

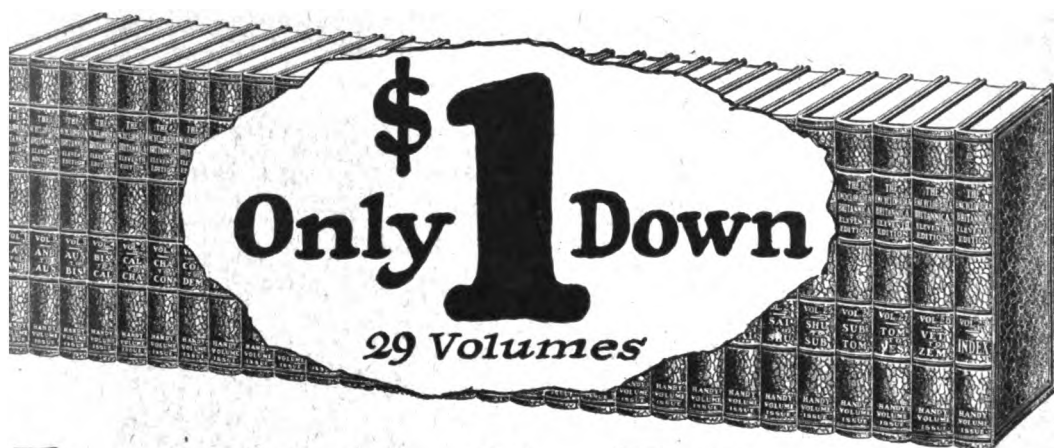
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by Marguerite
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ARGOSY-ALLSTORY W E E K L Y

VOL. CXXVII

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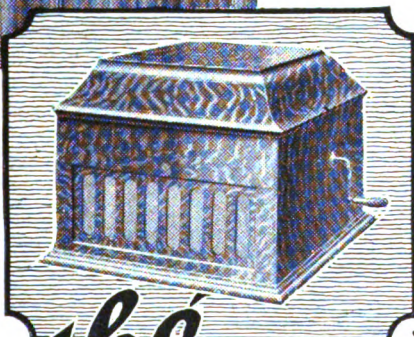
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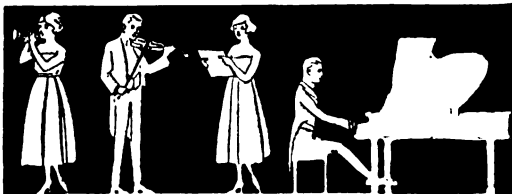
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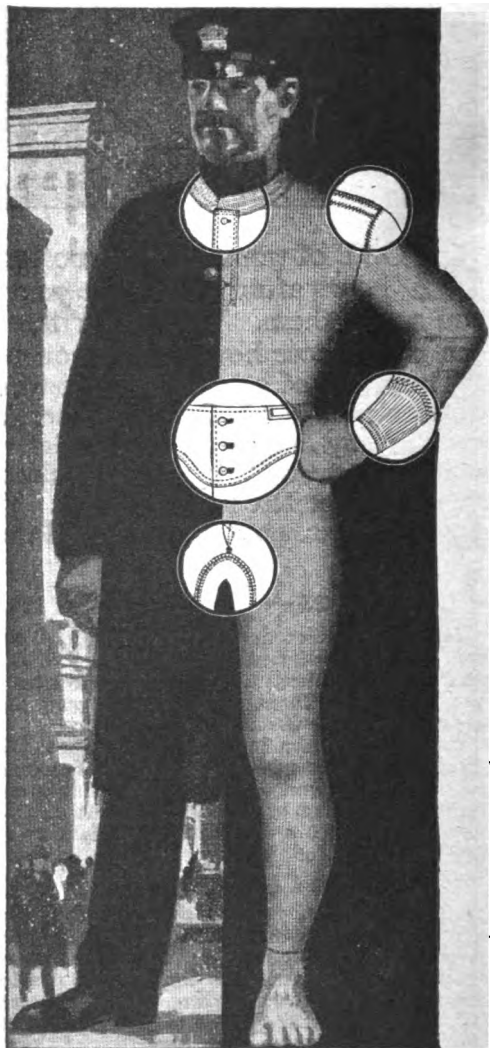
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ARGOSY-ALLSTORY W E E K L Y

VOL. CXXVII

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 13, 1920

NUMBER 3

The Orchid Huntress by Marguerite C. Storrs

CHAPTER I.

MARRIAGE OR MONEY.

RANFIELD MASTERS passed a deeply engrossed débutante, her wide, blasé eyes intent on the murmurs of the chinless young man who bent nearer to her on the wicker seat that was almost screened from view by a well-placed palm; endured the lorgnettes of several dowagers duly enthroned at one end of the most noteworthy features of the new Lennon estate; affected not to see the summons of Edith Grail, who was frankly known to be husband-seeking; and stopped finally in the embrasure of a velvet-hung window.

Here he drew out his dance-card and looked at the name quite as if he hadn't been repeating it to himself ever since that one dance with her. "Lawton," he read, and turned from his vantage point to look at her.

The divan on which she sat was blue like the hangings of the room. Against it the dull—almost faded—rose of her dress shone like the time-warmed paint of an old master. "She might have just stepped

down from a Watteau fan," Masters had told himself on first meeting her. There was something of asceticism in the finely modeled features and the cool brown eyes that held flecks of gold in them as did the brown of her hair. But this was denied by her mouth. The upper lip was fuller than the lower, and admirably made for either pouts or laughter. It was an unstable little mouth, a mouth of caprice, even of passion.

Betty Lennon had murmured to Masters only a few minutes before, "The daughter of Mears Lawton, you know. Absolutely no money! But so charming!"

Charming! The word recurred to the watching man. He found himself thinking of long galleries hung with rich paintings, the soft murmur of a foreign-tongued guide; and, there before him, framed in dull gold, a girl with powdered curls, a voluminous gown of faded rose held high in one tiny, jeweled hand.

Ranfield Masters moved nearer, and the girl drew over to make a place for him on the divan at her side.

"We're talking about money, Mr. Masters!" she said. "Oh, you know Laurie Truedale, of course!"

"Rather!" said the slightly stout man. "I brought Ran here. He pretends to hate social staggers."

"Really!" Her pursed lips and slightly arched brows teased Masters.

"Not a bit of it!" He hastened to assure her while the boyish trick of blushing that his thirty years had never been able to overcome, made his face dull red. "You were saying—"

"That we were talking about money," said Norine Lawton. "We always talk about it nowadays, don't we? That—or marriage!" With a quick little sidewise glance at him. "Do you know that Jerry Brent made—oh, thousands—in the market to-day?"

"I don't follow stocks particularly," said Ranfield Masters. His hand dropped against the heavy silk of her gown, and he felt a queer tremor through his entire body.

"Don't you?" Norine was answering his last remark. "It's all rotten confusing to me! Business is generally stupid. But I suppose when one has just heaps and heaps of money—"

"Mighty likely to find the heaps going in the wrong direction if you meddle with stocks," said Laurie Truedale.

"Jerry has inimitable luck!" said Norine, her clear pale cheeks flushing slightly. "I suppose, to him, it's just a great big sporting game! And with that angle on it, it isn't likely to be particularly boring. If I were a man, I think I'd play it too!" Her eyes had grown eager, her hands half went out as though to draw something nearer. "Play, and play!" she cried. "Until I was—rich!"

She stopped speaking and slumped against the dull blue of the divan, laughing alternately at the two men. "Sounds as if I wanted to be a—what do you call it? Bear!" she said. "Queer name! Every time I hear the words stock exchange, I seem to see numbers of cinnamon-colored bears walking about and stamping ticker-tape under their padded paws. Childish, isn't it? And one should be frightfully blasé at Betty's things—like her ballroom. Ah! A trot! And yours! I remember."

She smiled at Masters, with a little nod of farewell for Laurie Truedale as she rose and moved toward the dance-floor.

Norine Lawton talked but little when she danced, but her partners never felt the lack. Dancing to her was not a conventional whirling in stated form, but an emotion which she generally succeeded in transmitting to her companion. Under her spell Masters found himself attempting more and more audacious steps in an inescapable rhythm. The swirling men and women about him faded from his vision and left him alone with her. The exquisite, old-world quality that he had sensed in her, half frightened him as though he felt that she and her faded brocades might slip from him into the witchery of things dead.

"You trot well! Very well!" she said, a bit breathlessly when it was over. In a daze he guided her past the raised lorgnettes of the dowagers, the lifted brows of the three-or-four-season girls, the giggle of the débutantes, back to the blue divan.

There James Cordon was waiting for her. He rose and bowed in a manner not unlike the bewigged, eighteenth century men Masters had unconsciously associated her with. He was a queer old Beau Brummel, James Cordon, whose lack of business ability had made him an eternal borrower from his more prosperous friends. He was the always-available filler-in, the man who took to dinner the girl who had no suitors.

"Waiting for you," he said. His manner of speech was jerky in contrast to the courtliness of his bow. "Been looking forward to this dance all the evening. Hope you've done likewise. Would you care for punch?"

"Thank you, no!" said Norine, insinuating Masters into a seat beside her.

Under the run of the other man's conversation, Masters made his hesitating request to call.

"Of course!" Norine answered. "I'm visiting Betty just at present, you know. Any time you'd care—"

"No evening complete without at least one dance with you," Cordon was saying as he crossed his right knee over his slightly shiny left one. "You know, Miss Norine, I wonder you don't marry."

"So do—others!" said Norine Lawton.

Her eyes narrowed slightly as though in displeasure; then lightened with girlish laughter.

"Marriage!" She gave her attention fully to her questioner. "Marriage is so frightfully permanent, Mr. Cordon! It's like—this gown! Only the gown can be remade while a husband—the only additions he would be likely to undergo are adipose tissue and a dyspeptic disposition!"

"Afraid you're cynical!" Cordon stroked his well-clipped gray mustache and drew his brows together in an expression ludicrously firm. "Very cynical! Bad policy, Miss Lawton! Very bad policy!"

But Norine was not looking at him. She had turned to Masters. Her brows were questioning, her mouth puckered in mock anxiety.

"You're not pleased," she began. Then—"So you think it is a bad policy, too! I wonder—perhaps it is."

"Not at all!" stammered the young man. "I was just thinking—"

"I wasn't *that* kind of a girl after all," Norine completed the sentence for him. Her brows wrinkled slightly with the pleading of her lips. "I'm not always cynical! Perhaps, after all, it's just a pose."

"I thought so," said Ranfield Masters.

"The music, Miss Lawton!" James Cordon was rising.

As they swept away, Masters had a glimpse of her eyes and surprised in them a new expression, a narrowed, thoughtful concentration as though Norine Lawton were trying to solve some very knotty question. He left the divan and wandered past a conservatory, atinkle with the flow of fountains, its Roman benches well hidden in flower-screened nooks, but easily located by the sound of low voices; down a wide, soft-rugged hall to Jim Lennon's smoking-room.

Laurie Truedale sat there alone, though from the den beyond came the voices of men and the rattle of poker chips.

"Hello, Laurie!" said Masters, and seated himself across the table from his friend.

"Hello yourself!" Laurie mouthed the words around his thick cigar. "Are you glad or sorry I dragged you here?"

"It's not so bad!"

"Indeed it isn't when you've just finished dancing with Norine Lawton!"

Laurie smiled a little as he listened to the music coming in the open door. Masters answered the thrust with a boyish grin that showed white slightly crooked teeth. His smile was the only very noteworthy thing about him, unless you included his pleasant gray eyes that were wide-set, and dreamy except when they responded to the humor of his parted lips.

"That was a corking fox-trot!" he mused. "She seems to throw an electric spark into a fellow and warm the old engine up a bit! Makes you hit off steps you never dreamed of before. Does she affect you that way?"

"Something like it!" admitted Truedale, smoothing his vest over the place whose rotundity betrayed him as nearing forty. "And that's not the only step she inspires you to, my young friend!"

"Sorry to be dense! But I don't—"

"The marriage step. She makes you think of duplex apartments on—say Fifty-Seventh near the avenue! She trains your mind to a twosome, and then—"

"Yes!"

"Brings you back to your room at the club with a thud that could be felt from here to the Battery!"

"And you've thudded?"

"Um-m-m! Rather!" said Laurie with sudden reluctance to further confidence.

"Who's that Jerry chap she fills her program with?"

"Jerry Brent. Nobody seems to know overmuch about him. Her find, I guess. The first time I ever saw him was at a dinner of Jean Fathom's last spring. Since then he's pretty well trailed around wherever Norine went."

"Engaged?" Masters was painstakingly pulling a minute brown flake from the cigar he was about to light.

"That's what the crowd is asking. They all seem to agree—not yet. Norine rather shies at marriage, though, according to report; she's had a voluntary offering of most of the *young* eligibles and a few middle-aged chaps like—"

"Yourself, eh True?"

"I was about to say John Prendergast. They say he offered to make her Mrs. Three."

"What? That old—"

"Middle-aged, I said. And a winner! Home on the avenue. Offices—"

"Does it occur to you that she might be less commercial about the matter than you?"

The nice gray eyes had hardened a bit. Under their scrutiny Truedale fumbled his words into silence.

"We're a damned commercial lot!" he said after a pause.

"Yes. And she may trail around with you, use your English slang, and even your cynicism at times. But, for all that, she's different! Any fool could see it!"

"Um-m-m! Yes."

"Mears Lawton—" mused Masters. "I've heard the name, but can't remember—"

"The New York Lawtons. Owned a lot of the Bronx once, and sold it while New York was still several miles away. Such an old family that it's been living on its past generations for a century or so. The doctor-lawyer-preacher type of people. Norine's mother did up what little Mears left in giving his daughter an on-the-Hudson education."

"She's not—penniless!"

"More or less. It rather comes to living on family prestige. Invitations, you know—from old friends and people with more money and less family than she. She seems to have more lately. Some of Mears's old investments turning out, I suppose. She said something to-night about an apartment of her own."

There was silence while a six-foot waiter stopped by with a tray of glasses, destined for the den, and left two on the table. Ranfield Masters emptied his of its precious liquid, set it down and spoke again.

"What does this Jerry Brent do?" he asked.

"Do?" Truedale's eyes blinked as he puffed another cloud of smoke into the already murky interior of the room. "Why—stocks, I think. Not a broker, though! I know he's the fellow that told Burnham about those copper stocks the other day."

"Thought Burnham lost on that."

"He did. He was pretty sore at first. Started a story that Brent was a con-man of the fur-lined overcoat type."

"Think it's true?"

"Not particularly. Haven't thought about it at all for a fact. I happened to hear Burnham working Brent for that tip."

Out in Betty Lennon's big blue and silver ballroom, with the music stealing over it from behind a screen of tropic palms and mingling sensuously with the heavy air, Norine was breaking her custom of silence while dancing.

"This Mr. Masters," she said to James Cordon, "he's very rich, isn't he?"

"Think so. Million from his father, I believe. And uncle almost as much."

"He is—in business?"

"No. He hasn't been out of the army long. College and travel before that. Quiet, dreamy chap. I believe his lawyer pretty well runs his business affairs."

"Um-m-m! Something of a waster!"

"Is every one a waster who doesn't mix up with that grimy maw down there, Miss Lawton?"

She shrugged. "Those long-haired modernists down at Greenwich Village say not. But Mr. Masters's father wasn't a modernist. Isn't he the man that built up the family fortune when it was rather gone to seed a generation ago?"

"The same."

"I remember! Dad used to say that if Masters could win, he could. But poor dad never did!"

"No?" questioned the elderly suitor quite as if he didn't know the story of Mears Lawton from his first speculation through the few years of pseudo prosperity and then down the long period of declining fortune that had left his daughter penniless.

CHAPTER II.

"STRICTLY BUSINESS."

JERRY BRENT indicated a small table against the wall shaded by a rose-colored light. The head waiter led the way to it with an air of making way for

royalty. Two subordinates came forward, and the hovering, black-coated three insinuated Norine Lawton and her companion into their respective chairs.

The business of ordering followed with demands from Jerry that the maitre d'hotel himself come and receive instructions as to just what the hors-d'oeuvres should consist of and the particular sauce for the mushrooms-au-berre.

During this time Norine sat drawing off her gloves, adjusting the small fur collar of her black satin dress with its Oriental embroidery, and turning the one ring she wore to its proper position on her finger. When she had drawn her snug sleeves slightly over her narrow white hands, she rested her clasped fingers on the edge of the table and looked at Jerry.

"Endive!" he was saying. "D'you get that? And white bait—you see that it's fixed up right! And the wine—I know all about this two-and-a-quarter business, but—you understand!"

Norine's eyes traveled slowly over his taupe-colored waistcoat, the perfectly tailored brown of his suit and up to his immaculately shaven face. It was a pleasant face! The skin was clear and fresh-steamed from a session with the barber. The eyes were blue and frankly ingenuous, a fit complement for the wide expanse of his smile.

The hair was beginning to recede slightly from Jerry's forehead, but, as that member had never been particularly high, the effect was not unpleasant. All in all, Jerry Brent was far from a bad man to be lunching with at Pellico's on a clear-blue October day; and Norine's smile as the maitre d'hotel took himself away, was testimony of the fact.

"Well, duchess!" said Jerry Brent. "You're dolled to the eyes. Those new duds look like a million. Where d'you get 'em?"

Norine shrugged scornfully. "Some Betty doesn't want any more, of course!"

Norine's eyes had lost their smile. Her lips were drawn in a taut little line that with her meant displeasure.

"Don't like it, eh?" grinned Jerry. "Well, here then! What about this? It

may serve to buy you a hat or something while you're waiting for more."

He took a leather wallet from his pocket, abstracted a folded bit of paper and handed it across to her. She took the slip, opened and looked it over carefully. Then she refolded it, brought her black-silk bag to the top of the table, snapped open its tortoise-shell top and looked at him.

"What for?" she inquired.

"The Rembrandt."

"Um-m-m! Old Masters made in New York! What did he fall for?"

"A thousand."

"And you—"

"Double the check. We split fifty-fifty, you and I!"

"Um-m-m! That was a bit risky, Jerry! I wouldn't want to do it again. If any of my friends happened to see that picture hung in Carruthers's house—"

"Easy, sister! Carruthers won't make that highbrow bunch in a million years! If they did—a mistake."

"Yes! The best critics do. But this particular Rembrandt—and with the art I've dabbled in—"

"Baldwin wants some more steered his way."

"And I'm to be the pilot? I'd rather not, Jerry!"

"Easy pickings for you!"

"Perhaps," she answered.

The hors-d'oeuvres arrived duly arranged after Jerry's order. Norine stopped to eat a bit daintily. Then she spoke again.

"Did Harrison see you?"

"This morning."

"Was he successful?" With a quick amused little quirk of her lips.

"He thinks so. He almost went down on his marrows to get the dope from me. And he just about kissed me because I offered to save him trouble by carrying the deal for him through my brokers. I said I thought I could influence them to take fifty per cent in collateral."

"Um-m-m! I should think you could. You mean to buy short?"

"Yes."

"What do you figure we'll make?"

"All depends on how many shares he falls for. He's not a plunger, Norine."

"No-o-o! I thought not."

Jerry laid down his fork and looked across at her.

"I'd like to bag a big one, duchess!" he said, looking straight at her.

Norine took a sip of water, buttered the infinitesimal portion of a roll and ate it; carefully placed her knife across her butter plate and brought her attention to Jerry who by that time was wondering if he had been heard.

"Why not?" she inquired.

"Not very easy just now, sister! Lots of limousines and fine clothes and big talk, but actual cash—"

"There, too—if you look."

"What's this you've got up your sleeve? You—" A warning look from Norine as the waiter swept down upon them.

The girl bowed to a heavy woman in purple-and-black, murmuring: "Mrs. Morley, Jerry! I'll see that you get to some of her things this winter. She must have just come in from Long Island."

"Thanks, duchess!" Jerry gave her a long look. She answered it steadily. The waiter removed the silver cover from a dish and served the fish as if it had been specially procured for royalty. They waited impatiently while he filled their glasses, re-passed rolls, and finally stopped to see if his artist soul demanded any further additions to the perfect meal.

"All right!" said Jerry impatiently. "I'll call you if I don't like this! Slide! Out with it, kid!" he added as he watched the waiter beyond ear-range. "What 've you been hatching up for us?"

"A full-blown orchid!"

Norine ate a bit of fish, corroborating her statement with a nod of her head and delicate pursing of her lips.

"Name of—"

"Did you meet Ranfield Masters last night?"

"Met a lot. Was he a slender chap with nothing much to say?"

"His number, Jerry!"

"Masters — um-m-m Masters! — Ranfield—I've heard—" Jerry's eyes lightened to the color of blue water when the sun shines through it. His hand shot across the table and closed on the girl's.

"Sister!" he cried. "You've got it! I'd like to—"

"But you won't," said Norine composedly. "Mrs. Morley is looking at us now. It doesn't matter if people think I have something of a crush on you, but a rumored engagement would be—messy!"

Jerry withdrew his hand. Norine chattered commonplaces during the remainder of the meal, but Jerry was abstracted. A calculating gray had filmed the blue of his eyes. The delights of the would-be epicure in the perfect meal of his ordering were being partly submerged by those of the business man on the trail of a new deal. When the coffee was finished he raised his head and looked at her.

"You're the stuff, duchess!" he cried. "You're a keener little sport than I thought you were. I'll own to something. I had a hunch right along you might rake up some ancestral conscience after a while and leave me cold. But, you're all right! You've got the goods. Brains, looks, personality, friends among the right people—"

"Leave you—cold!" repeated Norine.

She stopped, one white glove half on her hand, an old diamond-and-sapphire ring of her mother's shining above it. Her eyes narrowed, giving the impression that she was looking a long way and seeing much.

"Leave you! No, Jerry!" she said, leaning forward and speaking in a low voice, but so vehemently that he caught every word clearly. "I went to help Betty choose a Callot, to-day," she said. "Some of these days I mean that Betty shall help me choose one. Understand, Jerry? The Lawtons have been respectably poor for generations, and all the time have been trying to become respectably rich. I'm the last of the line, Jerry, and—respectability be hanged!"

Jerry laughed, the wide-mouthed, gleeful laugh that served so well to enhance his boyish integrity of countenance. His hand half came across the table to her, then returned as the waiter placed a silver tray containing the dinner check at his elbow. Jerry smothered the slip with several bills which he bestowed upon the establishment with a large wave of his brilliantly manicured hand.

From within the taxi Norine smiled a little as she watched him tip the starter. She was thinking that Jerry should have a car of his own—that he *would* have it presently. Then she heard him say:

"Drive around the park till I tell you to stop."

In a few minutes they had swung upon a tree-arched drive. Then Jerry's hand came over hers.

"Say! You're the keenest little pal I've ever had!" he exulted. "Hang it all! There's no reason why this fifty-fifty business shouldn't broaden out a bit! You get me, don't you? You've had my number from the first, and now that you've rather chucked this highbrow bunch of yours—"

Norine put aside his arms and pushed her way into the corner of the seat.

"Suppose we cut the strong-arm stuff!" she said. "It's fifty-fifty, Jerry! Strictly business!"

"Good Lord, Norine! I mean I want to marry you! I know you too well to try anything bogus. I'm keen enough for you to get a Riverside apartment and put you in it as Mrs. Jerry! I tell you, you've got me running in circles! I wish—"

"Running is good exercise"—Norine insinuated herself more deeply into the corner, leaving no opportunity for Jerry's determined onslaught—"and it sometimes helps you to arrive even when done in circles. Now, Jerry, suppose we get this marriage business straight."

She put both hands lightly on his and pushed them to her knee, holding them there. Her eyes were wide and had hardened until the golden lights were gone.

"I suppose you know I haven't kept my original maiden calling-cards because of no opportunity to change them. The opportunities have probably been fewer than reports would indicate. There have been two or three messes—fathers who were nasty about son's desire to take on a penniless Lawton—you understand.

"Now I'll tell you what I've gotten out of it all. I'm making a strong gamble, Jerry. And I'm putting Norine up as the stakes. I mean to be happy, and I don't intend to do anything that will queer the game. Having money isn't enough for No-

rine, Jerry. She wants the certainty of keeping money. That's why I don't intend to marry any of these wasters. I know just how long *they'll* keep the pile their fathers worked ten hours a day to earn. Do you see? Now, Jerry, go ahead and win! Win big! And when you do—well, I'll see. You're a good sort, and I know you wouldn't quibble about the allowance. But you've got to have an established status first."

"George! You're a cool one!"

Jerry gained possession of her hands while his eyes admired her exquisite face with the red flame of her mouth shining from the half-obscurity of the taxicab.

"You're as selfish as the devil!" he went on. "But I like you just the same. You'd make a man either as wretched as hell or as happy as heaven, and I'm gambler enough to take the chance! All right! I'll come again. Don't forget!"

"I won't forget," promised Norine Lawton.

"And now—a kiss or so, girly! Come on! Don't be a welsher!"

Norine put her hand between his mouth and her own red lips. "No, Jerry!" she said. "Let's keep it business a while longer. I want it."

Jerry's arms released their hold on her taut little body; his breath was coming a bit heavily. From the corner of the cushioned seat her eyes flared out, tempting yet withholding him. He half leaned toward her again, but something restrained him—some inward pristine trait of her that he could not overcome; the knowledge that she, unreservedly as she might give herself to him, was yet of another stratum.

The thought vaguely put in his own mind was, "She's still trying to be a highbrow," and his instinct was to crush that from her with the strength of his desiring arms. But, in the face of her eyes, he stopped. He would never think of her as the figure in a Watteau fan or in the frame of an old master, and yet the elusive old-world quality of her that had impelled Ranfield Masters to make a rare request to call had reached the subconscious perception of Jerry as well.

The young man settled his overcoat well

up about his correct white collar and leaned back beside Norine, his shoulder touching hers, one hand dropping over her gloved one. She did not repel that.

"You're going to the Cecil with me to-night," he said; "after that—some show. This chaperone business is bosh! No reason why—"

"Sorry! I happen to be going to the Cecil with—some one else—and the theater as well."

Jerry's hand tightened on hers.

"Who?" he demanded.

"The orchid!" Norine's mouth puckered into amused railery. "It's first night for Leroy Gamble's new play, and we're turning out *en force*. Leroy *belongs*, you know. Ranfield is doing our particular party, just Betty and Jim, Jean and Struthers, so you see we shall be chaperoned by two thoroughly married—"

"Married enough!" scoffed Jerry. "But with Jean Fathom—"

He laughed shortly.

"What do you mean, Jerry?" the iris of Norine's eyes had widened and her mouth set the slightest bit as it did when she was displeased.

"Nothing. Just gossip."

"What gossip, Jerry?"

"I told you—nothing—kid!"

CHAPTER III.

BETWEEN THE ACTS.

THERE was not an empty seat at the first performance of Leroy Gamble's play. All over the brightly lighted theater jewels glittered in high-waved hair, and shoulders gleamed above gowns that Paris and New York had combined to make exclusively perfect. It was the season's first fashion display, and it did itself well.

Opera-glasses were busy between acts, and not a few of them focused themselves more than once on Ranfield Masters's box-party. His three women guests were quite noteworthy enough to demand this attention. Jean Fathom, Junoesque in black velvet with embroidered splashes of green and silver, her dark face and sullen mouth

settled into the smile that knew it was under scrutiny. Betty Lennon, less imposing but with her brilliant natural color offsetting her greater irregularity of feature. And, a bit in front of these two, Norine Lawton.

The gown of the latter was one of Betty's, artfully dyed and remade, yet the unusual quality about her that made her, above all, a personality, succeeded in rendering the other two women only a foil for her beauty. Her mouth was unnaturally red in the perfect Watteau delicacy of her face. Perhaps the opera-glasses started with Jean and her Callot, but they lingered on Norine.

Behind her shoulder the girl was listening to a murmured story by Jim Lennon. Jean laughed very long at its ending, and Betty said: "Rather rottener than usual, Jim!" Norine herself gave a polite little gurgle and glanced toward Ranfield Masters on her left. He was in the act of recovering from an attempted smile.

"He doesn't like Jim's stories, either," mused Norine. "Rather decent of him."

"Frightfully boring!" Betty was saying to heavy-jowled Struthers Fathom. "Interfered like the deuce with my golf! Jim said I'd fallen off when I played with him yesterday."

"What's your handicap?" inquired Fathom.

Norine lost the answer in Masters's voice beside her: "You liked—the flowers?"

She caressed the roses at her corsage.

"I never wear flowers that I don't like. How did you know I loved gold?"

He flushed boyishly in answer to the compliment. His eyes half left hers, as though he feared what she might see in them, then returned again.

"The dress you wore at Betty's tea," he said. "You're always lovely! But in that—"

"Sh! I'll tell you a secret that should never be whispered among these Callots and Poirrets! That dull-gold dress began life as my mother's teagown!"

"It looks it! And you, too! As though you had stepped down from some old painting!" He voiced the feeling she had first aroused in him.

Her lips parted as though for some bright witticism. Then her eyes caught his, and what she saw there seemed to make her hesitate. After a moment she said softly, "Thank you!" and turned from him to look idly down into the pit. Her glance almost instantly met that of a round, well-rouged woman who was staring up at her. Norine inclined her head slightly. The other woman answered the bow.

Masters had noticed the incident, for he said: "I don't remember meeting her."

"No. She doesn't do our sort of thing. Person I met in a more or less business way."

For a moment the people about her faded from Norine's sensibilities. Her eyes were on the woman in the pit, though she maintained a pretense of looking at the box beyond her. Lola Day! Or so she called herself. Norine *had* met her once, and in a way that, as she had said, was more or less business.

This woman, too, was one of Jerry Brent's coworkers. But where Norine scaled for him the heights his birth and breeding could not attain, Lola dipped into another world of coarse-jowled, heavy-faced men, quick to make and spend, wary, suspicious. It was one of these that sat beside her now, his shoulder pressed against hers, his hand beneath the fur on her lap. To Norine came the words Jerry had said that afternoon:

"And now that you've rather chucked that highbrow bunch—"

Chucked that highbrow bunch! Substituting—Lola. Norine half turned to look at Masters's quiet, high-cast features, but the movement brought Jim Lennon, too, within her range of vision. Did it make any difference after all? she wondered. Could this man beside Lola Day tell a story more spicy than that Jim Lennon had just rehearsed for his wife and her two friends? Was Lola herself less refined than Jean Fathom, always on the edge of divorce because she loved some one better than her husband? Why, the gossip of her had reached even Jerry! Norine's instinctive loyalty to her own set had made her halt him to-night, but he knew.

The thought made her turn and steal a

side glance at Jean's face. It was in repose for the instant, and the sulky lips seemed to embody all the dissatisfied abandon of her nature. Yes, Norine thought, Lola and Jean had much in common.

As for Jerry and Masters— Her host had hardly spoken the entire evening. She might as well admit that he was stupid! Jerry's hand seemed to be on hers, his voice was saying:

"I'm keen for you, sister! You're the best little pal I've ever had!"

Suppose Jerry *had* kissed her in the taxi that afternoon. An apartment on Riverside Drive—fifty-fifty— By Jove! she wished she were with him now. The only difference she could see between him and what he called her "highbrow bunch" was that he was more amusing. Furthermore, she knew Jerry would never have told her the story Jim Lennon had. But her sense of justice had to admit that neither would Ranfield Masters.

"You haven't been home very long, have you?" she asked.

"Only a few weeks."

"You think you will stay in New York now?"

"For a while at least. I want to get a line on business affairs. I've left them to my lawyer so far."

"Don't blame you for leaving them. Business must be rotten boring! Unless you dabble in stocks, and I think we agreed the other night that *that* was dangerous."

He glanced quickly at her, piqued by her insinuation that he would not be sporting enough to enter an unsafe game. Perhaps it was a princess not so far different from Norine Lawton who had thrown her glove into a lion's den, that her cavalier might have the very uncertain pleasure of rescuing it for her. The strain of the cavaliers has not died, however much the modern cynic may preach to the contrary. So it was Masters said:

"Stocks! A fellow might get some fun out of them. I've thought of going in for them once or twice."

"Safe thing to avoid, I should imagine. Of course, Jerry Brent plays it, and successfully. But I think he has rather grown up with it!"

Her eyes flamed suddenly up at him. Her face flushed as it had that other time when she had talked of stocks and Jerry Brent. One bare shoulder lightly touched his coat, and her hand brushed his as she put it up to move a jeweled strap higher on her white skin.

"It's a great game!" said Masters. "I may take a try at it. I've found it a bit stupid around here of late."

"H-m! Stupid!" Her elusive mood changed. Her red mouth pouted a question at him. Her eyes, all golden lights, implored the answer. By those two words she seemed to hedge them about with that enigmatic personality of hers, making everything on earth useless except themselves. The momentary disgruntlement he had felt at her praise of Jerry was swept away. Something big and inarticulate struggled in his throat.

Then the lights slipped out. The buzz of the room died to a softened whisper. The curtain rose on the second act of Leroy Gamble's play. But under cover of the opening words from the stage Norine's voice came softly at Masters's shoulder.

"Stupid?" she asked again; and the question was only a breath.

"Not since I met you!" There was a boyish tremble in his voice.

Norine Lawton leaned back and turned to the stage. There was the faintest of ironical smiles on her lips, and her eyes were slightly narrowed in thoughtful concentration.

CHAPTER IV.

ETHICS.

JERRY BRENT handed his brown derby hat and yellow gloves to Betty Lennon's English butler, allowed that functionary to relieve him of his brown overcoat, and stepped into the reception-room.

Norine came very soon. "Hello, Jerry!" she said.

Her eyes lightened as she looked at him, and the clasp of her slim, warm hand was frankly friendly.

"I think we'll take over Jim's den," she continued. "Betty's golfing and means to

tea a number of people here later, so that is the only place we will be undisturbed."

"Your move, old girl!" said Jerry, and followed her, his appreciative eyes lingering on her dull-gold dress that was corded at the waist with a touch of brown. There was something regal in the fine straight sweep of it from shoulder to ankle.

"Very tobaccoey!" sniffed Norine, as they entered the den with its heavy leather chairs, its card-tables pushed against the wall, and its mahogany desk littered with several ash-trays. Norine took a chair beside the desk and motioned Jerry to one near. But he was not so easily disposed of.

"I haven't seen you for three days, kid!" he said. "Let's have—"

She made a defensive movement as he dropped to the arm of her chair, encircling her shoulders.

"Let's not have—" she answered. "This is business, Jerry! Come!"

His arms tightened and his face came nearer to hers, but, under the steady regard of her eyes, he stopped with only a kiss dropped on the fluffy top of her hair. Before seating himself he drew his chair near enough for him to lay his hand over hers.

"You know, old girl," he said, "I've been thinking it's about time you ditched living around with this bunch and took an apartment of your own. I'm sick of cutting in every time I want to see you."

Her slightly narrowed eyes questioned him. "New York landlords aren't presenting favors this year, Jerry!"

"Money, eh? I think that 'll be all right. Harrison came through pretty well, and we've got—the Orchid!"

"Harrison?" she exclaimed. "How much?"

"I cleaned ten."

"Thousand?"

"Yes."

"Jerry!"

She put her free hand on his and leaned nearer him, all the gold lights in her eyes shining through.

"What shall I do with it, sister?"

"A check, I think! Is Harrison suspicious?"

"Haven't seen him. But I pulled a long line to that fellow Fathom about how I'd lost in United myself."

"Rather clever. Struthers and Harrison golf together a good bit."

Jerry drew nearer to the desk, reached for a pen, and spread out his check-book. There was a moment's silence while Norine sat watching his bent head, his hand moving across the paper. He was replacing the book in his pocket when she spoke.

"Know anything about this Steel the men are discussing?"

"Pretty sure dope, I gather!"

"I guessed so, but I wanted your opinion first."

"Have *you* money to lay on it, kid?"

"Hardly!" she shrugged. "But Ranfield Masters might—"

"I don't get you."

"Some orchids are larger than others," said Norine deliberately. "If I were observing one, I would be glad to have it as full-blown as possible before I—plucked."

"Come to the surface, old girl! You're too deep for me. You mean you want to present a block of Steel to—"

"It amounts to that, Jerry—"

"But—"

"As I said, full-blown! And, more than that, confidence! He's cautious, I think. Not much of the gambler instinct. But, one successful coup—"

"You're a genius, old girl! Say, you may as well buckle under. I've got to kiss you some day!"

"No buckling for Norine Lawton, Jerry! The only thing I've ever buckled to was poverty, and that's—over—" She said the last word with a relieved sigh as of one who comes suddenly from an underground passage into clean open air. Jerry leaned slightly away again, though his hand tightened on hers.

"Have you made any plans?" he asked.

"Betty's having a more or less family dinner to-morrow night. We'll include the two of you. When the smokes come on and the ladies go out—your opportunity, Jerry!"

"Rather too easy to stand up for a winner, kid!—But it's a good hunch. These highbrows may be getting suspicious of

"I've heard one or two things, Jerry!"

"H-m! Well, this 'll square me. What are you doing to-night?"

"Theater. Betty's party."

"And the Orchid—"

"Yes."

"You've got him going, eh, old girl?"

"Rather."

"By George! You're a winner! I'll be hanged if I don't think we can clean up the earth, you and I! I've thought of some one like you—some one with your delicacy of touch! You've got a system that beats girls like Lola about the way this little game of mine beats burglary!"

"I saw Lola at the theater the other night."

"Who with?"

"Puffy, dark man."

"Sims, I suppose. My broker, you know."

"Yes."

"By the way! Those pictures. Baldwin thinks—"

"I told you I don't like that, Jerry. If—"

"Lord! It's safe. Just a word dropped here and there, you know. Isn't there some fellow that wants to replace part of the money he's just earned with an old master."

"Yes—I met the Burgoynes—Middle West—I—"

"Take her to luncheon and charge it to the firm."

"Well—this once. But Norine doesn't propose to lose her present undeserved respectability before—"

"Before what, old girl?"

"Before Norine has landed a good many—Callots and Paquins and—"

"An apartment on Riverside Drive, with a country home wherever you want it, kid!" Jerry's arm was about her shoulders again, his face close to hers. "Cars—one of your own if you like—all the style you want to carry! I'll fall for it, girl! I'm not a tightwad!"

She turned, her eyes very close to his and gleaming with excitement at the picture he and she had made.

"No, Jerry, you're not a tightwad. But—not yet!" Her upraised hand caught the

kiss he had intended for her lips. "I'll see about the Burgoynes," she went on. "We must live even with the prospects of glorious tropical orchids! And"—she reached out and opened the check which she had folded and dropped on the desk before her—"perhaps I *will* have an apartment, Jerry! This nomad business—always wondering whether you'll have an invitation to fill in at the end of the one you're doing now—it's slavery! And I want to be free! I'm *going* to be free!

"I shall have luncheons—at the Ritz. And I shall order as prodigally as you—and I shall pay for it myself! And tip the waiter so magnificently that he'll practise a new bow for me when I come in again!"

Seeing the look in his eyes, feeling the tensing of his arms that were still half about her, she sprang up.

"I think I heard Betty come in! Let's have cocktails—begging your pardon, Mr. Wilson! Tea—and cigarettes and—" She had eluded him and was already in the doorway.

"But we haven't finished—" he began.

"I think we have quite finished—being businesslike!" she retorted and followed the bang of a piano and the sound of voices toward the drawing-room.

Cornelia Van Manse stopped playing when they entered. She shook her golden bobbed head at them and gave a merry hello, one hand still picking a bit of syncope from the keys. Betty Lennon extended a hand whose knuckles were sun-browned from her golf gloves. Her color was high, but beneath it countless tiny freckles and a certain coarsening of the skin betrayed the ravages of constant exposure.

Leroy Gamble, on the divan beside Jean Fathom, rose punctiliously and bowed over Norine's hands. Leroy was frankly diletante. The unhappy circumstance that had given him a Rugby body and a florid complexion tried him sorely. He longed for a pale, esthetic face, illumined by profound melancholy.

Norine dropped upon a big gray velvet chair, one foot twisted under her, the other dangling childishly with a piquant display of gold-stockinged ankle.

"Play going well, Leroy?" she asked, accepting the glass Jerry tendered her, with a nod of thanks."

"Ripping, thank you!"

"Top-hole mixture, Betty!" complimented Norine with a nod of her head toward the glass in her hand. Then to Leroy: "That star of yours is quite fascinating. I'd like to meet her." The last with a teasing sidewise glance at Jean.

"Norine is always wanting to meet queer creatures," Jean was answering the thrust with a quick little edge to her voice, a disturbed glint in her dark eyes.

"Queer? Or interesting?" inquired Cornelia, turning to face the company. Her eyes, which were small but of a bright, intense blue, met those of Jerry Brent, who had dropped to a low seat near Norine.

"Mainly interesting!" Norine answered the question. And she smiled slowly, triumphantly as she too glanced toward Jerry.

"Cornelia would say that, of course," said Jean. "She's a radical."

"She was," said Sanford Graham, a pale young man whose chin had been neglected in the fashioning of him. "But they raided the last meeting she attended."

"It was perfectly thrilling!" shivered Cornelia; "but a frightful bully of a policeman told me he'd take me to the station if he ever saw me about such places again. Imagine! And they call this a democracy!"

A chorus of laughter greeted her. Jean's cool voice, still with its almost imperceptible edge of sarcasm, rose above it.

"I met one of your—friends the other day, Norine!" she said.

"Yes?"

"He was so *nouveau riche* that he seemed fairly—varnished! A Mr. Caruthers!"

"I have wondered," said Norine, her eyes passing in detail over the people about her, "if a little varnish might not improve us at times."

"Do you remember him?" persisted Jean, ignoring the remark, though the line of her sullen mouth became ominous.

"Perfectly! He is—varnished. But then, I am moth-eaten. As a matter of fact"—she grinned suddenly about the

room—"I have recently given into his keeping a dining-room set in return for a little of his varnish."

"Not that beautiful Louis Fifteenth!" exclaimed Betty.

"The same."

"But, Norine! You know, I would have been glad to buy—"

"No, Betty! Ethics are strange things—as strange as morality; and, like that, generally dictated by personal position. My position, being more or less enigmatic, begets enigmatic ethics. No, Betty! I could never have sold that to my friends!"

She lifted her ringless hands and dropped them again to her lap. The malicious little smile on her lips widened.

"You're all frightfully embarrassed, I know," she said, "even though you are hiding it well under your blasé New York exteriors. You've come a long way from the Lennons and Gambles and Fathoms and Van Manses who helped make New York. But you haven't got over a certain distaste for being shown how the wheels go round. I *have*—mostly. Which shows that I've come farther than you. A cigarette, please, Jerry!"

They sat watching her while she pursed that remarkable little mouth of hers about the yellow paper and drew lightly against the match Jerry held for her.

"Doesn't that show class distinction is passing?" demanded Cornelia. "In a few years we shall be one brotherhood, living—"

"Bunk!" Jerry extinguished the match and flung it to a tray. "Beg your pardon, Miss Van Manse! But let me tell you, when those free-workers, Bolsheviks—whatever they want to call themselves—climb up a bit, they'll be buying *your* chairs and pictures, ready to make themselves the aristocracy of America."

"Aristocracy!" cried Jean and Betty together, but Norine interrupted.

"Class distinction talk always makes me either sleepy, frightened, or angry!" she said. "I want to dance! Who's coming?"

"Not after two rounds of golf," said Betty.

"Come on, Jerry!" Norine was on her feet. "Thank Heaven *we're* too young for

golf!" and she drew him toward the music-room adjoining.

They heard her say, "That rug, too, Jerry!"

A moment later a Victrola began to play a fox trot. Jean Fathom leaned a bit closer to her hostess.

"Ran seems to have an awful crush, doesn't he?" she said.

"I think so."

"You don't think she seriously considers this Brent!"

"I don't think Norine Lawton ever seriously considered anything!" shrugged Betty.

In the adjoining room Norine was looking up at Jerry, her brows slightly drawn together in a disapproving line. "We'll dispense with the death grip," she said. "This is a dance, not a wrestling match!"

CHAPTER V.

STOCKS AND GOWNS.

LOYD DAVIS, the lawyer who attended to Ranfield Masters's money, was entertaining his young client that morning. Davis was of an older generation, his back bent from close application to books and briefs, his weak blue eyes spectacled and his nondescript hair thin on top. Masters, leaning back in a chair beside the lawyer's desk, was speaking in earnest tones.

"But, you must admit that Steel was a good thing, Davis!" he said. "I made twenty-five thousand on it, and if I hadn't taken what Jerry Brent called 'a piker slice,' I'd have made more."

"Yes. That was a good buy, Mr. Masters. But, I tell you, I've heard things about this Brent. This Steel may have been good enough, but in another deal—"

"It's very easy to hear things about almost any one who plays the market and who hasn't the virtue of having been born in New York," said Masters. "As a matter of fact, when I came here a few minutes ago I don't remember saying that I meant to become a tip-beggar nor of mentioning Brent. I think you assumed that."

The other man took the rebuff quietly,

as he had been accustomed to do with Ranfield Senior.

"I merely inferred it when you said you thought you'd like a try at reinvesting your money," he said. "Your fortune is placed now in certain solid channels that your father thought best for it. I should not like to see it changed."

"You might as well say you see no reason why your offices shouldn't be in that old moth-eaten building on Chambers Street where they were when I was a boy," said Masters. "I'm a bit sick of batting around the world, Davis. I think I'd like a try at making my money work for me."

"The decision lies with you, Ranfield."

"As for Jerry Brent"—Masters crossed one knee over the other and took out a gold cigarette-case—"we don't know anything against him, I am sure. Ever meet him?" The lawyer admitted he had not.

"Likeable fellow! Personally I enjoy him! He's quite frank in his assertion that he makes his living by playing the market. He says he relies on luck and a few good friends who get the inside of things. He told me the other night at the club that the money he began to speculate with came of his own labors as ticket agent in some middle-western town. Personally I rather admire him for that."

"Came to New York with a thousand that he had saved. Came determined to make or break himself. I believe he had some idea of going into business until he realized what a joke a thousand was in that light. So he put the whole thing on one stock, with a fine flourish and a feeling that if he lost he could go back home."

"And he won?" asked Davis.

"He's been winning ever since—with an occasional slide, of course. He says he had lost on the two he played before this last coup. But now he's squared himself and, in his own words, is a number of thousands to the good!"

Davis looked thoughtfully at the younger man, impressed by a certain quickening of his dreamy gray eyes, a firmer set to his clean mouth. Impressed, too, by the fact that, in the years he had had dealings with Masters he had probably never spoken as many words to him as in this one conversa-

tion. Ordinarily he came, disposed of necessary business in a few bored sentences, and departed.

The young man put the burning end of his cigarette on the brass tray and rose.

"Thanks, Davis," he said as the lawyer helped him into his overcoat. "Rotten, cold day, even for December! I'll try not to dissipate the family fortune. Be in in a few days to tell you what I decide on."

Down-stairs he settled into his waiting car and said, "The Carleton," to his inquiring chauffeur. A woman rose to meet him as he entered the big lounge with its subdued lights and equally subdued murmur of voices.

"I'm not late!" he exclaimed, taking her gloved hand.

"Very probably I am early!" answered Norine Lawton. "Worst possible form, isn't it?" She slipped her beaded bag higher on her long white glove and smiled at him.

"What do we care for form. It's bully of you to lunch with me here to-day."

"Bully of you to ask me! I own to a constitutional objection to duennas. Besides, poor girls can't afford them. You know my one fear of getting old is that I may drift into the chaperone class." She wrinkled her forehead whimsically at him.

"You never would." Masters was struggling with the self-consciousness the sight of her always brought upon him. He was not unaccustomed to women, though his life had been mainly that of the quiet on-looker, and he had never made a point of them. But Norine always brought to him the half awe he had felt for her that first night at Betty Lennon's dinner-dance, a feeling that she walked in an atmosphere a bit finer and daintier than her associates. She was still, to Ranfield Masters, the vivified figure of a Watteau fan.

As they entered the dining-room, many heads were lifted to watch their progress. More than one woman in the room knew, or thought she knew, the particular Fifth Avenue shop that had produced that deep-brown gown with its cunning simplicity of line, its clinging softness of texture. And many women knew, or thought they knew, just what shop on Fifth Avenue had pro-

duced the small brown hat with the golden plume that swept over it and toned with the waves of the hair against which it rested.

Norine slipped off her brown furs while she watched Masters order. Half unconsciously she found herself comparing him with Jerry. This was the first time she had lunched with the young millionaire alone. He did not summon the maitre-d'hotel. He chose the luncheon conservatively and with good taste if with fewer instructions than his more bourgeois rival.

"Mind if I tell you I like your gown?" asked Masters. "It's very right looking!"

"I'm glad you think so. The price was right, too." She frowned at him in pretended despair. "But I didn't mind. You see, with me, gowns are an event—not a bore. By the way, Betty told me you were successful in stocks yesterday. May I congratulate you?"

"Thank you! The success is rather due to Mr. Brent. He told me about that Steel."

"Yes. I saw him last night. I think he has half forgotten this victory in another. He said, when I congratulated him, that he was glad, as this would give him the opportunity to attempt something really big."

"He's a game one! And he wins!"

"Yes. He wins! Oh! I almost forgot to tell you! I have taken an apartment. And such luck! I was able to locate Fannie, mother's old maid. So, you see, I am a householder."

"That's corking! And guests—"

"Yes, indeed! I shall make my teas famous for their informality! So famous my guests may spill out into the hall. It's only a rather wee apartment, and I have some of the old furniture. The Lawtons mortgaged their houses, but they didn't sell their mahogany—until it came to me. But then, my temptation has been greater. In former generations there were few of the rising proletariat to offer us so many ducats for Louis Fifteenth sideboards that we really couldn't withstand them."

When they came back into the lounge an hour later, almost the first person Norine saw was Jean Fathom. She was sitting partially screened by a large pillar.

But, as Norine started to call her companion's attention to her, Jean rose and moved toward the door. A man met her half-way and they went out hurriedly together. But Norine had made sure that the man was Leroy Gamble.

"Silly place to meet him," she mused. "But Jean is more or less calloused to public opinion now, I suppose."

"What shall we do?" Masters was asking.

"I don't know." Norine was conducting a casual scrutiny of the room. "Suppose we sit down and talk it over." She led the way to a velvet seat.

"Too late for a *matinée*," he said, as they settled themselves.

"Yes," she seemed little concerned over the vagueness of their plans, but sat, her eyes fastened dreamily on a dull-hued lamp-shade. Masters started to speak again, then stopped, content only to look at the glorious picture she made. Presently into the musing trend of his thoughts came a voice.

"It's velvet all right! Sims is only letting in a few fellows with good-sized rolls. Strictly *sub rosa*, you understand. I asked him about you, and he said he'd let you in on a hundred shares for old-time's sake."

"Oil's a sure investment," said the other man. "I wish he'd loosen up and give me a hundred and fifty."

"You're lucky to get any. Sims had the devil's own time getting hold of this land, and he can dictate his own terms now. You know what Mercer Oil is!"

"You'd better believe I do! Suppose we go down now and see what Sims can do for us."

The voices drifted away. Masters, surprised at the eagerness with which he had absorbed the words, mused: "Sims! Sims!" Why, Jerry's broker, of course. That was where he had heard the name before.

"You've been thinking very hard," he said to Norine. "You must have reached a decision by this time."

"I was just wondering what we should do with our afternoon," she said. "We might drop in at Mrs. Morley's. She generally has a rather amusing though fright-

fully highbrow crowd. Perhaps"—with a mischievous little upward lift of her lashes—"perhaps I want them to see my new gown!"

CHAPTER VI.

KISSES AND OLIVES.

THAT afternoon Masters stopped at his club after dropping Norine at her apartment. The big lounge was fairly well filled, but the first man he saw was Jerry, sitting near the door with a partially emptied glass on the table beside him. People wondered just how Jerry Brent had ever been enrolled in this inmost shrine of exclusive maledom. Norine, it was whispered, had proved the open sesame at a time when Jerry's uniform as a captain in the army had tended to help relax social vigilance.

"Well! Well!" said Jerry, as Masters came up to him. "Got a nice kind of feeling inside your vest? I have."

"Kind enough, though I'm ready to court-martial myself that I didn't buy more. I had an argument with my lawyer to-day. He's got most of my money lying around picking up five or six per cent interest, and he's certain anything better is dangerous."

"Have you got the market bug?" asked Jerry lazily.

"I think I'd like to let my money earn a bit more for me than it's been doing lately."

"I never let *mine* rot in banks," shrugged the other.

"I heard some men talking about Byrne Consolidated this morning. Do you think there's anything in it?"

"Really, I don't know. I made a pretty good pile in that Steel, and I'm thinking of going in for something bigger than usual."

"Yes?"

"New company," explained Jerry. "Sorry I can't tell you more about it, but it's *sub-rosa*, you understand! So, I can't talk."

"I see," nodded Masters.

"This is a big thing!" said Jerry. "Wealthy men concerned in it! My brok-

er helped me to get in on the ground floor. He's floating it."

"Mighty nice for you," said Masters, with a sudden envy for the luck of Jerry Brent with his wide-awake blue eyes, his boyish smile, and his enviable acquaintanceship among men who knew. An envy not one whit lessened by the fact that Jerry measured his thousands against the more-than-a-million that comprised the Masters fortune.

"I'll say it is!" Jerry was standing. "I want to speak to Mr. Holman. So-long, Masters! Shall I tip you off if I hear of anything good?"

"That *would* be fine of you!"

Masters watched the meeting between the little, bent financier who had come up from a clerk in a banking office to a man of authority on the Street. He was a gruff man, though he seemed to listen with interest to what Jerry had to say. Of their conversation Masters heard only one phrase clearly, "About that Mercer Oil, Mr. Holman!" The young man's voice lowered a bit more after that.

So, that was what Jerry had been talking about, mused Masters, the same thing he had overheard in the hotel lobby that afternoon. And he was to get his slice, lucky dog!

Jerry left the club, drawing his fur-lined overcoat closely about his erect shoulders, and entered a taxi. The address he gave was one of those semimodest apartments not far from Fifth Avenue on the East Side. A few minutes later a white-haired maid was conducting him to a small drawing-room, correct in period table, dull blue chairs and divan.

Norine appeared an instant later. "Jerry!" she exclaimed, "I'm so glad you came to tell me!"

"We've got the devil's own luck, kid!" He started as though he would draw her to him, but she placed a chair between them, resting her bare arms on its broad back.

"He came to the club?" she asked.

"You'd better believe he did!"

"We overheard a very interesting bit of market talk in the Carleton Lounge," said Norine with uplifted brows.

"Good!" He nodded approvingly at

her. "I knew you'd carry that through all right."

"But quick! Tell me about it."

"I did even better than we planned, old girl!" Jerry came closer and laid his hand on her arm. "I gave him the line about Mercer—and then, who should come along but old Holman?"

"What did you do, Jerry?"

"I one-stepped straight over to him—after excusing myself to the Orchid—business, you see!" He winked at her. "It was easy enough to frame a little talky-talk with Holman, and the only part of it our friend heard was a question about Mercer Oil."

"You are a wonder!"

Jerry admitted it by a complacent smile.

"That old boy would lend solidity to a San Francisco earthquake!" he said. "The rest of this will be like selling umbrellas on a rainy day!"

"I'm proud of you, Jerry! Dishonestly proud, I suppose!" with a little laugh.

"What're you doing to-night, sister? Can you dine with me?"

"Sorry. I'm to be at the Burgoynes."

"To once-over the masterpieces?"

"More or less."

"You'll mention Baldwin's antiques!"

"I don't like it, Jerry! Jean has met Carruthers, you know. We're very cosmopolitan nowadays, and we can't tell when some one will meet Mrs. Burgoyne."

"What difference? Who could prove anything?"

"No one, I suppose. You must go now, it's time to dress. I dare say I shall be bored. They talk mostly about the kiddy, but it is a dear. I"—she pursed her mouth a bit wistfully at him—"I like kiddies, Jerry—when their faces are clean!"

Jerry took her hands from the back of the chair, swung her with one movement into his arms and kissed her square on her puckered lips. Her eyes were very close to his, and they flared back at him, surprised, angry, puzzled. He caught the hand she raised to stop him and held it while he kissed her again. Then she wrenched away and stood looking at him.

"I knew I'd have to do it some time," said Jerry.

"I—I don't think I liked it," said Norine, retreating a step or two further away from him. "It was rather like—one's first olive!"

"In that case the second was better than the first, and a third—" He started toward her again, but she stopped him, once more the aloof Norine of whom he was impatiently afraid.

"No, Jerry!" she said. "Some people never like olives! And, if you eat too many the first time, they are likely to—prejudice you."

After she had let him out of the hall door, Norine paused before an old mirror in the drawing-room, raising her hands above her head.

"I wonder if I liked it," she mused. "Jerry is rather cataclysmic! But, with him, life would hardly be dull! And that is really the only thing in the world I am afraid of—dullness!"

CHAPTER VII.

BAITING THE TRAP.

RANFIELD MASTERS'S breakfast was interrupted the following morning by a telephone call from Jerry.

"You know that proposition I was talking to you about yesterday?" he said.

"At the club? Yes."

"Well, one of the fellows has reneged, and, remembering you asked me to steer something your way, I made my little spiel for you. I think they'll let you in on a small block if you want it."

"That's good of you, Brent!" said Masters. "I'd like to talk it over. Where can I see you?"

"I'm busy with Sims all morning—well—I'll tell you, I'll give you a little time anyway. Come to Sims's offices about eleven."

"Thanks! I'll be there!" The connection was destroyed.

Masters felt a deepening glow of interest in life as he motored toward Wall Street a couple of hours later. The idea of grappling with something big intrigued him. Underneath that was the male response to Norine's half-challenge, the desire to show

her that he, as well as Jerry Brent, could make money. That he wasn't the waster he rather imagined she thought him to be.

He left the car before a tall building not far from Wall Street, took the elevator to the tenth floor and stopped before a door marked, "Sims and Long, Brokers."

The offices inside were well equipped and had an air of stability about them as though they had been in existence for a reliable length of time. A stenographer clicked at a typewriter in the corner. An office-boy stopped stamping letters and came forward.

"Mr. Long's out," he volunteered, "and Mr. Sims's busy. D'y' want to wait?"

"I came here to meet a Mr. Brent," said Masters.

"He said—" began the boy, and just then Jerry Brent himself came to one of the glass-topped doors.

"Oh, Masters!" he said. "I was just coming out to tell the boy I'd see you when you came. We're so tied up we asked the kid not to let anybody in. Come right in to Mr. Long's office! He's out just now."

Jerry closed the door carefully after them, motioned his guest to a chair beside the flat-topped desk, and seated himself before it.

"I didn't have an idea there'd be an opening in this when I talked to you," he began. "But one of the men Sims offered this to had to drop out. Bad investments! Sims thought he was solid, of course, or he wouldn't have let him in."

"I see," said the other. "Now, if you'll explain what this is—"

"Oil, Mr. Masters. Perhaps you've heard of this oil strike in Texas—town called Mercer. Men making millions, you know!"

Masters found himself awakening to a quick throb of excitement. It made him feel as he had before a big game when he was full-back at college.

"Yes. I've heard of it," he said.

"Well, Sims has managed to land some of the finest oil land in Texas. The big fellows down there were all trying to get their hands on it. It was a case of litigation, you see. Sims went down, saw the land was pure velvet, and headed straight

for it. Took it right out from under their noses while they were still fighting.

"Now he's capitalized it for a million and is letting in just a limited number of good solid men. The thing is strictly *sub rosa*, you understand. He'd be mobbed if he let it out he was selling stock for Mercer Oil lands at par. Why, people out there are mad! Buying shares at any figure."

"I see. What is this new—er—company called?"

"The Mercer Development Company," said Jerry. "He's selling only ten thousand shares, so that doesn't make a very big slice for the six or eight men he's letting in on it. However, he said this morning he'd let you have a thousand, if you cared about it. That's the slice this fellow dropped."

"I'm very much interested in this," said Masters, a thought of yesterday's conversation with Davis warning him not to be too enthusiastic. "Of course I would have to look into the matter a bit more."

"Look all you like!" laughed the other. "Only, of course, don't spill the beans about this new project. Ask any one you meet about Mercer Oil and he'll tell you! Why, look at the ticker now!"

The two men bent in silence over the narrow white paper until it read, "Mo. 217." Masters consulted the index to assure himself that MO. stood for Mercer Oil.

"Now," Jerry continued, "if this idea really hits you, you might come in and see Sims. He's the fellow that's doing it, and can give you any pointers you want."

Sims, a bit overfat and heavy of jaw, with his clothes lacking the perfection of tailoring Jerry's had come to achieve, rose to meet them. He spoke with a slow weightiness, in contrast to Jerry's crisp enunciation; but the very deliberation of his speech gave it a ponderous reliability as though he were weighing each thing he said to be sure it was not a misstatement.

"Perhaps you'd like to see the maps," he suggested. "I had them made before I left Texas."

The three men bent over the blue-prints spread on the big desk.

"Now here"—the broker ran a pudgy finger over the paper—"are the holdings of the Mercer Oil Company."

"Quoted to-day at two seventeen," interrupted Jerry.

"Right there is their biggest gusher," continued Sims. "Now"—the finger progressed slightly across the paper—"this is our land. Adjoining the Mercer and the identical strata they have. In short, we tap the Mercer streams. We're sinking the first well here. Work has already begun. So, you see, that means speedy dividends."

"And big ones," put in Jerry.

Masters ran his own finger reflectively from the spot that marked the well already producing to the spot that marked the one about to produce. The excitement still filled him. It was as though he stood on the Texas plains and watched the steady flow of oil that was to net him thousands.

"I'd like to think it over," he said. "A few hours would be enough."

"Sorry I can't give you several days," said Sims; "but of course we're anxious to get the matter settled up. One of the men that's got a slice is mighty anxious to add this on, but I don't like it. Too big a share may mean a controlling interest later on."

"Yes," said Masters, rather vague as to just what a controlling interest might mean. "Suppose I come back at three and tell you what I decide."

"All right! If you should decide to drop it before that, just phone me, won't you?" said Sims.

On the curb the young man hesitated while his car was coming up for him. Where, he wondered, would be best to go for information about Mercer Oil? The matter was complicated by the fact that he could not tell of the development company. Well, he'd have luncheon, and then—too far to go up-town. There had been a place where— He spoke to the chauffeur as he climbed into the tonneau of the car.

"Williams," he said, "where did my father go to lunch?"

"White's, sir!"

The long grill was filled with men, from very young brokers in yellow spats, to fat

old financiers. Masters was about to allow himself to be put at a small table near the wall when his attention was caught by the round face, further widened by white side whiskers, of his father's old social friend and business enemy, Laurence Vail.

"Ranfield Masters by all that's great!" exclaimed the old gentleman after a moment's shrewd look at the young man who advanced with hand outstretched. "Sit down, boy! And have some lunch."

"Glad to," said Masters. "I have a hunger."

"Well! Well!" continued the financier when the order had been given. "Haven't seen you since your father's death. You were in the army, weren't you? Get over?"

"Over, but not in the middle of things."

"Too bad! And yet good enough. I'm glad to see you here, safe and sound. What're you doing now?"

"Well, I've been drifting, but I'm rather trying to gather up the threads of my income now and make my money work for me. A fellow hates to be a waster, you know."

"Right, my boy! Your father was a doer, and I think he used to be afraid you were pretty much of a dreamer. But I'll wager he was mistaken."

"I hope so, though I've sometimes shared his opinion. How are things going with you, Mr. Vail?"

"Rotten!" The old man's smile changed to a frown. His face grew yet redder as though at the thought of an ancient grievance. "Everything is rotten since the war! If I had one good man! Just one, you understand!"

He proceeded for the next half-hour to tell the young man, between mouthfuls of broiled lobster, just what he thought of labor, beginning with factory hands and ending with the force in his own office. The old-fashioned apple-pie that Vail had particularly recommended, had been brought on before Masters found an opportunity to ask the question that was uppermost in his mind.

"What do you think of Mercer Oil, Mr. Vail?"

"Mercer Oil! Mercer Oil!" The old

man brought himself back from the inefficiency of his office-manager. "Solid gold of course! I'm as sore as the devil that I didn't land a really good slice when it was little above par!"

"You have some then?"

"Yes. Piffing amount! It's gone so deucedly high now, though, that a fellow can't touch it!"

"No danger of the—er—supply giving out?"

"Giving out? Not for a good long time."

"The men that got in on the ground floor were pretty lucky, weren't they?" hazarded Masters.

"Soft, my boy! Soft!"

"Do you suppose there is more oil land out there that hasn't been developed?"

"Oh, yes! The field is new! What's the matter?" with a smile at the young man. "Are you thinking of buying an oil well?"

"Hardly—just interested."

"Well, it's a big gamble, and for big stakes," said the older man. "That land out there is shot as full of oil as a sponge is of water—if you hit the right place. Of course many a gusher peters out into nothing, but on the other hand a gusher may run for years. It's like mining—a mighty interesting game!"

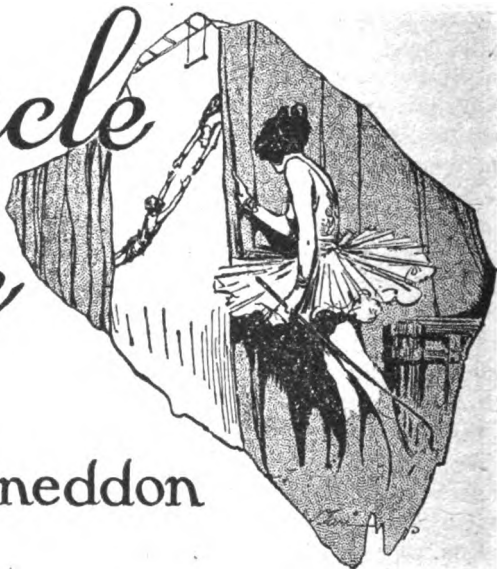
"You'll come and see me, won't you, my boy," said the older man a few minutes later as they parted on the curb.

"I will!" promised Masters, and turned to his car. "Sims's offices!" he added to the chauffeur.

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 Circle of Fate

by Robert W. Sneddon



ONE night there appeared upon the program of the Medrano circus of Paris a new act—the Olympian Brothers—trapeze artists extraordinary. The performers were a pair of superbly developed gymnasts who, disdainful of the fleshings of their calling, appeared in the skin tunics and leather wristlets of the weight lifters. The place of their birth on the papers which they furnished as strangers to the prefect was Berne, a Swiss city hith-

erto better known for the production of hotelkeepers, porters, and waiters than of acrobats, and they were listed on their passports as Adolphe and Adrian Grunau. In fact, they really were brothers by birth as well as by the tradition of the circus.

Adolphe was the younger, and to him as vaulter fell the more daring part of the performance, a superb double somersault in mid air before being caught by the ready hands of Adrian, on the opposite trapeze.

During the rehearsal, a brief one, for they had been rushed from a booking agency to supply the place of another couple, one of whom had contracted pneumonia, they had quite won the heart of M. Rossin, the manager, by their quiet and modest behavior. They spoke only when spoken to and accepted their place on the bill without demur, such a rare thing for an artist to do, that Rossin vowed to himself that if they made as good with his patrons as with himself, their engagement for a week should be renewed that very night.

The Medrano circus has no triple arena. Its delights are focused into a single ring with a diameter of fourteen yards nine inches. Long experience has taught the circus rider that this dimension is the one within which, perched on the back of his horse, he can maintain a stable equilibrium.

The two gymnasts stood side by side. There was no mistaking their relationship—the same white skins, blond, smoothly brushed hair, muscular arms and well-shaped legs.

"Heaven!" exclaimed Tipó, the clown. "I wish I had had a company of athletes like you when I was sergeant. Where did you serve, my friends?"

"We are Swiss, *monsieur*," said one of them quietly.

"Ah. *Eh bien*—well, perhaps you were better out of it. Good luck then, boys."

"Magnificent fellows," commented Rossin as they smiled and walked away. "We shall have to hire an extra man to handle their mail. Men like those receive as many mash-notes as tenors."

But Tipó shook his head quizzically.

"I offer to bet you anything they throw them away unread. Surely you know by now, my dear Rossin, that an athlete has no use for women. Believe me, I have known acrobats all my life, and it is a strange thing, they do not think much of women. The Greeks, now—"

"Heaven! Now you are talking history," Rossin protested. "Go on with your Greeks, you rogue. Paris is a long way from Athens. Times have changed."

"But not the athlete in training, Rossin, *mon vieux*. These gentlemen are too concerned with keeping themselves fit. And it

only takes half an eye to see that they are wrapped up in each other. They are really brothers?" •

"Yes."

"H-m! Well, anyway, I should be amazed to find they thought there was anything beautiful about the Venus of Milo."

"Ah, when it comes to love, leave it to the clown, eh, Tipó? That is what you want me to say. Well, I do. But what am I thinking of? People out there would laugh if they knew we were talking like two philosophers. On with you, Tipó."

Tipó took a run and bounded into the ring. There was a chorus of indrawn breaths, then a storm of applause, and Rossin, nodding his head cheerfully, hurried off to his duties.

It may be that there is something occult in the circle—the question may be left to those who are versed in such theories—but it is a fact that those who perform in the ring are more interested in the work of each other than those who appear between the walls of the theater. Dramatic stars do not wait in the wings to watch the work of the actor with a few lines. The play does not exist for them except when they are about to make their entrance and during the time they are on the stage. In vaudeville it is different again. Many a small act warms to work as they see the headliner watching them, unseen by the audience. But in the circus the company is one. It is a family, often a quarrelsome and jealous one, but still united.

And so there was not a groom, ring man, program seller, bareback rider, equestrienne, acrobat or clown who did not gather to watch the first showing of the new act.

When the warning bell rang for their number the Olympian Brothers ran out gracefully, with that high lifting of the feet which gives acrobats the appearance of spurning the earth before taking flight.

Tipó ran to greet them with affected, childlike squeals of welcome, falling in his haste, and they recognized his antics with a friendly smile.

"Safe voyage," he muttered as they put each a foot into the loop of the two ropes which were to carry them to the trapeze bars suspended high under the roof.

He pretended to follow their ascent with an imaginary telescope to his eye, calling out: "*Allo-Allo!*" and holding an invisible telephone-receiver to his ear.

Then, his part done, he ran off, kissing his hand, with nervous, sidelong leaps as though pursued by the ringmaster's whip.

The audience stirred in their seats, then settled to silence.

Outside at the entrance Tipo found Rossini staring upward as eagerly as any one.

"Neat work!" he murmured. "They have been trained in a good school. What do you say?"

"A sensation!" Tipo assured him. "They have some new ideas. Those skin tunics now. If my friend Atlas were here he would be jealous."

"The new school, Tipo. Heaven! He has forgotten to dry his hands before the leap. That is strange. They have all the appearance of experienced artists, yet to do that—it surprises me."

"You have seen their programs?"

"A few only. I was in a hurry. But they looked all right. America, North and South. Adrian said they lost all their early ones in a fire. Berton recommended them highly. And he is a pretty reputable agent even if he is a stolid Hollander."

The clown made no further comment.

"Pretty music. First class apparatus. All in good taste. Decidedly I shall keep them in the bill," muttered Rossini at his side. "*Diable!* I thought I was proof against thrills—but that—that trick of almost missing—"

The drums of the orchestra began to throb faintly, then with increasing volume, rasping all nerves to tense excitation.

"*Nom de nom de nom! Bravo!*"

A woman had screamed as Adolphe, at the extremity of his swing, let go his grip of the trapeze bar and twice curling in the air flew into Adrian's outstretched hands.

There was a moment of hysterical hush, then a burst of relieved handclapping, which grew louder and louder as the vaulter gracefully leaped in another double somersault to the quivering net.

"Splendid!" cried Rossini. "A real hit. That scream is worth another couple of hundred francs a week to them."

Adrian had followed his brother, and and bathed, in the spotlight, they took their bows.

"What men!" exclaimed La Bella Perosini, the Italian bareback rider, still in her fleshings and fluffy skirt, "I am almost tempted to make eyes at them."

Tipo laughed and pinched her plump arm paternally.

"Take papa's advice and don't. They are statues, not men, my child."

"Even marble crumbles in the fire. My father had a marble-yard. You cannot tell me anything about statues, M. Tipo. Here they come. Shall I or not?"

The brothers strode out of the ring stolidly.

"My compliments, *messieurs*," cried La Perosini, coming forward, her eyes warm with coquetry.

Adrian bowed stiffly.

"Thank you, *mademoiselle*. Come, Adolphe."

Adolphe regarded the bareback rider's pretty shoulders, white with powder, with an insolent and cold stare, and she shrugged them, displaying their dimples as she said:

"Perhaps we shall have the pleasure of seeing you at the Café des Artistes, opposite the circus, you know. We usually meet there for a little something to eat after the show."

"Many thanks, *mademoiselle*, but we are going straight home," said Adrian quietly. "We must hurry, Adolphe."

La Perosini drew back with a flush to let them pass, then, catching the clown's mocking eyes, stamped a slender foot and muttered contemptuously:

"What sort of men are they, anyway?"

"They are not men," said the clown, "I told you so. They are gods, my dear Olympians, *n'est ce pas?*"

"They have cold eyes," said the rider and shuddered involuntarily. "You were right, Tipo. I should hate to be in their power. They are wonderful, but—cruel—beasts walking like gods. Marble, without hearts."

And leaving the clown open-eyed at her outburst she ran off.

The success of the brothers was assured. In three days their faces were on bills all

over Paris, and many a dressmaker and milliner in the apprentice stage lost precious time gazing at the posters.

Two weeks went by and then an amazing rumor ran through the circus establishment.

The brothers had been seen by La Perosini, sitting in a café with a girl. Their companion was pretty, quietly dressed, and had been laughing and talking with her hosts.

"For the first time they looked almost human," said the rider, who had not altogether recovered from her chagrin. "Heaven knows where they picked her up, or what she sees in them."

Then one night she sat in the front row gazing up at the gymnasts with a rapt and dreamy expression. And thereafter with unflinching regularity she was numbered among the spectators. After the show she waited till the brothers were dressed and then departed with them.

You can imagine the gossip, the strange surmises.

Which of them was she in love with? Or was it possible that one of them was in love with her. Or both?

La Perosini explained it to her own satisfaction.

"They have adopted her as a daughter, no doubt, or perhaps they are going to break her into the act. Anything else. La, la! I flatter myself, when it comes to looks I could win in a canter. Or, wait—perhaps the girl has hypnotized them. There is something more in this than meets the eye. If we delved deep enough we should find some strange history."

She was wrong. The meeting of the gymnasts with the girl had been commonplace. They lodged in a house in the Rue de Douai, not far from the circus. Returning home one night, in the hall they met the girl, who had just come to live under the same roof. She had asked them the time, and from that simple introduction had arisen an intimacy. She had offered in the most natural way to do some mending for them, and when they offered to pay for it, had refused. This had nonplused them.

"But, *mademoiselle*, you must permit us. To take advantage of your kindness—no! We cannot do that."

"Why not? You are two lonely men. I am a lonely girl. So there you are. If I choose to mend your clothes, what about it? It is the simplest service in the world."

"Then"—Adolphe hesitated and glanced at Adrian—"then you must allow us to invite you to lunch to-morrow," he added in his precise manner, as though reading from a copy-book.

Adrian had started, and the girl seeing his momentary confusion quickly demurred.

"Thank you, M. Adolphe, but perhaps it is not convenient for M. Adrian."

"Not at all," Adrian urged, recovering his composure. "We shall be delighted. I say it, and I am sure my brother agrees. And then if you care you can come one evening to the show."

The girl wavered, then yielded.

"Very well, it is very kind of you. When I came here I did not expect to meet such—such good comrades."

"We are very fortunate, that is all I can say. Some good spirit must have led you here."

The girl laughed softly.

"That must be it. Some good spirit led me here—there is no doubt about that," she said, looking at them fixedly. "To-morrow then, *messieurs*. Good night."

"Pleasant dreams!" cried Adrian, looking after her as she went up-stairs.

She turned swiftly and glanced back.

"Pleasant dreams!" she answered, and some curious quality in her voice gave the good night an almost imperceptible note of menace.

She looked down at them for a moment then turned the landing.

"Curious voice—dramatic, eh?" said Adolphe.

"It plucks—yes," murmured Adrian almost to himself.

Adolphe returned no answer, and the two men going into their room were soon undressed and in bed.

In the middle of the night Adrian groaned and threw out his arms, muttering to himself and shuddering.

It was a habit now of frequent occurrence. As a rule Adolphe put his arm about his brother as though to protect him when

sleep robbed him of his strength. But this night for the first time as he awakened to consciousness, he made no movement, but lay still, eyes open, listening in the darkness to the muttering. Soon he turned his back upon the tormented sleeper, closing eyes and ears as best he could.

But he could not sleep himself, and the dawn was creeping in through the latticed shutters, in that brief moment of the twenty-four hours when the noises of Paris are stilled as though by magic, before he dozed off, still tingling with a vague irritation against the brother by his side.

When he wakened, Adrian was up and shaving before the mirror, whistling softly to himself.

Adolphe regarded the naked back, studying the firm muscles flexing under the movements of the raised arm.

"I am tired as a dog," he announced sullenly.

Adrian turned.

"Eh! Didn't you sleep well?"

"Sleep? Did you?"

"Surely. Didn't the young lady wish us pleasant dreams?"

His tone was cheerful.

"You kept me awake half the night," Adolphe grunted.

Adrian laid down the towel and stared at him suspiciously. He advanced to the foot of the bed.

"What do you mean?"—his expression was disturbed—"was I dreaming?"

"Dreaming—you ask me if you were dreaming?"

A startled look leaped into Adrian's face. He drew back, then laughed harshly.

"Bah! I'm sorry I disturbed you. Good thing I was with you, Adolphe."

"Yes, you are right. Just as well no one else heard you," said Adolphe significantly.

The two men stared at each other as though probing to the depths of memory, then Adrian turned his back and resumed his toilet. But in the face of his brother mirrored in the glass, the man in bed could see a strange expression of horror, as though some recollection wrapped in the grave clothes of the past had suddenly stirred to life.

"Well, I suppose I had better get up. We have a lunch party to-day, brother," Adolphe said, leaping from bed and fumbling for the sponge.

"Yes, yes," muttered the elder, "Mlle. Berson. We have been pretty severe with ourselves lately, but then you know why."

Adolphe nodded carelessly.

"Oh, yes. But you needn't be afraid of my tongue slipping, I have it too well trained. When we agreed to dispense with our wine and beer, I thought I never could get along without them, but it doesn't bother me now. As for women—they are more dangerous than drink."

"Still, *mademoiselle*, I suppose we can for once—" his brother stumbled uncertainly with the words.

"No chance for secrets, either in or out. We shall both be there. How long is it since we were in a woman's company—do you remember the last time?"

"Stop!" Adrian commanded sharply and shuddered.

Adolphe showed his white teeth good humoredly.

"My sentimental brother!" he said lazily. "Well, set your mind at rest. What we have to think about now is making money. Nothing else. I think we can work Rossin up still another couple of hundred francs and play the season. After that—we should have some money to spend in South America."

His lips curled and he smiled slyly to himself.

The lunch had been successful. Mlle. Berson had been aimable, somewhat shy and restrained, and the conversation had been carried on in a colorless neutrality. Three friends, that was all. There was no suspicion of coquetry in this girl—she did not impress one with her sex as did La Perosini, and the brothers as if by tacit consent effaced their masculinity.

After lunch she had left them to see after a stenographic position she had heard of.

That evening hearing she had been successful in getting it, Adolphe suggested they celebrate at a café, and there it was arranged that she was to go next evening to the circus. She went, and from that day

she was their constant attendant at the evening performance, watching them with that rapt expression which had attracted the attention of the performers.

"Heaven!" said one of them to Tipo. "If I had a woman come every night to watch me, as sure as fate, one evening I'd slip and break my neck. Her presence would get on my nerves. See how she watches them, almost as she were afraid one of them would miss. There's a lot of truth in the old circus saying: 'If you want to succeed in the ring, cut out wine and women.'"

Two weeks went by, three, and the fame of the Olympian Brothers was firmly established in Paris. The circus was crowded nightly, and it was noticed that the boxes suddenly assumed a gay and colorful appearance toward the middle of the performance. It became the fad for society women to run in for the latter half of the show, and it was well known that if they had cared the gymnasts could have driven off each night in the mysterious limousines from which perfumed, gloved hands thrust out notes to the care of the doorkeeper. But it was noted that the brothers made no use of their invitations, slipping out after the show by a side door with their invariable companion.

"Some night," said La Perosini in the Café des Artistes, where Tipo took a hasty glass of coffee and a sandwich before running off to his suburban villa and his wife. "Some night I have a great mind to ask her how she does it. To-night there was a duchess at the stage door. I caught a glimpse of her face, the shameless cat. What do you think it all means? Is it love or what is it? The girl is dressed plainly, she hasn't any jewels—so she isn't making anything out of them. What is the mystery? She is a sly one, she is."

"Well, I don't think I'd be inquisitive, my dear," said the clown, gulping down his coffee. "After all, it is no affair of ours."

"I never did like mysteries," rejoined the rider pettishly; "and I shouldn't be amazed to hear any day of some scandal. It's perfect nonsense. Two brothers absolutely devoted to each other—that's queer enough—you'd think Adrian was Adolphe's su-

perior officer and nurse-maid—but when you add to it, this running about with one woman—"

"They don't care a button for her—in the way you think—"

"That's all you know—leave it to me, my dear man—I know love at a glance—both of them are crazy about her. Well, run along, little man. My love to Huguette."

The following evening Tipo had snatched a moment to look at the evening paper during the last act of the show, when he heard a full-throated gasp which rose above the music, a thud just outside the entrance to the ring, to which succeeded a confused shouting. He flung down his paper and ran out, almost falling over something which lay there. As he did so Adrian slid down his rope, almost on top of him, and stood with blanched face and chattering teeth.

Tipo looked from him to the object at his feet. Lying in a grotesquely crumpled heap was the younger of the gymnasts, a bubble of faintly reddened foam on his lips.

The ring men swept about them in a circle, and through it pressed M. Rossin, a look of horror on his face.

He made a sign and two of the grooms, picking up the gymnast, carried him out. Tipo gasped as he saw how limply the head fell back.

He heard Rossin shout:

"*Messieurs—Mesdames!* A doctor is in attendance now. Pass out quietly. There is rarely a fatal fall. We must all hope for the best."

Tipo went out to where the grooms had laid the gymnast on a horse-blanket. His breast still moved and his eyelids fluttered feebly. In mute interrogation the clown looked at Adrian, who stood there stiffly, his arms held by his side.

"He missed you," he said slowly; "I am sorry, my friend."

Adrian's eyelids contracted and he shivered.

A dresser held out his dressing-gown and mechanically he slipped his arms into it.

Tipo still waited for reply.

A groom broke in eagerly:

"It was an accident, M. Tipo. I was watching—he took his swing just the same

as every night—then I gasped—he just missed Adrian's fingers and flew against the rail of the balcony, like a stone from a sling—and dropped. Another foot and the net would have caught him—"

Rossin bustled out.

"What a misfortune! My sympathies, my dear fellow. *Dieu!* where is that doctor? Ah, there you are. I am afraid we have some work for you."

The doctor bent over the stretched-out form and gently passed his hands over it. He raised the head and then let it fall limply.

"I can do nothing. I am sorry," he said, rising from his knees. "His neck is broken. In some cases even then there is hope of life, but not here. A pity! A fine specimen of humanity! Five minutes at most, M. Rossin."

The eyes of Adrian opened, blank and staring; his chin fell.

"You can do nothing more here, my dear man," said Rossin as though waking from a dream, "I will attend to everything. Do you hear me? I will attend to everything that has to be done. Go home, Adrian. Where is *mademoiselle*, your friend? She must be desolated."

The gymnast stared about him wildly, shaking his head.

"I insist," continued Rossin firmly. "You are going by the Rue de Douai, doctor. Will you be kind enough to take M. Adrian with you? Leave it to me. There, it is all right. A great grief. My sincere sympathies."

Rossin propelled the gymnast, unresisting, toward the doctor, who, linking his arm in his, moved with him toward the exit. They passed out of sight.

"Where the deuce did the woman go to?" asked Rossin, turning to the little crowd. "She must have slipped out—terrible thing for her to see, poor thing. Bastien, kindly run round to the undertaker's and ask them to send a man at once. What a misfortune! And in the midst of the season, my dear Tipo. Don't wait. Go and catch your train. This is a terrible blow! To-morrow's papers! Oh, *mon Dieu!*" And, lamenting, the kind-hearted fellow, torn between his sympathies and his busi-

ness cares, sat down on a box and lit a cigar with trembling hands.

The doctor led Adrian into the house and on his indicating by a nod that his room was at the back, guided him there and opened the door. He was surprised to find a woman sitting upright in a chair as though waiting and, taken aback, he coughed.

"Pardon, *madame!* *Monsieur* is somewhat shaken. An accident—but be calm—he is unhurt. I took the liberty of helping him home. No alarm, please. A good night's rest, that is all he needs. Good night. I leave you with your wife, *monsieur.*"

Mlle. Berson heard the outer door close before she stirred. Her lips tightened and she seemed to shrink within herself as the gymnast suddenly threw off the appearance of stunned helplessness.

"You were there," he said simply. "You are content now. Between accident and—otherwise there is but the quiver of a muscle. I have killed my brother, my brother whom I loved more than any other living—except you—killed him for you! I have torn my heart out, now, you must give me yours. Chance brought us together—nothing must drive us apart."

She rose from her seat, her arms by her side, the hands tense on her upbent wrists.

"You are wrong, it was not chance which brought us together. I saw your face on the bills and I made up my mind to find you. I did. I found you lodged here and I came to live under the roof where I might meet you."

He stared at her a moment then laughed brutally.

"So you set out to get me. You did. In spite of everything. We had agreed—you know—he and I—to keep clear of women till we were—till we had money enough to go our way as we wanted. That plan worked till you came along! You were a witch, my girl. I felt as if I had known you before—in some wild orgy of passion—when you were wholly mine—mine and no other's. Oh, I can talk when I want to. I was not always a gymnast, my dear. No, far from it. There is good blood in these veins—noble blood. But there was Adolphe"—he shut his eyes for an instant,

then opened them with a slow, steady stare at her, and she flushed and shrank back—"but you knew the tricks, little fox. You kept me at arm's length. Only there was Adolphe in the way. He wanted you, too, but not so much as I. I had to silence him—he knew—a word from him to the prefecture—but you shall learn of that later. You trust me. Then you said I must marry you. I shall do that now. All that is past is past. My—traditions—family, bah! You told me with your cunning eyes, with the whisperings of your clever brain—you told me without words what I must do. I have done it. A quiver and I was free. It was his life or mine. Now we shall pack up, and after the funeral—I must attend that or they might suspect—we shall sail to South America—to Brazil—I have it all planned out."

He advanced upon her, arms outstretched, the perspiration shining on his naked shoulders and arms from the vehemence of his speech.

"Now, for the first time you shall know how I make love, my pretty one."

She raised her head and met his eyes with a look so terrible that he hesitated and faltered on his feet.

"What is it? What have I said?"

"For the first time," she said slowly.

"That is not true. We have met before."

He stood bewildered.

"What do you mean?"

"Think of a night in Laon."

"A night in Laon?" he echoed dully.

"Yes. This is our second meeting. You were drunk and mad with lust. You do not remember me, Herr Captain, but I remembered your face and his? He was there laughing—his strong arms about my poor sister."

He shook his head.

"Laon!" he muttered. "There were so many—" He shuddered all at once, as returning memory showed its image on his face racked with recollection.

Suddenly, still regarding him with a look of hatred and contempt, she threw up her hands, and ripped open the front of her high-necked dress.

"You said," she told him in a strangely, even tone, "that I was now government property and that I must be branded with the mark—the mark of the beast. But I am content now, *sale boche*, I am content. The cross you bear is heavier than mine."

And drawing the torn cloth over her bosom, its whiteness marred by the disfigurement left by a red-hot iron cross, she walked slowly past him as he stood transfixed with horror, and out of the door.

The evening papers of next day had a second sensation on top of the circus tragedy. M. Adrian Grunau, unable to support the loss of the brother to whom he was notably so devoted, had blown out his brains.

THEIR OCCUPATIONS

HILDEGARDE and Christopher walked out to see a view;
 Frances and the Leonard youth are trying the canoe;
 Elizabeth and Solomon are resting in the shade;
 Walter's showing Susan how auction-bridge is played.

Angelina's gone to make arrangements for the fair—
 The odds are seventeen to one that Walter will be there.
 Richard and Carlotta went down to get the mail;
 Dorothy and Reuben are out to take a sail.

David's in the parlor with Charlotte and a book;
 Florence, in the kitchen, is teaching Ben to cook.
 Paul is helping Ada to find that missing glove—
 Of course, they're doing everything but simply "making love"!

Tudor Jenks.

Prairie Flowers

by James B. Hendryx

Author of "The Gold Girl," "The Gun Brand," "The One Big Thing," etc.

(A Sequel to "The Texan")

PRECEDING CHAPTERS BRIEFLY RETOLD

TEX BENTON, after working for a year as foreman on the Y Bar Ranch, leaves for Timber City on the anniversary of Alice Marcum's marriage to Win Endicott with the avowed intention of getting drunk. As it happens Alice and her husband arrive at Timber City that same day where Endicott has an appointment with Colston, owner of the Y Bar, which ranch he is considering buying. Alice, going for a ride, arrives at the Red Front Saloon just as a crowd of men are besieging Tex therein, he having made good his intention, become very drunk and shot up the place. Without hesitation Alice makes the men stand back, and regardless of shots advances to the door of the saloon.

CHAPTER VI.

AT THE RED FRONT.

WHEN Ike Stork had disappeared through the door of the Red Front, dragging the unconscious form of the bartender with him, the Texan poured himself a drink, set a quart bottle before him upon the bar, rummaged in a drawer, and produced a box of cartridges, which he placed conveniently to hand, reloaded his guns, and took another drink.

A report sounded in the street and a bullet crashed through the window and buried itself in a beer keg. The Texan laughed: "Fog 'er up, ol' hand, an' here's yer change!"

Reaching over the top of a keg, he sent a bullet through the window. The shot drew a volley from the street, and the big mirror behind the bar became a jangle of crashing glass.

"Barras 'll have to get him a new look-in'-glass," he opined, as he shook the sliv-

ers from his hat brim. "The war's on—an' she's a beaut! If ol' Santa Anna was here, him an' I could lick the world! This red lick sure is gettin' to my head—stayed off it too long; but I'm makin' up for lost time! Whoopee!"

"Oh, I'm a Texas cowboy,
Far away from home,
If I ever get back to Texas
I never more will roam."

"Hey, in there!" The song ceased abruptly, and, gun in hand, the Texan answered.

"There ain't no hay in here! What do you think this is—a cow's hotel? The livery barn's next door!"

"They ain't no outlaws goin' to run Timber City while I'm marshal!"

"Put 'er here, pardner!" answered the Texan. "You run Timber City, an' I'll run the Red Front! Come on in an' buy a drink, so I can get my change!"

"You're arrested fer disturbin' the peace!"

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for November 6.

"Come an' get me, then. But come a shootin'!"

"You can't git away with it. I got twenty men here, an' every one packin' a gun!"

"You've got me, then," mocked the Texan. "I've only got two guns. Run 'em in in a bunch. I can only take care of a dozen, an' the rest can get me before I can reload."

"Ye're kickin' up an awful stink fer a dollar an' four bits."

"Tain't the money—it's the principle of the thing. An' besides, I aimed to pull a hell-winder of a jamboree—an' I'm doin' it."

"You ain't helpin' yer case none by raisin' a rookus like this. Come out an' give yerself up. All there is ag'in' you is a fine an' a little damages."

"How much?"

"We'll make it fifty dollars fine, an' you'll have to talk to Pete Barras about the damages."

The Texan laughed derisively: "Guess again, you short-horn! I've got more money than that!"

"You comin' out, or I got to go in there an' git you?"

"I ain't comin' out, an' you ain't comin' in here an' get me," defied the cowboy. "You ain't got the guts to—you an' your twenty gun-fighters to boot. Just you stick your classic profile around the corner of that wall an' I'll shoot patterns in it!"

"You can't git away. We've got yer horse!"

"If I was a posse, I'd surround you an' string you up for a bunch of horse-thieves!"

"What you goin' to do about it?"

"I'm standin' pat—me. What you goin' to do?"

"Come on out, hands up, an' submit to arrest before you git in too deep."

"There ain't any marshal in Montana can arrest me!"

"What's yer name?"

"Hydrophobia B. Tarantula! I'm a curly wolf! I can't be handled 'cause I'm full of quills! I've got seventeen rattles an' a button, an' I'm right now coiled!"

"Ye're drunk as hell!" growled the marshal. "Wait till you git sober, an' you won't feel so damn hard."

"You're goin' to miss some sleep waitin', 'cause there's seventeen quarts in sight, without countin' the barrel goods an' beer."

For answer the exasperated marshal sent a bullet crashing into the wall high above the Texan's head, and the shot was immediately followed by a volley from the crowd outside, the bullets slivering the woodwork or burying themselves harmlessly in the barricade of beer-kegs.

"This saloon's gettin' all scratched up, the way you ruffians are carryin' on," called the Texan when the noise had subsided; "but if it's shootin' you want, divide these here up amongst you!" Reaching around a keg, he emptied a gun through the window, then reloaded, and poured himself another drink.

"The main question is," he announced judicially to himself, as he contemplated the liquor in the glass, "I've drunk one quart already; now shall I get seventeen times drunker 'n I am, or shall I stay drunk seventeen times as long?"

He drank the liquor and returned the glass to the bar.

"Guess I'll just let nature take her course," he opined, and glanced about him quizzically. "I mistrusted this wasn't goin' to be no prosaic jubilee, but what I'm wonderin' is, how it's goin' to come out? Tain't likely any one 'll get hurt, 'cause they can't hit me, an' I don't want to hit them."

"But this is goin' to get monotonous some time, an' I'll want to leave here. They've got my horse, an' it's a cinch I ain't goin' away afoot. Guess I'll have to borrow one like ol' Bat did down to Las Vegas an' get plumb out of the country. An' there's another reason I can't linger to get venerable amongst my present peaceful surroundings. When ol' Bat finds I've quit the outfit he'll trail me down, just as sure as I'm goin' to take another drink, an' when he does, he'll—"

Once more the voice of the marshal sounded from without: "Hey, young feller, I'm willin' to go half-way with you—"

"Half of nothin's nothin!" replied the Texan. "I ain't goin' nowhere!"

"You better listen to reason an' give yerself up. If you do we let you off with a hundred dollars fine, an' damages—if you don't, I'm goin' to charge you with shootin' to kill, an' send you up to Deer Lodge fer a year. You got just one minute to think it over. It's gettin' dark, an' I ain't had no supper."

"Me neither. You go on ahead an' get yours first; an' then hurry back an' let me go."

"I ain't foolin'! What you goin' to do?"

"Shoot to kill—if that's what I'm charged with."

The marshal leaped back as a bullet sung past his head.

As darkness gathered the crowd poured volley after volley into the saloon, and the Texan replied sparingly, and between shots he drank whisky.

It was dark inside the building, and the cowboy could see the flash of the guns in the street. Suddenly the bombardment ceased.

"Wonder what they're up to now?" he muttered, peering between the kegs.

He was finding it hard to concentrate his thoughts, and passed a hand across his forehead as if to brush away the cobwebs that were clogging his brain.

"I've got to outguess 'em!" He shook himself fiercely. "Le's see, if they rush me in the dark some of 'em's due to fall down cellar where Ike left the trap open, an' some of 'em's goin' to get mixed up with the bottles an' beer-kegs. If I don't shoot, they won't know where I am, an' while they're ontanglin' themselves maybe I can slip away in the dark."

A light flared suddenly beyond the wooden partition, flickered a moment, and burned steadily. The Texan's eyes widened as his hands closed about the butts of his guns. "Goin' to burn me out, eh?" he sneered, and then, with a smile, laid the two guns on the bar and watched the glow that softened the blackness about the edges of the screen.

"They can't burn me without burnin' up their whole damn little wooden town,"

he speculated. "But what in the devil do they want with a light?" With the words on his lips, the light moved, and once more he reached for his guns. A candle appeared around the end of the partition that formed the doorway. The Texan fired, and the room was plunged into darkness.

And then, through the inky blackness, thick with the pungent powder smoke, sounded a cry—a jerky, stabbing cry—a cry of mortal fear—a woman's cry—that woman's cry:

"Tex—Tex! Strike a light!"

The Texan reeled as from a blow; the gun dropped from his nerveless fingers and thudded upon the floor. He leaned weakly against the back-bar. He was conscious that his eyes were staring—straining to pierce the blackness in the direction of the sound—and yet he knew there was nothing there.

His mouth went dry, and he could distinctly hear his own breathing. He pulled himself jerkily erect and clawed the edge of the bar. His groping hand closed about an object hard and cylindrical. It was the quart bottle of whisky from which he had filled his glass.

Suddenly he shuddered.

"It's the booze," he thought. "It's got me—at last—I'm—I'm *bugs!*" The bottle slipped through his fingers and rolled along the bar, and the air became heavy with the fumes of the liquor that splashed unheeded from its mouth. He passed his hand across his brow and withdrew it slippery and wet with sweat.

"God!" Thickly the word struggled from between the dry lips. He stooped, his hand groping for the gun, his fingers closed uncertainly upon the butt, and as he straightened up the muzzle swung slowly into line with his own forehead. And in that instant a light puff of cool air fanned his dripping forehead. The gun stopped in its slow arc.

The lids closed for an instant over the horribly staring eyes. The shoulders stiffened, and the gun was laid gently upon the bar—for, upon that single puff of night air, delicate, subtle—yet unmistakably distinguishable from the heavy powder smoke and the reeking fumes of the whis-

ky—was borne a breath of the wide open places.

The man's nostrils quivered. Yes, it was there—the scent of the little blue and white prairie flowers—her flowers. Instantly his brain cleared. A moment before he had been hopelessly drunk; now he was sober. It was as though the delicate scent had entered his nostrils and cleansed his brain, clearing it of the befuddling fog, and leaving it wholesome, alert, capable. Poignantly, with the scent of those flowers, the scene of a year ago leaped into memory, when he had stooped to restore them to her hands—there in the tiny glade beside the big boulder.

"Alice!" he cried sharply.

"Tex!" The name was a sob, and then: "Oh, please—please strike a light! I'm—I'm afraid!"

For just an instant the Texan hesitated, a match between his fingers, and his voice sounded strangely hard:

"A light, now, will mean they'll get me! But—if you're real, girl, I'll trust you. If you ain't—the quicker they shoot, the better!"

There was a scratching sound, a light flared out, and, candle outstretched, the girl came swiftly to the bar; and as he held the match to the wick the Texan's eyes gazed wonderingly into the eyes of blue.

CHAPTER VII.

THE TEXAN "COMES A SHOOTIN'."

ALICE ENDICOTT gazed searchingly into the Texan's flushed face and wondered at the steadiness of his eyes. "They—they said you were drunk," she faltered.

The cynical smile that she remembered so well twisted the man's lips:

"They were right—partly. I was headed that way; but I'm cold sober now."

"Then leave your guns here and come with me. You must submit to arrest. They'll fine you and make you pay for the damages, and that will be all there'll be to it."

The Texan shook his head. "No. I

told that marshal he couldn't arrest me, an' he can't."

Alice's heart sank. "Please—for my sake," she pleaded. "If you haven't got the money—"

"Oh, I've got the money, all right—a whole year's wages right here in my pocket. It ain't the money—it's the principle of the thing. I made my brag, an' I've got to see it through. They might *get* me, but they'll never arrest me."

"Oh, please—"

Tex interrupted her sharply, and the girl was startled at the gleam that leaped suddenly from the gray eyes. "What are you doing here? Has he—didn't you an' Win—hit it out?"

"Oh, yes! Yes! Win is here—"

"An' he let you come in alone—an' stayed outside—"

"No—he doesn't know. He's up at the Camerons. I went for a ride, and coming back I saw the crowd, and when they told me the man in here was a Texan, somehow, I just knew it was you."

The gleam faded from the man's eyes, and he regarded her curiously. "But, what are you doin' in Timber City—you an' Win?"

"Why, it's our anniversary! We wanted to spend it here where we were married. And besides, we've got the grandest scheme. Win wants to see you. Come on, give yourself up, and pay their old fine!"

"I won't be arrested," repeated the Texan stubbornly. "An' don't count me in on any scheme with you an' Win." Once more his eyes blazed, and his words came low and tense: "Can't you see—I haven't forgot. I don't reckon I ever will forget!"

"Don't, don't, Tex! You haven't tried to forget. How many girls have you known since—a year ago?"

"None—an' I don't want to know any! There ain't any more like you—"

Alice interrupted him with a laugh:

"Don't be a fool. I know loads of girls—and they're all prettier than I am, and they've got lots more sense, too. Please don't spoil our anniversary this way. There are twenty men out there, and they're all armed, and they've sworn to kill you if you don't give yourself up."

"They better start in killin', then." Throwing back his shoulders, he struck the bar with his fist. "I'll tell you what I'll do—an' that's all I'll do. You go back an' tell 'em I'll pay my fine, an' a reasonable amount of damages, if they'll leave my horse outside and let me go away from here. It ain't because I'm afraid of 'em," he hastened to add. "Not a man of 'em—nor all of 'em. But if you want it that way, I'll do it!"

"But we don't want you to go away!" cried the girl. "Win wants to see you."

The cowboy shook his head. "I'm goin' away—an' far away," he answered. "I don't know what his scheme is, an' I don't want to know. We'd all be fools to tackle it. If that plan suits you, go ahead—no arrest—I'll just pay my fine an' go. An' if it don't suit you, you better go back to Win. This is no place for you, anyhow. Let 'em go ahead with their killin', if they think they can get away with it."

For a moment the girl hesitated, then, picking up her candle from the bar, she started slowly toward the door. "If I can only get word to Win and Mr. Colston," she thought, "I can delay things until they get here."

"Well, what 'd he say?" growled Hod Blake, stepping from among his retainers.

The tone angered the girl, and she glanced contemptuously into the eyes that stared boldly at her from beneath the wide hat-brim.

"He said that you can't arrest him," she answered defiantly. "And if you knew him as well as I do, you'd know he told the truth."

"Oh-ho—so he's got a record, has he?" leered the marshal. "Mebbe they'll be more to this here business than just pickin' up a plain drunk—little reward money, mebbe—eh?"

"No, no!" cried the girl. "Not that! It's just his—his pride. He will never submit to arrest."

"He won't, eh? Well, then, he'll shove up the posies!"

"He'll go away peaceably if you give him the chance. He offered to pay his fine and the damages to the saloon, if you'll allow him to ride away unmolested."

"Oh, he will, will he?" sneered the marshal. "It wouldn't take no mind-reader to tell that he's goin' to pay them fine an' damages—peaceable or onpeaceable, it don't make no difference to me. But, about lettin' him ride off without arrestin' him—they ain't nothin' doin'. I said I'd arrest him, an' I will—an' besides, I aim to hold him over a spell till I can find out if they ain't a reward out fer him. If they ain't nothin' on him, what's he so anxious to pay up an' git out fer?"

"Oh, can't you listen to reason?"

"Sure, Hod," urged Barraś, jumping at the Texan's offer. "Listen to reason. He ain't done nothin' to speak of. Let him pay up an' git."

"Ye shet yer mouth!" snapped the marshal. "They's reason enough in what I said. If they ain't nothin' on him, it ain't goin' to hurt him none to hold him over a few days. It'll do him good. Give him a chanst to sober up."

"He's as sober as you are now," flashed the girl angrily. "An' if he was as drunk as he could get, he'd have more sense than you'll ever have."

"Kind of peppery, ain't you? Well, you c'n go back an' tell him what I said. He c'n take it or leave it. An' while ye're gone, I'll jest slip around an' put a couple of more boys guardin' the back door."

The man turned on his heel and disappeared into the darkness. Glancing about in desperation, Alice saw the tall man who had first spoken to her, still seated upon a corner of the horse trough, a little apart from the crowd.

She hastened to his side. "Will you do something for me?" she asked breathlessly.

With a dexterous contortion of his nether lip, the man gathered an end of his huge mustache into the corner of his mouth: "What would it be?" he asked non-committally.

"Hurry to Mr. Cameron's and tell my husband and Mr. Colston to come down here quick!"

"Y Bar Colston?" he asked with exasperating deliberation.

"Yes. Oh, hurry, please!"

His left eyelid drooped meaningly, as he audibly expelled the mustache from be-

tween his lips and jerked his head in the direction of the saloon.

"Y' ain't helpin' his case none by draggin' Y Bar into it," he opined. "Hod hates Y Bar on account he trades over to Claggett. Hod, he runs the main store here besides bein' marshal."

"Oh, what shall I do?"

Making sure they were out of ear-shot, the man spoke rapidly:

"They ain't only one way to work it. You hustle back an' tell him to slip down cellar an' climb up the chute where they slide the beer-kaigs down. It opens onto the alley between the livery barn an' the store. Hod ain't thought of that yet, an' my horse is tied in the alley. Tell him to take the horse an' beat it."

For an instant the girl peered into the man's eyes as if to fathom his sincerity. "But why should you sacrifice your horse?"

"The man cut her short. "I'll claim his'n, an' it's about an even trade. Besides, he done me a good turn by not shootin' me in there when he had the chanst, after I tried to help Barras hold him. An' I'm one of these here parties that b'lieves one good turn deserves another."

"But," hesitated the girl, "you were shooting into the saloon at him. I saw you."

"Yup, I was shootin', all right," he grinned. "But he'd of had to been ten foot tall fer me to hit him. It wouldn't of looked right fer me not to of been a shootin'."

"But won't they shoot him when he tries to get away?"

The grin widened. "They won't. Tell him to come bustin' right out the front way on the high lope, right into the middle of 'em. I know them *hombres*, an' believe me, it's goin' to be fun to see 'em trompin' over one another a gitten' out of the road. By the time they git in shootin' shape, he'll be in the dark."

"But, they'll follow him."

"Yes, mom. But they ain't goin' to ketch him. That horse of mine kin run rings around anything they've got. Better hurry now, 'fore Hod thinks about that beer-kaig chute."

"Oh, how can I thank you?"

"Well, you might set up a brass statoo of me acrost from the post-office—when the sun hit it right it would show up clean from the top of the divide."

Alice giggled, as the man extended his hand and said: "Here's a couple more matches. You better run along now. Jest tell that there Texas cyclone that Ike Stork says this here play is the best bet, bein' as they'll starve him out if a stray bullet don't find its way between them kaigs an' git him first."

She took the matches, and once more paused in the doorway and lighted her candle. As she disappeared into the interior, Ike saw Stork shifted his position upon the edge of the horse trough and grinned broadly as his eyes rested upon the men huddled together in front of the saloon.

The girl crossed to the bar, and, reading the question in the Texan's eyes, shook her head.

"He won't do it," she said. "He's just as mean, and stubborn, and self-important and as *rude* as he can be. He says he's going to arrest you, and he's going to hold you for a few days in jail to see if there isn't a reward offered for you somewhere. He thinks, or pretends to think, that you're some terrible desperado."

The cynical smile twisted the Texan's lips. "He'll be sure of it before he gets through."

"No, no, Tex! Don't shoot anybody—please! Listen! I've got a plan that will get you out of here. But first you've got to promise that you will see Win. We've set our hearts on it, and you *must*."

"What's the good?"

"Please, for my sake, promise me!"

The man's eyes devoured her.

"I'd do anything in the world for your sake," he said simply. "I'll promise. Tell Win to drift over to Claggett day after to-morrow, an' I'll meet him somewhere along the trail."

"Surely? You won't disappoint us?"

The man regarded her reproachfully.

"You don't think I'd lie to you?"

"No—forgive me. I—" She paused and looked straight into his eyes. "And, will you promise me one thing more?"

"Tell me straight out what it is, an' I'll tell you straight out what I'll do."

"Promise me you won't drink any more until—until after you've seen Win."

"The Texan hesitated. "It's only a couple of days. Yes, I'll promise," he answered. "An' now, what's your plan?"

Alice glanced toward the door and leaned closer. "It really isn't my plan at all," she whispered. "But there's a man out there with a big, drooping, faded-looking mustache; he said you did him a good turn by not shooting him, or something—"

"Ike Stork," grinned the Texan.

Alice nodded. "Yes, that's his name; and he said to tell you it was the best bet, whatever that is."

"I get him. Go on."

"Well, he says there's some kind of a chute that they slide the beer-kegs down into the cellar with, and for you to go down and climb up the chute. It will let you out into the alley between this building and the livery stable. The marshal hasn't thought of posting any guards there, and Ike's horse is tied in the alley, and you're to take him and make a dash out of the front way, right through the crowd. He says they'll all fall over each other and be so scared that they won't think to shoot till you've had a chance to get away."

As the girl talked she could see that the Texan's eyes twinkled, and when she finished his shoulders were shaking with silent mirth.

"Good old Ike!" he chuckled. "You tell him I say he's a bear!"

"He said it would be fun to see them trample over each other getting out of the way."

"I'll sure see that he gets his money's worth," grinned the Texan.

A troubled look crept into the girl's face. "You won't hurt any one?" she asked.

The man shook his head. "Not unless some of 'em don't get out of the road. Might knock down a few with the horse, but that won't hurt 'em to speak of. It wouldn't pain me none to knock that marshal about half-ways down the street—not for anything he's done to me, but because I've got a hunch he talked pretty rough to you."

"Oh, I hope it's all right," whispered the girl. "Do you really think it will work?"

"Work! Of course it 'll work! I've got it all pictured out right now. It's a peach! Just you get off to one side far enough so's not to get caught in the rush, an' you'll see some fun. Tell Ike not to forget to put up an awful howl about loosin' his cayuse, just to make the play good."

"Are you sure he's really sincere—that it isn't just a trick to get you out where they can shoot you? How long have you known this Ike Stork?"

"Dead sure." The Texan's tone was reassuring. "Known him a good half-hour. You ought to seen those eyes of his when he thought I was goin' to shoot him—never flinched a hair. He's a good man; told me to hurry up an' make a good job of it."

The girl held out her hand. "Good-by, Tex—till day after to-morrow."

The cowboy took the hand and pressed it fiercely. "You're goin' to be there, too? That 'll make it harder—but—all right."

"Remember," smiled the girl, "what I said about there being loads of other girls."

"Too bad you hadn't been born in the West, so Win would never know you—then—maybe—"

"What shall I tell our friend the marshal?" interrupted the girl.

The Texan grinned. "Just tell him not to order any extra meals sent down to the jail on my account. An', here, tell him the drinks are on the house." He handed the girl a quart bottle of whisky. "That 'll keep 'em from gettin' restless before the show starts."

Candle in one hand, bottle in the other, the girl made her way to the door. As she stepped out into the night she was hailed roughly by the marshal: "Well, what 'd he say now?"

"He said," answered the girl scornfully, "that you were not to order any extra meals sent down to the jail on his account. And he sent you this and asked me to tell you that the drinks were on the house." She extended the bottle, which the marshal eagerly grasped, despite the strenuous objections of Pete Barras, who clamored for the return of his property.

"Ain't I had hell enough fer one day?"

demanded the bartender. "What with gittin' shot in the arm, an' gittin' tried to be held up fer four dollars of Sam's debts, an' gittin' laid out cold with a spittoon, an' gittin' my glasses an' bottles all busted, an' gittin' my place all shot up, an' my merrrow shot to hell, an' my kegs all shot holes in, without all you's hornin' in an' drinkin' up what little I got left? As the feller says, where do I git off at?"

"S'pose you dry up an' let me talk," retorted the marshal. "They ain't no one payin' you nawthin' to maintain law an' order in this town."

"If they was, I'll be damned if I wouldn't maintain it, 'stead of millin' around drinkin' up other folks' whisky."

"Looka here, Pete Barras, this makes twice now you've undertook to tell me my business. You shet yer yap, 'er you don't draw no damages when we corral that outlaw in yonder. I ain't so sure you didn't start the rookus nohow. Besides, the boys needs a little drink, an' we'll charge this here bottle up along with the rest of the damages, an' make him pay 'em."

"You ain't caught him yet. Where do I git off at if you don't ketch him?"

Ike Stork, grinning huge enjoyment over the altercation, managed to motion Alice to his side.

"Better git over to yer cayuse," he cautioned. "He's pretty near had time to make it into the alley, an' when he comes he'll come a shootin'. Guess I'll jest keep the squabble a goin'—they all seem right interested." He indicated the crowd that had edged close about the two principals. And Alice smiled as she mounted her horse to hear the renewed vigor with which retort met accusation after the redoubtable Mr. Stork had contributed his observations from the side lines.

The girl's eyes were fixed upon the black mouth of the alley, and with each passing minute she found it harder and harder to restrain her impatience. Would he never come? What if the window had been guarded unknown to Stork? What if Stork's horse had broken loose or had been moved by some one passing through the alley? What if—

A blood-curdling yell split the darkness.

And with a thunder of hoofs an indistinguishable shape whirled out of the alley. A crash of shots drowned the thunder of hoofs as from the plunging shape darted thin red streaks of flame. Straight into the crowd it plunged.

For a fleeting instant the girl caught a glimpse of bodies in confused motion, as the men surged back from its impact. Above the sounds of the guns shrill cries of fear and the hoarse angry curses split the air.

As Ike Stork had predicted, the Texan had "come a shootin'."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE ESCAPE.

ALICE had pressed forward until her horse stood at the very edge of the seething mêlée. Swiftly, objects took definite shape in the starlight. Men rushed past her, cursing. The marshal lay upon the ground, shrieking contradictory orders, while over him stood the outraged Barras, reviling him for permitting his man to escape.

Other men were shooting, and between the sounds of the shots the voice of Ike Stork could be heard loudly bewailing the loss of his horse. Hoof-beats sounded behind her, and, glancing backward, Alice could see men mounting the half-dozen horses that stood saddled before the store and the livery barn. As a man, already in the saddle, urged the others to hurry, he raised his gun and fired in the direction the Texan had taken.

"They'll kill him!" thought the girl. "No matter how fast his horse is, those bullets fly faster!"

Another shot followed the first, and, acting on the impulse of the moment, with the one thought to save the Texan from harm, she struck her horse down the flank and shot out into the trail behind the fleeing cow-puncher.

"They won't dare to shoot now," she sobbed as she urged her horse to his best, while in her ears rang a confusion of cries that she knew were directed at her. Leaning far forward, she shouted encouragement

to her straining animal. In vain her eyes sought to pierce the darkness for a glimpse of the Texan.

Her horse took a shallow ford in a fountain of spray. A patch of woods slipped behind, and she knew she was on the trail that led to the Missouri, and the flat-boat ferry of Long Bill Kearney. She wondered whether Tex would hold to the trail, or would he leave it and try to lose his pursuers among the maze of foothills and coulees through which it wound? Maybe he had turned into the patch of timber, and was even now breathing his horse in the little wild-flower glade. If so, her course was plain—to keep on at top speed and lead his pursuers as far as possible along the trail. Dimly she could hear the thunder of hoofs in her wake. She wondered how long it would be before they would overtake her.

On and on she sped, her thoughts racing wildly as the flying feet of her horse. "What would Win think? What would the horsemen behind her say when at last they overtook her? Maybe they would arrest her!" The thought terrified her, and she urged her horse to a still greater burst of speed. Presently she became aware that the hoofbeats behind had almost died away. Fainter and fainter they sounded—and then, far ahead, on top of a knoll silhouetted against the star-dotted sky, she saw the figure of a horseman.

Instantly it disappeared where the trail dipped into a coulee, and with a thrill of wild exhilaration she realized that her mount had run away from the pursuers, and not only that—he was actually closing up on the Texan, despite the boast of Ike Stork that his animal could run rings around any others.

She topped the rise, and half-way across a wide swale caught another glimpse of the horseman. The man pulled up sharply. There were two horsemen! She had almost come up to them when suddenly they crashed together.

She distinctly heard the sound of the impact. There was a short, sharp struggle, and, as the horses sprang apart, one of the saddles was empty, and a rider thudded heavily upon the ground.

Then, faintly at first, but momentarily growing louder and more distinct, she heard the rumble of pursuing hoofs. She glanced swiftly over her shoulder, and when she returned her eyes to the front one of the riders was disappearing over the rim of the swale, and the other was struggling to his feet.

For only an instant the girl hesitated, then plunged straight down the trail after the fleeing rider. As she passed the other a perfect torrent of vile curses poured from his lips, and with a shudder she recognized the voice of Long Bill Kearney.

The interruption of the headlong flight had been short, but it had served to cut down their lead perceptibly. The sounds of pursuit were plainer even than at first, and, glancing over her shoulder as she reached the rim of the swale, she could see horsemen stringing down into the depression.

Topping the ridge, she was surprised to find the Texan only a short distance ahead. He was plying his quirt mercilessly, but the animal moved slowly, and she could see that he limped. Swiftly she closed up the distance, and as she rode she became conscious of a low, hoarse rumbling—a peculiar sound, dull, all-pervading, terrifying. As she glanced ahead, beyond the figure of the rider, a cry escaped her. The whole world seemed to be a sea of wildly tossing water.

The Missouri! But surely not the Missouri as she remembered it—this wild, roaring flood! The river they had crossed a year ago on Long Bill's flat boat had been a very commonplace stream, flowing smoothly between its banks. But this—

As she caught up to the horseman, he whirled, gun in hand.

"Tex!" she screamed.

The gun-hand dropped, and the man stared at her in amazement. "What are you doing here?"

"I came—they had horses and were going to kill you—I rode in between so they wouldn't shoot."

"Good God, girl!"

"Hurry!" she cried frantically. "They are close behind!"

"Horse went lame," he jerked out as

he plied his quirt and spurs. "Got to make the ferry. Long Bill says the river's broke all records. He's runnin' away. Left his flat boat tied to a tree. It's only a little ways. You go back! I can make it. Had to knock Bill down to keep him from blockin' my game. Once on that boat, they can't follow."

"But, they're almost here!" Even at the words, a horseman topped the ridge, and, with a yell to his followers, plunged toward them.

The Texan scowled darkly. "Go back! They'll never say I hid behind a woman's skirts!"

"I won't go back! Oh, hurry—there's the boat! Two more minutes, and we'll be there! Turn around and shoot! It 'll hold 'em!"

"I won't shoot—not when they can't shoot back!"

The foremost horseman was almost upon them when they reached the flat boat. He was far in advance of the rest, and as the Texan swung to the ground the report of a six-gun rang loud, and a bullet sang over their heads.

The bullet was followed by the sound of a voice: "Shoot, you fool! Keep a shootin' till you pile onto the boat, an' I'll shoot back. Them hounds back there ain't a hankerin' fer no close quarters with you—I told 'em how good you was with yer guns." And Ike Stork followed his words with two shots in rapid succession.

"Good boy, old hand!" grinned the Texan. "How's that!" Six shots cut the air like the reports of an automatic, and Ike, swerving sharply, galloped back in a well-feigned panic of fear. It was the work of a moment to get the Texan's horse aboard, and Alice followed with her own.

The man stared. "Get back!" he cried. "I'm goin' across! Go back to Win!"

"They'll shoot if I don't stay right here! Ike can't hold 'em but a few minutes, at best. They'd have you at their mercy. This boat moves slowly."

The Texan took her roughly by the arm. "You go back!" he roared. "Can't you see it won't do? You can't come! God! girl, can't you see it? The touch of you drives me crazy!"

"Don't be a fool! And I won't see you shot—so there! Oh, Tex, it's you who can't see—I do love you—like a sister. I always think of you as my big brother—I never had a real one."

The Texan backed away. "I don't want no sister! What 'll folks say? This big-brother stuff won't go—by a damn sight!"

Hoof-beats sounded nearer, and a stream of curses floated to their ears.

"There comes that horrible Long Bill!" cried the girl, and before the Texan could make a move to stop her, she seized an ax from the bottom of the boat and brought its keen edge down upon the mooring-line. The flat boat shuddered and moved, slowly at first, then faster as it worked into the current.

The Texan gazed dumfounded at the rapidly widening strip of water that separated them from the shore. But he found scant time to stare idly at the water. All about them its surface was clogged with floating débris. The river had risen to within a foot of the slender cable that held the boat on its course, and the unwieldy craft was trembling and jerking as uprooted trees and masses of flotsam caught on the line, strained it almost to the point of snapping, and then, rolled under by the force of the current, allowed the line to spring into place again.

Slowly the craft, swept by the force of the flood, worked out into the stream, adding its own weight to the strain on the line. The boat shuddered as a tree-trunk struck her side, and, seizing a pole, the man shoved her free. The rushing waters sucked and gurgled at the edge of the boat, and Alice stepped nearer to the Texan.

"We're moving, anyway," she said. "We can't see the shore now. And the voices of the men have died away."

"We can't see, because it's cloudin' up, an' we can't hear 'em because the river's makin' such a racket. With the pull there is on the boat, we ain't ever goin' to get her past the middle—if I could, I'd work her back right now where we come from."

"They'd shoot you!"

"If they did, it would only be me they'd get—the river won't be so particular."

"You mean—we're in danger?"

"Danger!" The naive question angered the cowboy. "Oh, no—we ain't in any danger, not a bit in the world. We're just as safe as if we was sittin' on a keg of powder with the fuse lit. There's nothin' in the world can hurt us except this little old Mizoo, an' it wouldn't think of such a thing."

"Don't try to be sarcastic, Tex. You do it very clumsily."

"Maybe I do, but I ain't clumsy at guessin' that of all the tight places I've ever been in, this is the tightest. How far can you swim?"

"Not a stroke."

"So can I."

"Anyway, it's better than being lost in a dust-storm—we won't shrivel up an' die of thirst."

"No, we won't die of thirst, all right. But you an' me have sure stumbled into a fine mess. What 'll Win think, an' what 'll every one else think? If we go under, they'll never know any different, an' if we do happen to get across, it 'll be some several days before this river gets down to where we can get back, an' I can see from here what a lovely time we're goin' to have explainin' things to the satisfaction of all parties concerned."

"You seem to be a born pessimist. We're not going under, and what's to prevent us from waiting out here until the men on the bank go away, and then going back where we started from?"

A flash of lightning illumined the horizon, and the Texan's voice blended with a low rumble of thunder. "With the force of water the way it is," he explained, "we can't move this boat an inch. It 'll carry to the middle on the slack of the line, an' in the middle we'll stay. It 'll be uphill both ways from there, an' we can't budge her an inch. Then, either the line 'll bust, or the river will keep on risin' till it just naturally pulls us under."

"Maybe the river will start to fall," ventured the girl.

"Maybe it won't. We've had enough rain this spring for four summers already—an' more comin'."

"We'll get out some way."

The Texan knew that the words were

forced, and his heart bounded with admiration for this girl who could thus thrust danger to the winds and calmly assert that there would be a way out. A nearer flash of lightning was followed by louder thunder.

"Sure, we'll get out," he agreed heartily. "I didn't mean we wouldn't get out. I was just lookin' the facts square in the face. There ain't any jackpot that folks can get into that they can't get out of—somehow."

"Oh, does something awful always happen out here?" the girl asked almost plaintively. "Why can't things be just—just normal, like they ought to be?"

"It ain't the country; it's the folks. Get the right combination of folks together, an' somethin's bound to happen, no matter where you're at."

Then the storm struck, and the girl's reply was lost in the rush of wind and the crash of thunder, as flash after blinding flash lighted the surface of the flood. They had reached midstream. The boat had lost its forward motion and lay tugging at the taut line as the water rushed and gurgled about it.

The rain fell in blinding torrents, causing the two horses to huddle against each other, trembling in mortal fear. The drift was thicker in the full sweep of the current, and the Texan had his hands full warding it off the boat with his pole. By the lightning flashes Alice could see his set, tense face as he worked to keep the débris from massing against the craft.

A heavy object jarred against the cable, and the next moment the two gazed wide-eyed at a huge pine, branches and roots thrashing in the air, that had lodged against the line directly upstream. For a few moments it held as the water curled over it in white masses of foam. Then the trunk rolled heavily, the roots and branches thrashing wildly in the air, and the whole mass slipped slowly beneath the cable. It struck the boat with a heavy jar that canted it at a dangerous angle and caused the terrified horses to struggle frantically to keep their feet.

"Quick!" roared the Texan. "Get to the upper side, before they crush you!"

In vain he was pushing against the trunk

of the tree, exerting every atom of power in his body to dislodge the huge bulk that threatened each moment to capsize the clumsy craft. But he might as well have tried to dislodge a mountain. The frightened animals were plunging wildly, adding the menace of their thrashing hoofs to the menace of the river. Vainly the Texan sought to quiet them, but the sound of his voice was drowned in the roar of thunder, the swishing splash of rain, and the gurgle of water that purred among the roots and branches of the pine.

Suddenly the lame horse reared high, pawed frantically for a moment and with an almost human scream of terror, plunged over the side. Alice reached swiftly for the flying bridle reins of her own animal and as her hand closed upon them he quieted almost instantly. Relieved of the weight of the other horse, the boat shifted its position for the worse, the bottom canting to a still steeper angle. A flash of lightning revealed the precariousness of the situation. A few inches more and the water would rush over the side, and both realized that she would fill instantly.

It is a peculiar vagary of the human mind that in moments of greatest stress trivialities loom large. Thus it was that with almost certain destruction staring him in the face, the Texan's glance took in the detail of the brand that stood out plainly upon the wet flank of the girl's horse.

"What you doin' with a Y Bar cayuse?" he cried. "With Powder Face?" and then, the boat tilted still higher, he felt a splash of water against his foot, and as he reached out to steady himself his hand came in contact with the handle of the ax.

Seizing the tool, he sprang erect, poised for an instant upon the edge of the boat which was already awash, and with the next flash of lightning, brought its blade down upon the wire cable stretched taut as a fiddle gut. The rebound of the ax nearly wrenched it from his grasp, the boat shifted as the cable seemed to stretch ever so slightly, and the Texan noted with satisfaction that edge was no longer awash. Another flash of lightning and he could see the frayed ends where the severed strands were slowly untwisting. Another blow, and

the cable parted. With a jerk that nearly threw the occupants into the river the boat righted herself, the flat bottom striking the water with a loud splash. Before Alice realized what had happened she saw the high-flung tree-roots thrash wildly as the released tree rolled in the water. She screamed a warning, but too late. A root-stub, thick as a man's arm, struck the Texan squarely on top of the head, and without a sound he sank limp and lifeless to the bottom of the boat.

CHAPTER IX.

ON THE RIVER.

FOR a moment the girl sat paralyzed with terror as her brain grasped the full gravity of her position. The wind had risen, and blowing up-river, kicked up waves that struck the boat with sledge-hammer force and broke over the gunwales. Overhead the thunder roared incessantly, while about her the thick, black dark burst momentarily into vivid blazes of light that revealed the long slash of the driving rain, and the heaving bosom of the river, with its tossing burden of uprooted trees—revealed, also her trembling horse, and the form of the unconscious Texan lying with face awash in the bottom of the boat. His hat, floating from side to side as the craft rocked in the waves, brushed the horse's heels, and he lashed out viciously, his iron-shod hoofs striking the side of the boat with a force that threatened to tear the planking loose.

The incident galvanized her into action. If those hoofs had struck the Texan? And if he were not already dead, suppose he should drown in the filthy water in the bottom of the boat? Carefully she worked the frightened animal to the farther end and made her way to the limp form of the cowboy. She realized suddenly that she was numb with cold. Her hat, too, floated in the bottom of the boat, and her rain-soaked hair clung in wet straggling wisps to her neck and face.

Stooping over the injured man she twisted her fingers into the collar of his shirt and succeeded in raising his face clear of the water. Blood oozed from a long

cut on his forehead at the roots of his hair, and on top of his head she noticed a welt the size of a door-knob. With much effort she finally succeeded in raising him to a sitting posture and propping him into a corner of the boat, where she held him with her body close against his while she bathed his wound and wiped his eyes and lips with her rain-soaked handkerchief.

Opening her shirt, the girl succeeded in tearing a strip from her undergarments with which she proceeded to bandage the wound. This proved to be no small undertaking, and it was only after repeated failures that she finally succeeded in affixing the bandage smoothly and firmly in place. The storm continued with unabated fury and, shivering and drenched to the skin, she huddled miserably in the bottom against the unconscious form of the man.

Added to the physical discomfort came torturing thoughts of her plight. Each moment carried her farther and farther from Timber City—from Win. When the lightning flashed she caught glimpses of the shore, but always it appeared the same distance away. The boat was holding to the middle of the stream. She knew they must have drifted miles.

"What would Win say?" Over and over the same question repeated itself in her brain, and step by step, she reviewed the events of the night. "I did right, I know I did!" she muttered. "They would have killed him!" And immediately she burst into tears.

Inaction became unbearable and, shifting the body of the Texan so that his head would remain clear of the ever-deepening wash, she seized the pole and worked frantically. But after a few moments she realized the futility of her puny efforts to deviate the heavy craft a hair's-breadth from its course. The tree-root that had knocked the Texan unconscious had descended upon the boat, and remained locked over the gunwale, holding the trunk with its high-fung tangle of roots and branches close alongside, the whole structure moving as one mass.

She discarded the pole and tried to arouse the unconscious man, shaking and pounding him vigorously. After a time his

head moved slightly and, redoubling her efforts, she soon had the satisfaction of seeing his eyes open slowly. His hand raised to his bandaged head, and dropped listlessly to his side. Placing her lips close to his ear to make herself heard above the roar of the storm, she begged and implored him to rouse himself. He evidently understood, for he moved his arms and legs and shifted his body into a more comfortable position. "I—don't—remember"—the words came in a low, faltering voice—"what—happened."

"When you cut the cable that root hit you on the head," she explained, pointing to the root-stub that held the boat firmly against the trunk of the tree.

He nodded his understanding, and in the illumination of the almost continuous flashes of lightning stared at the root, as if trying to collect his scattered wits. The boat jerked unsteadily, hesitated, jerked again, and the branches and uplifted roots of the tree swayed and thrashed wildly. He struggled to his knees and, holding to the girl's arm, raised himself unsteadily to his feet where he stood swaying uncertainly, his eyes fixed on the thrashing branches. His vitality returned with a rush. His eyes narrowed as he pointed out the danger, and his voice rang strong above the storm: "Where's the ax?"

Stooping, the girl recovered it from the water at her feet. Instantly it was seized from her hand and, staggering to the root, the Texan chopped at it with blows that increased in vigor with each successive swing. A few moments sufficed to sever it and, springing to one side, the man drew the girl to the bottom of the boat, while above them the branches thrashed and tore at the gunwales. A moment later the craft floated free and, placing his lips to her ear, the Texan explained:

"They stick down as far as they do up, an' when we pass over a shallow place they drag along the bottom. If we'd struck a snag that would have held the tree, it would have been 'good night' for us. That root would have ripped down through the bottom, and all there'd be'n left of us is two strings of bubbles. We're lucky."

Alice shuddered. "An' now," continued

the cowboy, "we've got to bail out this old tub. What with the water that rolled in over the edge, and what's rained in, we'll have a boatful before long."

"Why, there's barrels of it!" cried the girl. "And we haven't anything to bail with!"

The Texan nodded: "There's barrels of it all right. I saw a fellow empty a barrel with a thimble once—on a bet. It took him a considerable spell, but he did it. My boots hold considerable more'n a thimble, an' we can each take one an' go to it."

"But wouldn't it be better to try and reach shore?"

"Reach shore?" With a sweep of his arm the man indicated the surface of the turgid flood. Following the gestures, Alice realized the utter futility of any attempt to influence the course of the clumsy craft. The wind had risen to a gale, but the full fury of the electrical storm had passed. Still continuous, the roar of the thunder had diminished to a low rumbling roll, and the lightning flashed pale, like ghost lightning, its wan luminescence foreshortening the range of vision to include only the nearer reaches of wild lashing water, upon whose surface heaved and tossed the trunks and branches of trees over which the white-capped waves broke with sodden hiss.

The shore line with its fringe of timber had merged into the outer dark—an all-enveloping, heavy darkness that seemed in itself *thing*—a thing of infinite horror, whose evil touch was momentarily dispelled by the paling flashes of light. "Oh, where are we? Where are we going?" moaned the girl.

"Down-river, somewhere," answered the Texan with an attempt at cheerfulness. The man was industriously bailing with a boot. He tossed its mate to the girl. "Bail," he urged. "It gives you somethin' to think about, an' it's good exercise. I was about froze till I got to heavin' out this water. We ain't so bad now. We're bound to get shoved ashore at some bend, or the wind 'll blow us ashore. Looks to me as if she was widenin' out. Must of overflowed some flat." Mechanically she took the boot and, following the example of the Texan, began to bail out. "Rains quit, an' this

wind 'll dry us out when we get the boat emptied so we don't have to sit in the water. My shirt's most dry already."

"The wind has changed!" cried the girl. "It's blowing crosswise of the river now."

"More likely we've rounded a bend," opined the Texan, "I don't know the river below Clagett."

"If we're blown ashore now, it will be the wrong shore."

"Most any old shore 'd look good to me. I ain't what you might call aquatic by nature—I ain't even amphibious." Alice laughed and the sound was music to the Texan's ears. "That's right, laugh," he hastened to say, and the girl noticed that the cheerfulness was not forced, "I've never heard you laugh much, owin' to the fact that our acquaintance has been what you might call tribulations to an extent that has be'n plumb discouragin' to jocosity. But, what was so funny?"

"Oh, nothing. Only one would hardly expect a cowboy, adrift in the middle of a swollen river, to be drawing distinctions between words."

"Bailin' water out of a boat with a boot don't overtax the mental capacity of even a cowboy to absolute paralysis."

"You're certainly the most astonishing cowboy I've ever known."

"You ain't known many—"

"If I'd known a thousand—" The sentence was never finished. The boat came to a sudden stop. Both occupants were thrown violently to the bottom, where they floundered helplessly in their efforts to regain their feet.

"What happened?" asked the girl as she struggled to her knees, holding fast to the gunwale. "Oh, maybe we're ashore!" Both glanced about them as a distant flash of lightning threw its pale radiance over the surface of the flood. On every side was water—water, and the tossing branches of floating trees. The Texan was quieting the terrified horse that crouched at the farther end of the boat threatening momentarily to become a very real menace by plunging and lashing out blindly in the darkness.

"Struck a rock, I reckon," the cowboy said. "This cayuse 'll be all right in a

minute, an' I'll try to shove her off. Must be we've headed along some new channel. There hadn't ought to be rocks in the main river."

The clumsy craft shifted position with an ugly grating sound as the current sucked and gurgled about it, and the white-capped waves pounded its sides and broke in white foam over the gunwales. The Texan took soundings with the pole. "Deep water on three sides," he announced, "an' about a foot down to solid rock on the other. Maybe I can climb out an' shove her off."

"No, no!" cried the girl in a sudden panic of fear. "You can't swim, and suppose something should happen and the boat moved off before you could climb it? You'd be washed off the rock in a minute, and I—I couldn't stand it alone!"

"The way she's millin' around on the rock, I'm afraid she'll rip her bottom out. She's leakin' already. There's more water in her now than when we started to bail."

"Most of it splashed in over the sides—see, when the waves break."

"Maybe," assented the Texan carelessly, but in the darkness he stooped and with his fingers located a crack where the planking had been forced apart, through which the river water gushed copiously. Without a word he stepped to the girl's saddle and took down the rope. "We've got to get off here" he insisted. "Where'd we be if some big tree like the one that knocked me cold would drift down on us?" As he talked he passed the loop of the rope over his head and made it fast about his shoulders, and allowing ten or twelve feet of slack, knotted it securely to a ring in the end of the boat. "There, now I can get onto the rock an' by using the pole for a crowbar, I can pry us off, then if I get left I'll just trail along on this rope till I can pull myself in."

The man's first effort resulted only in breaking a couple of feet from the end of his lever, but finally, by waiting to heave on his bar at the moment a wave pounded the side, he had the satisfaction of seeing the craft move slowly, inch by inch, toward the deeper water. A moment later the man thanked his stars that he had thought of the rope, for, without warning, the boat lifted on a huge wave and slipped from the

rock, where it was instantly seized by the current and whirled down-stream with a force that jerked him from his feet. Taking a deep breath, he clutched the line, and easily pulled himself alongside, where the girl assisted him over the gunwale.

They were entirely at the mercy of the river, for in the suddenness of their escape from the rock, the Texan had been unable to save the pole. Groping in the water for his boot he began to bail earnestly, and as Alice attempted to locate the other boot her hand came in contact with the inrushing stream of water. "Oh, it is leaking!" she cried in dismay. "I can feel it pouring through the bottom!"

"Yes, I found the leak back there on the rock. If we both bail for all we're worth maybe we can keep her afloat."

Alice found the other boot, and for what seemed interminable hours the two bailed in silence. But, despite their efforts, the water gained. Nearly half full, the boat floated lower and more sluggishly. Waves broke over the side with greater frequency, adding their bit to the stream that flowed in through the bottom. At length, the girl dropped her boot with a sigh that was half a sob: "I can't lift another bootful," she murmured. "My shoulders and arms ache so—and I feel—faint."

"Just you prop yourself up in the corner an' rest a while," advised the Texan with forced cheerfulness, "I can handle it all right, now."

Wearily, the girl obeyed. At the bow and stern of the square-ended boat, the bottom curved upward so that the water was not more than six or eight inches deep where she sank heavily against the rough planking, with an arm thrown over the gunwale. Her eyes closed, and despite the extreme discomfort of her position, utter weariness claimed her, and she sank into that borderland of oblivion that is neither restful sleep, nor impressionable wakefulness.

It may have been minutes later, or hours, that the voice of the Texan brought her jerkily erect. Vaguely she realized that she could see him dimly, and that his arm seemed to be pointing at something. With a sense of great physical effort, she managed to follow the direction of the pointing arm,

and then he was speaking again: "It's breakin' daylight! An' we're close to shore!" Alice nodded indifferently. It seemed, somehow, a trivial thing. She was conscious of a sense of annoyance that he should have rudely aroused her to tell her that it was breaking daylight, and that they were close to shore. Her eyes closed slowly, and her head sank onto the arm that lay numb and uncomfortable along the gunwale.

The Texan was on his feet, eagerly scanning his surroundings that grew momentarily more distinct in the rapidly increasing light. The farther shore showed dimly and the man emitted a low whistle of surprise. "Must be a good four or five miles wide," he muttered as his eyes took in the broad expanse of water that rolled between. He saw at a glance that he was well out of the main channel, for all about him were tiny islands formed by the summits of low buttes and ridges while here and there the green tops of willows protruded above the surface of the water swaying crazily in the current.

"Some flood!" he muttered, and turned his attention to the nearer bank. The boat floated sluggishly not more than fifty or sixty feet from the steep slope that rose to a considerable height. "Driftin' plumb along the edge of the bench," he opined. "If I only had the pole!"

He untied the rope by which he had dragged himself aboard from the rock, and coiled it slowly, measuring the distance with his eye.

"Too short by twenty feet," he concluded, "an' nothin' to tie to if I was near enough." He glanced downward with concern. The boat was settling lower and lower. The gunwales were scarcely a foot above the water. "She'll be divin' out from under us directly," he muttered. "I wonder how deep it is?" Hanging the coiled rope on the horn of the saddle he slipped over the edge, but, although he let down to the full reach of his arms his feet did not touch bottom and he drew himself aboard again. The boat was moving very slowly, drifting lazily across a bit of slack water that had backed into the mouth of a wide coulée.

Fifty yards away, at the head of the little bay formed by the backwater, the Texan saw a bit of level, grass-covered beach. Glancing helplessly at his rope, he noticed that the horse was gazing hungrily at the grass, and in an instant, the man sprang into action. Catching up his boots he secured them to the saddle by means of a dangling pack string, and hastily uncoiling the rope he slipped the noose over the horn of the saddle. The other end he knotted and, springing to the girl's side, shook her roughly.

"Wake up! Wake up! In a minute it'll be too late! Half lifting her to her feet he hastily explained his plan, as he talked he tore the brilliant scarf from his neck and tied it firmly about his own wrist and hers. Making her take firm hold about his neck he seized the knotted rope with one hand, while with the other he reached for the ax and brought the handle down with a crash against the horse's flank. The sudden blow caused the frightened animal to leap clean over the low gunwale. He went completely out of sight, but a moment later his head appeared and, snorting and thrashing about, he struck out for shore. When the slack was out of the line the Texan threw his arm about the girl's waist, and together they leaped over the side in the wake of the swimming horse. Even with the small amount of slack that remained, the jerk when the line pulled taut all but loosened the Texan's hold. Each moment seemed an eternity, as the weight of both hung upon the Texan's one-hand grip.

"Hold for all you're worth!" he gasped, and as he felt her arms tighten about him, relinquished the hold on her waist and with a mighty effort gripped the rope with the hand thus freed. Even with two hands it was no mean task to maintain his hold, for the current, slight as it was, swung them down so the pull was directly against it. The Texan felt the girl's grasp on his neck weaken. He shouted a word of encouragement, but it fell on deaf ears, her hands slipped over his shoulders, and at the same instant the man felt the strain of her weight on his arm as the scarf seemed to cut into the flesh.

The Texan felt himself growing numb. He seemed to be slipping—slipping—from some great height—slipping slowly down a long, soft incline. In vain he struggled to check the slow, easy descent. He was slipping faster now—fairly shooting toward the bottom. Somehow he didn't seem to care. There were rocks at the bottom—this he knew—but the knowledge did not worry him. Time enough to worry about that when he struck—but this smooth, easy slide was pleasant.

Crash! There was a blinding flash of light. Fountains of stars played before his eyes like fireworks on the Fourth of July. An agonizing pain shot through his body—and then—oblivion.

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.

A buckskin horse, with two water-soaked boots lashing his flanks, and trailing a lariet rope from the horn of his saddle, dashed madly up a coulée. The pack string broke and the terrifying thing that lashed him on fell to the ground with a thud. The run became a trot, and the trot a walk. When the coulée widened into a grassy plain, he warily circled the rope that dragged from the saddle, and presently deciding it was harmless, fell eagerly to eating soggy buffalo grass that carpeted the ground.

While back at the mouth of the coulee lay two unconscious forms, their bodies partly awash in the lapping waves of the rising river.



THE law as set down for sailing masters offers a fair measure of protection for seamen.

Captain Gully, of the steam whaler Bowhead, was familiar with this law. It prevented him from completing his crew. Men of any kind were scarce in San Francisco. Cargoes rotted in ships' holds while the wages of ordinary seamen mounted to impossible heights.

The Bowhead was ready to steam for the Arctic and Bering Sea whaling grounds. Her boat-steerers, harpooners, mates, engineers, and twelve of a crew were aboard. Captain Gully dared not cat the anchor

without eighteen men before the mast. He needed six more hands in the fo'c's'le.

"Hansen," he told his first mate, "lower the dingey and go to the Blubber Room on East Street. Ask for Abie Kelly. Bring Abie out with you."

"The crimp?"

"You know him."

"Ja! I dank I know him."

"Bring him to me!"

Hansen returned at nightfall. He steadied the bosun's ladder that hung from the taffrail and watched Abie Kelly climb to the deck.

Captain Gully greeted the crimp like a

long-lost son. They descended to the whaler's cabin while Hansen was hooking the dingey's bow to a dangling fall.

"To be brief as possible," said Gully after pouring out a generous portion of rum, "I want six men before midnight, when the tide turns."

"What kind of men, cappin?"

"Any kind, so long as they are husky—Chinks, Kanakas, dock-rats, mission-stiffs."

Abie the Crimp, as he was known along the Barbary Coast, upended the rum, wiped his mouth, and stared at the skipper of the Bowhead.

Captain Gully was tall, thin, and weather-beaten. Abie was slight. He had hawk eyes, black as beads; a hawk's long nose and a disappearing chin. He had been born in San Francisco. His mother owned the dive known from the Golden Gate to Vladivostok as the Blubber Room.

"Cap," said Abie, "I'd like to assist you, but you know the law."

"Time was when you didn't speak to me of any law."

"That time is gone, cap. The Seamen's Union is hostile to shanghaiin'. The crews of all ships going out must sign before the proper authorities."

Captain Gully knew Abie's former price.

"There's a hundred dollars advance for every man you bring aboard who won't care what he signs."

"Blood money?"

"Yes. I'll pay it to you out of hand."

Captain Gully touched his right breast, where a bulging pocket showed.

Abie the Crimp needed money. Six hundred dollars was a fair figure to pay for six men.

"There's only one way to get them," he said.

"What is that way, Abie?"

"Th' same way I fixed up old Cappin Pike of th' Norwhale, season before last. He went north with twenty-two good men. I furnished them all except three."

There was pride in Abie's voice. Captain Gully worked on this. He suggested:

"I only want six. Why, that ain't many for a runner like you."

"Not many? I should say it was, the

way things are ashore—Seamen's Union, Coaster Unions, Shipping Board paying eighty dollars a month for ordinary sailors. No, it isn't many, but they are going to be hard to get. Make it one hundred and twenty-five dollars a man."

"How are you going about getting them aboard, Abie?"

"A new idea with me. I'm a government detective, see. I know the hangouts and scatters of all the crooks in San Francisco. I know where they're coinin' the queer. I know of a few stills. I heard yesterday of two new hop joints right on Dupont Street."

"You'll represent yourself as an officer of the law?"

"I've got a gold badge. I'll make the pinch, turn them over to an assistant detective who will bring them out to this ship, and you can do the rest. They'll be glad enough for getaway when I get done with them."

"I'll make it one hundred and twenty-five, Abie, if you hurry."

The crimp paused with one foot on the ladder which led to the quarter-deck of the Bowhead.

"There's a detective in town, cap, nobody ever saw as far as I can find out. His name is James Keenon. They're afraid as hell of him. I'll be Keenon to-night. I'll make six quiet pinches and send the men out to you."

"But they might start trouble before they sign on for the voyage."

Abie the Crimp laid his hand over his heart.

"Cap," he declared, "there's men ashore—Chinks and crooks—who would pay you five hundred dollars to get away from Keenon. See the point?"

Captain Gully nodded.

"All right, I'll be waiting, Abie. Do you need a boat?"

"Lend me your dingey. Let me have that mate, Hansen. He's got a pair of blue pants on—just the thing to imitate a copper's."

"Where will the boat be if I want it?"

"At the foot of Meigg's wharf."

"What time are you going to send out the first men?"

"God knows, cap; but it's an awful crooked part of town where I'm going to make those phony pinches in."

Captain Gully followed Abie up the ladder. Hansen took the skipper's orders, touched his cap, pulled the dingy alongside the rudder-post, and motioned for the crimp to slide down.

The seaman hitched the painter to a pile at the foot of Meigg's wharf after a swift row over the bay, and followed the gliding figure of Abie along East Street until the Blubber Room was reached.

"We'll get some hardware," explained Abie. "Come in the back room. Sit down. If you want a drink, tell my mother you're with me."

The crimp appeared within ten minutes. A black, soft-brimmed hat hid his sharp eyes. A long raincoat reached to his heels. He looked the part of a sleuth, except his weak chin.

"Where are you going, Abie?" asked his mother.

Abie the Crimp leaned over the bar and touched his lips to a muscular arm. He was a good son in many ways.

"We'll try a place I heard of in Jackson Street," he told Hansen after they had climbed the stairs from the Blubber Room. "Here, take these handcuffs and this badge. It's a building inspector's. Nobody will know the difference where we're going."

The seaman crammed two pairs of rusty handcuffs in the side pockets of his pea-jacket. He pinned the badge on his vest.

"I'm James Keenon," explained Abie. "No crook or Chink knows Keenon in this town. He's the man behind. He works up the case, scouts around, and lets somebody else do the pinching. He don't testify at the trials. He's the brains. The detectives you hear about are his tools."

"I dank that's a good way," said Hansen.

"Of course it's good—for me! All I have got to do is say I'm Keenon, flash my badge, and you make the arrest."

Abie opened his raincoat. He ran a finger through an armhole of his vest. A gold insignia flashed beneath the shielding coat as the crimp pulled out a suspender strap.

"That's where all the good ones wear it," he explained. "But you want yours in sight. You're the tool, to-night."

The mate was a big man. He would have made two of Abie. He lacked the crimp's energy and assurance. He dropped back one stride and followed Abie up a hill, through an alley and over a roof.

"Nothin' doing," said Abie after glancing at three windows. "This used to be a creepin' joint where sailors were trimmed. The creepers have crawled away. Guess the police were wise."

The crimp led Hansen through a maze of courts, covered arches and hallways. They started descending cellar steps. Musty bales loomed before them. It was the place of Wan Fat, dealer in li-she nuts.

Abie recalled a brief-caught conversation which he had overheard in the rear of the Blubber Room. Wan Fat, and his brother Sing Fat, observed the law. Next door, however, lived Hong Kee, who was known to have a supply of choice Victoria opium. The matter of the opium was common gossip along the Barbary Coast. Hong Kee did not know Abie.

The crimp's pride had been awakened by Captain Gully. Here was a chance. He tiptoed between Wan Fat's bales of nuts, drew Hansen to his side, and pointed to a low door.

"Bust through there," he whispered. "You won't need no gat. I'll go all the way up-stairs. We'll trap the rats."

Hong Kee and two of his patrons were enjoying themselves around a layout tray when Abie, armed with a rusty revolver, dropped through a roof-scuttle and Hansen broke down the door.

The placid faces of the Chinamen underwent several changes after the crimp ripped open a chair's cushion and pulled out five toys of opium. He had learned of the hiding-place while listening to the conversation of two hop fiends in his mother's dive.

He convinced the Celestials that he meant business. He explained that he was the much-feared Keenon. The mere possession of five cans of hop called for years in prison. Hong Kee and two coolie

friends were taken by a roundabout route to Meigg's wharf. Hansen did not need to handcuff them.

Captain Gully, on watch, held up three fingers when Abie was rowed from the dingey whaler. The crimp had half filled the contract.

"I dank it will be easy to get the others," said the mate, whose slow brain had finally grasped Abie's big idea.

"We should have no trouble at all," Abie answered. He relaxed into silence and was rowed ashore.

Rain fell athwart the city. A mist rested on top of Knob Hill. Abie, hidden beneath the slouch hat and raincoat, entered several opium dens in hopes of catching some one napping. He was recognized in one of these. This would not do. He was supposed to be Keenon, a detective.

"We'll try for a big haul," he told the faithful mate. "We'll break in where men are making money."

The method pursued by the crimp to find the location of the coiners he had in mind was an involved detour which took all of an hour of precious time.

Mother Kelly, on duty as barmaid at the Blubber Room, supplied the necessary information. The Yetsky Wop, who had fortunately tried to pass a smooth two-bit piece on Abie's mother the day before, had never met Abie. His address was on Lower Mission Street, between a Chinese laundry and a ship's outfitter.

The crimp acted energetically. He dragged the mate out from a crowd that surrounded a soap-box preacher at Mission and East Street. He crossed the sidewalk, loosened his revolver, and started mounting flights of stairs which were steep as the shrouds to a topmast.

The Yetsky Wop, a meek-eyed Italian and his assistant coiner, had a crucible on a stove and three plaster-of-Paris molds ready for filling. Both raised their arms when Abie, backed by the mate, came around by a fire-escape.

The crimp took no chances with the coiners. Yetsky's brother was known in the city as Angel Face. He was credited with five murders.

Hansen securely handcuffed the prison-

ers. He waited while Abie searched the room. A plating outfit, a box of copper and zinc, and a double handful of smooth quarters were hidden beneath the floor.

"I'm Keenon of the Secret Service!" said Abie. "My man will take you out to the revenue cutter. You go to the Federal prison."

Yetsky and his brother had feared Detective Keenon for over four years. They were plastic as their own plaster-of-Paris in the mate's hands. They jumped to his proposal of letting them get away on a whaler. Had not they been caught red-handed? It was bad enough to have queer money in one's possession, but double worse to have both the money and the molds. The sentence given by the Federal courts on similar charges had been five years for each offense.

Abie waited at the shore end of Meigg's wharf for the mate to return from the whaler Bowhead. He had done remarkably well in the matter of getting Captain Gully a crew. There remained one more man to secure. The crimp had his pride. He had promised six.

The rain was a dampener to his hopes of getting this man. It would be useless to send out anybody except one who feared the law more than a whaling voyage.

Yetsky, Angel Face, Hong Kee and the two coolies would sign any paper at midnight. They did not need to be urged to leave San Francisco.

"Having put the fear of Keenon into their hearts," Abie told Hansen, when the mate came ashore, "we'll proceed to find the last man. What did Captain Gully say?"

"I dank he say nothin'. He is sitting on the booby-hatch holding down the crew."

Abie led the mate toward Mission Street. The two men paused a moment in the shelter of an awning. The soap-box preacher had guided his flock of derelicts into the Beacon Room.

The Beacon Room was a long saloon made over into a mission hall. The windows were silvered with Rochelle salts. A tramp stood at the entrance. He shivered in the rain, opened the door, and went in-

side. The sound of voices came through the transom. They were pitched in many broken keys.

"Holy Joe's Place," was the name given to the Beacon Light by the denizens of the Barbary Coast. Holy Joe had long been a figure of prominence along the water-front. He took in seamen, runaway apprentices from British ships, and the flotsam of the West Coast. He fed them, prayed for them, and sent them forth strengthened in body and spirit.

Abie knew Holy Joe by sight. The missionary and preacher had frequently visited the Blubber Room. It was rumored that he was not averse to taking a drink.

There existed an antipathy between the crimp and the preacher. Abie Kelly believed Holy Joe to be a sickening fraud. He had told his mother so. The missionary's visits to dives and saloons led the crimp to presume he was seeking whisky. Moreover, on one occasion, Abie had seen Holy Joe staggering.

"I've got my man!" said the crimp. "I won't need you any more, Hansen. Go to the boat and wait for me."

"I dank I better stay around."

Abie drew himself up to his full height of five feet four inches. "I've my man located," he said. "He's the preacher—Holy Joe!"

The mate shook his blond head. "Did he break a law?"

"Break th' law? He's lucky to stay out of San Quentin—what I know about him."

Abie knew nothing more about Holy Joe than the Barbary Coast gossip that the missionary was a gad-about and a nuisance. He was anxious to get rid of the mate. The time was short for him to supply Captain Gully with the sixth man.

"At the foot of Meigg's Wharf."

Hansen strode stiffly toward East Street. He vanished around the corner. Abie dived toward the Blubber Room. He went through the back door, reached under an old icebox, and pulled out a tiny vial. It was filled with a mixture of chloral-hydrate and morphia—two drugs which would produce a deep sleep if taken in quantity.

Mother Kelly supplied Abie with a half-pint of bar whisky. Into this the crimp

poured a tablespoon of the drug. He estimated the knockout dose for an average man to be fifteen drops of chloral and morphia. He had some experience in that line. The flask he pocketed and carried back to the Beacon Light was known as a "shoo-fly."

Abie's new idea was to get rid of Holy Joe and satisfy Captain Gully at the same time. His professional pride had changed to the soul-pleasing belief that the skipper of the Bowhead should be handed something as a reminder of the old days of shanghaiing. It would not be good ethics to let him get off without a hot one. The hot one being Holy Joe, who most certainly would make trouble.

From Abie's view-point all men were equal. He slipped into the Mission Hall like an eel. He took a shaky seat between a frowsled seafarer and a water-rat. He stared over the swaying heads of the congregation to where Holy Joe loomed upon a platform.

The preaching went on after a suggestive pause. The presence of Abie, the crimp, had almost brought forth a remark from the missionary. He recognized Mother Kelly's unsavory son. He changed the text and spoke of prodigals.

Abie was all eyes. He pretended to be deeply interested. Back in his brain his plan took form. He reviewed exactly what he was going to say to Holy Joe. It would take finesse to land the last man on the deck of the whale-ship. The service closed with the hymn:

"Salvation, Salvation—" changed to "There's a Light in the Window."

The meeting began to disperse. Abie waited until Holy Joe descended the platform and started down the aisle.

"A minute, preacher," he said. "You know me, don't you?"

Holy Joe, so called along the water-front, dropped a lambent glance upon Abie's glossy hair.

"How are you, boy?" he asked. "I'm glad you came to-night. I hope to—"

"Cut that," said Abie, remembering his rôle. "You see, I came to you because you was the only man who could help."

"Help what?"

Abie paused a suggestive minute. He stared around the rapidly emptying mission room.

"There's a man dyin' out in th' fo'c's'le of th' whaler Bowhead, preacher. "He ain't got nobody to pray for him. His name is Yetsky. He was hit by a Chink. He'll die and they'll throw him overboard to th' fishes."

Holy Joe, as Abie the Crimp expected, became interested.

"I'll be with you in a minute," he said, glancing at his flock going out the door.

"No! It's life or death, preacher. The Yetsky Wop—"

"The Yetsky Wop?"

"Sure, preacher. D'ye know who I mean now?"

"Yes. I've been watching his progress for years. He's one of my particular—converts."

"He's in bad now. Keenon, of the Secret Service, pinched him for makin' queer money. The detective let him go when he promised to stay aboard the whaler until it went out."

The lambent light in Holy Joe's eyes died to a retrospective glitter. Abie, keenly alert, detected a resolute movement of the missionary's lips. They closed in a straight line.

"I've heard of Keenon, Abie. So he arrested one of my converts? That is too bad!"

"Got him dead, bang right! Caught him with th' goods—molds and copper an' a platin' outfit. Then this Keenon let's him go."

"Were there any witnesses to the raid, Abie?"

"Sure! A mate of th' Bowhead saw th' whole thing."

"What is the mate's name?"

"Hansen."

"How—did the Yetsky Wop get injured?"

"A Chink hit him on th' head. The Chink's name is Hong Kee."

Abie thought he might as well pile matters on thick enough to make sure of getting Holy Joe out in the dingey. Hong Kee was a well known Barbary Coast character. The crimp was not surprised when Holy

Joe started buttoning up a long black coat and looking about for a hat.

"You're comin' with me, preacher?"

"Most certainly! I shall be of some service, I hope. You haven't explained how Hong Kee came to go to the whaler."

"Oh, Keenon caught him with five cans o' hop. It was good hop. I saw it with my own eyes."

Abie was the only man in San Francisco who knew where the five cans were hidden at that particular minute. He intended selling them when the Bowhead was well out from shore soundings.

"You get me," he told Holy Joe after they left the mission hall. "You get me, preacher, when I tell you that I am Keenon. It's not generally known."

The missionary did show some surprise.

"Why, I never suspected that," he said. "Are you the government detective?"

Abie opened his coat, ran a thumb within the arm-hole of his checked vest, and showed the gold insignia that was pinned to his suspender strap.

"United States Secret Service," whispered Holy Joe. "I never knew it, Abie."

"Sure! I pinched those guys to-night, then I changed m' mind an' let 'em go—to th' whaler. They started fightin' among themselves—there's some more out there—an' Captain Gully sent word to me that Yetsky Wop was dyin' an' needed a preacher. I thought of you."

Abie searched for sign of Hansen at the shore end of Meigg's wharf. He whistled shrilly. The mate, sleepy and damp, emerged from the shelter of a shed.

"Right out to th' Bowhead!" commanded the crimp. "I've kept my promise to Captain Gully. This is the man!"

The mate was a silent soul. He started rowing with long whaler's strokes.

Abie sat on the after thwart with Holy Joe. They faced the seaman whose glance was directed toward the Market Street ferry-house.

The Bowhead was some little distance from the shore. It showed a pale riding-light on the foremast. No other ship was near the whaler.

"So you are Keenon?" said the missionary suddenly.

"Bet I am, preacher! Even my mother don't know it."

"It's a bad thing for a son to keep anything from his mother."

"Got to! My life's always in danger." Abie reached into his hip-pocket, brought out the half-pint of whisky, and pulled the cork with his teeth.

"Have some?"

Holy Joe moistened his straight lips. Abie could not see the preacher's expression on account of the darkness. A light smacking indicated that the bait was acceptable. Holy Joe had been seen in too many dives and saloons along the coast of Barbary to refuse a drink.

"With my blessing," said the preacher, handing back the flask.

Abie pretended to take an enormous swallow. He pressed his tongue over the mouth of the bottle. Even then he tasted the bitterness of the chloral-hydrate and morphia. He wondered how Holy Joe stood the decoction. The preacher commenced swaying on the thwart. He rocked the small boat slightly. Hansen glanced at him.

"Abie," said Holy Joe in a low voice, "I'm not pleased with that whisky."

"Oh, it's all right, preacher. You know we make it in the cellar. We got a private still. You see, me being a government man allows us to do it."

"It was bitter, Abie."

The crimp realized that he would have to be careful if he wanted to deliver Captain Gully's last man. Holy Joe was apparently going under. There was a quarter-knot to be rowed before the Bowhead could be boarded.

"What's the matter, preacher?" he asked. "Are you prayin'?"

"I'm thinking, Abie, of what you told me about Yetsky Wop. Did Hong Kee strike him with provocation?"

"The Chink ran amuck. He tried to kill Yetsky's brother."

"Angel Face?"

"Sure! The one they want for five murders. I found him with Yetsky when I made the pinch. I'm going to let them go. I've changed heart, preacher."

Holy Joe wound his arms around Abie's

waist, and lurched to an erect position. Abie experienced the sensation of having his pockets picked. He wondered if the preacher had been seeking the flask of whisky. It was a strange action for a missionary. He attributed it to the effects of at least fifteen drops of chloral-hydrate.

The dingey swung its bow. Hansen drew in an oar. The dark outlines of the Bowhead were ahead. Captain Gully stood on the forepeak. He lowered a bo'swain's ladder.

"Up we go," said Abie. "Go right into the fo'c's'le, preacher. There's Yetsky Wop an' Angel Face an' Hong Kee waitin' for you."

Captain Gully unbattened the booby-hatch. He stepped aside. He leaned against a pinrail. Holy Joe, staggering and mumbling, crossed the whaler's planks, turned, and descended the greasy steps.

Abie grinned at the pleased skipper. "Six," he whispered. He reached for the rusty revolver which should have been in his pocket.

He had lost it during the boat ride! It was the weapon he intended using on the missionary. A light tap behind the ear would finish the work of the narcotic.

Abie was resourceful. He thought in split seconds. He heard voices below. One was Yetsky Wop's.

"My last man's all right," he assured the captain. "I'll put him in a bunk."

The scene in the fo'c's'le of the whaler was not exactly to the crimp's liking. He turned from the foot of the ladder and searched the gloom for Holy Joe.

The missionary struck a match. The yellow flame passed from bunk to bunk. Evil, vice-stamped faces, answered the search. The match went out. Abie, crouching with a belaying-pin in his hand, suddenly felt his wrist gripped with compelling fingers.

He writhed. His arm was bent back. Holy Joe's voice was low and demanding.

"Drop that! Now turn. Now go up the ladder. Follow me. Don't twist. It's no use at all, Abie."

The astonished skipper of the Bowhead was a witness to Abie's forced exit from the booby-hatch. Holy Joe, so called along

the Barbary Coast, hurled the crimp against the fife-rail on the foremast.

The preacher's smile was bland. He swiftly closed the hatch. He drove in a holding-pin with his right heel.

He turned to Abie:

"I didn't drink the knockout drops. I poured it down my shirt-front. I didn't leave the mission because I like the atmosphere of this whaler. You see, I *am* interested in Yetsky Wop and Yetsky's brother, Angel Face, the coiner. He is wanted by the government. I'll be promoted for capturing him."

Abie did not need to be told Holy Joe's

right name. He pieced events together. They dove-tailed. The reason for the missionary showing interest in Yetsky Wop—his habit of visiting the hang-outs of crooks—the adept manner in which he picked pockets, all pointed to a crushing conclusion.

"You're Detective Keenon!" declared the crimp.

The Secret Service man turned up the lower left-hand corner of his vest and showed the insignia of his office.

He said with the politest kind of a bow, after glancing at the hatch:

"Thanks, Abie!"



BALLADE OF THE GOLDEN FIELDS

THEY lay beneath the morning sky
 With opal dews bediamonded,
 As fair as ever mortal eye
 Beheld in Arcady outspread;
 Their fragrance was as attar shed
 In gardens where the roses creep—
 The hopes of Youth so fleetly fled—
 The golden fields we did not reap.

They stretched, what time the noon was high,
 And heavens were flawless overhead,
 And winds to low winds made reply,
 'Twixt hills where peace and plenty wed;
 They showed bright blossoms blue and red,
 And promised windrows dense and deep—
 Hale Manhood's dreams forever fled—
 The golden fields we did not reap.

They gleamed, while twilight hours slipped by,
 By pensive vesper music led,
 Faint-haloed by the sunset's dye,
 Touched by the first star's silver thread;
 Illusive as some shining shred
 Of spray upon a mountain steep—
 Old Age's visions vanished—
 The golden fields we did not reap.

ENVOY

Prince, we review them with a sigh
 As we draw nigh the bourn of Sleep,
 Each dear lost opportunity—
 The golden fields we did not reap.

Clinton Scollard

Mr. Binger Buys a Bed

By Bertram Lebhar

Author of "Come Across," "Password and Keys," etc.

CHAPTER I.

FIT FOR A KING.

IF you like peanuts the chances are at least fifty to one that, no matter in what part of the United States you may live, you have done your share toward paying for the palatial white stone residence of Mr. Horatio Binger, which is one of the show places of Riverside Drive. It is likely, too, that Mrs. Horatio Binger is partly beholden to you for the gorgeous strings of perfectly matched pearls which not infrequently encircle her short, rotund throat, the costly furs which swathe her portly form, and the luxuriously upholstered limousine which is often to be seen standing in front of the exclusive Fifth Avenue stores in which she does her shopping.

Even if you are not a consumer of salted peanuts you have no doubt heard of Binger, "The Peanut King." The million dollars he spends each year on advertising has, of course, made you familiar with those famous little pink, waxed-paper packages which are identified with his name. And perhaps you have read about him in the news columns, or the Sunday supplement of your favorite newspaper. For every once in a while, when the editors find themselves short of "human interest stuff," they seize upon some excuse for retelling the story of the man who began his commercial career by vending roasted peanuts from a push-cart outside one of the entrances to Central Park, and fifteen years later was the head of a business which occupied a

whole floor in the loftiest office-building on lower Broadway.

Mr. Binger, however, is not the hero of this story. He figures here merely as the employer of a young man named Ralph Henry Parker—an obscure young man, of whom the odds are more than a thousand to one you have never heard.

Parker held the position of assistant bookkeeper in the general offices of Horatio Binger & Co., Inc. His salary was twenty-two dollars per week. He lived in a shabby, genteel boarding-house, on a shabby, genteel street, on the upper west side of Manhattan Island. But there was nothing shabby about Ralph Henry himself. On the contrary, it was a source of some wonder to his fellow clerks how he managed to "put up such a good front" on such scanty pay. For there was no denying that he was easily the best-dressed, most dapper member of the office force.

It was rumored that he was the offspring of a wealthy family, that he had an independent income, and that the contents of his weekly pay-envelope were merely chicken-feed to him. Like most rumors, however, this was very far from the truth. Both for his wearing apparel and his sustenance he was entirely dependent on the wages he drew from the business of the Peanut King, and his father was a poor but honest blacksmith in a New England town.

He had a cousin, though, in New York, who was in the tailoring business, and who let him have his clothes at cost price. That was one of the reasons why Ralph Henry

was able to make such a good appearance on such a limited income. But the main reason was that he stinted himself in every other way so as to be able to spend most of his salary on fine raiment.

Before he started out from the parental blacksmith shop to seek his fortune, young Parker had read that in New York clothes went a long way toward making the man, in spite of the copy-book bromide to the contrary. And, believing what he read, and being eager to succeed, he had vowed that he would always be well dressed even if he had to get along on two meals a day in order to manage it. You see, it was not vanity with him. It was ambition.

Up to the time of a certain auction sale, however, it did not look as though Ralph Henry's formula for success was going to work out very well. He had been laboring at the assistant bookkeeper's desk in the Eastern sales department of the salted peanut concern for over two years, and he was no farther than when he started. His office associates had nicknamed him "Beau Brummel," and several of the young women stenographers regarded him with obvious favor, but those things, although gratifying in their way, did not get him anywhere when it came to advancement. Mr. Rooney, the head of his department, did not appear to be greatly impressed by his dapper appearance, so far as giving him a chance to climb the ladder was concerned, and as for the president and majority stockholder of Horatio Binger & Co., Inc., that great man hardly seemed to be aware of his existence.

Perhaps Mr. Binger, as he passed daily through the big general office, with its threescore employees, on his way to or from his private sanctum, had noticed the good looking, well groomed young man who sat at a desk in a corner of the vast room, but, if so, his observation had been casual, and almost subconscious. To him Ralph Henry was nothing more than a humble cog in the human machine which helped promote the sales of the pink tissue-paper packages—much too unimportant a person to command individual attention.

But on the morning of the day on which the personal effects of Mrs. Janet Wil-

loughby Morseman, widow of John K. Morseman, the late copper magnate, were disposed of at public auction, Mr. Binger came down to business with an expression of excitement on his full-moon countenance. As he entered the outer office his keen, gimlet eyes swept the occupants of the room and finally rested on young Parker, whom he now regarded with particular interest.

Then he walked over to the latter's desk.

"Young man," he said, "I need some one to go up-town for me on—er—some personal business, and I think you'll do. Come into my office."

Ralph Henry arose with alacrity and followed his chief into the adjoining room. Perhaps it had come at last—the opportunity he had long been eagerly awaiting.

Mr. Binger seated himself at his massive mahogany desk, and again made a searching survey of his employee, scrutinizing him closely from head to foot. Evidently this second inspection was as satisfactory as the first, for with a slight, confirmatory nod the older man invited Parker to be seated.

"You look like a reliable, discreet young fellow," he said. "I guess you'll do. This errand that I'm going to send you on is one that requires considerable discretion."

"Yes, sir," exclaimed Ralph Henry eagerly.

He was quite sure now that his big chance had arrived. He was in direct personal contact at last with the man who held his future in the palm of his hand. If he made good on this mission, whatever its nature, there was no telling what might come of it.

From his humble twenty-two-dollar-a-week job as assistant bookkeeper he might jump almost immediately to a big executive position. Meteoric rises, he was aware, were the rule rather than the exception in the New York business world. Once one had succeeded in attracting the attention of the boss the rest was comparatively easy. And Binger had picked him out for this confidential business matter from all the sixty employees in the outer office!

His pulses quickened at that reflection. If he failed to make the most of this golden

opportunity, he told himself, he would be undeserving of another smile from fortune.

"I want you to go up-town for me, and buy a bed," his employer went on.

"A bed!" Parker echoed, unable to conceal his disappointment. "I—is that all, sir?"

"It is not an ordinary bed," Binger explained, frowning at the interruption. "The piece of furniture I have in mind is—well, read this before we go any further, and you will understand."

He picked up a newspaper from his desk and handed it to Ralph Henry, pointing with a pudgy forefinger to a news item marked with a blue pencil.

FIFTY THOUSAND DOLLAR BED TO BE SOLD AT AUCTION

Magnificent Piece Of Furniture, That A Bavarian King Once Slept On, Among Famous Morseman Collection To Go Under Hammer To-day

All the personal effects of Mrs. John K. Morseman, who, since the death of her husband, the millionaire copper man, has met with financial reverses, are to be sold under the auctioneer's hammer at the Marlborough Galleries. The sale, which will begin this morning, is to include the entire famous Morseman collection of art and antiques which cost the late copper-mine owner several million dollars.

One of the most notable articles on the catalogue is the historic, massive bed which once belonged to the "mad king," Godfrey, of Bavaria. Mr. Morseman bought it in Europe five years ago, at the time of the death of its royal owner, and prized it above all the other treasures of his superb collection:

Aside from its historic associations the bed is a magnificent piece of furniture, truly "fit for a king." It has a high head-board of rare, polished wood, and supports a canopy of heavy drapery. The foot-board is heavily overlaid with bronze carvings, and its trimmings of bronze run around the sides and up the corners. Mr. Morseman is said to have paid fifty thousand dollars for it, and to have considered that he was getting a rare bargain.

The well-known feud between Morseman and Horatio Binger, "the Peanut King," is said to have originated over this bed. At the time it was in the market Binger wished to buy it for his wife, who was ambitious to sleep in a bed on which a royal head had

once reposed. The copper man got there first, however, and a bitter quarrel resulted between the families of the two millionaires.

Whether the peanut king still wants the bed, and will be a bidder at the sale is not known. There is no doubt, however, that there are several millionaires in New York who would like to acquire this remarkable piece of furniture, and the bidding on it is expected to be brisk.

"You see," said Mr. Binger, as his employee finished reading, "the job I'm giving you, young man, is one that is going to require a lot of tact and horse-sense. I want to buy that bed as a wedding anniversary present for my wife. I want it to be a surprise. That is one reason why I cannot attend the auction sale myself. The newspaper reporters would be sure to recognize me, and would publish my name as the purchaser, which would spoil the whole idea. Besides, if they knew that I was after it, those auction fellows would be likely to run up the price. I understand that sort of thing is done, even at the most reliable auction-rooms.

"So I want you to go up there and bid for the bed as though you were buying it for yourself. Not under any circumstances, you understand, are you to let it be known that you are acting as my agent, or are connected with me in any way. You look—er—like a gentleman, so you ought to be able to manage it all right. That is why I have selected you for the errand."

"I understand, Mr. Binger," said Ralph Henry eagerly. "You can depend on me, sir, not to give the secret away." He paused. "How high do you wish me to bid, in case there should be keen competition?"

"Go the limit," his employer responded, his eyes glinting. "I want that bed, even if it costs me a million. I can't think of anything in the world that would please Mrs. Binger more than to receive that bit of furniture on the morning of our wedding anniversary.

"You'll have to look out for those reporter fellows, though," he added. "They're a sharp lot, and when the bed's knocked down to you they'll probably buzz around like a flock of bumblebees, trying to find out who you are and what you are

going to do with it. They may even go to the trouble of shadowing you to try to get a line on you. So you'll have to be mighty careful."

"I'll manage the newspapermen all right," Parker declared confidently. "But after I have got the bed, what am I to do with it? Where shall I tell them to deliver it?"

"Tell them to hold it until it is sent for. I can attend to that myself, later. I suppose you'll have to pay a deposit, though. It's usual, I believe, at auction sales—particularly where the customer isn't known." Mr. Binger reached for his check-book.

"I beg your pardon," Parker put in. "A check would hardly do—at least, not your own check. Your signature would give the secret away."

"That's right," the Peanut King assented, regarding Ralph Henry approvingly. "I see you've got a head on you, young fellow. As you say, a check wouldn't do. You'll have to take some cash along."

He produced a bulging wallet; then, with a shrewd glance at his employee, changed his mind and replaced the wallet in his pocket. This chap looked honest, but, after all, one never could tell.

He unbuttoned his waistcoat, and from the lining pocket drew a single bank-note of saffron hue which he had placed there separately for safe keeping. Its denomination was one thousand dollars. If this young man should happen to yield to temptation he would have a harder task trying to dispose of a single thousand-dollar bill than of the same amount in smaller currency. Moreover, Mr. Binger took the precaution of jotting down on his memorandum pad the serial number of the note. He did this quite openly, as a gentle hint to Parker that it would not be well for the latter to swerve from the straight and narrow path.

"Here's a thousand dollars," he said. "That 'll be a large enough deposit, no matter what price the bed brings. Tell them you will send them the balance within a couple of hours."

Ralph Henry Parker carefully deposited the bill in his own lean wallet and started up-town immediately on the errand which,

he felt confident, was going to lift him eventually from the ranks of obscurity to a partnership in the firm of Horatio Binger & Co., Inc.

CHAPTER II.

TO THE HIGHEST BIDDER.

THE Marlborough Galleries and Auction Rooms are located on Fifth Avenue, within a stone's throw of the Public Library. The sales which are held there are attended by such a wealthy and select class of patrons that the gatherings almost take on the aspect of society functions.

Mr. George Augustus Markel, the suave, genial, well-groomed gentleman who usually presides at these assemblages, is not at all like the raucous-voiced auctioneers who wield the hammer at the cheaper type of salesrooms. His manner is always restrained, and his tone dulcet and subdued. He works more with his eyebrows than with his lungs. His "going, going—are you all done?" is a perfect symphony. When he points out the beauties of a rare piece of porcelain he sounds much more like a distinguished college professor addressing a class in archaeology than like a Coney Island barker trying to lure a crowd into a dime freak show.

This prince of auctioneers knows his audience like a book. It is impossible to deceive him as to your social standing, or the sincerity of your intentions. He is always courteous, but if you are a humble person of limited means, who has wandered into the sale solely out of curiosity, or to rub shoulders with the wealthy and fashionable, his keen, experienced eyes will instantly spot you out, and those eyes will soon make you feel so uncomfortable that you will be constrained to rise and sheepishly depart. The Marlborough Galleries is no place for pikers.

On the morning of the Morseman sale the crowd which assembled there was an unusually brilliant one. The fame of the late copper magnate's collection of art and antique treasures was a magnet powerful enough to draw the owners of New York's

most colossal fortunes. The long line of high-priced limousines drawn up in front of the door when Ralph Henry Parker arrived on the scene, somewhat awed that young man.

Parker had not come in a limousine. He had traveled up-town on the Broadway subway. Somewhat nervous because of that thousand-dollar bill in his pocket, he had thought at first of indulging in the luxury of a taxicab, but, on counting up his resources, had discovered that, besides Mr. Binger's bank-note, he had only seventy-eight cents on his person, so had decided that he would have to run the risk of getting his pocket picked in the Broadway tube.

The feeling of awe which the sight of that line of imposing equipages inspired in him was not diminished when he stepped into the doorway of the auction-room and caught a glimpse of the distinguished-looking occupants of the long rows of gilt chairs. It was the first time in his life that he had ever sat amid an audience which exuded such an atmosphere of opulence.

To add to his embarrassment, as he made his way toward a seat he collided forcibly with a young woman who was just coming in, and almost knocked her off her feet.

The collision was entirely her fault, but that did not prevent him from feeling very much disconcerted by the mishap. She was a very good looking young woman, and the way she stared at him out of her big, dark eyes branded him as a clumsy boor as severely as if she had put the accusation into words.

With a stammered apology he sat down in a vacant seat in the last row of gilt chairs, painfully conscious of the fact that the frock-coated gentleman on the auctioneer's rostrum was regarding him with a coldly critical eye.

The sale had already begun. A small, bronze incense burner was being spiritedly bid for. The price had already been run up to twenty-five thousand dollars, and Parker again experienced a sensation of awe as he heard the figures advance by thousand-dollar bids. Evidently a thousand dollars was a mere bagatelle to these

people. It didn't seem to occur to any of the bidders to offer an advance of a less amount.

The article was finally knocked down to a stout dowager for the small sum of fifty thousand dollars. From the expression of triumphant satisfaction on her face it was evident that she considered she had got a bargain.

The sale of several rare pictures followed. Small masterpieces of Turner, Corot, Franz Hals, and Van Dyke kept the gentleman with the hammer busy until noon; but, engrossed though the latter was in his task, he found time, nevertheless, to fix a stern, almost accusing glance on Ralph Henry at frequent intervals. In spite of that young man's well-groomed appearance, the auctioneer's unerring instinct had accurately sized up his social status. But where Mr. George Augustus Markel's instinct had for once played him false, was in the fact that he believed that the nervous, obviously uncomfortable young man in the last row of gilt chairs was an intruding trifle who had neither the intention nor the means of making a bid on even the less important of the offerings.

The auctioneer was, therefore, somewhat annoyed when, at 1.30 P.M., after a recess of an hour and a half had been taken to permit both the audience and the salesroom force to partake of refreshments, Parker was among the eager throng which came hurrying back to the auction. Evidently the fellow intended to make a day of it, and was too thick-skinned to perceive that his room was preferable to his company, especially as the audience had grown to such proportions that even standing room was at a premium.

But Mr. Markel's annoyance changed to astonishment presently. At 2 P.M., after an impressive pause in the proceedings, the auctioneer announced that the time had now come for the big event of the day.

"It is probably unnecessary for me to dilate on the importance of the next item on the catalogue, ladies and gentlemen," he said, with a deprecatory smile. "The history of the famous bed—the gem of the entire Morseman collection—is no doubt well known to all of you. Its almost price-

less value as a work of art, enhanced by the romantic associations which surround it, I am confident you all appreciate. It is my proud distinction to submit for your kind consideration the royal state bed of Godfrey, the mad King of Bavaria, and I give you my assurance that it will be sold to the highest bidder, regardless of its real value." He paused dramatically. "Now, who'll start the bidding at forty thousand dollars? Of course it is going to bring several times that figure before we are through, but we've got to start somewhere, and I am willing to hear any bid."

There was a rustling of catalogues, a clearing of throats, and a hushed murmur among the audience. Then Ralph Henry spoke up.

"I'll bid ten thousand dollars!" he cried, his voice pitched, nervously, high above its normal register.

The auctioneer's eyebrows went up. "Now, really, my dear young man," they protested, "this is ridiculous! In the first place, it is quite apparent to me that you cannot afford to pay ten thousand dollars for a bed. In the second place, even if you were serious, the inadequacy of your bid is positively shocking."

Of course he didn't give verbal expression to these thoughts, but his eloquent eyebrows plainly conveyed the message.

"Will anybody start the bidding at forty thousand?" he inquired, haughtily ignoring Parker's offer. "Thirty thousand, then? Will somebody please say thirty thousand—just to break the ice? Ah, thank you, Mr. J.!" smiling at a white-mustached gentleman in the front row who had just carelessly nodded. "I knew you wouldn't overlook this unparalleled opportunity to add to your collection, sir! Thirty thousand dollars I am bid, ladies and gentlemen! Thirty thousand! Do I hear any advance?"

"Thirty-one thousand," said young Mr. Parker.

"Thirty-two thousand," a woman's voice put in.

"Forty thousand," came from Mr. J., in the front row, who was one of the world's most famous millionaire art collectors.

"Forty thousand I am bid!" cried the auctioneer, with a reproachful glance at Ralph Henry. "Going at forty thousand dollars? Do I hear any—"

"Forty-one thousand," spoke up Parker.

"Forty-three thousand," came from the woman who had bid against him before. She was sitting three rows ahead of him, and he identified her as the attractive young woman with whom he had come into collision on entering the auction-room.

Several new bidders now joined in. One thousand-dollar advances came from all parts of the room. Apparently the bed of the demented Bavarian monarch was very much in demand, and Mr. Binger's anniversary present to his wife was going to cost him dear.

"Sixty thousand," the Croesus known as Mr. J. offered presently, becoming impatient.

"Sixty thousand I am bid!" cried the gentleman with the hammer. "Going at sixty thousand! Are you all done? Any advance on sixty thousand dollars? Going! Going—"

"Sixty-one thousand," said the young woman with whom Ralph Henry had collided.

"Sixty-five thousand," the latter shouted, with reckless abandon.

There followed an impressive hush. Several lorgnettes were turned in Parker's direction. The young men at the reporters' table in front of the room glanced at him curiously and whispered among themselves. The auctioneer's face wore a dubious frown.

"Seventy thousand," snapped Mr. J., and stood up in his seat to glare at the presumptuous young man in the back row who was giving him all this trouble.

"Seventy thousand I am bid!" cried the auctioneer, beginning to love Ralph Henry now, although he suspected the sincerity of the latter's intentions. The fellow might be—and undoubtedly was—an irresponsible four-flusher; but, at all events, he was serving a useful purpose by compelling the affluent Mr. J. to extend himself.

"Going at seventy thousand! Are you all done? Who'll say seventy-five? It is obvious, ladies and gentlemen, that we are

wasting valuable time if we take less than five thousand-dollar advances on this superb piece of furniture—the prize of the Morseman collection. Who'll make it seventy-five thousand? Going at seventy—Going! Going—

"Seventy-one thousand," cried Parker's woman competitor, her voice tremulous with anxiety.

"I'll make it seventy-five," Ralph Henry announced.

The auctioneer's eloquent eyebrows went up again. Once more the lorgnettes and curious glances were turned on Parker. There were beads of perspiration on his forehead, and his collar was wilting, but he was beginning to enjoy himself.

He had got over his stage fright now, and the attention he was attracting was not entirely displeasing to him. He grinned cheerfully. Seventy-five thousand dollars was a lot of money to pay for a bed, but Mr. Binger had authorized him to go as high as a million if necessary. The contest was thrilling while it lasted, but he was confident as to the outcome.

"The gentleman and lady seem determined to outbid you, Mr. J.," remarked the auctioneer insinuatingly. "Will you say eighty thousand? If you can get the bed at that figure I don't have to tell you that you'll be getting a bargain, sir."

The millionaire collector scowled and shook his head. "No; I've gone my limit," he declared. "I don't want it as badly as all that."

"Seventy-five thousand I am bid," chanted the auctioneer, his gaze sweeping the sea of faces before him searchingly. "Going at seventy-five! Do I hear any advance?"

He did not hear any advance. Parker's young woman rival had given up the fight. She, too, had reached her limit. And the other bidders had already dropped out of the race. In vain Mr. George Augustus Markel chided, argued, and pleaded. All his tricks failed to bring another bid.

"Sold to the young man at the back of the room for seventy-five thousand dollars," the auctioneer finally snapped, bringing his gavel down with a crash. "Will you step up to the cashier's desk, sir?"

Parker arose jubilantly. He had successfully carried out his mission. The bed was now Mr. Binger's. All that remained to be done was to adroitly elude the questions of the newspaper reporters who were already moving toward him as he made his way down the aisle to the cashier's desk.

There was no escaping them. They surrounded him at the end of the aisle and bombarded him with eager, insistent interrogations. Would he tell them his name? Was he buying the bed for himself? What did he intend to do with it? Was he a collector? Did he have any photographs of himself in his pocket?

He smilingly shook his head and declared that he had "nothing to say—absolutely nothing, gentlemen." He hated publicity, he explained, and never allowed his name to appear in the newspapers if he could help it.

At length he managed to break through them, and presented himself to the cashier. The latter had been holding a whispered conference with the auctioneer, and he eyed the purchaser of the bed sharply.

"You will give us your check now, sir? It is our rule, you know, that where a customer is absolutely unknown to us, payment must be made before delivery. I hope that will be agreeable."

"I can't give you a check," said Parker, with a significant gesture toward the reporters at his elbow. "But I will pay you in cash. I suppose a deposit will do? I—er—didn't come here expecting to pay cash down, but I have a thousand dollars with me which I can let you have."

"A thousand dollars is rather a small deposit, sir, on a seventy-five-thousand-dollar purchase."

"I will bring you the rest of the cash within an hour. In the mean time you will have the bed for security. It is to remain here, in fact, until my—until I send for it."

The cashier considered for a moment; then nodded.

"Very good, sir. A deposit of a thousand dollars in cash will be satisfactory."

Ralph Henry Parker's hand went to his coat pocket. Then a cold moisture sprang to his brow and an exclamation of mingled horror and dismay escaped his lips.

"Good Heavens!" he ejaculated. "I've been robbed. My wallet—my money is gone."

The cashier's face froze.

"Robbed!" he echoed, with an ironical inflection. "That is really too bad, sir. But of course you understand that we cannot hold the goods without a deposit. Unless you are able to satisfy us as to your good faith in making the bid, we shall have to put the bed back into the sale again."

CHAPTER III.

A TIME LIMIT.

FOR a moment Parker was completely overwhelmed by this double disaster.

Not only would he have to report to his employer that he had made a flivver of his confidential errand and failed to secure the royal bed which Mrs. Binger coveted, but he would have to confess that he was minus the one thousand-dollar bill which Binger had entrusted to his care.

If he could acquire title to the bed, perhaps the loss of the money would not be such a great calamity. After all, a thousand dollars was not a very large sum to Horatio Binger. In his satisfaction over getting the bed the latter might be inclined to overlook his—Ralph Henry's—carelessness in allowing his pocket to be picked.

But here was the cashier of the auction-rooms threatening to put the magnificent bit of furniture back in the sale, to be bid for over again, because of Parker's inability to pay a deposit! It looked very much as though Binger wasn't going to get that bed after all. And, in his disappointment, the millionaire was not likely to be very gracious about the disappearance of the one-thousand-dollar bill. He would probably insist on his unhappy employee making good the loss in weekly instalments deducted from his pay envelope. Perhaps he might even refuse to believe Parker's story that he had been robbed, and would call in the police and have Ralph Henry arrested.

That thousand-dollar bill must be recovered. He must go to the police, himself, and report the loss of his wallet. The

chances of the pickpocket being apprehended were not very bright, he realized, but the denomination of the note offered him some hope. Thousand-dollar bills could not easily be put into circulation without attracting attention toward the holder, and perhaps if an alarm were sent out immediately the police might be lucky enough to get a line on the thief when the latter attempted to dispose of his loot.

Even if fortune favored him to that extent, however, the distressing fact remained that Ralph Henry had failed to make good on the confidential mission on which he had built such golden hopes. There was no possibility, of course, of his recovering his lost wallet in time to prevent that confounded bed from being put back into the auction and knocked down to some other bidder. He might save himself from going to jail, but that was about the best he could expect now—unless this cynical, hard-faced auctioneer's cashier could be moved to mercy.

Parker clutched desperately at that straw.

"Can't you give me a little time?" he pleaded. "It is most unfortunate that this thing should have happened. My pocket must have been picked on the subway. Every dollar I had with me was in that wallet. There is no question, however, about my good faith in bidding on the bed, and if you will wait for just one hour I will try—I will bring you the money."

The cashier frowned and shook his head.

"It isn't fair to ask it of us," he said coldly. "The crowd is here now. We shall have no trouble in selling the bed over again—perhaps at a better figure than it was knocked down to you for—if it is put back into the sale immediately. But if we were to wait for even an hour, some of our best customers might be gone."

His frown deepened into a scowl. "Besides, we don't know you, sir. You are a stranger to us. And, frankly, Mr. Markel, the auctioneer, has an idea that you are not—that you weren't really serious in making that bid."

"Serious! I've never been more serious in my life. Just give me an hour to get the money, and I'll show you."

The cashier shrugged his shoulders. "Unless you are able to put up a deposit, as our rules call for, I'm afraid the sale is off," he rejoined. "You can't blame us for protecting ourselves against—er—triflers."

"I am no trifter," Ralph Henry protested. "I want that bed—I must have it. See here," he continued, suddenly changing his tactics. "You talk about fairness, but there are two sides to that. What about my rights in the matter? Whether you believe it or not, I made the bid in good faith, and the article was sold to me. It isn't my fault that I am unable to satisfy your requirements as to a deposit. I feel quite sure that no court would hold you justified in depriving me of my property, in the circumstances, by offering the bed for sale again, without giving me a chance to bring the money."

"I insist on my legal rights, and warn you that I shall place the matter in the hands of my attorneys and instruct them to bring suit against this concern for heavy damages if the bed is sold to any one else."

The cashier was somewhat impressed by this threat.

"We have no desire to be—er—unreasonable, sir," he said, a little less aggressively. "We are entirely within our rights, of course, and have no fear of a lawsuit, but perhaps if you were to identify yourself, and—er—satisfy us as to your ability to pay the seventy-five thousand dollars, we might—er—the matter might be satisfactorily adjusted." He paused. "What is your name, sir?"

"Ralph Henry Parker."

"And your address, Mr. Parker?"

The young man hesitated for a moment. If he gave his boarding-house number, the revelation of the neighborhood he lived in was not likely to make much of an impression.

"My office is in the Windsor Building, on lower Broadway," he announced presently.

"In business, eh? What line, may I ask?"

The word peanuts sprang to Parker's lips, but he caught himself just in time.

"I am in the produce business," he volunteered.

"A broker on the Produce Exchange!" the auction-room employee exclaimed, his tone much more respectful. "I suppose your name is in the telephone book, Mr. Parker?"

"I don't—er—of course," Ralph Henry stammered.

"And what bank references can you give us, sir? If you would permit us to call up your bank and make an inquiry as to your financial standing, I have no doubt that the matter of the deposit could be waived, and the bed held for you."

"I can't—I won't give you any references," Parker declared. "I consider all this cross-examination entirely uncalled-for when I am prepared to bring you the seventy-five thousand dollars in cash within an hour. The bed is mine, and my attorneys will hold you responsible if you dare to dispose of my property."

The cashier shrugged again. He walked over to the auctioneer and held another whispered conference with him.

"All right, Mr. Parker," he said when he returned. "We'll give you an hour. That's as long as we'll wait, though. It is now three o'clock. If you are not back here by four, and ready to hand us a certified check or cash for seventy-five thousand dollars, the bed will be put up for sale again."

Ralph Henry exhaled a deep breath of relief as he hurried out of the salesroom. He was not yet out of the woods, by any means, but at least the situation now offered some hope.

He had made up his mind what he was going to do. He would get Binger on the telephone immediately, tell him what had happened, and urge him to save the day by despatching a trusted messenger up-town with the money. The messenger could make the trip in much less than an hour, and everything would be all right, except for the loss of the thousand-dollar bill. That matter could be discussed with Mr. Binger later, but in the mean time the bed of the mad King Godfrey must be rescued.

Parker rushed across the street to a cigar-

store and shut himself up in a telephone booth.

"Connect me with the chief at once, Miss Broughton," he said eagerly, when he got his number. "This is Parker talking. Of course. Don't you recognize my voice? Certainly I mean Mr. Binger. I must talk to him immediately. It is a matter of the greatest urgency."

"That's too bad," Miss Broughton, the switchboard operator of Horace Binger & Co., responded. "That your business is so urgent, I mean, Mr. Parker. I can't connect you with the boss. He isn't in his office. Went out about half an hour ago, and left no word when he'd be back. Would anybody else do?"

"Holy mackerel!" Ralph Henry groaned. "Talk about rotten luck! I suppose you haven't any idea where Mr. Binger could be reached?"

"No idea at all."

"Then give me Mr. Westphal, the cashier," Parker demanded desperately.

The voice which came to him presently over the wire was not a pleasant one. Old "Squeeze-a-Penny" Westphal was the office grouch, and his manner of speech was in keeping with his disposition.

"What is it?" he rasped.

"Mr. Westphal," said Ralph Henry, "this is Parker, of the Eastern sales department. I am up-town, on an errand for the chief, and—I'm in trouble. I've had my pocket picked. My wallet, containing a thousand-dollar bill, has been taken, and—"

"A thousand-dollar bill! My word! That's a lot of money? Have you notified the police?"

"Not yet. I intend to do so later. But I—that's not the point. The idea is that I must have seventy-five thousand dollars immediately. It's very important. If—"

"Young man, you sound to me as if you had been imbibing."

"I swear to you that I am perfectly sober. I am up here on business for the boss, and I must have the money sent to me at once. You see, Mr. Westphal, this is the situation. I—"

He broke off suddenly. Two young men had drawn near the telephone booth and

were standing in an obviously listening attitude. Parker was quite sure that he recognized them as two of the newspapermen who had been covering the auction sale.

"I can't very well go into details now," he told the cashier. "It is an exceedingly confidential matter, and there are a couple of eavesdropping chaps outside trying to catch on to the secret. If they find it out, the fat will be in the fire. I daren't mention any names, but I—the party I spoke of before wanted me to make a purchase up-town, and as I have told you, I have, unfortunately, lost the money. If you will send—"

"Lost it! You said just now that you had been robbed."

"Of course. But the money has gone. That's what I'm trying to make you understand. I've got to have seventy-five thousand dollars in less than an hour, or—"

"Why seventy-five thousand? You said the amount that was stolen from you was a thousand."

"But that was only a deposit. I must have all the money now. And there isn't any time to be lost. If you will rush somebody up here with it right away, Mr. Westphal—"

"Young man, I am quite sure now that, in spite of the prohibition law, you have managed to become intoxicated," the cashier cut in. "Your talk is disgracefully incoherent. Seventy-five thousand dollars, eh? I shall report this impertinence to Mr. Binger, and see that you are discharged for annoying me in this outrageous manner."

Parker started to protest, but found that he was trying to talk over a "dead" wire. The indignant Mr. Westphal had rung off. He deposited another nickel, and got a connection with the office again. The switchboard operator, however, refused to put him back on the cashier's extension line.

"I daren't do it, Mr. Parker," she told him. "He's got a big drag with the boss, and he'd have me fired. He called me down something fierce just now for letting you bother him the first time. Why don't you come down-town and have a talk with him?"

Ralph Henry decided that he had better

follow that suggestion. He could get downtown to the office and back within the hour, if he hurried. He had not much hope, though, of being able to persuade Westphal to let him have the money. Even if he could get the grouchy cashier to believe his story, the chances were a million to one that the latter would refuse to draw seventy-five thousand dollars and hand it to him without an O. K. from Mr. Binger. That was hardly Squeezé-a-Penny Westphal's way of doing business.

Binger might return, however, in time to save the situation. Parker brightened at that thought as he rushed toward the subway station. But he was doomed to disappointment. When he arrived at the office his employer was still absent. And Westphal would not even listen to him.

CHAPTER IV.

A THOUSAND-DOLLAR BILL.

RALPH HENRY hung around the office until a quarter to four, impatiently waiting for Binger to put in an appearance. Then, realizing that if he waited a minute longer it would be too late, he dashed out of the building and up Broadway to the Marine Savings Bank. He had an account at that bank.

Although, as we have said, most of his income went toward the maintenance of his wardrobe, and he was obliged to stint himself in various other ways in order to live up to his standard in clothes, he had managed to save a dollar out of his salary and deposit it in the savings-bank every week of the two years he had been working in the office of Binger & Co.

By his thrift he had accumulated one hundred and four dollars. But his balance was bigger than that. A year after his arrival in New York he had inherited a small legacy from a relative, and had deposited the greater part of it; so that there now stood to his credit on the savings-bank's books the sum of five hundred and fifty dollars.

He had vowed to himself that, no matter what happened, he would never touch a cent of that money—not until it had grown

to a thousand dollars. The first thousand was the hardest to save, he had read, and when one had got that far one was on the high road to success.

He decided now, however, to break that vow. When he arrived at the bank he drew out his entire balance. It was his only chance of making good on the mission which was to put him permanently in the good graces of the president and majority stockholder of Horatio Binger & Co.—and not much of a chance, at that, as he despondently realized.

In his desperation it had occurred to him that if he drew out this money and hurried up-town with it, there was a slight possibility that the auction-room people might be induced to accept it as a deposit on the bed. It was hardly to be hoped, of course, that they would be satisfied with such a small sum. They were expecting him to return with the entire purchase price of seventy-five thousand dollars, and would naturally protest against the proffer of a deposit that was only half the amount originally offered by him.

But he might be able to talk them into accepting it. The auction-room cashier had been obviously impressed by his threat to take legal action if the bed were resold. Some further talk along those lines might be effective. It was worth trying, anyway.

Unfortunately, there were several people ahead of him at the paying-teller's window. It was three minutes to four when he finally thrust the five hundred and fifty-four dollars in his pocket and hurried out of the bank. Still he had not abandoned all hope.

The subway would get him up-town within fifteen minutes, barring accidents, and although they had set 4 P.M. as the time limit, the auction people might wait a little longer before putting the bed up for sale again. That wasn't too much to expect of Dame Fortune, even though she seemed to be inclined to treat him like a stepchild.

As he sped northward on a Broadway express, Ralph Henry's optimism began to assert itself. Somehow that five hundred and fifty dollars in his pocket gave him confidence. He had a hunch that everything

was going to turn out all right, after all—and the hunch kept getting stronger as he neared his destination.

After all, if the auctioneer's cashier was obdurate, there was always the expedient of taking the fellow into his confidence—whispering in his ear the name of the great millionaire he, Parker, represented in this transaction. That ought to do the trick. It was a step to be avoided, of course, if possible, for fear that the man might break faith with him and pass on the information to the newspaper reporters. But better that than to lose the bed altogether.

With these reflections to encourage him, Ralph Henry, although exceedingly anxious, was feeling almost cheerful when, at 4.25 P.M., he reentered the Marlborough Galleries.

The sale was still going on. From all over the room bids were being hurled at the smiling gentleman on the auctioneer's rostrum.

Parker listened apprehensively for a moment and exhaled a deep breath of relief as he assured himself that the article being bid for was a Turner landscape, and not a bed.

He strode down the aisle to the cashier's desk.

"Well, here I am," he said, trying to speak nonchalantly.

"So I see," the man behind the counter rejoined coldly. "What can I do for you, sir?"

"Do for me! You don't mean to say that you don't remember me? I am the party who bought the bed. I have brought you the money, as I promised. That is to say, I have—er—brought a deposit. I suppose that will be—"

"I am sorry, sir, but you are too late," the cashier cut in. "The understanding was that you were to be back by 4 P.M. It is now four thirty, and naturally you could not expect us to wait. The bed has been put up for sale again, and has just been bought—by this young lady here."

It was only then that Ralph Henry became aware of the presence of the girl at his side. In his excitement he had not noticed her standing there before. She was the young woman who had bid so

determinedly against him—the young woman he had bumped into when he first entered the auction-rooms.

Their eyes met, and a smile of triumph curved her lips. It seemed to Parker that there was a trace of defiance in her manner.

"I am sorry to disappoint the lady," he said, turning to the cashier, "but she can't have the bed. It is my property, and I object to its being sold over again. If—"

"Objection overruled," the man sneered. "Go ahead and bring a legal action against us if you wish, sir. That is your privilege. We are entirely within our rights and are not afraid of your taking the matter into court. But let us not have any further discussion about it now, if you please."

"But if you knew," Parker began.

"I won't listen to any more arguments," the cashier interrupted impatiently. He turned to the girl, and his frown dissolved into a smile. "Where do you wish the bed shipped, miss?" he inquired deferentially.

"You can send it to this address," she said, handing him a card. "I suppose you expect me to pay a deposit. I haven't the entire amount with me, but I can give you something now, on account, and you can collect the balance when the bed is delivered."

"That will be perfectly all right."

"I object," Ralph Henry began again; then stopped short, his eyes opening wide with amazement.

"The young woman had just placed her deposit on the counter. It was a single bank-note, and its denomination was one thousand dollars.

It might be merely a coincidence, of course, but it looked startlingly significant to Parker.

For from where he stood he could see the serial number on the bill the young woman had just laid down. It was D 40009682A.

And the serial number of the thousand-dollar bill that Binger had handed him began with a D, a four, and three ciphers. He didn't remember the rest of it, but he was quite positive about the first figures.

Until now he had taken it for granted that his pocket had been picked on the subway, but at the moment he was not so sure about that.

He had not missed his wallet until he was inside the auction-room, and this young woman had forcibly collided with him as he entered the place.

She did not look like a thief, but one never could judge by appearances. If this was a coincidence it was certainly an exceedingly remarkable one.

CHAPTER V.

FACING THE MUSIC.

RALPH HENRY'S first impulse was to denounce the young woman who had just acquired title to the state bed of the mad King Godfrey—to accuse her of grand larceny and demand her arrest.

But he checked that impulse. It occurred to him that such a course would in all likelihood be attended by rather unpleasant consequences.

He had no proof to offer immediately that the thousand-dollar bill was the one that had been stolen from his pocket. The only way he could prove that would be by calling on his employer to substantiate his charge. Binger had jotted down the number of the bank-note before he handed it to him, and by producing that memorandum could conclusively prove the young woman's guilt.

But this could not be done, unfortunately, without opening the eyes of the newspaper reporters to the fact that the Peanut King was desirous of getting possession of the famous bed. Parker realized that such publicity would be anything but agreeable to his boss.

He did some quick thinking, and decided to keep his suspicions to himself for the present. After all, he reflected, nothing was to be gained by acting hastily.

The girl flashed him another triumphant smile; then turned and left the auction-room. Ralph Henry followed her, unobtrusively. It was his intention to shadow her until he had ascertained her identity, and where she lived. Then he could report the situation to his employer, and leave it to the latter to decide what was to be done.

His evil star, however, still appeared to

be in the ascendent. He did not learn the young woman's name or address that day. He trailed her up Fifth Avenue as far as Central Park. There she hailed a passing taxicab, in which she rode off westward through Fifty-Ninth Street.

Parker looked about him in vain for another cab in which to continue the chase. There were plenty of taxis in sight, but they were all occupied. He was obliged to stand by helplessly and watch his quarry disappear.

He went back to the auction-rooms and had a talk with the cashier. The latter indignantly refused to give him any information about the identity of the purchaser of the bed. The fellow laughed incredulously at Ralph Henry's assertion that the deposit the young woman had paid was the bill that had been stolen from his pocket. He advised Parker to consult an alienist, and threatened to have him committed to the psychopathic ward of Bellevue Hospital if he did not immediately make himself scarce.

Parker went home to his boarding-house and spent a sleepless night.

At nine o'clock the next morning he presented himself in the private office of Mr. Horatio Binger. His face was haggard, and he had forgotten to shave.

His employer looked at him sharply.

"Well, young man," he said, "how did you make out at the auction sale yesterday?"

"Rotten!" Ralph Henry replied dejectedly. "I not only failed to buy the bed, but I have lost the thousand-dollar bill you gave me. That is to say, it was stolen from me."

"Stolen, eh?" Mr. Binger frowned dubiously. "Let's hear the story."

Parker told him what had happened. "I'm awfully sorry, sir," the young man wound up, "but perhaps everything will turn out all right after all. If we act quickly we may still be in time to get that bed, and nab the young woman, too. It probably hasn't left the auction-rooms yet, and, although they wouldn't give me any satisfaction yesterday, if you will put the matter at once in the hands of your attorneys they will most likely sing a different tune."

Mr. Binger frowned, and shook his head. "I sha'n't put the matter in the hands of my attorneys," he declared. "I hardly think that is necessary."

"But it is your only chance of getting the bed, sir," Parker protested, "and of bringing about the arrest of that young woman who robbed me. If you delay, the bed will be delivered to her and she will have skipped before we can put our hands on her."

The Peanut King shrugged his shoulders.

"I hardly think there is any danger of her skipping," he remarked. "And I have changed my mind about that bed. I don't want it now."

A broad grin suddenly illuminated his face. "You see," he continued, "I happen to be aware of the identity of that young woman. Her name is Elise Van Orsdell, and she is employed as my wife's private secretary."

"Mrs. Binger sent her to the auction sale yesterday to bid for that confounded bit of furniture. She had read about it in the newspapers and decided that she wanted it—not dreaming, of course, that I contemplated buying it for her as a wedding anniversary surprise."

"So she sent Miss Van Orsdell there to buy it, and handed her a thousand-dollar bill I had given her yesterday, before I left the house, to deposit to her private account."

"Then it wasn't the same bill that was stolen from me!" Ralph Henry exclaimed.

"Apparently not. I had a couple of

thousand-dollar bills in my pocket, and no doubt their serial numbers ran consecutively. Your pocket was probably picked in the subway, as you at first concluded. At all events, you can be sure that Miss Van Orsdell had nothing to do with it. That little lady is the last person in the world I'd suspect of dishonesty."

"But don't worry about your loss, son," Binger went on. "It was a mighty lucky thing for me that it happened. Saved me a matter of ten thousand dollars."

"You say that the bed was sold to you for seventy-five thousand dollars! Well, Miss Van Orsdell bought it in at sixty-five thousand the second time it was put under the hammer. Old Archibald K. Jackson, the millionaire collector, who had been running up the price for you when you bid on it, had gone home by the time it was put up for sale again, so my wife's secretary got a bargain. In the circumstances, you can just forget about that thousand."

Ralph Henry Parker went dazedly back to his desk in the outer office. This happened three months ago, and he is still sitting at that desk. The meteoric rise that he had expected to come out of his confidential mission hasn't happened yet. His salary is still twenty-two dollars a week.

But on more than one occasion the president of the concern has nodded pleasantly to Ralph Henry on his way to or from his private office. He no longer seems totally unaware of that young man's existence. And Parker believes this is an encouraging sign.

(The end.)

DAY AND NIGHT

INTO my day comes a thought of you,
Like the flash of a bird 'cross summer skies,
Silently forceful, through space it flies;
Serene, though compelling, this thought of you.

II.

Into my night comes a dream of you,
Bewild'ring, enchanting, a vision of love,
A mystery as wondrous as stars above;
Your soul touches mine in this dream of you.

Arthur Webster.

The Picture on the Wall by J. Breckenridge Ellis

PRECEDING CHAPTERS BRIEFLY RETOLD

"DO you see that?" Jim Blearstead shoved a newspaper story of how John Lyle Warring was still expecting the return of his son who had been kidnaped some twenty years ago, under the eyes of Harve Cleek, a local pugilist, who came into Blearstead's eating-house at closing time. Blearstead had abducted the child, but reported the nurse-maid, who had been his pal, had drowned the boy. With Cleek's help, Blearstead now proposed to palm off his young nephew, John Walters, for the long lost son. The young man who had been induced by the pair to assist in a robbery against his will, insisted he was going straight and declined to take part in the deception. But the entrance of the police cut short his protestations. The law was looking for the burglar who had entered the Troost Avenue house of Alice Klade.

Blearstead hid his nephew under a pile of soiled linen while the police searched the premises. Next day Cleek hauled him away in a laundry-basket and hid him in a tenement, where he left clothes and instructions from his uncle. Tacky Hode would row him up-river, and then he was to exchange his identity for that of John Lyle Warring, kidnaped son of the millionaire.

Hode's daughter Bettie and John were friends. On an old pencil-addressed envelope which he found in his hiding-place, and which envelope had been stamped "New York, March 4," without the year, John wrote Bettie a note which might serve later on to establish an alibi.

Two days later he rang the bell of the Warring house. His credentials demanded, the young man opened his package with the "identification tags" and then Lucia threw her arms about him and exclaimed: "My brother!"

Mr. Glaxton, a Denver lawyer and a cousin of Mr. Warring, was also a member of the millionaire's household and his principal advisor. At the moment he was out of town on business.

When John saw how much his supposed father had been benefited by the imposition, he had little compunction over his deception. He promised himself he would "handle" the Denver lawyer, who had usurped Mr. Warring's will as well as his authority.

Virgie sent John to see Brother Harry Tredmill and he returned resolved to see that Eugene Ware, Lucia's fiancé, as well as Glaxton fell in line. That much he could do for "his sister and father." But the news of the mysterious presence of two detectives in Lagville who had called at the Warring house looking for one John Walters, wanted for robbery in Kansas City, gave him considerable anxiety. The women had successfully dismissed the detectives, but John's troubles were not at an end: Alice Klade, whose house John had entered on Troost Avenue, was Lucia's dearest friend and she was coming for a visit.

Some evenings later he was sitting with Lucia in the moonlight trying to dissuade her from her marriage with Eugene Ware. Lucia, when she learned of Bettie, was equally insistent.

CHAPTER XV.

THE BROKEN ENGAGEMENT.

A FEW days later, after intense hours devoted to his problem, John sought the Ware Dry-Goods Emporium and invited the proprietor to a corner behind a high rampart of shoe-boxes where confidences were possible.

Eugene Ware was six or seven years his senior, a good-looking, dry man, immensely absorbed in business, without curiosity. He had visited John and been visited by him and it was not in nature for him to catch sight of the other without feeling the burden of the hours thus dragged through the dust of labored small-talk. Eugene could not sustain his end of any conversa-

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for October 30.

tion not dealing with the buying, selling, or handling of goods.

Without general information and utterly lacking interest in such ideas as had been crammed into his head at high school, Ware looked upon a ready talker as an inferior, and held ideals in suspicion. To drive a bargain he was prodigal with words, but had not one with which to sweeten life, and he spent much of the time while calling upon Lucia in dark, dense silence shot through occasionally by monosyllabic responses to the vivacious girl of his choice. Lucia sometimes comforted herself with the reflection that after they were married it would not be necessary to try to think of something to say; life would be freer without the nightmare heaviness of his visitations.

"Look here, Eugene, I guess it's a little out of order, but considering my connection with the family, I hope you'll take no exception to a few candid remarks."

"Yes, yes," responded Eugene, who hated anything out of order and instantly became on guard when anybody else spoke of candor.

"Has it occurred to you that Lucia is pretty young to get married? Strikes me a girl ought to see more of the world first, to find out what sort of people are in it. Of course you and I are all right—but there are others. I don't like the thought of her marrying so early and you might as well know how I feel about it."

"Yes, yes," Eugene responded, looking slightly flabbier than usual. He could say "Yes, yes" in a dozen different ways, all of them objectionable to John, and no way was more nerve-racking than when he meant "No, no."

"Of course I don't blame you for thinking otherwise; that's your point of view. But what I have to consider is not you, but Lucia. Perhaps you think that, though I am her brother, I haven't been long on the job. True, I haven't seen much of her, but I've seen a great deal of the world. I know men; and I know when they're like you, so much older than the girls they want to marry, there's mighty little chance of happiness for either when the man isn't willing to yield one inch to the girl's wishes—

or, if you want to call it so, whims. I don't know but you and Lucia might do well enough if you'd consider her likes and dislikes, but as long as you hold to a straight line that isn't her line and can't be induced across it, seems to me the prospect is pretty dark."

"For instance," Eugene said, toying with the upper boxes, "what are you thinking of as my 'line'? I didn't know I had one. It's a man's place to run the business, and the woman's place to run the home—if you call that a 'line.' Lucia isn't ten years younger than myself, and if you'll permit a few candid remarks of my own, you're talking nonsense. Whatever Lucia wants I want. Nobody was ever more yielding than I am. I agree to everything." Suddenly he lost his flabby look and grew red. "If you weren't her brother I should call this intolerable."

"Naturally I didn't come here to quarrel, but I did come to let you know my opinion. Eight or nine years make a great difference, when the man won't accommodate himself to the girl's prejudices. Now for an instance, since you ask for one: you are working to drive Brother Tredmill out of town. I don't care what your attitude toward religion is, but my sister is fond of her church. You are always opposing her. It may seem a little thing; but if you can't yield to Lucia in little things, then the difference between your ages is too big a thing to be smoothed away."

"You said you didn't come here to quarrel with me. Then looks are deceiving. Tredmill is a dead one. I won't say he hasn't acted from good motives, but he has meddled in the affairs of Lagville and has openly spoken of some things that don't sound well. We men propose to lead our own lives in our own way and it's none of Tredmill's business how we lead them. You are hardly in a position to talk to me about religious matters. From what I've heard you got the gang to church by pitching horse-shoes with the boys!"

"I'm not talking about religious matters. I'm discussing your warfare on Lucia's minister. That's my only point. Look here, old fellow"—suddenly his tone altered to frank entreaty—"let up on Brother

Treadmill. Upon my word, he means well, as you admit; and it's worrying Lucia dreadfully to know that if he loses his place you'll be largely responsible."

"Yes, yes." Eugene applied the brakes on his growing resentment, for it was with him a maxim that ill-humor is bad for business. "Well, well!" But though his manner grew docile, he had really hardened as the other softened. "Am I to understand," he asked dryly, "that you represent your sister in this curious interview? Has she sent me her orders that I am to embrace her preacher?"

John turned from him without a word. He was too angry to treat himself to the luxury of self-expression.

His visible emotion amused the merchant. "Do wait one moment," Eugene called. "I can talk over the telephone without being overheard. I'll get your sister on the wire."

John waited with his back turned. He was deeply annoyed by the turn matters had taken, but could not bring himself to attempt further conciliation.

"Is that you, Lucia? I have just had a remarkable conversation with your brother. Did you know he was coming to call on me at the store?"

"No," came Lucia's response, faint, agitated.

"Well, it doesn't matter. The point is, he thinks the difference in our ages and tastes is so great that it would be a mistake for us to marry. I am wondering if you could possibly agree with him?"

John wheeled about, throwing up a hand in protest. "Wait, Eugene, let us talk this thing over fairly and soberly."

Paying no heed to the expostulation, Eugene pressed the receiver to his ear. John watched his face pass from a flaming-red to a milky pallor.

Lucia answered: "I perfectly agree with my brother. It was a mistake, Eugene; the only good thing about it is that we have found out in time. I am so sorry—"

John could hear every word distinctly before the receiver fell.

Without glancing at John, who remained with hand uplifted as if deprived of the power of motion. Eugene restored the re-

ceiver to the fork and went to wait upon a customer, still pale, but otherwise his phlegmatic self.

CHAPTER XVI.

BURIED TREASURE.

JOHN, deeply agitated, went for a long walk in the country hoping the situation would clear up for him with quiet meditation; but he could not compose his mind to quietness. On reaching the deserted cattle-shed, where he had changed clothes on first coming to Lagville—he had taken that direction unconsciously—confusion deepened while uneasiness over what ought to be done caused a violent throbbing of his head. Fate seemed to have led him back to the days of Blearstead and Bettie Hode as if to give warning that from his past there was no escape.

Other lonely roads led from the river through dense woodlands and upspringing meadows, where the tender wheat showed its faithful pledge of living green, but they brought no counsel. It was almost dusk when he reached home. Lucia, who had been watching for him, was in the reception hall as he came through the door.

"Brother!" She threw her arms about his neck and pressed her cheek against his coat-sleeve. He stood very still, not even stroking her hair. "Brother!" Her voice quivered with emotion. "I am so glad, so glad, so glad!" He thought he knew what she meant, yet was afraid to ask.

She gave him instant reassurance. "It was always a mistake. But I shouldn't have known it until too late if you hadn't come. John, I never loved him. I never, never loved him. I cannot imagine now how I ever could have imagined even for an hour that I did. The part of me that admired his success, his determination—the part of me that found him agreeable and pleasant to look at and comforting to have near seems to have been cut away. Isn't it wonderful! As if I'd been through an operation. And was healed. But if you hadn't come, I'd still be in darkness. I'd have gone on in my darkness. We'd have married. Then when you came, as of course

finally you must have come, I'd have waked up. How dreadful not to have known the truth until too late!"

She had grown so excited that he tried to soothe her with commonplace words, but she put them aside. "I can't understand," she rushed on; "it's from being with you that I've realized what it would mean all my life to—to be with *him*." She began to sob, but he knew they were tears of happiness.

"It's all over now," she gasped between long breaths, "and spring is here. That's the way I think about it: spring is here—and you. To-day has been so beautiful—such wonderful colors, and odors of earth and grass, and the shadows of first leaves flickering so faintly on the ground, to and fro. You'll think me a foolish girl who doesn't know her mind, but this is the way I think of it—the engagement is ended and spring is here. There'll never be such a wonderful spring as this spring. I owe it to you, you wonderful, handsome deliverer!"

She gazed up at him through shining eyes. "Yes, and I can see how glad you are, too, Mr. John Warring, though you think it for my good and for your own dignity to appear neutral! It's like a man not to say a word to show how happy he is. Yes, you *are* happy; you can't hide it! But father mustn't know, not just yet."

She went on breathlessly to explain. A letter had come evidently containing important news, for her father, visibly moved and without revealing its nature, had declared that it would be necessary for him to absent himself from home for at least a week. Since he had not left town for a year and, before John's coming, had not been considered strong enough to leave the house, the announcement that he meant to take the midnight train for Chicago had met with serious remonstrance. Because his vitality had been almost miraculously restored there was no question of his fitness for travel; but the business letter had so manifestly proved disturbing that John concurred in Lucia's opinion: no other trouble should be heaped upon his mind—and it was certain that he would regard the broken engagement as a serious trouble.

After the evening meal, which in Lagville was invariably "supper," Mr. Warring invited John to a conference in the room where so many of his days had been spent in bed. The elderly gentleman was plainly nervous and decidedly sketchy in what he sought to communicate. His purpose seemed rather to convey impressions than facts. Through everything shone love and pride in his "son," but with this was mingled something dark as of a dread imperfectly realized. His journey was necessary in order to put to rights some of his lumberyard affairs which he had supposed in perfect condition.

"I want your help, my boy, and I'm trusting you to give it without asking questions. There are some things I cannot understand, yet if I tried to explain, my words might cause you to misunderstand. Because I doubt if affairs are always dark when they look dark. Perhaps the difficulty is in our eyes, eh? If we can't see clearly, is it the other fellow's fault if we think his nose crooked?"

He rubbed his shock of gray hair and his lips moved without speech. Then: "It's hard to get at what I want to tell you. Yet in justice to others you must take it without details. Maybe I'll find it easier to show you—"

He went to a landscape painting hanging opposite the light, felt behind the canvas and produced a tiny key. Then he crossed the floor to an old-fashioned leather trunk which stood directly opposite the bed. The key was not meant for the trunk, for it was not only unfastened, but stood ajar from some defect in the lid hinges, showing a crevice of at least an inch between its iron-rimmed jaws.

"This trunk," he said, "is supposed to contain nothing but old letters and souvenirs of my happy married life. Photographs and love-tokens. Look out in the hall, John, and find if Simmons is anywhere about."

John found the hall deserted and came back to look into the trunk which, without its tray, showed a wild confusion of yellowed envelopes, pale-inked notes, fading photographs, bits of ribbon and other driftage of past years.

"No doubt this appears to you in utter confusion," the old man smiled, "but I know exactly what letters and pictures should be on top. I can see that the contents of this trunk have not been disturbed since I last opened it."

"But who should be prowling into your trunk?" John demanded indignantly.

"You never can tell. Now, my boy, dig down through all that mass to the far corner your right. Feel anything?"

"It's a small metallic box."

Mr. Warring sighed his relief. "Lift it out. You'll not find it heavy. Although," he added anxiously, "it shouldn't be altogether light. I hope it doesn't seem empty to you."

"I think there is something in it. Of course the box alone has a certain weight." He drew to the light a flat, oblong, shiny-black box. The other tested it in his careful hands and banished half-formed fears.

Mr. Warring snatched up a soft-cushion and shook the cover empty. "Put the box in this cover; I don't want any one to see what it is."

John, obeying, was startled by sudden darkness. "It's all right," the old man whispered. "I've switched off the light to make sure no one is in Cousin Glaxton's room. There's no light shining under his door."

"You thought Simmons might be spying in there?"

"One never knows. But it's all right. And it's good and dark outdoors. We might as well take the box now. We're going to hide it, son, till I get back from the timber lands. I know of a splendid place—I've thought it all out, lying in my bed so long—under the summer-house. I have the spade under the back porch. I wouldn't dare go away leaving the box in the trunk. Put your ear closer: it's filled with bank-notes."

"But surely it ought to be deposited in the bank."

"No. There it would get out of my hands. You see, Cousin Glaxton manages my account. I can't explain. I know I have this much money and I can't be absolutely certain about the rest. I shall hold on to this, for you and Lucia."

John exclaimed impetuously. "You dis-

trust that man Glaxton. Why don't you get rid of him? Revoke his power of attorney. Now that I've come home—"

The other grasped his arm in the darkness. "Hush, boy, not so loud! We mustn't hurry things. Oh, we have to be so cautious, so easy, so slow, and all the time seem so unsuspecting! If he gets a hint that we doubt him, if he finds one inkling that we suspect—he could ruin us all. Of course I mean if he wanted to; if he's bad at heart. But of course we don't doubt him; not really, you know. He has always been so helpful, and knows how to quiet my heart when all the doctors are useless. But we have this box. Whatever comes, we have this box. And, besides, of course everything is all right. Hush! Your Cousin Glaxton will be back in the morning. That's why I'm going to-night. He wouldn't let me go if he were here. I'm not telling you my destination nor just exactly why I'm going. That'll make it easier for you to deal with him. You'll simply be at liberty to tell him all you know, which is next to nothing—except about this box."

"You sha'n't fear that lawyer while I'm here," John persisted. "It's none of his business where you go and I'd like to see him try to stop you."

"You don't understand. But you will when you meet him. And he is so helpful and energetic, and kind."

"Would a good man have lied to the minister to drive him from your house?"

"Don't let's talk about him, son. Your Cousin Glaxton isn't a man to be explained. I gave that up long ago." He softly opened the hall door, then tiptoed back to whisper: "A good while after your cousin began taking over the management of my business I began to draw in certain funds such as he knew nothing about. He's an incredibly lynx-eyed gentleman, but he can't see everything—that's beyond mortal power. I converted all my outside interests to bank-notes. Of course I couldn't hide my farms and forest lands and I seldom ask questions because your Cousin Glaxton abhors questions. And it would never do to antagonize him. Nobody else can quiet my heart. Bear that in mind while I'm away. He's all right. I'm sure he's all right. If he

isn't, we're ruined. If you're ever tempted to antagonize him, remember that he has the power. That's what he stands for in this house: power. Power over all my properties, but if everything else should be swept away, here's fifty thousand dollars in this box for you and Lucia. It would be a start. It would be something. Come!"

He slipped to the hall door. "The coast is clear. Should we meet any one, keep the box well under your coat."

Through the dim hall and down the stairs John followed, meeting no one. The voices of Lucia, Virgie, and Mrs. Abbottsfield reached them from the front room, but they escaped out the back door undetected. From under the porch Mr. Warring secured the spade and waved toward the summer-house without a word. There was no moon, but the stars were bright and an arc light sent from the street a shaft of white radiance across rose-bushes and gravel walks, missing the summer-house by only a few feet. However, once within the latticed enclosure the two men were safe from general observation.

Instead of relaxing his caution Mr. Warring grew even more secretive in manner. Never saying a word he crept to a distant corner and by guiding John's hand with his own showed him a loose plank in the floor. They drew it up and the young man dug the hole while the other carried away the loose dirt in a basket which had been hidden in the shrubbery for that purpose. Dense bushes crowded up from a garden walk to the back of the rustic structure, a thicket which, in the early weeks of May, formed an unbroken wall of white blossoms.

While John dug he followed with strained hearing every subdued sound of the old man's progress to and fro and once his nerves quivered as from an electric shock on hearing something he feared could not have been the other's footstep. It came from the thicket and he darted around the summer-house much to the confusion of his "father," who had not caught the alarm.

"Somebody's spying upon us," John whispered with conviction. He plunged into the thicket, but it was darkened by the house and no sign was discovered of a spy.

"You must have been mistaken," the

other urged. "Trust me to hear anybody trying to find my precious box. There's no other spot so good for a safe hiding-place."

John admitted: "My nerves are a little on edge." After the box was safely stowed away and all traces of their labor removed, they returned to the house as silently as they had left it.

As they stepped upon the back porch, Simmons came out from the corridor. "What do you want?" Mr. Warring demanded with unwonted brusqueness.

"Excuse me, sir, but the motor-bus has come to take you to the station."

"Ah, thank you." He hurried through the house, calling good-byes to every one. The women ran out from the parlor and there ensued the confusion incident to the departure of one unused to travel.

"But where's my son?" called Mr. Warring, half-way down the front walk. "I've got to give him a hug."

"I'll give it to him for you," Lucia promised with a swift, uprushing of the spirits. To Virgie she whispered: "If you only knew what I know!" She felt the spring scattering blossoms in its warm wind over her heart.

While his "father" had hurried after his suit-case, John had stopped in the back corridor, then turned and tiptoed to the door. Simmons had pulled from under the porch floor the spade where Mr. Warring had hastily flung it, and was feeling the stained edge with deft sensitive fingers. It was this discovery that caused the young man almost to miss telling the traveler good-by. However, he reached the car before it left the gate and received from Mr. Warring not only a hug but a hearty kiss which he accepted with his bright, affectionate smile.

John had finished burying the box in its owner's favorite hiding-place simply to calm his mind, not at all convinced that he had been startled by a false alarm. He believed some one in the thicket had spied upon them, and the discovery of Simmons thoughtfully examining the spade confirmed his instinctive surmise that Glaxton's confidential servant was the spy. It would be necessary to hide the box in another place,

but in the mean time something else was even more essential; and after bidding the family good night he called Simmons for a private word in the garden.

The man, always polite and soft of voice, looked down from his superior height with a certain air of apology in having the other at a disadvantage.

John began abruptly: "You leave this place at once. Mr. Glaxton brought you here not because the family needed your services. However, I am going to pay you for your time."

Simmons smiled and responded with unruffled countenance: "Oh, I'm quite sure you don't understand, Mr. John. You see, Mr. Glaxton wouldn't like it at all, not finding me when he comes back."

"It isn't a matter for discussion," John remarked. "You are dismissed, and it merely remains for you to go away immediately."

"But I couldn't do it, Mr. John. In the morning when Mr. Glaxton comes, whatever he decides about it will be perfectly all right."

"But you are going now."

"I couldn't think of it, really."

"This moment."

"Mr. Glaxton told me—"

"But you have heard what I've told you. I represent Mr. Warring while he is away from home."

"Mr. Glaxton would be very angry. I'm I represent Mr. Warring while he is away from home."

"I'm afraid you're going to feel much worse; but I hate to use physical means of persuasion."

"Mr. John, it would be very unbecoming in me to strike you, which I would never do unless you jumped on me. Better leave me alone, for I've got to think of Mr. Glaxton. I take my orders from him and he told me to stay."

"Now's the time," remarked John, "for you to think less of Mr. Glaxton than of yourself. Right now is when, as you express it, I jump on you." He darted forward, and the man was unpleasantly shocked out of his supercilious attitude. His advantage of weight and height was more than counterbalanced by the younger man's

swiftness and agility, while the latter's expert knowledge of athletics gained from Cleek proved determining factors. There were several rushes and countercharges, then all was over; Simmons lay flat upon his back while John's knees bored painfully into his ribs.

"I'll go," Simmons gasped.

John rose, his breath even. "Let's see you. You may get your things."

Simmons rose slowly.

"Mr. Glaxton will see about this," he muttered.

"Simmons, don't you know when you're whipped? Must I do it again?"

Simmons went away, cursing futilely under his breath. Determined not to be again spied upon, John made a thorough search of the garden before digging up the box, then doubled every precaution before burying it in a spot much less likely of detection than a corner of the summer-house.

It was one in the morning when he started for the house, his mind at ease. He had almost reached the porch steps when loud screams from up-stairs cause him to drop the spade in dismay. A large figure, which in the semidarkness assumed huge proportions, burst through the doorway and came leaping across the back porch straight toward the young man.

"Get out of my way," came a hoarse undertone as John snatched desperately at the intruder's arm. "Ho! So it's you, huh?" The man—it was Blearstead—stopped short and gave a hoarse chuckle. "I hope you've had a companion in your midnight stroll. He'd come in handy, in case you wanted to prove an alibi."

John dropped his arm. His heart was like a lump of ice in his bosom. "What have you done? You mustn't come here again. If you do I'll—I'll give you up to the police; yes, if I have to give myself up at the same time."

Again came the terrified scream from the upper floor.

"I haven't hurt anybody," Blearstead grinned, and John could see his nose twisting from side to side in the old nerve-racking way. "That old woman's scared silly, that's all. But don't you get it into your head, dear nevvv, that I'm not coming

again. For coming again I am just as soon as this blows over. Good night, nevvie, and for a little while, good-by."

CHAPTER XVII.

THE COMING OF GLAXTON.

A FEW moments—long enough for Blearstead to leap the fence and disappear down the alley—John stood stunned. Then he rushed into the house to find Lucia hysterical over the burglar, whose face she had caught reflected in her mirror. Virgie, too, had seen him, but had not cried out.

"Virgie was so brave," Lucia gasped. "She actually ran after him—yes, tried to stop him."

Mrs. Abbottsfield amended her phrase. "Brave? No, reckless; wilfully reckless. She was wickedly reckless!" Her voice rose shrilly. All of them were in their night-robes and it seemed that with her conventional clothes she had laid aside her careful gentility. Terror rendered her vicious.

"Virgie," she cried, having no other way to vent her emotions roused by the midnight intruder, "you are so *tall*."

In fact, her daughter looked less pleasing than by day; and there was a certain inexplicable solemnity of countenance less natural than the mother's agitation. Of course one instinctively looks solemn over a burglar, but the ghostly figure seemed concerned about something else.

Virgie spoke to John, not with the freedom that usually characterized their intercourse, but with an inscrutable withholding of comradeship: "You hadn't gone to bed."

The dry words were not spoken as a question, yet seemed to call for some sort of explanation and he had none to offer. He hoped the point would be overlooked.

However, there was something much more dangerous to be faced. The robbery, when published, would bring detectives and other officers of the law, and search would be renewed for the young man who had been seen to leave the train at the Lagville station on the day of John's arrival.

Though profoundly disturbed, John was struck by the immense advantage to which

Lucia appeared. Too highly wrought up to think of her disheveled state, her charms were revealed in all the innocence of a little child. His breath was caught in his throat. Bettie, running barefooted on the river sands, faded so completely from memory's wall that he couldn't even see the spot where the picture had hung.

The vision of Lucia's loveliness was prolonged in the search through the house for missing objects. Blearstead had perhaps slipped through the back door while the box was being buried under the summer-house—probably it was he, not Simmons, who had made the noise in the shrubbery. If so, doubly important had been the second hiding of the money-box. When an inventory had been made of missing valuables it was found that all the jewelry—a pearl necklace and the diamonds—had been stolen.

John addressed the agitated ladies in his most persuasive manner. He knew, he told them, an expert detective—his life of hardships had cast him among many kinds of people—a detective who would undertake to recover the jewelry provided the theft were kept secret; thus he always worked to best advantage. As sure as the alarm was given, the robber or robbers would dispose of the gems—possibly fling them into the river.

"Don't say a word about it to any one. I want to be here in the morning when Mr. Glaxton comes; I want to see him. But as soon as that's over, I'll go after my man. If Glaxton finds out about it, he'll interfere. I give you my word that if anybody can get back your things my friend can."

This sounded reasonable, and John was so earnest in asking them to promise secrecy that they agreed amid sighs and tears. But after that they remained together for some time overwhelmed by the loss of the wonderful necklace and the diamond rings. John, who felt confident of his ability to make quick restoration, tried his best to soothe their agitation and bring a smile to Lucia's lips, and it was not until they separated that he became definitely aware of Virgie's cool aloofness—Virgie, who had not been frightened by the night's experi-

ence and who had never before failed to respond to his kindness.

Perhaps, after all, she had not been as unafraid as her mother had supposed. If the shock had broken Mrs. Abbottsfield's veneer to reveal an underskin of the common man, might it not have imparted to Virgie's manner a vague trace of hostility? He dismissed the point as exaggerated by his perilous situation and presently forgot even Blearstead. The image of Lucia, like the shining of a transfigured face, blotted out dark thoughts and in the morning as he lay very still in bed, as if fearful of wrecking a fairy dream, these words slipped from tenderly smiling lips: "What a sister!"

The news failed to arouse his night's dim uneasiness when it was announced that Virgie had a headache and would not come down to breakfast. Lucia was there in that intimacy of the family life that gives dear-ness to the casual word, the unimportant gesture, and Mrs. Abbottsfield was herself again, except for some constraint at the remembrance that she had been rather on exhibition the previous night. This sensitiveness John soothed by dragging in Glaxton for their morning's theme.

"Would it be asking too much to let me face him alone?" he smiled. "I want to get a full-length impression without the different shadings of other people's likes or dislikes."

"You can always have him alone, and welcome," cried Lucia, laughing. "I give you my share in him. Come on, Aunt Hildegard, be generous!"

"Lucia," murmured the other, putting up her nose-glasses.

Lucia laughed again. "Don't you say 'the best families to me,' Aunt Hildegard after last night!"

When the motor-bus chugged up to the gate, John, watching alone from the parlor, was scarcely surprised to see Simmons alight with his master. Of course he had met the train to make bitter complaint of his ejection.

Simmons took possession of the newcomer's suit-case, but John smiled grimly on finding that he had no intention of advancing with it into the yard. Glaxton waved

him forward, but the man-servant shook his head. He would wait outside the gate until his enemy was pacified.

The lawyer lost no time in argument, but came briskly up the walk while John, from behind the curtain, scrutinized him keenly. He was a short, dark man with black hair, heavy eyebrows, a square chin. At first glance one was impressed by the handsomeness of his regular features; then came the deeper sense of darkness, not only of skin and hair, but of spiritual texture. John did not penetrate his mood. It seemed to lack responsiveness, but of that he was not sure. A smile might be lurking behind the keen, deep-set eyes or might be utterly lacking from their hidden depths.

The next descriptive epithet that occurred to the observer after "handsome" and "dark" was "unusual." His air of distinction was not such as to warm admiration, but it must catch and hold the most careless eye. Swiftly following up these characteristics came the man's vitality which smote upon one's perceptions as by a blow. He was alive throughout his stoutly built body and in every brain-cell. He breathed intensive energy, recalling Mr. Warring's term, "power." Handsome—dark—unusual—powerful: there you had Cousin Glaxton.

Before he had come half-way up the walk, John saw the Rev. Harry Tredmill push past Simmons, who had the cool impudence to maintain his position in front of the gate. Glaxton was aware that the minister was hastening after him, but made no sign either by slowing or quickening his pace. As he stepped upon the porch, Tredmill, at the bottom of the steps, protested:

"I beg your pardon—"

Glaxton wheeled around. "Stop where you are," he spoke in a low but cruelly cutting tone. "Really, sir, you should be more considerate of my feelings than to oblige me for a second time to order you off the place."

John appeared at the front door. "How are you, Brother Tredmill?" he called with aggressive friendliness. The thought that the lawyer might in some inexplicable manner be able to penetrate the secret of his past gave to the young man an attitude

of sheer recklessness. "Come right in. You know you're always as welcome in this house as I am myself."

Tredmill cast him an appreciative glance, then looked steadily at Glaxton, whose darkness had increased tenfold, though there was no apparent change of countenance. "I wish to see Mr. Warring on important business."

"My father is not at home," John interposed, "but I'm always glad to see you. My father has left town for some time."

"Then I'll wait. No," in answer to John's insistence, "not now." He turned toward the gate.

John turned upon the lawyer. "And now, who are *you*?" he demanded shortly.

For a moment the other gave him a piercing look that sought to take his measure. Then in full, musically modulated voice: "I am your cousin, Edgar Glaxton." He smiled darkly, proffering his hand. "I need not ask who you are. Of course I have heard the news; and the resemblance to your father is obvious. It cries aloud. Like father, like son. And how impetuous you are! Just as your father used to be. I know we shall be excellent friends. This is indeed a pleasure to welcome into our midst the son we have so long mourned as dead."

John let his hand be taken, but his set face did not relax. "It would be a far greater pleasure to me, Mr. Glaxton, if you had not begun our acquaintance by insulting one of my best friends."

"Oh—you mean the parson? As one new to our town, of course you don't understand. He has been hunting out the evils in our community and preaching about them with the hope of making us better. He drags skeletons from closets in the name of religion. I am not opposed to religion, indeed, no. But we cannot tolerate a preacher who makes our religion unpleasant to us. He has made himself obnoxious to the better element, to your father in particular."

"On the contrary, my father esteems him highly."

"I should of course be sorry to have misinterpreted your father's feelings. The fact is, your father's state of health, which

varies in a way to puzzle all our doctors, determines his opinions for the time being. When he is at his worst, he dislikes what in better health he likes. But there are a few things he dislikes consistently, and I thought this Tredmill was one of them."

"You know my father is devoted to his church."

"I was not aware of it, I assure you. Come, come, John, it isn't possible that a fine, young, full-blooded fellow like you clings to the old Sunday-school book classifications. You don't believe that the worthwhile folk are all in the church, and the bad, bad people are all out of it."

"That's a very convenient classification in Lagville," John said cheerfully. "And you know the old styles are coming back in fashion this year. Before I came here I didn't care any more about religion than you do. I thought of the church as a sort of jail—a place to keep out of. But I've been trying to build me a shack of my own. It's easy for others to see where my lines are crooked and my material shoddy, but the fault's with the carpenter; the level and plumb-line are all right. And it's a good thing, I've been thinking, to have any sort of a roof when it's raining." He waved his arm. "Of course going to church is a novelty to me—I don't know how it'll wear, but for a recreation warranted not to leave a headache or a bad taste in the mouth, it carries the blue ribbon."

John turned from the silent figure to call to Simmons: "I'll let you come on in with that suit-case. And you can stay here as long as Mr. Glaxton stays."

Glaxton shot a glance toward his stalwart servant, then at the slight figure of his "cousin" and doubtless concluded that there was less to be hoped for from Simmons and more to be feared from John than appeared on the surface.

In the front room their conversation was continued, though it occurred to neither to sit down.

"I find changes," Glaxton remarked, since my departure. "Best of all," he continued, never indicating what emotion, if any, was at play beneath the dark surface, "is naturally your presence among us. It is wonderful. It is almost enough to make

one believe in miracles. Cousin John Waring has his son again, dear Lucia her brother."

John added with an inscrutable smile. "And you, your cousin."

"Yes—thank you for saying that. And I find your father's health quite restored. Simmons tells me the heart gives no more uneasiness. How delightful! However, this is not so miraculous; you were sufficient to effect the cure. With you here, he can never be ill again."

"I don't believe he can," John agreed. "I think I'm what the Indians call 'good medicine'—for him, I mean."

"I see. For him; yes." Glaxton shot him a lightning glance from under his heavy brows. He spoke calmly: "Simmons tells me Lucia's engagement to Eugene Ware is broken off. This does not please me. How could it? There is not in the county half so good a match for her. Even before our young men were scattered by the war there was practically nobody but Eugene in Lagville. You will not find such another. I fear this will mean a lonely, isolated life for your sister."

John was unable to still a twinge of conscience. The other's words represented his apprehension on quitting the Ware Dry-Goods Emporium after the fateful interview. He stared from the window, frowning from the difficult thoughts that perplexed him whenever Lucia's marriage was discussed as a possibility. It would have been better for her after years, had he not interfered.

"However," Glaxton sighed, "they may reconsider. Let us hope that they will reconsider."

"I shall hope nothing of the sort." Suddenly John saw the whole matter in the light of the moonlight streaming over Lucia with her guitar. "The thing is settled for all time."

• Glaxton started back theatrically. "What! You objected? You must have had powerful reasons to practically condemn your sister to a hermit's life."

"She'll not be lonesome if I can help it. We'll be two hermits together."

"But when you go away—"

"I shall not go away."

Glaxton smiled. "Do not be too sure of that, my dear cousin. One never knows what may happen."

John darkened. "When it comes to the matter of Lucia's happiness, it is infinitely more to me than it could be to you, so please let the subject pass. As to my 'powerful reasons' against Eugene Ware, I cannot claim all the honor of breaking off the engagement, so we'll not discuss that either."

"Quite right, cousin, quite right. I am a little discomfited to find that your father has gone on a journey because I have important matters to communicate to him." He produced his note-book and said quietly: "His address, please?"

"I do not know it. But if the business is pressing, you might communicate it to me."

For an instant the other's brows met ominously, but he was a man of great self-control. He had the manner of carefully suppressing a derisive smile which John found particularly offensive, but when he spoke, his voice was resonant and mild. "Truly, the business is pressing. But your father alone could pass upon it authoritatively. Will he be long absent?"

"He left no word on that point, but I can answer more definitely about my own movements. I am leaving on the next train, though I expect to be back in two days—to-morrow, if possible."

"Of course," Glaxton suddenly gave him effect of increased darkness, "I will look after the household while you are away." Slowly he restored the book to his pocket. "May I know how to reach you in case of any accident in Lagville?"

"I'll be on the move most of my time. Better hold my mail till I get back," John smiled easily.

"I see. Quite right. Thank you."

"Besides, with you here, accidents cannot happen," John added politely. He added with a show of playfulness: "If they did, I should certainly hold you to a strict account."

Glaxton did not respond to this pleasantry. Simmons stopped before the doorway, suit-case in hand. "Take it up to my room, Simmons, and wait there for me."

The man vanished noiselessly. The master turned sharply to John:

"You don't like Simmons?"

"Just like that," John smiled. "I must admit prejudice against such a big fellow with such poor fighting capacity. I used to wish I were as tall as that rascal, but bulk isn't everything. Certainly in this instance, there's a good deal of muscle going to waste."

"My dear boy," Glaxton drew down his mouth, "don't let your expert training under athletic masters make you intolerant of those not so fortunate. And, by the way, do you find that it keeps you fit to dig in old mother earth?"

"Digging is healthy exercise," remarked John nonchalantly, "but it is healthier for the man with the spade than for anybody watching from the shrubbery." He had instantly divined that Simmons had either seen the first burying of the box, or had guessed it from the spade's condition.

"Quite right. I see. Did you find out who was watching? Simmons tells me he was in the house when he saw your father throw the spade under the back porch. Simmons says he was not in the shrubbery and he always tells me the truth. That is why I employ him."

There was an easy assurance in the tone that convinced John the watcher, after all, must have been Blearstead. Simmons could have known nothing of the second burying or of Blearstead's coming, yet the master was close upon the scent.

John was uncomfortable. He had the impression that if they kept talking, though he uttered the vaguest remarks, the mystery of the money-box and the secret of its key ordinarily kept behind the landscape painting would pass into the lawyer's keeping.

"To be perfectly frank," Glaxton smiled slightly, "it appears that you drove Simmons away on a mere pretext. Last night you wanted him off the grounds for some purpose—this morning you do not object to his presence. It makes me think of pirates' gold and old romances. If I could only know what you were burying—you and your father! But after it was buried, and your father had left, could you have wanted to dig it up again? Your treatment

of Simmons suggests that. These fancies have drifted across my mind, and I think it nothing but frank and fair to tell you so."

"I appreciate your frankness, all the more so as I imagine it's a treat you do not always give your friends. It occurs to me, however, that while you're finding out a good deal about your Cousin John Lyle Warring, he is learning very little about you. Right now, then, is when we break our interview into, that each of us may keep his particular fragment as a pleasant souvenir of memory. To be serious—something hard to maintain with so humorous a companion—I must run for my train."

CHAPTER XVIII.

BETTIE AGAIN TO THE RESCUE.

IN order to catch the early train for Kansas City without making his destination known, John took the local freight to a near-by town and there waited for the cross-country express, headed for St. Louis. At Lexington Junction he left the car at the tank just before the engine pulled up to the station to board a train traveling in the opposite direction. In due time he was climbing the long flight of iron steps to the waiting-room of the Kansas City Union Station.

After subduing his attire to harmonize with the murky environs of Smiling Lane—accomplished by expert shopping at old-clothes shops—he hastened toward the disreputable quarters of his past adventures, yet not too hurriedly to choose alleys and byways safest from his enemies, the guardians of the law.

How remote seemed to him his past, how alien were the surroundings which a month ago had seemed a fitting setting for his life! As on going to Lagville he had been conscious of acting a part, like that of a disguised beggar in scenes of opulence, so now he had the feeling of one of the favored classes passing himself off as a vagrant. In the midst of foul sights and sounds, he found beneath his shabby exterior something of spiritual kinship to the picture on the wall. Without doubt there was this inner resemblance:

Alas! Such spiritual texture is invisible

to mortal eyes, incapable of demonstration, and he must continue to lead the hunted existence of a criminal.

Facing Blearstead's Eating House, the Smiling Lane tenement stood in the shape of a flat-iron to fit itself into such space as other tenements had left. It was usually designated as "Old Smiley," but originally it had been dubbed the "Cowcatcher," and to this day each of its inmates, irrespective of age or sex, was called a "cow." John, by virtue of renting a front corner room on the second floor, became one of the herd. Though hoping to finish his business in the city that night, he of course paid a week's rent in advance, and as far as possible confined himself in his squalid apartment lest he encounter an acquaintance in the neighborhood or in the building itself.

Besides the window facing the alley or street that separated Old Smiley's from his uncle's restaurant, another on the side looked out upon a fire-escape, illegally cumbered with various washings and made doubly dangerous in case of fire, by various ropes stretched from its railing to upper windows. John's first care was to make sure that this side window was securely nailed down, then he drew the curtain to the sill, that no one might spy upon him. From the front window he could watch Blearstead's without fear of detection. It was his hope that Blearstead might go away after closing time, on some nefarious expedition with Cleek, thus leaving an opportunity for a careful search in his quarters for the stolen jewelry. But if Blearstead remained at home that night, John's stay must be protracted, hence a supply of food should be laid in.

It was dusk before he left his room. Not daring to risk recognition in the grocery that occupied one gloomy corner of the tenement, he made hurried purchases from vendors' pushcarts and curbstone markets where the flaring of gasoline torches brought out picturesque costumes and striking colors. He loaded himself with hot tamales, whose succulent meaty meal was almost lost in a wilderness of cornshuck, frankfurters, sauerkraut, dried tongue, shaped like boot-heels but flabbier, hard-

boiled eggs, their whites a pale blue; rolls as hard to crack open as nuts, lettuce, thick brown pies, sweet pickles in tiny wooden boats, cheese not all rind.

All this he stored away in his room, as far as might be from his impossible bed, then took up his post at the front window to watch the eating-house. He soon found that a stranger had been employed to wait upon the noisy habitués of the place—a girl unknown to him, whose pretty face and slatternly dress showed that she had been better cared for by nature than ever she had cared for herself. He observed familiar figures slouching beneath the window, drifting across to the restaurant, emerging from the swinging doors with jovial or lowering faces, but not once did his uncle show himself. Once his unmistakable shadow fell along the smoke-stained wall of his bedroom, and several times his voice came roaring across the narrow chasm.

At eight o'clock John ate his solitary supper, his eyes still fixed upon the lights and shadows across the way. Cleek swaggered in to visit his confederate at a later hour, but when he came out alone, John knew his uncle would not leave the house that night. That meant an extra day of waiting, and the young man found what repose he could on a couple of chairs. The morning broke fair and bright. Familiar sights, which were to him now queerly strange, appeared below: the laundry-wagon rattled up to the threshold and the milk-wagon ground over the cobblestones. Hawkers of fruits and vegetables for a time drowned out the sounds of cursing and crying. Evening came; but Blearstead, as if some intuition had warned him of the watcher, kept close.

Just before sunset a girl stopped before Blearstead's with a basket on her arm. She had fish to sell. John, at the first glimpse of her supple back, knew it was Bettie Hode. He longed intensely for her to turn that he might catch her eye, but during her negotiations with the new waitress she remained in the same position. He felt that he could not let her depart thus. Not only did he feel for her the affection of long years of comradeship, but he ardently desired to compare his old standards with

his new. He had once held her above other women—he must see her face again.

When her basket, after very close bargaining, had been emptied, she crossed the street, still with head bowed so that he could not catch a glimpse of her countenance. John's impatience to see her increased enormously. As noiselessly as possible he darted from his room and sped down the long, greasy staircase to the ground corridor, which, without windows, save for a gritty pane in the street door, separated a rankly perfumed barber-shop from what had been a saloon, but was now empty save for a few frank pictures. It was under this saloon that John had hidden in the cellar on the day of his flight from Blearstead's.

Near the corridor's entrance he waited for Bettie's passing, inhaling deeply the cheap perfumes which almost overbore the odor of boiling cabbage. When her shadow fell past the doorway he called cautiously and she, though taken wholly by surprise, came straight to him as if this were a part of her daily program—except for the gladness in her eyes. Their hands clasped firmly, but he lost no time in leading her to his room, where the door was instantly bolted, a ceremony to be judged strictly by the code of Smiling Lane.

Safe from prying eyes, he took her hand again—such a hard little hand!—and they looked into each other's eyes with open pleasure.

"I haven't got time to stay with you, John," she sighed regretfully, "for pa gets worse every day; looks like I can't move without his knowing why. He gives me just so long to sell the fish, and if I ain't back when he thinks I ought to be, there's no use my trying to explain."

"Is he still intimate with Cleek and my uncle?"

"They go out together nearly every night; and when pa gets back it's morning, and he sleeps half the day. They are taking all kinds of chances; ma and I are looking for the worst every minute. It can't go on forever. You know how that kind of thing always ends. But there's one good thing about pa: he was always determined that ma and I were never to

know anything about his doings. If he gets into trouble, he'll not have us suffering for it. Pa ain't all bad." She lifted her head. "I know girls who have lots worse fathers—but I'd better be getting back to mine."

John had been watching her with grave attention. She was young and pretty, she was well-formed. She was honest and faithful and without guile. But there stretched between them an immeasurable gulf. This gulf, a sort of Grand Cañon, had always been there, but he had not previously realized its separating force. If he had been in danger of falling over the brink, that was past; he grasped the depths and the distances. He knew she could not see this barrier; and he admitted that to an impartial judge, doubtless a fugitive from justice, and a girl whose father was a suspected but undetected highwayman, would seem in the same class. Perhaps they were. She who had kept herself unspotted was perhaps superior to one whose uncle had induced him to involve himself in a night's lawless adventure.

The principal point for him, driven home by this meeting, was that whatever his past or present might signify, he could not see Bettie with the eyes of a month ago. She was as pretty as he had thought her, and had she been barefooted he would have found her as charmingly picturesque; and her friendliness was exceedingly grateful to his overcharged nerves. But somehow she had been crowded out of the near spaces of his heart. He felt aloof through no fault of hers, and it saddened him to realize that where he saw the yawning cañon her eyes found only a level plain.

While laying in his provisions, he had hoped she might come to the eating-house to sell fish, that they might feast together in the snug security of his room. In the old days it would have proved an event of careless gaiety, romantically flavored. What had happened? All his emotions seemed tightened above the slacked strings of her easy existence, and soul-harmony was out of the question.

He asked if her father had any designs of coming to Lagville to endanger his situation or if she knew anything of his uncle's

plans relative to his future, but she shook her head.

"Pa never tells me anything. But, sure enough, I've got to go." He only sighed. "Say, John, I know something about you that you don't know. Ma told me only the other day. It's awful interesting and strange."

"Let's have it, Bettie."

"No—I won't tell you, since you ask that way," she pouted while opening the door.

He roused himself. "Then I ask you *this way!*" he exclaimed with an uncertain laugh, holding her close.

She remained very still. She whispered: "Want me to stay a little longer with you, John?"

"Of course I do; only you mustn't get into trouble with your father."

"The trouble would pass away," she murmured, "and I'd have you to think about. And I'm used to trouble. But, anyway"—she slowly drew away—"it was awful interesting what ma told me. How you'd open your eyes if I told!"

He made a gesture as if to grab her again, but she slipped into the hall.

She said: "But you don't really want me to stay. It's just to learn the secret."

"Bettie! You sha'n't say that."

"No, I won't say it; not again. Honestly, John, if I thought it would make you happier, I'd tell. But ma says it wouldn't. She said not to let you know, ever or ever. Your mother told her years ago. But if the day ever comes when I think it right for you to know, I'm going to tell, anyhow; yes, I am." She said wistfully: "Are you ever coming back here—I mean, to live?"

"But, Bettie, what could it have been? I must know, really."

He started after her, but she passed lightly to the head of the stairs. "Maybe I'll tell you—oh, certain sure I'll do whatever you want me to do, John—when you come back—to stay."

Suddenly she raised a warning arm. He understood the signal. The police were at the foot of the stairs. On tiptoe he gained his room, locked the door, and braced himself against it.

"Hello, Bettie!" called a policeman,

whose voice John recognized. "Where's our friend, John Walters?"

"I guess he's wherever he went," Bettie replied, showing her teeth in an easy smile. It was difficult to ruffle her hard-tested exterior.

"Oh, I guess not. He was right here. You must have put him in your pocket. Come, come, Bettie, play square. What have you done with him? Tell us where he is."

Bettie answered: "I can tell you what he says about it."

She drew from her bosom the letter John had written her on the eve of his escape from Old Smiley's cellar. John could distinctly hear one of the men reading it aloud to his companions, and as the old phrases came to him, he had the uncanny feeling of listening to the utterance of a dead self.

"DEAR BETTIE:

It's like going fishing without bait to leave town without telling you good-by. In the East I hope to lose myself, big as I am, for I care not for fame. Listen to my advice, my dear: keep out of the newspapers, for there's nothing to it. If I succeed in hiding behind the trees of Manhattan—that's geography for New York City—I'm going to build a little cabin down on Wall Street where the wolves can't get over into the yard. And later you'll come to me, won't you, Bettie, and be my little wife. When it's muddy, we'll clean our shoes on the skyscrapers and when times are dull we'll get on an Elevated and if the cops come nosing around in their police-boats we'll sink ourselves in a subway and pull under our periscopes. The world is fuller of girls than of boys, but there's only one I ever kissed when we said good-by, and I've set her a chair at the head of my table marked 'Bettie.' If any other lady tries to get into it, she'll get such a hard seat on the floor that she'll see you in the air looking like a big star. This isn't plain talk, but when you're in love, you wear frilled shirts:

Life will be all joy-rides, bright lights and confetti

When I am plain John Walters and have my little Bettie."

"That's a love-letter," said one of the men.

Bettie answered pertly: "I took it for such."

"It's a plain offer," said another.

"Here's the post-mark, 'New York.' He invented this poetry on the train and mailed it after he reached his destination. It's marked March 4. That shows he must have gone straight there."

"Couldn't hardly get there in that time, could he?" the first objected.

"Yes, if he didn't lose any time. That was sure a bad lead to Lagville!"

"Look here," the sergeant suddenly addressed Bettie. "We'll agree that he jumped to New York. But he was seen in town last night. Certain sure. Down on the curb. He's in this house, and you came to meet him. And I believe he's in this room."

He gave John's door a kick that made it jump on its hinges.

"Don't you dare disturb that room," Bettie cried with seeming indignation. She dropped her basket to squeeze herself between them and the portal. "You'll never go in there!"

The murky corridor was filling with curious children. Opened doors let sickly bars of light crisscross on the floor. Opposite Bettie a woman, formless and unconfined, with the lingering beauty of an overblown rose about to drop its petals, stared at the officers with dark hostility. Every face that peered under cobwebbed lintels scowled with hatred. Bettie appealed over the sergeant's shoulder to this woman whom she had never seen before.

"Can he go in there, Mrs. Flannigan?"

"God strike him dead if he does," grated the woman whose name was O'Conner.

Bettie glared at the officer with the expression of a wildcat. "Can't you leave even the dead alone?"

Mrs. O'Conner shouted, taking this hint with swift subtlety: "A poor little mite laid out for her coffin, and the next of kin to her without a cent to pay for the coffin and all! A dead child that never had no chance

in this world at all. She was hounded from the cradle and now she can't lay on her death-bed in peace!"

"Oh, the shame of it!" shrieked another woman. A wail went up from the cell-like chambers on either side.

Bettie spoke to the men appeasingly. "But you never knew the truth of it, of course. You wouldn't do as Mrs. Flannigan says if you had to cut off your right hands to keep from doing it. You're real men, I know that much."

The sergeant addressed his men gruffly: "Come along."

"Thank God," cried Mrs. O'Connor hysterically, "there's a worse world than this for them that needs it!"

At the head of the stairs they met a huge, unkempt fellow pounding laboriously upward.

"Why, hello, Blearstead!" the sergeant spoke easily. "Coming to call on your nephew?"

Blearstead stopped aghast, then shot a venomous glance at Bettie.

The officer smiled. "Don't blame the girl, she put up a plucky fight to get rid of us. I suppose the rumor that reached us about John Walters must have found its way to you. What do you think? Must be something in it, eh?"

To his men he said: "We'll go back. I don't think it right to leave little girls unattended on their death-beds. We may have to take up a subscription for that coffin among ourselves." He glanced admiringly at Bettie. "You can go, girl. You've earned it."

But Bettie stood motionless, her hand pressed to her side, her lips white.

He drew his revolver and covered Blearstead. "But I want you to stay. This is to be a sort of family party." He issued the crisp order to his men: "Break open that door!"

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.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS IN THE ARGOSY-ALLSTORY WEEKLY

WATCH FOR THE DATES—NEW SERIALS BY

Charles Alden Seltzer, Edgar Rice Burroughs, E. J. Rath, Bertram Lebhar

Who's Boss?

by



Winnie Freeman



THE prospective heir to the house of Edwards had been the subject under discussion. Robert Alexander Edwards naturally supposed it would be an heir.

"I think we'll have a private instructor for him when he's about five or six—a boy picks up such bad habits at public schools," he had made the mistake of saying.

"A boy! Who said it's going to be a boy?" Miriam had pouted. "I don't want a boy. They're such responsibilities. And besides, you can dress a little girl so much cuter."

"I'd sort of hoped it would be a boy," Robert said. "I suppose all men want a boy at one time or another. And a boy really isn't any more responsibility than a girl—all things considered. Seems to me—"

"There you go," Miriam interrupted petulantly. "You don't want anything I want since we're married. You used to agree with everything I said. Now you're all changed. I'm sure you don't love me the same as you did then. A man never loves his wife like he loves his sweetheart."

Robert knew, of course, that he loved Miriam more now than he had before they were married—that he loved her more each day, in fact. But being sure of these things himself wasn't convincing Miriam. And he did so want her to understand. He tried in his own feeble way to explain.

"I wish you wouldn't say those things, Miriam, dear. If you'd just think a minute you'd know they aren't true. You must know that I love you more than anything in the world."

"Then why don't you ever agree with me now? Why don't you want the things I want—want to do the things I want to do?"

Robert probed the most remote recesses of his mind for words with which to explain. These failing him, he resorted to a language which they both understood.

"Why don't you, dear—why don't you want the things I want?" Miriam pleaded.

"Of course I want the things you want, sweetheart," he soothed her.

"But I do so want a little girl."

"And if you want a little girl, then I want a little girl, too—and a little girl it's going to be," he replied.

And a little girl it was.

Then came the eventful time of choosing a name. Robert had held out for Miriam—for the mother. Miriam had held out for Judith, because she liked the name, she said, but principally because she had a wealthy aunt who honored that name by bearing it.

"She's got your eyes, dear, and everything—she looks just like a little Miriam—I think she really should have your name," Robert had mildly urged.

"But I don't like Miriam—you know I don't—I despise it. And besides I want

her named for Aunt Judith—it 'll mean a lot to her."

"So far as that goes, I don't give a hang about your Aunt Judith or her money, but if you want her named Judith—name her that," Robert had conceded.

He spoke almost crossly.

Miriam couldn't understand.

And not understanding, she wept copiously.

"How can you—how dare you speak to me like that!" she almost wailed. "You'd never have spoken to me like that before we were married. You don't love me like you did then—I know you don't—"

"Please—please, don't begin that again, Miriam," Robert protested. "I've told you time and again that I love you more than I ever did. I've tried to explain—to make you feel it. It may not be the same kind of unthinking love, but there's more of it, and it's stronger. Besides, I can't see what that has to do with choosing a name for the baby. I simply like Miriam, and I'd like for her to be named for you. But of course if you want Judith—why, it 'll be Judith.

II.

LITTLE Judith was one year old when Robert found himself one day taking an inventory of himself. He had just failed to land a very important contract. And he knew that there was no good reason why he should have lost it. His wares were as good as those of his competitors. Also the people letting the contract were inclined toward his firm. And Robert told himself that he had failed to land the business simply because he had let his competitors out-talk him.

The realization started him thinking. He knew that two years ago there was no young man in the brokerage business who could outtalk him. Two years ago he would not have been afraid to go up against any man in New York City when it came to landing a contract. But he seemed to have lost his power to convince others. The responsibility for this condition, he knew, was directly traceable to his domestic life.

He had become accustomed to giving in

at home. And the weakness was creeping into his office and his business. He had become so accustomed to admitting to Miriam "you're right—I'm wrong"—if not in so many words, by his every action—that he had lost, or was losing, the power to convince others that he was right—even in his business.

After communing with himself for half an hour, Robert was convinced of one thing—steps must be taken. And the first step must be taken at home and immediately.

By the time he arrived there in the evening he had figured out a pretty well founded plan of action, the paramount idea being that he was to quit letting his common sense be subservient to Miriam's whims.

He knew in his soul that it would not be an easy program to follow. Above all things in the world, he hated scenes—especially domestic scenes. But if scenes were necessary to bring back his self-assurance and to curb his financial downfall—why, scenes there'd be.

At home he found Miriam in a high state of excitement.

"Oh, I don't know what I'm going to do about everything," she began when they were seated at the table. "It's such a responsibility—being married, and having children."

"What's wrong now?" Robert Edwards asked.

"It's about little Judy, and Alice. I've simply got to have another maid. Alice can't serve as maid and nurse, too, and take proper care of Judy."

"She's been doing it, hasn't she?" he hazarded.

"Yes, but Judy's getting bigger. She'll soon be walking, and she has to be watched every minute. Only this morning, while Alice was straightening up, the little darling found a hairpin—the Lord knows where—and when I came in she had it in her mouth. Just think, Bobbie, she might have swallowed it."

"Couldn't you keep an eye on her yourself when Alice is busy? You have two servants now, and it seems to me that's enough in an apartment the size of ours."

"I—I don't know what's getting into you, Robert," Miriam interrupted. Robert could see that she was clouding up, and he steeled himself to resist a barrage of tears—the usual form of attack.

"You're—you're impossible. Do you think I'm going to stay home and play nurse when we can afford another servant—you know we can."

"Of course we can afford another servant—who said we couldn't?" he countered. His tone was firm—and he showed no signs of weakening. "It isn't a question of money, Miriam. It's the principle. It's simply that I'm tired of humoring your whims."

"My—my whims?" Miriam gasped.

"Yes, your whims!" he responded, and he looked her straight in the eyes as he spoke. "For the past year or more this house has been absolutely ruled by them. I've been a slave to them—a human parrot, caroling 'me, too—me, too'—and I'm through, Miriam; I tell you I'm through."

As he finished speaking he brought his fist down on the table with an emphatic motion that caused the family silver to rattle.

Miriam sat for a minute as one stricken dumb. Then the tears descended like a flood.

"Oh—you—you—brute!" she wailed.

"It 'll be all right about your calling me names, if you want to," unflinchingly. "I can stand that. But for the Lord's sake, Miriam, I wish you'd stop that crying—it's getting on my nerves."

Because he dared not look at her—for fear he'd weaken—he applied himself studiously to his dinner. Gosh, it was hard to see a woman cry—especially a woman one loved as he loved Miriam. But it was for her good, he told himself, and for Judith's—as well as his own.

"Keep firm, old man," he cautioned himself. "Don't weaken."

For a few minutes the silence was broken only by Miriam's sobs. Then she came to life with:

"How—how dare you sit there and eat, Robert Edwards, when I'm so—so miserable. How dare you—why do you pretend to love me—why don't you admit you

don't? You don't love me—you know you don't."

"I do love you, Miriam," he answered, with no especial emphasis.

"Yes—you love me," she wept. "You love me so much you want me to be—a nurse!"

"I do love you," he repeated.

"Well, it's a funny kind of love, Robert Edwards."

"We won't go into that again, Miriam," he interrupted, rising from the table and starting toward the door. "There's no use arguing."

"No, there's no use arguing as long as you can have things your way," she chided. "I—"

"It may be interesting to you to know that from now on I'm going to have things my way around this house—when I'm right, at least, Miriam. And you may as well understand that I'm in earnest about what I say. To begin with, we're not going to have another maid."

"And Judith will swallow hairpins and things—and die," she challenged him as he stood with his hand on the door-knob. "The Browns have a cook and two maids and a butler, and their apartment isn't any larger than ours."

"Oh, to hell with the Browns!" he flung at her.

Any protest Miriam might have uttered would have been drowned by the noise of the slamming door.

Once in his room, Robert Alexander Edwards prayed that he would have the courage to continue as he had started.

III.

THE new order of things had been in operation in the Edwards household about two months when Robert found himself one morning again taking inventory of himself. The inventory showed him quite a bit ahead of the game. The two months had brought back much of his old assurance. He was getting back his erstwhile grip on himself and the world.

True, it had been no easy road. There had been more than one scene—scenes in which he suffered much. But never once

had he given in. And Miriam, finding that she was coming out the loser in every encounter—that her tears availed nothing—was not so anxious to manifest her whims as she had been in the old days.

To be sure there had been quite a scene just two weeks before. Miriam had decided to go to the beach two weeks earlier this summer than usual. She had decreed also that Robert should accompany her. But Robert had decided otherwise. His business would not permit him to get out of town for several weeks, and he had said so conclusively.

"You go along with Alice and Judith, and get things straightened up, and I'll come down through the week when I can, and for week-ends," he told her. And Miriam had gone.

Robert was theoretically patting himself on the back for the struggle he had put forth when his office door opened and Miriam came in.

She was looking unusually well, and none of her splendor was lost on her adoring husband. It was like having the cooling breezes of the ocean wafted into his business environment.

"Just thinking about you, Miriam," he greeted her. "Gee, you're looking great. In town for the day?"

She seated herself in a big chair with the air of a person who has come for a conference, before replying.

"No, I just drove in to get a few things for to-day—for the luncheon, you know."

"By jove, you did tell me you were having a luncheon to-day. What time?"

Quite casually she removed her gloves, and began fingering the rings on her finger. Quite as casually she replied:

"Two thirty. I made it late so you could be there. If you leave town at noon—"

"But I can't do it, Miriam. It's impossible," his tone suggesting a person trying to ward off the inevitable. "I know it's a shame for a man to have to work on Saturday afternoon, but I've got an important conference."

"You—you don't mean you won't be there?" she exclaimed.

"I'm sorry, Miriam. Of course I'd put it off if I could, but I can't. The man I'm to see is here from out of town, and he's leaving to-morrow."

"But you've no right to place me in such an embarrassing position," she fenced. "Of course I thought you'd be there or I'd never have arranged the luncheon. Can't you let somebody else handle this for you? It's always your business first, and then me."

"If it's business first, and then you—it's business first, because of you," he tried to console her. "Don't you know that my wish to be successful is founded on my love for you?"

"I'm not so sure about your loving me, Robert," she replied. She had risen and was putting on her gloves. "If you loved me you'd be willing to sacrifice some of your interests for mine. If you loved me, you wouldn't want to embarrass me before my friends."

"I don't want to embarrass you, Miriam, and you know it." He went and stood beside her and took her one ungloved hand in his. "I don't want to do anything that will hurt you, dear."

"Then come," she urged.

"I can't do it, Miriam—not with this conference on. If I don't see this man, I'll lose a big contract—a very important contract."

"And that means that you won't come?" she challenged.

"It means that I can't come," he corrected her. "I can't possibly leave town before two or three. It'll take me at least two hours to drive out. The conference is for one o'clock."

"And you won't do this—for me?" Again the challenge.

"I'm sorry, dear," he met it. "But please try to believe that everything I do, I do—for you."

She accepted his proffered kiss without a word. He opened the door, and she was gone.

Robert Edwards watched her get into the elevator. Then he went back to his desk.

There was little of the air of the conqueror about him as he dropped into his

swivel chair and rested his head for a minute in his hands.

"Damn!" he said.

And the way he said it, that "damn" might have meant 'most anything.

IV.

It was exactly twenty-seven minutes after five when Robert brought his big touring-car to a stop in front of his summer home. One glance at the house told him that the last of the luncheon guests had departed. Miriam, cool and radiant, was seated in a big wicker chair on the porch, with Judith in her arms.

She put the baby down as Robert came briskly up the walk, and started to meet him.

Where Robert had expected to be met with frowns and condemnation, he was received with kisses and beaming consideration.

"Where's Alice?" he asked, sort of hedging the issue he knew must be forthcoming. "Can't she look after the baby?"

Miriam smiled as she recalled a scene when he had suggested that she take a hand at the nursing game.

"Alice is busy in the house," she answered.

She led him toward the big wicker swing, pressed him comfortably into place among the cushions, then sat down beside him, snuggling close.

"How was the luncheon?" he asked. There was something apprehensive about her gay mood, and Robert took the quickest way of ferreting the mystery.

"The luncheon? Oh, Bobbie, dear, it was great. Everybody—"

"Sorry I couldn't get here, Miriam," he began, with the air of a man feeling his way in the dark. "I—"

She made it impossible for him to continue, first with a kiss, then by putting her hand over his mouth.

"Please don't apologize, Bobbie," she said. "Don't ruin it."

"Ruin what?" he asked dazedly.

"Can't you guess?" she beamed.

"Guess what?"

"Haven't you seen?"

"Seen what, dear?"

For answer she took one of his big hands in both of her little ones, pillowed her head on his shoulder, and whispered into the folds of his shirt front:

"I'm so happy, Bobbie, dear."

Bobbie was happy too. But he was equally dazed. What sort of game was this Miriam was playing? Here he had expected to find her raving and tearing her hair, and biting holes in the atmosphere, and he found her—

"Bobbie"—this from the folds of his shirt front.

"Yes, dear."

"Bobbie, I was so afraid you'd come."

"Afraid I'd come. You mean afraid I wouldn't come."

"No, I don't, Bobbie, dear. I mean—afraid you'd come. But you didn't, and—"

She looked up into his inquiring face and smiled.

"You don't understand, stupid?"

"No, I admit I don't, Miriam—not quite."

"You haven't even suspected?"

His reply was an absolutely blank expression.

"Honestly, Bobbie, didn't you know that I was trying you out—that I was testing you?"

"Trying me out—testing me? What do you mean, Miriam?" His tone might have been taken for one of impatience had there not been so much warmth in it.

She met his question with one of her own.

"Bobbie, do you remember that night I told you I wanted a nurse for Judith—remember?"

He assured her that he did.

"Bobbie, you made me happier that night than you ever had before."

Robert, bewildered, dazed, wondering, ventured to offer a suggestion.

"What do you mean, Miriam; what are you driving at? Won't you please begin at the beginning—for the sake of a very stupid husband?"

"I'm beginning at the beginning," she answered. "The beginning was that night. Hadn't you felt that there was something

sort of topsy-turvy in our lives up until that night, Bobbie?"

Without waiting for him to reply, she continued:

"Well, I had, but I didn't know exactly what it was. I had everything I wanted—you always gave me everything I asked for. And then suddenly I discovered that night that that was what was wrong. You were letting me rule you, and I—I—well, any woman, I guess, Bobbie, dear, sort of wants to be bossed—a little."

Speaking of thunderbolts out of clear skies—which of course nobody was—that confession certainly came like one to Robert Alexander Edwards. Miriam—of all women. Miriam whom—blast his soul—he'd been loving all these months as an adorable little nagger, with very much a will of her own, wanted to be bossed, and by him.

Rapturously he gathered her into his embrace. His lips met hers in a kiss that signaled the beginning of a new era for them. Then she lay quietly in his arms. For several minutes neither of them spoke. The first words came from Robert.

"It doesn't seem quite possible, Miriam, dear. But what a tyrant you must have thought I was—the way I've acted recently."

"I've loved you for it, dear—how much you'll never know. I never loved you as much in my life as I did that night, do you remember, Bobbie; that night we were arguing about getting a nurse for Judith, and I said something about how many servants the Browns had, and you said 'To hell with the Browns,' just like that, and flew out of the room—do you remember, Bobbie?"

"It almost broke my heart to do it, Miriam—honestly."

"And it made me the happiest woman in the world," she responded.

A few minutes of pregnant silence. Then she continued:

"After that—after that night, Bobbie, I was so happy—but I was afraid it wouldn't last. I was afraid maybe you didn't mean it—wouldn't stick to what you'd said. And then—you'll forgive me, dear—I thought I'd try you out. That's

why I suggested coming down here two weeks sooner—to see if you'd come—and that's why I asked you to cancel that engagement to-day to be here for the luncheon. And now I've confessed everything except—"

"Except what, dearest?" as she hesitated.

"Except that there really wasn't any luncheon, Bobbie, dear. It was just the final test."

She sat still, waiting for him to say something. And when he didn't speak to her:

"You'll forgive me, dear—you're not angry?"

"Forgive you, sweetheart? Angry? You've made me the happiest man in the world."

V.

IN his room that night, Robert pulled from his pocket a little thin piece of paper. It was a summons to appear before the court of the little town of Millersville—half-way between the city and his summer home—to answer a charge of speeding. He tore the paper into bits and threw the scraps in the fireplace. Then he lighted the gas logs. It would never do to have Miriam see that paper.

No, Robert told himself, after the wonderful way in which fate had adjusted things, it would never do to have Miriam suspect the truth—the truth being that he had canceled his business engagement, had left New York at noon as she had requested, and but for a wary traffic cop, with more regard for the lives of cows and chickens than the time of automobile drivers, he would have been at home in ample time for the luncheon—which was not.

A smile, half cynical, wholly happy, spread across his face as he watched the little pieces of paper turn into ashes. Even yet he could hardly understand. It seemed too good to be true. His mind was filled with conflicting thoughts. He searched his rather limited vocabulary for words worthy the occasion. He selected four very short ones:

"Well, I'll be damned!"

The Mysterious Quest

by Frederick R. Bechdolt

Author of "Whose Gold?" etc.

PRECEDING CHAPTERS BRIEFLY RETOLD

WILLIAM JASPRO, a San Francisco lawyer, hired Mr. Dolan, a seafaring man without a ship, to take a Mr. Langton and his daughter and a cargo of valuable but mysterious boxes from a lonesome house on the city marshes and get them aboard Captain Wilson's ship, the Dora. Dolan had succeeded in getting the girl and her father out of the house and into a wagon, when he was set upon by two men. He knocked out one of his assailants and eluded the other in time to leap over the tailgate of the wagon.

When he finally reached the lonely dock, where a boat from the Dora was to pick them up, Dolan found a constable as well as the boat. He made short work of the constable, but when he had his charges aboard the ship, the crew began to make trouble. When Dolan found the dead body of the second mate in the hold of the ship, he was prepared for the mutineers, led by one Lewis. Worst of all in their first attack, Dolan discovered they were preparing for their next move.

With Miss Langton's help, Dolan and the skipper quelled the mutiny, but the ship was disabled and they had to make for land in the open boats. They reached a barren shore, struck camp and piled their cargo, when the crew openly showed their determination to take the boxes. The captain had ordered a beacon built on the promontory when the disaffected sailors set upon the three loyal members of the crew. Dolan and Miss Langton hastened back to camp to warn the captain of the advance of Lewis and his men with hatchets in their upraised hands.

CHAPTER XVIII.

BOATS AND BOXES.

LEWIS had been correct when he said the fog was thinning. As we struck out down the hill the difference was apparent, and by the time we reached the foot we were able to distinguish objects thirty yards away. Our chances for safety were slimmer; our only hope lay in gaining the sand dunes and keeping under cover of their first ridges.

We ran for it, and now my wound began to give me trouble. What with the exertions of the day and the lack of attention, inflammation had set in, and while we raced through shifting sands, I felt a terrible hot throbbing which dragged me down as if some one were pulling at the hurt. I had all that I could do to keep pace with

my companion before we saw the pallid dunes ahead of us. We mustered all our strength for the last burst of speed, climbed the slope and plunged down the landward side; and none too soon; as we were crossing the crest I was able to distinguish four forms up the beach, perhaps one hundred yards nearer the camp. The mutineers were hurrying toward their goal at a dog-trot.

The girl had seen them, too; but as she turned to whisper the news to me, I got a catch in my side which made me wince.

"You're hurt!" she exclaimed. I assured her it was not serious beyond the hindrance it brought to our efforts. We made what speed we could among the dunes; now climbing over an intervening ridge, again throwing ourselves prone and creeping to the downward slope. Now and

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for October 23.

again I would feel her hand under my elbow as she strove to support my ebbing strength.

"I want to ask you something," she said abruptly, as one who has had the question on her mind for a considerable time, "about my father and those boxes."

I was not able to reply, for when we crossed a new summit I could see the mutineers quite plainly. They were not making as good time as we were, for all my handicap. We had drawn almost alongside them, and the camp was perhaps a quarter of a mile ahead. When we reached the shelter of the next depression, I came back to her question.

"There's no need for you to speak about your father or the boxes to me. I'm sure your father is an honest man." I had convinced myself because I loved Langton's daughter—not from any innate conviction of Langton's honesty at all. I was, moreover, entirely satisfied with my conviction. I didn't care if Langton were the thief that circumstances proclaimed; I was with him all the way, if it led inside prison bars, because I could not be otherwise than loyal to her. I never did regret that feeling on my part, and I do not regret it now, although when I look back on it, I realize it was entirely lawless.

She heard me say this, and she made no verbal comment; but her eyes, which had been fixed on mine during the last few moments, became very bright, and that made me forget the throbbing of my wound.

Up to this time I think my motives in helping those two were plain enough. From now on emotion and not reason was in the ascendent. There had been the two passengers and the rest of us before; now there were three of us and the ship's company; that is as nearly as I can express it. And all because I knew, beyond any shadow of a doubt, that she believed her father to be honorable.

We had slipped along by a zigzag course, keeping to lower levels for some distance; now we came to a place where we must cross another ridge. We crept up cautiously, and as we gained the summit the four mutineers were not more than a hundred yards to the left of us, hurrying along the

beach; and camp lay twice that distance ahead. They caught sight of us just as I saw them.

One of them was pointing at me, and I heard his cry; and all four of them started straight toward us on a run. I did not waste time with further looking, but leaped to my feet, and the girl was up beside me in the instant. We rushed down the next slope, and I could hear their voices more plainly as we climbed the ridge beyond. There did not seem to be a living chance for us. For we raced with death behind us.

Now their hoarse breathing was audible. With my sheath knife in my hand, I turned to meet their onslaught. Then my ears were startled by a loud cry, and next I saw Captain Wilson's head topping a lofty dune. The race was won. If those four had not been craven cowards they would have had us in another second or two; but fighting face to face with their enemies was not to their fancy, even though they were the better armed. Ross appeared beside the skipper on the instant. And the two of us staggered on, to drop all but exhausted into their arms. When I got my breath and glanced round, still expecting to face our pursuers, those over prudent enemies were drawing off down toward the beach.

Ross was holding me up, and I saw Larson coming on a run. The skipper released the girl in the same moment, as she asked: "My father?" He pointed toward the camp.

We took our stations along the summit of the first dune—we four men who had survived the other honest members of the ship's roster—and while we watched our enemies I recounted what had happened. What to do now was the question, and that in a good measure depended on what our enemies would attempt. But they seemed content to abide down there on the beach.

"They've something up their sleeve for to-night," the skipper asserted as dusk began to deepen. "Stand by and do the best we can when they start in; that's all the plan I'm able to propose."

I was assigned guard duty for one of the early watches, and before the night descended Miss Langton had dressed my wound.

I stood my turn at guard, keeping to the seaward dune, which was quite lofty, and gave me a good vantage point from which to look and listen for movement from the mutineers. I could hear them plainly enough down there on the beach by the two yawls. They were talking quietly among themselves, but were making no attempt to conceal their presence there. What they intended would come later, and when I went to my blankets it was with a sense of impending disaster which I could not shake off for the life of me.

Anxiety and the tugging pains in that inflamed knife-wound kept me wakeful. I lay there, staring upward at the great yellow stars, hearing all manner of fanciful sounds, until sleep became impossible. I arose and crept to the summit of the seaward dune and found the skipper lying flat. He whispered to me that there had been no sign of trouble.

"Still down there on the beach," he told me. "I can hear 'em every now and then." As he said it, I caught the sound of their voices where he had indicated. I lay there beside him for a little while and tried to pierce the darkness, but my eyes were not equal to the task. I could barely make out the great heap of the ship's stores which overshadowed the pile of leaden boxes so completely that the latter were merged with it. Not a minute passed but I fancied I could see some one stealing along. I told Wilson as much.

"Aye," he answered with his lips close to my ear, "I've seen a matter o' fifty men more or less down there to-night, only to know it wasn't so. Better ye go back to your blankets. Ye'll need all the rest ye can get before we're through."

I took his advice and crawled down into the trough, and in the course of an hour or so I saw Ross go up to the summit of the dune and relieve the skipper on sentry. Some time afterward I awoke from a troubled sleep with a start to feel a hand upon my face.

"Steady." It was the captain whispering as I leaped up. "Ross sneaked down and give me word they're movin' toward us."

I drew my knife and the two of us went

on hands and knees to the crest where the sailor was waiting. Larson was there before us.

"They've crep' up clost," the engineer whispered. "Now!" I felt his fingers gripping my arm.

They could not have been forty feet away when he gave the warning, and I thought I could distinguish a moving shape close to the sand. A moment later I was sure that there were several of them.

There followed an interval during which there was no sound save our own breathing and the dull undertone of the slumbering surf. Occasionally the slight backwash hissed along the sands.

Then something stirred in the dark where the great heap of ship's stores enshadowed everything. Just a little scraping sound, after which the silence resumed. Later on it was followed by a clump as if some one had dropped a weight on the sands.

"Stand by for a rush. They'll be on us in another minute," the skipper whispered. But he was wrong. They did not come. I saw some signs of movement down on the sands, but the figures which were close to the earth vanished presently; and then we caught several faint noises by the two yawls.

All of this was maddening, and I would have given a great deal had we only been in a position where no one's life but his own depended on the outcome. We dared take no such risks and had to bide here.

And while we waited the shadows of moving forms approached from the direction of the beach. The little hushed sounds came again by the heap of ship's stores; then the vague forms reappeared to melt into the night down toward the water-line.

The truth was beginning to come over me, and I was about to speak my suspicions when a new sound smote my ears. A gurgle of water. It had been growing on my senses slowly for some time.

Captain Wilson was creeping down the slope toward the heap of stores by the time he had whispered the command for the rest of us to follow. He was the first to reach the water cask. And as he muttered the oath which the horror of his discovery

brought from his lips, the waterside became alive with sounds.

There was no mistaking those mingled noises. The mutineers were launching the two yawls.

"They've tapped the water cask," the skipper shouted.

So cleverly had they hidden the sounds of leakage after withdrawing the plug, by heaping sand before the vent, that the precious fluid had been pouring out for all of the last half-hour, while they were busy at their stealthy task between the casks and the yawls. And now the thump of the oar-locks came to tell us how they were rowing away.

Ross was the one to announce the consummation of the moment's news. "Them boxes!" he cried. The whole heap had vanished.

CHAPTER XIX.

LEWIS'S LAST LOOK.

I HAVE tried my best in this tale to avoid all those technicalities of my trade, which still is following the sea, although my ventures are of a different nature now than they were at the time when these things took place; but there are some matters pertaining to the deep water and the ships which sail beyond sight of land, which no landsman would readily understand unless they were explained to him. Here I must pause to recall the character of our foremast hands. These fellows were the dregs of San Francisco's city front whom drink and hard usage had debased to the lowest level.

The skipper struck a light, and that in itself brought a feeling of huge relief. We paid dearly for it, but the sneaking about in the darkness and the holding of our breaths was done away with. We appraised the extent of the catastrophe, and as we appraised, we made our reckoning on how it had been brought about.

While we were lying there guarding the lives of ourselves and our passengers, Lewis had improved his opportunity. He had led his three companions from the beach to the cache, two round trips in all, and

they had managed to carry away all ten of the leaden boxes. Some one must have done a good deal of sweating for a single box was a goodly load, and the thieves had been obliged to bear them off on hands and knees. The height of the heap of ship's stores had helped to conceal their movements and had covered the depletion of the smaller pile. It had been simple enough, now that we knew what had happened.

They had not taken any food. At first this puzzled me, but the skipper reminded me that plenty of provisions were left aboard the wreck and the sea was calm. As he spoke we harkened; the thump-thump of the row-locks came across the water in the direction of the reef where the Dora was stranded.

"Easier to go aboard and take on what canned goods they need than to risk fight-in' for 'em on land," he said grimly.

The pulling of the plug in the cask was pure wantonness of course; cold-blooded murder was the motive; and we knew that no one but the leader could have been capable of that. He had taken this means of killing us off, and it looked as if he might succeed; for the cask was not more than a quarter full when we replugged the hole.

While we were overhauling things I learned how badly we had fared. The captain's sea glasses were missing. The binoculars were the only thing apparently which had been removed from the heap of stores.

The thump-thump of the straining row-locks stopped a minute or two later; a voice floated in across the waters giving some sort of an order. Then silence.

"Boardin' the wreck," Ross explained. "I wonder wot 'll come when they broach them boxes?"

That had not occurred to me, but I saw right off that the sailor was right. They would be opening those leaden packets now. I was wondering what their greedy eyes would see when I caught a little pinpoint of light in the midst of the darkness which hid the placid waters of the bay.

Just then Langton and the girl came among us and I heard the skipper notify-

ing the fugitive of his loss. He took it very quietly; in the light of Captain Wilson's lantern I saw his face as he looked into his daughter's upturned eyes and smiled. It was a gentle smile, patient as if the man had grown accustomed to bearing disappointment. She patted his waxen hand. Even the skipper, whose obstinate dislike of his passenger persisted to the last, showed embarrassment as he looked on that mute display of affection.

Two or three pin-points of light were dancing about out there on the wreck. I pulled my watch from my pocket and had a look; it was well along after five o'clock, and as I glanced eastward I saw the whiteness on the sky's edge above the crest of the ragged mountains. Dawn was coming on.

"Hark!" Larson cried, and pointed seaward.

Something was happening aboard the schooner. It all came faint with distance, but unmistakable in its suggestion of turmoil. A voice, then another, followed the upraised voices, a banging as of heavy footsteps on the canted deck. Then just a barely perceptible interval of dead silence, terminated by a shrill cry which I would have taken for the call of some frightened sea-fowl had I not been certain that it was one of those men. The lights were moving.

We stood there for a long time and watched them zigzagging as they grew fainter with the increasing of the dawn's radiance. Now and again the stillness was broken by the rattle of a block or the noise of boxes being dragged about. Evidently they were provisioning the two yawls.

When that wild outcry had come across the hidden waters I had seen the girl grip her father's arm and he nodded as if in confirmation of some unspoken comment. They stood a little ways off to one side from us, watching the darkness as if they looked for some unknown redemption.

The dawn came on. By imperceptible degrees the shore line emerged from the thinning shadows. The schooner grew visible, a blot at first against the surface of the gently heaving swells, and then took shape until the tilted masts were outlined.

Of a sudden, as briskly as an expected guest who has managed to make his appearance during the moment when the attention of those awaiting him has lapsed, the sun shot forth.

Instantly the placid bay turned deep blue, the crescent beach gleamed like burnished gold; the dots of moving men upon the Dora's deck were distinguishable. We strained our eyes to watch them.

The skipper and I stood there on the sands striving to make out what was going forward, but Ross shouted the big news while the rest of us were still uncertain. "A boat," he cried, "and coming ashore." One of the yawls was drawing off in the direction of the beach.

"Now," the skipper said to me, "that's main strange. What d'ye make of it, Mr. Dolan?" I shook my head. It was beyond my conjecture. Then came a fresh riddle. There was only one man in the yawl. The second yawl was putting off to sea.

It shot out from under the schooner's uptilted bows and we caught the flash of the oar-blades as they came up dripping water. The rowers were pulling hard as men who want to get away from something. Now we stared at the outgoing boat, and it grew smaller every time it rose to the crest of one of the low swells. A little speck of brownish black, it dropped into a shallow trough and we turned our eyes again to the other boat.

This one had barely moved. And as we looked we saw now that there was no sign of flashing oar, no movement on the part of any one. And only one man was aboard.

"By the livin' man!" the captain muttered. "He's adrift!" Then with a queer catch of his breath and a smothered oath: "No. Not that. I see the oars. But why—" The question trailed off with a quick indrawn breath.

To my mind there was something peculiarly strange about that boat. Larson, Ross and the skipper all stood peering at it, their faces set. Miss Langton and her father had turned their backs as if they could not endure the suspense longer; the girl was helping him up the slope of the

first dune and presently they vanished over the crest.

"Drawing off," the captain told me some moments afterward, "toward the cape. Now why does he leave her drift?" The current was carrying the small boat over in the direction of the point where we had started that beacon on the afternoon before. In another hour she would drift on the rocks. And we needed that yawl; it might mean all our lives. We must get her at any risk.

One of us must swim out to her, and the task fell to me. I stripped to my waist, kicked off my shoes, and took my sheath knife in my teeth.

One could not tell what might happen when I came to place my hand on that gunwale. I made up my mind that if there was to be trouble, I would go prepared.

I waded through the breakers and struck out, with the bite of the salt water on that wound like hot vinegar. But the swells were low and even; the water pleasantly warm, and the distance not more than three hundred yards. I had only that current to look out for; the set of the tide was carrying me over toward the point and the yawl was almost straight out toward the sea from where I had started. So every time I came to the summit of a swell I took a look to get my bearings, then plunged onward with lowered head.

Every time I looked the yawl and the man were plainer. But he was sitting a little askew, and his head was bowed so that I could not see his face. I recognized him at last. It was Lewis.

My heart slowed up a little at that, and I think I faltered in my stroke. The man was up to any sort of game, capable of any manner of ambush, and I had plenty of evidence that he was more than anxious to add my life to those which he and his fellows had taken. Now when I lowered my head and buffeted the water I had an uncanny feeling that his eyes were upon me; that he only turned his head away when I took a look in his direction, and spent the intervals in watching me.

For that very reason I made myself keep to my swimming longer this time than I had before. I did not want to yield to

the almost overpowering desire to get my eyes on him, lest, yielding, I should grow cowardly. And I made a greater distance than I was aware.

I came to the crest of a swell and slackened my stroke to look. The yawl was in the trough below me, and I was staring down into the mutineer's eyes. Their reddened rims were terrible; but more terrible was the grin which revealed both rows of his discolored teeth. In the same instant the surge passed on under me and I shot down upon the boat.

I flung another glance upward as I swept alongside, and I gripped the gunwale with my left hand to save myself from being run down. We were rising to the crest of the next swell. My knife was in my other fist already. And my eyes met the eyes of the man who had sought to kill us all.

The pallor of those eyes which had struck me when I had seen them a few moments ago was the first discovery in that meeting. They were sightless, glazed.

And the grin—it was a fearful thing to see, for it was born itself of fear which must have come over him in his last moments—was fixed by death.

He sat there, huddled, his body askew, propped up by leaden boxes, and a leaden box upon his lap. The hilt of a knife protruded between his shoulder-blades.

He swayed a little with the heaving of the sea, and, swaying toward me, he seemed to leer. It was as if, having learned the secret of the contents of that box, whose broken iron straps showed plainly there on his lap, he was gloating over the knowledge which had turned the rage of his mates against him and brought him to his death. I hung there by the gunwale for some moments. I was a little sick.

Finally I managed to climb on board.

CHAPTER XX.

THE LITTLE WISP OF SMOKE.

THE leaden boxes held the dead mutineer upright; but I knew there was more than that purpose in the manner of their stowing. There was a grim, sardonic jest played on the helpless rem-

nant of mortality, and to make the point plainer the three slayers had laid the opened packet in his lap. It was as if they had said: "You wanted them so badly; well, here they are; keep them."

But that was not all. Those fellows knew the set of the tide at this hour, and that the yawl, when cast adrift, would float inshore; they must have reckoned on its coming back to us. And the joke was meant for us as well as for the dead man who had led them into this affair. I marveled at the depth of hatred, the extent of the malevolence which had prompted this bit of devilish ingenuity.

No doubt about it. Disappointment had roused that feeling. Bursting open the box, in the full expectation of looking on gold, they had found—what?

What *had* they found? What had they sent back to us with the dead man? Now it looked as if disappointment was not alone, as if some other strong emotion—perhaps repugnance—had led them to the murder and what followed. Indeed, the disillusionment must have been powerful and sudden to bring that sequel.

Facing the stern, I faced the dead man. It seemed as if he were mocking me, as if he knew what was still to come to all of us; and, knowing, grinned because he had won. It was the fancy of a sick man. The sun was coming down hot already on my bared head; my wound was throbbing terribly. I felt the fever leaping through my veins as I rowed on.

And when I beached the yawl at last, leaping out into the sleepy wash, I reeled uncertainly; I was about to fall when Wilson caught me.

He was the first to reach the boat, but Larson and Ross were hard at his heels. I do not think that what they saw surprised them at all; they had been watching me all the way in, and the knowledge must have begun to dawn on them when I climbed on board.

They unloaded the leaden boxes, piling them in a heap above the high-water line. They did not so much as make a move to open the one with the broken fastenings, but placed it on the pile.

I did not help them. Not that day, nor

the next, nor the next after. The wound which Lewis had dealt me had laid me out completely. And if I could tell you just what passed, I would not; for my few memories are such as I do not care to recall: utter helplessness and the crawling presence of the fever in my body.

There was just one picture on which I like to look back. I often see it to this day: the girl's face looking down into mine, very close to mine; her eyes filled with solicitude; her lips moving as she spoke softly, and her little hand holding a pannikin of water to my lips. It must have happened more than once—many times, I dare say—but I have only the one vision in my memory.

On the fourth day I awoke with my head ringing like a bell, but my mind clear enough. I got to my feet before that morning was over, only to make a fresh discovery. Our ship's company was again divided.

The division was as sharply marked as it had been during the days of the mutiny, and although there was no deadliness of intent, there was something which was very close to out-and-out hatred. Ross, Larson, and the skipper were arrayed against Langton and his daughter as unmistakably as Lewis and his followers had been arrayed against the rest of us.

Just how it had crystallized I do not know, for I have not spoken of the matter to any of them since that day of my recovery. But you will remember how it had been engendered aboard the *Dora*, and how it had grown during our first day ashore, when Langton tried to speak to the captain about those leaden boxes. I have an idea that after I brought the yawl ashore the two groups simply pulled apart.

The pile of boxes down there near the high-water line was the thing that kept the feud alive. I do not think that any of the three seafaring men ever passed them without a scowl or a muttered oath; and it was plain enough on such occasions that they were thinking of Langton—Langton, Honduras, and our flight from San Francisco Bay.

The captain, the engineer, and the sailor had done their duty as they saw it by their

ship and its passengers—aye, and by that hated cargo—and they felt that in doing so, in suffering what they had suffered, they were helping a thief. They felt that the girl was suffering in her turn for her father's sins.

And knowing that they felt thus, she despised them for it. There was no dodging the issue. I had my choice of factions, and I took it. Even if I had owned no love for Dorothy Langton, I could not have turned away from her after she had ministered to me. My declaration came when we castaways gathered for our noontime meal. The three seafarers filled their plates at the little fire and withdrew to one side; Langton and his daughter did the same. And now the fire was between the two parties. I had scant appetite; I poured out a cup of coffee, took a ship's biscuit, and—I joined the two passengers.

The girl said nothing, but gave me a look which made me thankful I had done what I did. Her father smiled faintly, diffidently; he was a long ways from being well yet. And then the meal went on in silence.

No words passed between me and the skipper on the subject, but beginning with that afternoon he treated me with a marked punctiliousness, and when he had anything to say to me his words came cold and formal. As for Larson and Ross, they simply withdrew from me from that time on. Such things seem childish under ordinary circumstances, but they are common enough when people are thrown together in the wilderness.

Our situation was an ugly one. The water was low. There was next to no hope of our being picked up. It looked as if we must be taking to the boat and running our chances of capsizing offshore. The nearest port was Ensanada, something like one hundred and fifty miles to the northward. It was a toss-up whether we would be able to make it, even with fair weather holding on.

Life passed in a dreadful routine during those days. But thirst was always with us. Noontime we ate our second meal; with dusk came the third gathering by the campfire, a separate group on either side. Every

morning one of us took his turn at watching on the hill where that beacon was now built. Every noon he was relieved by another who stayed there until the coming of dusk. And that was all there was to do.

On the fourth noon I was going to the knoll as usual, wondering whether there would be any hope of the overladen yawl weathering those high seas off the capes when we set out the next day for Ensanada. I passed the mound in the sand dunes which marked the grave of Lewis. My mind turned, in spite of my efforts to keep off of the subject, to that heap of boxes. And that brought up the question of Langton. It is hard to hold yourself loyal to a man in whom you do not believe, in whose honor you cannot pin your faith, no matter how much you would like to do so. Yet I could not dislike him, either; there was something about him that appealed to my sympathies; and that in itself would have made me less uncompromising than the skipper and his companions, even if I had not been pulled by my new love for the girl.

I was trying to reenforce my belief in Langton's honesty. I reviewed the whole affair from the beginning; but there was no use trying to bolster up a case for him. And I loved his daughter. As I thought of her my heart leaped within me and my head went back. I did not care what her father was; if she were standing by him, well, then, I would continue to do so. And that was all there was to it.

While I was thinking on these things I had traveled from the grave of the mutineer to another grave. I halted beside the mound where Wilson, Larson, and Ross had buried their little cook. My mind reverted to that afternoon in the fog and the things that had taken place then.

Some one was coming up behind me. I turned at the sound of the footsteps and faced Dorothy Langton. Neither of us said anything for some moments, but the two of us stood there side by side, looking at the grave of the cook, whose fate we two had come so close to sharing, and I remembered how love had come to my knowledge when death passed so near to me on that other afternoon.

In silence we started to climb the hill, and Ross, whose turn on watch had expired, came down past us with a hand to his cap in deference to the girl's presence, but no word of greeting. The two of us gained the summit. My eyes went out to sea, and I scanned the gleaming spread of waters for some sign of a passing vessel. When I was assured that there was none, I looked down into her face. She smiled up at me.

"I came," she said then, "to ask you something. Why don't you believe—as Captain Wilson does, and those others?"

I did not speak for some moments. Why, indeed? I knew why. I knew—rather on the other hand—that I did come near to believing as they did. And as I looked into her eyes the temptation was strong upon me to say: "Because I love you."

"Because I can't help believe in your father," I answered. It was partly true, anyhow. And it was pleasant to see her eyes lighten as I uttered the words.

The habit of silence had grown strong upon all of us members of the ship's company during these days ashore. We two were in its grip. We seated ourselves there at the summit of the low cliff and gazed out across the sea; and I noticed that her eyes were fixed to the northward with a resolute hope in them. And when they strayed into the south, apprehension showed like a shadow beneath her long lashes.

But as for me, I kept my eyes roving first one way and then the other. It was my duty to look out for a sail, and, when one came, to kindle the beacon in the hope that the smoke might attract attention. Then to raise the white flag which had been fashioned from a bit of sail-cloth and two lashed oars. Yet I hoped with her that the sail might come from the north—if it should come at all, which seemed beyond all likelihood now. Luck was not with us.

Well, luck is a strange thing; it comes when you least expect it, and it often comes in a manner that you would not reckon on. I was the one who owned the sharpest eyes. And I was the one who looked most of-

ten—as I have said—to the southward. But Dorothy Langton was the one who first caught sight of the little wisp of smoke coming over the horizon where it curved in to meet the coast-line.

She uttered what sounded like a sob. And when I had seen what she saw—the mark of the advancing vessel—I glanced down at her and read the grief that the discovery had brought.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE MAN WITH THE SPOILED EYE.

HOPE dies hard in all of us. When I saw that thread of smoke crawling up from the southward I began to plan to cheat unkind fate. Here we had striven all along this road from the pink house on the marsh to the coast of Baja California, fleeing, fighting, enduring; we had put our enemies behind us, to encounter new ones, and battled against these only to run afoul of grimmer perils than murderous men; and, facing the dangers of thirst and starvation, we had—come to this.

For rescue meant return to San Francisco. Only the coastwise steamers, bound to and from that port, passed close enough to this place to be discernible.

How could we get around this ending to our cruise? How avoid being brought back to the port from which we had fled with those leaden boxes?

Well, here we were, we two, alone on the hilltop. And the camp behind the crescent beach was beyond the sight of the oncoming vessel. As I stood staring at the darkening thread of smoke from her funnels, I realized how the issue could be avoided.

I needed only to refrain from kindling that beacon and lifting the signal and she would pass on northward up the coast. I confess that I wrestled with that temptation for some minutes. The sight of Dorothy Langton's stricken face made me forget the things that I owed to the other members of our company during that time. It seemed better that we should face the dangers toward which we were looking—the

likelihood of death in an overladen open boat—than to be carried back to San Francisco now.

So I gazed southward at the smoke-line, and I did not move; and she stood beside me in silence. Once I glanced down at her face, and saw the pallor in her cheeks, the lips pressed tightly together, the tears gathering in her eyes.

And then there came back to me the knowledge of the duty which I could not shirk. There are some things which are greater than love, and fair dealing with one's fellow men is one of these. I knew now that, if I were to refrain from lighting that heap of wood, love would itself turn to bitterness.

So I struck the match and touched it to the whittled shavings at the base of the pile, and in silence I watched the little flame climb, growing as it ascended until it was roaring among the fagots. The smoke column shot upward, a straight line of dense black, against the cloudless sky.

"It is the only way," I said.

She nodded, and in silence she smiled bravely up at me. And then she pointed to the lashed oars with the white cloth; and I raised the signal.

We waited, watching the distant vessel's smoke.

And while we bided there, holding our eyes on the oncoming ship as the two masts crept up over the sky-line and the hull slowly revealed itself, it struck me that she was keeping unusually close to the coast; that she was really off her course. The possibility that she had picked up some news of the departing mutineers occurred to me; that would account for her creeping shoreward where she could search for further signs of the schooner or ourselves.

Now she had caught our signal. For she was coming straight on, and the sudden blackening of the cloud which poured from her funnels showed that she was putting on speed. We had done all that there was for us to do.

"We may as well be heading back for camp," I said.

She sighed, and I wondered, as she turned to go with me, whether she was taking it amiss that I had done the only

thing there was to do. But when we had gotten about half-way down the slope she answered my unspoken thought.

"I'm glad it was you," she said simply, "for I would not have been brave enough to make that signal."

I did not make any reply to this, for I was thinking that perhaps there was, after all, a chance for us. It was one in a hundred—I knew that, for I knew the ways of coastwise vessels—but the fact remained that sometimes northbound steamers did touch at Ensanada; and if this one would not be making that obscure little port of its own accord, there was still the possibility of inducing her skipper to do so.

"You're thinking that perhaps we've some hope yet?" she asked me, and the question startled me, hitting as it did the truth.

I nodded, and I told her what was in my mind.

Her eyes brightened at once and the color came back into her face.

"I'll tell my father," she said, "and—if we can do that—" She smiled up at me. "We owe so much to you already," she ended with a little catching of her breath.

As we returned to camp Captain Wilson, Ross, and Larson were on their way to meet us, and walked back the better portion of the distance in our company.

For the first time since we had been together, we talked to one another without constraint. The feud was done with—for the time.

I will pass by the final ordeal of our waiting; when the steamer showed standing by outside the little bay, until the two boats which put off from her, visible now on a tossing crest, vanishing now in the trough of the sea, reached our gleaming beach. We men ran out in the wash, grasped the gunwales, and dragged them up inshore.

The steamship came with news of the mutineers. She had picked up the yawl early in the day, some distance down the coast, bottom side up. Discovery of the tragedy which had overtaken the trio while they were fleeing from the scene of the murder had caused the vessel to change

her course and search along shore for some signs of shipwreck. In any event they must have sighted the *Dora*, now breaking to pieces on the reef, and come to take us on board.

A blocky second officer with a weather-beaten face and pig's eyes were in charge of the two boats. I noticed when he stepped ashore how those small eyes of his went straight to the heap of leaden boxes, and although he never said a word about them, it was quite plain that the sight of them had set him to thinking hard. A certain stiffness in his manner also struck me as unpleasant. But these impressions were blotted out by the stirring incidents of our departure.

All of us talked back and forth like old and tried companions; there was a pleasantness in this new intimacy which warmed one's heart. Even Langton and Captain Wilson interchanged something like good-natured congratulations.

And Dorothy Langton, who had taken her father to one side promptly on our arrival from the hill, to tell him of my plan of being set ashore at Ensanada, seemed to have forgotten enough of her dislike of the skipper to part with some of her iciness toward him. It was a warming interlude. But when we came on board the steamer—or soon afterward, at any rate—the old conditions returned.

There were, of course, the inevitable questions to be asked and answered. Captain Wilson faced the liner's skipper in the latter's stateroom and told his story; and when he came out he almost ran against me, talking with Dorothy Langton. His eyes rested on us for a moment with something like disfavor, and then traveled to her father, who was seated in a steamer-chair near by.

Soon afterward the girl and her father had an interview with the captain. When they left his stateroom Dorothy rejoined me.

"He says," she told me quietly, and I could see the worry in her eyes, "that the steamer is going to Ensanada; but there is something about him—I do not know what it is—something in his way of talking—that makes me afraid."

I tried to reassure her, but for the life of me I could put no ring of conviction in my voice. Something was coming, something unpleasant. I was morally certain of it. The manner in which that second officer had looked at the leaden boxes and then at us; the manner of Captain Wilson; and, later on, the manner of the ship's captain when he had me in for a talk—all were disquieting. Some one had cards up his sleeve.

As for my story—I kept strictly to the facts. And as I recited the tale I realized how it must sound; there was only one construction to be placed on Langton's conduct and the presence of those boxes.

Still, Ensanada was in Mexican territory, and there was no formal charge against either of the *Dora*'s passengers. I could not see what the skipper could do, save to allow the two to go ashore if they so chose. It was his business to report the entire matter when he came to San Francisco, and that was all there was to it.

Evening had come when something happened which aroused all my apprehensions anew. It began with the steamer changing her course abruptly. And it terminated with several loud blasts of the whistle. As soon as I could do so without display of suspicious haste, I excused myself and went out on deck.

Sure enough, there lay another vessel's lights off our port bow. And she was lying to. We had signaled her. I went to the rail.

The rattle of blocks and the whine of tackle followed the stopping of our engines. A boat went overside, carrying that same second officer with the pig's eyes.

A quarter of a mile away the lights of the biding steamship cast particolored streaks upon the ocean.

While I lingered at the rail I became conscious of some one beside me. Langton was standing close by, gripping the rail with his two waxen hands; beyond him I got sight of the girl. We looked across her father and into each other's eyes. But neither of us said anything. Both of us were dreading something—and what that thing was we did not know. Which made the dread all the more terrible, which made

the interval of waiting for the return of the boat all the harder to endure.

The pin-point of lantern light showed at the crest of a lofty swell. It hovered there for a moment, then it vanished as the boat descended into the trough. Some seconds passed, and then it reappeared, to disappear again. And at every fresh appearance it became plainer, larger. Now we could distinguish the forms of men, and soon we heard their voices from the shadows under us.

"Now. Look out, there! Hold on a second!"

There was an interval of silence. Some

one had chosen the wrong moment to leave the small boat and grip the ladder which hung down the vessel's steep flank. The voices rose again: "Easy there. Now you make it."

And this time he did. Some one was climbing up.

Out of the darkness he came slowly toward the light, revealing himself as long and lank and dark, his face a blur of whiteness which in turn resolved itself into lines and lineaments when the light shone fairly upon it.

I knew the man who was boarding us. It was the man with the spoiled eye.

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 Snow Bath

by Frank A. Halverson

THERE'S Trapper Reuben and his dog."

The surprised ejaculation startled the stillness of the big camp room as Duane Hempfield sprang into the roaring snow-storm that was raging through the white-laden trees of the Great North Woods.

"They're not much to look at," commented S. Ferdinand Stokes as he joined the group of hunters at the window. "After what Duane's been saying about this fellow, one would expect to see something better."

The hunters of the Golden Arrow Camp gave S. Ferdinand a silent glance of disgust. The unspoken language of their eyes said mutely that S. Ferdinand was not a good sport, nor the kind of a fellow they could be with on a hunting trip.

The truth of the matter was that Reuben

and his dog Patches were not much to look at. They were not showy or classy. Reuben's clothes were heavy woolen, torn and patched, but comfortable and warm. A coon-skin cap protected his head and his ears, thick mittens covered his hands from the stinging Northern wind that scourged the hills and valleys of the Golden Arrow Camp, and his feet were encased in heavy felt boots with Mackinaw rubbers. The whole assortment gave him a kind of a bundleman's appearance.

On the white trail outside of the camp, Duane was petting Patches endearingly. He was hunched in the snow and he was greeting the fine, upstanding dog, who held his keen, intelligent head proudly as only a Kentucky fox-hound can, and one who has the breeding and blood of the best Walker

dogs that have made their kind famous wherever sport for sport's sake is followed by those who love the chase for the deep baying of the regal hounds who stick to the trail of the elusive Reynard unceasingly.

"So that's the dog," said S. Ferdinand sullenly, "who's to make the rest of the pack look sick. He's the kingpin, eh? The dog that can pick the scent out of the air without seeing the track? But Duane had been kidding us. That dog's an April-fool joke. Take it from me, he's a mongrel, pure and simple."

The fellows listened to S. Ferdinand with disgust on their faces. In the party of clean sports he was a misfit. Unfortunately, S. Ferdinand had been invited by Duane, who was the owner of the Golden Arrow Camp because of kinship to him. But S. Ferdinand had succeeded in making himself obnoxious by his loud boasting from the moment of his arrival.

Nothing suited him unless he had something to do with it. Everything that he possessed was the best. His two dogs, Jip and Zip, were, of course, the most perfect fox trailers that would ever chase over the snowy stretches of the Northland. Hence, S. Ferdinand's reference to Patches as a mongrel. However, the hunters of the Golden Arrow Camp smiled knowingly.

Duane had been telling them during the storm that had kept them from hunting that during the last year's hunt a trapper by the name of Reuben and his dog Patches had been the sensation of the Golden Arrow Camp, and it was upon Duane's invitation that Reuben and Patches were now coming to join in the hunt.

"Look at him!" shouted S. Ferdinand.

Through a cleared space of the frost-rimmed window the hunters saw Reuben carefully examining Patches's feet. From the padded toes he dug pieces of ice. Patches growled a satisfied approval. When his feet were freed from the chilling snow and ice, Reuben led Patches to his warm kennel.

"A real horseman," said Jim Rowland, "always looks after his horse first and a good hunter does the same with his dog. So I'm thinking that we're going to see something in this dog Patches."

The rest of the hunters nodded their approval excepting S. Ferdinand, who smiled with a self-satisfied air of "I'll show him up."

That evening, by the great, roaring fire, Reuben told hunting tales of the North woods. The mighty wind that had drooned the song of the forest was dying down into a swaying sigh that echoed faintly over the ridges and hills. A gentle snow was falling soft and gracefully over the wooded landscape. The dull, broken winter clouds, scurrying underneath the white moon, whose beams gilded the Golden Arrow Camp, presaged a good day for the sly, red fox that would now be out seeking a satisfying meal of rabbits or wood mice and thereby leave his trail imprinted in the soft, clinging snow.

Before turning in for the night Reuben went out to have a look at the weather and to see if Patches was comfortable. When the camp door closed on him, S. Ferdinand said rather pompously:

"Duane, I don't think much of this fellow and his dog. He's a frost."

Duane did not heed S. Ferdinand at all. S. Ferdinand was going to say something more when Reuben appeared from the outside and he checked himself quickly. Reuben's heavy clothes were flecked with snowflakes that sparkled like diamonds in the gleam of the camp light.

"S. Ferdinand's a coward, too," whispered Jim Rowland to Duane as they turned in for the night.

With the first gray smudge of dawn streaking across the sky, Reuben sprang out of his bunk. Shortly a roaring fire was blazing in the open hearth. On a dish-pan Reuben beat a sleep-banishing tattoo. The hunters tumbled out as Reuben, from the open door, called that: "Tracking's fine today."

A hasty breakfast, and with shotguns shouldered the hunters were ready. The woodlands lay white and inviting before them. The hounds tugged at their leashes—all excepting Patches. He knew what the day held in store for him. He remained quiet, saving his strength. The chase, as he had run it many times, would call for all of

his endurance. He knew the ways of the mountain fox. They were hard. Through the tangled blackberry briars he would lead the pack, into the most inaccessible places he would take them to elude his pursuers; over hills and valleys he would run until a lucky shot ended the chase, or perchance his burrow under some gigantic stone would save his life from the pursuing hounds.

Patches was well acquainted with his sly ways and therefore he waited patiently for the unlatching of the chain that would set him free.

From the clubhouse the hunters filed silently. The rosy brilliancy of a clear winter day was painted on the western sky in beams of yellow light that sparkled from the rapidly rising sun. The dogs were pulling the hunters ahead in their eagerness. Leading the party was S. Ferdinand, whose two thoroughbreds, Jip and Zip, were barking in their enthusiasm to strike the trail.

Reuben and Patches brought up the rear. Hardly had a hundred yards been covered before Patches stopped; his nose pointed toward the hillside, over which a mild winter breeze was stirring. The dog stood still, sniffing at some familiar scent in the air. His tail took on a grand pendulum swing and soon a loud baying came from his throat.

"Wait a minute," called Reuben. "Patches is saying that a fox is on yonder hill."

S. Ferdinand halted the party with a malicious laugh.

"Likely a pole-cat," sneered he with a superior air.

Reuben's weather-tanned face flushed at the subtle insult to his dog's intelligence, then he replied with quiet calm that Patches wasn't in the habit of noticing pole-cats or other varmints when on the chase. He furthermore added that he would let Patches go and if he didn't strike a fox track inside of five minutes that he would "chaw" his coon-skin cap. S. Ferdinand took him up promptly. Watch in hand, he began counting the seconds as Patches, with a bark of delight, dashed into the underbrush. The rest of the hounds set up a howl of disapproval when they saw Patches mounting up the hillside.

"One minute," called S. Ferdinand.

The silence of the mountain ranges, white in the majestic glory of King Winter's holiday attire, remained unbroken as S. Ferdinand shouted gleefully: "Two."

Duane kept his eyes on Reuben's immobile face.

"Three!" Patches was gone. No sound had come from him so far.

"Four!" Get your cap off for the chaw-in' mimicked S. Ferdinand gladly.

But the woodlands rang in a mighty "Au-u-uo! Au-u! Au!" before he could count five. Patches was off on the trail. His silvery voice awakened echoes that rang from frost-rimmed crags to wooded ridges. He had traveled far to strike the trail. His nose had been true, and Reuben's faith in his ability had not been misplaced.

"Don't get excited!" shouted S. Ferdinand meanly. "Our cocksure friend might have to do the chawin' yet. Perhaps it's a rabbit."

But the hunters scrambled up through the underbrush on the tracks that Patches had made in mighty leaps. His course had been straight. He had done no trailing, simply followed the scent that he felt in the air. By a fallen tree the hunters stopped. The white snow was scattered from its level smoothness. About five feet from the windfall were a number of gaping tracks made by Patches and a big red fox.

"Sure 'nough, it's a fox!" cried Duane excitedly. "See, it's been lying on the windfall when Patches scented it. Here's where it lit in its running away when Patches came up. See the tracks!"

"Au-u-ua! Au-u-ua!" bayed Patches.

The fox had made the first run, a short circle. He was now on the opposite side from the hunters. His voice rang with a clear vibrancy that thrilled the hearts of the sportsmen. The other hounds were loosened and a mad scramble in a wild race took place as they ran toward the "Au-u-au-ing" of Patches. A volley of mingling tongues joined in the chase.

"That's music," said Reuben, stepping close to Duane's side. "Listen at 'em tuning up! Hear 'em go! They're like the chimes of a big church ringing in unison. Did you ever hear the like?"

The thoroughbreds made a wonderful chorus. The melody of many voices swelled, echoed, and gradually faded away. Each second took the singing hounds farther onward. They swept over the Silver Knob Mountain, then, swinging out to the Barrens, from there to the Burnt Ridges and beyond White Cove, miles away from where the fox had been started. The hunters stood as if enthralled while the blending music of the hounds gradually drew out of hearing.

"W-whe-u!" exclaimed Duane. "Wasn't that great?"

"A lot of noise," was S. Ferdinand's grouchy rejoinder.

"That guy is the next thing to an insect," said Jim Rowland to himself.

Nearly all the hunters knew S. Ferdinand's trouble. His dog had not found the fox's trail and therefore he was sore. He had made sport of Reuben, and his dog had shown him up at the very start of the chase.

The whole pack was now returning in a full cry. Patches was leading. His "Au-u-us!" sounded echoing above the other voices.

"Get to the lookout!" cried Duane enthusiastically.

The hunters scattered out like a net. Each sought a place where the view through the underbrush would be clear so that they could see the fox as he was running to elude the hounds. Duane scaled a high stone at the far end of the north ravine. Jim Rowland sought a windfall on Zeigler's Point, while the other hunters found vantage places in the different runaways that Reuben pointed out to them. S. Ferdinand would have none of his advice and he stalked off alone. He retained his surly and grouchy attitude.

Following the fox came Patches, baying their joy of the hot trail, but the fox had the advantage of the start, the handicap in the race. Sly Reynard was slipping over the white frost-rimmed snow for his life. He knew Patches's voice. It wasn't the first time that they had matched speed and endurance. The contest was to the death. The fox took to the ravines and the blackberry briars. Running with the elusive ease of the wild things of the woods,

the fox gained on Patches and the dogs whose ears were cut terribly by the sharp briars and stinging thorns of the underbrush, yet the chorus on the fox's trail never ceased. Like leeches the pack struck always the "Au-u-ua!" of Patches leading unceasingly. The ravine reverberated with their barking. Over the Silver Knob Mountain the fox glided through the cordon of hunters and, reaching the Barrens, he crawled up the bare trunk of a fallen tree and from it he managed to jump into the zigzagging Abe Lincoln fence, and to the top rail the fox clung and crawled like a red squirrel. In this manner he succeeded in going about one hundred yards, and by the maneuver he had hidden his tracks and entirely disappeared to the pursuing dogs.

It was an old, foxy trick that he had executed that completely fooled all the dogs excepting Patches. When the tracks disappeared by the windfall, Patches simply took a long, detouring circle of a possible half-mile and there he found the trail leading out of the Barrens that the fox had made in his escape. His triumphant note called the other dogs, who were trying to find the trail by the fence and by short cuts, the whole pack succeeded in joining the chase that led back to the Golden Arrow Clubhouse.

The hunters heard the returning hounds in the gentle stir of the woods. Faintly at first, and then stronger and firmer came the chorus. Out upon the billowing air broke the sharp boom of a shotgun. Another charge came almost instantly. The chase continued. The hunter had missed his shot and the fox was leading out toward the Little Oak Flats.

Gradually the singing voices of the dogs died into a faint echo in the far distance. The familiar sighing of the trees as the playful wind soughed over the big wilderness took the place of the musical voices of the chase. The dogs were gone with their elusive quarry into the faint distance, marked by the blue-gray skyline of the Little Oak Flats.

The bright, warm sun of the late winter day had lost its warmth beyond the horizon when all of the hunters returned to camp. Reuben was the last of the party to

come in. When he entered S. Ferdinand exclaimed:

"You missed the fox, didn't you?"

Reuben only smiled in a knowing manner.

After a hasty meal S. Ferdinand declared positively that he would not go out again as, in his opinion, the fox would not return before dark and therefore he would not brave the cold in order to only hear the dogs returning. What was the use, anyhow? No one could shoot after dark."

A scratching sounded on the camp door. Reuben sprang up from the table.

"The dogs are coming back," said he. "They've done fine for young ones.

When he opened the door in crept S. Ferdinand's Jip, her pretty ears cut and bleeding, her body bruised and her feet caked with ice.

S. Ferdinand's face clouded with an angry scowl. His fine thoroughbred dog had been the first to leave the chase. Red spots appeared on his flushed cheeks. It should have been Patches, but it was his own—

"Let her alone!" shouted Ferdinand angrily to Reuben, who was digging the frozen particles of ice and snow out from her padded feet. The young trapper merely smiled and paid no attention to S. Ferdinand.

"Good doggie," said Reuben consolingly, petting the beautiful golden-brown flank of Jip, who kissed his hand with her moist tongue. "I didn't think that you could stand the chase as long as you have done. You're all right, doggie. To stick with old Patches for a day is good work, and then if your master, S. Ferdinand, would have been a better shot you would not have had to run so hard."

A roar came out of S. Ferdinand. He sprang up to the kneeling Reuben.

"It's a lie!" he screamed.

"Your footsteps are in the snow for every one to see," replied Reuben unruffled.

S. Ferdinand sank back on the bench with an angry gleam in his eyes. He had been caught in his own net squarely. His tracks in the snow were an undisputable evidence. Why hadn't he thought of them? He didn't want the hunters to know that he had fired at the fox because of his self-centered egotism and therefore he had tried

to fasten the firing of the shot on Reuben, but the tracks gave him away, and S. Ferdinand sulked alone in a corner of the clubhouse.

When the graying dusk of the winter day crept over the forest in an afterglow of beryl green, against which was etched the faintest coloring of the crescent moon, several of the other dogs returned from the chase. Tired and footsore, they crept in, all except S. Ferdinand's Zip and Patches. They were still driving the fox in the Little Oak Flats. In the shifting tints of the northern light their voices rang out faintly.

The fox was staying away. The shots from S. Ferdinand's gun had been a warning and he was trying to shake off his pursuers by the ruse of back-tracking, doubling, and dodging. In the night the chase continued while the evening star hung low in the west. In the cobalt blue of the forest silhouetted by the myriad stars on the snow, stood Reuben and Duane listening to the voices of Patches and Zip, who were driving their quarry unceasingly. Their joy was that of sportsmen. Such a chase! It was glorious!

It was now emerging into fifteen hours since the fox had been started on his run and it was still going in the starlight of the forest.

There was little sleep in the Golden Arrow Camp that night. Excitement ran high. How long would the fox run before taking to cover? Would the dogs or the fox give up? But the fox didn't dare. His life was at stake. As the stars began to die in the velvety sky and a faint tint of light appeared in the east, Reuben announced that the chase was coming back. In the frosty air the dogs' voices grew stronger. With the coming of daylight Patches and Zip had returned and still were they trailing the tired fox. The chase was slow now. Their speed and strength were gone. From the way their barking sounded the drive had now slowed down to a walk.

"Get your guns," shouted S. Ferdinand, springing up from the breakfast-table.

"One minute," interposed Duane sternly. "It seems to me that the fox has earned a right to come back home without being shot. What do you say, fellows?"

Let's give it fair play. Leave the dogs and the fox finish it."

"That's sportsmanship," agreed Reuben and the other hunter.

S. Ferdinand flung his gun in the corner savagely. He growled something inarticulate under his breath.

"Get up on the Silver Knob Mountain," instructed Reuben, "and you'll see the finish of the chase. The fox will be making for his hole under the big rocks."

The hunters, minus their guns, hastened out. S. Ferdinand remained behind sulkily. He wouldn't go out in the snow to only hear the dogs barking. He wasn't big enough for that, so he sat by the fire and growled at such hunting.

Under a blue sky with the northern wind sweeping through the trees that contained an icy tang, the hunters scrambled toward the high mountaintop. Half-way up the rocky slope, they stopped to regain their breath. Through the swaying trees they only heard one dog's bark and it was Patches. Reuben listened. His face took on an understanding expression. S. Ferdinand's Zip had left the trail. It was the most natural thing for her to do. She had likely been driving with Patches because she was lost and therefore when the fox had turned homeward had come back into the country that she knew, she had in all probability turned toward the camp.

Reuben understood the ways of young dogs. He felt that she was now seeking her master, and as S. Ferdinand had not joined the party, but sulked in camp, Reuben did not follow the hunters to the top of Silver Knob Mountain, but turned and retraced his steps back to the camp. At the edge of the little clearing he waited and presently he was rewarded by seeing Zip crawling along the beaten snow-path on her foot-sore feet. She limped badly.

Up to the door she crawled and scratched upon it with a weak paw. A loud, angry voice came from the inside. The next minute S. Ferdinand appeared. Instead of showing the solicitude of the true hunter he pulled the door shut and stood listening with his foot raised to kick the noble dog that had made a glorious chase. Reuben, from his hiding-place, surmised that S. Fer-

dinand was straining his ears to catch a bark from Patches. It came echoingly.

After hearing that Patches was still chasing, S. Ferdinand slammed the door and returned almost immediately with his shotgun. Clicking the chain on the whimpering Zip's neck, he dragged her toward the thicket in which Reuben was hiding. A deep gully was right below the Golden Arrow Camp, and into it S. Ferdinand was taking his wonderful Zip. Reuben's cheeks burned with anger. He surmised that S. Ferdinand was going to shoot her and hide the body in the deep ravine. Then he could say that his dog had been in the chase to the last, and was lost.

S. Ferdinand raised his gun on the whimpering dog. His finger was touching the trigger when a crunching of footsteps sounded in the snow behind him and before he could fire the shot into the helpless Zip, Reuben's powerful arms caught him and whirled him, head first, into the deep gully.

"You're dirty!" cried Reuben. "The dirtiest sportsman that I've ever seen in the woods, but I'm going to make you clean. Yes, sir! As white as snow."

With a strength that S. Ferdinand could not resist, Reuben flung him back into the drift again and then he began scrubbing S. Ferdinand. He chuckled S. Ferdinand's face into the snow, rolled him in it, turned him over and applied more snow to his person until S. Ferdinand looked like a real snow-man.

Duane Hempfield was the first to hear the sounds that came from the deep gully when the hunters returned from seeing the finish of the chase. A strange sight was before them, and then they understood when they heard Reuben muttering: "You're dirty, snow 'll make you white!"

S. Ferdinand choked on a handful of snow.

"Are you clean?" asked Reuben, poisoning another handful close to his mouth.

"Yes, yes," cried S. Ferdinand Stokes tearfully.

The hunters drew away, smiling gleefully.

"Guess S. Ferdinand's got what he's been looking for," commented Duane Hempfield, "and here's hoping that his snow-bath will make him a better sportsman."

What Was That?

By Katharine Haviland Taylor

Author of "Yellow Soap," etc.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE TRIAL.

I CANNOT describe the week that followed Gloria Vernon's murder. It was too horrible. With the exception of Gustave, we were all badly shaken. He was only dull, heavily wondering, seemingly half awake, looking as if he had been suddenly shocked from a long, troubled sleep. One could see in his eyes the memories of nightmares, his surprise that they had been—that he had let them be.

A strange development that somewhat shook us out of our morbid introspection and into alert questioning was the suspicion that fastened on the judge. A detective from Philadelphia put him in prominence, and seemed to take pleasure in doing it. The judge's nature, which combines choleric explosion, and over-pompous dignity, led certain people to enjoy belittling him. He had always shown a contempt for the mob, and the mob had honestly enjoyed it. But now, with a breath of suspicion, the mob plainly revealed another American characteristic, that entire and sudden shift of alliance, that veering to the extreme other side. I saw it in faces and I heard it in the snickers that followed the judge wherever he went.

Therefore, when the court opened, a month later, Gustave appeared under a heavy cloud, the judge was arraigned openly, and lawyers grew loud—or soft—as they pleaded for their victims.

The things that came out were extraordinary, but told nothing. They were like bits of a picture puzzle, lying separated on a table; each one had some sort of a pic-

ture scrap on it, but each one, alone, meant nothing.

"You were aware that the deceased was not in New York?" This from Gustave's lawyer to the judge.

"I knew that she was not," he replied, after a spluttering cough and an anxious look toward Nathan, who, imperturbable, and with as little expression as a stone wall, sat well to the front of the courtroom.

"How did you know?"

"I saw her."

"Where?" asked Gustave's lawyer, a Mr. Beagle by name.

"In the cabin," answered the judge.

"What cabin?"

"A cabin that Rudolph Loucks allowed my younger brother to put up on some of his wooded land. It lies past the pine woods and a rough piece of rocky land on the hill behind the Loucks house."

"Why were you there?"

"I often walked there. I go there because my brother sometimes lived there—association, sentiment—" He broke off and coughed so hard that his neck grew red.

"Why was she there?"

"She was going to meet some one," answered the judge silkily. Gustave turned white, his lawyer frowned, and for a moment testimony was stopped.

"Is your brother dead?"

"No."

"Where does he live?"

"New York."

"Occupation?"

"Artist."

"Does he ever come here?"

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

"Rarely," replied the judge.

"Are you on good terms? Is your relation in every way amicable?"

"Entirely," responded the judge. "He is much my junior. I have for him that affection which, ah, might be called paternal, as it were. I, ah, was, ah—his guardian, his adviser and guide—until he left here."

"When?" asked the lawyer. The judge named a date which I do not recall. It was several years gone.

The lawyer then asked Mrs. Harkins to take the stand. She was in the back of the court-room. Necks craned around, whispers rose, dresses rustled as she made her way forward, and as she did I began to understand why the judge drank, and to pity him. I imagined that any one who disagreed with her would have to tiptoe about doing it. She was one of those awful women who are always conducting vice crusades, and positively enjoy rattling off statistics about dance halls, illegitimate children, underpaid factory hands; and child labor in the South. I'd rather meet a lion than one of that type any day.

After she took the stand she surveyed the court, which withered. Then she was requested to narrate something—anything about the judge's relation with his brother, and whether it was likely he would kite off into the woods for sentiment. Of course these questions were veiled, but their substance was that.

"A most impractical young man!" she said, after which she clamped her hammer-jaw shut, and gave a quick, backward jerk to her head. When she let her voice out again she informed us that Joseph Harkins was a person of little refinement, and that what she had endured while he lived with them was unthinkable. He was an artist and his work had made dirt and disorder. He was fond of low company, spending much time with Nathan Greenleaf at his cabin. He was constantly with Nathan Greenleaf's nephew. Once in a while he took her husband off, but—another firm wag of her head—not often. When he left she had to admit she was relieved. He had been in the gas office; Rudolph Loucks, because of his friendship with the judge,

had been good about giving him a position, but he had given it up.

Then she rambled on a little while longer, and then, unwillingly, retired. Questions came after that about when the judge's brother, Joseph Harkins, had left Rudolph Loucks's employ. It seemed he had left after Rudolph's death. There was a titter around the court at this.

Where was Nathan's nephew? was the next question.

Nathan responded, giving an address, which he said was near Canal Street. He had been there, and described it, and the fact that he had wandered around lower New York was proved by his evident knowledge of landmarks.

"Was your nephew here the night that Rudolph Loucks was stabbed?"

"Shot," corrected some one from the back of the room.

"Shot," the lawyer said, some irritation appearing on his face. "Was he here?"

"Yes, sir; he went for the doctor. I was took with pleurisy. I had it bad."

"He was with you?"

"Yes, sir. Doc Smith 'll tell you so," answered Nathan. "Ask him!"

Evidently that avenue did not lead where the representative of the law would have it, and he veered off.

The judge's lawyer, whose calm achieved remarkable results, succeeded in tangling Gustave in a maze of questions, none of which seemed vital as he put them separately. Gustave knew she was not in New York; he had met her regularly; she told him she pretended that she was in New York to avoid the unwelcome attentions of a bothersome suitor, a man whose jealousy had alarmed her; this man was to be in town for only a short space, until Friday, she thought, when she would return to Mrs. Beasley's. Gustave did not know his name, nor had any one seen a stranger. Gloria lived at the cabin during that time.

But she had gone to New York? Yes, she had started. Who saw her start? In here came a medley of testimony, some of it given with such nervous eagerness that it was amusing.

It was found that Gloria had gone to

New York; had arrived there; but the following day she had been back. Connections were bad, a train could not have brought her so quickly; it was thought some one motored her back.

Had she friends?

Gustave was cited as the only one generally known.

How had Gustave come into possession of the strip of pink-checked gingham which had done so much to harm his chances of being proved innocent?

Gustave did not know. But—people were around there who had no business there. Some one had crept in the night that a cat had had a fit all over the place. This was described.

Why had the judge written the note to Gloria Vernon that had turned suspicion upon him? Why had he written: "Unless you leave quickly something will happen to you!" The judge answered, because Miss Vernon had taken an intense, almost insane dislike to Miss April Barry, and meant to do her harm if possible. He was trying to protect her, he asserted. How did the judge know of this dislike?

The judge hemmed and hawed, and then he said that he "had been up to see the Beasley man, who was sick—the fellow who farms—out past Greyson's hill; they had been talking—"

"Who is 'they'?" asked Gustave's lawyer.

The judge spluttered.

"Miss Vernon and myself," he shouted. No one believed him.

"Why not 'we'?" asked the lawyer.

"I erred; I refer to Mrs. Beasley, and Miss Vernon," wheezed the judge. Mrs. Beasley then testified she had never been in the room with Miss Vernon while the judge called. "Yes, sir, he come often," she answered in reply to a question. "I don't recollect that him and my husband ever spoke afore. He says he done it fer sympathy."

"Beautiful thing, sympathy!" said Gustave's lawyer dryly. There was a ripple of mirth.

"Why," went on Mr. Beagle, who spoke nervously, and in his way affected his listeners quite as much as the heavy and

more restrained tones of the judge's lawyer—"why did you buy strychnin from Jason Humphrie's drug-store the night before the Beasley's dog was poisoned?"

The judge did not answer promptly; finally he said: "Rats"—his voice weak and close to failing.

"Where did you put it?"

"In—in the cellar."

Mrs. Harkins, called upon to testify, was asked: "Does the judge go down cellar often?"

"*Very*," she replied. There was a positive hurricane of nervously pitched laughter. "Silence!" boomed the judge of the district. Then Gustave's lawyer suggested that perhaps the judge went down to drink something himself—something that was not poison—for *rats*. He paused before his reason for the material that the judge had bought. And then he went on, speaking more quietly than was his wont. The Beasley dog, it seemed, had been poisoned with strychnin.

There was counter-question about this; couldn't the dog, in wandering, have come across some of the poison left out in the judge's yard? "Why didn't his own dog come across it, too?" asked Mr. Beagle. This seemed unanswerable. "No, he went on. 'The judge was there that evening, and that evening the dog was killed; killed for some reason—killed so that some one could come and go to the Beasley house without being troubled—so that some one could ruthlessly murder a girl—a girl who had given her life to soothing the sick and—' a great deal more of the same, and then the court adjourned.

I walked home between Billy and Dick Codman. The rest, with the exception of Gustave, trailed behind. Gustave was boarding at the jail. He had actually been sport enough to joke with us about it as we said good-by to him that day. "The beds aren't much," he said to me, "but the food is better than I'm used to." And then, the warden drawing near with a huge key and an expression that meant "go," we withdrew.

Jane had not spoken to Gustave, but she had gone with us, and somehow I know that both of them really saw no one else.

I wondered whether, as the physical appeal of Gloria was dead, his madness was dying. I knew that he had been ashamed of it, and that usually argues a short-lived growth.

No man who has to apologize to his own soul after every kiss, goes on kissing forever.

I am quite sure that Gustave's stay in that bleak, little cell did not harm him. Perhaps he saw some things that had happened, as they were. Certainly he was most healthily humble, and the very fact that he did not speak to Jane at all, and avoided her eyes, made me certain that his heart was calling to her continually, and that he saw no one else.

"I wonder how it will end?" I asked, as we trudged home that day. The dust was heavy, and the growth at the roadside was powdered thickly with it. "Gustave," I said, "mustn't be convicted. He didn't—I *know* he didn't!"

Dick Codman grunted a reflective "Um—" and I felt the irritation which arises from being tied and unable to help some one who needs it. "I can't see," I thought, "why Billy puts so much faith in him," for at that time mine had entirely evaporated.

"He's going to fix it up, April," said Billy, and then: "I wish we'd motored; you're tired."

"He isn't guilty?" I asked sharply, turning to Dick.

"Oh, no," said Dick easily.

"Then why," I demanded; "why can't you do something?"

"Maybe I will, next week," he answered. "We'll see. We'll see."

"The judge?" I asked.

"No—don't think it's the judge."

"Can't you tell me what you think?" I asked.

"No," he replied. "No, I couldn't do that. Thank Heaven, we're nearly home—nearly home—" suddenly he stopped, looked down the road, and took out a pistol. He took aim, fired carefully, and then told Midgette to be quiet; that she made him nervous.

"Oh, but"—she said between long gasps—"what—you make *me* nervous, Dick!"

He took her hand, pulled it through his arm, and said: "Come on, we'll go down and see what I bagged."

He had hit a mirror; the mirror frame was gone and could not be found, but fragments of the mirror lay on the ground, shining brightly.

"Well, well," said Dick; "guess I hit some of Nathan's bird photograph scenery. Too bad—" and at that moment Nathan appeared. I thought he seemed disturbed, but when Dick explained that he would make good, and that he was sorry, Nathan brightened.

I didn't understand it—Dick's having done that, but I didn't give the matter much thought. Nathan said he could easily get another mirror. He explained that he used it at night, back of a lantern, for moth catching. I went on, helped Nan get dinner, and forgot it. I even remember I complained about Dick's slowness, and his having done "nothing at all; positively *nothing*, Nan!" I was stupid.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE MAN WHO SAW AN ANGEL.

BILLY sent for his motor, and it arrived in time to help us to and from town. We spent much time there, as the case continued, growing more exciting, more involved with each day's testimony.

All sorts of things were said against the judge; all sorts against Gustave. The judge's trying to warn people against old Nathan was held against him as a serious charge, and his acceptance of this made another black mark to his discredit.

"Look at that old woodsman," said Gustave's lawyer with something that approached a sneer; "doesn't he *look* like a murderer? Do faces tell us anything, friends? Look at his face!"

"If I could tell you," blatted out the judge, and then, with a change of color, shrunk back in his chair, shaking as if he had the palsy.

"Do tell us!" said Mr. Beagle. But the judge had an attack of "indigestion" which ended up that matter for the moment. However, the feeling that he had

tried to involve old Nathan Greenleaf in the affair made many and bitter murmurs against him.

It was Saturday that Gus Dirks appeared. I shall never forget it. His entrance was dramatic from its very awkwardness; he wore his Sunday clothes, in which he was not at ease, and his collar, a high, stiff, celluloid affair, almost eclipsed his chin, which was of the sinking variety. His stiff-soled shoes made him clatter as he made his way up the narrow aisle—an aisle which had grown more slender each day as chairs were brought in to accommodate the growing crowds.

Outside, the autumn was making her coming felt; locusts shrilled loudly to fade off into nothing; bees hummed; the air was loaded with the drone of insects. It made one sleepy. I remember that my head bobbed from side to side, and that once I almost slipped off.

It was not from boredom that I longed to sleep, but from neglect of sleep. At night I could not seem to find the land of dreams; instead, I saw the boat—the pink-ingham strips lying in tangled heaps on the roughly built dock, and the green-white pallor of Glória Vernon's face.

"You're tired," said Billy, as Gus Dirks made speech possible by his going up to the witness stand. "You poor child!" I slipped my hand in his. We had long since "made up," and when you do, you know what scraps are for.

"Not very," I answered, as I imperfectly subdued a yawn, and then the judge of the district, whose name was Llewellyn, rapped for silence, and we all looked at the human carrot.

"My name's Gus Dirks," he announced, his voice shaking a trifle from nervousness. "I live a piece away up the crick. Maybe you've saw my truck farm up thataways. I'm going to tell what I seen of these here goings on, and it is fer that reason that I have appeared in this here court to-day."

He stopped, and you could hear people rustle a little as they leaned forward. Every one was listening so hard that you could hear them; the silence beat and was broken only by one big, bluebottle fly which was buzzing, kicking, and flopping

up and down against a dirty window-pane. I can see that window now—the cobweb in the upper part of the sash, and the dirty shade, which was torn and run up on the bias.

"Go on," said the judge.

"It's this way; that there feller"—he pointed to Billy—"was with her; that there nurse of Beasley's what was killed, he was with her."

There was another rustle in the courtroom. Some one sobbed—some one, I suppose, who did not know Billy from Adam. There was a lot of hysteria in the air. A lot of tense interest that came from nothing but the average mob's interest in the gruesome.

"Who?" asked Gustave's lawyer.

"That there feller," said Gus Dirks, again pointing to Billy.

"Stand up," said some one else. Billy did. I clung to his hand so hard that my knuckles were white. His chief worry seemed to be about me; he whispered: "Don't worry, dear, this is nonsense," and then faced the crowd. There was a scrape of chairs from the back of the room, for people were mounting them. I heard a surging murmur. Some one back of me said: "I thought so—I says to Aunt Mandy that some one that *wasn't* accused would be the one who done it—I says—" triumphant, the voice. I wondered what difference it made to them, how they could care.

I gripped Billy's hand even more closely, and hated the crowd—hated them all. And then the surging murmurs quieted, the scrape of chair legs on the bare floor was heard and silenced, and Gus Dirks went on:

"Well," he said, as he ran his hand around his collar, trying to ease it, "it was this way. I was down by the crick layin' in wait fer them pesterin' boys that swim and roile the water so the cows won't drink—layin' there low, a waitin'. It had been hot, if you recall; that there week was a scorcher, and I guess mebbe *that* was the reason I went to sleep; leastways, I *think* mebbe—"

"Go on!" shouted Judge Llewellyn. "No one cares *how* you went to sleep! You

went to sleep, and when you woke—" the judge leaned forward, his face tense, and his eyes agleam.

"Yes, sir," said Gus, "that was it. I went to sleep and slep' clean through supper-time an' all, and when I woke it was dark. I heard a splashin', and I wondered where I was. Then I recollected, and I thinks, half awake: 'Well, I got them danged kids *this* time, and I'll cowhide 'em good, too!' I meant to. They make me a lotta trouble; the cows won't drink."

"Let that go," some one broke in. Gus blinked, some one in the back of the room laughed, there was a rap, a sharp call to order, and he went on.

"What was the noise?" asked Judge Llewellyn.

"It was a boat—a motor-boat," answered Gus Dirks. "When it come alongside to where I was a layin' they shut off the motor. He done it," he asserted, pointing to Billy. Then he grew suddenly alert and a mean smile played across his usually expressionless features. "*He* done it," he said loudly again. "He was in that there boat with her. I knowed her afore, and I seen her after it happened. I never miss seein' a corpse. I enjoys a viewin' of 'em."

"Did he speak?" asked some one, I do not know who; everything about that time was hazy for me.

"Yes, sir; him and her, they talked."

"What did he say—now be careful, my man—*what did he say?*"

"He says: 'As fer money, I'll give yuh *that*; but you knowed I was as good as married to another woman. It was *you* who told me to come up to the cabin that night, you who started this here; and now, when—'

Billy stood up and simply shouted: "*It's a damned lie!*" and after he was reprimanded sharply, sat down, looking foolish. Gus went on:

"She says," he stated, "'I'll expose you! You'll pay for this, you—'" and he strung out some epithets that sounded as if they had come from Gloria. These were silenced, and then the court-room went mad. Some fat woman with beads on her waist wept so loudly that they had to take her out. She kept moaning: "My Gawd!

My Gawd!" I found afterward that she was exhibiting some pickle company's products in a local store, and had never been near the town before, and didn't know a soul in it.

After her exit, again there was some sort of order, and the case went on. For obvious reasons they asked where the body of Gloria Vernon was buried, and it was found that it had been cremated. This had been her wish, and it was disclosed by an aunt of hers who lived in New Rochelle. At this news Dick Codman spoke; and it was the only time I ever knew his enthusiasm to rise so high that it broke the wall of his silence. He simply said: "Smart! Darned smart!" as he looked toward Gus Dirks.

I did not think so.

I thought very little, to be truthful; my whole soul, being, heart, were given over to and wrapped in horror and forming a blind prayer. But dimly I heard the rest of the questions and answers. The coroner testified to Gloria Vernon's looks in a way that showed his carelessness; a carelessness which he shared with an examining physician, a carelessness that now proved to be criminal negligence. There was a moment's excitement when, after the coroner had described Gloria Vernon after the murder, he rolled over in a faint.

Some one admitted that Billy and I had had a disagreement at that time; some one else had seen Billy talking to her; another some one had seen him walking by the creek the very day of the murder, plastered with mud, haggard, and looking miserably unhappy.

I spoke up, and told why he looked that way; said that it was my fault; that we had quarreled; but that I knew he was innocent of this charge. I heard myself growing more and more incoherent, and, gasping, I stopped, Billy's arm around me, my head against his shoulder. My excitement had made things swim before me, and because of that I closed my eyes. When I opened them I encountered old Nathan's gaze. His eyes seemed to tell me that it would be all right.

There were mutters of: "Poor little thing!" and "Now, ain't that sad!" then

again the sharp tap, a request for silence, and questions—more questions. After these had been asked and answered, for perhaps thirty minutes, old Nathan was called to witness. Then came more craning of heads, more whispered speculations, and the queerest and most counting bit of testimony that that day had held.

"It's like this," he drawled, "something I seen this morning fixed it fer truth to *my* thinkin'. It's like this—" he paused. I know he longed to spit, and after shifting his ever-present cud of tobacco, went on with: "I ain't sayin' nothin' against the testemony of Gus Dirks. Him and me have been neighbors, an' *good* neighbors, fer nigh forty-some years, I reckon. But—now lookee here, you ask Gus; didn't he see the Angel Gabriel real plain wunst when he was chasin' a white leghorn down in the north lot?"

Gus admitted it; admitted it with a holy, uplifted, and curiously solemn look gracing his insignificant face. That look, which would have made another man splendid, only turned his poor little face more silly than it was naturally.

"He come to me," said Gus, "a wavin' a sword. He says: 'Keep off the creek! Danger lies there!' I says 'Yes, sir,' and then he says: 'I am the Angel Gabriel!' and cut and run."

There was laughter—laughter that bewildered and hurt the poor little man and his pride in that which was his reality. He looked foolish and stunned beneath it. I hated it, and the way that people who wouldn't hurt a dog—physically—will walk up to any one's pet belief and kick it, sneering as they do so.

"Where did Gabriel go?" asked one of the lawyers.

"I dunno"—this sullenly—"I was a prayin'."

"Good occupation," said Judge Harkins's lawyer; "but he who remains to pray often loses his train. You lost this one, and Gabriel's first stop. And now, Mr. Greenleaf—"

He questioned Nathan for a moment; Nathan answered at random, seemed to have lost his thread, and then suddenly he gripped it again and turned to Gus.

"Gus, he has fallin' fits," he announced. "Just ask Gus, ain't that true?"

Gus nodded heavily—nodded in a manner that bespoke a distinction, humbly owned.

"Yes, sir," went on Nathan; "he's had these here fallin' fits ever since I've knew him, and that's forty some years, if I count correct. Now after these here fallin' fits Gus don't *always* know what he sees and hears. Ain't that true, Gus?"

Poor, stupid Gus nodded.

Nathan did not go on, he looked at Gus steadily, and the crowd breathed an "Ah!"

"Get Gus to tell 'em about some of his dreams," drawled Nathan smoothly. "Tell 'em about how wonderful he planned to drain the crick and make a place in the sand to raise melons. Tell 'em how an angel come to him and says if he prayed regular it would dry up. Tell 'em—"

Gus did.

For that moment—for several after that Billy was cleared. And then, Gus Dirks, sensing what had occurred, grew irate, spluttered, asserted that what he had seen *had* happened.

"That there feller," he said, "had a dark four-in-hand tie on. I seen it by the moon that slid up and shone bright while I was still a layin' there. He had a tie-pin shaped like a almond"—I shook; that shape of pin was the one Billy usually wore—"she was wearin' white. She picked up a dress with checks in it. She says: 'Bill, what you got thjs here for?' He says: 'Mebbe I'll use it.' He didn't tell her what for."

"What color was the dress?" asked some one.

"I ain't sure. I think pink."

I looked at Nathan in despair. His ruse had failed. I thought we were gone, until Nathan spoke again. When he did my heart leaped and then missed a beat from relief.

"I've more to say," he announced. "I think I know who done it. And it wasn't that there young feller who's sweet on Miss *Aprile*. I notioned it, and this morning I seen what proved it. Leastways, to *my* thinkin', it proved it."

"Go on, omit details," said some one.

"It's this way," said Nathan loudly.

I leaned forward, breathing fast. Nathan spoke well. I felt myself relax. "They must believe him," I reflected; "they *must!*" It seemed incredible that any one should doubt him. He spoke so simply and with such evident sincerity.

What he said was this:

CHAPTER XXIV.

A GRIM REHEARSAL.

"**B**EASLEY'S woman done it," old Nathan asserted.

There was an incredulous silence after this, and then an outbreak. A few of the natives dared to cackle a little behind their hands, for stupid Mrs. Beasley did not seem the sort to whom you could moor such a crime. Undaunted, seemingly entirely undisturbed, Nathan went on, when asked to substantiate his statement:

"We all know farmer Beasley," he announced. "We—some of us know that he wasn't always none too good to *her*, but she had washed and cooked and done all for him till this young woman arrived and *wouldn't let her go in the room!*"

"I met her one day a wanderin' by the crick. First time I recollect ever having saw her outside of their farmyard and not a workin'. I asks her what she was doin'. She says: 'I dunno—dull like. Then I says: 'That there nurse you have up to your place, I reckon she helps yuh?' And the look she gimme—well—"

Nathan paused, tugged at his whiskers, looked up at the ceiling. When he spoke again his drawl was intensified; the waiting for facts stimulated the crowd, and the hysterically minded began to gasp audibly.

"This morning," went on Nathan, "afore sun-up, I went down to the crick to see whether the lines I'd left out over night had caught anything. I had 'em moored a good ways down the crick; one of 'em near the boat landin' that belongs to the bungalow. While I was fussin' around here tryin' to untie, I hears a noise, and when I looked up I seen Beasley's boy a tackin' somethin'—a bundle of rags I found later—on the bottom of a rowboat.

"He held it down, and then he'd grunt like he does when he's a playin' his echo games. Well, after mebbe ten minutes of this, he stops jiggling them rags in the water, and begins to tack 'em on. Steady and secure, a laughin' all the while, like he does. And I seen it—"

"What?" asked Judge Llewellyn.

"What happened that there night of the murder. How they done it."

"Go on," prompted a man, I did not notice who.

"If you recollect, it was a threatenin' night. The wind blew from the south, and rain begun about four; I don't remember exact, not hearin' it start, since I aim to sleep on my good ear so's to git undesturbed rest. That there night—" Nathan paused, and then he talked with emphasis. He whispered the rest more quickly than he usually spoke—whispered it, but so that it carried all over the court-room and left every one shaking.

"It was a dark night," he said; "the wind moaned over Greyson's Hill. Linda Beasley went up-stairs early, but she couldn't sleep. Habit took her to her room where her husband slep'. Sometimes she had hated him, often he was cruel to her, but she had cooked fer him, washed fer him, done all fer him, for all the years she could remember easy. She's laid by his side to sleep, been driven by him to work, an' he was—her man.

"Well, she went to that there room. She says: 'Is he restin' easy?' And Gloria Vernon, she reesponds: 'Yes, Miss Beasley, he's restin' comfortable, an' goin' to sleep. Ef you was to come in now you'd deesturb him likely.' So Beasley's woman she went on up to the attic, which was the only place left for her to sleep, since the nurse had the best room, and her husband the other.

"Well, I reckon she set on the edge of her broken-down cot lookin' at the candle flame and seein' nothin'. Mebbe she picked at the candle drip, like you and me does when we ain't thinkin' of anything easy thought out, and then somethin' flared in her brain, and she begins to laugh like her son laughs. Then she tiptoes down-stairs soft and hunts Hiram.

"‘Hiram!’ she calls, and he come. ‘Hiram,’ she says, ‘look!’ And then he up and switches a gunny sack over a clothes-pole. Then that same way she learned him to tie it over, and to hold it. She learns him like that—"

There was a murmur from the court that meant assent.

"Well, then she goes back," continued Nathan; "she calls ‘Miss Vernon, would yuh kindly step this way a minute? Yer needed down-stairs.’ Miss Vernon comes down. The gunny sack goes over her head. Hiram holds her, laughin’ fit to kill, fer he thinks he’s playin’ a grand, new game, and then they haul her down to the crick—"

"Nonsense!" said some one loudly. Nathan smiled. When he again spoke his whippers had departed.

"There’s a gunny sack with ‘Fairview Farm’ wrote on it in my cabin," said Nathan. "I found it the morning after the murder in the underbrush by the path that leads to Beasley’s. I didn’t think nothing of it then—that there dress that Miss Vernon was tied with, that was lost by Beasley’s woman. It belonged to Miss Jane Hoyle, who sends her wash up to Beasley’s farm. Hiram will use a gunny sack like I says if you give him one. He will tack a bundle of rags on the bottom of a boat. Yesterday I found a nurse’s cap in the high grass near Beasley’s pigpen. That ain’t sayin’ much, but mebbe it come off in a struggle?"

"Mebbe it blew off the clothes line," said some one.

"Mebbe," said Nathan; "mebbe."

"How do we know this is true—that what you say of the Beasley boy is true?"

"Come out and see," said Nathan.

"Come out and see—"

And all the State militia couldn’t have held that court together after that. People bolted for the doors and started running toward Greyson’s Hill. People rented all the teams in town; horses that were ready for the grave struggled out toward our place, drawing wagons that were loaded past capacity. Flivvers sneezed their way up the street that led out of the village. The few good cars that belonged in the place were forced to make their weary way

behind carts and vehicles of every description.

The judge and his elaborate equipage were moored behind a garbage wagon, driven by an individual known to the county as "Smelly Burch." The minister sat on the rumble seat of a very noisy motor-cycle which belonged to a disreputable person who ran a dubiously considered dance hall. Caste was forgotten, ignored, swallowed up in mystery, and the wonder that it made.

When we at last arrived we found perhaps two hundred and fifty people swarming over the place, and more coming at every minute. Some one was despatched to find the Echo, and when he was found, and brought to his trial, there were probably three times as many people crowding, pushing, and jostling each other in their efforts to see. I had gone up-stairs with Nan, and we, with Jane and Laurence, looked out of a window directly over the landing.

When the Echo was brought up there was absolute silence, pounding, tense silence. Then some one handed him a gunny-sack bag, held up three oars, and—we saw it happen—that which Nathan had said would happen.

Nathan surveyed it with satisfaction, but did not speak. Instead he made his usual cut-plug offering, this time to the creek, and moved out of Hiram Beasley’s way.

The boy was moving surely now, intent in every move. He muttered as he looked around, and when he saw a roll of carpet that some one had tied up with some little girl’s hair ribbon, he grunted with satisfaction.

Then he dumped it in the creek, jumped in himself—the water is only shoulder-deep there—and the struggle ensued. That struggle made one hide one’s head and gasp. Laurence, of course wept. When I heard a hammer I looked out again—the Echo was completing the job.

"That must have been hard work," said Jane in an undertone. "He *never* did it alone."

"Oh, of course not," I replied. And then I thought of something—something that was so simple that I wondered the

others hadn't seen it; but for various reasons I kept silent.

About that time Judge Llewellyn asked whether Mrs. Beasley had been in court that day. It seemed not, and it proved that she had been there only one day, when a neighbor had consented to stay with her husband, and another had induced her, after much pleading, to make the trip.

"She don't go out much," said the neighbor, who was now looking on, and was, I feel sure, convinced with many, that Linda Beasley was the murderer of Gloria.

After a half-hour, or a little more, Linda Beasley appeared. She looked baffled, and I felt sure that no one had told her of the suspicion. "Yuh wanted me?" she asked.

"Have you ever seen this?" asked Frank Beagle, holding up the gunny-sack bag that Nathan had produced.

"Yes, sir; it belongs to our farm. That there Fairview on it is the name of our farm."

They told her bluntly, cruelly, of what she was suspected. She quailed, and then sank into her usual dull apathy. Questions flew back and forth. She denied the charge.

"Were you out that night?" Judge Llewellyn questioned.

"Yes, sir."

"Why?"

"I was a huntin' Hiram."

"Did you find him?"

"No, sir."

"Well, of course he couldn't have done this alone. He hasn't wit enough for that." That question, I felt sure, was meant to test and trap her. She tangled in it.

"He would," she contradicted, maternal pride overstepping caution. "Hiram, he ain't so dumb as people think; he helps me real nice."

"If you wanted him to help you, to do anything for you, he would?"

"Yes, sir."

"He is devoted to you?"

"How?"

"I say, he is influenced by you, cares for you?"

"Yes, sir; I reckon."

"Can any one else teach him to work—to do things?"

"Yes, sir; sometimes. But nobody can do it like me."

"You liked Miss Vernon? Now think carefully about this answer."

Fumblingly she admitted she had not liked Miss Vernon. They probed her skillfully; before she knew it an emotion that might be called a half-awake jealousy exhibited itself. The fact that she had felt more than a mild aversion to Gloria Vernon came out when she flared, after telling of her exclusion from the sick room; flared, and then, after a return to her usual level, said: "He was my man."

And so it rested.

Judge Harkins, William P. Watts, Gustave Gerome, Linda, and Hiram Beasley, all of them suspected, and from convincing evidence, of the murder of Gloria Vernon. The next day was not a happy Sunday.

Nathan alone seemed cheerful. He spent the day in the woods, using his photographs, and stringing up a mirror which he said he was going to use that night to catch a certain sort of moth which he thought was hovering around.

He had a great deal of trouble adjusting the mirror. The angle seemed to bother him, and it would not stay up. We could see it reflect on the hillside.

"My, he's having lots of trouble with that," said Nan.

"Isn't he," agreed Dick, and then he suggested that he and I go walking. As we neared Nathan we heard him singing an ancient song, the first words of which are: "Old Dan Tucker, he got drunk—"

"Doesn't seem to bother him," said I.

"No," Dick answered; "doesn't bother him—look here, do you think I have any chance with Midgette?"

"Midgette's dad appeared yesterday," I said; "they fell on each other's necks and wept. It was really touching. She says she's going back to him after this is settled, and that she'll never leave him. Something has made her decided to stick it out with us until the open season for murders closes, and we can clear out."

"She told me she'd promised to stay with you all," said Dick, a fatuous look on his face. I didn't say so, but I had never known Midgette to be really influenced by

a little thing like her word of honor before. "And," continued Dick, "I could hang out here. Evidently there's a good opening for my sort of activity."

"Then why don't you take advantage of it now?" I asked. The idea of his thinking of Midgette, when Billy was suspected, enraged me; and he hadn't seemed to accomplish anything.

"Heavens, woman," said Dick, "I don't beat a drum when I work! Hello, Nathan, going to catch a moth to-night?"

"I'm settin' out to," Nathan responded.

"Go to it," said Dick, and then we wandered on.

"Don't be so impatient," said Dick. "To-morrow may show developments." I didn't answer, since my patience with Dick was worn so thin that it threatened to snap.

Monday did show developments, remarkable developments; and Tuesday the clear-up, a clear-up that held some sorrow and a great deal of relief.

I can see Nathan now, again on the stand, again telling what he knew of affairs at the Beasley farm; admitting with pride the horrible truth which so terribly involved poor, dull Linda Beasley and her son.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE VERDICT.

MONDAY morning found Gus Dirks again in court. Gus, with tears running down his sun-dried cheeks. Having attended a camp-meeting during the interval, he was all for truth. The revivalist had exhorted against deviations from exact truth; Gus, it seemed, had deviated.

In his new anxiety to escape the slow cooking promised by the revivalist for liars, Gus was coming across with the facts. These again involved an angel, but without wings.

"He come to me often, but mostly exhorted silence," said Gus, between loud sniffings and futile moppings of his nose. "And this time he come to me, he described what I described, making me repeat it after him three times. He says I

was to let on I seed what I told of, but this here preacher yesterday, *he* says—"

So, Gus rambled on, showing how the last argument had convinced him, and how the fear of hell had made him disregard the injunctions of an angel.

We found out that the angel had appeared to Gus again, telling him that he had accused the wrong man; that Gustave Gerome was the guilty one, and it was he whom the angel would see avenged.

"He told me afore," said Gus, "to pin it on the feller that was always with her. Twice I seen that there feller with her, and so I thought—"

And again more ramblings and at greater length.

"Would you know Gabriel's voice if he appeared on Main Street?" asked Mr. Beagle.

"I guess," said Gus.

"Anything peculiar about it?"

"He says 'joynal' instead of 'journal,'" replied Gus.

"Little old New York," sang out some one. There was a laugh.

"I recollect this," he went on, after some queries, "because I couldn't get the sense of what he was sayin' right, and had to say 'How?' He says: 'In the joynal of heav-en this will be reecorded to your credit.' I didn't understand fer a while."

"Some one," said the judge's lawyer, after permission was granted for him to speak, "knows of this crime—how it was committed, by whom. Quite naturally, some one is afraid to offend a character so dangerous; quite naturally, again, he wants to see the crime righted, the innocent freed, and the murderer punished."

He went on at length. He talked well, and it looked pretty bad for Gustave; and then some child had to pop in, just at that point, produced of course by one of Judge Harkins's friends, and this child said she had seen Gloria and Gustave together—"that there man," she called him. The "murdered lady" had been crying, it seemed—the child had seen her after death—and the murdered lady had said: "'I do love you; you know it; but—I am *afraid* to see you any more! Afraid for you, of what may happen!' That there man,"

the child went on to say, "had replied real fierce like: 'It would be easier to *kill* you than to give you up now! Gloria, you *know* how I feel, you know I *must* have you—I'll go mad without you. If you won't see me, I'll—'" Then Gustave had taken Gloria in his arms, and the child, who had been hunting moss to sell to the town florist, hurried off.

During this recital a local lawyer whom Linda Beasley had employed wagged his head solemnly, as if each wag pounded the facts in, fastened them to truth.

And in spite of Nathan's clever supposition, which the Echo had so well exhibited, the Beasleys were regarded as out of the count. Two o'clock saw all evidence against Gustave mustered and in line. It looked pretty black.

His infatuation prejudiced folk against him; Frank Lethridge's locket, and threats against Frank Lethridge almost made him twice a murderer.

Nathan admitted having heard Gustave threaten to kill any one who harmed Jane; Jane had to admit that he had ceased to care for her. I think Gustave felt that more than any testimony that was given. He started to protest, but gave it up, and after that hung his head.

His changing love, his fierce championing of the moment's amour, his hot temper, which had so plainly shown through both affairs, made his escape seem hopeless. The judge appeared as an angel in comparison; and, in comparison, the evidence against him was slight.

Country folk of all around had seen Gustave and Gloria together. Many of them had heard fragments of the hot discussions which all seemed to involve Gloria's anxiety to be rid of his society. Children who had been hunting berries appeared with damaging contributions to swell the evidence against Gustave. Two women who had been walking home from church and who had sat down by the roadside to rest repeated a fragment of conversation that they had heard as Gloria and he had gone by.

Both Gloria and Gustave were used to city life. They could not, any more than I, sense the repose that makes country people when they relax almost a part of the land-

scape. I did not wonder that Gloria and Gustave had so often been overheard. I could imagine those women at the roadside, sitting beneath bushes, well-shaded by them, and as silent as that which gave them shade, as they watched the passers-by; noting what she wore, what he wore, what they said, and how they said it.

At four the jury went out, and at six we were admitted to Gustave's cell. He rose as we entered—Jane, Laurence, and I—tried to make a jest, and failed. "I guess," he said, "I'm it."

"It is too terrible," said Laurence, who was hunting around for his handkerchief, which for once in its history had escaped his cuff. "I declare I am entirely unnerved, but you must be brave! You must be brave—everything is against you, but you mustn't give up hope."

Gustave paid no heed to his remark; he had turned to Jane.

"You know I didn't do it, don't you?" he asked.

"I know you didn't," she said, her eyes filling.

"This way of going would be none too good for me, no better than I deserve," went on Gustave; "but I didn't—"

"I know," Jane said again.

"I suppose I should not say it," said Gustave; "I know I have lost the right—but I always loved you, Jane, even when I treated you the most cruelly."

Jane put out her hand. He looked at it, at her, and turned away. Then I saw her go to him, put her arms around his neck, and heard him sob. Laurence, who was mopping away his easily arriving tears, planted himself with me before the door, and we tried to make some sort of a screen, the warden having just appeared with a group who wished to view the prisoner. I had one more view of Jane's swiftly moving, adorably tender hands, and then I became absorbed in a signet ring I always wear, and the initials on it blurred before my gaze.

We left a little while after that, Laurence weeping all the way home. Jane did not; she stared stonily ahead, and when she spoke, spoke too conventionally, too carefully. I saw that she was building walls

within herself against all the loneliness and terror that she felt was to be hers. No one slept that night, and we heard Jane pacing to and fro during all the long hours of her vigil.

Laurence kept calling the court-house for a report from the jury, but there was none. Nan sat gazing miserably ahead. Dick and Billy played rum. I tried to read, but I cannot remember a word of it. And so the night passed slowly.

At ten o'clock the following morning the jury gave their verdict. Gustave Gerome was found guilty of manslaughter in the first degree.

CHAPTER XXVI.

CODMAN EXPLAINS.

AT five minutes past ten Dick Codman came into the court-room, followed by two officers, who had between them, handcuffed and terrified, the man whom I had seen sitting on the edge of the creek the day that Frank Lethbridge was drowned.

"Here," said Dick Codman, striding up the aisle, "is the murderer of Frank Lethbridge and Gloria Vernon, and the man who knows who murdered Rudolph Loucks!"

Oh—the bedlam!

Judge Harkins fainted, Jane began to sob deeply, brokenly; Laurence bleated out a prayer of thanksgiving, and the court went wild. When it had somewhat silenced, Dick Codman held up a paper. "I won't read it," he said; "but you can. Just tell the assembled court the name of this periodical."

"The New Yoik *Joynal-Gazette*," said the man.

"Gabriel!" shouted Gus Dirks.

Gabriel staggered and almost fell. I saw Jane hurry over to Gustave, and his arms close around her. I heard Laurence's sob—the first, of course, to arrive; Nan's hysterical bleating about her feeling that it *would* be righted; the howls of the mob; Billy's soothing voice, the feel of his arm.

Oh, that day! Everything whirled, and the precipitate was a gorgeous medley of relief, tears, laughter, love, and pain.

A little funny, perhaps, to turn the corner of the porch, and then to have to back out of a scene that involved Laurence and Nan; to hear Laurence in a kiss-free interlude loudly asserting that Nan needed a strong, courageous man to care for her. But not funny to find Jane and Gustave, his hand on a fold of her skirt, or her sleeve, and to hear his unconscious repetition of her name, half aloud, half pleadingly. It seemed as if his lacerated nerves found in that name peace and courage to go on; felt through her the breeze that brought cool promise of another land.

The second night after Gustave's release we heard the story of the start of it. Dick Codman told it in his easy, drawling voice and his very matter-of-fact manner. Even Midgette screamed only three times. After the third, Dick Codman laid his hand on hers, forgot to remove it, and she stopped. I think exhibitions of that sort are disgusting, and so Billy and I sat back in the shadows— But to go on.

Nan said: "Do tell us all you know, Dick. I'm interested."

Dick stood up to hunt a match, poked up the fire a bit—it had been a gray, damp, cold day—and then, after sitting down and puffing at his pipe for a few moments, he began:

"Hunger and fear started it. Of course you all know that hunger, hate, and fear make all the crimes. This started on money-hunger and fear, and it lived on anarchy—throve on it."

Dick leaned forward, stirred the fire anew, and then, his face well lit by the roaring blaze, told the tale. Always I will see that fire-lit room as I remember it then; the shadows and brightness of it, the tense, listening group.

"Judge Harkins's younger brother, Joseph," said Dick, "was a dreamer, an impractical, paint-loving, artistic, erratic dreamer. The judge, starved for love, disillusioned, childless, woman-nagged, fastened all his affection on the boy. And, in spite of the quality of his offering, the thing he gave was a pretty heavy burden for young shoulders to bear. The judge demanded character, pine-straight character,

in a boy who was ruled, as much as any sapling, by the strongest wind.

"The judge was a business success, not a creator. He admired creators, but didn't reflect that money-sense and artistic achievement seldom go in one package; so he expected this younger brother to work for the money which was to take him to Paris, where he planned to study under Guernierre.

"I suppose he thought he was doing the thing which was best for the boy—anyway, he got the youngster a job in the Water Company his friend Rudolph Loucks headed; and the kid started his pegging. Days were long and ledgers stupid. I suppose this Joseph felt the call to his colors more than forty times a day—as a drunkard feels his thirst.

"Paris, I suppose, became farther and farther away," continued Dick. "You can picture the boy's hopelessness as he looked at his scanty savings, and realized what the trip would cost, the living take—the dreamed-of years of learning nearing the impossible—while his employer and his brother wallowed in money, a small part of which would have given him his chance at—"

"Heaven," finished Nan.

"Heaven," agreed Dick. "After working hours, he wandered these hills, and here—perhaps on this very spot—he came across a woodsman who hated the moneyed people of the world because one of them had taken off his wife.

"They became close friends, and I think that in all the vitriol that their words flung Joseph found a sort of peace until Nathan's nephew came back from the city, where he had learned as well as worked, and he sneered at words and spoke grandly of action.

"Harry Greenleaf was the sort who flourished south of State Street, Chicago, not so very long ago. When he wanted things, he took them, and he had at his tongue's end the patter of the most idle and discontented class on earth—the class that we are beginning to deport.

"Joseph Harkins was persuaded; some of the things Rudolph Loucks did backed Harry Greenleaf's theory that Rudolph not

only had no right to more money than they, but had less right. 'It's yours—yours!' Harry Greenleaf would shout. 'Yours and mine! Some day we'll take it, teach those parasites of the poor that we—' and so on.

"Then one day the paint call grew too strong, and Joseph Harkins had a chance to divert a little of the money that belonged in the coffers of the Water Company. On the spur of the moment he took it, in the way an impetuous, unbalanced youngster might, afterward feeling all the horror of what he had done. He spent it, tried to get enough to put it back; couldn't. Took more—you know that old story; every one knows it; it's a part of life.

"He didn't know how to retrieve, so he began a blackmailing scheme. 'Put your money under this rock'—whatever sum he wanted—directed this at Rudolph Loucks, with a threat of death; directed it for money, so that he might pay Rudolph Loucks what he owed him!

"Practical, wasn't it? That was what made Rudolph afraid when he heard the hoof-beats behind him on the road that wild, stormy night. That was what made him tie the girl's hands, fearing that if he were hurt she might be implicated, charged with it. No slate altogether black, is there?"

"Wasn't he afraid to go out alone?" asked Nan.

"No. He carried a pistol, and he rather liked the spice, I think. He had to use a lot of seasoning to get a sensation," answered Dick, "for he had made himself immune to the usual sensations of usual men."

"Why didn't he resort to the law?" asked Laurence primly. "I think that was a matter for the police."

"Rudolph had too many black spots of his own to hunt the police," replied Dick. "I think he supposed it was a relative of some one whom he'd wronged. Perhaps he was afraid of what the search might reveal, or perhaps he liked the new interest. He was a strange man—a very strange man. He was not a coward, for he paid no attention to the demands, and left no money to insure his safety.

"On the night of the murder Joseph Harkins started for New York, where he was to meet Judge and Mrs. Harkins. He was a miserably unhappy young man, for he had had word, just that afternoon, that the Water Company's books were to be audited. Plans went through his head about disappearing, but the lack of money, his usual state, made all these impossible. Every gate was closed, and he was up against a fight with no armor or any other means of defense.

"He brooded all the way over to the junction, shrinking every time any one looked at him. In the station he met Harry Greenleaf, who had driven over that day with a load of firewood Nathan had just cut. Harry was warming up before his return trip.

"Somehow, Joseph Harkins confessed—and Harry offered a solution. He judged that Rudolph wouldn't be so brash in the face of a forty five, and he asserted that Rudolph would have no mercy if he discovered the shortage, which was undoubtedly true.

" 'This is your only chance,' said Harry Greenleaf. 'Squeeze him, or he'll squeeze you; and it'll be the pen—you can wear a mask—'

"Joseph went back with him; drove behind Nathan's team, and was seen by no one. After Harry had put up the team they made their way to town. At the foot of Greyson's hill they paused, considered walking the rest of the distance, decided they would not.

"Sleighs whirled by them, returning to town, for the storm was growing bad. These sleighs and the cold made Harry sneer over the division of the world's goods and decide that what was needed must be taken by force.

"That led them to use the sleigh of the Norwegian draftsman, gag him, take him through an adjoining building, an easy-to-open, empty storage place, to the third-floor room of the disreputable hotel on the flats, from which Vera Struthers had been coaxed by Rudolph Loucks.

"Without knowing he had her, they followed him, having learned, by the judge's telephone—the house was closed, but Jo-

seph had a key—that he had gone to his bungalow.

"After they again started, Harry Greenleaf decided he would not become involved. 'My uncle's sick,' he said; 'has a hell of a cold. I'll go get a doctor. You go on. You can deal with him, and it's your matter, after all. Got a pistol?'

"Shaking, Joseph admitted that he had one that he had gotten at the judge's after telephoning; and then, letting Harry Greenleaf get out of the sleigh, he went on alone.

"Now, no one knows what happened," said Dick, after Midgette's third small squeal made his hand cover hers; "but you can judge—"

Nan sat forward. Her plot sense was asserting itself.

"He followed him into the field," she whispered, "the wind blowing the handkerchief away from his mouth, revealing his shaking lips. A thin, pitifully shaken boy, forced by circumstances to his lowest hell. In the center of the field Rudolph Loucks turned—waited. He spoke, after a laugh—a sneering laugh.

" 'To think,' he said, 'that it was you, Joe—you weak, shuffling—' and so on—"

"No, he didn't," cut in Jane. "How would he know?"

"He might have gone over the books that evening," said Nan, "or known the cut of the boy's coat, his hat, his walk—I'll venture he knew, and *laughed*, and that that piece of arrogance from the class that Joseph had learned to hate brought his death."

"I'll venture he said, 'Come here and fight like a man!'" said Gustave; "and the boy turned weak, and in a frenzy of fear shot him down."

"He was shot in the back," said Dick.

"Perhaps," Nan cut in, "all the hell of fear was upon him. Perhaps every breeze brought to his fevered hearing the sound of footsteps; perhaps Rudolph refused to help him, quelled him, laughed, and carelessly turned away, swaggering like a conqueror; and then, desperate, hunted, sick from fear and loss, the boy followed—followed until he was near; and then he screamed, as a woman might—and fired!"

"No one will ever know about that," said Dick. "Not unless Joseph is found, which I doubt. What is known is the fact that he got away."

"How?" asked Midgette. "And why were Gloria Vernon and Frank Lethridge killed? You do explain things so wonderfully, Dick—so *wonderfully!*"

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE SORDID STORY.

"JOSEPH hid in the attic of his cabin in the woods," said Dick, "the one that Gloria Vernon knew and used. Somehow, he escaped detection. The small town police force were flustered by the affair, and he slipped off before the bigger and more capable men arrived."

"How?" asked Midgette, in her softest voice.

"Nathan hid him in a load of spruce-trees he had just cut. These he took over to Bridgeport, which is forty miles away. Here, Joseph, who is small, masquerading as a shawl-wrapped country woman, took the train for New York, where he was supposed to be all the while."

"Didn't the judge's wife—" began some one.

"She'd gone to visit relatives in Vermont the night before the murder. Only Harry Greenleaf, Nathan, and the judge knew where Joseph Harkins had and had not been in the interim. The judge had taken his wife to her home, and then, returning, had changed his hotel. That made that purely unconscious action of his another shield.

"However, precaution really wasn't necessary. Joseph encountered no suspicion. Harry Greenleaf's innocence was established by his own capable handling of the situation; for, on leaving Joseph, he had immediately gone to the doctor's, asking him to come out to see, old Nathan, who had what the boy thought a cold.

"'Lucky if *you* aren't sick after your walk to town,' said the local M. D. 'How long did it take you to make it, young man?' Harry thought about an hour and a half, he wasn't quite sure.

"'Plucky!' said the doctor, and then he loaded him up with Scotch, told him to get warm before he started, after which they drove off toward the country. Now, that walk in the driving snow made Harry Greenleaf a little hero. People liked his devotion to old Nathan, prattled of his taking care of him during Nathan's attack of pleurisy and pneumonia which developed that night.

"Harry saw in this attitude and his uncle's reputation for gentleness a screen for an enterprise which he wished to establish in silence, an enterprise which was to level ranks, wipe out hurts and injustices, by—fear and death!

"Well, you can see the rest: the old woodsman's unwillingness to comply; the glib persuasions of the younger man; the hurt in the old man that had made him think much money and sin were synonymous; finally you can see him coming around, and how, once converted, his unsophisticated yet cunning brain would never waver.

"It was his sort who made the early Christians—I mean the sort who could be so filled and dominated by an idea or an ideal that they would suffer anything, suffer anything *to be*, for the great and ultimate good.

"Nathan at first only protected the bomb-maker, but soon he was helping. Seems strange to think of that old man doing that, perhaps after he'd been tramping in the woods and there had spent half an hour trying to get a baby bird to cling to a high branch that meant safety."

Then he leaned over to the table, picked up a sheet of paper, and drew scrawls and meaningless lines as he went on, his narrative growing short-clipped, staccato.

"The judge knew," he said as his pencil moved jerkily, "but for obvious reasons he couldn't blow on the gang. Frank Lethridge thought Nathan a moonshiner, went to poking in the creek in spite of the warnings the judge gave him. He was caught in the trap, put on top of the box that held tools, by Harry Greenleaf.

"This was tied on a rope which ran down in deep water, and there through a heavy root. The rope then hid itself in

underbrush, ran from that over a tree-bough, so that the pulling could be easily done by weight if the work were hard.

"Frank Lethridge was caught in the trap as he triumphantly fumbled over the thing he'd been hunting so long. Then he was pulled out of his boat, into deep water, and held there until the bubbles stopped rising and the surface was still. So far—all right; but at that moment some one came along—perhaps Gustave in a boat, or a farmer's boy—anyway, the murderer had to drop the rope and hide.

"The Echo came forward after the boat had slipped away, pulled wildly, following the lead he'd seen, broke the hand off where the trap had weakened it—the arm and hand slipped under the root, but not the body—and then went bounding off with his find. I suppose Harry Greenleaf had a bad moment or so, don't you?"

We nodded.

"Frank kissed me that day," said Jane, "so that Nathan, who was looking on, should think us sweethearts and not suspect. Then he went on, pretending he was going home, but intending to take the road on the other side of the creek—as he did—and—" Her voice faded.

"Gloria?" asked Gustave.

"Killed by Harry, as you know, because she was his amour and loved some one else. She was Vera Struthers of the flats, whom Rudolph Loucks had tried to ruin. She, from that experience, was another one who was ripe and ready for the cult that harms the man who controls. She lived with Greenleaf in New York until it got hot for her—there was some suspicion—then they hurried her up here; the judge, at Nathan's request, suggesting her to the town's doctor for the case.

"Nathan controlled every move of that old man. Knew where his brother was, you know, and threatened to disclose it. Always scared of his life, that old codger. That day April found him poking here he was hunting for letters from Joseph, thinking some of the anonymous blackmailing ones might still be around. That shows how rattled he was, for the place had been pretty well combed years before."

We were silent for a few moments. I

was picturing Harry Greenleaf's vigil. I saw him creeping through the woods, with the soft tread he had learned as a country boy; coming upon Gloria and Gustave, watching, watching—laughing silently when he saw her go white, her eyes widen, darken, in a fear that was almost mad. It was he who had worn Jane's frock, he who made Gustave think Jane followed them; he who kept the country folk quelled by his ghostly appearances and made the bungalow an unpopular place for night parties. Most of the important work was done at night, and then—as the dawn broke—hidden in a box, sunk in the creek, by Nathan.

Perhaps the most picturesque bit of the affair was the meetings in the room of the voiceless husband of Linda Beasley. Here, in the shadows, which were brought to being by a wavering candle-light, Gloria and Harry talked. For the most part in lowered tones, but once and again, as when Linda thought she'd heard her husband's voice, theirs would rise over some altercation.

I can visualize it entirely.

The law-abiding citizen who lay on the bed, chained and made harmless by his infirmities, listening to talk that must have set even his flesh to creeping horribly. Perhaps he'd watch the brutal caresses of Harry Greenleaf, see through Gloria's response a shrinking—the new shrinking. Seeing in Gloria's eyes a wonder about—how much he, this master and lover of hers, *knew*.

"You came from New York to-day?" she would ask.

"Yes. Some people moving to Franklinsburg—" Part time he drove a moving van which plied over the Lincoln way. "Nathan signaled not to stop. That crowd's made hell for us."

The affair was discovered by Dick through Nathan's signals. After he'd read a message that flashed "Start two tomorrow," he shattered the glass with his mighty good shot, to find that it was a better, stronger glass than was necessary for moth catching, and the sort of glass that is manufactured in only one place. He located this and the buyers, from which list

he selected Harry; but Harry bought under a *nom de plume*, and Dick selected him because of the address to which the glass was to go. It was on Broome Street, near Pitt, and that caught Dick's attention because the rents of that quarter and the expense of the mirror did not tally.

Some one probed him as he told of that—or tried to.

"The very usual or the very unusual," he explained, "almost always lead somewhere. The real normal, the middle ground, is seldom attained by a nervous, fear-cramped man."

"How do you go about these things?" asked Nan.

"I'm not a Sherlock Holmes," he answered. "You'd laugh at some of the steps that take me into the heart of crime; they are so simple. All of you thought Gloria Vernon a strange person to be a nurse. I did too—nothing remarkable in that—only I took the trouble to find out, by probing Mrs. Beasley about the way her husband was cared for.

"I saw in Nathan's eyes the light of a fanaticism; I talked to him of government. I saw in the judge a certain gentleness; this was revealed in his fears for April's safety, and his decency—except in one case, when he was ordered to poison that collie—to animals. I knew that he sent large checks to his brother in New York. I knew something made him drink. All these things—" then Dick waved his hands, settled back, and went on with his puffing of a short brier pipe, his eyes half closed, his face benign and peaceful.

I knew that he had gone down to the post-office; there he had seen the post-mistress address a package for Nathan.

"Write on 'em real plain," said Nathan; "write phototeograph plates from Nathan Greenleaf, so they'll know." After he left, Dick flashed a bit of authority, went back of the screens, and inspected "the plates." He said that they were the prettiest bombs he had ever seen, and that some of them had been used by the chap who had used the Gamble paper; he had only recently seen some of that display. Dick said that that made the rest very simple, the solution only natural.

Obviously, people around the bungalow were a bother; people on the creek, and the constant use of the boats, disturbed the industry. So the ghost occasionally appeared on the hillside, when Nathan flashed a "safe" message. Harry Greenleaf, of course, was Gus Dirks's "Gabriel," carefully sandwiching orders between hints about the crops, and so avoiding the suspicion possible even in that dull mind.

It was he who put the poisoned cat in the bungalow that night to cover noises; for the judge had grown so uneasy that he demanded a search for his brother's letters in the old storeroom.

None were found, and the judge, relieved, declared a sort of truce. It was he who stole the judge's check, filled it in, and so made the confusion about the writing. It was he who left the note in Frank Lethridge's car the day he was murdered, which read, as Billy conjectured: "Keep away from the creek."

He didn't want to kill Lethridge. He only wanted to kill one person, and that person was Gloria. The law, he thought, would torture Gustave, whom he planned to implicate, more cleverly than he could. And so he planned it—and after it Nathan taught the trick to the Echo.

Poor old Nathan! I was, in spite of the hideous truth, sorry for him, and I was not sorry to see him go. The shock ended him, and the valvular defect that he had gone around with for so many years saved him from prison—or worse. He died in the court-room after the truth came out; and he had contributed to it.

"Yes, sir," he had admitted, "my nephew and Gloria, who was Vera Struthers, they met at Beasley's, in the room where he lays. He couldn't talk, and they kep' her out." Then he swayed. "Men will die," he shouted, his voice hoarse and his color beginning to fade—"men must suffer, men must kill! Until—until—*men learn—to live!*" Then he fell, and was not conscious again.

I hurried to the front of the room, bent above him, and laid my hand on his forehead. He felt my touch, and murmured a name. That name, his last word, I found afterward, was his wife's. When I re-

member that, together with what Nathan lost, I am more gentle in my judgment of him.

" 'Mary' meant love, for Nathan," I said that evening, as Billy and I sat out in the end of the big punt. "I wish he had not lost Mary, and that he could have been as gentle as I am sure he wanted to be, deep inside."

"April is love for me," said Billy, and then: "when?"

And we fixed a date which involved Billy, myself, and a clergyman, two witnesses, a ring, and a fee.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE END—WHICH IS THE BEGINNING.

AS I said, the resolve is interesting; but it is the thing which doesn't resolve that holds. Little things like the true reading of Judge Harkins's note slipped from my consciousness after being answered. It was, "I'll get you some dry," and it was a promise made to Rudolph Loucks, made when he and the judge had met at a lecture given by the local clergyman at his home.

The magazine the divine took, the only subscription in town, you will remember, was afterward sent by him to Rudolph Loucks because of an article he wanted Rudolph to see, and in that manner found its way to the dark corner of the store-room.

But Nathan's going on grips the question mark in me. For the gentleness of Nathan was real, in spite of the horror of what he did, the warnings he wrote on our bungalow walls, the fear he tried to fix in us on that first day with—blood from a chicken. It was he who caused the unusual noises, sneezed in the cellar that absurd afternoon of the crowded bath-tub, and—he who shielded us from Harry's more vicious forms of attack.

It is the unanswerable that makes conjecture. I thought of him a good deal, and I did of Joseph Harkins and the judge. "I hope," I said to Billy, on the afternoon before we left the bungalow for good, "that old Nathan has left the twisted side

of him here, with his ailing heart and world-worn body."

Billy hoped so, too.

"I can imagine him taking pictures of the little angels," I went on, "hiding behind a cloud, as he hid in trees here, to catch them off-guard and at play!"

"So can I," Billy agreed.

Then he sat down by me, on Nan's trunk, which was waiting to be taken to the station. We were out on the porch of the bungalow, looking down on the creek, that creek that had made possible so many horrors.

"Heard that Joseph Harkins was identified in a morgue in Cincinnati," said Billy.

"Who identified him?" asked Jane, who came out carrying a hat which she had just shoe-blackened.

"The judge," replied Billy.

"H-m!" said Gustave, who had followed, having come to be Jane's second shadow.

"Don't believe it," asserted Jane. "He's gone abroad, hasn't he?"

"Yes."

"Well, can't you see him—meeting that boy? Trying to step from the bitterness of all his wasted hopes? To forget his own failure to do the right, and the boy's crime? I can see him"—Jane twirled the hat and inspected her work—"sitting opposite Joseph at a boulevard café, listening to studio gossip and for the voice of some one from home—some one he knows, who may at any moment intrude—"

"That old soak?" sneered Gustave, who had never forgiven the judge for the headache his hospitality had given him.

"He is capable of feeling," I asserted. "It was he who wrote Midgettte about loneliness, after she had left her father—he wrote of loneliness too graphically; it was a confession of his—"

We were all silent, thinking of Midgettte's wedding, which we had witnessed that afternoon. In the strange way that weddings have, it had left us sad. Perhaps it brought to us the seriousness of the step which we were all about to take.

"Dick was frightened," said Laurence, who arose from the bosom of a porch swing

I'd thought to be empty. "I, for one, *cannot* comprehend that sensation."

Gustave snorted, and I realized that his old balance was returning.

"Fright, personal fright, and divergence from truth I cannot sense," Laurence continued ponderously. No one applauded this, Nan having gone to town to buy a few new things for a trousseau.

I *could* understand divergence from truth. I had let Linda Beasley and her boy bear suspicion—more, conviction—when I knew that they weren't guilty. The boy had moaned from a tree-top all that night, but to shield Billy—to shield Billy I had acted a lie in my silence. I am ashamed of it, and I suppose the sensation is healthy. I wonder if there are many of us who are so tall they cannot stoop?

"Strange ending," said Jane, "and yet"—her eyes traveled to Gustave—"no other was possible for me."

"Nor for me," said Billy.

"Beginning," I corrected.

Gustave and Jane went off toward the hillside path.

"Boating?" asked Billy.

I shook my head. I couldn't bear the creek, for at that time what it had made was far too close. But now—since I am shielded, happily entrenched behind love, the grocer's orders, sock darnings, and a real three-story house, I can look back on the whole affair and even see its humors.

And yet, when I do, I always think of a windy, wet, blowing day in March—that day when our summer plan was made; and after that I seem to see a bomb slipping into almost still-water, so gently putting out that it hardly made a ripple. And then—I hear my friend, the boy whom I met at Le Monte-Dore, hear him say: "Look at the little beggar! A bit calm, isn't she? But she'll make some jolly hell when she 'up and busts,' to quote you Yankees—some jolly hell, you know!"

But our particular bomb, which was started by Nan and furthered by Jane, Midgette, Dick, Gustave, Billy, Laurence, and myself, went a little better; it manufactured both extremes—the nicest coming last!

(The end.)



HOPPING off the train at Emmettsburg, I rested my heavy sample-case on the bench outside the waiting-room, and ran my hand over my face. I thought maybe I needed a shave. I did. So, before I called on the trade, I hustled

down Main Street and stopped at old man Doolittle's barber-shop.

When I got there, Pharaoh Evans, Doolittle's assistant, so cross-eyed you couldn't tell whether he was looking at you or not, was just starting off to lunch.

"Hello, Pharaoh, old man!" I said.

"How do, Mr. Parker," he mumbled. He was looking awful glum.

"Heard anything of Jake Finney since I was here last?"

"Sure!" replied Doolittle. "He's back! Been back some time."

"So the Germans didn't pot him after all, eh?" I said. "Well, I'm glad of that."

"Well, I ain't!" snarled Pharaoh, looking more cross-eyed than ever. With that he walked out of the shop, letting the screen door go to with a slam, and disappeared up the street.

"Hoity toity!" I said. "What's up? Jake and Pharaoh had a falling out?"

Old man Doolittle chuckled as he tucked a towel beneath my chin and prepared to strop his razor. "Well, Pharaoh had, anyhow. He had a falling out with a number of folks. It was about a girl. Jake and Pharaoh give me the details between 'em."

"Oh, a girl, eh?" I mumbled, through the lather which covered my mouth.

"Yes," went on Doolittle, "old man Spiffel's daughter, Daisy. Him that has the truck farm just outside of town. She used to wait on table and wash dishes at the American House. You remember her."

"Why, yes," I said. "She's an awful big girl, isn't she? At least, she was the last time I saw her."

"That's her," said Doolittle. "And she's bigger than ever now."

"It was the war started the whole thing, just like it started a lot of other things. When the war broke out, Pharaoh, he got scared for fear he'd have to go, though anybody would 'a' known he wouldn't with them bum lamps of hisn. How he's ever shaved his customers all these years without cutting their throats is a mystery to me. But being so used to his squint he never noticed it no more, he had an idea nobody else did, and felt sure they'd take him for the army. So he decided to get engaged to a girl. Then in case he was taken he could marry her quick, and maybe get out of going after all."

"Well, there's lots of girls in Emmettsburg, about four to every man, and that's about the only reason Pharaoh, cock-eyed as he was, and tight as a drum, didn't have

more trouble getting one. And he wouldn't 'a' got the one he did get if he hadn't 'a' been so anxious to get engaged prompt, him thinking the draft was liable to grab him any second; for anybody knows that even if a girl is anxious, she likes to let on she ain't, and wants to be coaxed some before she says yes. So, as I says, wishing to get the thing over with, he hooks up with Daisy Spiffel.

"Now, daisies are right hardy sort of things, and Daisy Spiffel was as hardy as any of 'em. If she hadn't 'a' been she couldn't 'a' washed dishes at the American House; and her heart was as hardy as the rest of her. After she got started loving Pharaoh Evans she loved him like a kid loves candy, and if you've ever tried to take candy away from a kid, you know what I mean."

"Pharaoh, he didn't mind her loving him that way as long as the war kept up, but after it stopped, he begun to search about in his mind for a way to get out of it. The thought of marrying Daisy always had give him the cold chills, but the idea of marrying her, or anybody else, on the wages I paid him, pretty near give him hysterics."

"So he kept a-fretting, and a-worrying, and a-stewing hisself up, trying to find a way out of his trouble, but he couldn't hit on a thing that he felt would appeal to Daisy."

"Then Jake Finney come home from France, and one of the first things he done was to come into the shop to see if he could get his old chair back. And the next thing he done was to notice how kind of miserable Pharaoh looked, and he says to him: 'Ain't you well, Pharaoh?'"

"'Oh, so-so,' says Pharaoh. 'But say, Jake, you look fine!'"

"Well, Jake did look fine. He'd ought to, he said, after what he'd been put through in the army. But he wasn't feeling so fine, for he hadn't no job, and he hadn't no cash, having stopped in New York and blowed it all in, so what about getting his old chair once more?"

"'Sorry, Jake,' I says, 'but we ain't doing hardly anything nowadays. Living is got so fierce folks are letting their whiskers grow to hide the worried looks on their

faces, I guess. *Everybody* didn't get in on that oil boom, you know.'

"'Oil boom?' says Jake. 'I never heard of no oil boom. Around here, you mean?'

"'That's what!' says Pharaoh. 'I guess you must have went across just about then. Why, they found oil on Joe Carter's place—not so much, but it paid a darn sight better than farming.'

"'I should smile!' I says. 'And Eben Morse, out Green Valley way, he's rich. Blame near-drowned in the precious fluid. But me and Pharaoh, all the oil we ever come across is what I buy in bottles to put on heads in this old dump. And from the way business is going, Pharaoh won't be doing that much longer. It looks like I'll even have to drop him.'

"And when I says that Pharaoh jumped like he'd been stung. 'Heavens above, Mr. Doolittle!' he says. 'You wouldn't go and bounce a feller when he's engaged to be married?'

"'None o' that!' I says. 'You can work that there stunt with the United States army, maybe, but it don't bring no tears from me. I ain't going to run this shop at a loss just so you can marry Daisy Spiffel. Not so you'd notice it!'

"'But,' says Pharaoh, very indignant, 'what in cats 'll I live on?'

"'Air, I guess,' says I. 'Or maybe you might use some of that there cash you've been a-hoarding in the savings bank.'

"Now maybe you think I was cruel to answer him like that, but if you do, it's because you don't know Pharaoh Evans the way you ought. His long suit was poverty. He was always starving to death just as though his dad hadn't left him a flock of dollars pretty near large enough to keep him. Ever since I'd met him he'd been falling in love with nickels, and going into raptures over anything bigger. He sure was tight as a drum.

"However, if I didn't feel sorry for Pharaoh, Jake did. Him and Pharaoh had worked alongside each other for years. But he didn't feel as sorry for him as he did for himself. Even if Pharaoh lost his job, he had money in the bank; but Jake, he only had sixty-eight cents in his pants pocket.

"'Look here, Pharaoh,' he says to him,

when I'd gone off to supper, 'let's me and you start up a shop of our own.'

"'Huh!' says Pharaoh with a sniff. 'What on?'

"'What on?' says Jake. 'How about that there money you got in the bank? What's the matter with that?'

"'Nothing is the matter with it, I *hope*,' says Pharaoh. 'But I don't see myself starting you up in business with it. What do you think I am?'

"'Oh, very well,' says Jake, 'if you're going to look at it that way, why, all right. But the first thing *you* know you'll find yourself out of work with a *wife* to support.'

"Pharaoh turned pea-green. 'Oh, I ain't married *yet*,' he growled.

"'No,' says Jake, 'but you will be if I know Daisy Spiffel. She ain't a going to wash dishes all her life; and I don't blame her.'

"'H-m!' says Pharaoh, dropping into a chair and squinting sixteen ways at once. 'Huh!' Then, giving a groan, he got to his feet and commenced to walk up and down, his hands clutched in his hair. 'Jake,' he says, 'I'd pretty near rather die than marry that girl, or any girl. I just can't afford it.' Then taking his hands out of his hair so he could wring 'em instead, he told Jake about the fix he was in. 'Of course,' he says, 'she *thinks* I'm going to do it, and I would 'a' done it if the war had kept up, but now—I tell you, I ain't a going to marry her.'

"'Well, don't look at me,' says Jake. 'I ain't a going to make you. But you better think up a pretty good excuse before you tell Daisy.'

"'Huh!' says Pharaoh once more, stopping his floor-walking and staring at Jake as piercing as a cock-eyed feller can. 'Oh, hell! Ain't it awful?'

"And then it was Jake told me that all of a sudden he had an idea come to him. Maybe if he got Pharaoh Evans out of his trouble, he'd agree to finance the shop they'd been talking about.

"'Pharaoh,' he says, 'I got a proposition to make to you. If I sidetrack Daisy Spiffel, will you put up the money to go into business together?'

"'Will I?' says Pharaoh, looking like

somebody had thrown him a life-belt when he was a going down for the third time. 'Jake, if you stop this here wreck of my life, I'll do anything. I'm wore out worryin' about it.'

"So, after a little more talking about the matter, it was arranged that Jake should go out with Pharaoh that evening to the farm, where Daisy went every night—it being only a short ride—and call on her.

"You see, Jake, he believed he had Daisy Spiffel's number down fine. Her and Pharaoh, when they got engaged, had come to the station to see him off when he went to camp. At that time he couldn't help but notice that Daisy looked at him kind of longin', for, though he wasn't no beauty, he was a sight better looking than Pharaoh Evans. But now, in his khaki, with his divisional decoration on one shoulder, and his sassy little overseas cap cocked over one ear, he was more allurin' than ever. And that's what he was counting on to help get Pharaoh out of his hole. Not that he wasn't sorry for Daisy, knowing how Pharaoh had made a sort of goat of her; but as he says to hisself, business is business, and if I don't look out for myself, who will?

" 'This is the way we'll work it, Pharaoh,' he says, as they boarded the trolley. 'When you get up to go home, I'll stick on, like I couldn't bear to leave. And to-morrow night, when Daisy comes out of the hotel to take the car, I'll happen to be around there, too, and ride out with her. Then later you come out. And when you find me setting in the parlor again, you act like I'd stabbed you in the back or something, and scowl the worst you can. And every time after that you find me there, you get madder and madder. See?'

" 'Sure, I see,' says Pharaoh, grinning like it was Christmas.

" 'Of course,' went on Jake, 'I'll have to give her presents and things, I s'pose; so if you'll slip me twenty-five dollars or so—'

" 'Twenty-five dollars!' yelled Pharaoh. 'Twenty-five—say, are you out of your mind?'

" 'Well,' says Jake, 'if I don't give her something now and then, it ain't likely to work, that's all.'

" 'I'll give you five dollars,' growled Pharaoh, pulling out his wallet. 'Not one cent more. Why, I ain't spent that much on her altogether, except for the ring.'

" 'All right,' says Jake, tucking the bills in his pocket hurriedly. 'I'll do what I can, but it don't pay to be too tight in a desperate case like this.'

"Well, everything worked fine. When Daisy seen him come up the walk with Pharaoh, a real, live hero fresh from licking Kaiser Bill, her eyes just ate him up. She was standing on the porch with her dog, Bingo, a whopping red-eyed bull, alongside her.

" 'Oh, Mr. Finney,' says she, 'ain't it grand you got back all right and looking so fine, too?'

" 'No finer than you, Miss Spiffel,' says Jake; 'and I see you got Bingo still taking care of you.'

" 'His name ain't going to be Bingo no more,' says Daisy. 'Soon as I seen we was going to win I decided to change it to Pershing, and I believe he'll like it better. Won't you, Bingo?'

"And when she says that the bull blinked his red eyes and let out a rumble like somebody was moving furniture indoors. Bingo wasn't no beauty and the way he sort of sneered, showing a big, shiny tooth at each corner of his mouth when he looked at Jake and Pharaoh, made the both of 'em feel kind of creepy.

" 'Gee!' says Jake when at last they was in the parlor and he was setting on the sofa with Daisy, the bull underneath it and sticking a growl into the conversation every now and then. 'Gee, Miss Spiffel, but's it's good to see an American girl once more.'

" 'Oh, go on, Mr. Finney,' says she, tickled something terrible. 'You're just talking! What about them French girls in France?'

" 'French girls is like French fried potatoes,' says Jake. 'You get tired of 'em after a bit. No, Miss Spiffel, there ain't none to beat our girls here.'

"He spread his arm along the back of the sofa and give her an eager look that set her gasping. 'I often used to think of you and Pharaoh, Miss Spiffel,' he says,

'Often when I was a-setting in the mud up to my neck dodging machine gun bullets, I used to say to myself: 'There's Pharaoh Evans with a good, safe job, and a pretty girl getting ready to marry him. He's a lucky duck!'

"Huh!" put in Pharaoh with a snort from his chair on the other side of the room. 'In-deed! You don't say so, Mr. Finney!'

"After which he got up and come over to the sofa, his face all scrouged up to show he was mad. 'What's the matter with me setting down, too?' says he to Daisy. 'Move along, can't you?'

"'Move along?' she says, snickering. 'Where to? Can't you see all the seat's being used. Unless you want me to set on Mr. Finney's lap.' And when she says that she almost choked herself laughing.

"'Miss Spiffel,' says Pharaoh, very stiff, 'you're forgetting something, ain't you?'

"'What?' asks Daisy.

"'Well, that there ring on your finger I give you, for instance,' says he. 'Don't that mean nothing to you?'

"'Oh, come now, Pharaoh,' says Jake. 'I ain't trying to steal your girl. Don't think that. Not but what it's a temptation, though.'

"'Mr. Finney!' shrieked Daisy. 'If you ain't just terrible! The first thing you know, you'll have Pharaoh a-shooting us both out of jealousy.'

"'Pooh!' says Pharaoh. 'And getting hung for it? Not me! I know a better way than that.' He picked up his hat. 'Good night, Miss Spiffel!' he says. 'I hope you'll enjoy yourself.' Then he give Jake a knowing sort of squint, and stalked out of the house.

"'My,' says Daisy, looking rather pop-eyed as the door slammed behind him, 'I do believe he's mad. It's all your fault, Mr. Finney.'

"'My fault,' says Jake. 'Why, the idea, Miss Spiffel! It ain't my fault you're so nice, is it? He oughtn't to have brought me here. I'd better be going myself.'

"But he didn't; not for a half-hour or so. And when he did tear himself away, he did it so lingering, Daisy's dad had to yell down-stairs twice at 'em.

"The next day at noon, Jake says, when

he knowed I wouldn't be there, he stopped in at the shop. 'You done noble, Pharaoh,' he says. 'At the rate we're going, it won't be no time before the grand finale. Don't you think you'd better commence to start to get that money out of the bank?'

"'Not on your life!' says Pharaoh. 'Why, I ain't even got my ring back yet. I'll wait and see what sort of headway you make at Daisy's this evening.'

"'You watch me!' says Jake, throwing back his shoulders.

"So when Daisy come out the back door of the American House that evening to take her car, she was both pleased and surprised to bump right into Private Finney, who, according to schedule, happened to be in the vicinity.

"'Why, Miss Spiffel,' says he, giving her his best salute, 'ain't it nice meeting you this way by accident? Where do we go from here, eh?'

"'I'm going home,' says she; 'unless I went to a movie.'

"'Oh, there ain't no place like home,' says Jake hastily, remembering how he only had the five Pharaoh had give him, and the sixty-eight cents of his own, to pay his board and everything. So he dragged her to the trolley and give her a boost up the step before she could argue the matter.

"'You fond o' candy, Miss Spiffel?' he says, bringing out a package of cough drops he'd hooked from off my razor-stand.

"'I love it,' says she, grabbing the refreshments as the car started. 'I love anything I can eat.'

"'Geel!' says Jake. 'You ought to marry a gingerbread man!'

"She give a shriek of merriment that made his blood run cold. 'Mr. Finney! You're getting worse and worse! You don't care what you say!'

"'Oh, yes, I do,' says he, thinking what Pharaoh had wished on himself by talking too much. 'If ever you hear me say anything I oughtn't to, Miss Spiffel, you just call me down.'

"'Then you stop now,' she says in what she thought was a whisper, 'making love to me this way!'

"Luckily they was the only ones in the car. If they hadn't 'a' been, I guess they'd

'a' been arrested. As it was the motorman mighty near had a collision once or twice, twisting about to grin at them.

"About half past eight, shortly after Jake and Daisy had got settled comfortable on the sofa, in come Pharaoh. When he seen them setting there, he stopped short.

"'Ha!' he says, very tragic, folding his arms and breathing heavy through his nose. Then he set down in the chair he'd set in the night before.

"'You been here ever since, Mr. Finney?' says he, very polite and sneerylike.

"'Of course not,' growled Jake, letting on he was terrible sore at him. 'Why, I just come. The idea of talking that way. Are you trying to hurt my feelings, Mr. Evans?'

"'What's the use,' says Pharaoh, 'when you ain't got none?'

"'Miss Spiffel,' says Jake, getting up and making her a bow, 'I'm a gentleman, I am; and a gentleman don't never quarrel before ladies. Good night!' Then he beat it, leaving her setting there with her mouth open.

"He didn't hear what happened after that, he told me, until just as he was getting ready for bed. Then Pharaoh rung the bell, and dragged him out on the porch.

"'Jake,' says Pharaoh, beaming like a full moon, 'you're the champeen actor of the world. You should 'a' seen the fight we had. The engagement is as good as broke, I guess. I told her I'd be out tomorrow night, though. And then I'm going to have another fight to make sure. She called me every name she could think of, short of swearing.'

"'What's all this fuss about anyhow, Daisy?' I says to her. 'Ain't I got a right to get mad when I see you so fickle? Are you trying to get engaged to Mr. Finney, or what?'

"'Say,' yelled Jake, shaking his fist under Pharaoh's nose, 'where do you get that stuff? What do you mean by putting such fool notions as that into her head? I'll drop out of this thing if you don't quit it. Do you want to get me in the same mess you're in?'

"'All right! All right!' says Pharaoh. 'Keep your hair on! She didn't say she was trying.'

"'I should hope not!' growled Jake.

"Well, the next night Pharaoh went out to have his second fight with Daisy like he said he would, so as to be sure the engagement was busted. But instead of finding her in the parlor when he arrived, he found her down by the pond back of the house. She had a lantern with her. And maybe she wasn't excited.

"'What you doing here?' asked Pharaoh.

"'S-h!' says she, putting her finger to her lips. 'I don't want pa to know it yet, for if it wasn't really so, the disappointment might kill him. He's been hoping and hoping, ever since Eben Morse found oil on his farm, that we might find it on ours.'

"'Oil!' says Pharaoh, gulping suddenly. 'Oil? You—you don't think you've found oil, do you, Daisy?'

"'It—it looks mighty like it,' says she, her voice trembling. She pointed to the pond, holding up the lantern so he could see. And darned if there wasn't an oily scum all over it; and you could smell it, too.

"'I can hardly believe it's true,' says she. 'So I'm going to wait a week or two and see if it keeps on coming up; and if it does—oh, boy! No more dish-washing at the American House for this lady!'

"Say, you could 'a' knocked Pharaoh Evans down with a feather. He shuddered to think how near he'd come to having a second fight with Daisy Spiffel, and busting his engagement for sure. All he had to do now, he says to hisself, was to pet her up a bit, and he'd soon fix everything O. K. But before he did it, he took the lantern from Daisy and walked around the pond a-sniffing and examining the water careful, to make sure his eyes and his nose hadn't gone back on him. But there was the oil all right, big patches of it.

"'Daisy,' he says as they walked back to the house, 'I feel awful we had that fuss last night. But it wouldn't 'a' happened if I wasn't so wild about you.'

"'Wild about me!' says she. 'Well, you may be wild about me, but I ain't about you. Not no more. I don't marry no jealous hound like you, Pharaoh Evans. I'll give you your ring as soon as we get in the

parlor. My finger was so swole it took me all day to get it off.'

" 'I won't take it!' says Pharaoh, passionate and perspiring. 'If you won't keep me, keep my ring, anyways, even if it did cost me eight dollars. And maybe some time your heart 'll tell you how wrong you been.'

" 'I should worry about my heart,' says Daisy, 'with all this here oil on my mind.'

"And, sure enough, when they got into the parlor, she give him his ring. And though he near beat Henry Clay to a frazzle a-pleading his case, she just yawned a couple of times, and then, when he wouldn't go, she blowed out the lamp and went upstairs, and left him to get out the best way he could.

"The next morning as Pharaoh was on his way to work, he says Jake Finney come running up behind him. 'Is it all fixed up, Pharaoh?' says Jake. 'Did you have the other fight? Or shall I go out and do some more good work?'

" 'Good work!' bawled Pharaoh, turning on him in a fury. 'Fine work you done, Jake Finney. If it hadn't 'a' been for you I'd be engaged to Daisy Spiffel yet. But now—oh, what's the use?'

" 'What you talking about?' cried Jake. 'Do you mean to say you *want* to keep on being engaged to her?'

" 'Sure, I do!' says Pharaoh. 'But it ain't no use. She won't have nothing to do with me. Gee, I might have been a rich man if it hadn't 'a' been for you.'

"Then he told Jake all about the oil that had been found on the Spiffel farm. 'The pond back of the house is greasy with it,' he says.

" 'Go on!' says Jake. 'You're dreaming! I don't believe it!'

" 'I tell you, I seen it!' yelled Pharaoh. 'Oil—lots and lots of it, floating on top of the water. Go on out and see for yourself, if you want. But you needn't think you're going to step in with Daisy where I stepped off, because you ain't. I've fixed your feet! I told her everything! And I ain't going to set you up in business, neither. You're dished just as bad as me.'

"But Jake says that didn't stop him none. First he went out and examined

the pond even more careful than Pharaoh had done. Then in the evening, after shaving hisself for the second time that day, and making hisself look as nice as he could, he went out again. And this time he took Daisy a dollar box of candy.

"As he was waiting for the trolley along come Pharaoh Evans on his way from work. Pharaoh scowled at him. Then he noticed the box of candy with the ribbon tied about it. 'Where you going?' he says.

" 'Where ~~do~~ you s'pose?' says Jake, holding the candy so Pharaoh could see it better.

" 'If you're a going out to Daisy's,' says Pharaoh, 'you're a-wasting your time, I can tell you that.'

" 'Time ain't nothing to me,' says Jake.

" 'She'll set the dog on you,' says Pharaoh.

" 'Not on me, she won't,' says Jake, 'after I tell her what a liar you are.'

" 'Liar?' says Pharaoh. 'So that's your game, is it? All right, I'll go out with you. We'll see what she thinks when I tell her you bought that there candy with *my* money.' With that he hops on the trolley as it comes along.

" 'You go home and get your supper, and mind your own business,' says Jake, trying to bump him off.

" 'Don't you worry about my supper,' says Pharaoh, hanging on for dear life as they went around a curve. 'I'll get that after I've seen the can tied to you, and enjoy it, too.'

" 'Maybe you will, and maybe you won't,' growled Jake, setting as far from him as he could.

"It was almost nine o'clock when they got to Daisy's. The minute she opened the door Jake poked the box of candy at her. 'Hello!' he says, cute as a kitten.

" 'What do you want?' says she, looking first at Jake and then at Pharaoh; then taking the box of candy under her arm.

" 'You,' says Jake, putting on his most winning smile. 'All I want is you, Daisy.'

" 'How about the oil?' says she, pushing him back on the step when he tried to come in. 'Don't you want that, too, Mr. Finney?'

" 'Yes,' says Pharaoh, grinning; 'how about the oil, Mr. Finney?'

"Don't you pay no attention to him," says Jake to Daisy. "He's mad jealous because I'm cutting him out. That's why he told you them lies about me."

"Lies, nothing!" says Pharaoh.

"Oh, they was lies, was they?" says Daisy.

"Black as ink," says Jake. "Lemme come in and I'll prove it! When you marry, Miss Spiffel, you want to marry a gentleman."

"Is that so, Mr. Finney!" says she. "Then what are *you* hanging around for?" After which she slammed the door in his face.

"Now you would have thought, Pharaoh says to me when Daisy done that, that Jake would have give up and gone away. And Pharaoh was so sure he would he just leant against the fence and commenced to cackle about it. But, no, Pharaoh told me, that wasn't Jake Finney's way of working things. When he couldn't see Daisy at the front door, he just went around to the back, Pharaoh a-trailing after him and explaining to him what a fool he was. And there, setting on the steps in the moonlight, with the bull alongside of her, was Daisy, eating up the box of candy."

"Down sets Jake on the other side of her. 'Daisy,' says he, helping hisself to about fifty cents' worth of the candy, 'you ain't going to stay mad, are you? You really don't think I'm after your money, do you? Why, if I thought *that*, I'd get mad myself.'

"Well," says she, 'what *are* you after then? Me?'

"Sure," says Jake, trying to take all he could of her in his arms. "You, and every bit of you!"

"Dear me," says Daisy, jerking herself loose, "I don't know what to think. Pharaoh told me the same thing."

"And I *meant* it, too," put in Pharaoh, walking up and down in front of 'em like a bear in a pit. "He don't. He's a liar just like I told you."

"You shut your head, Pharaoh Evans," snarled Jake, "or I'll knock it off."

"You try it," says Pharaoh, doubling up his fists. "You think because you been in the army you can lick anything."

"I can lick anything like you," says

Jake, jumping up and squaring away at him. "Miss Spiffel," he says, turning to Daisy, "if I lick him will you marry me?"

"Oh," says Daisy, eating candy faster than ever, "why, I—I don't know. I never had gentlemen fight over me before."

"That's all right," says Jake, "but will you? And to be fair, if he licks me, you can marry him."

"Oh, she can, can she?" sneered Pharaoh. "Well, you needn't worry yourself about that, Mr. Finney. When this here affair is over there won't be no one left to marry *but* me."

"Whereupon he hit Jake Finney on the nose as hard as he could, and the *next* minute you couldn't see nothing but arms and legs going around and around, while Daisy set on the steps giving little screams and holding on to the bull to keep him from joining in."

"Well, if you'd 'a' been there, Jake says, you sure would 'a' bet on him; for though he was shorter than Pharaoh, he was in prime shape from his army life. But if you'd 'a' bet on him, he says, you'd 'a' lost, for just as him and Pharaoh got in among the bushes, what did he do but stumble over something and go over backward, which surprised him as much as anybody. And the next minute Pharaoh was setting on his chest pounding his face like a trip-hammer. And after a spell of *that* treatment, he says, he just had to give up and yell he'd had enough."

"There," says Pharaoh, getting up and going over to Daisy, "didn't I tell you I could lick him?"

"Daisy looked at him as he stood before her trying to get his left eye open. Then she looked over to where Jake was setting among the bushes trying to make his nose stop bleeding. She didn't say nothing, Jake says, but from the look on her face he could tell plain she was sorry he'd got the worst of it."

"You'll marry me now, Daisy, won't you?" says Pharaoh, pulling out the ring she'd give him back. "Here, hold out your finger."

"And Daisy, after hesitating a minute, let him put it on."

"Then out come old man Spiffel with

his pants over his nightshirt. 'What's all this here rumpus about?' he says. 'It's scandalous! Such carryings on!'

"Then while Pharaoh Evans was explaining matters to him, Jake found out all at once what had made him lose the fight.

"'Here's what tripped me,' says he to Daisy, coming forward with a can in his hands. 'If it hadn't 'a' been for this I'd 'a' won. We got to try it over again.'

"'Not much!' says Pharaoh, waving him off and squeezing Daisy to him tight. 'You're licked, Mr. Finney, and you ain't man enough to own up to it. Miss Spiffel's going to marry me, and her father's a witness to it.'

"'Where'd you find that there oil-can?' says old man Spiffel, grabbing it from Jake. 'I been a-looking everywhere for it.'

"'In the bushes,' says Jake. 'It got between my legs when we was fighting.'

"'Oh,' says Daisy as if she'd just remembered something. She give the oil-can a hard look for a moment, and then she commenced to chuckle.

"'I wonder what you'd think,' says she to Pharaoh, 'if I told you I'd poured oil out of that there can into the pond so you'd believe you missed marrying an heiress when we had our falling out?'

"'What!' says Pharaoh, letting go of her like she was red-hot.

"'Eh?' says Jake, letting his nose go ahead and bleed all it wanted to. He says he felt like he was going to swoon. 'Why—why—well, as long as Pharaoh won't fight no more, I guess I'd better be going.'

"'Wait a minute,' says Pharaoh, backing away as fast as he could, 'I'll go with you.'

"'But look here, Daisy,' says old man Spiffel. 'I don't understand. This here can ain't been in use for months. It's got a hole in it. I been looking for it to mend it. You *couldn't* 'a' poured oil in the pond from it.'

"'Well,' says Daisy, 'I didn't say I had, did I? I only asked what Pharaoh would think *if* I had. No, dad, I didn't pour no oil into the pond, but I guess somebody did from the way it keeps on coming up. And if I don't miss my guess, me and you are going to be even richer than Eben Morse down Green Valley way.'

"Well, Jake says, the effect of that there speech on him and Pharaoh was something stupendous. First they couldn't speak a word, then they started to say all kinds of things in a sort of duet, holding out their arms toward Daisy like little Eva does when she's looking up into heaven, but it didn't work worth a cent.

"'Huh!' says Daisy, with a sneer, turning her back on them. After which she snaps her fingers at the bull and hisses: 'Take 'em, boy!'

"And Bingo, showing his cozy corner teeth, and letting out a rumble that made you shiver, started to take 'em with a rush, but by that time Jake and Pharaoh was over the fence, and stirring up the dust in the roadway like a tornado. But even then they wouldn't 'a' made it, if old man Spiffel hadn't had presence of mind enough to grab at his pants with one hand, and at the bull's collar with the other, just in time."

Doolittle paused and, reaching for a sad-looking concoction labeled "Bay Rum," soused my face with it. Then, drying my features carefully, he powdered them, pulled the chair lever, and brought me upright with a jerk.

"Well," I said, as the old man began to juggle his comb and brush, "is that all?"

"All?" he replied. "I guess it is, unless you want a hair-cut. You only *said* a shave and a massage."

"No, no, I mean is that all the story?"

Doolittle chuckled. "Sure, that's all. And it ended fine, don't you think? The lady got what was comin' to her, and the villains got what was comin' to them; at least, Pharaoh Evans did. As for Jake, I heard—

"Well, for Pete's sake! Look, Mr. Parker, quick!"

Clamping my head in his hands, he turned it toward the window. Down the street came Miss Spiffel, resplendent. And walking at her side with apparent ease, was Mr. Finney.

"I heard—" began Doolittle.

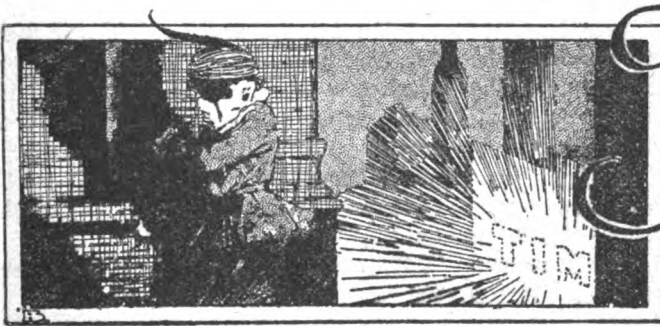
"Good Heavens!" I gasped, falling back in my chair. "What do you think of that? What the—how the—"

"Oh, you got to hand it to him for a

sticker, all right," said the old man, admiringly. "His middle name is mucilage, sure enough. Pharaoh told me he was still on the job, but I didn't believe it. Well, it takes all sorts of fellers to make a world, don't it, Mr. Parker?"

"It certainly does," I said, buttoning my collar hastily. "And it take all sorts of work to make a living, so I've got to be moving. What's the tax, Doolittle?"

"Sixty cents, Mr. Parker. Thanks! Stop in again when you're in town."



Tim
by

Genevieve Wimsatt

"BUT you can't stop me from writing to you."

"I won't open your letters, I'll never read your name again as long as I live! T-i-m has spelled disappointment and unhappiness for me, and I'm going to forget that word as soon as I can."

"But you can't! Love won't let you forget it. If you shut your eyes to it by day you'll see it written across the night in letters of fire."

"You talk like one of the minor prophets! I tell you I'll never see you again, and in a few months I won't remember your name."

"You are in a temper, but you love me, and you can no more forget my name than I can forget your eyes."

Rosalie Caswell jerked her coat-sleeve free from the restraining hand that clutched it, flounced into her apartment, and slammed the door. Timothy Long turned, and walked slowly down the hall toward the elevator.

Viewing this stormy parting an unseen and cynical observer might well have shaken his bald and pessimistic head, remarking: "So much for the power of love that the poets sing." But you and I who know that love is more subtle than cynics, would

have counted fifty, very slowly, and waited to see what would happen.

We should not have had long to wait. Almost before the elevator had finished its descent Rosalie, in a tweed traveling suit, came from the apartment carrying a suitcase. She again slammed the door, locked it, and turned on her smart French heel.

"I'll never speak, nor hear, nor see his name again!" she vowed to the blank panels of the door. "I'll go to New York, have a spin down Fifth Avenue and up Broadway, then catch a train for Washington, stay a week with Aunt Ellen and, after that, ho, for Los Angeles!"

Some five hours later Rosalie descended from the Pullman wherein she had sulked continuously, took her bag from the porter, crossed Grand Central Station, and looked out upon New York.

"Take me slowly down Fifth Avenue, and up Broadway, and get me to the Pennsylvania Station for this train," she directed a taxi driver, showing him a checked figure on a time-table.

Sinking back in the leather cavern she closed her eyes tight to restrain the overflowing tears.

Fifth Avenue slid past the windows of the moving cab in a current of eddying

humanity, and long reaches of chaotic splendor; the elite of fashion thronged the pavements; pictures, lustrous brocades, flowers, bon-bons, porcelains gleamed through the plate-glass of the display cases; but so far as Rosalie was concerned the taxi might have been speeding across the desert. Blind to the hurrying crowds, oblivious of the shops, she stared straight ahead, repeating to the stolid back of the chauffeur the vow she had made to the locked door—the vow now elaborated by the restriction: “I won’t even think it, or dream it!”

Aroused from her abstraction by a sudden jolt and the stopping of the cab in a tangle of traffic she straightened up, and glanced listlessly out at the street. It was twilight, and as she looked down the gray, seething vista myriads upon myriads of lights flashed into beauty. Above the lowest stratum of street lights the restless theater announcements and café signs flashed intermittently, or zigzagged across gay façades, or crept coily into glory, then vanished, only to reappear the next moment; while over the roofs, mingling with the dimmed stars, animated creatures outlined in white fire performed feats of wonder against the sky. A girl of golden light with streaming bright hair swung out on diamond ropes higher than the Great Dipper; a company of lineal gnomes drilled and presented arms to Orion; a kitten bigger than the Little Bear teased a spool of endless thread.

Distracted from her brooding for a moment Rosalie leaned forward and watched one great electric display after another flame in the galaxy above Broadway. As she looked a sign high on a building down the street flashed and coruscated in uneasy brilliancy, catching her attention from the more uniform scintillations. Letter by huge letter it blazed its message down the street into her rounding eyes; a gigantic T smoldered, reddened, flickered, then shone in steady radiance; an equally heroic I followed the T; there was a moment’s pause, then an M added itself to the beaming pair.

“Tim!” gasped the girl in the taxi, burying her face in her hands. “Tim!” He

said I would see his name written across the dark in letters of fire—and there it is!”

Cautiously she peeped between her fingers; but the flashes of blue lightning that had followed the appearance of the M had ceased, and the name *Tim* shone clear and fixed.

“I’m going crazy!” shuddered Rosalie, cowering in the cab. “Or Tim has hypnotized me! Maybe his thought waves make that impression, and that name isn’t there at all! This is mental persecution! I’m glad I’m going on—New York isn’t far enough—I suppose I’ll be safe in Washington.”

Frantically she tapped on the pane of the taxi.

“Driver! Hurry to the Pennsylvania Station!” she implored. “I must catch that train for Washington! Hurry!”

Now, if the cynical old misogynist presupposed in an earlier paragraph had been an unseen passenger in the taxi it is probable he would have chuckled disagreeably, and dashed into the tall building to whisper a few disturbing words in the ear of a busy man at a desk. But if you and I had been with him we should have winked at his wisdom, and assured each other that with love there can be no such thing as chance.

“You seem pale, Rosie. Are you ill?”

Rosalie’s aunt looked anxiously at her pretty niece, who stood still on the corner, and stared across Pennsylvania Avenue.

“Do you see what I see, Aunt Ellen?” inquired Rosalie breathlessly.

“Where? Oh, that building where all the bunting is waving! Yes, of course, I see it!”

“Do you—do you see any letters there, Aunt Ellen, right between those flags?”

“My sight is not so good as it once was, Rosalie, and it is growing dark, but I can still distinguish an electric sign of that size,” replied the aunt with some asperity. “Yes, I see it quite well—T-I-M. Isn’t that odd? I wonder what it means! Neither of our Presidential candidates is named Tim—nor neither of the Vice-Presidents. Washington is so full of politics. Perhaps that’s the

name of some third party leader we haven't heard of yet."

"Oh, horrors, he's got you, too!" exclaimed Rosalie cryptically under her breath. She grasped her aunt's elbow, and steered her gently up the avenue.

"I find, Aunt Ellen, I must go on tomorrow instead of waiting until next week. Oh, I really must! It's so cold here in Washington, and Gertrude has wired that she is expecting me. Really, I must."

How that hypothetical old grouch would have laughed to hear her. But you and I, more learned in the devious ways of love, would have laughed, too—at the grouch.

In Los Angeles, five days later, Rosalie paced the floor of her friend Gertrude's apartment, and drew long breaths of exaltation.

"And so we broke it off," she informed the lacy figure stretched at length on the divan. "Don't speak to me about him, Trudy, for I've vowed never to hear his name again."

"But poor old Tim! His absence wasn't intentional, and he couldn't help the motor's breaking down!"

"There you go! It's Tim, Tim, wherever I turn! And the worst of it I haven't come to yet! He's trying to annoy me psychically, Trudy! He's persecuting me with occult manifestations!"

"What! Psychic phenomena! Why, I'm thrilled, Rosalie! Tell me all!"

"When we quarreled he threatened that even though I wouldn't let any one mention his name to me, and wouldn't read it signed to his letters, I couldn't get away from it—that I'd seen it written in letters of fire."

"But of course you didn't."

"But I did! Once in New York as I was passing through, and again in Washington! Oh, I didn't dream I was psychic—I never could do anything with the ouija board! But twice that mystic bully has been able to project his horrid name through my subconsciousness, and make me think I saw Tim in bright letters six feet high!"

"Fancy! We'll go to the next meeting of the Amateur Mediums' Club and make them green with jealousy!"

"But I'll get the better of him yet, no matter what sneaky, sublimated methods he resorts to," Rosalie vowed. "I'll bet his control can't touch me here! It's too far!"

With a gesture indicative of freedom triumphant she swept aside the heavy window curtains, and looked out over the fog-wrapped city. For a moment she stood transfixed before the three letters that seemed to stare her in the face, then fell backward in a faint.

Gertrude sprang to her feet, and blinked before her window. After one long glance at the baleful letters throwing their beams straight into her apartment she looked down at the limp form at her feet, and chuckled:

"Coincidences run in series," she murmured, bending over her friend. "And if it's happened once, I guess it's happened before."

"It's no good fighting your fate, is it, Trudy?" Rosalie inquired an hour later, sitting up in bed, and sipping the hot tea her hostess brought her. "Besides, Tim must be thinking of me terribly hard to send thought waves all across the continent."

"I should imagine that would take considerable concentration," agreed Gertrude, turning abruptly from the bed.

"And if he thinks of me as hard as that perhaps he didn't have any attention to spare for that other girl. Maybe it was an accident, as he said."

"It seems probable."

"And perhaps it was somewhat my fault about the quarrel."

Gertrude said nothing.

"And I think I'll go to sleep now. I'll have to get up early to catch that train back East."

"The little goose fancied herself the heroine of a psychic wooing," the cynic would have explained. "She imagined that her fellow, through the power of love, made her see his name in big, flaming letters in three different cities! Now, any fool knows there's a *Times* newspaper, and a *Times* building in half the cities in the United States.

"Now, in New York, coming down Broadway, she happened to catch sight of the electric sign on the *Times* Building at

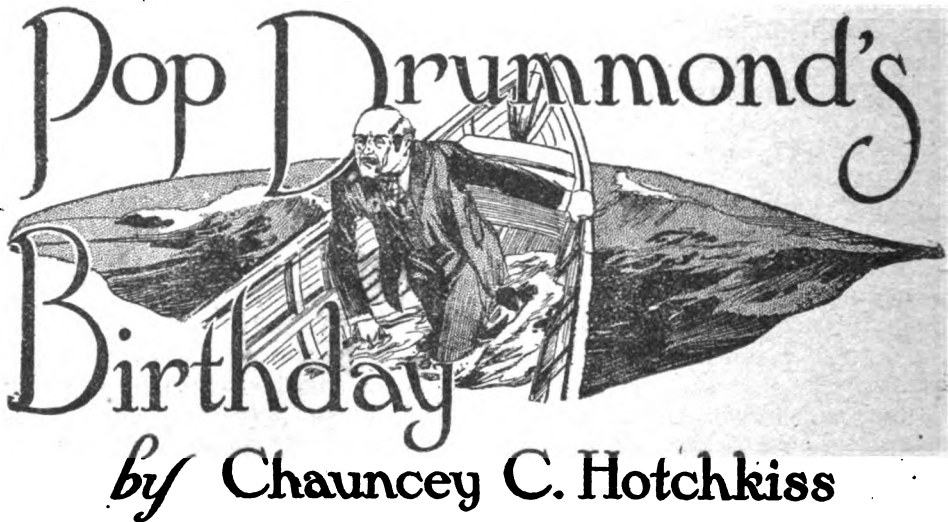
a moment when there was trouble at the switch, and the current was cut off before it lighted the E S that should have completed the TIM.

"Then, in Washington, when the political celebration was at its height she saw the Times Building so hung with flags, and banners, and bunting, that all she could see of their sign was the first three letters.

"And in Los Angeles on a foggy night, an

angle of the apartment cut off part of her view of the Times tower, slicing the E S that she couldn't see, from the TIM that she could see! The power of love! Fiddlesticks!"

But you and I know that it doesn't matter how the effect is produced if the result is satisfactory; and that only for those who believe in his power does love work miracles.



SANFORD'S general store showed little of the science of up-to-date merchandizing. And a single whiff of its stale atmosphere would have determined the character of the surrounding community, the mingled flavors of new oilskins, pitch, tarred rope, and marine supplies deadening the less forceful odors of fresh calico, leather and kerosene. One knew at once that Sanford purveyed to a seafaring custom as well as to dwellers of the littoral. The grime on the small paned windows was months old, and the mixed display behind them fly-specked and stale with age, the whole place looking unswept and dingy in the mellow light of the waning September afternoon.

It was not the hour for either customers or loungers. Mr. Sanford himself, with something of the character of his immediate surroundings stamped on his person, sat alone behind the knife-scored counter reading a newspaper. It was very quiet. Save

for the loud ticking of the murky-faced clock, the subdued sound of waves rolling in from the bay not forty rods distant, and the rattle of the paper as Mr. Sanford turned it, the emporium was wrapped in melancholy silence.

Presently there was a heavy step on the outside platform and the store-door opened. The proprietor glanced up, then with an air of wonder sat up; for the stranger who entered bore no resemblance to the usual habitu   of the store, and, in fact, the little hamlet of Wickapemis rarely saw his like.

That he was from the city was clear at a glance. The exact fit of his light suit proclaimed it; the sparkle of the diamond pin in his noisy necktie emphasized it, while the yellow chamois gloves and high silk hat, the latter very glossy and worn at a tilt, shouted it. He was a trifle undersized as to height and a trifle oversized as to girth, but neither fact mitigated the air of self-importance which seemed as much a part

of him as his closely cropped moustache. Prosperity and pomposity sat on his shoulders as plain as his silk-faced spring overcoat which was thrown back, displaying the gold chain stretched across his chest. He walked up to the counter, deposited on it a fire-new pigskin grip, and leaned confidentially toward the proprietor who, with the impassibility of his class, looked at his visitor.

"I'm in something of a dilemma," said the stranger. "I have just arrived in this jumping-off place. There was to be a man to meet me and take me over the bay—a Mr. David T. Turk—but he was not at the depot. I was told that perhaps Mr. Turk would be found here. You know him, of course—I don't."

Mr. Sanford's gorge had instinctively risen against the superior air of the man and his scant respect for Wickapemis; but there was no sign of ire in his answer: "Know Dave Turk? Wall, I guess! He was in here this mornin' buyin' some ter-baker fer Pop Drummond's birthday. Hain't seen him sence. Don't know if he has gone back or not. Guess he has."

"I presume I can find some one to take me over."

"To where?"

"To Pelican Point. I have business with the Captain Drummond you speak of."

Mr. Sanford's heavy eyes opened wide. "Oh, I see! Wall, you won't have no trouble gettin' across, I cal'late. Some one's likely to be down to the pier."

"One is as good as another," said the stranger, and taking a well-filled cigar-case from his pocket, he drew out a Havana and lighted it. Mr. Sanford looked a trifle disappointed 'as the case was repocketed un-offered, then he reached into his cigar-stand and helped himself to a cheroot the color of molasses. For a few moments the two smoked in silence, the proprietor furtively eying his profitless caller. It was the latter who broke the spell.

"What sort of a man is Captain Drummond, my good friend?" he asked, sending a thin line of smoke toward the blackened ceiling.

"Pop Drummond? Don't you know him?"

"No. I have never been here before—and have no wish to come again."

Mr. Sanford permitted himself to appear surprised, and licked a loose leaf of his cheroot before answering. "Wall, sir," he finally said, "Pop Drummond is a case. He's a leetle teched, perhaps—like his father what suicided—drownded himself, years ago. But pop is a fine old chap. Looks harmless enough, but he might be a terror if he's woke up and 'roused."

"So! Shaky in the head, hey?"

"Yaas. He's a old whaler livin' on a pension from his firm—or he has been. The old concern's in trouble now an' pop don't get his money very reg'lar. I don't know what he'd do without Dave Turk—an' Dave's poorer 'n a crow."

"The man who was to have met me?"

"Yaas. Not in money; he can't do much, but he does some. Say, once last winter, when the pension didn't come, an' pop was nigh starvin' in his pride, Dave gets me to trust him fer a ham an' a lot o' pertaters an' stuff, an' he goes an' lays 'em on pop's front porch. He said he'd kill me if I told pop—an' I guess he's ekle to it. The joke is that pop said it was God what done it."

"Ah! Did you ever get paid?"

"Oh, yaas; Dave paid. An' this spring, when pop was sick, I'm darned if Dave didn't go an' dig up the old man's garden patch in the middle o' the night, an' he planted it, an' pop don't guess it yet. He says that was God, too. I guess there ain't no hate between them two fellers. Dave's a fool."

"Damon and Pythias, hey!"

"Huh?"

"Close friends, you know."

"You bet! But Dave's an ass."

"For what?" asked the city man.

"For workin' fer nothin'. Dave could lay a claim against pop."

"It would be business," said the other, picking up his bag. "I suppose I'm likely to meet this man, Turk, at the point, but he can make no trouble."

"Trouble about what? Him! Dave's as mild as skimmed milk. He wouldn't trouble nobody what treats him right. He'd be better off if he had more spunk."

"Yes? Well, I must be going. You say there will be some one at the pier?"

"More 'n likely."

The door closed behind the stranger. Mr. Sanford's brows knitted as he stepped to the front window and looked after his visitor. "Wonder what in the devil he's goin' to do with pop?" he muttered. "Foreclose? Gosh! I hope Dave—"

He did not pursue his unspoken hope for at that moment a customer came up the rickety steps and absorbed his attention.

The man from the city went down the steep street which seemed reluctant to stop at the water's edge, for it continued on in the shape of a long, narrow pier black with age. When there was an eastern gale the whole crazy structure would shake with the force of the surges, but now the low swell of the rising tide, ruffled by the west wind, smote the ancient structure gently.

Moored to the end of the pier was a fisherman's dory, line-scored, old and worn, and on the rotting string-piece above it sat a man, the only one in sight. He was well past sixty years but was almost a giant in size. Clad in shabby overalls and worn rubber boots he made a picturesque figure as he seemed to gaze abstractedly at the few smacks anchored in-shore. And, indeed, he was splendid to look at. He needed but a black ribbon to gather his flowing gray hair to be the type of the strong, resourceful colonial the mold of which seems to have been shattered. Clean shaven, smoothly bronzed, deep of chest and large of bone he would have graced either pulpit or rostrum—until he opened his fine mouth and showed his ragged, tobacco-stained teeth; until he displayed his fund of profanity and his ignorance of the polite amenities. He would hardly have been popular in a gentle community, being too like the coast on which he lived—rugged and uncompromising.

And yet, withal, his smooth forehead was almost as clear as a child's, and his face bore something of a child's simplicity as he sat there, an old oilskin sou'wester pushed back on his magnificent head. He appeared to be in deep dejection.

To him the other made his way, the rattling of loose planking heralding his approach.

"Say, there! What will you charge to take me over to Pelican Point?"

The sitting man gave a slow, sidelong glance at the well-dressed stranger and sent a stream of black tobacco-juice into the water. "'Bout fifty cents, I guess—when I go." The answer was spiritless.

"All right! When will that be?"

"Mebby a minnit—mebby an hour—mebby two. Waitin' fer a sack o' pertaters to take across."

"Why, man, it will be black dark in less than two hours!"

"Wall, what of it?"

"Oh, nothing, I suppose, if you know your business. Only I hate the water, especially after dark. It's treacherous. I was to be met and taken across by a chap named Turk—David Turk. Do you know him?"

The other did not turn his head. "Yaas, I know him. Saw him at the deppo this mornin'. Said he was waitin' for a feller from Boston, but the feller didn't come. Be ye him?"

"Yes, I missed the first train. What is your name, my friend?"

"Tobias. Some calls me Toby."

"Mine is Stegle. I'm a lawyer and have business with Captain Drummond at the Point. You can show me where he lives?"

The big man spat again, and there was a vehement jerk to the stream he sent into the bay. Wheeling around on the speaker he faced him squarely for the first time, seemingly studying the man before him. Mr. Stegle threw away his half-consumed cigar, which had become extinguished, and took a fresh one from the case which he did not tender to the other.

"Wall, sir," said the fisherman, speaking in a resonant voice which could be felt as well as heard. "I allow ye be arter pop. Goin' to foreclose on him, I take it! Everybody to the P'int knows what's in the wind. Ye be workin' fer that old skin-flint, Lowny, aint ye?"

"Mr. Lowny is my client, and he would doubtless be crushed by your estimate of him. However, business is business, my good friend."

"So 'tis—so 'tis," was the dejected answer. "Be ye goin' to fire old pop? Ef ye be ye might as well know it will just

about kill him. It 'll mean the County House fer him. He won't have nothin' left."

"I'm sorry, but Mr. Lowny is no eleemosynary foundation, my friend."

"Ef ye'll stick to English perhaps I can foller ye."

"I mean that he is not a charitable institution."

"Sho! No, I jedge he ain't," was the slow return. "An' he'll plug pop on his birthday, too. It don't seem right. Say, everybody knows that pop's been payin' intrust on that moggage fer forty year. He's paid more intrust than the place stan's fer. Don't Lowny think o' that? Ain't there nothin' to be done 'cept to ruin a old man?"

"I think not. My client is obdurate."

The big man looked puzzled, but he nodded. "Shouldn't wonder a bit! Say, wouldn't he belay boardin' pop ef he paid off the hull moggage now?"

The other shook his head as he dusted the string-piece with his gloved hand and sat down. "I'll be frank with you, my friend. I have been ordered to dispossess Captain Drummond. The interest on the mortgage has not been paid for a year and now Mr. Lowny has a chance to sell the entire Point to a menhaden company, the title to be given within three days. Nothing else can be considered; the time is too short. That's the situation. I tell you because I think you people ought to know it. I wish to add that this errand is intensely disagreeable to me."

"I see—I see. But perhaps Lowny don't just reckon what it 'll mean to pop. Won't ye hold off till ye can tell him?"

The other shook his head. "No. Mr. Lowny understands. I have discussed the matter with him. I have done my best for Captain Drummond, but pertinacity of purpose is one of my client's idiosyncracies."

"Don't git furrin' again. I only understand United States."

"I mean he is set. Business is business, and he knows the law will uphold him. For the rest he cares nothing."

The other made no direct return to this. After a flashing glance at the sleek Mr. Stegle he ejected a wad of tobacco from his mouth and got to his feet.

"Then there ain't no more to be said.

That seegar o' yourn makes me kinder hanker fer a smoke. No thank ye, I wouldn't rob ye. I'll be back in a minnit. Ef them pertaters come tell the feller to leave 'em. Ye can git into the dory, ef ye want to."

But Mr. Stegle preferred the steadier pier and contented himself in looking across the broad bay. The other climbed the hill to the store. Mr. Sanford was behind the counter, and his late customer, a slatternly female, was doubtfully fingering a piece of calico. The big man came in softly but his deep voice shook the floor like the subbass of a grand organ.

"Gimme a seegar, Phil. It's all up! He's come!"

"Who's come?"

"Lowny's lawyer. Stegle, he calls himself."

"Feller that was just in here? Plug hat an' store clothes?"

"That's him! 'Fraid o' the dark—'fraid o' the water! My land! An' I promised to take him over."

The proprietor looked puzzled. "What did he say his name was?"

"Stegle."

Mr. Sanford's lips puckered in a low whistle. He looked askance at the listening woman ten feet away and beckoned the big man to come close. Leaning across the counter he whispered into his ear. The fisherman listened, then started back and stared at him incredulously.

"Ye don't mean it's so!"

"Uhuh." Again came more whispering during which Mr. Sanford waved an arm in vigorous gesture, ending his earnest speech aloud and with a cryptic sentence which put the lingering woman into a desperate state of unsatisfied curiosity.

"Do as I tell ye. Git his finger in the hole—git it in the hole like I said, an' ye'll have him tame."

But the big man did not appear to have heard the last. He was mightily stirred over something, and his tobacco-stained lips were set into a hard line. For a moment he stared into vacancy, and then, as if he had seen a great light, he turned and abruptly left the store. Outside he halted a moment then brought his great hand down

on his thigh with a resounding slap. "By gosh, I'll do it!" he muttered and straightway set out for the pier, his long hair dancing on his shoulders.

"Say, 'tain't no use waitin' fer them pertaters! Git in the dory, if ye be goin' with me," he said, as he hauled the boat close to the pier. Mr. Stegle noted the changed face of the man as he carefully lowered himself into the dory, but he made no return. Having seated his passenger amidships and loosened the triangular sail the other took his place astern, and in a moment the little craft was gliding over the increasing seas—seas which to the city man looked sinister in the fast fading light.

The lawyer was not happy; the nearness to the water he disliked, and the motion of the boat, made him apprehensive, while his not too fine sensibility was keen enough to permit him to see that there was an antagonistic feeling toward himself on the part of the man facing him. It appeared to be his duty to dissipate it. When the boat had sailed well into the bay he spoke.

"I see you are not smoking, Mr. Tobias, I thought—"

"Naw, I fergot about it," was the short answer.

"Won't you have one of mine? I meant—"

"Say, I wouldn't take a seegar from ye for a million dollars."

It was as flat a rebuff as the lawyer had ever received. He coughed. "I presume you have some personal feeling against me on account of my errand," he returned, in a conciliatory tone.

"Wall, you bet! I got a call to hev."

"Why?"

"'Cause I happen to be Pop Drummond." The big man fixed a hard eye on his passenger.

Mr. Stegle stared. "You told me your name was Toby—or Tobias!"

"Wall, lawyers hain't got a license to do all the lyin'! I knew ye! I knew ye was comin' to ruin a feller on his birthday—on his seventieth birthday, mind ye. I was layin' for ye. I ought to love ye, hadn't I?"

"You might have told me the truth when I first met you."

"Wall, I didn't, but I'm tellin' ye some-

thin' now. An' I'll go so far as to ask again ef somethin' can't be done?"

Mr. Stegle was angry and for a moment forgot the irritability of his stomach. "No, nothing can be done," he snapped. "I am sorry for you, Captain Drummond. I have explained that this is a disagreeable matter for me."

"Nothin' to be done, hey?" There was something about the fisherman's hard eye which Mr. Stegle did not like.

"Nothing—unless I might arrange for a small loan," he answered.

"Don't talk about loans to a dyin' man."

The lawyer was impressed more by the other's manner than by his words. He suddenly realized that he was alone with the man he had come to ruin, and under the circumstance considered it prudent to hedge. "I little wonder that you have a bitter feeling toward me, but to blame me personally is unjust. I am only a servant. I am only here to give you formal notice of Mr. Lowny's intentions." His voice was persuasive but it seemed to have little effect on the fisherman whose face had grown as hard as flint.

"Ye won't never foreclose that moggage, mister." There was plain menace in the deep tone. Mr. Stegle's latent fear became active. "Take me back to Wickapemis at once," he said. "I will not go over to-day."

"Nor to-morrer—nor next day—nor never," was the return that suddenly tightened the lawyer's nerves and made him catch his breath. Had he been ashore he would have stoutly stood his ground but the existing conditions were different from anything he had ever experienced and he did not know how to meet them. He was on the water with a man against whom he was going to commit a moral wrong, though a legal right, and the land looked terribly far away. A sudden recollection of the words of the store proprietor to the effect that Pop Drummond was "a leetle teched" and might become violent if aroused assailed him with a force which curbed a wordy outbreak and made him politic. It was not the time nor place for him to threaten. He gave a gulp and sent an anxious look over the darkening water the swells of which

were growing greater as the boat sped down the bay. But there was nothing in sight to help him; a belated gull was winging its way seaward, a reeling spar-buoy seemed to drift past, the epitome of loneliness, but the sight of them only increased the lawyer's tension. "I don't—I don't think I quite—quite understand," he returned, feebly. "You—you had better set me ashore and go home."

"Home! I hain't got no home now! You've talked enough; ye had better do some prayin'."

"What—what are you going to do?"

There was no answer, but Mr. Stegle hardly needed a verbal one. For a single glance at the man in the stern convinced him that Captain Drummond had become "roused"—not to a wild, maniacal violence as yet, but his countenance had lost its late look of bland simplicity and a portentous expression of malignancy taken its place. He was now boring his passenger with his keen blue eyes—eyes that to the more than nervous landsman were far from sane.

And it was a devilish ingenuity that commanded silence in order that the lawyer's imagination might run riot, for run riot it did. The tragedy of his position came to him with full force, and he could see but one conclusion. He cursed himself for having walked into the clutches of his unsound victim; he cursed all and sundry bearing upon his visit to Wickapemis, but he did no praying. He was wofully fearful, but his fear had not yet taken the definite and monstrous form it did a few minutes later.

Mr. Stegle was a coward, and he knew it; but even if his present status had been different he would have been frightened. For the seas had grown heavy and were now tossing the frail craft with a motion that sickened the man in spite of his mental stress; and the risen wind had grown chilly with the fall of dusk. The lawyer fairly shook, but not altogether from cold.

There was nothing for the quaking man to do but await events and trust that continued quiet would soothe the temper of the other. If worst came to worst he might promise that no action would be taken; he would not balk at a bit of diplomatic de-

ception or anything to once more feel the land beneath his feet and be rid of the unfailing stare of his silent *vis-à-vis*. But he dared not revert to the subject of his errand just then. He decided to wait. He did not have to wait long.

For fully half an hour neither man spoke, and by then the dory was well across the bay, the few houses on Pelican Point showing clear in the feebling light. Mr. Stegle harbored hopes that his troubles were over—that the mood of his companion had softened. He was suddenly undeceived.

"Hev ye got a wife?" The unexpected question came with startling abruptness.

"Yes, and a daughter," answered the lawyer, with alacrity.

"Can ye swim?"

Mr. Stegle clutched the thwart on which he was sitting. "N-no," he faltered, as a great wave broke near the dory and showed its teeth in a crest of foam.

"Then God help ye. He wouldn't help me," was the sober return. As the big man spoke he reached down and pulling the wooden plug from the boat's bottom flung it into the sea. Instantly a stream of water shot upward and splashed over the lawyer's polished boots. He sprang to his feet, nearly falling overboard.

"My God! What are you doing!" he shouted.

"Goin' to hell—an' goin' to hev company. 'Tain't no use o' livin'!"

"For the love of Heaven! Are you going to drown me?" Mr. Stegle's spine had turned to water but his words were screamed.

"It 'll just add one more shark to the rest. I'll be along—never you fear. Nice little fount'in, ain't it? Guess we'll fill in 'bout five minnits." Captain Drummond seemed to be admiring the spouting stream with childish simplicity. "Say," he concluded, "it's jest about as big as a man's finger, ain't it?"

There was no wildness about him. Mr. Stegle saw only a calmly desperate lunatic—a person immune to reason, but his last remark brought a suggestion to the terrified lawyer. In the measure of his increased fear had fallen his pride and the incoming water robbed him of the last rag

of it; he dropped to his knees in the slip and thrust his pudgy finger into the hole. It exactly fitted the aperture; the flow stopped; the man in the stern laughed aloud.

But the lawyer's apprehension was hardly lessened; his finger might easily be pulled out by the lunatic. In his terror he lifted his face and pleaded with the eloquence which in a supreme moment even a coward can command. He begged for life as only the weak will beg; he promised anything and everything, though what he said he never exactly remembered. Before he had half exhausted his wild appeal he became conscious that the man to whom he addressed his well-nigh hopeless petition was laughing at him, his ragged teeth showing in an undisguised grin. He stopped abruptly.

"So ye have a change o' heart, hey!" said the fisherman. "Ye don't seem to be so sot in cuttin' a old man adrift! Wonderful what a little o' water will do! Ye ain't sich a bad feller after all! Pop'll be tickled to death! Say, mister, I ain't him." There was no insanity in the deep voice.

Mr. Stegle was so astonished that he straightened himself, thereby pulling his finger from the hole, but as the water spouted in he immediately thrust it back. "You are not Captain Drummond!"

"Not a bit. See here!" The big man leaned forward and wagged a forefinger in the face of the kneeling lawyer. "My name ain't Drummond any more 'n yours is Stegle. I didn't lie when I told ye it was Tobias. 'Tis so. David Tobias Turk, an' yourn is Peter B. Lowny. Ye lied about your name 'cause ye was afraid to come to Wickapemis as Lowny; ye thought folks wouldn't stan' for yer meanness. I lied about bein' pop fer a different reason."

"You—you knew me all the time?"

"Naw, I didn't know ye all the time. It was yer cussed tightness with yer seegars that did it. I went up to the store to git a smoker, an' Sanford told me. He was on to ye but he didn't give himself away. Then I made up my mind to get ye, an' if ye hadn't put yer finger into that hole I'd ha' set ye on a reef an' let the tide drown ye. I have ye fine now, an' by the devil an'

Dave Turk ye'll never git ashore until ye show ye won't drive pop to the poorhouse. Say, ye was just a—bleatin' that you would do anything, as Stegle; ye can't ha' forgot how ye begged fer pop to Lowny. Oh, I hev ye! Belay, there!"

The exclamation was sudden, for the other, in his emotion, had withdrawn his finger, but he hastily replaced it.

"This here boat won't stand a sight o' water in her," continued Mr. Turk. "When she turns turtle I'll swim ashore. I won't mind a mile or so." To point the danger he pulled off his rubber boots.

Stripped of his disguise and every means of defense Mr. Lowny began to give way. Though his personal danger was not as imminent as it had been it was still great, and even in his stress he realized that he was cutting a poor figure—that there was something both degrading and ridiculous in his attitude as he crouched in an inch of water. He looked up at the giant who had led him into the simple trap. "What do you wish me to do?" he whimpered, as the boat lifted on a roller that splintered against the bow and flung a shower over him.

"Nothin' ye can't do—even as a boat-plug. Ye have some papers ye was goin' to give to pop, hain't ye?"

Mr. Lowny, now with his finger growing numb, but which he did not dare to pull from the hole, decided to make a clean breast of it. "I was not going to leave Captain Drummond destitute," he said, in a sudden inspiration. "I expected to get him to deed the property back to me; then I would give him fifty dollars, and a satisfaction-piece which he could record. I'll give you one hundred dollars if you will set me ashore."

"Will ye, now! That's kind! Got that satisfaction-piece all signed an' witnessed reg'lar?"

"Yes. I had it made out in Boston."

"Ye might hand it over to me, if ye want to—but mind, I ain't makin' no demand."

Mr. Lowny hesitated. This thing was monstrous. He had no desire to lose his grip on his debtor—not that the few hundred dollars Captain Drummond still owed him would make any difference, but his

sale of the Point would be impossible without the old whaler's property being included. He had every legal right on his side, but the force of circumstances was against him. He made no move toward obeying the broad hint of his persecutor. Mr. Turk shifted the helm and pointed the dory's bow toward the mouth of the bay.

"How long do ye think ye can stand actin' as a boat-plug?" he asked, nonchalantly.

"My God, man! You are not going out to sea?"

"Thought I would," was the easy reply.

"The—the papers are in my bag."

"Wall, ye can pull yer finger out an' get 'em, if ye want to. Mind, I ain't insistin'. I'll tend to the hole."

Mr. Lowny capitulated. He withdrew his finger, and Mr. Turk immediately planted his bare foot on the opening and stopped the inflow. A moment later he had the papers in his hand. They were only a formal notice of foreclosure, and a satisfaction-piece drawn on a legal blank. The boatman studied them both with a critical eye then placed them in his pocket.

"Say, ye ain't half a bad feller, arter all!" he said, shifting the boat's head toward the Point. "I knowed ye'd think twice about ruinin' a old man on his birthday! Ye hadn't the heart to do it, had ye? Ye remember how ye said it hurt ye to be on yer errand—an' how ye had begged fer pop?"

Mr. Lowny made no reply. His defeat at the hands of a common fisherman, who was quoting him against himself, left nothing to return.

A few minutes later the dory grounded on the shingle of the beach. "Come with me an' get dry an' warm," said Turk, and led the way to a little house standing back from the shore, a patch of decaying garden behind it. Mr. Lowny followed. He was wet and chilled, but his temper had begun to react from his late fright. And yet he saw that if he took legal action and proved that the satisfaction-piece had been obtained under duress he could not count on the verdict of a local jury, and in the story of its loss he would not shine as a hero. He had been beaten at every point, and for the

first time in his life he doubted his own business acumen. And it was strange to him that his hate for the man he was now tamely following was not hotter; he even had a certain respect for him. It was a tribute to the one who could get the better of Peter Lowny.

Mr. Turk halted as they reached the lonely dwelling, and peered through an uncurtained window; then he laid his hand on his companion's arm. "There's pop! Look in an' see what ye was goin' to do."

Mr. Lowny looked. Captain Drummond sat before a small open fire in a room bearing every evidence of the occupant's past calling. He was a relic of bygone days, but the marine flavor showed on him in the worn pea-jacket covering his shrunken shoulders. His eyes were bleary; his toothless mouth resembled a drawn purse from which wrinkles radiated like the spokes of a wheel. On his white head was a tall and almost napless silk hat, the onetime full dress of the sea. Altogether he made a pathetic figure as he crouched over the fire.

"Allers puts that hat on between six bells an' supper," said Turk. "Calls that time his watch on deck. Ye needn't be keerful—he's as deaf as a post. Come in."

The other hesitated. In his present position he had no wish to meet Captain Drummond, but he was wet and chilled to the bone, and the fire appealed to him. He followed the fisherman who led the way into the hall and threw open the door of the room.

The old man looked up as the two entered, and a deep flush suffused his pale face as he noted the stranger. "'Tain't—'tain't Mr. Lowny come to put me out, is it?" he exclaimed apprehensively, grasping the arms of his shabby chair and lifting himself to his feet. Mr. Lowny stood still. Mr. Turk went up to the old whaler and shouted in his ear:

"Yaas, pop, old ship, it's Mr. Lowny, all right. But he hain't come to do what ye feared. He's come to see ye on yer birthday, an' give ye clear title to the property! See here, pop!" Mr. Turk dragged the satisfaction-piece from his pocket and opening it shook it excitedly in the old man's face, his own eyes shining. "He told me

he wouldn't put ye out fer the world! He says that God made the land ye be on, an' that he hain't got any more right to it than ye hev, reely; an' that ye hev more 'n paid fer the old house."

Captain Drummond dropped into his chair and took the paper in his trembling hand. "He—he clears the place!" he faltered. "Thank God! It was Him what did it!"

Mr. Lowny was astonished. He had expected to hear a vivid recital of how he had been "done," and was hardly prepared to find himself elevated to a plane of which his hard, business life had permitted him to know nothing. Something within him seemed to break and he experienced a sudden revulsion of feeling as he noticed the childish emotion of the ancient mariner. He took a step forward and was about to protest, but Mr. Turk gave him a look that halted him.

"If ye dare interrupt me by buttin' in I'll brain ye where ye stand," he exclaimed in a strident whisper; then bending over the old man and patting the thin shoulder, he shouted:

"The place is all clear, pop! That paper proves it! Mr. Lowny had it made made out fer ye in Boston 'cause ye had paid so much intrust for forty year. He brought it to ye for yer birthday present. He's a real fine feller, he is; he's a real God-fearin' Christian, an' his heart's bigger 'n a quarter-boat. He's one o' them philanthropists what go around doin' good without blowin' a fog-horn about it. That's why he don't say much. He wants to shake han's with ye."

Mr. Turk straightened himself and turned to the astonished Bostonian. "An' now go up to pop an' tell him I'm a damned liar—if ye can. Go up an' kill him by

tellin' him ye be goin' to fight him—that ye be a hard-hearted skin-a-bone, if ye dare. But I don't think ye be ekle to it."

Mr. Lowny felt that he had been completely flanked, but he did not resent it being beset by a force of mingled emotions the like of which he had known nothing since childhood. And he was not all yellow; indeed, he was largely like other men living in a world which made little appeal to their better nature. And it was rather too much for him to knock himself from the pedestal on which the astute Mr. Turk had placed him. He was beaten. He came forward impulsively and held out his hand to the man he had expected to dispossess. It was grasped by both of Captain Drummond's, down whose cheeks tears of relief were now streaming.

Mr. Turk dashed his hand across his own eyes. The Boston man turned to him. "I presume that now you will enlighten the entire county about your smartness," he said, with a touch of bitterness.

The return was hearty. "My land! Does the shoe pinch ye there! Ye can bet that even pop won't ever know, unless ye tell. I ain't that kind, mister."

"But the storekeeper—"

"Gosh! I'll break his face if he opens it. Don't you fear nothin'."

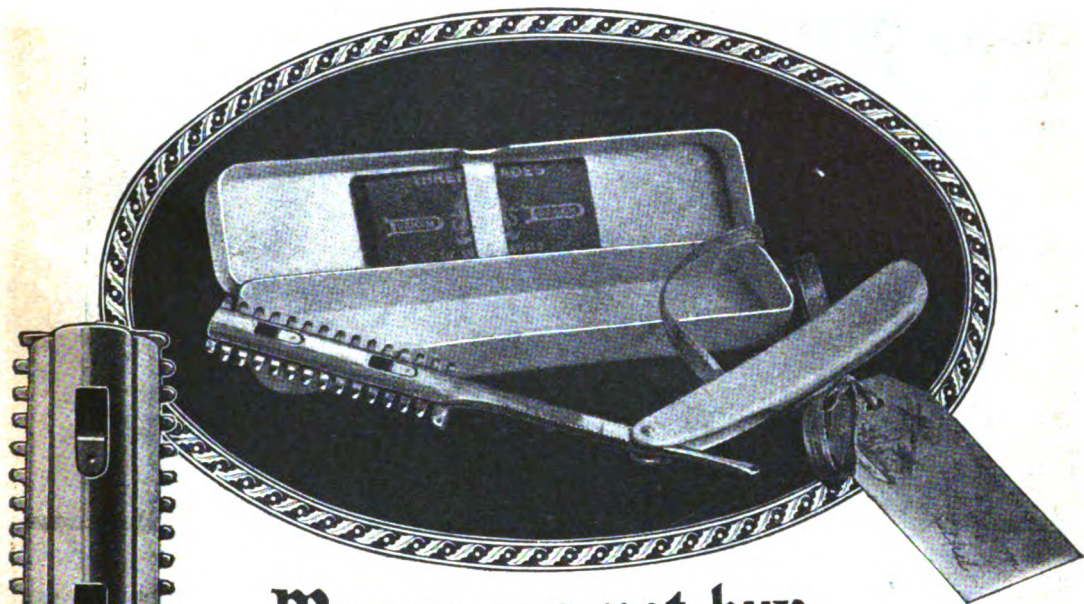
Mr. Lowny fired his last shot, but he almost smiled as he sent it forth. "Mr. Turk, the storekeeper told me that you were a meek sort of person; that you lacked spunk; that you were spiritless."

The other caught the grim smile of surrender and laughed joyously. "Wall, so I be, when I ain't 'roused up. Take a cheer and set down. Damned if I think I lied to pop about ye, after all! And, say, I'll let ye off from payin' that hundred dollars ye promised for settin' ye ashore."

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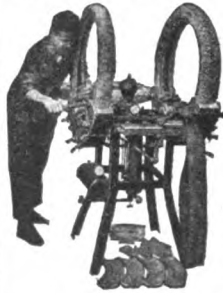
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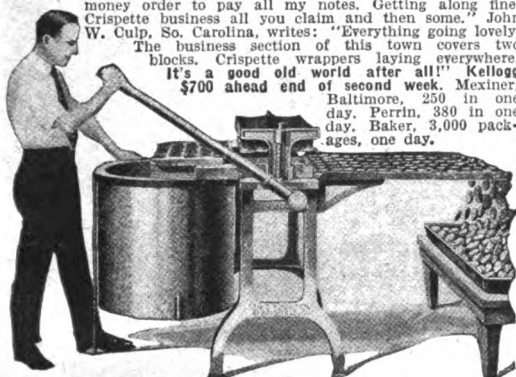
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making and selling popcorn Crispettes with this machine. Profits \$269.00. Mullen of East Liberty bought two outfits recently, and is ready for third. Iwata, Calif., purchased outfit Feb. 1920. Since, has bought 10 more--his profits enormous. J. R. Bert, Ala., wrote: "Only thing I ever bought equaled advertisement." J. M. Patillo, Ocala, wrote: "Enclosed find money order to pay all my notes. Getting along fine. Crispette business all you claim and then some." John W. Culp, So. Carolina, writes: "Everything going lovely. The business section of this town covers two blocks. Crispette wrappers laying everywhere. It's a good old world after all!" Kellogg \$700 ahead end of second week. Mexiner, Baltimore, 250 in one day. Perrin, 380 in one day. Baker, 3,000 packages, one day.



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Name
Address



Ladies' LaValliere

No. 4. Solid gold throughout. Chain 15 inches long. One-half carat guaranteed genuine Tifnite Gem artistically mounted in genuine latest style black enamel circle. Price \$16.50; only \$4.50 upon arrival. Balance \$3 per month. Can be returned at our expense within 10 days.

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Going home to turkey and trimmin's



THANKSGIVING DAY last year.

I ATE my chow.

ALONE in the big town.

AND THE TURKEY was all.

NEATLY VARNISHED and had.

NICE LITTLE paper pants.

ON BOTH its legs.

AND TASTED strongly.

LIKE NOTHING at all.

BUT THIS year.

MAN ALIVE, I'm going home.

AND THERE will be.

A COUNTRY turkey.

DONE TO a turn.

BROWN AND savory.

CRISP AND flaky.

SENDING UP little clouds.

OF TANTALIZING steam.

MAKING NOSTRILS wrinkle.

AND PALATES quiver.

OH BOY, real turkey.

AND THEN afterwards.

ABLE TO breathe.

BUT NOT to bend.

I'LL REACH for a smoke.

THAT'S THE real turkey, too.

COSTLY AROMATIC Turkish.

BLENDED WITH the best.

OF MELLOW Domestic leaf.

AND ONCE again—oh boy.

CAN'T YOU just hear me.

INFORMING THE world.

"THEY SATISFY."



IT'S real Turkish tobacco that goes into Chesterfields—really grown in Turkey and bought on the ground by our own buyers. To blend it with best Domestic, in the exclusive Chesterfield way—leave that to us! "They Satisfy?" We'll leave that to you.

They Satisfy **Chesterfield**
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