till it burst and rang through the house—the long-drawn wail of a wolf when it hunts on a fresh trail.

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.

Love and Money

by Courtenay Savage

BEN MILLER was of a careful, conventional type. That was why, when he had felt the rather sharp pain in the vicinity of his heart for the third time in two days, he decided that it was best to see a physician—and being a chap who did nothing by halves, eight-thirty the next morning found him sitting in a great leather chair opposite Dr. Tibbits, a wizened old man who was counted as being a heart specialist of renown.

"H'm," the old doctor wheezed. "H'm—well—you've quite a condition there. You say that you've only had the pain for two days?" There was something uncannily foreboding in the medical man's manner.

"That's all I remember—" Ben confessed rather weakly.

"Odd—but then perhaps you have not noticed the thing—perhaps it has been so constant that you did not realize it was pain?" and the doctor beamed.

Ben was not at all relieved by the smile.

"You—you don't think my condition is very bad—do you?" he asked anxiously.

"Bad? Well—you're fortunate not to suffer."

There was a long pause while the young man fidgeted in his chair and the physician studied the end of the stethescope he had just used.

"To be truthful with you—and I must tell you this even if it hurts—I doubt very much that you'll live a month—certainly not more."

Ben was thirty-three, and death had always seemed far away. Now, he grabbed the arms of his chair and with a great intake of breath managed to fight back the lump that rose in his throat. He was frightened—faint, ready to die right on the spot without waiting a month. He was tall, slender, good looking, holding a good job—and yet—

"But—but—can't something be done?" he gulped.

"I'm afraid not. Your condition is very odd. You have no pain—you'll probably go right on, and then—die."

"But—if I had medicine—if I went to bed—if—"

"I'm sorry, young man, none of these things would help. It isn't really necessary for you to come here again. Just get your affairs in order." Then, after a slight pause, Dr. Tibbits rose, placed the stethescope on his desk, and made a note on his pad. "The fee is twenty-five dollars."

Ben Miller paid it from a well-filled wallet, put on his hat and in a pace quite befitting a man who has received his death sentence, went slowly out through the reception room to the street.

One month to live!

It was late spring. The sun was bright, the air tinged with the promise of summer. A soft wind stirred the leaves of the flower boxes that lined the doctor's windows. The warm days Miller loved were coming, and when they waned, he would not be on earth. Mechanically, he looked at his watch, saw that it was nine, and calculated that he would be late at the office—and then, suddenly realizing that neither business, nor anything else, mattered in his life, he walked slowly up-town to the very substantial boarding-house that he had called home for the past five years.

At the top of the stairs, just as he reached his room, he felt the pain in his heart again. Perhaps he would die before the month was out. He flung open the door, and without waiting to see that it was really closed behind him, he hurled himself face downward on the bed, and lay racked with an agony of mind that was so deep that it prevented all thought.

An hour passed. He felt no pain now, but there was a dull ache in the back of his brain. He got up, bathed his face and hands, and throwing open the window, stood in the morning sunshine. On the street below the world was going on just as usual, but he was going to die.

He crossed the room, gazed at himself in the glass, and was thankful that he looked very healthy—that is, save for a slight paleness. He noted that his collar was crumpled, and changed to a fresh one, pleased that he could think of such a trifle in the face of death.

"Well," he addressed his image in the mirror, "you might just as well call up the office—or, better still, you can go down. You ought to consider yourself lucky that you don't have to stay in bed and suffer for a month."

The image in the glass agreed with him perfectly, even to the correct angle of his hat. And, as he ran down the stairs from force of habit, Ben thought that if it were any one but the famous heart specialist who had told him he was ill he would not have believed him.

The next two or three days passed slowly, hours of mingled horror and unbelief, horror that he was going, unbelief that it could be true. And there came to him gradually, the advice of the savant—that he put his affairs in order.

There was going to be little difficulty with this. Ben Miller was alone in the world—absolutely so. He had a few friends, also a few thousand dollars. He began to think of how he would leave the money.

This money was the accumulation of ten years of strict saving—plus a couple of thousand dollars' worth of insurance that had come to him at his father's death. Ben had always feared poverty, and each week, when the bills were paid, he made his deposit in a savings bank. That deposit had often meant going without things he wanted—not food or clothing, for Ben lived and dressed fairly well—but like many a young man, he often lusted for the luxury of the city. There were many desires that he had never fulfilled—riding around town in a taxi, for instance, best seats at the play, or having a "girl." Ben had always scrupulously avoided the ladies, for he knew that if one wished to make a member of the fair sex very happy, it was necessary to spend money—not necessarily much money—but some.

But more than for anything else, Ben Miller had a burning desire that urged him to play the Wall Street stock market.

This urge had reached him because for seven years, the length of time he had been employed by the commission house of Bates, Franklin & Bates—he had watched Mr. George Bates do this very thing. From his chair at the small mahogany desk, which he occupied as confidential clerk to Mr. Bates, he had been able to hear much that gave him knowledge of the market, especially of the curb, where it was possible, so Mr. George Bates said, to beat the crowd at their own game.

More than once in the past two years Ben's fingers had itched to draw money from its safe three per cent bank, and fling it into the maw of Wall Street, manipulate it so that he would find himself richer by possibly hundreds or thousands of dollars. Why, it was only last week that he had heard Mr. Bates receive an inside tip

that Creole Oils, Inc., was going to be bought over by one of the bigger oil companies—why, only yesterday he had been dreaming of how much money he might make if he invested all his savings—and *now*—he could invest, and care little if he lost or won.

Yes, Ben decided, looking back quite calmly over the years that he had lived—he was going away from the sunshine of the world without two things he craved—one was love, the other was money.

Slowly, for Ben's was a very conventional mind, it came to him that he need lack little—if anything—that would to his notion, round out life. He did not imagine that he could fall in love, really in love, in less than a month, but at least he could take a girl out to dinner and the theater, and, as far as money was concerned—well, why not play that tip on Creole Oils? If it proved worthless, as many a tip that Mr. Bates received, had proved—well, he, at least, would not have to start saving all over again.

The next noontime he went to the bank and drew out all of his money? No, not all, for habit is a creature not to be dismissed at once. He left a balance of one thousand dollars lest he might not die as soon as the doctor had predicted.

Then he took a taxi to Wall Street.

Have you ever ridden down Broadway in a taxi, when the month was May, the air soft and warm, the streets crowded with young men in their spring clothes and pretty girls who look like duchesses ought to look, but don't? Well—if you haven't, do so—it gives one a sense of well-being that is really worth while.

At the broker's office Ben made his investment, took his receipt and left. He didn't taxi up-town—habit again—but went on the subway.

That night he went to dinner at a place where they serve five courses for a dollar, and afterwards enjoyed a musical comedy from the first balcony. Somehow, he did not feel that he ought to get all the way down-stairs in one jump.

He was far from happy, however, for he still lacked the girl. As he wandered uptown after the play he was frankly jealous of the men he passed, each of them escorting some young and pretty creature. He thought over the few girls he knew and wondered if there was one he could ask to go to the theater with him. There were the Douglas sisters at the boarding-house, but he could not take one without the other, and there was a girl up-town—sister of one of his friends—but she wasn't pretty. He didn't like her. The prettiest, jazziest girl he knew already had a fellow, so she, too, had to be counted out.

For half an hour he pondered, with little success. The only girl to which his mind reverted a second, or third time, was Alma Carew, who was the telephone operator at the office of Bates, Franklin & Bates. She was fairly tall, slender, with a mop of blond hair that several of the fellows in the office loved to rumple. He did not know much about her, but every one about the place liked her. He had often talked with her, and while he imagined she must be very popular, and have lots of "dates," he decided to invite her to go out with him.

He went to bed quite elated, for he had made up his mind to ask her if she liked the theater, and if she would go with him to the matinée next Saturday. That, he judged, was the proper way to start.

And, when she had recovered her surprise, and decided that he was not "kidding," she accepted his invitation.

In his excitement over the anticipated pleasure, there were many moments when he forgot his impending doom. For a whole day it was banished entirely by the fact that he could not have a suit made by a swell tailor in time for Saturday. He compromised by going to one of the most fashionable ready-to-wear shops, and picking out just the type of suit that he had always felt should adorn his tall, slender figure. And when he put it on Saturday morning, he admitted to himself that he looked "class." Also, he made up his mind that he was going to have another new suit at once.

Saturday afternoon was a tremendous success. The play was a musical comedy, they sat in the fourth row, and she wore what he would have described as "a peach

of a blue dress " which he made more beautiful by a bunch of flowers. When the play was over, he asked if she could stay down-town for dinner.

" Oh—I'd love it—I most certainly can," and to his amazement he learned that she was all alone in the world, one of the thousands, who like himself, lived in a boarding-house—only hers was a cheap one, for most of her money went for the pretty clothes she wore. He learned, too, that she had a married sister living in the Middle West and that her sister often sent her presents of clothes and money. She told him likewise that she had a few hundred dollars in the bank in case she never got married and had to go to the old ladies' home. Her ambition in life was a bungalow up in the hills near the city, with chickens, and maybe two children—a boy and a girl.

He certainly was amazed, and over the small table they became fast friends, so fast indeed that he thought her the nicest girl in the world, and suggested that they stay down-town and go to another show—which they did.

She accepted his invitations for three nights the following week, which—as Ben reflected with a twinge of pain about his heart—was getting mighty near the end of his little span of life.

On Monday morning he put on the new suit, went down-town, and decided that he would resign from his job. As long as he had such a short time to live, he could see no sense in working. Mr. George Bates was not in the office, however—he was ill, having eaten too much canned lobster at a seaside resort where the *menu* informed the guests that the lobsters were freshly caught. About the middle of the morning one of the biggest clients of the commission house arrived on the scene much flustered, and in need of having his agent buy him several South American commodities and make arrangements to have them dispatched north at once—before a threatened shipping embargo went into effect.

" George Bates not here?" Mr. Franklin, the middle partner of the firm asked of Ben.

The latter explained his absence.

" Good night—and I don't know a darned thing about that South American end of the business, do you?"

Ben thought for a moment, and while his mind said no, his lips said yes.

" Well, then, for the love of Pat, take care of this job, and if you ball it up, you'll get fired!"

Which did not frighten Ben at all. As a matter of fact, he was so calm about the matter that the deal proved a huge success. When George Bates recovered from the ptomaine and was once again at his desk he had a long conference with his partner, Franklin, and later he told Ben that his salary was going to be raised five hundred a year, and that he was going to have more chance to handle the South American end of the business.

Ben was not at all excited by the news. It was five o'clock when he heard it, and he was much more interested in wondering if Alma was ready—or if she would need another five minutes to powder her nose.

On Sunday afternoon they planned to go out into the country, to one of those suburban hill towns that she loved. They were going to have a long walk, find a real country inn at supper-time, and get back in good season. As he very leisurely dressed himself Ben looked in the glass and decided that he really did look ill and —he did not feel very well. Ordinarily, he would have blamed it on the late hours, and the rush of business that had suddenly come to him at the office—but he knew it was his heart. He looked tired, drawn, and very pale. Also, there was no denying the fact that recently he had had several very severe pains.

Well, he was entering the last ten days of his existence, and, as long as he could drag around, he was going to keep going. He had tasted of practically all the luxuries he had always craved—and he had quite made up his mind that he was going to leave his oil stock to Alma. What a dandy girl she was! The very lips of him tingled to tell her that he loved her, his arms ached to encircle her, but he was man enough not to do so. He was going to die, and he wished only to keep her happy,

and then leave her his meager fortune. He made a note to call on a lawyer the next day to see about the making of his last will.

But the next day was far too exciting for will-making. The Standard Oil announced that it had bought the Creole Oil Company—and Creole Oil stock jumped five points in a morning. Then followed a strenuous three days, strenuous because Ben was busy in the office by day, because he insisted that he and Alma dine and go to the theater together each night, and because he could not, felt that he dare not, announce to the world that each time the ticker told that Creole Oil was a point higher—he was so much richer. Finally, he sold out, and after deducting all commissions, he was over thirty-five thousand dollars wealthier than he had been. Yes, Alma could have her house in the country—even if he could not be there to enjoy it with her.

The morning after the sale he awoke at the usual time, and realized with a stab of horror that he felt very sick, and that he had not made his will. He must attend to the matter at once. The doctor's warning had been that he might die without a minute's warning.

He supposed, after some deep thought, that he ought to give up going out with Alma now that he was so near the end. It would be awful for her if he were to drop dead in a restaurant, or the theater. Perhaps he ought to engage a nurse to go about with him, and claim the body if he died in a public place.

He lay in bed far past his usual rising hour, for he felt too ill to make the effort to dress. Finally, however, he managed to get shaved, bathed, and into his clothes. Going away from the world was a terrifying thought that morning—why, the world was just a wonderful place. He thought of what the path ahead of him might be if he could only enjoy it.

Why, with the South American trade practically in his control, he could command a salary of—well—possibly, ten or fifteen thousand dollars a year. Not at once, of course, but in two or three years' time. And, playing the market conservatively would bring him in more money than he had ever dreamed existed.

And Alma—it was hardest to think of leaving her! Something rose in his throat and choked him—how he loved her. And he knew—as many a man knows from the light in her eyes, from the smile that warmed his heart—that Alma cared—cared for him.

Darn it—he couldn't die now—he couldn't! There must be some way to save him—some way to stop this pain in his heart. He hurried feverishly with the rest of his dressing, ignored his breakfast, and whistled to the first taxi that he saw. He was going back to Dr. Tibbits to see if there was not a mistake, to find out if there wasn't some way he could live.

The car stopped before the doctor's familiar house, with its gay window-boxes. Slowly, with the determination of a man who goes to his certain doom without faltering, Ben mounted the steps. The maid admitted him, the office nurse sent him a familiar look, and took his name into the consulting room. Two agonized minutes ticked by, and then the nurse beckoned him.

The old heart specialist was not there. A younger, very dapper chap had his desk.

"I've come to see the doctor," Ben blurted out; "it's about my heart."

"Yes—shall I make an examination?" The tone was soft, kindly, reassuring.

Ben removed his coat, vest, and opened his shirt as directed. The doctor listened for several seconds, making breathing tests, and then suggested that the patient be seated.

"Dr. Tibbits told me that I wouldn't last much more than a month, and this is the twenty-seventh day. Oh, doctor, don't you suppose that—"

"Dr. Tibbits told you that?" The young man jumped to his feet. "Oh, I'm so very, very sorry. But, you see just before Dr. Tibbits died—"

"Died?" Ben interrupted. "Is he dead, too?"

"Didn't you read about it in the newspapers?"

Ben shook his head violently. He had

read very little in the newspapers except stock reports during the past weeks.

"Well, the old gentleman is gone. I'm his nephew—I've taken over his practise. And, as I started to tell you, I'm sorry to have to report that the doctor died from a very serious brain condition caused by a blood clot that had been forming for some time, and causing by its pressure, a type of insanity. He imagined a lot of things, and told them to people."

"Yes, but he didn't imagine about me. I've had quite a lot of pain—worse than I had before." Ben found no consolation in the explanation.

"Sir, I'm very happy to be able to tell you that you have a normal heart. You are, and probably were, suffering from indigestion which often causes slight sharp pains in the cardiac region. Of course, you're in a highly nervous condition from worry, but you'll be all right. I'm going to give you a prescription, and suggest a diet—also, as soon as possible, a good vacation."

"Then I'm not going to die?" Ben could hardly believe that he understood correctly.

"We all have to die some day, but I can't see any immediate signs of your passing away."

The doctor wrote out the prescription.

"There is no fee," he said, as he handed the slip of paper to Ben, "and you'll forgive the old man, won't you? I'm sure that you will be able to get back to the old routine of your existence in a short time."

He offered his hand with a kindly, somewhat wistful smile.

Ben took the hand, and shook it in silence. A rather amused smile spread slowly over his features. He was thinking of the old routine, and how he had so drastically broken from it—done all the things he had never dared do before. Why, he had money, and he'd ridden in taxis, eaten at good hotels, and, gee whizz, he could marry Alma now—he wasn't going to die after all! He could use the prescribed vacation as a honeymoon.

The smile broke into a laugh.

"Sure, I'll forgive the old man," he said, "and I feel better already," and then he turned and almost ran from the office.

And the rest of the story, the moral conclusion, and the happy ending? Well, draw your own moral—you can have "you never can tell"—"it might happen to anybody," or something about "courage in the face of death." The moral part is up to the reader, but one thing is certain—it took Ben Miller six months before he wholly recovered from his mental shock of getting ready for death, and not dying—and it might have taken him much longer if it hadn't been that he had so much to take his mind from himself—Alma, for instance, and the growing importance of his work—love and money.

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AT THE LIBRARY

HUNGRY-EYED, intent, they roam.
Flippant novel, weighty tome—
Romance, mystery, history, too,
Eager fingers flutter through;

With Aristotle up to Wells,
They build around them magic spells;
And from printed pages shape
Instruments of swift escape;
Finding there on crowded shelf
Some brief deliverance from self.

Dorothy De Jagers.

The Ghost Road*

by George Washington Ogden

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

CHAPTER XXIV.

BIG NEWS IN LITTLE EARS.

A SHOT from the door. The globe of the lantern crashed. Hunter fired, the flash of his gun revealing Calvert stooping low, saved by the quick wit that anticipated such a move. Another shot from the door, quick as a hammer-stroke on Hunter's. Then the sudden rush of feet, the sharp smell of powder filling the room.

"Mr. Calvert!" Susie Richardson called out of the darkness, her voice breaking in a sob.

Calvert answered, assuring her that he was unharmed, feeling his way toward her along the wall.

"Strike a light, Mrs. Kindred," Susie appealed.

Calvert had reached Susie before the match flashed, and taken the rifle from her hands. He stood ready for a quick shot, pushing Susie into the shelter of the thick door.

Hunter was gone from his place by the chimney. So were the men. Outside there was the sound of horses' feet galloping away over the flinty road. Hunter's hat lay on the floor, the brim of it torn by the bullet that had broken the lantern. Calvert moved it with his foot. Susie picked it up and stood turning it in her hand for the mark of the second bullet.

"I missed him—I was trembling so," she said.

"Thank Heaven you were trembling, dear, my love!" he said, looking down at Rex, whose mother bent over him, covering his face with her apron.

"They say he just used Judge Richardson and Susie," said Myrta Smith.

Aunt Nancy Grinnell stopped weaving to look at her shrewdly a moment.

"Who says so?" she demanded, making her old eyes sharp as awls.

"Everybody," Myrta explained. "Just used them to keep Tru Hunter from burnin' the bonds, and to get the money out of this county he never would have got if he'd left the case in court. Oh, you must have heard them say Judge Richardson's going to get a rake-off of five thousand dollars from Calvert, haven't you?"

"How did they find *that* out—did Judge Richardson or Calvert say so?"

"Oh, Aunt Nancy!"

"Well, they're the only ones I'd believe."

"I guess somebody in the bank at Vinland must 'a' told it," Myrta said, not

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

troubled in the least over where the report started, but quite content to keep it on its way.

"Banks don't talk about things that don't concern 'em. Has anybody seen Tru Hunter since he killed Kindred's fool?"

"He's out in the swamps, they say—you know they're goin' to have the inquest this afternoon?"

"I heard about it."

"And to-morrow afternoon Judge Richardson is going to hold a meeting. He's telephoned all around, and sent out letters, askin' everybody to come. They say he's goin' to try to palm off that deal he's made with the banks at Vinland to pay Calvert for the bonds."

"Palm off!" Aunt Nancy sniffed.

"That's what they say. General Treadmill says he'll never vote money to pay the banks what they put into it, even if they do get the bonds for next to nothing, considering what interest and all amounts to by now. Oh, millions, they say."

"Nobody ever expected he would," said Aunt Nancy; "nobody ever expected anybody in this county to settle his debts for twenty-five cents on the dollar if there was any show of beatin' 'em."

"Oh, Aunt Nancy! You surely don't believe everybody in Clearwater County is dishonest?"

"Most of 'em. If I was Judge Richardson I'd take hands off of the whole thing; I'd send Calvert back where he come from, and let somebody else go and lay in jail till they got stiff and bent and gray-headed before their time."

Meanwhile Susie and Calvert were talking of Truman Hunter and the others who had carried Calvert off and held him prisoner in Kindred's house.

"There's no use prosecuting," he said, dismissing it as something they had discussed.

"I suppose not," she sighed, "but it's disgraceful that nothing can be done."

"Oglethorpe's been telling around that it was only a joke; that they only wanted to throw a scare into me so I'd leave the country when they turned me loose. They'd get away with that part of it before a jury anywhere down here. You know that, Susie."

"Yes, and the coroner's inquest wouldn't be anything but a perfunctory proceeding to fill the requirements of the law, father says. They'll clear Hunter of all blame for killing Kindred's fool."

"Surely they will," said he as confidently as if apprised beforehand of the verdict.

"Hunter knows it as well as anybody, but he dreads the disgrace of being arrested on the warrant Kindred swore out for him. That man's the biggest coward that ever breathed!"

"He isn't the less dangerous for all that, Susie."

"More dangerous, like any sneak."

"He'll be back here for the meeting to-morrow afternoon, doing his best to turn the sentiment against me."

"He's done about all the damage he can do in that direction," Susie said gloomily. "He's spread it all over the county that father's to get a commission from you for arranging with the banks to take up the bonds for twenty-five thousand dollars."

"Sawyer was telling me this morning; that was the first I'd heard of it."

"It's ungenerous of me to give such plain slander a thought, I know, but he's telling more."

Here Susie looked up at him with serious directness.

"What else has the scoundrel been saying?" Calvert asked.

"He says you've debauched the whole family, including me," she replied.

"Debauched?"

"Deceived and disgraced," she said, nodding gravely; "that's what he's been telling around. He was hiding across the road that night—he saw and heard everything."

"Oh, if that's all!" said he, vastly relieved. "I'm not ashamed of anything that happened; are you, Susie?"

"It's likely I'd be here with you if I was ashamed," she returned, so earnest in her pride that her voice trembled. "But he has told around that you only used me as a repository for the bonds, and you're still doing it, and that you'll pocket the money when you put your scheme through and go away laughing over how easy it was."

"Susie!" said he sternly. "Why, you talk as if you believed it!"

"You know I don't, but there are a thousand that do, I suppose."

"I can go to Vinland and get the license to-day," he said, drawing out his watch. "We can be married this evening. Leave you! Go away laughing! I'll answer *that* lie in the most direct way."

"I'm afraid they'd say it was part of your scheme—getting into the family to make sure father would help you out on the bond deal," she said. "But afterward—as soon afterward as you like."

"We'll learn what the public sentiment on the proposal is to-morrow afternoon, and one way or the other I'll know what the county is disposed to do. It will be either yes or no for me from these folks here, and no matter which way they decide we'll go to Vinland the next morning and get married."

"That would be the best way out of it," said Susie, with droll sincerity.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE VOICE OF THE PEOPLE.

ALMOST as many people were in Indian Springs on the afternoon appointed by Judge Richardson for the public discussion of the bondholder's proposal as had been in attendance on the encampment. They represented the body as well as the mind of Clearwater County, and their decision in the matter of the proffered adjustment of the old debt would be final, as far as Judge Richardson's efforts were involved.

The judge completed his arrangement with the banks at the county seat to take the old bond issue off Calvert's hands at twenty-five cents on the dollar of the original principal sum, provided the voters of the county would agree to a tax levy sufficient to retire the debt in five years. The banks asked no profit out of the transaction but the interest, and what they would share with other property owners in having the cloud lifted from the land titles in that retarded county.

True to the general belief, the coroner's jury, sitting in Indian Springs the day before, had absolved Truman Hunter of blame in the slaying of Kindred's fool. Hunter's witnesses made out a case of self-defense for him, which the testimony of Calvert and Mrs. Kindred could not offset, especially when the intention of the jury was a preconcluded thing.

Judge Hunter was free to come and go, therefore, in his accustomed way. He was expected at the mass meeting of citizens that afternoon, his opinion in the matter being well known. It was the general expectation that he would make a speech against the proposal of the stranger, and public interest in the occasion had been stimulated not a little by the speculation on what would happen when Hunter and the bondholder met.

There was a good deal of merriment over the prank that had been played on the bondholder in laying him captive, nearly everybody accepting the pretense that it was, indeed, a prank. Still, there was not a man among them who did not know what Hunter's intentions in the matter had been.

That Susie Richardson had been led into these jokers' little play at the bondholder's expense in the belief that she was rescuing him from a perilous situation was further fuel for their peculiar humorous fire. And the joke was on Hunter at last, they said, considering how close Susie had come to putting a bullet through his head.

The general verdict was that it was an unfortunate thing for the county that Hunter had failed to realize on his scheme of making the bonds his captive's ransom. If he had succeeded, all this bother and discussion and hard feeling that was bound to grow out of it would have been needless; the old debt would have been canceled in fire.

Susie Richardson was there among the women of the village, who had turned out almost to the last petticoat, even down to Aunt Nancy Grinnell. Always a favorite with the members of her own sex, Susie was not the less popular this day on account of the romance gathering around her, the details of which every woman in the place knew, due to Myrta Smith's close attention to her duties in the post-office.

General Treadmill was on hand, looking

a great deal older and less important in his civilian dress, but none the less straight and severe, or uncompromising in his attitude on the question of a settlement with the holder of the bonds.

The general avoided Judge Richardson, presenting his back with an unmistakable expression of scorn. Indeed, Judge Richardson found that many of those who had been eager to further Calvert's desire of a settlement in the beginning had grown hostile to the plan. The charge that the judge was pushing the compromise for what he could get out of it had tainted the judgment of some of his oldest friends.

"I'm afraid we're going to have uphill work," he said to Calvert when the latter arrived on the grounds. "I expect you'd spare yourself insult and humiliation by letting it go—I'm beginning to believe they don't deserve your sacrifice, anyhow."

"They're a set of pizen-hearted skunks!" Dan Grinnell declared, at no pains to hide his opinion from anybody.

The bankers from Vinland were present, out in the crowd, feeling the pulse of the county. Two of them now joined Judge Richardson, and together they mounted the platform.

One of the bankers opened the meeting, and laid the situation before the people in a short address. They gave him a silent, respectful hearing. Only when he turned to Calvert, calling him to the platform from where he sat at the front with Dan Grinnell and a few of Judge Richardson's supporters, was there a stir and murmur over the gathering. Those in the back who had not found seats on the plank benches crowded around the flanks, pressing as close to the platform as they could come.

Calvert faced the people with a frank cheerfulness, as if he had no knowledge of their animosity against himself or distrust of his friends. He told them of his purpose in coming there, his hope of a settlement, but said nothing about the treatment he had received. He proceeded as if he had come to their notice for the first time that moment, bearing no grudges, displaying no ill-feeling for what had passed.

From the moment that Calvert stood before them and began the presentation of his case, opposition was evident, a spirit of antagonism, a desire to discount and confuse. The earnest and thinking among the crowd decried these efforts to confound the speaker, turning severe faces upon the disturbers, remonstrating with them, drawing them aside. But it was plain to Calvert as he looked over the gathering that it had been determined beforehand that he was to be drowned in a confusion of discord and overwhelmed in a flood of derision and abuse. Hunter and his followers had attended well to that.

Still, Calvert kept his temper as he contended against the growing turmoil, which the appeals of the banker chairman could no more than momentarily quiet. Presently he was forced to stop to let pass a turmoil of laughter and derisive calls set going by the heckling of some loutish wit.

"I can't believe this opposition represents the thinking portion of the county," Calvert told them when they quieted. "You people act as if I came to you asking you to make some great and impossible sacrifice—so impossible, in fact, as to be ridiculous, where I'm only offering to assume a heavy loss to make peace with you. Wait till I get through, and then laugh, if you must."

"We don't want to do business with a thief!" somebody said.

Calvert could not pick out the speaker, but it was an old man's voice, high and tremulous.

"You're a receiver of stolen property," another said. "We ain't got no compromise to make with you!"

"One ruffian always makes more noise than ten gentlemen," said Calvert, his resentful independence beginning to take the upper hand. "I don't believe that you fellows who have been butting in represent any substantial portion of the people of this county. There are earnest, honest men here who want to reach a settlement—"

"Ten per cent of it to go to Judge Richardson!" said the same high, dry, trembling voice that had called Calvert a thief.

General Treadmill was on his feet, lifting his hands, beating down the uproar of derisive laughter and insulting cries. He stood on a bench to lift himself better into

the notice of the turbulent crowd, making his pacific gestures like a conductor before a band.

Calvert, flushed and fighting mad all in a moment, aware of the uselessness of continued friendly effort, went to the edge of the platform as if he intended to go down and challenge the rioters hand to hand. The chairman jumped up and hurried to stop him, the others on the platform coming to their feet.

"You'd better let it go, Mr. Calvert," the chairman said. "Judge Hunter seems to have packed the meeting."

Judge Richardson came over and laid a restraining hand on Calvert's arm.

"They'll not listen to you, Calvert," he said, "and I don't believe there's any use for me to say a word."

At the sight of Judge Richardson standing before them as if to speak, the denunciations began anew. Those who had been sitting quietly on the benches got to their feet, many of them looking anxiously around as if for means of exit from a perilous place. Susie was standing among them, her friends pressing around her, frightened and disturbed. Dan Grinnell, back to the platform, stood leaning against it easily, elbows supporting him, watching the temper of the crowd closely, but apparently unmoved, and almost unconcerned.

Now General Treadmill was speaking, bringing order out of the unruly demonstration. He turned to the platform, the rabble's spokesman, a doubtful honor for which he had been playing from the first.

"Mr. Bondholder," said he, voice full and strong, "the people of Clearwater County would have met you half-way, with their hearts in their hands, eager to make a settlement on this long quarrel, if you'd come among them like a man, openly and honorably. But when you come and begin underhanded work of corruption, we shut the door in your face and tell you to begone!"

The group on the platform remained standing, gathered about Calvert where he stood forward on the edge. Judge Richardson drew his slender frame straight at the words of his colleague, looking sternly and unflinchingly with the face of an honest man, into his neighbor's eyes.

"You're a slanderous old scoundrel, sir!" said Calvert, pointing a denunciatory finger at General Treadmill, who stood on a bench not more than two rods distant.

"Judge Richardson stands convicted of complicity in your scheme to make the people of this county pay for what they've been repudiating for forty-seven years," continued General Treadmill, his old voice roaring over the silent attention of the crowd.

"There isn't any use arguing with you, sir," Calvert returned, quieting now, ashamed of his heat of a moment before. His voice was calm, his manner tolerant, as he went on:

"You have been licking poisoned honeydew from the leaves, General Treadmill, spread by a villainous and black-hearted man. What you have charged against Judge Richardson is slander, sir—slander of the basest, falsehood of the most wicked brand. I don't charge that you're responsible for the origin of it, sir, but I do say you ought to be ashamed to give it credit enough to get up here and repeat it to this assemblage."

This outspoken defense of Judge Richardson brought a little ripple of applause from his supporters, but it was quickly drowned in derisive challenges to Calvert, and a threatening movement forward of the hostile crowd. Susie and her friends were pushed against the platform, the throng flanking it so densely as to make escape out of the press impossible. Dan Grinnell cleared a little space to relieve them, and resumed his place with back against the boards, chewing his tobacco with placid eye.

It looked as if the intention of the crowd was to storm the platform and drag the speaker from it, a thing that even Judge Richardson began to fear. But General Treadmill quieted this demonstration, and proceeded, with more passion in his voice than before:

"Judge Richardson has been given his chance to clear himself in the eyes of this community," he said. "He failed to take it; he stands convicted by his own deeds

alone, to say nothing of the testimony of honest and respected citizens."

Calvert would have replied, but Judge Richardson restrained him, fearing to inflame them to any higher resentment. Susie, standing close beside Dan Grinnell, looked up, adding her plea to her father's that Calvert leave the platform and dismiss the project, for the present at least.

"I'm not going to leave it this way—this thing must be cleared up," Calvert told them.

He faced the crowd again, hand lifted to command silence, a momentary grace which they granted.

"Say what you please about me, your feeling isn't expected to be very warm and friendly in my direction," he said, "but don't come here making your base and cowardly charges against a man that I know to be honorable and clean beyond your narrow conception."

"Keep the money in the fam'ly," somebody jeered.

"Ten per cent to the judge, and the rest to Susie," another added.

"Come on down—let them go," Susie pleaded. "They're not worth it—not worth another word."

Calvert heard her only dimly through the uproar of derisive jeers and insulting calls. He was standing with folded arms, straight and calm, very competent-looking, and very grave and earnest in his purpose, like a man who would await his hour and triumph in the end.

"Goin' to marry her to-morrow," a loud, mocking treble shouted.

Calvert saw a bony youth standing in a little clear space midway of the crowd, hand lifted like a schoolboy who appeals to the teacher's eye. Out of his great, uncultured mouth this coarse, unmanly taunt came.

General Treadmill came forward, pushing up within a few feet of the platform, where he stood shaking a trembling finger at Calvert, towering tall above him.

"Do you deny the common report that you're to marry Judge Richardson's daughter the minute this infamous deal is saddled on the taxpayers of this county?" General Treadmill demanded, with a fierceness as if he charged murder and arson and all the vile crimes among men.

If Calvert would have replied to this purely personal and irrelevant question, he was given no opportunity. The crowd took it up, tossing it from vile mouth to vile mouth, distorting it, sullying it by shaping it on their tongues. Susie looked up at Calvert, her eyes great in the shock of this wanton raillery, stunned by the wonder of how their great secret had become a taunt and an argument in their enemies' mouths. But he, remembering that the trees had ears, was at no loss to know.

Calvert motioned General Treadmill forward, indicating that he desired him to take his place on the platform. Instantly the crowd fell silent, wondering what new move the tricky bondholder was going to try to put over on them now. General Treadmill pushed forward with a show of determination and bravery which gave the impression that he was at least sincere.

"Come up here, general—I want you to do me a slight favor in your official capacity," Calvert said, offering his hand to assist the old man up the steep and narrow steps.

Treadmill refused the hand with haughty independence, springing up the steps like a young man. He wheeled about to face the crowd, hat in hand, as if to begin a speech.

"Hear me one minute," Calvert appealed to the people, stepping out to the platform edge.

"Marry him off to Susie and keep the money in the fam'ly," chanted one, bringing a gale of laughter.

"Wasn't that a part of your compact, sir—wasn't it a condition imposed by this traitorous bargainer that you marry his daughter as soon as he completed arrangements for the betrayal of the taxpayers of this county?"

"Why, you old fool!" said Calvert, forgetful for the moment of the general's white hair, staring at him in more amazement than anger. As if Susie Richardson was such a drug on her father's hands that she must be bargained off like a balky horse!

Calvert bent over and spoke to Dan

Grinnell, who forthwith handed up the little bag upon which covetous eyes had been cast before that day. This Calvert put at his feet, turned and drew General Treadmill forward until he stood a little way apart from the rest.

"You'll not object to being conspicuous for a little while, I guess?" Calvert said.

"I refuse to be made a puppet and a show of, sir!" General Treadmill flashed back and he started to leave the platform.

"Just a moment, sir," Calvert requested, with polite deference. "You have indicted Judge Richardson and convicted him without a hearing. We're about to reopen that case."

"Judge Richardson was given his opportunity to clear himself of the charge," General Treadmill declared, puffing his chest as if he would explode in his effort to contain his anger.

"He was told he could prove the charge false by giving you my bonds to burn, by betraying the trust of a friend—a thing Judge Richardson never did in his life. Better for him if he'd turned his back on the whole yellow crowd of you, years ago!"

Calvert leaned over the crowd, shaking his fist in the vigor of his denunciation. Dan Grinnell nodded, looking severely from side to side to see if any wanted to take it up.

"You've yelped at his heels," continued Calvert, "set on by Hunter, a sneak and a murderer, a liar and a coward, blind to his sufferings when he stood between your property and the judgment of the courts and went to jail year after year! You've snapped and whined and whispered in the dark, and spread your slanders over this county among the ignorant and vicious when you knew in your black hearts you were a pack of liars!"

"Sir!" said General Treadmill, bristling with rage, his face purple, swelling himself for a torrent of oratory. Calvert stopped him with command of his lifted hand, and went on with his harangue to the crowd.

"I've known Judge Richardson scarcely a week, but I know him better than you do. Just keep back there, gentlemen—don't crowd the ladies."

Calvert paused in his speech to wave them back from the platform edge, walking around to see that they moved according to his command. Then he confronted General Treadmill, who was easing his passion on the bankers.

"If I had a deal all set with Judge Richardson I'd be the last man to spring the trap before the game was in it, wouldn't I?" Calvert demanded. "I'd be the last man to stumble over the sack and spill the spuds—you can figure that out in your head. What would I care what happened to Judge Richardson, or anybody else, if I put money above honor, peace and security, as you people of Clearwater County have been doing for nearly fifty years?"

Calvert took a sheaf of papers from the little bag, gave one to each of the bankers and Judge Richardson, handed several of them to General Treadmill.

"Here are the Clearwater County bonds," he said. "These gentlemen can tell you whether or not they are genuine, or whether they are forgeries in the hands of a crook who came here to play another trick on you, as some of you have told around. Gentlemen"—to the bankers—"will you give them your opinion on the validity of these papers?"

One of the bankers stood forward, the bond in his hand.

"These are the bonds—no question about it," he said. The others nodded assent, handing the bonds back to Calvert.

"Are you satisfied, General Treadmill, that I'm not trying to work off any forgeries on this county?" Calvert asked, smiling a little, with a rather grim humor that nobody else could see, as he reached to take the papers from the old man's hand.

"I suppose they're genuine," Treadmill returned.

"Is there any doubt about it at all?" Calvert insisted, offering more of the bonds for his inspection.

"No, sir, no doubt. These are the securities the county gave for the plunder of thieves."

"I came to Clearwater County," went on Calvert, speaking to the people again, "determined to make sacrifices to reach

a settlement with you folks, but I'm determined to make a greater sacrifice for the honor of a friend. All I own in the world I hold here in my hand—this bundle of papers is my fortune. Judge Hunter has told you, and you believe it, that Judge Richardson and I are partners in the deal to cash these bonds, the judge to get five thousand dollars if the deal goes through."

The people were listening to him silently, if not respectfully. Even the lanky youth who spoke insults out of his big mouth had pushed nearer, his harsh features drawn in an effort of concentration, not willing to lose a word.

"The only hope that I've got of ever reaching a settlement on this old debt rests in Judge Richardson. If the deal ever is made, even on the basis I've offered, it must go through while Judge Richardson is presiding judge of the county court."

"That's right," and "You know him," came from the crowd, with laughter which ran over it like some one shaking a rug, dying out in sharp gibes at the edges.

"I say it would have to be done while Judge Richardson is in office, because no other man in the county would have the courage to make a compromise of the debt. With Judge Richardson out of office, my chance is gone. So you can all see that I've got to put this thing through right now or lose. That being the case, what do I care whether you make Judge Richardson and his family social outcasts, slander him, lynch him—so long as I get my money and hit the road out of this country? It's as plain as a knot on a log."

Calvert took a match from his vest pocket, struck it on the sole of his shoe, and touched it to the papers in his hand. As they blazed up a gasp of astonishment swept the crowd like a breeze in a field of corn. Judge Richardson sprang forward, laying hold of Calvert's arm.

"For God's sake, Calvert, what are you doing?" he cried.

Calvert dropped the burning bonds to the planks, bent over them, heaping them together to make certain of complete and speedy destruction. Then he stood, the little circle of men closing in silent wonderment around the fire, folded his arms, and watched the burning documents until the last fragment curled in the thin blaze and vanished.

The bankers pressed around Calvert, speechless in the surprise of the thing they had witnessed. The crowd was dumb, as if it did not realize that the bondholder had canceled the ancient debt in flames.

But Calvert had no thought for any of them. He was looking down into Susie Richardson's glowing face, reading her praise, her admiration, and her boundless pride in him which spoke out of her wondering eyes. All the rest of the world might remain blind to his generosity, dumb to his sacrifice; Susie understood it—the answer to his life's highest hope lay in her animated face.

Judge Richardson sank down to his chair as if the sight of this man's sacrifice for him and his had cut away the last tendon of his strength. He sat there with bowed head, hands pressed to his temples, those on the platform cutting him off from view of most of the crowd.

Presently the people began to murmur and push forward, the understanding of what this stranger's act meant to the taxpayers of the county at last breaking through their unfriendly intolerance. General Treadmill stood looking at Calvert, overwhelmed by a multitude of emotions, his face white, his mouth open in stunned amazement, the dignity and proud bearing quite gone out of his stiff and stubborn old frame. Then he started, animated by the spirit of fairness that underlay his ancient prejudice, and offered Calvert his hand.

"I apologize for every word, every thought, that the unjust bias of my mind ever nursed against you, sir," he said, speaking loudly so all might hear. Then he wheeled to Judge Richardson. "You'll give me my deserts if you spit in my face and call me a cur, Judge Richardson," he said. "But if you'll forgive my hour of blindness, sir, I offer you my hand."

"All of us have been blind in our day," said Judge Richardson, taking the proffered hand. "It is all past and forgotten."

"Man never witnessed a more magnanimous deed, sir," the old rebel declared,

shaking hands with Calvert again. "You have cleared the score, sir."

"Part of it," said Calvert, looking over the heads of the excited people to where Truman Hunter sat on his horse, having appeared but that moment to witness the refutation of his slanders and deceits.

CHAPTER XXVI.

JUDGE HUNTER SETS THE HOUR.

JUDGE HUNTER flung himself from his horse like a man who had ridden to stay a calamity. As his friends closed around him, talking in the quick, tense voice of suppressed excitement, Hunter turned his face toward the platform where the little group of men stood.

Calvert was receiving the congratulations of those who pressed forward, bending a little to grasp their hands at the edge of the low platform. He saw in that quick uplifting of Hunter's face the passion that raged in the man's breast and triumphed in his moment of victory, no matter what the price. Hunter started forward as if impelled by some sudden decision, then stopped as his friends pressed closer, laying their heads close together.

"Let's hear from Judge Hunter," somebody said, lifting a sudden, sharp voice.

Calvert turned. Judge Hunter was approaching the platform, his bridle-rein over his arm. He forged forward through the crowd, which parted before him, heedless of the hands put out to restrain him from what his best friends knew to be a rash and foolish deed.

Calvert drew to one side as Hunter mounted the steps of the platform.

"Judge Hunter 'll give us the straight of it," said somebody, with satisfied conviction.

"Judge Hunter, sir, there's no use in attempting to move dissension and ill feeling in this assembly," General Treadmill said, coming forward to the bottom of the low steps. "This meeting's business is over, sir—over happily, with the most fortunate conclusion for Clearwater County. Let it rest; let the old fires die."

Hunter stood, hands clasping the lapels of his long black coat, the shadow of his broad hat on his dark face, while the protests of others who spoke in General Treadmill's train spent themselves and died away.

"I'm sorry I didn't get here in time for the great conflagration," Judge Hunter began, smiling in tolerant derision, turning a little toward Calvert, who stood near him with folded arms. A ripple of laughter broke over that portion of the crowd where Judge Hunter's supporters were bunched; men adjusted themselves in comfortable expectation, tingling with a keen zest for what was to come.

"But I'll have to make the best of it, and put my grief in my pocket," Judge Hunter continued, smiling still in his derisive, scornful way, turning his dark eyes on Calvert in insolent mockery.

"Give us the facts, Judge Hunter!" demanded the sharp voice that had championed him on his arrival.

Again Judge Hunter paused with uplifted hand, that inscrutable, yet promising cast of dark humor quickening his somber face.

"The facts, fellow-citizens of Clearwater County, seem to be that some papers have been set afire up here before you and burnt, and the ashes of them scattered to the four winds of heaven," Judge Hunter continued. "You have been told by competent authorities that these papers were the old Palestine and Gulf railroad bonds, and we will suppose, for the time being, that they were. Is there any man in this crowd simple enough to believe burnin' that mess of old papers clears the debt off this county?"

Judge Hunter paused for a reply, turning his head, casting his sharp black eyes around. Nobody answered, for that was the point of indecision and doubt in many a man's mind which they waited for Judge Hunter to clear away.

"Has this bondholder, or this alleged bondholder, made any relinquishment of record, confessed satisfaction in due and legal form? He has not. As far as the records of this county and State are concerned, the Palestine and Gulf railroad

bonds are still outstanding against the taxpayers.

"We'll go ahead on the theory and supposition that this man is all he represents himself to be, and the papers he set afire under your noses here a little while ago were the bonds we're all so much interested in. We'll say they're gone, wiped out, destroyed from off the face of the earth. And then I'll ask you to step up and tell me, gentlemen, how much better we're all off on account of it?"

"How much better off is any man when he's paid off the mortgage on his home, Judge Hunter?" a man near the front inquired. "If you can't see that, there's no use for anybody to tell you."

"If those papers had been the bonds, and this man was the bondholder, that might be so, Judge Donaldson," Hunter replied, drawing his slender frame up with high dignity. "But the papers he set afire here before your faces was as false as his own pretense. They wasn't any more the bonds than he's the bondholder. He's a fraud and a crook!"

Calvert was more diverted than incensed by Hunter's laborious arrival at his ridiculous climax, ready as he knew many in the crowd would be to swallow it in spite of the evidence of their own eyes. He stepped across to Hunter's side and put a hand on his shoulder. "Hunter—" he began.

Hunter started back at his touch, flinging off his hand.

"Don't touch me, sir! The hand of a thief—"

Calvert felt the prickling of his slow wrath like the rising of hairs. For a moment he held silence, determined not to allow his anger to debase him to a brawl, no matter what the provocation. There was a better way out of it between him and this man.

"You're an audacious liar, Hunter," said he, calmly. "I think, perhaps, you've said enough for to-day."

"Prove yourself the bondholder!" Judge Hunter challenged, shaking a trembling finger in Calvert's face.

"Why, I guess you've got me there, Hunter," Calvert confessed, grinning a little as he spoke; "I've destroyed all the evidence I brought to Clearwater County with me."

Mutterings, sharp curses, derisive cries rose out of the crowd. Men came pressing forward, engulfing Judge Richardson and those who stood before the steps, menace in their mien. Judge Hunter spread his hands, stooping as if to stay a child who tottered too near the fire.

"Keep back, gentlemen—I beg of you to keep back!" he pleaded.

"Hand him down to us, Judge Hunter!" one suggested.

"Go up and take him!" another counseled, in the high quaver which the voice of a hillman reached when it rose in excitement or anger.

"I'll come down to you in a minute, gentlemen, if you'll just be calm," Calvert assured them, looking down into their angry faces as a man might look into a rushing torrent which he is soon to tax his utmost courage and strength to leap.

"Neighbors and friends," he heard General Treadmill saying, spreading his arms among them like a patriarch of Israel. The old man had mounted to the end of a plank bench, prepared to champion the cause of one he had so lately denounced. But the crowd would not hear him; gentle, but determined hands plucked him down and smothered his voice among them as they pushed him back.

"Prove yourself the bondholder!" Judge Hunter challenged again, his satisfaction growing as he realized fully, if he had not done so before, the impossible task Calvert would have in convincing those who lifted their faces and clamored against him.

"I'll vouch for him," said one of the bankers from Vinland.

Judge Hunter stood a moment clutching the lapels of his coat.

"When a man goes to your bank to borrow money, Mr. Vorhees, you ask of him something more than his word for security," he said. The banker subsided, and turned away, giving it up.

"You're straining at a gnat, Judge Hunter," Calvert said. "As far as I'm concerned, the Clearwater County bond case is ended." He turned partly, taking

a half step as if to leave, halted, a humorous gleam in his eyes, a slow smile breaking over his serious face.

"Of course, if you can make the taxpayers of the county believe they're still under obligation to pay the bonded debt, and they want to do it, I'll not object," he said.

"You're a swindler and a humbug; I've been on your track ever since you struck this county!" Hunter declared.

"Yes, you've crowded me pretty close looking for trouble, Judge Hunter," Calvert admitted, his face growing white as all this man's past indignities and persecutions rose up in his mind, "but this is the end of the road. It's come to a show-down between you and me, here and—"

"I'll give you fifteen minutes to saddle a horse and strike the road out of this county," said Hunter, lifting his voice. "If you're not gone by then I'll hunt you down and shoot you in your hole like a rat!"

"You'll not have to hunt me—I'll be right here," Calvert returned, holding him a moment, eye to eye.

Calvert passed down the three steps and into the crowd, no hand lifted to stay him, no voice raised in insult or protest. They had put their case into Judge Hunter's hands, they had heard his ultimatum pronounced, and were satisfied to await the issue.

For the moment Calvert did not think even of Susie Richardson, for there comes a time in the life of every man when the first wild passions of the species rise and surge and drown out all of his desires and hopes but one. There must be hate and vengeance before love, indeed; upon these love itself is predicated. Without the capability to rage and destroy there would be no upgrowth of tenderness in the human breast. The storm must bellow its fierce breath away, the fire must surge its scarlet wave to temper the human heart to the finer responses of love's tender chords.

Yet this was far apart from Calvert's reasoning as he pushed through the crowd toward the hotel. Indeed, there was no reason in him—only the cold and hard determination to kill the man who had crowded him with insult and humiliation, and crowned it all by this public command to begone like a beaten dog.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE HOUR STRIKES.

BILL SAWYER was sitting in his great hickory chair at the end of the porch, the savor of frying chicken whipping around the corner from the kitchen to tell him that supper was well on the way. Calvert bounded up the steps and crossed over to his side.

"Uncle Bill, I want to borrow your gun a little while," he said, calm and unmoved as if he asked for a pipeful of tobacco.

Bill got to his feet with astonishing spryness and went toddling into the office. He did not speak until he reached behind the litter of newspapers on his desk and brought out the weapon.

"I thought you might, Tom," he said. "Well, I'm proud to let you have it."

"Thank you, Uncle Bill."

"I loaded her fresh all around just a few minutes ago; you can depend on her like you would your own mother—she's as true as a plumb line."

Sawyer handed the revolver over with pride in the touch of it and Calvert thrust it inside the waistband of his trousers.

"Good-by, Uncle Bill, and good luck to you."

"I'll have your supper set out for you when you come back, Tom," Uncle Bill replied easily, as if no cloud of tragedy hung over that sunny hour. He followed him to the top of the steps, where he stood watching him away to keep his appointment with Judge Hunter on the green.

Dan Grinnell came clattering up the steps, passing Calvert without a word.

"I want to use your gun a little while, Bill," he panted, sweat on his old dry face.

"I just loaned it to Tom," Bill replied.

"Any old one that'll shoot—I don't give a d—"

"No, I don't reckon you better have no gun to-day, Dan."

"They won't give that boy no chance—

they'll gang him, Bill—they'll run over him like a swarm of bees!"

"I don't reckon they'll be so hot for it as a man might think," said Uncle Bill. "That boy's got a pocket full of ammunition, and the best gun that ever roared."

"If I had time to go home—but I ain't!" Dan lamented.

"Anyway, it ain't your fight; Tom might resent it if you come down there buttin' in. I know in my fightin' days—"

"It's too late now—I'll have to let him go it alone," wailed Dan.

"They're cleanin' out of there," Bill remarked, looking over at the crowd.

As Calvert struck across the grassy common to present himself before Judge Hunter, he also noted the breaking up of the crowd. The one-sided little street facing the grassy plot was already filled with people who had hurried thither as the news of the impending fight went round.

In front of the stores people stood crowding, close to the doors, ready to run inside when the bullets began to hum; mothers came running to gather in small children. Citizens who deplored the extreme to which this generous stranger among them had been pushed at last to defend his honor and life, rushed to telephones, calling out the town marshal, the constable, and even appealing to the sheriff at Vinland.

In spite of this public furor and anxiety, nobody came forward to stop Calvert, even to protest or argue with him for going out in this manner to meet what treachery and unequal numbers no man knew. The public appeared to accept it as Uncle Bill Sawyer had done, in the way of something that had been growing from the first and must be met in the end.

Calvert ran his eyes along the fringe of the crowd as he walked rapidly across the green, searching for Susie Richardson. He was unable to single her out from the agitated and shifting throng, but hoped that she had sought shelter beyond the range of a wild or careless shot. It was his hope, indeed, that this disagreeable business might be carried to its conclusion without Susie being a witness to it.

Yet this was all aside from the main purpose; even Susie Richardson stood in a dimmer light than this pressing duty which confronted him. This barrier between them that must be removed with unfaltering hand before he could stand before her again in the full right of an honorable man. There was no thought in him that he might fall; only the steady, cold determination of shooting Truman Hunter as he would kill a thief who had rifled his house.

Over near the speakers' stand there stood a little group of men and saddled horses, Judge Hunter among them, prominent in his black coat and white shirt. A hundred yards or more behind him the ice-house stood, a clear and open space of greensward between; at Calvert's back, somewhat farther away, was the hotel, Bill Sawyer and Dan Grinnell standing at the railing of the veranda, a crowd of women and children filling the steps leading up to it. Calvert altered his course to put them out of danger, striking an angle across the green.

Judge Hunter stood waiting for Calvert to come clear of the hotel and put the distant woods behind him, posing as he posed on the rostrum, hands clasping the lapels of his coat, one foot a little forward. There was calmness in his carriage, the expression of confident preparation to meet whatever might come, and give back better than was sent.

When Calvert found himself out of line with the hotel, a wide space between him and the woods across which he prayed no child would venture, Judge Hunter was about two hundred feet away. Calvert felt that he should be nearer his mark with an untried weapon, and at once proceeded to close up this intervening ground. Judge Hunter, not altering his pose, stood waiting.

Suddenly there rose a commotion among the men from whom Judge Hunter had lately parted. One of them was mounting, others clutching his reins, swarming about him in confusion, shouting to him sharply. Now he was in the saddle, trying to lash his horse clear of them, cursing them, commanding them to set him free. Cass Oglethorpe it was, and now he had his pistol

out, threatening those who restrained him. They fell back before his angry menace, letting him have his will.

Oglethorpe's intention was unmistakably to mix in the fight with Calvert. He came galloping over in a way to flank him, pistol lifted high, ready to throw the weapon down in a shot. Hunter beckoned him with angry gesture to keep out of the fight. Calvert stopped ready to meet and dispose of this new challenger.

A moment Oglethorpe hesitated at Hunter's command, letting the threatening pistol swing at his side as he turned in the saddle to look round at his friend. Again Hunter ordered him out of the fight with an angry sweep of the hand. Disregarding his authority, if authority ever had extended over him, Oglethorpe rode on, angling to bring himself nearer Calvert, swung his pistol arm, and fired.

Oglethorpe's bullet snipped the grass near Calvert's feet; another immediately following it sang over his head. Oglethorpe had maneuvered to place himself directly in line with the people on the street, and out of consideration for them Calvert had restrained his fire.

He then ran ahead a little that he might get a quartering shot, wheeled and fired. Then Oglethorpe's horse reared, lashing with its fore feet as if trying to clamber over a barrier, ran wildly a little way, pitched to its knees and fell. Oglethorpe went sailing out of the saddle over the creature's head, his pistol flying, glinting as it whirled in the sun. It fell far from the spot where he landed.

Calvert looked over his shoulder for Hunter, to see him approaching slowly, something expressive of great and sudden caution in his tense carriage. Cass Oglethorpe hit the ground running; Calvert jerked a shot after him to speed him on his way.

This preliminary incident with Cass Oglethorpe had closed up the space between Calvert and Judge Hunter until now not more than twenty yards separated them. Hunter was crouching, as Calvert had seen him bend in action before, pistol in hand, holding it with peculiar short-armed stiffness elbow tight against his side.

In that moment it came to Calvert like a message that he must not be the aggressor in this combat; Hunter must fire first. Better not to kill him at all, said that new voice of reason which sounded in his conscience. Let him have the first shot, then disable him, and bring him in humiliation to a public supplication for his life. So Calvert stood, muscles set, pistol raised, waiting for Hunter to fire.

The judge came creeping forward, the skirts of his long coat almost sweeping the ground as he crouched with bent knees to bring down his height and present a smaller mark before his foe. Yard by yard he came on, stealthily. He was so near now that Calvert could see his nostrils flare as he crouched lower.

Calvert felt as if a sudden flame leaped round him, cutting off his breath. He must fire, must kill this crouching tiger that was stealing upon him. Justification to the winds! It was self-preservation. And as this great clamor of life rose in him, Calvert brought his weapon down to shoot.

Judge Hunter, not more than thirty feet away, pitched forward on his face, his weapon discharged aimlessly as Calvert's finger stiffened on the trigger for the shot he had not yet fired.

Calvert looked toward the line of people across the street, amazed, his undischarged pistol in his hand. He had heard no shot but Hunter's. Then he caught sight of a man who stood in the street a little way in front of the silent, shocked people; a tall, bare-headed man, his shaggy hair long on his bloodless temples, hiding his bloodless ears.

Marvel Kindred, father of the murdered fool, had come for the vengeance that the law denied him. He stood clutching the rifle he had now lowered, looking with the sharp, inquiring eye of the hunter who pauses a moment to mark the spot where the game has fallen. Now he came forward with long, cautious step, and after him the crowd.

Judge Hunter's horse had broken loose from the man who held it, and was galloping away wildly, the stirrups lashing its sides, its panic growing with every leap. Across the little bridge it rushed, a drum-

beat of sound in its retreat, running for home, where the empty saddle would tell its story to somebody who watched for the coming of that dark man who lay huddled upon the grass, the darker passions of his heart dispersed by Kindred's bullet.

Susie Richardson came in shocked and awful fear, and stood beside Calvert in the fast-growing crowd. She took his hand and clung to it like a child who walks beside its protector in the night.

"Thank God you didn't have to do it!" she whispered.

"Thank God!" he repeated, his voice trembling in fervent gratitude for the interference that had left his hands stainless of that dark heart's blood.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS.

CALVERT walked toward the house under the elm tree with light step. The debt was paid, the strife and contention and bitterness of heart were at an end. The drain of lawyers was over, the impoverishing flicker of a destructive hope was put out forever. He was richer in the peace of that hour than he would have been in the vindictive triumph of an enforced judgment and execution on the poor property of that defiant people.

Doubtless there was not a more tranquil mind, a cleaner conscience, a happier heart, in all Clearwater County that night than his. There was not a speck between his eyes and the eyes of any man, not a smirch to be hidden. Even Judge Hunter, vindictive, jealous, biased in his narrow mind, was purged of his sins by the tragedy of his death, by the relief on Calvert's conscience that justice, commonly so unsparing of men's hearts, had put the weapon of his judgment in another's hand.

Susie Richardson was waiting down the lane where the moonlight was silvering the old elm tree over her bright head.

"They're the most ungrateful people that ever lived!" Susie charged, but long after greetings, long after a flood of words had passed on the mill-race of their nimble tongues.

"Oh, I don't know, Susie," he demurred, soft in his heart for all the world.

"There they stood and saw you burn up the debt that's been a burden on the back of every property owner in this county for fifty years without a word or a cheer out of them. They acted just as if they'd seen it done every Fourth of July."

"I don't think they're a shouting people," Calvert said, reflectively.

"You ought to hear them at a charivari or a camp-meeting," said she.

"I didn't expect them to be moved by it; I never figured they would be, Susie."

"Never figured? Do you mean to stand there and tell me, Tom Calvert, that you went to that meeting intending to burn those bonds?"

"Do you remember the morning I found you milking the Jersey?" Calvert countered, his voice soft and low.

"Remember!" she laughed. "Dear little Jersey! She trusted you, too."

"That was the beginning of it, Susie. I left you with the thought growing in my heart along with something else that hadn't been there before; I said then that this would be the way out of it for both of us in the end."

"Did you, Tom?" Susie breathed it very softly, her hand on his arm.

"It wasn't a sacrifice, although I told them it was," he said. "I didn't do it for them. I never would have done it for them."

"It was for father," said she wisely, her grateful eyes on his sober face, her caressing hand finding his. "He never will forget it—I saw that it nearly broke his heart for joy."

"For myself, more than anybody," said Calvert, no self-arraignment in his serious voice. "I was selfish, but I'm not ashamed of it."

"For yourself!" she echoed, not able to read the meaning in his face.

"You never would have married me after what you heard them charge if I'd hung on to the bonds, Susie."

Susie shook her head, clinging closer to his hand, leaning against his shoulder a little, a lovely burden that made his heart light to bear.

"No, I never would," she admitted.

"I said, that day I found you, they'd have to go into the fire if they ever came to stand between you and me, Susie."

"It would have broken my heart, but I couldn't, *couldn't* have married you, Tom, if you'd kept them after what those slanderous men charged."

"We'll go to Vinland and get the license in the morning—I've learned that the lady must appear in that transaction, as well as the one following it, in this State," he said.

Silence, sweeter, with its compensations, than words. Then:

"Susie?"

"Yes, Tom?"

"We were speaking of the Congregationalist minister over at Vinland, your father's friend, you know?"

"Yes, Tom."

"If you don't mind, I'd like to come back here and stand up before Uncle Bill Sawyer—he's a justice of the peace."

"Why, if you'd rather, Tom," but somewhat shocked by the proposal, it seemed, or surprised to such degree that it amounted to a mild shock.

"Uncle Bill asked me to let him have the honor and pleasure—those were his very words—just like the courtly old gentleman he is, Susie. He said we could have a preacher go over it afterward if you wanted to have it done that way."

"A preacher afterward!" she scorned. "Why, it would look like we didn't trust him, Tom. I wouldn't any more have a preacher marry me over after Uncle Bill Sawyer than I'd revise the Lord's Prayer."

Thus, having come to the end of the unfinished business, there was no place for words between them for a long, long time. And in that time the strand of moonlight between house and elm tree broadened, and lay white as a shore at noonday when the tide has gone lisping with its secrets again to sea.

"Tom?"

"Yes, my dear."

"Shall we go over to Vinland with Joe Tager in the morning?" Susie asked it banteringly, with sly reference to Calvert's first adventure in Clearwater County at the hands of that amiable carrier.

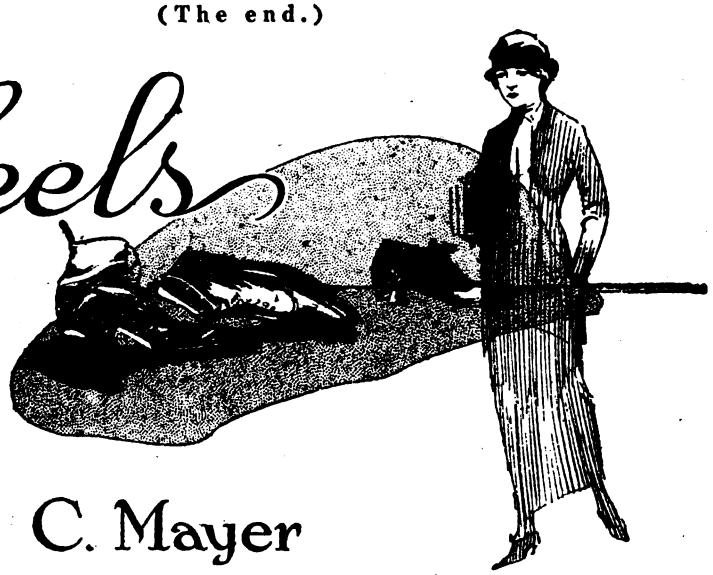
"Jist accordin'," said he, laughing with her in the growing joy of their new peace.

(The end.)

Heels

by

Raye C. Mayer



WILLIAM Beyer, the shoemaker, respected for his uncommon sense, poised a worn awl, brushed a fleck of beeswax from a furrowed thumb, and addressed his cronies—the old men of Hornerville. "I kin allus tell a woman by the heels on her old shoes," challenged the village sage.

Three silvered heads raised.

"These yere heels f'r instance," argued

Beyer. "These heels was built for comfort, not speed. They ain't elegant heels, b'gosh, but they is the heels of a fine, upstandin' woman." And he held aloft the plain, neat and substantial boots of Eliza Bird, most easily identified by Hornerville gossips as the "steady" of W. Horton Gibbs, the fast arriving Daniel Webster of Cowega County.

"Lizey Bird—them's her kicks," chuckled the philosopher of the bench.

"Le's see now, Lizey's been trottin' with Gibbs now close on to ten years," speculated Adoniram Moot, always long on statistics.

"Lizey never 'll burn up the world as I has sed, but, mark my word, Lizey Bird walks the ways of this vale of tears with a clear eye, an honest tread and with a heart plumb wide open fer love," continued Beyer. She hits out on the balls of her feet; no runover high heels fer hern."

"You're more 'n half right," agreed Gabe Gressman, the richest and meanest man in Hornerville.

Gressman never agreed absolutely with anybody.

"Now cast yer watery eyes on this footgear," ordered the man with the hammer. Reaching a hairy, iron-muscled arm into a mass of shoes of every possible state of disrepair, Beyer extracted a superpolished left belonging to one of the male sex. Then he hooked its mate.

Six time-dimmed eyes squinted questioningly.

"Them is the high-toned kickers of our esteemed feller citizen—W. Horton Gibbs," explained Beyer. "They'se bluff from uppers to welt. In shine they rival the rays of the sun. They'se cheap shoes, the shoes of a cheap man. See how them toes is worn off? That means their owner is allus tryin' to stand head 'n' shoulders above his fell bein's. An' them heels. Worn way off on the side. That, gentlem'n is a supreme indication that the owner of them shoes don' take a solid stand on anything. It means he won' back up what he says; his backbone is weak. It tells plain, gentlem'n, that young Gibbs is a man what fergits. Mind me—a man what fergits!"

"How much is he owing you, Bill?" guffawed Cain Bellowes, rotund Hornerville wit.

"He ain't owing me, cuz I ses: No trust, Mr. Gibbs, when he broach the subjict to me wunst," retorted the ouija of the bench. "Now, Lizey Bird," droned on Beyer, "she'll never fergit. Whether it be love or kindness or hurt, Lizey Bird 'll never fergit."

And three wise, hoary heads nodded in solemn agreement.

All Hornerville knew that W. Horton Gibbs parted his name and his conscience in the middle. The dogs curled in the sun in Hornerville square pulled in their tails when the aspiring young lawyer injected zip into the noonday quiet by rushing from his office in the Taylor Building across to the Giles Emporium, where Lizey Bird kept books. Dogs, clairvoyants of men's characters, knew that W. Horton Gibbs was prone to trod ruthlessly upon the rights of others. Therefore they folded their waggers, those that had them. And little children clung to their mothers when W. Horton sought to hug them to his immaculate bosom. And as the shoemaker said: "Beware when kids mistrust!"

All Hornerville knew that W. Horton Gibbs was the reason why Lizey Bird had worn the same faded blue suit for so many years. In fact, Hornerville's newest lawyer possessed an ornate diploma allowing him the dishonorable right to practise his brand of law, which had been wrought from the heart yearnings and savings of Lizey Bird. And Gale Harkins, of the Hornerville Bank, knew that the flashy rugs and glistening furniture in W. Horton's tower of law, had been bought with Lizey Bird's sacrifice. But Gale Harkins was close of mouth.

Hornerville was quite used to Lizey Bird and W. Horton. For years the gossips had predicted their marriage. Sharp tongues wagged and time spun on, and the hope-chest of Lizey Bird became old and its scent of lavender faint. Success came to polish the ego of W. Horton. Hornerville grew, with W. Horton ahead of the pace. Only Lizey Bird tagged behind along with the interest that W. Horton did not pay on the money she had advanced him.

One May day as hyacinths lifted their perfume to the soft breath of spring and little boys scuttled through back lots with wiggling worms and winter-dried fishing-poles, the Hornerville *Banner* announced simultaneously the forming of a new bank with W. Horton Gibbs as president, and his engagement to May Ruth Mullins, of Crestboro, "the beautiful daughter of Senator Mullins." At least, so the *Banner* identified her.

Maytime was lovetime in Hornerville except for Lizey Bird. It brought to her only realization, a hurt that smoldered in the soft brown eyes and a new determination.

Lizey Bird's story should fade out here with a pretty picture revealing her as an old woman alone in her garden of hollyhocks and petunias reviewing in her mellowed memory the love of her youth. But this is the age of romance up to date. William Beyer had read from the heels on Lizey Bird's old shoes that "she was of the breed that walked flat on their heels and never forgot, love, kindness, or a hurt." Rest your eyes a while, and then read on—for Beyer shall give proof of his sagacity.

W. Horton Gibbs strode into Beyer's dingy shop the afternoon that Lizey Bird quit her job keeping books in the Emporium, and bought a ticket on the Limited for Gate City. "'Afternoon, Beyer," puffed W. Horton, pulling up grandly before the throne of the Hornerville sage. The ancient shoemaker peering through the dimness of his musty shop, wherein he studied human nature as the astronomer studies the stars from his roof-peak, inclined his frowsy head in acceptance of the greeting.

"Now, Beyer, I am here not to ask a favor, but to allow you the first honor to place your account with the newly organized Gibbs Bank of Hornerville," orated Gibbs.

The shoemaker-oracle tossed a sliver of leather into a tub of greasy-black water, stropped a blunt knife-edge methodically upon the rim of his bench and surveyed the speaker with a look of childlike invitation.

"Our capital stock, paid in, is five hundred thousand," W. Horton continued. "I—of course—am the president. Your account, though not large, is welcome and we shall strive to serve. Can we count upon you?"

The shoemaker carefully drove a peg and then another.

W. Horton waited, confidence illuminating his podgy features.

The old man, who clung to his bench despite time and a comfortable fortune, appeared in meditative mood. His eyes weakly sought vision through the dust-stained window of his two by four shop. Those meditative eyes followed a slender figure up through the maples of Hornerville's main street. The slender figure wore an overbrushed, faded blue suit of a style that even Beyer knew was not that of the young girls who tripped giggling into his shop to have their heels built higher. His tired eyes saw the slender figure pause to drop a battered and bulging suit-case upon the flagstones of the sidewalk. He saw her take a new grip upon the burden, throw back her head, and strike out proudly toward the depot.

W. Horton turned sharply. He, too, saw the slender figure in the trim, neat suit of faded blue. W. Horton flushed as he noted the shoemaker was watching him quizzically under his shaggy eyebrows.

"Seems Lizey Bird's goin' away," drawled the shoemaker dreamily. "Thar's a girl what stands fair and square on her heels," he rambled on. "She's sumpin' like me; she never fergits a hurt, nor a good turn."

A tiny bell over the door in the shoemaker's shop tinkled its derision to the wrath that foamed in the heart of W. Horton Gibbs as he slunk out of the dimness into the light. The snug fortune of Beyer was not entrusted to the Gibbs Bank of Hornerville. Gale Harkins, he of the closed mouth, could have assured you of that, for he was the cashier of the Bank of Hornerville.

Four years skipped merrily along. Lizey Bird, now assistant to the credit manager of the Gate City department store, no longer graced an overbrushed, faded blue suit

of ancient stamp. Neither did she wear the look of one who had lost heart because of an early love that had gone to smash on the shoals of man's deceit. Behind the modern shell-rimmed glasses of Lizey Bird burned the new determination that had come to her the day the Hornerville *Banner* announced the engagement of W. Horton Gibbs to "the beautiful daughter of Senator Mullins."

The shoemaker-sage of Hornerville, had he peered into those soft brown eyes, however, would have later impressed upon his dwindling group of cronies that Lizey Bird had not forgotten.

Eliza Bird was happy in a new world she had discovered one May day when the Gate City florist shops bloomed with hyacinths. It was on that day that Jack Gerry came to serve as credit manager. At first she had feared the young accountant would displace her with his own assistant, but after the first day all doubt removed itself. Her heart thrilled then for the first time in months. The thrill became a pleasant, permanent thing, until now when Gerry approached her desk, color flooded into her face as if whipped there by a Hornerville March wind.

But to-day there was a somber note that called for no humming song as Lizey sorted a sheaf of application-blanks for credit. A romanceless credit request had stopped the fount of her happiness. It recalled in sharp, typewritten relief the tragedy of her early trust. The name of "W. Horton Gibbs" smote her between the eyes.

Not that the old love had returned. It had not even been stirred. In fact, she laughed at that idea, which, too, had crept into her keen perception. That which did stir her was the scrawl of Jack Gerry approving the giving of unlimited credit, and the bills attached for merchandise purchased.

The bills showed that W. Horton was debtor for:

1 lady's hat	$45.00
8 pairs ladies' silk stockings	96.00
3 camisoles	36.00
4 silk underwear	80.00

You will ask—what of this? Yes, a married man is forced to these feminine extravagances! Certainly, but you must remember that Eliza Bird knew W. Horton much better than we could ever hope to know him—and into her being there came a suspicion.

Why, dear friend, was the splendid Mrs. W. Horton Gibbs buying headgear and unmentionables in Gate City when Buffalo, much larger and with more up-to-date and exclusive shops was of closer proximity to Hornerville? And when you discount suspicion you must remember that Lizey Bird was the rejected "steady" of W. Horton Gibbs, president of the Gibbs Bank of Hornerville.

So Eliza, womanlike, had her suspicions, which we might classify as the well known "woman's intuition."

And as the debts of W. Horton began to mount upon the books of the Gate City department store, the assistant credit manager evinced a lively interest in the account of one W. Horton Gibbs, Hornerville.

That may explain why, late one afternoon, a natty little salesgirl issued a hasty summons to the gentle Eliza. And that may well explain why Eliza, who we have been told, never forgot a hurt, surveyed critically from a safe vantage point the woman upon whom W. Horton Gibbs had bestowed more than a thousand dollars' worth of finery in less than one short month.

W. Horton was the same W. Horton, only more boisterously impressive. Eliza was dismayed that her heart fluttered not a flutter as she viewed him. The woman? She was not Mrs. W. Horton. Eliza was sure of that. She knew full well the comfortable forty waist of the former Miss Mullins. This wasplike young thing, who chewed gum, certainly was not that estimable woman.

Her suspicion—or shall we call it intuition—having proved correct, Eliza Bird crept to her office loft. There she toiled into the night, so long that a watchman unlocked the entrance door to allow her to depart. It was late.

Eliza Bird laughed merrily, even a mite spitefully, as she heard the impact of three

envelopes as they struck the bottom of the letter-box.

Three days skipped on joyfully for Eliza Bird. Then one day there came to her desk a copy of the Hornerville *Banner*. Across the front page a blazing caption in blood-red type shrieked its message. It read:

GIBBS BANK OF HORNERVILLE IS BURNED!

President Gibbs Reported Missing—State Bank Examiners Arrive One Day Late To Act Upon Tip From Mysterious Source—All Records Destroyed

A cold smile framed the lips of Eliza Bird. A shaft of steely light crept into the iris of each soft brown eye. She read on:

The Gibbs Bank of Hornerville was destroyed by fire last night. It is the belief of the police that the blaze was of incendiary origin. Further mystery is added to the fire through the arrival here to-day of State bank examiners, who it is reported, were scheduled to have gone over the books of the institution. Rumor for the past few days has led the public to believe that the funds of the bank were in bad shape and that a run on the bank was feared.

President W. Horton Gibbs had not been located at a late hour and nothing is known of his whereabouts. Employees of the bank state that following the receipt of a mysterious letter on Tuesday President Gibbs had a brief mental breakdown, but recovered quickly.

State Bank Examiner Rollo Perkins told the *News* correspondent that the department had received a tip suggesting that the accounts of the bank be examined.

It is also stated that several prominent men, depositors in the bank, received anonymous communications setting forth that one of the officials had been plunging in stocks. A strange woman was also mentioned.

The police believe that the fire was of incendiary origin. An empty gasoline-can from a near-by garage was found in the ruins.

Eliza Bird chuckled as she delved on into the details. Jack Gerry interrupted her. As he assimilated the import of the headlines his face paled.

"Never mind, old dear," purred Eliza. "I insisted upon an immediate settlement of W. Horton's account several days ago, and he sent a check by return mail." Although a talkative chit of a bundle girl lingered near, Jack Gerry gazed wonderingly into the soft brown eyes of his assistant.

William Beyer, the shoemaker, squinted near-sightedly through the murky panes of his back shop window to where the afternoon sunlight played among the gaunt, black ruins of the late Gibbs Bank of Hornerville.

"Now les' see," ruminated gouty Adoniram Moot, always long on statistics. "Now, les' see—ain't this the day they bring Gibbs home. Been about two weeks since they caught him up in Noo York ready to vamose on that 'er boat fer Bermudy."

"Will Wambold—he sez—Gibbs had more 'n eighty-five thousand dollars in his valise," interjected Gabe Gressman, four-score and ten experienced. "What yer lookin' at William?"

"Ain't that Lizey Bird over yonder by the deceased Gibbs bank?" pondered the shoemaker.

"Right you be, William," concurred Cain Bellowes, the village wit. "An' ain't she the dressed-up, too! Lookit the young swell she's got with her. Mebbe it's her husband."

"Wonder why they's laffin' so?" worried Adoniram Moot. "Seems t' be havin' a fit."

"Guess Lizey thinks the joke's on W. Horton," ventured the shoemaker. "Who do you s'pose could have notified them bank examiners."

A knowing laugh rumbled from the great chest of William Beyer, and his eyes were focused on a happy young couple surveying the wreck of the Gibbs Bank of Hornerville.

"I kin tell a man's character by the heels on his old shoes," challenged the shoemaker-sage. "Or a woman's fer that matter. Now, Lizey Bird thar; Lizey never run down her heels. She walked straight out on the balls of her feet, indicatin' she was fair an' square and never fergot a good turn—or a hurt."

And the three ancient men of Hornerville nodded in solemn agreement.

The Big Game Prince

A. Lincoln Bender

THE thousands who but five minutes before had been silent with apprehension, now became a swinging, gyrating mass of animated color. Old men gray from their battle with life swung their arms crookedly above their uncovered heads, and hoarsely commanded a distant muddy figure to "smash 'em up." Women in the first bloom of vibrant, matronly prettiness threw their arms skyward and waved their pennants excitedly, or clutched agitatedly at their neighbors' arms.

The sparkle of keen excitement shone upon every face in the huge bowl. Every pair of eyes was trained upon the strange phenomenon out upon the sticky, cleat-torn field. For steadily now, the Roxboros were marching up the field. At first it did not seem true, it was just a flash of brilliant play; then with sudden illumination those who watched realized the truth.

Now they were imploring the gritty, lightweight team to smash their rivals to bits. There was not much time to lose. On the side lines the coach of the Traylors was glancing at his watch with nervous little movements. Already in a vain endeavor to halt the victorious march he had sent in four substitutes within five minutes. When the last sped over the turf to take his place, the coach had fiercely commanded:

"Get that guy—you know—Prince!"

There was a strident voice calling off a series of numbers amid a thick silence. Simultaneously fourteen moleskinned men stiffened their backs and glared at each other from behind amorphous nose and head-guards. Across the field thundered a very hoarse appeal voiced by the adherents of Traylor University: "Hold 'em, Traylor!"

As though wound by some huge key, twenty-two men got into action. There was a piling motion and then a halt, but out of the bunch flickered a figure, running close to the ground. His bright red hair shone in the dying twilight of the November day, and it seemed like a firebrand. He hurtled with terrific impetus into the waiting arms of two backs, who threw him heavily. But he rose, shook himself and hurried back, pulling up his stocking.

The cheers thundered forth again, this time with wild acclaim:

"Prince—Jimmy Prince—yea—bo-o-y!"

Acrobatic cheer-leaders flung themselves into knots, exhorting their followers to more noise. The twenty-two gladiators lined up. Those who were carrying the banner of Traylor lagged and looked despairingly toward the sidelines. The Roxboro men bent to their task with a bull-dog ferocity.

Back of the line of offense the figure of Jimmy Prince swayed. His teeth were tightly clenched and his vision blurred by the tears of pain that sprang to his eyes

unbidden. Jimmie knew—though they back in the stands did not. It was his knee. The right one, which he had sprained somehow early in the season. That was the reason why he had not played so frequently. He tested it tentatively. It was wobbly. "Dislocation of the cartilage," the surgeons had pronounced. "Never be able to use it in strenuous work." And it had nearly broken Jimmy's heart. Now, directly against all advice, he was out there playing—playing to win.

Through a painful daze he heard his string of numbers. He was touched deeply by the voice. Little Doc Noonan it was. Doc, whose lack of size and weight was easily balanced by his courage and grit. They had never been very close friends, except in an athletic way. Doc Noonan was radical in his views. He came from the bottom class. He was keenly against those who controlled huge interests. It was probably that which prevented Jimmy Prince from becoming the little fellow's friend. In the flash of a moment Jimmy recalled all that.

He knew that he was to take the oval and plunge through the hole at center. It was the last of their string of trick plays—which were not so tricky, but just strategic. The Traylors had been taken off their feet by them. For every signal gave Jimmy Prince the ball, even when it seemed that he did not have it.

Jimmy braced himself. Everything depended upon getting a flying start. He heard little Doc Noonan hurl forth the last numeral and he started. The hole was there. His vision cleared as he felt the leathern oval dash against his hardened stomach. There was a tightened, convulsive grip upon his jersey, and he heard Doc Noonan's voice yell: "Get through there!"

He plunged and ripped hard between the space. It gave way, and he was out. No one was before him, and he hugged the ball tight as a mother might her first-born, and swept onward. Ground gained was what counted. There was an impact, and he knew that some one had tackled him. Instinctively he relaxed his muscles and met the turf. This time he did not rise so quickly. But he knew when he swayed upward that they would win.

Twenty-six yards he had torn off that time. The posts loomed and beckoned but a short twelve yards away. It was easy. He laughed a trifle peculiarly and limped for two steps. Then he remembered and placed his full weight upon the knee. It rocked with pain, and he prayed that he might last until that objective had been attained.

He did not hear the wild, uncontrolled howl of acclaim that rocketed over the field. He did not see anything but the bent backs and curved legs of the men before him—and Doc Noonan. There was inspiration in the sight of the little quarter-back. Jimmy knew instinctively that he was to take the ball. Again he tested the leg. It throbbed with a dull ache that could hardly be denied.

His red thatch waved in the lowering darkness, and again there was that impact. He squirmed through and broke loose from the detaining hands. But it cost a terrific volume of determination. He staggered two steps, and slithered forward toward the waiting fullback. Again that crash, and he threw himself forward over the man. The arms outstretched and the ball inched its way. Two more yards and victory would be theirs.

Jimmy Prince did not rise. Two of his companions assisted him. He noted that one was Noonan. There was an appeal in the deep blue eyes.

"All right, Prince?" he asked in a husky, strained voice.

Jimmy forced his eyes open. He shook his head in acquiescence.

His leg wobbled crazily, and then there was a little click. It stiffened almost instantly, and Jimmy knew. It meant another week in an adhesive plaster. But he bit his lips together, and turned his face resolutely forward. It was simple now. A rush, with plenty of pushing, and he would be over. They lined up, and he wheezed his thoughts to Noonan. The latter dove low and the ball slammed against the redhead's ribs. He was conscious of a whirling mass and that he was the center of it. Then after an interminable length of time he

heard the whistle and knew that it was all over. And then Jimmy Prince forgot.

II.

It was just after Christmas that Jimmy Prince was able to walk from his room into the sunlight and air. Just about a month since he had ripped his way through the Traylor line and snatched victory from sure defeat. The college work had gone on the same. While he lay in the infirmary with his knee strapped up many were the thoughts that had come to the mind of the sorrel-topped Jimmy Prince. Only he and the surgeon knew what a terrific strain he had suffered. In that last plunge he had torn the ligaments to pieces. The cartilage had been bitten nearly in two.

There was a moisture in the eyes of the professional man when he told his verdict.

"Never be any good again, Jim. Any sort of a slight strain will throw it out and jerk it back. I've seen too many of them, but none like this. Stiffen up for days." He shrugged his shoulders and turned away. "Pretty bad thing to carry around with you the rest of your life, young man," he gruffly finished. "Rainy day, slushy day, and you step too heavily upon that right knee—flop, down you go. Oh, I know. Don't tell me. This is not the first time I've tried to mend such a tear. Too bad, boy, too bad."

And it was then that Doc Noonan came to be understood by Jimmy Prince. Twice a week the embryo physician stopped in to see the injured man. At first the visits were merely perfunctory greetings; then one day Jimmy got the truth. Noonan was going back when he took his degrees, to serve his own people.

"No money in it, Prince," he said, "but a whole lot of personal satisfaction. They need me and I'm going. They need me because some others of our human brothers don't think of them—only in terms of how many dollars and cents their labor is worth."

And Jimmy was forced to admire the young fellow. It showed him a side of human nature that he had never before studied.

But it was soon forgotten. Jimmy was thinking of what he was missing out there in the world of his comrades. The knee did not heal as quickly as it should. Already the hockey season had started, and he longed to be there. Basketball came and went.

Then one night Jimmy tried to test the surgeon's opinion. It ended disastrously. As he set his full weight down upon the leg it trembled and with difficulty Jimmy Prince saved himself a nasty fall upon a slippery pavement. But then he knew!

He realized fully that what the surgeon had said was true. Never would that knee be any good. There was not a thing that he could do—in the athletic line. So Jimmy Prince brooded to himself. He stayed in his room—he missed lectures.

And then upon the day of days when he completed his stay at the old college, Jimmy Prince shook hands with his comrades and bade them farewell. Last of all came little Doc Noonan. The little fellow had been a constant visitor. Jimmy had come to like him after a fashion. Doc looked him squarely in the eyes.

"There are two kinds of lameness, Prince," said the physician. "Physical and mental. Look out for the latter—it's incurable! Good-by!"

It was an enigmatic statement, and Jimmy frowned.

"Good-by and good luck, Noonan," responded Jimmy, and they parted.

But Jimmy's knee continued to bother him. He tried wearing a brace specially prepared, but it bulged and was decidedly uncomfortable. Too, it was not reliable. Once when he was running, confident that it would hold up, he turned suddenly, and it gave way. So he discarded it with a cry of impatience. Nothing was any good!

He went north to a camp, expecting to stay there all summer and forget. But he found that he could not. There was really nothing that he could do. When he tried to swing an ax he learned that his knee would not stand the strain. Twice early in the morning he had stolen away with his rod and the brace strapped about his knee, only to come back later dripping and limping and his features screwed in pain.

Everything he tried was contingent upon that right knee—and the more Jimmy tried to discover something that would take his mind off it, the less successful was he.

He stayed at the camp a week longer; then, with a sick heart, he turned his steps toward the city. He was not needy. There was a position open for him in his father's huge lumber office. But Jim Prince was sick at heart—sick because he was lamed for life. And such a lameness! It could not be perceived. If he were careful he could walk along as though he were whole, but deep down in his heart was that dread—that sword of Damocles that threatened any moment to slice his leg from under him and throw him downward, broken.

III.

THE greatest fight that Jimmy Prince ever fought was against that dread thought and fear of his knee. It was brought home to him in so many ways that it was a constant threatener. For the first few weeks in the office he nursed his secret fear with a bundle of taut nerves. Once during that time he had leaped up quickly from his desk, caught his lower leg against an open drawer and was conscious of a sharp, protesting wrench. He laughed bitterly at it.

He could not dance. To try to gyrate upon a slippery floor was entirely out of the question. He tried golf one morning with his father, and upon the first long address and drive he twisted the member until it twitched little pain wrinkles upon his tight lips.

No matter what he tried, that tender member gave painful evidence that it controlled his actions entirely.

So Jimmy plunged into the business details of his father's enormous firm. It was for self-preservation that he did it. For though Jimmy was not a shirker he wanted the great outdoors and all that they meant to a healthy man. Only when he realized fully that he was through with all that his heart yearned for did he focus his thoughts upon business.

Like everything that he tried, the young man became proficient in all details of the huge concern. It was remarkable to his father and those associated with him. Usually young blood out of college is wont to take its time learning the dry routine of business. But they did not know the internal hurt that urged Jimmy Prince to absorb all the problems that were laid before him. They did not realize the tremendous wrench that it caused the young man to apply himself thus.

He did not go out evenings. He developed a strange, trenchant manner of speaking that surprised even his father. At home in his rooms Jimmy read volumes. He smoked incessantly. His only companion was a phonograph which he utilized as an accompaniment to his violin.

It was but natural that he should become sluggish as regarded his movements. One who has been accustomed to a violent exercise such as football, for instance, and then suddenly compelled to forego it, always goes to the other extreme. At first he had endeavored to exercise in his private gym, but he gave it up. Then he dropped into the extremely natural habit of favoring his knee upon all occasions. It flattered his sense of security.

And so he became as morbid as a healthy brained man could. At the office he was a regular tyrant. Everything done by his assistants had to be correct when brought to him. If it were not, his sarcasm was biting and sometimes nasty. He became to be known as "The Rasp." Owing to his own isolation he began to lose those acquaintances who had sought him. He did not attend the club more than once or twice a month and at those times he was silent, moody.

Then one day, a card was brought in to him. He smiled a bit, a twisted bit of smile.

"Send him in," he ordered.

Doc Noonan came in. He looked healthy, but there were little lines about his eyes. And too, he carried himself like a man who had seen hard living.

"Hello, Jim," he smiled. "Just down in the city, so thought I would drop in. How are things?"

They talked for half an hour on their reminiscences. Then Doc broke off suddenly.

"Down for a purpose, Jim, so I've got to beat it. Drop up to see me sometime."

Jimmy promised with a pang of jealousy in his heart. Here was a man perfectly healthy, and he was happy. He did not look at the address. He tore the card into little bits and laughed harshly.

His father first noted the violent change in the man. Like the shrewd judge that he was he attributed it to some love affair, and sat down to watch. Love to a young man is an indefinable thing, and being indefinable, it is something easily tossed aside and begun anew. But old Jim Prince found out nothing along those lines, for there was nothing to be discovered.

He was proud of his son. He still had the paper which had commented upon the grit and courage of Jimmy Prince in working the ball eighty-five yards to a touchdown single-handed. He was proud and rightfully so. Also he loved his only boy. And that love went deeper, for with it was a generous mixture of respect for the bulldog courage with which Jim Prince, the younger showed he was imbued. But now the older man was afraid.

He, too, knew of the injury. He, too, knew that it would never heal. And he, too, sensed this change that had come over his only born. He marveled at the manner in which the young fellow handled the business and uncannily developed into a master mind. He marveled at it—until he noted that it was done with a ferocity that meant obsession, and that was why he became afraid. Such a state of mind could end but one way. And old Jim Prince shivered as he thought of it. He had seen too many men go down. He called to mind young David Ostern, who had risen in a year to be a world financier. He recalled how the young fellow had taxed his brain with study; then the break came, and now Ostern was in a sanatorium, a hopeless case.

For a week the older man shrewdly studied his son. Then with his customary brusk manner he called him into consultation. Obviously there was no time to lose. Young Jimmy Prince, the lame man, was not only lame in his knee, but his injury had caused him to grow lame in his heart.

"Son," began the older man, gazing deeply into the steel-blue eyes. "Your work here is marvelous. We need a man to straighten out the tangle up in the woods. You recall what I mean?"

"Perfectly," replied Jimmy Prince, without the flicker of an eyelid. "You are referring to the Manger properties."

The older man nodded, but he was not pleased with his son's answer. The Manger properties were huge holdings, but their legal entanglements were supposed to have been secret and in the hands of their attorneys. Yet his son knew them perfectly. It was but further proof of the senior's fears.

"Well, it looks as though we will obtain them. Mean time they are in a dreadful state up there. I want you to go there and straighten out the shipping and production end of it. You know the business well enough now. I'm confident you can iron out the kinks."

Jimmy Prince nodded. There was a slight smile upon his lips, but it was not a smile good to look at. It contained a message that clearly spoke: "No quarter from me."

The older man rose and stepped to the side of his maimed son. In his heart was a prayer to the Almighty that He would succeed in swaying the young mind into broader channels.

"Good-by, son. I've got a meeting on. You'll take the afternoon express, I suppose. Wire me all details, and of course call upon me for any assistance you want. Oh, by the way, here's a letter to the superintendent up there. He's an old pal of mine, Jimmy, so treat him and his people kindly."

IV.

THE smell of the pine woods thrilled the young man. For half a day he had been gazing out upon the lordly hills clothed tightly in their vest of gorgeous pines. It was a sight to thrill any man. Here it looked wonderful. Back there thirty miles away from any semblance of civilization it was inspiring. Jim knew. He had read descriptions from his father, and once or twice he had listened to the superintendents who dropped in yearly to pay their visit to the big city.

It was an enormous undertaking, this business established by his father. Only now, upon the smallest of the operations, could Jimmy Prince visualize it. Lumber that supplied half the country came from the company that his father headed. And this place to which he was bound represented but a small corner of that huge concern.

The thin lines of worry that had traced their marks down the cheeks of Jim Prince drew together in a hard, sarcastic grin. Here was work to be done. Here was the only thing that would cause him to forget—forget! He drew in a long breath of the air. He was to have absolute sway—he could forget—forget that dread fear. It was a chance to show the world that if he were lame in his knee his brain was keen! He would show them.

He would do it heartlessly—precisely—to win the respect of those who controlled the product. It was good to be in such a position. He would in a few years be one of them—one of the powers. Everything else must be subordinated to that. He could not hope to play with them—but he could rise to the top by work!

The tall form of Jimmy Prince descended from the train at the way station and he peered about at the three or four persons who were waiting. One in particular held his gaze because it was a woman. He noted that she was dressed in the short skirts and mackinaw of the country, and that her hair rebelled at its captivity under a tam-o'-shanter of vivid plaid.

More than that he could not observe without shattering the bonds of etiquette.

For presently she came toward him with a little smile that hovered midway between welcome and curiosity.

"Mr. Prince?" asked she finally, in a full-throated tone.

Jimmy Prince allowed a brief, vague smile to flash to his lips, and he bowed.

"I am he," replied the tall young fellow.

His manner seemed to freeze up the sunniness of her greeting and with a quick glance she nodded toward the end of the station.

"I will take you over," came her voice, clearly impersonal.

If he were surprised, Jimmy Prince did not show it. He followed in a short-stepped manner that he had affected since the true extent of his injury was known.

The little buckboard held them with a little squeezing, and he mentally noted that she handled the lines with skill and understanding.

All during the drive through the pine-fringed roads that wound like velvet before his eyes, he said not a word. That she was pretty he did not deny even to himself. But he mentally noted, she was probably the daughter of one of the workmen—a nobody.

The ride was invigorating. Jim marveled at the fact that just as they drove up to the collection of one and two-story frame houses that composed the little settlement, he was hungry. The girl motioned as she drew up before the largest house.

"There's the office, sir. You'll find everything in readiness. I wish you luck."

There was a little tang to the latter expression that sounded somewhat like a challenge to Jimmy Prince, but before he could turn about the girl had urged the horse onward and disappeared round the side of the house.

Jimmy Prince walked to the steps and pushed the door inward. A man with a rollicking laugh and wide, humorous face met him.

"Sure, you look enough like your dad to be him," was his greeting. "Welcome; come in, come in."

For a moment the tall form hesitated. He had understood that his advent would cause a much different reception. But it did not surprise him. Nothing surprised Jim Prince of late.

"You are Noonan, the superintendent?" he asked in his cold, calculating voice.

"The same," bowed the man with a broad grin. "We got a telegrapht from your father, and have been expecting you."

Jimmy noted that at times the heavy speech of the superintendent relapsed to the vernacular of the woodsmen. But he could see that this man was above board and honest. That was discernible in his very manner.

Noonan, apparently, took the utmost

pleasure in showing the young fellow his rooms and relating everything that had happened for months back. And as they sat down to supper, as Noonan called it, Jimmy Prince was surprised to see the female figure who had brought him from the station come in and serve them before she, too, seated herself.

"My darter, Ethel," bowed Noonan, with pride in his eyes.

Before Jimmy could say a word, there was a little flash to the deep gray eyes, and she replied:

"We have met before, dad."

Jimmy Prince was conscious that he had been reprimanded.

V.

If the son of the lumber magnate thought that he was going to take hold of a business matter that required but snappy orders to consummate it, he found himself vastly mistaken during the first week of his visit to the property.

To say that matters were in chaos would be but reiterating a fact. It was not due entirely to Noonan's lack of attention, however. It was clearly apparent after a cursory examination that Noonan had had too much to handle. Which led Jimmy Prince to wire his father to send an expert bookkeeper immediately. He then turned his mind to the matter which he knew was the most important—that of straightening out the production end of the deal.

That he was inexperienced he discovered on his first day. And then it was that Jimmy Prince realized the magnitude of the task his father had sent him to handle. Were it a mere matter of cutting trees, he would have laughed at the ridiculous ease with which it could be handled. But it was more than that. It was a problem of engineering, production, sagacity — and handling of men.

Such men they were, too! Not the sort he had been accustomed to down in the city. These were men, spelled with a capital "M." And the very sight of them angered Jimmy Prince. He coveted their health; he was jealous of their prowess; he envied their springy movements and catlike actions. And the more he thought of it, and of his own condition, the more angered he became at them. He hated them for their health.

It was with them that Noonan had had the most trouble. The engineering problem was simple enough. It was but a case of getting surveyors. But after the narrow-gauge railroad had been laid—what then? The woodsmen were plainly not in a receptive mood. The Manger interests had angered them. They had many grievances to settle. They were "on the fence," and it was a matter that need a cool head to settle. It needed a human man. It required a man who could see both sides of the question, and who could appreciate justice.

In his present state of mind Jimmy Prince was not the man to handle the question. He hated these healthy men. He was angered at them because their stand held up his work. That was his God now. Anything that deterred him from reaching that goal of a power angered him unbelievably. He was lame—lame upon a subject that he had taken to his heart to make him forget his injury. And these healthy men inflamed him. He grinned sardonically. It was not a grin pretty to look at.

The men sent their committee with their grievances. Already two precious weeks had been lost. Young Jim Prince received them in a cold, sarcastic silence. Already he had heard from Noonan that these men had virtually refused to work if not given certain demands. That in itself was enough to incite the young fellow to bitter thought. He knew from questioning that his father had always treated these men with the utmost consideration. And now they were showing their true colors. That fact made Jimmy Prince chuckle harshly down in his throat.

The interview was short and to the point. Young Jimmy listened to them in silence; then when they had finished, he walked calmly toward the door and nodded his head.

"Ye mean ye won't?" demanded the spokesman, Danny MacKey. He was a big man, thewed like a Colossus.

"There's the door," snapped the young fellow. "You men are insulting—you know my answer. Take it or leave it."

"But," gurgled the spokesman, "man, listen t' reason. Prices is awful. We want better livin'. It's only justice we asks fer. Th' kiddies an' th' wimmin."

His appeal fell upon deaf ears. Jimmy Prince stood patiently awaiting their departure. When the last one of them had gone, he turned to his desk with a little grim grin upon his tightened lips. He had told them exactly what he meant. But he was not seated long before a figure was before him. He looked up in surprise and noted that it was Ethel Noonan. Now, as she stood there, breast heaving, he noted with a distinct start that she was undeniably beautiful. The skin was perfect velvet, with a bold splash of red upon the cheeks. The white of her teeth made a wondrous background for the scarlet of her lips.

"You can't," she voiced in a trembling tone. "They are right, Mr. Prince. I know. You must at least weigh their demands. You must give them the benefit of the doubt. You must grant them—for it is human."

He was taken aback and plainly showed it. Finally that old hardness of the eyes came, and he laughed low, that bitter, unanswerable laugh that left the listener cold.

"When I desire your advice I'll call upon you, Miss Noonan," he said in his low, aggravating tone.

She drew one long breath and her gray eyes sparkled in anger. For a moment she seemed about to give vent to a wrathful retort, then she turned and almost ran from the room.

"Oh," came her voice, pitifully low and filled with anguish. "You are not human. You are not *human!*"

And Jimmy Prince looked up sharply as the door slammed. It filled his soul—that cry, and for an instant he was startled out of himself. Then, lighting a cigarette, he turned to his work, forcing his brain to concentrate upon the problems that assailed him. But through all his thoughts rang that cry. Finally he arose and with his short steps gained the window.

Outside an ominous quiet had settled. He looked off toward the towering woods and the sight seemed to throw fresh tinder to his wrath.

"They'll work," he confidently soliloquized, "or they'll pay!"

VI.

JIMMY PRINCE reckoned without thinking of the consequences. The men would not work. One by one they left. He wired to New York for more. His father replied that that was his job. It left Jimmy dazed for the moment. But with his characteristic doggedness he went along. His anger toward the men increased daily. He grew to hate them. He commenced to pity himself. If he were whole—if that knee were sound he would be able to go out there and fight them as they should be fought.

When a man begins to pity himself he becomes morbid to the uttermost limit. Jimmy cursed the men outrageously. He blamed them alone for these delays. He vowed that he would run them into the earth. His wrath was terrible to contemplate, for it was becoming an obsession. It seared his brain—it was slowly driving him to hypochondria.

Twice he made a trip overland with Noonan and engaged gangs. They were worse than none at all, and at their incompetent efforts Jimmy raged. The production fell below that of the former year. His costs were mounting, and Jimmy knew that instead of becoming a man to be praised, he was on the road to a rank failure. And so his manner became the more domineering and inhuman. He blamed those who worked for him—blamed them entirely.

Of Ethel Noonan he saw but little. Ever since that day when she had asked him to be just she had avoided him. He was conscious of this with a feeling of indifference that startled him, for he had the utmost respect for the opposite sex.

Then came the day, after a succession of halts, when he went deep into the woods to urge the men to greater effort. It was ill-advised. The old superintendent accompanied him, but had pleaded with him not to go. Jimmy Prince would not hear it. His eyes burned with savage intent, and his cheeks were sunken from the worry of it all.

The trip culminated in a very unexpected

manner. One big, brawny woodsman had taken exception to the sarcastic remarks of the young fellow. Only the quick intervention of Noonan prevented the man from reaching the white face with a wild swing. And as Jimmy was driven back to the office, he was trembling in every limb.

For he had been afraid! He knew it! A man had threatened him, and he, Jimmy Prince, had stood there, incapable of action, and with fear gripping at his heart. He knew that had the man hit him, he would have been unable to strike back. He realized with a sinking heart and shaking limbs that Noonan's intervention saved him.

Then, as he searched his brain for an explanation, he flattered himself that it was because of his knee. He had instantly thought of it at that climactic moment. It was because of it that he was afraid. He placed the blame heavily upon the maimed knee, and deep in his soul he reviled himself and it. It had made him a coward—it had made him afraid!

And as he cogitated, he became the more inflamed against the men. They were driving him to harsh action and underhanded means. Had it not been for their preposterous demands he would not have been forced to suffer this humiliation. Beasts they were—not human beings. And into his mind flashed plans to drive them. Inhuman plans that bespoke the lameness of his brain.

He walked immediately to his rooms. For a long time he sat staring out of the window. He was afraid. He was human, after all, for he had been afraid. She had told him that he must be human.

Jimmy rose and snorted angrily. What was he thinking of? Was he becoming insane? Hereafter he must carry a gun. He could afford to take no more chances with these brutes. They deserved no consideration whatever. Brutes they were, not men, and as brutes he must treat them.

The air in his room was close. He seized his fur cap and jerked it on. Usually when he felt the need he walked a short way back of the house and into the woods. It overhung a steep cliff looking off to the thick woods. Here he could think aloud.

As he approached the spot he became conscious that some one else was there. At first he was very cautious. He must take no chances with these brutes. They were probably hiding for him. Then as he looked he saw a flash of red mackinaw, and he knew. But he did not retrace his steps. For he found himself interested in the picture. She had not heard him. Her lips were parted, and he had to admit that she was beautiful.

He came forward a step, mystified that he should be attracted to this girl. Then she heard him and rose with a startled look in her gray eyes.

"Please," he found himself saying, "don't go because I am here."

Her breast rose and fell, and for an instant her eyes flashed. Then she smiled at him whimsically and waited until he came toward her.

Jimmy Prince found himself very satisfied. Quick to go to the bottom of such feelings, he recognized it as a sense of comradeship. He needed company. He longed for some one to sympathize with him, to comfort him in this time of his trials. He did not revile himself for the feeling. It was so wonderful—the peace that her presence seemed to bring.

"It is a wonderful sight here," he said, looking away from her.

"Yes," she replied. "So peaceful and quiet."

"Wonderful," breathed he. Her voice was so soothing, so agreeable. He turned his eyes toward her, and found a great longing welling up into his heart. "Wonderful," he reiterated. "Nature at her best. It thrills one."

Her voice was low, and her eyes twinkled like stars upon a cold night.

"Is it? I always had the impression that Nature at her best was illustrated by human beings."

He looked around at her again with wonder in his eyes. The gray pools met and held his, and it seemed that they tantalized him. He turned away. The proximity of the girl intoxicated him. He longed for her companionship. He craved it. It soothed his brain, and drove away the harassing thoughts that assailed him.

"Yes, I guess you are right. We animals are the best, and worst, of Nature, are we not?"

It was a statement of fact, not a question. Ethel Noonan relapsed into silence again. But he was even more sensible to her proximity. She looked so small there—yet to his hungry eyes, how wonderful she was. Her skin was comparable to the most expensive velvet he had ever seen. Her hair shone like a golden crown. A little cry came from his lips. He wanted to throw himself at her feet, and put his head into her lap. He wanted to be comforted and mothered. He wanted it as he had never wanted anything else in the world.

She turned toward him at the sound. There was a look in her eyes that bespoke but one thing—keen appreciation of his needs. But she put it aside as quickly as it had flamed forth. Her voice was low and throbbing.

"MacKey's youngest died yesterday," she said, with infinite sorrow in her voice.

Jimmy Prince felt the flush coming along his lean cheeks.

"MacKey's?"

Her eyes held his, and her clean-cut limbs swung outward and inward under the trunk of the noble pine upon which she sat.

"Yes—the spokesman of the men, you know. Oh, Mr. Prince, I don't believe that you mean to do it. It is not in you. You—"

He recalled now, and looked away. The deep flush suffused itself up past his cheekbones, causing his eyes to stand out like twin beacons of hate.

"You—" she went on, "can't understand. He could not get work. The baby died without a doctor's attention. It was pitiful. One of Nature's best examples gone—gone—because—because—"

Her tone thrilled him. Somewhere in his brain a little thread seemed to snap. He focused his eyes upon her face, and noted that tears had filled her eyes and were wetting her cheeks. For a moment he was in a quandary. Never had he seen a girl cry because of some one else's hurt. He marveled at this phenomenon. Why should she concern herself about any one else? He took a step forward, but before he could mouth any word, she was before him, blazing.

"Oh, it is on your head," she cried fiercely. "You—you—are not human! You are not the Jim I—"

Her head dropped to her hands and she flew past him. Jimmy Prince stood there watching her retreat. He was stunned by the outburst. A new feeling was permeating to his seared brain. "Not the Jim I—" he wondered what was the expression she had on the tip of her tongue. How wonderful it sounded to his ears. She had been thinking of him!

A crashing in the bushes caused him to look up, startled. He drew back, and fingered the gun. Then the huge form of her father came into view. There was much concern upon his broad face.

"Th' divils have broke out, sir. They're burnin' th' cook shanty, an'—"

There was a glint in the eyes. All the comforting feeling of but a short moment ago left him. He was cold with hate. Jimmy Prince seized the arm of his superintendent.

His voice was deadly cold.

"Where, Noonan?"

"Down th' holler. Oh, sir, if only—"

"Come with me, Noonan. We'll put a stop to this." His tone was biting. Without waiting to see if the big man was following, Jimmy Prince walked to his office.

"No, no, sir. Ye can't go. What 'll I ever tell yer dad?"

Jimmy Prince halted as he heard the words.

"They'll kill ye, Jim," quavered the old man. "They hate ye!"

"The feeling is mutual then, Noonan," bit off the young fellow. "Come on, Noonan, do you think I am going to stand idly by and see those brutes burn my property?"

"But ye don't understand, Mr. Prince. It ain't them men ye've got to face. It's them that ye—"

A sudden illumination came to the eyes of Jimmy Prince, and his breath whipped through his nostrils.

"MacKey?"

"Yis—oh, Mr. Prince—"

The blue eyes snapped more than ever.

Jimmy Prince turned away and strode down the steps.

"You can stay here, if you want to, Noonan," he said curtly. "But I'm going to stop this nonsense right away!"

"I got me men there," almost howled the superintendent. "Oh, Mr. Prince, don't go. They'll kill ye, sure. They're drunk wit' hate."

But the tall figure glided down the path with short, snappy steps. Noonan watched him, then he dashed into the house. His daughter met him. With breathless tones, he husked:

"Prince—he's goin' down to th' holler. They'll kill him!"

VII.

THE matter on hand did not linger long in the mind of Jimmy Prince. He was thinking somehow of that little talk high up on the ledge, and curiously it came to him word for word. He forgot about the rumpus that was before him. What he remembered perfectly was her condemnation of him. He had caused the death of a baby. A little crawling thing that cried and pulled in its mother's arms. A human atom that came into the world unprotected and with no means to protect itself. Why, he had been a baby once. And he—why she, Ethel, had bitterly condemned him. The horror in her tones he felt deep in his soul.

What if she were right? What if he were using the wrong means? What if he were so monstrous? And Noonan had told him the answer. The men hated him. They would kill him. Somehow that thought caused him to grin. What mattered it now? Why, he loved the girl. He craved her more than anything else in the world. What was work—when such a girl condemned him with her own lips? She had told him that he was not human! It was the last blow to all these failures that had been piling up on him.

Sounds of raucous cursing and thuds of fists reached his ears. There was the thrill of battle in the sounds. Jimmy Prince found himself hurrying toward the direction from whence they came. It was no matter now what happened to him. He had lost that thing which is most precious. Only now during the past ten minutes did he realize that. He had by his actions lost the love of the only thing that he loved! Shouts came to his ears. He fingered the pistol and found no comfort in it.

Down in the hollow he could see the struggling bands of men. He knew those whom he had hired recently, and he could see that they were evidently upon the winning side. With peavys and cant-hooks and an occasional ax they were driving before them another motley band of men. But the others were putting up a good fight. As he drew near, he saw one of the men fall, and immediately three of those whom he had a few days ago hired set upon the fallen figure.

For a moment he stood there. Thoughts flashed through his mind. Three men were out there beating one. And he stood there. Was he afraid? Of what was he afraid? And why? There was nothing to be afraid of now—he had lost everything—he had lost Ethel.

The thought spurred him to action. He needed something to make him forget. He wanted to forget it all—the knee—his inhuman actions—this last blow. He swung out of his mackinaw, and cleared the intervening space with that old swing that stood him in good stead on the football field.

He knew that his fist crashed into the face of one of the brutes intent upon driving a cant-hook into the huddled heap. He knew also that his advent caused the utmost consternation, and that the remaining two men set upon him. And then a great curtain seemed to be lifted from his mind. He saw clearly. He was helping some one who was down! The thrill of battle took hold of him, and with a throaty cry he was springing for the other two men.

With animal-like strategy he knocked the nearest to the ground. The other swung the peavy with murderous intent, but the young fellow avoided it.

And then the battle started with renewed fury. For Jimmy Prince kicked out, and sent the man reeling. He bent and picked up the huddled man. He did not grunt in surprise when he found that it thrilled him. He stood the wobbly man upon his feet

and supported him. And as he took him toward the remaining house, the wild men had set upon him.

He fought them off with one arm. His blows counted, for he was adept at handling his fists. He recalled vividly that he ran the gauntlet, and threw the man inside the door. Then he turned and faced them. There was a smile upon his lips. He heard old Noonan's voice: "They'll kill ye, fer they hate ye!" What a glorious death to die! To be fighting when they killed him!

He fought like a wildcat. Several times he knocked men down with his bare fists, until they drew off and gazed at his bloody face. And then they recognized him, and with cries of mingled horror and fear they shouted:

"Th' boss, it's th' boss."

They all hesitated but one. Jimmy recognized him as the man who had swung at him during the earlier hours. There was a little cry of apprehension from the other men, but Jimmy met the rush. He smacked home a right-hand uppercut that rocked the man to his knees. But it failed to stop him.

From behind him came a voice.

"He'll kill ye, look out."

Jimmy recognized it. And he was surprised. For it was the voice of MacKey! And the man was urging him to take care of himself! After he, Jimmy Prince, had killed his baby! It was confounding, that thought! Why under all laws of the woods and Nature, MacKey should have beaten him to the earth, and stamped the life out of his body! It thrilled Jimmy.

"That's th' guy I want," howled the raving man before him. "You, MacKey, I vowed I'd git ye, an' I'm goin' to!"

Again he rushed. There was implacable courage in the heart of Jimmy Prince now. He was doomed to suffer—how could he suffer more wonderfully than by protecting this man MacKey? It was a glorious thought! It caused him to laugh outright. The man slipped by his guard and their bodies were close together. There was a scuffle, and Jimmy's arms wound about the thick body. He sought for the neck, straining every muscle. And then he gave way. For an ominous click sounded, and the right leg buckled. He became sick at the pit of his stomach, and everything went white before his eyes.

But he did not relax his hold. More than ever before did his mind concentrate. All he could think of was to beat this man. The weight of the man was driving the breath from his body. A fetching, tearing pain scared through his vitals. The pain from his knee was terrible. But his fingers relentlessly caught at the hairy neck, and he pressed, gloatingly. A rain of heavy blows came down upon his upturned face. He was fast losing consciousness. And then his brain turned backward. He could see a sticky field, and the close pressure brought to mind those other days. He must—

A voice sounded. It was little Doc Noonan. There was a string of numerals being barked out, and he knew that he must take that ball through the line. There were only twelve yards to go. "Never let your brain become lame." His knee pained unbelievably.

His fingers gripped hard. There was a convulsive upheaval, and he was glad. The man's efforts grew less marked. There was a smile upon the lips. "I must have made it," stammered the form. "It was only twelve yards!"

He stumbled, and brought up against the house. He rubbed the boards lovingly.

"Doc," he mumbled. "Did we make it?"

And then he crumbled up, and fell.

A figure was beside him. The head was lifted up, and a pair of lips brushed his.

"Yes, yes," she whispered vehemently, "you made it—Jimmy—but—oh, God, he has paid—please let him live!"

VIII.

He awoke in a thick daze. There was a strange man strapping his leg, and when he finished that, he felt steady, strong fingers pluck at the bandages upon his head. Jimmy Prince frowned and tried to focus his brain. He had hurt himself. But how?

Where was he? Oh, yes. Up in the woods somewhere. He was there to put the operation in shape. But why had he hurt his knee again?

Another figure came into the room, and the two conferred. It was all Greek to Jimmy Prince. He could see that the newcomer was a woman, and that she was beautiful. But who was she? He frowned again.

The man left, and the woman came to him. Her fingers were cool and wonderful. Then she smiled down at him. His brain moved rapidly, and he smiled joyously, contented.

"Ethel—"

She sat down upon the edge of the bed. He glanced about and noted it was her room. He turned toward her.

"You—shouldn't—I don't deserve it."

She did not speak, and he took her silence to mean acquiescence.

"I would much rather have died out there," he said gravely.

She caught his hand and her eyes were wild with fear.

"No, no, Jimmy—I prayed—"

"You—prayed?"

She nodded, and her whole being was sanctified.

"For—me?" he went on unbelieving.

"For you. Oh, Jimmy, I knew that—"

"That I was human? I don't know, Ethel—it's terrible to think of it. I—was lame—lame—and I pitied myself for it instead of fighting the fight upon the square. I—should have died! It would have been better."

He did not allow her to speak.

"Ethel—back there in college when I hurt myself, there was a fellow who told me to watch out for a mental injury. I did not believe him. He was right—Doc Noonan—he was right!"

The gray eyes met his. There was a deep pride in them.

"My brother—you knew?"

"Yesterday — whenever that glorious fight took place—then I knew. I was too stupid to realize it before."

"He—he—" There was a catch in her tone.

"Died?" questioned Jimmy Prince.

She nodded, then drew her head up proudly.

"Last year—trying to prevent an epidemic. Oh, Jimmy, I've known you for years, it seems. Phil told me. He honored you—loved you. He always said that you were sound deep down in your soul. And he told me that if I ever needed help to go to you, and tell you that I was his sister!"

The man on the bed gulped.

"It should have been me," he reiterated over and over again. "What a coward I am! What a poor apology of a man. Oh, Ethel, get me away from here. Send me back—send me far away where I can forget what I have done to you and your people. I—" He turned his head, and the pain caused little wrinkles to come to his eyes. "But—I—tried. Oh, Ethel, it was the knee. It—made me forget my brothers. When I realized that I could not do those things I wanted to do—it changed me. I—why, it was not my knee that was hurt—it was my brain! But I didn't know—until you told me that I had—had become responsible for—a baby!"

"Jim—my Jim. You—showed that you were human."

"But you—you can't have me," he went on dully. "I—not after what I have done. You would never forget it—I will never forget it!"

She seized his hands and pressed them to her cheeks.

"You must forget, Jim. MacKey knows that you saved his life at the peril of your own. He will never forget that. And I—Jim—can't I help you forget? Can't I help you atone—help you to be whole again?"

"You believe it can be done?" he asked incredulously.

"Forever, Jim."

For a long time he was silent, gazing into the gray pools. It was a miracle to him. Something that could not have happened. This girl was giving herself to him!

His hands came upward. They, too, were bandaged. His fingers caught hers, and there was a great light of wonder and contentment in his eyes.

"Tell all your people to come back, Ethel," he breathed. "Tell them that Jim Prince was born again—that he means to be one of them—with your help! Tell them that I am not lame any more!"

She bent to him, and their lips met.

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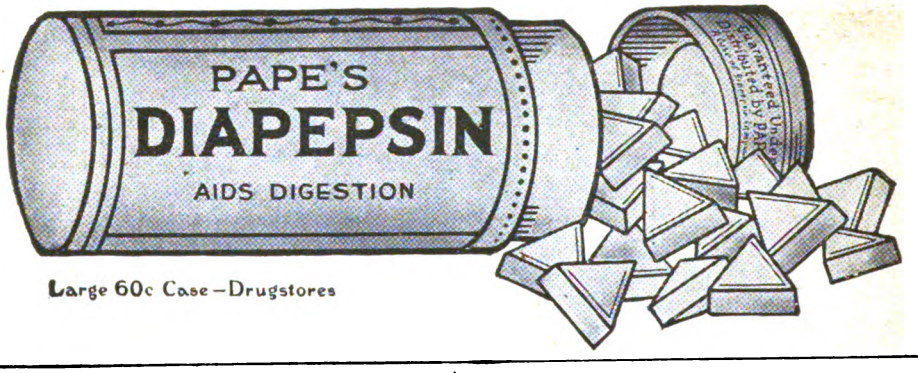

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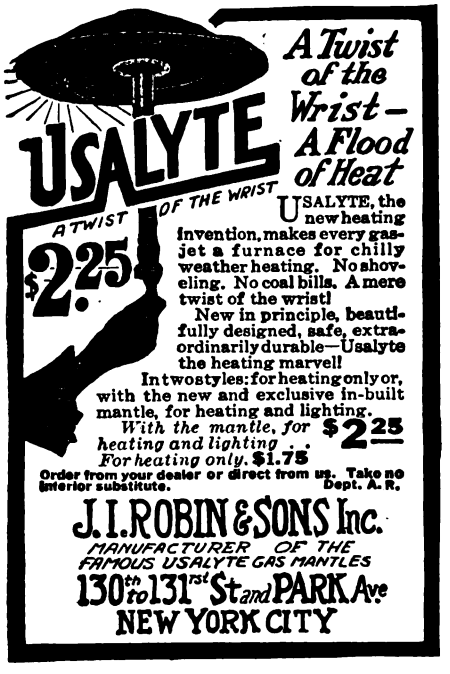

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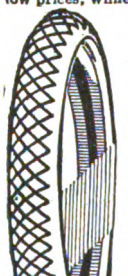

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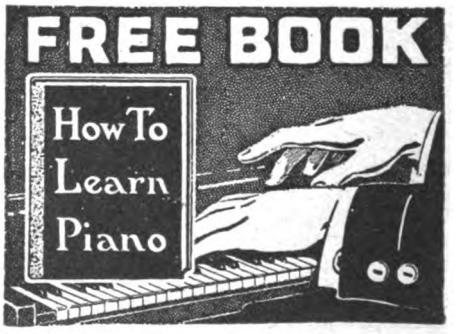

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—Do you know what it means—the seizure, the desert journey, the whips of the drivers, the house of the dealer, the shame!

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Who was this super-being, before whom the strongest men trembled—to whom was known every secret of science—who embodied the cunning of all the ages—whose power was absolute and far reaching—whose astounding career is described as only one man can do it in

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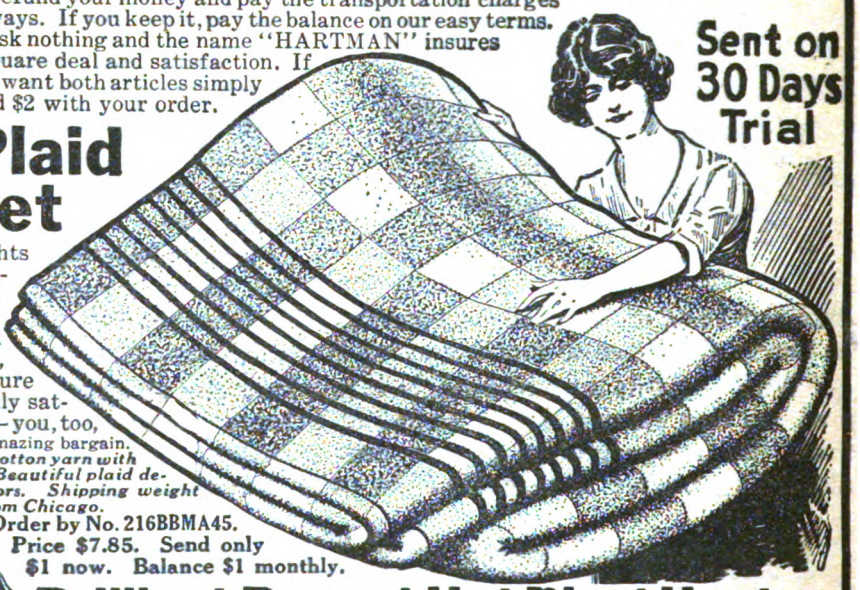
Both splendid bargains—the kind you will appreciate during the bitter, cold weather. Choose the one you want and send $1.00 with order and we will ship it to you. Keep it for 30 days on free trial, then if you are not satisfied, ship it back to us and we will cheerfully refund your money and pay the transportation charges both ways. If you keep it, pay the balance on our easy terms. You risk nothing and the name "HARTMAN" insures a square deal and satisfaction. If you want both articles simply send $2 with your order.



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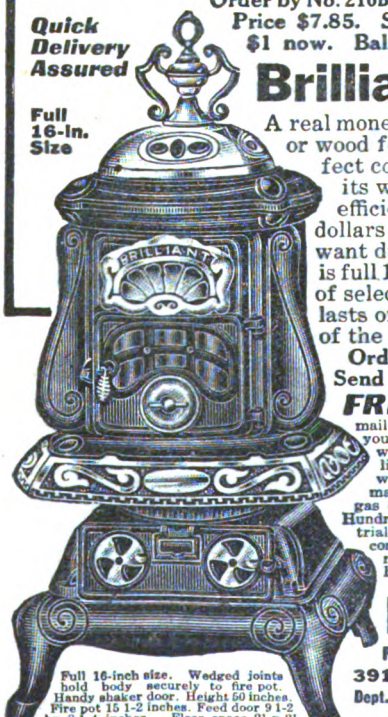

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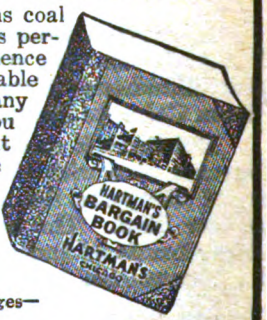

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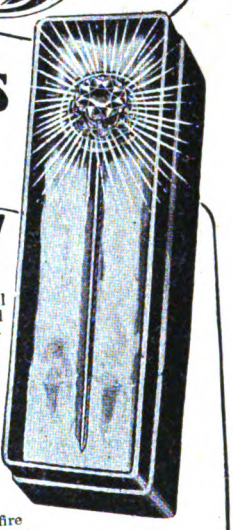

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☐ Ring No..... ☐ Scarf Pin ☐ LaValliere

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Name .....

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I surely liked
"The Midnight Show"
Great, eh?
Pep,
Music
Snappy Lyrics,
Best dancing of the season.
And
Millie ! !
And
Life Savers ! !

* * *

You know, John,
How it was
Before the Big Drought?
Between the acts
You had to see
A man
Or something
—well,
Not now.
Just sit tight
And reach for the packet
o' Pep-O-Mints

* * *

Millie looked at me
Poor old thirsty Bob
She says,
And smiled.

* * *

Not any more
I said;
Here, Honey!
And I handed her
A couple—
No, you poor boob,
Not kisses—
Life Savers!
And we talked
And talked
And talked
And touched shoulders
There
In the half-shadows
And
—well, John—
Millie's mine
Believe me—
(between ourselves and
between the acts)
It pays to go armed
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