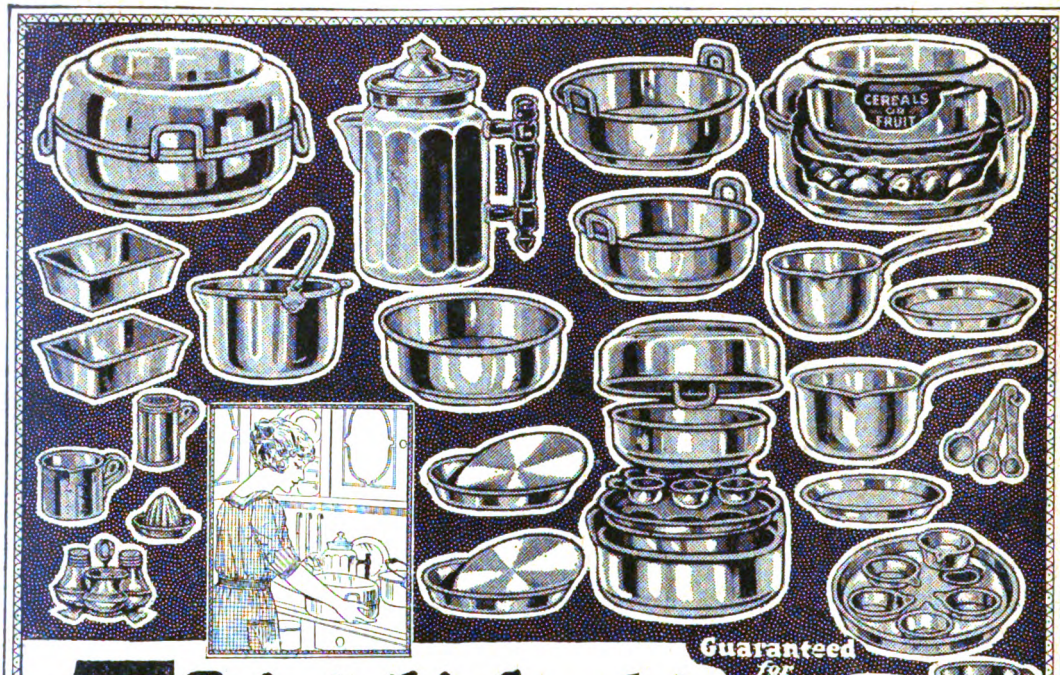
ARGOSY ALL-STORY WEEKLY

A Tale *of the* Manhattan Jungle

TIGER

by Max Brand



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ARGOSY-ALLSTORY
WEEKLY

VOL. CXXIX SATURDAY, JANUARY 8, 1921 NUMBER 3

Tiger

by Max Brand

Author of "The Night Horseman," etc.

CHAPTER I.

A TWENTIETH CENTURY PIONEER.

SITTING down, his head seemed a little too large for his body and his hands were needlessly bulky, but the instant he stood up every detail clicked into place, and when he walked he carried his six feet and odd inches with that long, light step which means power, and poise, and supple muscles.

If he carried himself proudly it was the natural pride of one who breathed deep and met every eye and people forgave him this high-headed dignity partly because of a premature sprinkling of gray about his temples and perhaps, also, because he had in his face those sad lines which come from a great deal of living, and adventures, whether of brain or body.

His manner this afternoon was that of one who lives in apprehension of trouble, for no chair in his room appeared to satisfy him, and though he turned the pages of half a dozen books, he did not read a paragraph of words; the cigarette he had lighted fumed away on the ash tray and sent up a diminishing line of light blue smoke; the pipe he had just filled was cold between his teeth.

Presently the valet entered with word that Mrs. William Lodge wished to see her son. From the manner in which he shied his book into the nearest chair it was apparent that this summons from his mother was the crisis he expected, but the instant the crisis came he was relieved, for he had one of those concrete minds which are baffled by abstractions and flinch from problems; but when the time came for action he shook back his shoulders and was ready. There are more men in this category than one might expect, and a good many who feel themselves cowards simply because they have never received the vital test.

As for Jack Lodge, he had faced the ultimate moment any number of times, for since he left college his chief business in life had been the hunting of big game.

Taking his character in consideration it was not surprising that he refused the thousand opportunities for careers which lay ready to his hand. His father had both an ancient name and a huge fortune; even in these years of many millions the man on the street knew the Lodge wealth and numbered it with the great ones of the land. And Jack Lodge had only to choose and take as far as his future was concerned. But he was one of those men who instinctively prefer a pipe to cigars and cigarettes.

If he had been born into a family of

paupers he would have worked his way through college and become, say, an engineer, or a criminal lawyer. At all events he would have chosen a strenuous profession, for he had in his veins that streak of pioneer blood which runs so strongly through some American families, that desire to get out and away into new places, to stand on a boundary, to meet strange conditions, to be a law unto one's self.

Understanding this, it is not hard to see why Jack Lodge refused to enter either the financial world or some such thing as the diplomatic service; and it is equally plain why he had no taste for social idling. He preferred to take his chances, rifle in hand, in South America and Africa, wherever frontiers remain.

But in his choice he mortally wounded his mother! She was a Stone, of the Winthrop Stones, and their traditions were to her a religion. She had behind her three generations of social leadership and she took it for granted that her son would look about him, contract a diplomatic alliance, and settle down. Year after year he eluded her, but this season, having returned from a long trip into Brazil, she cornered him as soon as he came home and laid before him a series of bare facts. He was no longer a boy and he looked even more than his thirty years of age; in a short time he would not only cease to be such an excellent match, but he would also be past the age of easy adaptation. Men grow hard at the corners after thirty, she had said, and they can't be changed.

In short, she beat down his resistance and made him promise to step into social life for thirty days in search of a wife. It was a great triumph for her; in fact, next to her wedding day it was the happiest moment in her life. She planned his social progress with infinite diplomacy, taking care that the demand upon his time was not too great, giving him intervals with nothing to do, and her reward was great.

For a week, for ten days Jack Lodge went here and there, and he was a success. Upon his strong shoulders he carried the burden of the Lodge millions, and he carried it easily, for if he had not social ease he had a quiet, unaffected reserve which served the same purpose admirably. The men respected him; the women were enticed by his silence, and to the unspeakable delight of Mrs. William Lodge she found her son socially successful.

At the end of a week, however, there was a cloud on her sky of content; at the end of ten days she was deeply worried, for though Jack had met the finest girls in the city, the most charming, the most lovely, he persisted in treating them all with as much calm good-nature as if they had been men, and Mrs. Lodge watched him in vain to detect that sudden awkward self-consciousness and eagerness of eye for which she hoped.

She waited in vain and with a growing despair when, on this afternoon, he suddenly departed from the midst of a reception, apparently drawn away by some urgent message. She followed him home as soon as she conveniently could; he was in his room, as she had expected and now she awaited him in tense anxiety.

She was one of those young-old women, with masses of perfect silver hair, and the lids drooped over her eyes with the weariness of age, but the eyes themselves were as crystal clear as at twenty and her carriage as proud as that of her son. When he came in, he closed the door behind him and they looked quietly at one another. Then he smiled—one of those irresistible smiles which dawn suddenly on grave faces. It was so infectious that she had to set her mind upon it to keep her eyes from twinkling.

"As a matter of fact," he said, "you see that I'm not socially ambitious."

"That was obvious long ago, my dear," she answered.

She was so calm about it that he suddenly fired up with hope.

"Then let's chuck the whole business, eh?"

"You know there are reasons, Jack."

"Oh, yes," he said wearily. "I know."

"And I've depended on your promise."

He winced at that, looked earnestly at her as if he sought a loophole of escape, and finding none he let his shoulders droop and his big hands swung a little in front of him. All at once he appeared clumsy and

helpless. His mother saw the weakening, and she struck at once; she was blunt partly by nature and partly by pose.

"As a matter of fact, Jack, it was embarrassing to have you run away like that; and you had told me I could depend on you."

He dropped into a chair close to her. Words were never his best weapons and now he reached out a hand toward her in appeal, but she met him with a frosted eye of displeasure.

"Mother," he said, "I couldn't go it."

"Couldn't go what?"

"That crowd of chattering girls."

"My dear!"

"Let's be frank. You want me to marry; I want to please you. But I can't stand the gaff, mother. I don't like these girls. They're too well trained. Too silky smooth. Why don't they act what they are? Animals underneath."

"Jack, you've been reading German philosophy. Besides, I should think you'd like that sort of girl."

"I like them well enough; I hate their finessing and their masks."

"Tell me just what you expect in your wife?"

"Can't be described."

"At least she must be beautiful."

"Not a bit. I've seen blood-horses buckle under hard work and I've ridden ugly bronchos all day. It's the heart that counts."

"My dear, foolish boy. How are you going to test your wife, by running cross-country with her?"

"I'll tell her by her eye."

"No matter what you feel," she said, smiling to cover an inner uneasiness, "your time has come. A man may go to forty and then when his time comes the spark will fly and then he's on fire. I've been watching you, and you're uneasy, restless."

"Why not leave it to chance, then?"

"Because unless I have you in hand you'll probably be burned to a cinder in the flames. You go to extremes."

"You're a bit deep, to-day, mother."

"Jack, above all things in the world I dread a mesalliance."

Here a providential knock sounded at the door, and then it opened on a maid who announced Mr. Cecil Darling, calling upon Jack Lodge. The latter rose at once.

"But," warned his mother, "the matter is not closed."

"I know that," he answered gloomily.

"Also, I have your promise."

"Only, for Heaven's sake don't press me too far. I know I've promised to let you direct the affair. But—sometimes it's hard for me to keep control."

She regarded him with a quiet smile that continued until the door closed upon him, and then, very much like a man, the smile went out and she struck the knuckles of her fists together so hard that she hurt herself. She could hear Jack running down the steps to meet his unexpected guest, and it was as if her son was running away from her.

Down-stairs, Jack was shaking hands with Cecil Hubert Darling, whose family took root at the Conquest; but although the Darling fortunes had grown and blossomed and flourished always eight centuries and more, the blood of the race grew thin and thinner, their stature diminished, and now Cecil Darling was the last of his race. He wore high-heeled shoes, but even then he stood barely five feet six of meagre body and withered hands and a skinny neck. To cover the painful hollows of his cheeks he had let his beard grow extensively, so that at twenty-five he looked forty, and at forty-five he seemed already old, masked with an iron-gray stubble; but his little black eyes were bright, active, tireless. On the whole, he had an amazing resemblance to an Irish terrier.

He had to look up at a sharp angle to meet the glance of Jack Lodge, but his fingers closed over the hand of the larger man with the grip of strong talons.

"Man, I'm gladder to see you than any living thing!"

"How about a big black-mane a hundred yards off? Thought you were still in the heart of things in Africa, Darling?"

"I'm going back again; that's why I'm glad to see you."

"Eh?"

"Because I'm going to take you with me."

"Tush! I have to be tame now for six months."

"Pure bunk. Where can we talk?"

"Not about Africa."

"No, only about the trip I'm going to make."

"Confound you, Darling!"

"I only want your advice, Jack."

"Well?"

"I want your opinion of a fellow who knows his gun better than most men know their wives and yet who won't talk about a country where there are eleven-foot elephants and rhinos with twenty-three-inch horns."

"Twenty-three-inch horns? Man alive, Rowland Ward only numbers eight all told with horns that long, or anything near it."

"The devil take Rowland Ward. I'm telling you facts. A country where the rhino bulls run a ton and a half if they run an ounce, ugly devils that get the wind of you a mile away and come charging like a bullet—"

All the time he talked he kept his bright little eyes fixed upon the face of Jack Lodge; the big man was stiffening and straightening.

"Real old warriors, Jack," went on Darling, "who can carry a whole bandolier full of lead unless you place it right. And I'd bring you where you'll find a whole marsh thick with spoor. And footprints a good foot across—"

"Ah!" sighed Jack Lodge.

"But of course there's no use chattering about it if you've made up your mind to stay home."

"I suppose not."

"So let's wander in and ask Mrs. Lodge for a cup of tea."

"At the same time, Cecil, it doesn't do any harm to talk a little about the trail, eh?"

"I don't want to tempt you, Jack."

"Eh?"

"Mrs. Lodge will never forgive me if I drag you away about as soon as you've reached home."

"Nonsense."

"But ever since I heard you were coming home I've pictured the two of us out in British East Africa—you've never hunted there, Jack?"

"No."

"With four or five dozen husky Kavirondo who can pack their sixty pounds through a day's march and never feel it. Gad, man, it gives me a thrill when I think of looking back over the line of those grinning, cheery devils, all bright with sweat!"

Jack Lodge set his teeth, looked guiltily around; and then: "Suppose we drop into the library for a minute, Darling?"

"If there's no harm—"

And Darling started leisurely toward the library, a broad grin on his face the instant his back was turned to Jack.

CHAPTER II.

THE TREKKER.

MRS. WILLIAM LODGE would have been singularly obtuse if she had not feared any long and private conversation between her son and the inveterate trekker from Africa; and when an hour had passed and Jack had not yet emerged from the library, she went down to it, and pausing at the door, she saw Cecil Darling and Jack seated before the fire; she turned on the little withered man an eye that gleamed with something akin to hate.

It was a dark, drab day, quite warm, but with a thick mist blanketing the city, and above the mist thundering, great cumulus clouds that made a twilight with their passing; accordingly the big library was lost in shadows, except when a leap of the fire splashed the table with red light.

She looked at Jack anxiously. He sat on the very edge of the chair, his elbows on his knees, his strong fingers interlaced, and without listening to the words of Darling she could have followed their sense by the play of shadow and fierce interest in the eyes of Jack.

"But for my part," said Darling, ending a tale, "give me a .405. It's big enough to kill anything that walks and it's not a cannon to carry."

"Every man to his taste," nodded Jack. He waved his hand, and the gesture was so vivid that Mrs. Lodge caught the image of

a rifle-butt pitched to his shoulder. I'll take a double-barrelled .577 cordite rifle. They weigh, but they're worth a bit of trouble. Remember hitting the black-mane head on at a hundred and forty yards and the bullet plowed clear through the length of him and stuck in the skin of his rump."

"The devil!"

"Jarvis will tell you about it. He cut out the lead."

"But let me tell you what a .405 will do to an elephant. We were after a big bull—eleven feet to an inch, when we measured him after the kill—and he led us out of twelve-foot grass into the jungle. Man, it was hard going! It was midday, and the sort of sun that goes through a tent like a knife through butter and sets your head on fire unless you have a helmet on, but inside the forest it was dark and dumb. Couldn't see an arm's length in front of us most of the time, and with the vines whipping back at us it was like swimming against a current. In fifty yards I was as wet with sweat as if I'd dived in water. And every once in a while here was a big trunk fallen across the path and we had to climb over it—the elephant could take 'em at a step, you know.

"We were working up wind, carefully, because the breeze was too light; we had to keep holding up our hands to see which side blew cool. And a pair of Masai, bare, and black, and shining with sweat, were slipping on ahead of us, never making a sound. Finally we got pretty close to the elephant—solid wall of grass and brush and vines before us and the bull not ten feet off beyond the wall. Every minute I expected to feel a big snaky trunk snoop around me from behind and yank me six yards into the air. Ticklish stuff, eh?"

"Ah!" nodded Jack.

"We stopped there to listen. Mind you, there hadn't been a sound of life in the brush since we started, except the noise of the bull we were following; but the instant we halted there was a burst of noise from elephants all around us. A branch would crackle over here, and a sigh over there from some big devil with a belly-full, then a big 'whoosh' where a foot was pulled out of the mud. Gad! we were right in the middle of a herd. How many? From the noise there must have been a thousand.

"My temperature dropped seventy degrees in a second. Any minute they were apt to start, and nine chances out of ten they would start our way. No way to turn 'em except by shooting."

"And if you wound 'em they hunt you down like devils incarnate," suggested Jack Lodge.

"Then the rush came. And straight at us. It was like the noise of a mountain tipping over and smashing a forest of glass; prodigious roar. It thundered right on top of us—and then stopped dead still. Some of those fellows must have been no more than six feet away through the brush. One more step and they would have seen us and finished us.

"I thought they'd fallen asleep. Five minutes, ten minutes we waited—ten hours, more like, to me; and then one of the Masai began worming his way through the grass. I tried to call him back, but I didn't dare whisper—you know how an elephant can hear?—and I was almost afraid to beckon. So the fool kept on, disappeared, and a moment later came back shouting that they were gone.

"And they were. How the devil those uncounted tons of meat could have wished themselves away in that dead silence is still a mystery to me. Why, even the Masai couldn't move through that brush without making noise; but the elephants did it, though some of 'em left footprints two feet deep in the mud of the marsh.

"We saw 'em trekking north, and—"

Mrs. Lodge dared not wait longer. She saw the pull which the inveterate little hunter was putting on Jack, drawing him away from home, thousands of miles, out to that wilderness of blue-black cobras, and mighty pythons, and lion, and wild buffalo and sleeping-sickness, and a thousand other plagues; she remembered the pictures which Jack had shown her after his last return from Africa, snapshots of shaven-headed negroes, ape-mouthed, and she had stared at them in horror as upon a terror which is forever past. And this little goat-necked hunter had brought all that terror into her drawing-room, beside her library fire, and

poured out the full of it upon her imagination.

"Jack," she said, stepping in, "sorry to break up your talk with Mr. Darling, but you promised to call Mr. Schneider at five."

He started up guiltily and consulted his watch.

"Terribly sorry," he said. "Time simply ran away like water." He started for the door, talking over his shoulder. "By the way, Darling, I'll drop over to Wainwright's in the morning and get a .577."

"Wainwright's?"

"Never heard of him, eh? Queer old duck. His father before him kept a gunsmith's shop over in the Tangle when that was the best shopping district in the town; now it's the slums, but Wainwright stays with the old hunting ground. About details, Cecil, I'll see you to-night, eh?"

And he was gone through the door, shrugging back his shoulders to make ready for the social ordeal before him. Mrs. Lodge lingered behind and faced the little man, who was humming with excitement.

"Cecil Darling," she said, "what have you been doing to Jack?"

He had a face of Gallic flexibility, and now his eyebrows raised. "I?" he murmured innocently.

"You've started Jack off for Africa," she said bluntly. "Africa!"

If they were not friends, at least they were very old acquaintances, which permitted Cecil Darling and Mrs. Lodge to stand looking at each other through one of those eloquent silences in which thoughts ebb and flow, as patent as though they had been spoken. Then he stepped close to her, and he was so small that he had to look up even into the face of his hostess.

"Dear Mrs. Lodge," he said confidentially, "you can't make a show horse out of a mustang. Why don't you stop trying."

"And what is a wild mustang except a nuisance?" she answered.

He flushed a little. "At least a glorious nuisance."

"If *you* have got to go back to your Africa," she said with open irritation, "why do you have to take Jack along? There are a thousand men who'd be glad to go."

"But there isn't one man in a thousand I'd have when I'm trekking through Africa. Oh, yes, the woods are full of half-fleged hunters; but out there for real shooting you want a man full of nerves that he keeps under control; a man who can do thirty miles in oven heat without water, perhaps; a fellow who doesn't whine when the pinch comes; who plays square on shooting chances when there's a real trophy in prospect; who'll risk his neck when there's danger and keep his mouth shut about it afterwards; in short, you want what they mean in our own West when they speak of a 'partner,' and of all the clean-cut good fellows on a trek there's none to compare with Jack Lodge. That's why I want him with me!"

He jerked his head back when he said this last, and Mrs. Lodge caught her breath. She knew the repute of this little man for fearlessness and it made her heart leap to hear such things spoken of her son; for that very reason she was trebly certain that Jack must stay at home.

"I'm going to be perfectly open with you," she said.

He saw the appeal which was coming and winced.

"Be generous, also," he begged.

"The fact is, both Mr. Lodge and I are worried about Jack. Eight years out of college, and still wandering, isn't that enough to worry us?"

"But what should he do if he settled down, Mrs. Lodge? Make money? Why pile Pelion on the Ossa of the Lodge fortune? Go in for charity? If he started to give away money he'd throw every cent to the winds in six months. Become a collector of beautiful things? He'd hire purchasers to do the work. Found a college? There's plenty of time for that, and he's too young. In fact, I defy you to name a single thing which is really open for Jack except to settle him down as a social light; and who would want to take a comet out of the sky and use it for an electric display?"

When he was well under way, Darling was a good deal of an orator, and Mrs. Lodge took advantage of the first pause to counter quick and hard upon the little man.

"The single thing he can do, Mr. Darling, is to make a home and have children."

He kept the smile on his lips, but his face was gray; he had no child to take either name or fortune, and he never would have. There had been one brief touch of romance in his youth, and since that time it was known that he had not spoken ten words of sentiment to any woman. But Mrs. Lodge was never tender, at best, and now she had a purpose and became cruel.

"To a hardened old Odysseus like yourself, Mr. Darling," she went on, "of course a home means nothing, and your guns and horses are wife and child to you." He had one hand behind him, and she knew that he was burying the nails in the palm to keep his poise; so she smiled sweetly upon him. "But I don't think Jack is so much of an adventurer that he couldn't take an interest in a family of his own."

"Perhaps not," said Cecil Darling. His eyes wandered and then came back to the lovely, remorseless face of Mrs. William Lodge. "Perhaps not," he said hoarsely.

"And you'll go one step more for me?"

"I suppose I shall," nodded he.

"Give up this trip; at least, persuade Jack to give up his share in it."

He hesitated.

"Do you know what my husband looks forward to more keenly than any business success? It's to the day when he'll have a Jack Lodge Junior in his arms."

She saw by the way in which he stood like a soldier, with his weight going forward on his toes, that she had pressed him too far, and she would have given a great deal to retract her last sentence. What was the rise and fall or continuity of the Lodges in the eyes of one who was in himself the period to eight centuries of family history? A faint smile twitched at the lips of Cecil Darling and he bowed in haste to cover it.

"As you say yourself," he said, "I am such a hardened old rambler that I've lost my perspective of family life, and I don't feel myself competent to either persuade or dissuade your son. If he wishes to go, I shall be happy to accompany him; if he decides to stay, it is perfectly well. But, Mrs. Lodge, I cannot take it on myself to interfere with a man's destiny."

He made his adieus, and when Mrs. Lodge raised her eyes from the floor she saw him going out with that quick, light step which sometimes becomes habitual to those who have tramped a great deal over dangerous ground.

CHAPTER III.

THE TANGLE.

THE Lodges dined that night in silence. There was an unwritten law in their household that on no account, no matter how acute the domestic crisis, was William Lodge himself to be called into the family councils. He went his way to and from the house, tall and gray and cold of eye, formally courteous even to his wife, and apt, in the midst of the most animated conversation, to draw inside his thoughts and present a blank to the world.

That evening, however, Mrs. Lodge spoke to her husband freely, with an energetic abandon in the quiet of his room, until he began to cross and un-cross his legs, the sign of tremendous mental perturbation. She drew a grim picture of the future of their only child when his unsocial habits should grow fixed, but her husband refused to interfere.

Mrs. Lodge trembled on the very verge of hysteria.

"But he's past thirty," she cried, "and what has he done in his life?"

"What do most men of his station and group accomplish at thirty, or even forty, for that matter?" answered William Lodge serenely.

"Do you realize that he is apt to be another Cecil Darling? The last of his family?"

His eyes went blank for a second while he was looking at her, and she knew that he was thinking; what he saw was in swift review the possessions of the house of Lodge reverting for lack of an heir to the state; but when his eyes cleared and he spoke again his voice was undisturbed.

"In little things," he said, "I'm perfectly willing to follow your advice and make suggestions and even demands upon Jack, but in such a matter as this I can't speak. I won't put pressure upon him to marry for the sake of marriage."

"And what in Heaven's name do you wait for? A romance?"

"I suppose so."

"This is the Twentieth Century!" said Mrs. Lodge. "William, the cruel truth is that you put your business affairs above the happiness of Jack; you forget him."

"I have never had him out of my mind," said the father judiciously, "for an hour at a time since the second he was born."

She was so angry that she laughed.

"Why, the boy has grown up a stranger to you!"

"I know him," said William Lodge, "from the soles of his feet to the tips of his fingers."

"Then you know this is a crisis in his life?" she said, a little staggered by his assurance.

"It is."

"And yet you do nothing!"

"Because if we force or persuade this amiable son of ours into a false position, do you know what he will do?"

"Sulk a while; and in three years realize that love-marriages are prettier in books than in fact."

"No, he isn't the sulking nature. He would raise the very devil, my dear."

"That," said Mrs. Lodge, quite relieved from the feeling of awe which her husband's calm assurance had raised in her a moment ago, "that is exactly like a man! Because Jack likes to go hunting you think he's naturally violent; as a matter of fact, his good nature is proverbial everywhere."

"You say that because you only know the surface of Jack. Scratch the surface and you'll find the tiger. You can thump him with words, cudgel him with advice, bait him with ridicule, and he'll simply laugh at you and never bear malice; but scratch the skin of your boy and you'll have a tiger on your hands."

For thirty odd years her husband had been continually surprising her with unsuspected glimpses of his hidden thoughts; and the result was that for thirty odd years she had loved him with the fervor of a girl. She stared at him now rather foolishly.

"And how do you know that?" she murmured.

"Because he's my son," said William Lodge, and closed the conversation by looking out of the window.

So they dined that night in utter silence, Mrs. Lodge swelling with inward anger and despair, Jack busy with his plans, his father wrapped in his usual thoughtful calm. Mrs. Lodge looked from one to the other. She had always looked on them as different types, but now she noted that they had the same fighting jaw, the same lean, active lines of body; Jack was a little nearer to the soil, that was all.

She felt that she was closer to an intimate understanding of her husband than she had ever been before; and in the same breath she hated his silence and loved his calm.

She had by no means given up the battle; she reserved her strength for a time when she should find Jack alone, and the next morning she watched with silent misgiving while her son climbed into the touring car with his valet, Henry Sanford. The chauffeur turned dexterously into the stream of traffic and the car hummed away, with Jack Lodge sitting with both hands draped idly over the butt of a walking stick which he held between his knees.

He was going to Wainwright's after that double-barreled .577, and he took the valet along because the latter would be sadly in need of a heavy rifle when they reached Africa. Sanford was one of those ideal body servants who feel the distinctions of caste so sharply that they can wait on a master without losing either character or personality; but what Jack Lodge prized in him more than his perfect manner was Sanford's absolute ignorance of fear.

More than once each of them had owed the other his life on hunting trips after big game and accordingly they accepted each other with perfect trust. Their attitudes in the automobile were typical. Jack Lodge looked straight ahead and saw nothing; Sanford kept his eyes glued on the face of the master and apparently saw nothing else, but in reality there was not a face on the sidewalk, not a window along the street that he missed. He possessed to the *n*th degree, that talent which all good servants must have of seeing from the corner of the eye.

The car turned out of the broad avenue of the residence district, cut across some shopping streets of rapidly lessening quality and swung in under the elevated.

It ran a boundary line of noise and confusion across the heart of the city; one block to the west the better residential and shopping districts began; and with the elevated started the slums, and ran block after block side by side with respectability. They wound slowly under the blinding roar of the elevated, with a thick stream of surface cars added to the confusion of trucks and drays and automobiles, swerving in and out among the iron pillars; the elevated swerved away to the right, and the car kept on down a side street, turned a corner, and the babel of the elevated was left in the far distance.

Instead, there was a tumult of street noises that ran in three main keys. First there was the undertone of men's conversation and shouts, with the honking of automobile horns blending into this; removed above this, the voices of women, the most part of them in shawls so that they gave a touch of the foreign to the scene, and the tones of the women absorbed such noises as the rattling music of a hurdy-gurdy, and the calling of the street pedlers; while higher still the children, darting across the street through perilous traffic and swarming along the sidewalks, kept up an endless shrill chatter that chimed with the whine of the hoisting engines on the skeleton of a new building, and smothered the higher-pitched automobile horns.

It gave a tremendous impression of multitudes, tons of humanity; there seemed more tons of flesh and blood in the slums than there were pounds of stones and mortar. All this life kept playing like an incoming tide across a marsh. Sometimes a rush of humanity blocked the street from curb to curb and set impatient drivers cursing; again the tide split and left pools of men and women on the corners; still again every vestige of life disappeared, and except for a scattering at store entrances there was not a human being to be seen; an instant later the living wave washed out of cross-streets, cellars, open doors, and flooded the street.

Through these cross-currents of the Tangle, for that was the name of this darkest corner of the slums, the machine of Jack Lodge moved, running chiefly on second, and feeling its way through crowds which literally gave way like water only when the fenders brushed their clothes, and closed at once behind the automobile; and when they came to one of those rare stretches where the street was comparatively empty of pedestrians, the chauffeur with a sigh of relief shot into high, lunged around an ambling truck, and sped out toward the next traffic jam.

The same thought was evidently in the mind of a reckless taxi-driver, who, literally standing on his feet, whipped about the truck, and gathering full speed came humming past Jack's car. It was a narrow chance, for a steady trickle of traffic was coming up the opposite side of the street, but the taxi would have darted back into his own side of the street safely had not he struck a pool of water where the fire-hose had played half an hour before. The result was that he skidded in the very act of swinging to the right in front of Jack, and the rear of his car toppled a fruit-vendor's push-cart over and sent the vendor himself tumbling on the street.

The taxi driver had no mind to stop and ask questions; he speeded up again, and nosed anxiously on either side of a big truck hunting for clearance and a getaway.

But back of him the fruit-pedler had scrambled to his feet and now stood in the center of the pavement screaming a torrent of Italian; his arms were waving, a slight scalp-wound sent a stream of blood down his face. A moment before he had been the most amiable, smiling Italian in the great city; now he was terrible. His voice reached the taxi-driver and made him twist his machine back and forth still more nervously hunting for escape; it also reached into houses, and windows were instantly black with faces, into lunch-counters, stores, cellars, and in ten seconds the street was black with humanity.

They flooded in front of the taxicab; they surrounded him, men, children, women. And the women were the most terrible of all. Jack Lodge had never dreamed that

there could be so many ugly feminine faces in one crowd. One and all, they seemed to be both plump and muscular, dark-skinned, with tiny, bright black eyes and a great display of teeth while they talked.

They pressed forward to the edge of the crowd, tossing back their shawls, shaking their fists; and now the pedler worked his way into the heart of the excitement. He began to shriek above the tumult; with one hand he pointed to his bleeding face; with the other he indicated his overturned cart, and it seemed that he was ruined in purse and also about to die of wounds. The crowd had been noisy enough before, but most of them had swept out simply to see what was wrong. One glance at the blood-stained face drove them mad.

In an instant every hand was raised, and every hand held a weapon, the stave of a barrel, a stone, and more than one knife winking in the bright sunlight. The taxi-driver, seeing that escape was impossible, had climbed out of his car and now stood beside it trying to explain. He might as well have talked against the roar of an ocean. They pressed closer; they jammed him against the side of the machine. Toward him the red face of the Italian was working through the crowd and when the two met there would be a blow, and then a thorough mobbing for the driver.

Jack Lodge slipped out of his top-coat.

"It's up to you, Sanford," he said to his valet. "You can come with me or stay here—and look after our things; but I've got to go down and help that poor beggar. They'll have his throat cut in another moment."

All color had died from the rosy face of Sanford. All at once his cheeks lost their curve and became sagging, and middle-aged.

"Very good, sir. I'll go along. But—for God's sake—I beg your pardon, sir—but don't go until it's absolutely necessary. If it comes to a fight they'll use their knives."

"I think you're right," murmured Jack, and settled back gingerly on the edge of the seat. "Ugly looking batch, eh? We'll wait until the last trick is on the table, Sanford."

He flexed his fingers once or twice and shrugged his shoulders to make sure that his muscles were in working order and then waited. In the meantime the fruit-vendor had given up his effort to wedge a passage through the mob and instead was delivering himself of an incendiary speech. At every pause a savage yell came from the crowd, brief as the bark of a single dog. There was swaying back and forth, a sure sign that they were about to start; the taxi-driver cringed against his machine, shrieking for the police.

Then someone from the rear of the crowd shot a brick straight for the head of the driver, missed him, and smashed the window of the machine. The crowd swayed back and then began to surge forward; they had their signal for violence and they meant business; the taxi-driver cowered, and framed his arms helplessly about his head.

"Now," said Jack Lodge, rising. "Quick, Sanford!"

The latter touched his arm. "One minute, sir. Look there!"

A girl had worked her way in some miraculous manner through the crowd and now she leaped upon the running board of the car beside the driver and faced the mob. There was stir of white as all faces were lifted toward her.

CHAPTER IV.

THE RIOT QUELLER.

SHE was sadly rumpled from the struggle through the host, a white apron being twisted all awry, her hair brushed loose and half of it sweeping about her shoulders. It flung from side to side as she glanced about the crowd, with the sun flashing on it, and Jack caught the glitter of great black eyes. Just as she leaped upon the running board of the car the wave of the crowd rolled upon her, a crest of lifted hands.

"Back with you!" she cried, and her shrill, clear voice cut through the babel of the crowd. Out of one of those lifted hands she snatched the weapon—it was only a harmless piece of flat board, but she

whirled it like a sword in their faces and they shrank away. They would come again on the recoil, more strongly than before.

"Shapiro!" she cried, "duck that knife or the flatties will get you!"

There was a universal turning of heads. They saw no policeman, but everyone felt than one might be coming from the opposite direction. She accompanied her warning with a blow of the stick across the knuckles of the unfortunate Shapiro, and he dropped his weapon with a howl. It brought a deep shout of laughter from the mob, but the laughter was brief; a wave began toward the automobile, growing in strength from the rear toward the front of the mass.

Single voices rose above the murmurs, trouble-makers: "Get the hound! Break his head! Lemme at him!"

The girl on the running-board had a word for every one of these speakers, and she had a voice that reached them. Her piece of board was a flimsy weapon, but it flickered in front of the driver, a sufficient shield in her strong hand.

"Kriemoff, if you throw that brick you'll be throwing it at me, understand?" One hand went down.

"Who the hell is she?" bellowed some one. "Knock her out of the way!"

"You muckers, you lowlifes!" shrilled the girl. "I'll teach you who I am. Keep away or I'll brain a pair of you. Billy!"

A deep bass voice roared response from the rear of the host.

"Come up here and give me a hand with this bunch of muckers, Bob, Slippy, are you going to stand still and watch them mob this poor fellow?"

The mob was falling silent in patches, and a murmur ran through it, as they established the girl's identity. Several stalwarts were plunging toward her; knives disappeared; not a brick or a club was in sight; there was only an angry humming.

"He ran down Anton a purpose."

"You lie!" she answered. "I saw it. His back wheels skidded."

She pointed at the pedler. "Anton, you fat pig-head, go home and wash your face. You aren't hurt. Hey, somebody page Mrs. Anton before somebody steps on her man." The cause of the trouble, the victim, sidled sulkily away, followed by laughter.

"The rest of you beat it. You're disturbing the peace; you're blocking up the traffic. Hey, officer!"

She appeared to beckon some arm of the law, and the mob broke and slid toward the sidewalk. The girl jumped from the running-board, but stayed in the middle of the street until the offending taxi was out of sight around the next corner.

"Wait," said Jack, as his chauffeur started. "Sanford, go and find out what you can about that girl."

The other looked once into his master's face, seemed to find many words written there, and then obeyed. One flip of his hands turned up the collar of his coat, a jerk pulled the vizor of his cap about his eyes, and in a moment he was out of the machine and slouching through the mob, to all intents and purposes a perfect sample of the crew. Even in the swing of his shoulders and the muscular sway of his gait he was one of them.

"There are qualities in Sanford," muttered Lodge, "that may be studied. He's like a book. You keep turning the pages, but you never come to the end."

He relaxed in one corner of the seat with his big hands once more draped over the butt of his stick, and at once was oblivious of the world. In ten minutes Sanford climbed back into the car and slipped from his rôle of the hardened tough into that of the perfect valet. His master watched him with a quiet content.

"Her name is Mary Dover," reported Sanford. "Her parents are dead, and since the death of her father she has been running the Chuck-a-Luck saloon around the corner. She leases the whole building except for some shops along the street, and she runs the up-stairs as a rooming-house. Has a rather hard class of patronage, but they think a great deal of her, and she handles them well. The place has a suspicious atmosphere, but it is absolutely respectable. It looks like a place where one could get liquor, but she's keeping the law and the old saloon is dry. She runs a soup-

kitchen along with her noon lunch, and her soft drinks, and serves out soup for a nickel a bowl to any one who wants to stand in line. An old paralytic named Whitey finances the charity, but Mary Dover gets most of the credit for it."

He ended his narrative and waited; Jack Lodge sighed.

"You knew none of this before, Sanford?"

"I, sir? Before?" echoed the valet, and raised his brows.

"I thought you might know something of these people; you dropped into their ways with devilish ease, you know."

He smiled at his valet, and the latter grew pink in the center of each cheek.

"I have observed their ways, sir," he answered.

"And you learned all this about Mary Dover while you were away?"

The other met his glance without faltering.

"Well, I wish I had your eyes. But you've always seen everything, Sanford."

"Yes, sir."

"I can understand the rest of it—you picked up some gossipy old chap and made him talk; but where did you learn about the—er—respectability of the place, and the girl's control over the roomers?"

"I saw her face, sir."

"Eh?"

For a moment they looked gravely at each other.

"Sanford, I admire a good many things about you; the way you keep your past obscure, for instance—"

"Sir—"

"Tush! I'm not curious. But about this Mary Dover."

He paused and fumbled at the head of the cane. When he raised his head his eyes were clear.

"I'll have to know more of her, Sanford; you'll take me to her place."

He opened the door of the car.

"Sir, sir," stammered Sanford, "pardon me, but—"

"What the devil! You seem positively frightened!"

"At the thought of your going to the Chuck-a-Luck, sir."

"Danger, eh?"

"They're an ugly crew, sir. Very rough."

"You seem to have handled them easily enough."

"I was made-up for the part."

"H-m," pondered Lodge, and again looked squarely into the eyes of his valet.

"Besides," went on Sanford hastily, "this Mary Dover—"

"Well, what of her?"

"At close hand, sir, she's not nearly so attractive."

"No."

"Quite the opposite, sir."

"Sanford, I'm going to be personal."

"Quite so, sir."

"Some men are born prevaricators."

"Yes, sir."

"And some acquire the talent."

"Very true, sir."

"But you, Sanford, started with a fine gift and you have polished it off with training."

"Sir?"

"Nonsense, Sanford. My eyes are as clear as yours, except that they don't see quite so far into corners. The girl is beautiful."

"Very good, sir."

"But if she were as ugly as a witch, Sanford, there'd still be something rare about her."

"Yes, sir."

"There would. It's the spirit. It shone like a light. It glittered at me over the crowd. The spirit, the spark; she's fire!" He had straightened with one big hand clenched; now he relaxed in the seat and said calmly: "You can take me to her now, Sanford."

"Very good, sir."

He climbed down from the car and held the door; but Lodge paused.

"What's in your mind now?"

"In your place, sir, I'd make some changes of costume before I went into such a place."

"Ah, I see! Roughen up a bit?"

"Exactly, sir."

"Then we'll run back home and I'll jump into some old togs."

"Not that, sir."

"Well?"

"You have nothing that will do."

"But where the deuce shall I get the togs?"

"For five dollars, sir, I'll find you an equipment in one of these cellar stores."

"Off with you, then. And hurry."

Once more the valet made his change of appearance and again he stepped onto the pavement, but this time he walked through the crowd with a bent and thoughtful head.

CHAPTER V.

MAKE-UP.

WITHIN the hour Jack Lodge stood in his room before the tall mirror, dressed in his new outfit. He stood in black shoes with tan-leather tops, gray-check trousers which barely touched his shoes, a brown coat of a two-year-old model, well frayed at the wrists and with shiny seams, a derby hat, and a green-striped shirt without a collar. From all angles Jack Lodge surveyed himself approvingly.

"You've turned me into a hard one, Sanford," he smiled at the valet. "I could mix in that mob, now, as if they were my brothers."

But Sanford circled round and round his master, shaking his head.

"You won't do," he said gloomily. "You won't do, sir."

"Good gad, Sanford, what do you want me to do? Wear an infernal wig, then?"

"Your hair!" cried the valet, inspired. "That's it! Take off your hat." He was obeyed. "Your pardon, sir." One up stroke of his hand ruffled the hair in the back of Jack's head; another brisk motion caused the forelocks to tumble across his forehead. "Now your hat again, sir."

With the derby on again, a jag of hair showed under the brim of the hat.

"Good!" sighed the valet. "One hundred per cent better."

"But I look like a vagabond, Sanford."

"There are three possible parts you can play, sir. You can be an honest laboring man, the lounge-lizard, or the crook."

"Well, then, I'll be an honest laborer."

"Sorry, sir, but your hands won't do for that; too soft, and the finger-tips aren't square enough."

"No one would notice little things like that, in a crowd."

"Sir, in the Tangle every one notices everything. They have to; it's not pleasure, it may be a matter of life and death. The moment a stranger comes among them they look him over, weigh him, sift his qualities. They do it from the corner of the eye, but they do it thoroughly, for he may be a stool-pigeon, a plain-clothes stiff."

"Well, then, the lounge-lizard, as you call it."

"You'd need better clothes for that. Shabby outfit, perhaps, but complete, with a collar a little soiled, maybe, and a bright tie. You might be unshaven, but your shoes would have to be shined. Besides, sir, you haven't the face for the part."

"This is like going on the stage."

"Quite right, sir."

"But I'll trust in you to fix me up; you seem to have been behind the scenes."

"Nothing but observation, sir."

"H-m," murmured Jack Lodge, and flashed a quick glance at the valet, but the eye of the latter was imperturbable.

"It seems there's nothing left for me but to be a crook."

"Sorry, sir."

"In a word, you're very anxious that I should not go to the Chuck-a-Luck, eh?"

"Yes, sir."

"But you don't try to persuade me?"

The valet smiled. "As a crook you might be a moll-buzzer."

"Eh?"

"A thief, a pickpocket, who preys on women, sir."

"The devil!"

"Exactly, sir. That would not do. You haven't the face for it. Or you might be a green-goods expert—but you haven't the conversational qualities which are necessary. In fact, sir, I think there is nothing for you but the part of a plain yegg."

"Good gad, Sanford, this is terrible!"

"There seems nothing else, sir."

"Very well, then, I am a safe-breaker, a burglar, eh?"

"Sorry, sir. But it's far the easiest part."

"How so?"

"You won't have to talk a great deal, sir; besides, I'll be with you to keep you in hand, sir."

"You'll be with me? I wouldn't think of taking you along into that den of crooks, Sanford. There might be a fracas; you might be injured, you know."

The valet found occasion to turn and close the door, which was slightly ajar, and in turning he indulged himself in a faint smile which was gone when he faced the master again.

"Couldn't think of letting you go down there alone, sir."

"I'm not a child, Sanford."

"Certainly not. A child could go anywhere in the Tangle and every man and woman would give it a helping hand; even a sickly man is perfectly safe there; but one like you, sir—" he shook his head.

"Well?"

"You are not one of them;. you come from the outside; if they learn that they'll suspect you of being a stool-pigeon, a plant."

"I see. But let them suspect. There are ways of convincing these fellows."

He glanced down at his big hands.

"If they would fight in a stand-up manner you would be safe enough, sir; I have seen you box. But these fellows don't like trouble, and when trouble starts they put an end to it as soon as possible."

"Ah?"

"A chair thrown from behind, for instance, is very effectual; or a beer bottle swung from almost any angle ends a great deal of noise; they hate noise, sir. Then, as for actual fist-fighting, they are a rough-and-tumble lot, sir, and they use their feet, their nails, even their teeth. It is said that a champion pugilist once picked a quarrel in the Tangle. It was most unfortunate. At the inquest it was believed that a mad dog must have attacked the man; in reality it was all the work of one man's hands."

"And feet, Sanford?"

"And feet, sir."

"In fact, I think you'd better come along. Shall we start?"

"Suppose we have a few lessons first, sir?"

"You'll have to stop that 'sirring,' Sanford, if we go down there together, eh? Well, what lessons do you mean?"

Sanford looked at his master with a smile; and then he began to change so gradually that Jack Lodge, with astonishment, could trace the details of the alteration. Passing a hand thoughtfully across his hair, the valet left it rumpled and highly pompadoured. His mouth changed from its rather prim expression to a sort of supercilious sneer, and his eyes, usually so blank and naive, at once became alert, brilliant. A quick motion of his hand unbuttoned his coat, his hands slipped into his pockets, his shoulders sagged a little, and in a word he had stepped before the very eyes of his master from an attitude of bland deference to one of contemptuous, hard criticism.

"I get your drift, bo," said Sanford, running those critical eyes up and down the muscular body of Lodge. "Let me tip you off. If you go down with those guys you got to change a lot; get me?"

The master blinked, but Sanford did not smile.

"Start walkin'," snapped the valet.

The master obediently began walking.

"Rotten! Say, d'you think maybe you're promenadin' with a swell jane down the avenue? Well, you ain't, that's all. You're walkin' through a crowd, sort of." The valet stepped close to Jack Lodge. "Listen to me, bo, I know you've snuffed a drum, and there's a dozen other birds in the crowd know the same thing. You know they know it. You're watchin' 'em all the time; see?"

He himself started to cross the room, and there was a vast difference in his very gait; one would have said that he was walking on eggs, and yet he went with a slight swagger, planting each foot as firmly as a sailor walking on shore. He was at once ready to buffet his way through the crowd without being thrown off his balance for an instant, and he was also poised to turn in any direction at the first alarm; and all this without any exaggeration which could call eyes his way.

"Are you on?" said the valet, swinging upon Jack Lodge.

The latter replied with a glance, and then attempted to imitate Sanford's manner; but the latter shook his head.

"Look!" he said. "You're Soapy Jack; after you snuffed your drum the peelers got wised up and you had to jimmy a bull. Then you screwed your nut down to the Tangle and you're tryin' to keep dark. You're looking for a fall right now, and if they ever nab you and knock you down to a beak you'll be a lucky yegg if you get off with less 'n a finnif."

Jack Lodge gasped.

"Translate, Sanford," he said. The valet sighed, recalled what he had said, and then rendered it as follows: "You're Soapy Jack because safe-blowers use soap to run the nitro-glycerine. That's what the yeggs call 'soup' because they boil down dynamite to get it. You have just blown a safe, but the police got wind of it, and you had to shoot an officer to break away. Then you ran for the Tangle, and you're keeping as quiet as possible. You expect arrest at any minute, and if you are taken and introduced to a magistrate you'll be a lucky yegg if you get off with less than a five-year sentence."

"But if some one should talk to me like this, Sanford, I wouldn't understand a single phrase."

"You don't have to answer."

"I can't insult 'em, Sanford."

"If you do it correctly you don't have to speak. For instance, suppose you address me now."

He turned a little from the master and became at once oblivious of his presence.

"Good morning," said Jack.

The valet turned his head slowly, and a pair of bright, hard, unquestioning eyes probed Jack Lodge; then Sanford nodded. Not a word had been spoken, and yet Jack felt that he was completely dismissed.

"I think," he murmured, "that I understand."

"One thing more, sir. If trouble should start, will you leave the place without seeing it through?"

"Goes against the grain, but you seem to know what's what about the Tangle. Yes, I'll leave. But if I can't leave, Sanford, I want to see my own way through. I've hunted up this affair, and I want your word of honor that you won't raise a hand for me."

"Sir?"

"Speak up."

"Only in the last extremity, sir."

"Not even then. Promise me, Sanford."

"Very good, sir. But pray God there's no trouble."

They had been through so much together that there was no possible doubt as to the valet's courage; but he spoke with such fervency that Jack looked at him in amazement. He remembered one hot, breathless dusk in the Indian jungle when he and Sanford had pressed into the tiger's covert in the semidark. There was then in the valet's eyes the same desperate intentness with which he now approached the Tangle.

He was, as Jack Lodge plainly saw, in a blue funk, but Sanford never made a determined effort to escape from a tight place; he was thoroughly imbued with a spirit of fatalism.

CHAPTER VI.

THE SOUP LINE.

THEY were well into the Tangle when the noon whistles blew, a far-away moaning; a change came over the slums. The riveters on the nearest building grew silent; the trucks and drays within five minutes diminished to a third of the usual volume; all those overtones of women and children vanished; and in their place rose the deep murmur of men's voices, workers who tumbled up from excavations, or poured out of new structures.

The day was both warm and dim, with a bright mist hanging close to the city and noticeably obscuring the tops of some of the sky-scrapers; and in the comparative hush of those men's voices the city seemed for a moment to sleep. Laborers sat in every corner with their lunch-tins, munching vast sandwiches and grunting at one another between mouthfuls.

They came to a corner where the crowd was unusually thick.

"There," said the valet, "is the Chuck-a-Luck."

It was like any other saloon in the town, with the central pane in the swinging doors battered out, the same gilding, the same elaborate "Family Entrance"; and, like most of the down-town saloons since prohibition went into effect, it displayed a card with "Merchants and Business Men's Lunch, 11 to 2," and a menu scrawled beneath the caption. A continual line went in and out of this place. The "business men" were chiefly in overalls, but the number of them was prodigious. Jack Lodge and Sanford could barely edge their way through the door.

They found an extraordinarily spacious barroom, now largely usurped by a throng of little iron-legged tables which must have come out of some ice-cream parlor. About these sat the purchasers of the lunch, which was served to them by two waiters and a cook behind the bar in a tall white cap and apron covered with many stains; but the greatest part of the crowd was in the lower end of the barroom, proper, and extending beyond it into the two back apartments.

A line formed and filed past a counter behind which stood Mary Dover. At first Jack hardly recognized her, for he recalled a girl whose eyes were fire, shrilling at a crowd that wavered before her; and what he saw now was a grave face, pale in the shadow of the barroom. In front of her were two great pots of soup and coffee and a huge tray of bread, and from these receptacles she served a bowl of coffee, a bowl of soup, and a chunk of bread to each of the passing men. And as each man paused for his portion and paid his five-cent piece, she lifted her eyes and regarded him with a single sharp glance.

Jack Lodge, taking his place with Sanford at the end of the line, observed those shrewd looks, and when he became accustomed to the dim light at this end of the room he noted that her expression changed with every man she served. Sometimes her face lightened, again it was filmed with gloom, again she was simply non-committal, but usually she had some remark for each man as he passed. Most of them were Greek to Jack, but behind him stood Sanford, injecting ready translations for each word of the slang.

"I hear you're off the scat (whisky)?" "Am I off it? Mary, for life. Boone's stuff is pure dooley (dynamite)!"

"How's your arm, Bud?" (This to a tall man whose left arm was carried in a sling). "Comin' fine, Mary. Thanks to you, Gawd bless you!"

"Brush on! Brush on, Bud. You're stopping up the line. Say, the door-rapper's back! Will you bat an eye at this bird? What are you doing here, whiskers?"

An unshaven face scowled up at her; a short, ponderous man.

"Aw, cheese it, Mary. Slip me a gob of punk (bread) and I'll be on my way."

"Not a crumb! Why, boys, look at this blowed-in-the-glass stiff (veteran hobo) begging for a handout—here!"

"That's easy!" snarled the hobo, and scooped half a loaf from the bar and slipped into the crowd.

Mary Dover did not move; but she sent her voice over and through the mob after the fugitive. "Block that door! Grab that stiff!"

In front of each entrance to the saloon men squeezed from either side, and the hobo came face to face with a solid wall of humanity. "What sort of a plant is this?" he growled. "Lemme out, will you?"

"Larry!" called Mary Dover, directing operations like a general from behind the lines.

In answer to her call there appeared through the crowd the finest figure of a man Jack had ever seen, not quite so tall as Jack himself, but a full thirty pounds heavier, and every pound represented in muscle. He split the crowd easily, crushing them back on either side like the bow-waves before a ship.

"The bouncer," said Sanford to Jack.

The hand of Larry the bouncer fell on the shoulder of the hobo, and the latter turned, squirming, but the moment his eyes fell on the face of Larry he stood perfectly still. Not until that moment did Jack real-

ize what a man the bouncer was, for the hobo was a solid figure, but he looked like a child in the grip of Larry.

"What's bitin' you?" whined the tramp.

"He lifted some bread, Larry," directed Mary Dover. "Don't hurt him; just throw him out on his ear, will you?"

Larry regarded his prisoner with an ominous smile. He caught away the part-loaf from the numb hand of the tramp, the crowd before the door opened, and an instant later the hobo was lunging toward the pavement outside like a diver. The crowd had closed before he struck the concrete and only a brief howl of pain announced his fall.

It sickened Jack Lodge. He had met tall men and strong men in the ring through many a year of amateur boxing, and this same Larry in the clothes of a gentleman would not have given him a moment's uneasiness, but in that flashy shirt of thin blue silk the sway of the bouncer's shoulders suggested infinite power. Surrounded by a hum of admiration, Larry turned complacently on the crowd and his grin was a sidewise twitch of his lips, as if he would not give his satisfaction free rein for fear of appearing too amiable.

He was a fine-looking fellow, he would even have been handsome had not his nose been too small and flat and his jaw over heavy. He seemed to Jack Lodge invincibly close to the soil, and naturally a picture of himself facing this man rose in his mind and thrilled him. The very thought terrified him, but his courage was of that sort which starts with terror and goes on to extravagant heroism.

"If any of these birds give you any trouble, Mary," said Larry, slouching toward her, "just tip me off and I'll knock their blocks loose."

"Easy, Larry," said the girl. "Don't use your fists or you'll have to be paying funeral expenses."

The bouncer grinned broadly, made his face sober with a quick effort, and glanced sternly up and down the line, like an officer marshaling his men. It was a sweeping look until he struck the eyes of Jack Lodge. The latter straightened and felt a tingle run down his spine, as though an electric current had run in at his eyes and centered in the small of his back. He was horribly afraid; he knew that his face grew pale, and that his eyes burned. The bouncer walked down the line, and so doing, paused beside Jack and swept him from head to feet. The glance seemed to reassure him, for he shrugged his shoulders with a grunt and went on.

"Easy!" whispered Sanford, at the shoulder of his master. Jack turned.

"What a man!" he whispered. "What a man!"

Sanford leaned his elbow on the counter, for they were now close to the soup and coffee and bread; he spoke with a smile as though whispering a jest; but what he really said was: "For God's sake, sir, keep hold of yourself. That's Larry Boynton."

"Well?"

"You saw him for yourself, and he's even more than he looks. Very quick, and a dirty fighter, sir. He's never been beaten in the Tangle."

"If he's such a king, Sanford, what is he doing here?"

"It's the girl, sir. It's Mary Dover that brings him here as bouncer."

"Ah? And she?"

"I can't read her mind about him, sir. Can you?"

The whole affair of the ejection of the hobo had not made Mary Dover send more than two looks at her bouncer, and now he was apparently forgotten. She went on serving the line with incredible swiftness, and Jack forgot her face to watch her hand upon the ladles; for he knew that the hand is the closest criterion of a woman's beauty; he had seen a thousand pretty faces, and some far more lovely than even Mary Dover, but in all his life he remembered not half a dozen fine hands.

Now he watched, fascinated; they were large enough to seem capable, but they were molded with a scrupulous and wonderful care from the round wrist to the tapering finger-tips, and she had those small knuckles which disappear into dimples when the hand is relaxed. He found himself stepping into the place before her, looking into her face.

She examined him sharply, not with a

prying insolence, but a calmly impersonal gaze like that of a judge; and at once Jack forgot all his lessons from Sanford. He straightened and looked her squarely between the eyes.

"I don't know you," said the girl.

"I'm Jack."

"Jack the Rambler? Chicago Jack? Battling Jack? What's your monniker, Jack?"

"They call me Soapy Jack, sometimes," he said, and smiled at her. She leaned both elbows on the counter and looked at him seriously, but by degrees a smile came in the corners of her eyes.

"Soapy Jack?" she repeated. "That's because you keep clean, maybe?"

"Maybe," nodded Jack Lodge.

"I don't ask you to tip your mit," said Mary Dover, "but I don't know you, Jack, and—"

He saw her glance away, knew that the bouncer had drifted closer, and at this moment he heard a faint indrawn hiss from Sanford, a sound so faint that it seemed it could reach no ear but his. Yet Mary straightened. Her eyes grew at once both bright and gloomy.

"I didn't get you," she murmured, and at once placed his portion before him.

They had been so near the end of the line that by the time the valet and the master had their share of the edibles the greater portion of the crowd was gone. Those who stood in the soup line made quick work with their "hand-outs," and even the working men who had been eating at the little iron-legged tables in the front portion of the Chuck-a-Luck were now finishing their cans of near-beer and wandering out.

So Jack and Sanford easily found a corner table from which they could look on at everything that passed.

After that hiss, it seemed to Jack that all suspicion was done away with.

(To be continued NEXT WEEK.)

THE police captain looked up with a yawn as the door of his private office opened and closed. "Oh, that you, lieutenant? Thought it was Clieve—he phoned he'd be in around midnight." He consulted his watch. "It lacks a half-hour yet. Sit down."

He pushed a box of cigars toward the other, who removed his gloves and tucked them inside the cap, which he placed, crown down, upon the table. Drawing a chair into position, the lieutenant seated himself and bit the end from a cigar.

"Wise as hell, wasn't he—the commissioner," he remarked, "going outside the force for his private pussyfoots? Wonder where he thought Slade's agency got its men?" He regarded the captain through

a haze of blue smoke. "Some commissioners wouldn't go outside the force," he added thoughtfully.

The captain glanced up quickly. Their eyes met.

"Meaning?" he suggested.

The lieutenant shrugged. "Nothing—only if your shoe pinches you'd better throw it away and get one that don't, even if it's a new one."

"He hasn't been in a month."

"A month, or a day—what difference does it make? He's been in long enough to show that he's going to make it damned uncomfortable for—some folks."

The captain glanced toward the door, picked up the telephone and called the outer office. "Hello, Coulter. When Clieve comes in tell him to wait out there—I'm busy." Crossing the room he turned the key in the lock and resumed his seat. "How about the mayor? Carston is his commissioner, you know."

The lieutenant smiled. "The mayor is new at the game himself. He's out to make good. Ain't he been handing it out through the papers that he's there to do things—not to talk? Suppose, now, he was to get something on his brand new commissioner and fire him? It would be nuts for him—he'd be doing things."

"What good would it do? He'd just appoint another—they're all for reform nowadays—the high-brows."

"That's just the reason I was thinking that maybe if we could work in some one that wasn't a high-brow, it would be better—for the force."

"I don't get you."

"Well, there's—me, for instance. I ain't a high-brow—been on the force twenty years, and got a good record."

The captain stared at him in amazement.

"You don't mean that you are thinking of getting appointed police commissioner!" he exclaimed. "Are you crazy?"

"Not so you could prove it," smiled the other. "That's just exactly what I do mean—and you are the boy that's got to put the flea in his honor's ear."

The captain continued to stare. "But—why, they wouldn't stand for it!"

"Who wouldn't?"

"The people."

The lieutenant made a motion of contempt.

"Hell! They'll stand for anything," he growled. "Most of 'em will fall for it. Listen here, does this sound reasonable, or don't it? It's what you've got to put up to the mayor when the time comes. Why put a civilian at the head of a police force? What do they know about police business? Here's men trained in police work—men that have put in most of their lives at it, and that know it from the ground up, and yet you stick in a civilian because he's a good lawyer, or a good button-maker, to tell them how to run the force. If you wanted to tunnel the river, would you get a barber to boss the job? Or, if you got sick, would you send for a motorman?"

"That's all right—but how you going to get rid of the commissioner? It's pretty risky business—butting in on the big ones."

"You're sure of Clieve, ain't you?"

"Yes."

"And Holden?"

"Yes, they're ours, all right."

"Then you listen to me." For an hour the lieutenant talked, and the captain listened, interrupting at intervals with a question, an objection, or an observation.

Then the lieutenant went away, and the captain phoned for Clieve.

II.

DAYLIGHT was beginning to pale the electrics when the officer once more called the outer office.

"Send a man out to hunt up Spanish Mary," he ordered. "I want to see her."

Spanish Mary, be it known, was a character in the underworld. A product of the slums who unostentatiously gathered the "leathers" of the *bourgeoisie*—and paid well for the privilege. An hour later the girl entered the captain's room unannounced. It was empty. She dropped into a chair and waited. Her glance strayed from the severe interior to the window and rested upon the gray brick wall of a loft building, whose rows of iron-shuttered windows were tightly barred.

She counted the shutters, and the rows

of bricks. She counted them over again, and before she had finished the door opened and the captain entered and, seating himself at his desk, began to pore over a little pile of carefully folded papers. The girl's eyes rested for a moment upon the uniformed figure with the closely cropped gray mustache, and returned to the counting of bricks. The silence was profound—emphasized by the occasional rattling of crisp paper. Presently the officer looked up and cleared his throat roughly.

"Why, hello, Mary!"

The girl's gaze returned from the brick wall. "Ain't you surprised?" she said ironically. "And busy, too! You'd oughtn't to work so hard, cap. It's bad for your health."

The officer grinned as his blue eyes rested in frank admiration upon the regular lines of the face with the soft, richly tinted skin, and its aureole of jet-black hair. "*You* ain't working enough to hurt your health any," he retorted. "What's the matter with you, retired—or tied up with a meal-ticket?"

The black eyes flashed scornfully. "You know as well as I do I put in three weeks in the hospital, and I ain't worked any since. Somehow, I ain't felt up to it."

"That's ancient history. You were discharged a month ago."

"But I ain't been working, I tell you."

"That's what I'm getting at."

"You mean, I've got to—"

"Kick in." The words rasped short and harsh, and the girl winced and shook her head wearily.

"I can't," she faltered, "I'm broke."

The gruff voice took on a more kindly tone. "Look here, Mary, buck up. You were sick, I know that, and I ain't going to be hard on you. But it's seven weeks since you've showed anything. You ain't sick now, and it's time you were back on the job. There ain't any one laying off of me—I've got to come across, same as always, and they're gouging me deep."

The girl nodded.

"I suppose so," she answered indifferently. "I've got to start some time. It might as well be now."

"That's the talk. We'll say about fifty to start in on. I don't want to crowd you. You'll strike your gait again before long. Just see that you come across inside of twenty-four hours, though."

The girl crossed to the door. With her hand on the knob she turned. "And if I don't?"

The officer laughed shortly. "The trains still run up the river. You won't need to bother to pack your grip, though. The State will furnish your clothes."

When she had gone he drummed thoughtfully upon the desk with his fingers. "If it works, I'm an inspector. And if it don't—well, twenty-four years of it haven't left me a pauper, by a hundred thousand or so."

III.

LATE that same afternoon Clieve, private detective to the police commissioner, tapped at the door of a two-room apartment, third floor front, in a tenement house east of Third Avenue. The door opened a scant two inches and Clieve saw that it was secured by means of a chain. Saw, also, that a woman was regarding him intently through the narrow aperture and his eyes lighted with approval as they rested for a moment upon the dark beauty of her.

"Are you Spanish Mary?" he asked.

"Who are you?" came the counter-question.

"Let me in. I've got something to tell you. I'm here to put you hep."

"Who are you? And what are you talking about? Go on away from here. I never saw you before."

Clieve placed his lips close to the opening. "I'm from the commissioner himself. Let me in and I'll tell you. You can trust me."

From beyond the door came a gurgle of laughter. "I'm trusting you all right, as long as this chain holds—that's as far as I'd trust any dick. Say it from there, bo."

"Suit yourself," replied Clieve with a show of indifference. "The commissioner wants to see you."

"Gee, I'm getting popular with the big ones all to once! What's the game?"

"He'll tell you that himself. Take a taxi to—you know where he lives—apart-

ment D." The man slipped a bill through the aperture.

The girl hesitated. "How do I know you're from the commissioner? And what does he want with me?"

Clieve stepped closer and turned back the lapel of his coat. "Just lamp that. I'm on the job. I happen to know that you were jerked up for a kick-in this morning, and that you couldn't come across. The commissioner's whetting up his ax, and he wants the dope first hand—get me?"

"You mean—"

"I mean, you show up at eight o'clock and you'll learn a lot of things that 'll surprise you."

The girl took the bill, and Clieve turned and made his way down the dark stairway.

Promptly on the stroke of eight a taxi swung to the curb before the door of an Eighty-Fourth Street apartment-house. Spanish Mary alighted and crossed the sidewalk. Clieve was awaiting her, and the two stepped into the elevator, which moved noiselessly upward. A moment later the girl found herself standing in a carpeted hall while the detective pressed a pearl button set into the wall beside a heavy mahogany door. The door opened and a servant conducted them through a long hall into a large room, where a wood fire burned cheerfully in a huge fireplace.

"This is the young woman I told you about, sir—Spanish Mary," announced Clieve, and withdrew.

A tall, gray-haired man arose from an easy chair and greeted her, smiling. "Good evening, Miss—Mary." The girl glanced warily into the kindly eyes as the man continued: "Just throw off your wraps and sit here before the fire."

As she sank into the proffered chair, her eyes roved about the expensively furnished room. The commissioner himself closed the door and returned to the fire.

"Just forget," he began, "that you are talking to a police official. We are alone here, and whatever you see fit to tell me will be held in strict confidence."

"What's the game? What do you want of me?"

The commissioner noted an undertone of suspicion in the girl's voice.

"The game, as you call it, is this: The mayor of this city has seen fit to appoint me his police commissioner. Having accepted the appointment, I intend to administer the affairs of the department to the best of my ability. The people have the right to hold me responsible for the condition of the department during the term of my administration. My belief is that if there are rotten spots in the force, it is because the commissioner allows them to be rotten. If you find that there are certain rotten apples in your barrel of apples, the sooner you get rid of the rotten ones the better. If you don't get rid of them your whole barrel is in danger. Rot spreads."

The girl was listening intently with her dark eyes on the commissioner's face. "Your barrel's stood too long, cap," she observed dryly. "You'd better just roll it in the river."

"No, no! It is not as bad as that. You have evidently come in contact with the worst."

"I hope I have," she answered bitterly.

"I believe that the great mass of the force is honest."

Spanish Mary shook her head. "Tell it to Sweeney!"

"To whom?"

"Oh, that's just a way of speaking—like your barrel of apples. You and me don't talk just alike, but we can get each other at that. I wasn't born in a minute, and since then I've lived like I had to live. I sized you up for a square guy the minute I lamped you. And, believe me, you're in the wrong pew. You're up against something that's bigger than you are—bigger than any man—the *system*. Take it from me, bo, if you want to hold your job, lay off them—they'll get you!"

The commissioner leaned forward, and the kindly eyes looked into the dark ones gravely. "I don't want to hold my job if in order to hold it I have to wink at graft, and close my eyes to crookedness. I did not seek this position—it was urged upon me, and I accepted it as a matter of duty. From a financial standpoint, I am losing money every day I hold it."

"You won't lose much," said the girl wisely. "I can see your finish."

The commissioner returned her smile. "I am afraid you are pessimistic. At least I have nothing to fear. The mayor and the district attorney are with me. If crookedness exists we will stamp it out."

The girl shook her head. "The mayor has been in a month, the district attorney a couple of years, and you're newer yet. But the system has been going on for years. Them old Dutchmens started it, I guess, that we learnt about in school."

"Everything has an end."

"Yes, and when everything ends, the system will end. How do you know you ain't up against a plant right now?"

"A plant?"

"Yes, a plant. How do you know I ain't been sent here to get your goat?"

The commissioner comprehended the reference to the goat. He smiled. "If such were the case, you would hardly suggest it. When Clieve reported your predicament to me I decided to send for you. The police, of course, know nothing of it. I can trust Clieve and Holden implicitly."

"You can't trust no one that's a dick," maintained the girl stubbornly.

The commissioner waived the point. "Now I want to ask you some questions, and I want you to answer me promptly and honestly. I think you feel that you can believe me when I tell you that nothing you may say shall be used in any way against you. Some of the questions may seem personal and impertinent, but you must remember I am trying to secure evidence, not against you, but against the grafters in the police force, if any exist."

"Go ahead. You can't hurt my feelings none."

"In the first place, if you have paid certain moneys to any one connected with the police, kindly state as nearly as you can, the amount, to whom it was paid, and why."

Spanish Mary smiled. "The easiest to answer is the last part of it," she said. "I pay so the dicks won't bother me while I work the hotels, theaters, and subway stations between Thirty-Fourth Street and the park."

"What do you mean by 'work'?"

"I am a dip. I work alone—bag-opening, mostly women's hand-bags. I can't tell nothing about how much I paid. It's been fifty-fifty for going on four years. I work one night every week, sometimes two, and I gather anywhere from nothing up to a thousand or so."

The commissioner was listening in horror. "And to whom do you pay this money?"

"Sometimes one and sometimes another. They've all got their mitts out."

For upward of two hours he questioned, and jotted down answers. Toward the last he noticed an increasing nervousness on the girl's part—an evident anxiety to be gone. At last she rose and adjusted her wraps. The commissioner made a gesture of protest. "Just a few moments." He touched a button and a servant appeared in the doorway.

"A light luncheon, Grimes, please. You may serve it in here."

The servant disappeared, and the girl hesitated. Then she shook her head. "No, no, I can't. I'd like to stay, it's so warm and comfortable here. A girl like me don't often get the chance to feed in a swell joint like this. But I've got to go. The shows will be over in a few minutes and—well, if I don't come across with fifty in the morning they'll frame me for a stretch up the river."

"Do you mean that you are going out, now—from here, and pick pockets to get money to hand over to the police—and that, under their own orders!"

"You guessed it right, bo."

"But surely if you refuse to do it they can't—"

The girl interrupted him with a laugh. "Oh, they can't, can't they? You can take it from me that if I don't kick in to-morrow with that fifty, I'll be pinched and stuck in stir, and when the grand jury meets they'll have as pretty a case against me as ever you seen. Witnesses all rehearsed up to the letter—and it won't be no Island case, neither—the cap said so."

The servant, moving noiselessly, cleared a small table and covered it with a white square of linen. The commissioner was staring into the fire, and the girl watched the servant with interest. When he had withdrawn she turned to the official:

"Where'd you get the tabby-cat from?" she asked.

"The what?"

"Your hash-slinger. Seems like I've seen him before somewheres."

The man seemed preoccupied. "Oh, I guess not," he murmured without removing his gaze from the fire. "They look pretty much alike."

The girl turned toward the door. "So long, cap," she said. "I've got to blow."

The commissioner looked up, and the girl saw that the kindly eyes were hard. "Wait! You say the police will frame you as you call it? Will have witnesses who will swear that you committed a crime tonight?"

"If I don't come across in the morning, they will."

He touched a different button and Clieve appeared. "Mark these bills for identification, and bring them back." The detective took the money and withdrew from the room.

"Nix on that!" cried the girl in alarm. "Suppose we got the cap, what would the rest of 'em do to me?"

"I will take care of you. We have the opportunity of a lifetime to strike directly at the root of the evil. If you are with me in this I give you my word you will never regret it."

"But they'll frame me just the same. It ain't helping my case none. Because I give him marked bills I got off of you, ain't no sign I didn't gather a few leathers on the side."

The commissioner smiled. "We can meet the objections, I think. My wife and daughter are in Florida. You can occupy my daughter's room. There are five witnesses here who can swear that you remained under this roof throughout the night. I am right; and right is bound to triumph."

The girl placed her hand upon the back of the man's chair. "And, take it from me, because you're right, is the reason you're going to hit the greased skids, bo. There's only one right in this man's town—right with the cops—and that's wrong."

"But you will help me in this? Help to crush out this systematized graft?"

"I'll take a chance," she agreed after a moment's hesitation. "You've got further to drop than I have. I'll sit in the game for a while, but I'll hand it to you straight, if it comes to saving myself, some one else will have to worry about you."

IV.

EARLY the following morning Clieve let himself noiselessly out of the commissioner's apartment and, hastening to a telephone-booth in a near-by drug-store, held a long conversation with the captain of police. After which he returned to the apartment while the captain held a much longer colloquy with his honor, the mayor.

At nine o'clock Spanish Mary walked into the captain's office. She stepped to the desk and counted out some bills.

"Take them up from there, and hold 'em in your hand!" The girl stared into the captain's glittering eyes as she complied. "You fool! Do you think you could put anything over on me—throwing in with that high-brow commissioner? He'll be in here in a minute—to catch me with the goods—with these marked bills. And there'll be others here, too. He's shot the chutes. With those bills there, we've got him."

"But Clieve marked the bills—he knows!" cried the girl.

The captain laughed. "Sure, he knows. Wait till you hear him tell it. Clieve's a Slade Agency man—he's been working under my orders for years—Holden, too." The man leaned closer, and with narrowed eyes, spoke rapidly. "Your ship's sinking, you rat! Come clean with me and you're all right—I ain't holding this against you. Play the fool, and you'll be an old woman before you'll get the chance to double-cross me again. We're going to stage a little show-down right here in this room. Three minutes after your commissioner walks through that door, the mayor will follow him in. Clieve and Holden will be here, too. And Graham—it's a wonder you didn't spot Graham, he's the commissioner's servant; Grimes, I think he calls him." A hidden buzzer purred softly, and the captain pointed to a chair. "Get into that, quick! He's coming."

The door opened abruptly and the commissioner entered, followed closely by Clieve and Holden. The dejected attitude of the girl, and the confident, almost patronizing greeting of the captain, caused a swift look of anxiety to flash into his eyes.

"Have you paid over the money?" he asked.

The figure shrank still farther into the chair. Her lips moved, but no words came.

"If you mean the money you paid her last night," said the captain with a sneer, "she still has it. The bills are marked, ain't they, Clieve?"

The commissioner whirled on the captain. "What do you mean?"

From the doorway sounded the voice of the mayor, coldly formal: "Hold your temper, please. Your case can only be injured by bluff and bluster."

"You here!" The commissioner faced the speaker. "Your presence is most opportune."

"So I believe," answered the city's chief executive dryly. "I am bitterly disappointed in you, William."

"Disappointed! In me?" The man regarded the mayor in wide-eyed astonishment.

"Yes, disappointed in you. In placing you at the head of the police department I thought I was selecting a man of sterling worth and the highest character."

"Proceed."

"I think the shorter we cut this, and the sooner you affix your signature to your resignation, the better it will be for all concerned."

"My resignation! Are you requesting my resignation? I demand an explanation!"

"Did you send for that woman to come to your apartment last evening?"

"I did."

"And she spent the night there?"

"She did."

"While in your apartment you paid her a certain sum of money—fifty dollars, to be exact?"

"I did."

"Your wife, and the other members of your family are out of the city?"

"They are."

"That is all, I believe."

"Oh, that is all, is it? Well, let me tell you, Mr. Mayor, that is not all! I demand to be heard." The executive nodded, and the commissioner turned with blazing eyes upon Clieve. "What is the meaning of this? Where is the leak? Speak out, confound you! Tell them why I sent for that girl."

The detective smiled brazenly into his face. "I guess it's pretty evident why you sent for her, ain't it?"

"Tell them what you told me about that scoundrel levying graft upon her!" The commissioner pointed a finger shaking with rage at the captain. "And tell them why that money was turned over to her. And why it was marked."

"What are you trying to do, make me the goat? I never saw that woman till you sent me to her flat. And, as for graft, as far as I know, the word never passed between us. When I found out what kind of guy you was, I made up my mind to show you up—me and Holden, both. We figured money would pass from you to her, so we marked them bills. It's a cheap bluff you're trying to pull, Mr. Commissioner—but one that's so flimsy it wouldn't fool even a blind man. If you want to go any further, though, there's your man, Grimes. He can tell about the carryings on in the library."

The commissioner was very white—and very calm. He turned to the girl.

"And you?" he asked. "Will you speak out here and now, and tell these men why I paid you that money? Will you tell them that I ordered Clieve and Holden to mark it for the purpose of trapping that scoundrel? And will you repeat here before his honor, the mayor, the story of rottenness and graft that you told me last night? Will you tell how you have paid for the privilege of committing crime in the very heart of the city? Oh, are you just another tool of these damnable plotters?"

A long moment of silence followed the commissioner's words, during which the girl did not raise her face from her hands.

"Come, speak out, can't you?" The voice of the captain of police rasped harsh, and the girl shuddered.

"I—never paid nothing—to no one for—

anything," she faltered. "I told you it was risky for me to go to your rooms—"

"That will do." The voice of the mayor was cold. "I think, William, that, under the circumstances, if I were you, I should lay my resignation on that desk. Of course, you can stand on your rights and demand a public hearing, or carry your case into the courts, but there is your family to think of. This way, you avoid publicity. No one will know why you resigned. My explanation will be simply that we were not in accord on certain points connected with the administration of the department."

The commissioner's eyes flashed. He would fight—would force them to prove their trumped-up charges! Would air before the world the rotten system—the system that had victimized him, and duped the mayor of the city. With an expression of infinite contempt his glance traveled from face to face—the complaisant captain, the brazen Clieve and Holden, the shrinking figure of the girl, the mayor, upon whose countenance was blended sorrow, anger, and bitter disappointment.

Suddenly his face went gray—these were the witnesses against him! There was even Grimes, his servant. What weight would his unsubstantiated word carry before an investigating committee—before a jury, against the testimony of these, borne out, as it would be by the facts he himself must admit? His wife and his daughter—they would believe in his innocence—would know that despite these filthy accusations, he was clean in mind and body. And his friends? He glanced once more into the face of the mayor. Well, some friends, perhaps—but the majority of them, business associates—neighbors—would accept as a matter of course the verdict.

And there were the others—his butcher, his baker, the drug clerk on the corner, the guards on the subway, the policeman on his beat—he could see the covert winks, the malice-bearing smiles, the noddings of heads as he passed. He could see the thick, black headlines of the penny papers, and hear the blatant voices of the news-mongers hurling his name from street corner to street corner.

Once again his thoughts turned to his wife and his daughter—the believing ones—the loyal. What would this thing mean to them? Theirs would be the harder lot, for they must brave the women—the good women, and the average, that made up their little world of acquaintance—the open snubbing, the studied coolness, the purring sympathy that sheathed the venom-tipped claws of the little-souled among them, the me-and-thou scorn of the righteous—his glance strayed to the desk. Conspicuous upon its broad expanse of flat top was a heavy iron inkstand, a pen, and a dozen sheets of police letterheads.

The captain rose from his chair and walked to the window. Slowly, with shoulders drooping like the shoulders of an old man, the commissioner seated himself at the desk.

He picked up the pen, tested its point upon the nail of his thumb, drew the paper toward him, dipped the pen, and began slowly to write. At the end of five minutes he arose, and, with bowed head, silently left the room. In the chair the girl sobbed dryly. Clieve and Holden passed out by another door. Grimes followed them, and the captain turned to the girl. "Beat it!" he said gruffly, and when she had gone, he glanced toward the mayor, who stood staring out the window at the brick wall of the loft building. After a moment of silence the mayor spoke, more to himself than to the captain:

"I don't know—I would have staked my life on William Carston's integrity."

"Excuse me, your honor, I don't want to butt in with any suggestions of my own. If I seem impertinent, tell me so. What I'm saying is said only to help you, and to give the city the benefit of greater efficiency in the department. Twenty-four years of police work has convinced me that no one without police experience can run the department. It stands to reason, your honor, that this is true. Bankers run the banks—railroad men run the railroads—why not have a policeman run the police department?"

"What! A man from the force as commissioner! The people would never stand for it!"

"Make 'em stand for it! You're the

mayor. It's a bold move. But, when they get used to it, they'll see it's a wise one. If it don't work, fire him. You've tried a high-brow; try a policeman. I can name you the man—twenty years on the force with a clean record. He's only a lieutenant, but he's got more horse sense, and more education, too, than any of the captains or inspectors, either—speaking man to man."

The mayor paced the room in silence. Suddenly he turned upon the officer. "Who is this man?"

"Lieutenant Regan, sir."

"Send for him."

"He should be here now." He called the outer office. "Hello, Coulter, is Lieutenant Regan there? Just came in? Send him here at once." As the lieutenant entered the captain left the room. An hour later he reentered. The new commissioner of police sat in the captain's chair, with his feet on the captain's desk, smoking one of the captain's cigars. He was alone. The captain offered his hand, and as he took it, the ex-lieutenant grinned.

"System, cap—you can't beat system. And, by the way, that Spanish Mary—she knows too much."

"You mean—"

The lieutenant jerked his thumb over his shoulder. "Up the river—and see that she gets about ten."

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A CHANGE OF HEART

SAID John to Jane: "Wilt marry me,
My dearest, sweetest Honey?"
Said Jane to John: "Oh, no, I think
You haven't any money;
The man I wed must have a goodly
Sum in bonds invested,
He must own property and lands,
And show them well attested."

Said John to Jane: "Wilt be my wife,"
(Some years a little later).
Said Jane to John, with manner coy:
"You'd better ask my pater.
Although you're very wealthy now,
He wishes me to marry
A scion of nobility
So I for him must tarry."

Said John to Jane: "You're growing old,
And I am somewhat older."
Said Jane to John: "I'll not deny
You seem a trifle colder."
Said John to Jane: "I'll ask once more,
And if you still refuse me
With weak excuses o'er and o'er
You're very like to lose me!"
Said Jane to John: "I can't believe
That you would now forsake me,
I love you more than all the world,
Dear John, come quick and take me!"

Ray H. Gross.

Listening Eyes

by Bertram Lebhar

Author of "Thumbs Down," "A Nurse Named Allenby," etc.

WHAT HAS ALREADY HAPPENED

A UNIQUE advertisement for a deaf stenographer offered to the New York *Mercury* suggested investigation by the editorial department. Cecilie Harvey, a newcomer to the editorial staff, was assigned to cover the case for a "story" and decided to apply for the post herself, pretending to be deaf and a lip-reader. Gordon Hemment, star reporter, who took a particular interest in the girl, even though somewhat stunned by the sudden announcement of her engagement to Ethan Underwood, coached her a bit and was interested in her reports. She was unable, however, to fathom the cause of her engagement by the Gotham Development Company until one day she was asked to apply field-glasses to two holes in the window-shade and report to Mr. Wrigley what two men in an office across the street were saying. One of these men was her fiancé, she promptly refused, and hurried across the street to apprise Underwood that he was being spied upon. To her amazement he refused to allow her to mention the fact to her paper, to which that evening she did not return to report as usual, much to Hemment's anxiety. His consternation, then, may be imagined when, on asking to be excused from covering a banquet, the night city editor informed him that it would be out of the question as the only other available reporter was just being sent off to cover the murder of a man named Wrigley, found dead with a knotted cord around his neck.

CHAPTER VII.

BY WHOSE HAND?

LESS than three minutes after he had heard the news, Gordon Hemment was on his way to the scene of the latest Metropolitan crime mystery, while Watson, the only other general workman available, was hurrying up-town to the Waldorf Astoria to attend the annual rally of the Native Sons of Ohio. Austin, the night city editor, had cheerfully acceded to his favorite's suggestion that the two reporters swap assignments, despite Watson's almost tearful protest that he preferred murders to banquets, and that it was a beastly shame anyway to chase him out to cover a dinner at an hour when they would be nothing left on the tables but bread-crumbs and menu-cards.

Considering that only a minute before Hemment had been complaining of not feeling very fit, Austin was somewhat astonished at the eagerness with which the former begged to be allowed to cover the murder story, and the briskness with which he rushed out of the office when his plea was granted. The editor was not aware of the star reporter's strong personal interest in Cecilie Harvey. Moreover, he had no idea that the violent death of a business man named Wrigley, which a bulletin from the City News Association had just announced, had any significance so far as the little, blond girl reporter was concerned. It was Bailey, the day city editor, who had given her the assignment to investigate that queer help wanted advertisement in the *Mercury*, and all that the night desk knew about her present activities was that she was "out on a special story."

Austin, therefore, jumped to the conclusion that Hemment's sudden display of vitality and his keen interest in the tragedy at the Interborough office building were due merely to professional zeal, and to an expert appreciation of the fact that from the meager details already at hand the case gave promise of developing into a pretty choice morsel of police news.

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for January 1.

It was true, indeed, that Hemment had a partiality for delving into sensational mysteries of crime—preferred that phase of newspaper work to all other branches of reporting. Even if there had not been a special reason for his being concerned over this startling happening in the offices of the Gotham Development Company he would have welcomed an opportunity to investigate an affair which evidently was a bit out of the ordinary. Now, however, as he set out for the scene of the tragedy, his journalistic enthusiasm was overshadowed by his anxiety on behalf of the young woman who until very recently had sat in that very room in which the murder had been committed.

"Killed by a knotted cord around his neck, eh!" the reporter mused. "That would hardly be a woman's way of going about it. Not a girl like her, at all events. If the fellow had been stabbed or shot, it would be possible to conceive of her being in such a desperate situation that she had to take that way out. But the manner in which he came by his death would seem to eliminate her from the list of suspects.

"Thank Heaven, for that much, anyway! But just the same, the fact that she appears to be missing has an ugly look. In the circumstances, her failure to show up at the office this evening is certainly confoundedly peculiar."

The elevator service at the Interborough building was maintained until midnight, so, although it was after ordinary business hours, he was relieved to find that he did not have to walk up the twenty flights of stairs. When he got off the car at the top floor, and approached the offices of Cecilie Harvey's recent employers, he found half a dozen other reporters in the corridor, arguing with a determined patrolman in uniform who stood guard outside the door.

"No use getting sore at me, boys," the policeman was saying, "I'd do it quick enough if I could, but order is orders. Do you want to get me broke? If— Ah! Good evening, Mr. Hemment. 'Tis glad I am to see you. Maybe you'll explain to these *on*reasonable young men that I'm always glad to do a good turn for the press boys when I can. 'Tis well you know that yourself, sir, I'm after thinking. But they won't seem to understand that I'd be up on charges if I was to violate the strict orders I was given not to let anybody set foot inside these rooms until the big boss from the Central Office has been here to investigate."

"I guess they realize that all right, Tim," said Hemment, smiling. "I can bear witness that you're one of the best friends we have on the force. Did I understand you to say that you expect Deputy Commissioner Oglivie here pretty soon?"

"I don't know just when he's coming, but he telephoned the desk lieutenant just before I was sent on this job to say that he'd be here. He seems to think that this is a big enough case to need his personal attention."

"Very good," said Hemment. "We'll have to wait until he arrives. In the meantime, Tim, what do you know about this business yourself? I suppose you can give us a few details."

Patrolman Timothy Callahan hesitated. "I'm not supposed to talk about it, Mr. Hemment. My orders was not to give out any information."

"Of course not. I beg your pardon, Tim. I was forgetting about the new gag rule they've put in operation up at headquarters. But, if you were permitted to give out information, what time would you say this thing happened?"

"I don't know just when it happened. The medical examiner, after he looked at the body, seemed to think that he'd been dead for at least three or four hours. But it was at 7 P.M. that the crime was discovered. One of the scrub-women came in here to clean up, and found him sitting in his chair, stone dead, with a cord tied tight around his neck. It was her that gave the alarm."

"At 7 P.M., eh!" Hemment muttered. "And there were indications that he had been dead for several hours! Who else besides the medical examiner has been here to look at the body, Tim? Any one from the department?"

"The captain, and a couple of plain-clothes men from the precinct. But they didn't do any investigating. As soon as they saw what was what they got in touch

with the Central Office and was told to leave everything as it was until the big boss got on the job."

"Then of course there have been no arrests as yet? None of the employes of the concern has been held as a witness, eh, Tim?"

"Not yet. You see it was after office hours when the murder was discovered, and I understand that all the people who work here had gone home. When the scrub-woman came in, the offices were empty—except for the body."

The *Mercury* representative nodded. "Yes; naturally she—er—all the employes would have left by that time," he mused aloud. "That's clear enough. But if the medical examiner is correct in assuming that the thing actually happened three or four hours before—and he ought to be able to determine that pretty accurately—the—er—the office force must still have been on the job when the crime was committed. Queer! Deucedly queer!" He paused. "I suppose you've had a look inside that room, Tim? Were things much disturbed? Any signs of a struggle?"

"Not a sign, sir, so far as I could see. Not even a chair overturned. That's the strange thing about this murder. 'Tis right you are in remarking it. A gent sits calmly in his chair and lets himself be strangled to death without yelling for help, or putting up a fight. One thing's sure—he was no Irishman, I'm after thinking."

"Perhaps he committed suicide," one of the newspapermen put in.

"Not a chance of that," the policeman dissented. "Onless he was one of these here contortionist fellows he couldn't have died by his own hand. The cord which did for him was knotted at the *back* of his neck. If—"

He did not finish the sentence. Three men had just alighted from the elevator, and were coming down the corridor. At sight of one of them Callahan's lips gave a graphic imitation of a clam in the act of shutting up shop, and his hand went to his uniform cap in salute.

"Good evening, commissioner," Hemment greeted one of the new-comers, a burly, shrewd-faced man who nodded affably to the group of scribes. "We're glad you've come at last. Now perhaps we shall be able to get a crumb or two of information. This sphinx in brass buttons you've put on guard seems to be tongue-tied."

Deputy Police Commissioner Oglivie, chief of the Central Office detective bureau, received this with a quizzical grin.

"Sphinx in brass buttons, eh!" he remarked whimsically. "That's pretty good. He didn't appear to me to be acting very sphinx-like as we came along just now. Must have been an optical illusion, I guess. Be that as it may, however—you might hang around here for a while, gentlemen. I don't make any promises, but it's just barely possible that I may have something to give out, after we get through inside."

He disappeared within the offices of the Gotham Development Company, followed by his two aides, one of whom carried some photographic paraphernalia. They remained shut up in those rooms for the best part of an hour. The reporters waited outside in the corridor, impatient, but confident that their vigil would be finally rewarded. That was one good thing about Oglivie; he could always be relied on to "come across" promptly and frankly, notwithstanding the fact that there was a feud on between the present city administration and the press, and the heads of all departments had received instructions from the City Hall to "shut down on the news" as much as possible as a retaliatory measure against the offending scribes.

This big, good-natured, police official had never taken pains to conceal the fact that he observed this gag rule with a wink, a policy which had made him more popular in journalistic circles than he was in the mayor's office. With his distinguished record as a former chief of the United States Secret Service, however, and his reputation for possessing one of the most brilliant detective minds in the country, he was too valuable an asset to the Metropolitan police department to be disciplined for his independence.

There was a grim expression on his features when presently he came out of the ill-fated Wrigley's private office and confronted the eager group of newspapermen.

"There is a great deal of work to be done on this case yet, gentlemen," he announced. "It will be several hours at least before we can expect to make any headway. So far, I don't mind admitting, we are completely in the dark as to the motive for the crime—except that it can be taken for granted that it wasn't robbery. And we haven't much light at present on the antecedents and habits of the victim. From the papers in his desk, and a talk I had with the superintendent of the building before I came up, I am inclined to think that the real estate business he and his partner have been conducting was none too conservative or substantial a concern—but we shall know more about that later on, after we have had a chance to talk with some of the employes.

"In the meantime, this much seems clear: Wrigley was murdered around four o'clock this afternoon. He was taken by surprise and drugged into insensibility before he could make a move to defend himself."

"Drugged!" Hemment exclaimed sharply.

"Unquestionably," the police official declared. "The actual cause of death was strangulation, but a drug was used first. He was unconscious and helpless at the time the cord was tied around his throat."

"That's only theory, of course, commissioner?" Hemment asked. "A very plausible theory, to be sure, since it would be difficult to explain otherwise how a crime of that violent nature could have been perpetrated without the victim putting up a fight which would have attracted attention, but still—you haven't any actual proof that a drug was used, I suppose?"

Oglivie hesitated for a moment.

"Ever hear of the 'endormeurs' of Paris?" he inquired, suddenly.

"I've read something about them," the *Mercury* reporter replied. "You mean, of course, the new school of scientific criminals who put their victims to sleep with stupefying drugs?"

"Exactly. They are the most daring and dangerous lot of crooks the European police have ever had to contend with. The extent to which they have availed themselves of the latest scientific research and the finesse with which the gang conducts its operations, has got all Paris terrorized. Nothing so commonplace as chloral, or 'knock-out drops' in their methods. They use the various derivatives of opium, such as morphin, eodein, heroin, dionin, marceine, and narcotin, as well as certain chemical compounds such as bromure d'eytle, bromoform, and amylin. The stuff is sometimes enclosed in tiny balls of thin-spun glass. They will conceal one of these miniature gas-bombs under a handkerchief, hold it for a second under the victim's nose, crush the glass between their fingers, and in an instant he is dead to the world. One whiff is enough to do the trick.

"I don't say that the person who croaked Wrigley was a member of this gang," the deputy police commissioner continued. "That remains to be seen. But there is hardly room for doubt that he was equipped with one of their little, quick-acting sleep producers." He paused. "We found some fragments of very thin, curved glass on the rug at the dead man's feet. When we fitted them together we discovered that they formed part of a hollow globe. Guess that's enough to satisfy you that we are not merely theorizing, eh, Hemment?"

The reporter nodded. "You're going to submit the glass fragments to a laboratory test, and definitely establish the fact that the hollow ball contained a quick-acting, stupefying drug, of course?" he said.

"Sure thing. We shall attend to that detail as soon as we get back to headquarters. But even now there isn't the slightest doubt in my mind. The unfortunate Mr. Howard Parsons Wrigley was drugged into insensibility first, and then strangled to death. You can take it from me that you will be quite safe in making that statement in your stories, gentlemen. All the circumstances point to such a conclusion."

The newspapermen hurriedly made notes. "New York business man slain in his office by member of the notorious 'Endormeurs of Paris' gang!" the youngest member of the group exclaimed presently, a glint of enthusiasm in his eyes. "Holy smoke! What a whale of a yarn!"

"Hold on, young fellow!" Oglivie protested, frowning. "I didn't say that, you know. I thought I had made it clear to everybody that as yet we are not at all sure that the person who croaked Wrigley was a member in good standing of that Parisian band of crooks. The only thing that points to such a possibility at present is the fact that he used their methods. And, of course, it's quite likely that he managed to get hold of one of those little sleep-producers through some acquaintance in the underworld, without actually being identified with the gang himself. We shall know more about that later."

"Why do you say 'himself,' commissioner?" one of Hemment's journalistic associates asked. "Isn't there any chance of its turning out that the murder was committed by a woman?"

This young man's tone was almost wistful as he put the question. He represented a New York sheet of ultra sensational proclivities and an inclination to break out with half-tone illustrations on the slightest provocation, and he was anticipating the moment when the identity of Wrigley's slayer would become known. The picture of a beautiful woman murderer would make a much more attractive adornment to the front page than the portrait of a mere male slayer.

"What reason have you for assuming that this thing was the work of a man, commissioner?" he persisted. "I have read a little about these endormeurs, too, and I understand that they have several beautiful and accomplished ladies in their organization."

The chief of detectives shrugged his shoulders.

"I won't say that it is outside the bounds of possibility that it was a woman who did it," he replied, slowly. "We found some female finger prints in the room. It is possible that they may have some bearing on the case. But we understand that Wrigley's concern employed several young women in its offices, so I am not inclined to attach a great deal of importance to those finger-impressions.

"Considering the manner in which the unfortunate man was put to death," he continued, "it doesn't look to me like a woman's work. For one thing, I have never met a woman who could tie the kind of knots which are in that cord. I don't mind telling you that they are peculiar knots, gentlemen. The hands which made them, we are strongly inclined to think, belongs to a man who has spent some part of his life at sea. That, by the way, is a clue which may serve us in good stead when we have made a little more headway on the case."

Some of Oglivie's predecessors in the Central Office would have been inexpressibly shocked if they had heard him thus frankly discussing the results of his preliminary investigation with the representatives of the press, even revealing the clues which had thus far come to light. Most detectives, great and mediocre, regard secrecy as an essential part of their work until a case has been thoroughly cleaned up. To "tip off one's hand," through the public prints, in this reckless fashion, and at such a premature stage of the game, would strike them as little short of criminal folly.

But this man's methods had always been daringly original in this respect—which was one of the reasons of his great success. Even when he was connected with the United States Secret Service he had always made it a point to lay his cards on the table as much as possible. Sometimes he found it expedient to withhold a trick or two, but he invariably took the newspapermen into his confidence to an extent which defied all the best detective traditions.

It was a policy which possessed certain important advantages, to be sure. One of them was the terror which it often inspired in the breast of the culprit. Many a guilty wretch had been driven from cover by the knowledge that this formidable adversary was so confident of success that he did not hesitate to show his hand. The very boldness and originality of the move preyed upon their fears. They reasoned that if he was willing to tell so much it must be because he knew a great deal more. Sometimes this reasoning was not in accord with the facts, but it had the effect of throwing even unsuspected criminals into such a state of panic that they were bluffed into

making indiscreet moves which betrayed them.

In the present instance Oglivie was keeping nothing back from Hemment and his brother reporters. He had told them all he knew about the case to date.

"That's the best I can do for you at present, gentlemen," he wound up. "Perhaps I shall have something more definite to give out to-morrow. You might say in your stories that we are confident of having Wrigley's murderer behind bars before many more editions of your papers are run off the press." He grinned. "That little line may help some."

The newspapermen hurried back to their respective offices to write their stories. Hemment pounded out on his typewriter a concise but graphic report of his interview with the deputy police commissioner. He did not include in his version any of the special knowledge he possessed about the affairs of the late Mr. Howard Parsons Wrigley. Not a word about the mysterious need of the Gotham Development Company for a deaf stenographer who was an expert at the art of lip-reading. It was too early to say yet whether that remarkable circumstance bore any relation to the violent end of Cecilie Harvey's late employer. It was advisable to refrain from mentioning it, he decided, until a little more was known about the murder—or, at all events, until he had succeeded in holding a conference with a certain person who might now be able to throw some light on the motive which had prompted Wrigley to insert that unusual "Help Wanted" advertisement in the *Mercury*.

He handed in his copy at the night desk; then spent a few seconds hunting up an address in a little book on the day city editor's roll-top desk.

Since her graduation from the school of journalism Cecilie Harvey had given up the bachelor apartment which she had shared with her fiancé's sister. The latter, after receiving her diploma, had gone to Boston to fill a position on a daily paper in that city. Since her departure Cecilie had made her home in a boarding-house on the upper West Side.

It was nearly midnight when Hemment arrived at this house. From the darkened appearance of the place it looked as though all its inmates had retired. Nevertheless he persisted in ringing the bell until finally a middle-aged woman attired in a kimono, and with her hair in curl papers, opened the front door as far as its chain latch would permit, and through the aperture nervously demanded to know what he wanted.

"I'm sorry to disturb you at this late hour," the reporter apologized, "but I must see Miss Harvey on important business. I am from the office, and—it is very important."

"Miss Harvey isn't in," the woman informed him. "She wasn't here for dinner, and she hasn't come home to-night. I can't imagine what's keeping her, sir. She always telephones me when she is going to be late."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE RAISED SHADE.

IT was very late that night when Gordon Hemment went to bed. For hours he sat in his room, burning a great quantity of pipe tobacco, meditating on the startling events of the day, and striving ineffectually to evolve a satisfactory theory which would account for the fact that his little blond girl reporter friend seemed to be mysteriously missing. And when, finally, he gave up the latter problem as a bad job, for the time being, having come to the conclusion that he had better "sleep on it," his slumbers were tortured by a series of luridly melodramatic dreams in which Cecilie Harvey met with all sorts of horrible fates, the mildest of them being abduction by a band of ruthless European criminals who drugged her into insensibility and carried her off to captivity to prevent her from telling what she knew about the murder of Wrigley.

He was up, however, at six the next morning. This was several hours ahead of his usual rising time, but he had important work to do, and had set his alarm clock accordingly.

A cold shower and a hearty breakfast at

a near-by restaurant went a long way toward making amends for his scanty and troubled sleep, and outwardly he did not look very much the worse for wear when at seven-thirty he presented himself once more at the boarding-house in which Cecilie made her home.

The landlady, the same woman he had interviewed on his previous visit, responded to his ring. Recognizing him instantly, she told him that her missing boarder had not returned, but that she had received word from her.

"She wasn't home all night, sir, and when I got up this morning and found her bed empty I was so worried that I was seriously thinking of notifying the police," the good woman explained. "She's such a thoughtful little thing that I felt sure she wouldn't give me a scare like that if she could help it. Although she's no kin of mine we've been more like mother and daughter to one another than landlady and lodger, ever since she's been stopping with me, so naturally I was quite upset. But thank goodness everything is all right. Only a few minutes ago the telephone rang and when I went to answer it I was relieved to find that it was she who was on the wire."

"What did she say?" Hemment asked eagerly. "Did she tell you where she is?"

"No, sir; she didn't tell me that. She merely apologized for any anxiety she may have caused me last night, and said that she had some important business to attend to, and might not be home for the next few days. She seemed to be in a hurry, and rang off before I could get any particulars from her."

"You are sure it was her voice?"

The landlady was quite positive on that point, and when presently her visitor departed he was feeling considerably relieved, although more than a little puzzled over this development.

He proceeded down-town to the Interborough Building with the intention of paying another visit to the scene of the crime. He thought he would like to make a personal inspection of the room in which Wrigley had met his fate, and in which Cecilie had sat for several days. That seemed to him to be the logical starting point of the earnest endeavor he intended to make to solve the dual mystery.

When he entered the offices of the Gotham Development Company he found Deputy Commissioner Oglivie and some of his personal staff in possession. The police official greeted him with an affable nod.

"On the job pretty early this morning, aren't you, Hemment?" he remarked. "I had an idea that you night owls didn't venture abroad much before noon."

"The early bird catches the worm, you know," the newspaperman said, smiling. "Any new developments in this affair since last night, commissioner?"

"Well, you may be interested to hear that we've submitted the fragments of glass to a laboratory test, and are now absolutely certain that the little, hollow globe contained *netrite d'amyle* when it was crushed under Wrigley's nostrils."

"Good enough! Anything else new? Any line on the motive for the murder yet?"

"Not exactly. When we have discovered the motive I have an idea that we shall be pretty close to putting our hands on the murderer." Oglivie hesitated. "We have found out a thing or two, though, about the dead man and his partner which may help us in that direction," he continued. "I don't mind telling you, Hemment, that both of them were jail-birds. Some fifteen years ago they did a five-year stretch in Atlanta for selling fake oil stock through the mails."

Hemment tried to look as though this was news to him. He did not care to mention to Oglivie that he had already received the information from his friend Inspector Morrisey of the postal secret service. That might have provoked embarrassing questions from the former as to why he, Hemment, had been interested in Wrigley's affairs some hours before the murder—embarrassing because he had decided not to let the facts about Cecilie's assignment become known to the authorities if it could possibly be avoided.

Not that he suspected the girl of being guiltily involved in this mysterious crime. From the facts which had already come to

light he had now fully assured himself that, in spite of her inexplicable behavior, she could have had no hand in the violent death of her employer. But, in addition to the strong personal reasons he had for interesting himself in this case, he was also keenly alive to its journalistic possibilities.

As a reporter, he was eager to solve this perplexing problem, and publish the solution in his paper while the police and the *Mercury's* contemporaries were still groping for the answer. With that end in view it might be a big advantage to keep to himself for the present his knowledge of the circumstances which had led to Cecilie's being employed in the offices of the Gotham Development Company — circumstances which, it was not improbable, had some bearing on the fate of Wrigley.

"So the dead man was an ex-convict!" he exclaimed, with well-feigned astonishment. "And his partner, too! That certainly is interesting, commissioner. By the way, what's become of the partner? Have you had any word from him since last night's grim business?"

Oglivie shook his head. "We're looking for him," he said. "We'd like to have a talk with Mr. Benjamin Franklin Gilder."

"You think it may have been he who killed Wrigley?"

"Well, I won't say that. He seems to have a pretty good alibi. We happen to know that he was out of the city at the time the murder was committed—went to Pennsylvania a couple of days ago to try to interest some rural suckers in his beautifully engraved building lot certificates. We got that from the post-office inspectors, who, it appears, have been keeping tabs on him and his partner for some time.

"No; we don't expect to hang the murder on him," the police official went on. "But just the same I am anxious to have a chat with him as soon as possible. I have a hunch that he can throw some light on the subject."

"I suppose you expect to see him at headquarters before long?" the reporter suggested. "If, as you say, the postal inspectors have been camping on his trail, you oughtn't to have any difficulty in putting your hands on him."

Oglivie shrugged. "I don't mind telling you that he has given us the slip," he said. "Unfortunately the secret service men who have been shadowing him fell down on the job last night. They had their eye on him until yesterday evening—just long enough to provide him with an alibi—and then he must have got wise that he was under espionage, and succeeded in dropping out of sight."

"Too bad!" the reporter sympathized. Then, after a pause: "Any objection to my gratifying my morbid curiosity by taking a peep into the next room, commissioner?"

"I don't see any particular reason why you shouldn't. I'm afraid you won't find much there to interest you now, though. The body has been removed to the morgue, and there's nothing about the present appearance of the room to suggest what went on there yesterday."

Oglivie led the way into the private office. "Pretty swell fixings for a couple of jail-birds, eh?" he remarked, whimsically. "But then, of course, they needed this sort of scenery in their business. The financial lambs insist on being shorn with gilded shears, you know."

He walked over to the big double desk in the center of the room. "This massive bit of mahogany must have set them back a pretty penny—if they ever paid for it," he continued. "Knowing something about the ways of gentlemen of their ilk, my guess is that they didn't. Bought it and the rest of the stuff on credit most likely, and dodged the collector when he called."

Hemment nodded absently. He was not particularly interested in the office furniture. It was the room's solitary window which claimed his attention.

"Was that shade up or down at the time the murder was discovered, commissioner?" he asked.

"It was up," Oglivie answered positively, but with a trace of wonder in his manner. "Does that suggest anything in particular to you?" he added. "If so I must confess that I have missed it myself."

Hemment thought that it was rather significant. He recalled what Cecilie had told him about her employer's mysterious habit of frequently gazing out of the window

through two small peep-holes cut in the shade. The shade was always down. Who had raised it now? If it was the slayer of Wrigley who had taken the time and trouble to attend to that detail, after the crime, what was his reason?

One answer readily suggested itself. The murderer had known of this peculiar practice of his victim's—and he did not want others to know of it. He had rolled up the shade in the hope that in that position it would escape the attention of the investigators of the murder—prevent them from hitting on the discovery that Wrigley had been in the habit of watching somebody through these peep-holes.

The reporter gazed out of the window, across Nassau Street, at the towering office building opposite, and a glint came to his eyes. If this theory of his was correct—and it looked pretty good to him—it led to further deductions of startling import. The person whom Wrigley had been surreptitiously watching, if not the murderer himself, at least knew a great deal about the crime. The discovery Hemment had just made about the window-shade pointed obviously to that conclusion.

Moreover, this unknown person who had been the object of the slain man's stealthy interest, was—or until recently had been—located in one of those offices across the street. That was equally obvious. From where he stood Hemment had satisfied himself that only the windows of the Bannister Building across the way could have been in the line of Wrigley's vision. Find out which of those windows was the one which had held the particular attention of Cecilie's ill-fated employer, and the solution of this mystery would be close at hand, the *Mercury's* star reporter felt sure.

He was aroused from his reflections by Oglivie's voice.

"What's the idea?" the detective demanded insistently. "If you see anything in the fact that the shade was up at the time the murder was discovered, Hemment, I'll be glad to hear what it is." He laughed good-humoredly. "I don't mind admitting that it wouldn't be the first time in my career that I've received a helpful hint from a newspaperman."

The reporter hesitated. His conscience was telling him that he might be failing in his duty as a good citizen by withholding material information from the authorities. Besides, he realized that in spite of the light that had come to him he had a mighty big job ahead, and that in following this promising lead it would be no small advantage to have the cooperation of this able professional investigator and the powerful resources at his command.

For a moment he weighed these things against the glory that would be the *Mercury's* if he tackled the problem single-handed and succeeded in beating the police to the answer. That tempting prospect won. He was too much of a dyed-in-the-wool newspaperman, had been too long steeped in the traditions of Park Row, to come to any other decision.

"I was just wondering, commissioner, whether, if the shade was up, somebody in the building across the street might not have caught sight of the murderer while he was in this room," he explained.

"Oh, is that all," said Oglivie, and his tone and manner indicated that he did not think much of the suggestion.

CHAPTER IX.

WRIGLEY'S LAST WORDS.

SHORTLY after 9 A.M., some of the employes of the Gotham Development Company began to arrive. One of them was a sixteen-year-old office boy; the others were over-dressed, frivolous, highly manicured and pomaded young women of the type usually to be found tapping the keys of typewriting machines in the outer offices of get-rich-quick concerns.

Oglivie was glad to see them. It was mainly to await the coming of these possibly important witnesses that he and his aids had appeared on the scene so early.

When he proceeded to examine the women, however, the police official soon satisfied himself that there was not much to be learned from them. All that they knew about the murder was what they had read in the newspapers. They had closed up their typewriter desks and departed for

home at five o'clock the evening before, in serene ignorance of the tragedy which had already been enacted in the adjoining room. They had heard no signs of distress or alarm from Wrigley, and had seen no visitor enter the private office.

As for giving the deputy police commissioner any helpful information regarding their employer's affairs, that they were quite unable to do. They were willing enough to answer his questions on the subject, but from their vague responses it was evident that they had been hired more for their picturesqueness than for their intelligence and powers of observation.

The boy was different, though. His name was Johnny Kelly, and he was a bright and alert youngster with a good memory for details, and a habit of keeping his eyes and ears wide open.

"I am dead sure that there was a man in that room around four o'clock yesterday afternoon, boss," he told Oglivie. "I didn't see him. He must have gone in and out by the other door, which leads from the private office out into the public hall. But I heard him talking to Wrigley. He had a deep, bass voice, which I believe I'd recognize again, if I heard it."

"You heard him talking to Wrigley, did you?" quoth the detective. "What did he say?"

"I couldn't catch what he said, boss. That door between the two rooms is a very thick one, as you can see for yourself; and it was closed. Besides, the typewriters out here were making such a racket that it was impossible to hear the words.

"But I did hear something that Wrigley said," Johnny went on, eagerly. "I had stepped up close by that time to listen. You see, I was kind of surprised at that other guy being in there with him—wondered how he had got in, for that other door to the private office was always kept locked on the inside. So I started to investigate, and I heard the chief cry out, excited-like, *'You can't bluff me. I'm not afraid to tell you that I'm out to get you, and I'm going to do it.'*"

"You are sure it was Wrigley who said that?" Oglivie exclaimed, with a quick glance at Hemment.

"I can make an affidavit to it, boss. It was Wrigley, and those was his exact words."

"And then?"

"That was all. I kept my ears peeled for a minute, thinking there was going to be a scrap. But nothing doing. Nothing but silence after that, so far as I was able to hear. And just at that moment one of the dames here called me over and chased me out to get her a package of gum, and by the time I came back I had kind of forgotten about the matter, not thinking it particularly important at the time, of course."

Oglivie's face lighted up. "By George!" he said to Hemment, in an excited undertone. "What the kid heard must have been Wrigley's last words. It was probably right after he had uttered that threat that his visitor put him to sleep by crushing the little glass ball under his nose. No wonder there was silence immediately afterwards."

"Rather queer, though, how the fellow managed to get into the room without coming through here, isn't it?" one of the deputy commissioner's aides put in.

"I don't see anything queer about it," his chief disagreed. "He came in by the door which opens into the public hall, of course, as this intelligent young man has already suggested. You know, Murdock, we had pretty well made up out minds as to that. One of the first things we noticed when we arrived on the scene was that that door was unlocked. Guess we can take it for granted that he used it both for his entrance and getaway."

"But according to the boy, that door was always kept locked on the inside," Lieutenant Murdock persisted. "That's what's puzzling me, chief. The kid's probably right. Considering the nature of the business they were engaged in, it is hardly likely that these birds would have left the door of their private office unlocked. Too much danger of some unwelcome visitor dropping in on them unexpectedly. And if it was locked, chief, the question is how did the murderer manage to effect an entrance without announcing himself?"

"Possibly he did announce himself," Oglivie suggested. "Wrigley may have

recognized his voice, or signal, and let him in. The chances are that he was expecting this visitor, and had previously arranged to have him come in that way to avoid observation. That's plausible enough. There's nothing to show that he stood in fear of the fellow—had any premonition of what was going to happen. In fact, if this boy's ears didn't deceive him, we have his words to the contrary."

Hemment had been listening to this colloquy between the two detectives with great interest. He was glad that Lieutenant Murdock had brought up this point about the unlocked door, for it suggested to his mind a possibility which greatly relieved his apprehensions concerning his missing friend. He remembered that Cecilie had mentioned that door to him when he had warned her of the risk she was running. She had told him that she was relying on that exit as a means of making a prompt escape in case her adventure was brought to an unpleasant climax by her employers suddenly discovering the daring hoax she had been playing on them.

Was it not reasonable to assume, he now asked himself eagerly, that such a contingency had arisen earlier that day, and that the real reason the murderer had been able to sneak unobserved into Wrigley's private office was because the girl had already fled from the room, leaving the door unlatched behind her?

Hemment fervently hoped that this was the right explanation. If so, it would mean, of course, that Cecilie knew nothing of the tragedy which had occurred later, and that her disappearance, hard to understand though it was, could be nothing more than a coincidence, so far as the slaying of her employer was concerned.

As though he had partly read the newspaperman's thoughts, Oglivie suddenly turned again to the office-boy and said: "By the way, sonny, there's something else you can tell us. Who occupied that cute little typewriter desk in the other room, alongside Wrigley's chair. Did he have a confidential stenographer working in there?"

Young Kelly's face lighted up at the question.

"Gee!" he exclaimed excitedly. "I was forgetting all about the deaf dame. You're right, boss. She was in there with him. She must have been right on the spot when the moider was committed. Gee! I never thought of that."

"The deaf dame?" the police official repeated, with an interrogative lift of his eyebrows. "Why do you call her that?"

"Because she's as deaf as a post," the boy explained. "She's a peach, though. Some swell little chicken, boss, believe me! Her name is Miss Harvey. She's only been working here a couple of days. Wrigley hired her as a sort of private secretary, and had one of the desks moved into the other room especially for her." He grinned knowingly. "You could trust him for picking a good-looker. He was some picker!"

"A private secretary who's as deaf as a post!" Oglivie muttered musingly. "Must have been more ornamental than useful, I should imagine."

"Oh, she could handle the job all right," Johnny Kelly volunteered. "She was one of these here lip-readers. I've seen the boss slipping her some dictation, and she took it down as easy as anything."

Again the deputy commissioner's eyebrows went up.

"A lip-reading stenographer!" he exclaimed. "That's a new one, eh, Hemment?"

"I—er—rather a novelty, I should say," the reporter responded uncomfortably.

"And you are under the impression that she was in the room at the time Wrigley was murdered?" Oglivie said to the boy.

"She must have been, boss—unless she went out by the other door before that bird arrived. I remember distinctly seeing her come back from lunch at one o'clock yesterday. Some of these dames here will probably remember that, too. She passed through here and went back into the private office, and that was the last I saw of her up to the time I quit work for the day and went home, which was a little before 5 P.M."

Oglivie frowned thoughtfully. "Name's Harvey? Any idea where she lives, son?"

"No, sir, I haven't. I don't know a thing about her, excepting what I've just told you."

"We'll have to find her," the police official muttered, his frown deepening. "Even though she's deaf, a talk with this young lady promises to be interesting." He paused. "Look through that list of the names and home addresses of the office employees we found in Wrigley's desk last night, Murdock," he ordered. "See if the name Harvey appears there. I don't recall seeing it."

Lieutenant Murdock examined the record.

"It isn't here, sir," he reported.

Hemment was rather glad to hear that. No doubt the police would eventually succeed in getting in touch with Cecilie, even if, for some puzzling reason, she was deliberately keeping under cover, as there was some cause to suspect. Finding missing persons, particularly those whose retirement was not involuntary, was one of the best things Oglivie did. But with the handicap which the Central Office was laboring under, it was likely to be a day or two at least before they located the girl, and in the mean time Hemment had hopes of finding her himself. He was very anxious to have a talk with her before Oglivie got hold of her and learned what she knew about her late employer's reasons for providing himself with a pair of "listening eyes."

CHAPTER X.

THE KNOTTED CORD.

CROSSING Nassau Street, Gordon Hemment entered the Bannister Building, scanned the hall directory for a moment, then stepped into an express elevator. He got off at the twentieth floor and entered an office.

"Mr. Underwood in?" he inquired of the little, wizen old clerk who came shuffling forward to receive him.

"I'm not sure, sir, but I'll see. Have you an appointment?"

"Not exactly, but I think he'll spare me a few minutes. Just tell him I am a friend of Miss Harvey's, and that I wish to see him on a personal matter of some importance."

The clerk disappeared within the adjoining room, and returned to demand further particulars.

"Mr. Underwood is exceedingly busy this morning, sir," he apologized in the tone of one repeating a lesson by heart. "He hasn't much time for personal matters, but if you will let me have your name, and explain just what your business is, I'll see what he can do."

Hemment produced one of his business cards. "I am one of Miss Cecilie Harvey's associates on the staff of the *Mercury*," he said; "and it is a matter which concerns her personally that has brought me here. Something rather startling has happened which makes it imperative for me to have a talk with him. If you'll tell him that, I think it will be sufficient."

The little old man went into the private office again. He was gone some minutes, but when he reappeared he announced that his employer would see the visitor immediately, and unceremoniously ushered the latter into the presence of Mr. Ethan Underwood.

Cecilie's fiancé greeted the newspaperman pleasantly enough, although his manner was a trifle nervous.

"Have a seat, Mr.—er—Hemment," he said, with a glance at the card on his desk pad. "I haven't much time to spare this morning, but I am always glad to meet any of Miss Harvey's friends. What can I do for you?"

Hemment was studying him with an interest that was far from impersonal. So this was the lucky man who had succeeded in winning Cecilie Harvey's affections! Well, he looked like a likable sort of chap, his unsuccessful rival was generous enough to admit to himself. A somewhat older man than the reporter had expected to find, perhaps; but, on the whole, Ethan Underwood, with his fine eyes, frank cast of countenance, and engaging smile, made a favorable first impression.

"I am very anxious to find Miss Harvey," Hemment began, getting to the point at once. "She did not show up at the

office yesterday, and she is not at her boarding-house. I have come to you because it struck me that you would be most likely to know what has become of her."

Underwood met his gaze squarely.

"Why should you assume that?" he asked.

"Isn't it a natural assumption? I don't suppose she would drop out of sight without taking the man she is going to marry into her confidence regarding her plans."

"Possibly not," the other rejoined. "But I fail to see how that applies to me. If you are under the impression that Miss Harvey has done me the honor to promise to marry me—"

"Under the impression! Why, man, she told me so herself!"

Underwood's heavy eyebrows went up. If his surprise was counterfeited there was no denying that it was well done."

"When was this?" he asked incredulously.

"Only a couple of days ago."

"I think you must have misunderstood her. I wish I could think otherwise, but—unfortunately I have substantial reasons for doubting the accuracy of your information, Mr. Hemment." Underwood laughed bitterly. "This is rather an embarrassing topic to discuss with a stranger, but the painful fact is that I proposed to Miss Harvey a couple of weeks ago, and—she made it very clear to me that there was no hope for me."

For a moment Hemment's face lighted up with the joy he was unable to conceal at this unexpected announcement.

"I beg your pardon for touching on such a painful subject," he apologized. "Perhaps, though, there is more hope for you than you imagine. From what Miss Harvey said to me, it looks as though she—er—might have changed her mind since—er—the occasion you have referred to."

"I hardly think so. I am more inclined to believe that you must have misunderstood her. At all events, I have not seen or heard from her since that day—so you see I am not in a position to give you the information you seek. I know nothing whatever about the young lady's recent activities."

"Too bad!" said the reporter. "I was in hopes that you would be able to throw some light on the mystery of her disappearance. We are becoming quite alarmed at the office over her failure to show up."

"I wish I could help you, old man. Cecilie Harvey is a mighty fine girl. I'd hate to think of her being in any trouble. But isn't it a bit early to become alarmed about her? If I understood you correctly, your only reason for fearing that anything is wrong is the fact that she failed to put in an appearance at your newspaper office yesterday. Surely there isn't anything particularly startling about that. She may have taken a day off, you know."

"But she didn't show up at her boarding-house, either. She was away all night, and her landlady hasn't the slightest idea where she is."

"There might be a dozen ways of explaining that, too. She may be visiting at the home of a friend, for instance. It seems to me that you are needlessly alarming yourself, Mr. Hemment." He paused. "What on earth do you imagine has happened to her?"

Hemment did not make any response. In fact, he hardly heard what the other had said. His attention was riveted at that moment on an object lying on Underwood's desk. He had just made a discovery of such startling significance that he had great difficulty in concealing his excitement.

"I suppose you have heard about the murder across the street, Mr. Underwood?" he said suddenly.

"I read something about it in my newspaper, coming down in the subway this morning. But what the deuce has that got to do with the matter we are discussing? Surely you don't suspect Cecilie—Miss Harvey—of being mixed up in that affair?"

The accountant's tone was bantering and his smile quizzical.

"I don't know," the reporter rejoined very gravely. "She may have had more to do with it than you think. Perhaps you are not aware that she worked in that office?"

"In that office? I don't understand."

"In the office of the man who was murdered. She had been working there for the past three days, and—"

"Great Scott! What do you mean? How could she have been employed there, when only a minute ago you were telling me that she was still on the staff of the *Mercury?*"

"She was there for the paper," Hemment elucidated. "Confidentially, Mr. Underwood, we had certain reasons for being interested in that concern, and the city editor had planted Miss Harvey in their office in the hope that she would be able to get the information we wanted. That is why her failure to report on her assignment last night has got us worried."

"Great Scott!" the other man ejaculated again. "You don't mean—you're not trying to tell me that she was in that room at the time of the murder, and that you suspect her of being responsible for it?"

"Certainly not. I am quite sure that she had no hand in the killing of Wrigley; and I am almost as positive that she wasn't in the room at the time it happened. My theory is that she had already succeeded in obtaining the information she was sent there to get, and had left the office by that time. But the question remains—what has become of her?"

Underwood shook his head. "It does have rather a bad look, I must admit," he said. "Any objection to telling me what this information was that your paper was after?"

"We were trying to find out what use the Gotham Development Company intended to make of an expert lip-reader they had advertised for. The advertisement had aroused our curiosity, and the city editor assigned Miss Harvey to apply for the position and masquerade as a deaf person so as to find out what the game was."

Underwood smiled. "What queer things you newspaper folk have to do sometimes!" he remarked. "I don't wonder that your editor was curious about that advertisement. What could those people have wanted a lip-reading expert for?"

He looked searchingly at Hemment, and it seemed to the latter that there was a challenge in his dark, keen eyes. The newspaperman was strongly tempted to meet that challenge by telling him of certain suspicions that were in his mind, but he checked the impulse.

"We'll have to find Miss Harvey before we can answer that question," he said instead. "Perhaps even then we sha'n't be able to answer it. She may not, after all, have succeeded in finding out what the big idea was."

"Let's hope that she did—and that she will soon show up at the *Mercury* office with the answer," Underwood rejoined pleasantly. "I suppose in the mean time you have formed some sort of theory of your own, Mr. Hemment? You newspapermen are usually pretty good at theories."

Once more his tone, and the penetrating glance which accompanied it, held a challenge. There was no mistaking it this time. But again the reporter saw fit to dodge the issue.

"I'm afraid I'll have to pass this one up," he responded with a laugh. "Ever since I heard of Miss Harvey's queer assignment I've been cudgeling my brains, trying to dope out an explanation for that freak ad. I must confess that it has got me completely stumped—and everybody else at our office."

Underwood looked relieved.

"What do the police think about it?" he asked with elaborate carelessness.

"The police! They don't know anything about it—and won't, either, if we can help it. Of course, you understand, Mr. Underwood, that what I have told you is in strict confidence. Whether that lip-reading stunt has anything to do with the murder or not—and there's no particular reason to assume that it has, I suppose—the *Mercury* would like to keep that little detail to itself for the present. It's our own story, and we don't feel like sharing it with every other paper in town."

"I understand," the other man said genially. "You can rely upon me not to spoil your scoop, my boy." He hesitated. "When are you going to print it?"

"Not until we have found out why Wrigley and his partner wanted a private secretary who could read lips. To print the puzzle without the answer would be spoiling a good yarn."

Hemment rose to his feet. "Well, I guess I won't take up any more of your time, Mr. Underwood," he continued. "Sorry you can't help me in locating the little lady. Of course I shouldn't have bothered you if—er—I hadn't been laboring under a misapprehension concerning your relations toward her."

"That's all right," Underwood responded with a good-humored smile. "I'm sorry too that I couldn't be of assistance to you. Let us hope, however, that your apprehensions concerning Cecilie Harvey will prove to be unfounded. If she should happen to show up at the office, or send you any word, you might let me know. I'd greatly appreciate it."

He got up and accompanied his visitor courteously to the door. It was then that the latter observed for the first time that he was slightly lame. Nevertheless, he was a fine figure of a man, with a presence and manner so prepossessing that Hemment might have carried away the favorable impression he had first formed of him—if it hadn't been for the oblong paper package the reporter had noticed on a corner of his desk.

There was nothing at all startling about the package itself. It was a plain, commonplace bundle, wrapped in manila paper and tied with rather heavy cord. It looked as though it might contain office stationery, or something of that sort. But the cord which bound it was knotted in a somewhat unusual manner—and it was that fact which had claimed the newspaperman's startled attention.

Hemment had served in the navy during the war. He knew a double-reef knot when he saw one, and he was as positive that this was a knot of that order as he was of his clear recollection of the remark which Deputy Police Commissioner Oglivie had made concerning the cord tied around the murder victim's neck.

"The knots in that cord are peculiar ones, gentlemen," the chief of the Central Office detective bureau had told the reporters. "The hand which made them, we are strongly inclined to think, belongs to a man who has spent some part of his life at sea. That, by the way, is a clue which may serve us in good stead when we have made a little more headway on this case."

It might, of course, be nothing more than a coincidence, Hemment reflected, as he entered an elevator. His experience in the newspaper game had taught him that circumstantial evidence was not always to be accepted at its face value. But, at all events, he was now firmly of the opinion that Mr. Ethan Underwood, certified public accountant, would bear close watching, in spite of his frank cast of countenance and his winning personality.

The cord around that innocent-looking package on his desk suggested a dramatic possibility—especially when taken in conjunction with the fact that the window of his private office faced the window of the room in which the man known as Howard Parsons Wrigley had carried on his furtive activities.

CHAPTER XI.

A NOTE FROM A LADY.

HEMMENT'S principal object in calling on Underwood had been, as he stated to the latter, to get in communication with Cecilie Harvey. The girl had mentioned to him the name of the man she was engaged to marry, and, although he had heard the name only once, he would not have been likely to forget it even if his memory had been only half as good as it was. He had recalled, too, Cecilie's additional information that her fiancé had an office in the Bannister Building.

Therefore, after parting company with Oglivie, in the offices of the Gotham Development Company, it had occurred to him that it might be a good idea to go across the street and interview Underwood on the subject of the young woman's whereabouts.

That was all he had expected to accom-

plish by his visit—except that perhaps he was glad of this opportunity to get a look at the man who had been fortunate enough to win the affections of his girl reporter friend. He had not known, before he went up there, in what part of the building Underwood's office was situated. Even if he had known it, the significance of its location might not have suggested itself to him—or, at least, if it had not wholly escaped him he would have been inclined to dismiss it from his mind as too much of a coincidence to be given serious consideration.

There were scores of other windows in that building which had been in the line of Wrigley's vision when he had peered out through the peep-holes cut in his window-shade; why pick on Underwood's in particular? Besides, it would have been rather poor cricket to try to make out a case of murder against one's successful rival in love. The fact that Underwood was engaged to Cecilie would have been enough to cause Hemment to drive any such suspicions from his mind as being unworthy of a good sportsman.

But now, as he stepped out of the Bannister Building, and walked slowly north along Nassau Street, his suspicions were fully aroused, and he made no attempt to check the line of thought which was shaping itself in his active brain. Underwood had repudiated the girl's statement, made only a couple of days before, that they were engaged to be married and that their wedding-day had been set. Why was that? Obviously, either the girl or the man had lied to him, and there wasn't any doubt in Hemment's mind as to which one of them was to be believed.

All prejudice aside, he told himself, it wasn't logical to suppose that a nice girl like Cecilie would claim to be betrothed to a man, and mention his name, unless she had substantial reasons for making such an assertion. But, on the other hand, Underwood—assuming that he was involved in the murder in the Interborough Building—would have a reason for trying to conceal his relationship to the slain man's missing private secretary—the same reason which had prompted the murderer to go to the trouble of rolling up that window-shade before he fled from the scene of his crime.

In other words, Cecilie's fiancé was anticipating the possibility of some of the facts about her assignment becoming known to the authorities. Should that happen, he didn't want the attention of the police to be attracted toward himself, even to the extent of their becoming interested in him as the future husband of the missing girl. That might lead to their making some embarrassing deductions.

Naturally they would come to interview him to find out what he knew about the young woman's disappearance, and in the course of that interview they might notice the rather significant circumstance that the window of his office was almost directly opposite the window from which the victim of the murder had done his furtive spying.

Not only was Hemment satisfied that Underwood had sought to deceive him regarding his matrimonial plans, but he was almost as positive that the man had lied to him when he asseverated that he had not seen or heard from Cecilie Harvey within the past couple of weeks. The reporter had a hunch that the girl had visited the accountant's office on the very day of the murder. In fact, it was more than a mere hunch. It was a logical conclusion based on some of the circumstances preceding and following the tragic fate of her employer.

With his trained capacity for putting two and two together, he was able to guess pretty accurately, up to a certain point, what had happened that day. His lively imagination and his sense of logic enabled him to construct a theory which came very close to the truth.

Some time that afternoon, he reasoned, the girl's employer must have made known to her his real reason for having her there. Cecilie had learned at last the motive behind the queer "Help Wanted" advertisement which had brought her into this case.

Wrigley had called her to the window, and, pointing to the man in the office across the street, had bade her read his lips as he sat conversing with some person

whose identity was at present time unknown.

Of course the young woman would have been unable to render him this service even if she had been willing. The not unforeseen climax to her daring adventure had come. Her bluff was called. There was nothing for her to do but confess that she was an impostor and make her escape before her chagrined and disappointed employer had a chance to vent his wrath on her. This, evidently, she had succeeded in doing—thanks to the precaution she had taken of previously unlocking the door leading to the public hall, in expectation of just such an emergency.

And having succeeded in making her escape, with the startling knowledge in her possession that the man she was engaged to marry was being spied upon, what would be her next step? Naturally she would rush across the street to warn Underwood. That was what any woman—or any man, for that matter, in her situation—would have done, Hemment reasoned.

The fellow was lying when he said that he had not seen her. She had been to him that afternoon, and had told him of Wrigley's purpose in providing himself with a pair of listening eyes. And apparently it was because of what she had told him that later there had been a murder in the Interborough Building.

Evidently the secret which Ethan Underwood possessed, and which the slain man had hoped to share by means of the ingenious ruse he had adopted, was such an important one that it had become necessary to close the lips of this spying enemy even though he had not yet succeeded in getting the information he wanted. Perhaps he already knew half of it—enough to make him a menace while he lived—or possibly it was merely the fear that he would succeed later on in achieving his purpose—if not by the lip-reading stunt, in some other way—which had sealed the unhappy wretch's doom.

Up to this point the reporter's theory ran as smoothly as the successive stages of a problem in algebra. But what had become of Cecilie Harvey? What had happened to her after she had notified Underwood of what was going on in the office across the street? Hemment's face clouded as those questions arose in his mind, and his strong mouth tightened into a grim line.

The nightmares that had tortured his slumbers suddenly took on a prophetic aspect. His imagination pictured her in the hands of desperate men who realized that there would be no safety for them if she was permitted to go back to the *Mercury* office and report on her assignment; and these mental pictures were so startling that, with a sharp ejaculation, he turned abruptly on his heels and began to retrace his steps along Nassau Street. His objective was the offices of the Gotham Development Company, and it was his intention to seek Deputy Police Commissioner Oglivie there, and tell him all that he knew about the case, including his discovery of the paper package on Underwood's desk which was tied with a double-reef knot.

"Hang the story!" he told himself impatiently. "That little girl may be in physical danger at this very moment. She's got to be found, even though every sheet in town shares our scoop, and the Central Office pulls off all the credit for cleaning up the case. I can't afford to work alone. It might take too long—and there's no time to be lost."

But when he arrived at the scene of the tragedy he found that the police official had left.

"You've just missed him," one of Oglivie's aides, who had remained behind, informed him. "He went away less than five minutes ago. Anything I can do for you?"

"I'm afraid not, old man. It's something I want to take up with the commissioner himself. Guess I'll run up to headquarters and see if I can catch him there."

Before he got half-way to the famous golden-domed building on Center Street, however, Hemment had changed his mind. After all, he reflected, it was a bit far-fetched to suppose that the young woman's disappearance was wholly involuntary. Hadn't she telephoned her landlady only a few hours ago to say that she was all

right? Of course there was a chance that she had been coerced into sending that message; but it was much more likely that she had gone into voluntary retirement to escape having to tell what she knew about the murder. If the man she loved was involved in it, one could readily understand her reluctance to bear witness against him, horrified though she must have been at this revelation of his character.

Perhaps she had demurred at first about dropping out of sight, but had finally been persuaded by Underwood. The fellow might be a scoundrel, but there was no denying that he had a magnetic personality. It was not difficult to conceive of his being able to influence an impressionable, unsophisticated slip of a girl who loved him, without having to resort to violent methods of persuasion.

Somewhat reassured by these reflections, the *Mercury's* star reporter decided for the present he would not take the chief of the Central Office into his confidence. Instead of continuing on his way to police headquarters, he turned about and headed for the Mercury Building.

It was a few minutes before 11 A.M. when he entered the city room, and the reportorial staff had not yet come down to work. Bailey, the city editor, and his assistant were already on the job, busily engaged in making out the assignment list for the day, but the other desks were empty. Hemment glanced wistfully in the direction of one particular desk in a far corner of the room, and sighed as a vision of its missing occupant swam before his eyes.

An office-boy came toward him with a bunch of mail in his hand, which he was about to distribute among the long row of private letter-boxes on the wall.

"Good morning, Mr. Hemment," the youngster said. "Gee! but you're down early to-day. Must have got up before your breakfast this morning." He picked out a pink envelope from the assortment he carried. "Here's one for you. I was just going to shove it into your box. It didn't come through the mail. A Western Union kid brought it in, ten minutes or so ago."

The reporter tore open the missive with eager fingers. It was addressed in a woman's handwriting, and, although he was not familiar with the penmanship, he guessed who its author was—and guessed correctly.

The note was signed "Cecilie Harvey," and ran as follows:

DEAR MR. HEMMENT:

I suppose you are wondering why I did not put in an appearance last night, and what has become of me. If so, I am afraid you will not be very much enlightened, even after you have read this. All I can tell you is that I am safe and sound, and otherwise perfectly all right, and that I have a very good reason for absenting myself from my usual haunts for a while.

If you knew the circumstances I feel sure that you would not blame me for keeping my friends guessing as to my present whereabouts. Unfortunately I cannot take you, or anybody else, into my confidence. It isn't, of course, that I don't trust you, but the secret is not mine alone, so I have no right to share it—even with you, who have been so very, very kind to me, and whose advice I value so highly.

But even though I am unable to confide in you, dear Mr. Hemment, I am going to make so bold as to ask a great favor of you. It is about that assignment of mine. There are reasons why I don't want anything about it to be printed in the paper, or to be made public in any way, and I am hoping that you will not only keep silent about the matter yourself, but will be good enough to use your influence with the city editor to have the story suppressed, in case he should contemplate publishing anything about the queer "Help Wanted" advertisement, and my efforts to find out what it meant.

I know this is asking a whole lot of you, dear Mr. Hemment, but if you knew how much it means to me—how very unhappy it would make me if any of the facts about my adventure were to come out at this time—I feel sure that you would not refuse me.

One thing I can assure you of: My reasons for keeping "under cover" at present, and for asking this great favor of you, have *nothing whatever to do with the terrible thing that happened yesterday after I had left that unfortunate man's office.* If such a thought has been in your mind—which, I suppose, would be quite natural in the circumstances—I ask you to take my word for it that it is not so. I am in a position to tell you positively that that unhappy man's reasons for providing himself with a private secretary who could read lips were not in any way connected with his awful fate.

That was all, except for the closing words, "Your sincere and ever grateful friend," and Cecilie Harvey's signature. There was no address, of course, and nothing about the tinted, dainty stationery to furnish a clue as to the writer's whereabouts. Perhaps it might be possible to trace the messenger who had brought the note, but Hemment was inclined to think that the result of any efforts he might make in that direction, in case he should see fit to ignore the girl's evident desire to keep him at a distance, would hardly repay him. The chances were that such an investigation would stop short at the branch office of the Western Union from which she had engaged the boy. She had probably called there in person, paid in advance for the service, and gone away without leaving any address.

He went over the note three or four times, trying to read between the lines. The last paragraph particularly interested him. He smiled sardonically at her emphatic assurance that the lip-reading stunt and her motive for dropping out of sight had nothing to do with the murder of Wrigley.

"'Methinks the lady doth protest too much,'" he quoted whimsically. "Not that the poor kid wasn't probably sincere enough when she wrote those lines, though. Underwood is a smooth proposition, and it is not at all unlikely that he has succeeded in pulling the wool over her eyes. Offered her some plausible and perfectly respectable reason, no doubt, for obliging him by doing this self-effacement act. Yes, that is a far more satisfactory explanation of her behavior than the theory that she is knowingly and deliberately aiding and abetting the perpetrator of a cold-blooded assassination in his attempt to dodge the law."

He grinned again as another thought came to him. It was rather significant, he reflected, that this note should have arrived by special messenger only half an hour after his interview with Underwood. Might be nothing more than a coincidence, but it looked very much as though the fellow had got in communication with Cecilie immediately after he left, and induced her to send this appeal. With a half shrug Hemment crossed the room and approached the editorial desk. Bailey greeted him with his customary frown.

"Got a bit of news for you, Hemment," the city editor said dryly. "You may be interested to hear that your little friend, Miss Harvey, has quit the job. Received her resignation in the mail this morning." He handed the reporter the letter. It was very brief:

DEAR MR. BAILEY:

I have been unable to make good on the assignment you gave me, so am resigning my position on the *Mercury* staff. I have come to the conclusion that I am not cut out for newspaper work. Thanking you for your patience with me and your many kindnesses.

Yours very sincerely,

CECILIE HARVEY.

"She must have written this last night," Hemment remarked thoughtfully.

"Of course. It arrived in this morning's mail. So far as her usefulness to the paper is concerned, I can't say that her resignation is a staggering blow. She was a nice girl, but, as she truthfully remarks in her letter, she wasn't cut out for newspaper work," said Bailey. "Too bad, though, that she fell down on her assignment! It might possibly have thrown some light on that Interborough Building murder case if she could have told us what those fellows had in mind when they advertised for a lip-reading expert. Evidently she became discouraged and quit without finding out what was back of that advertisement."

Hemment told his chief that he had reasons for believing that Cecilie had not fallen down on her assignment in spite of the intimation to that effect which her letter of resignation conveyed. He proceeded to make the city editor sufficiently acquainted with the situation to cause that phlegmatic gentleman to evince as much excitement as he had ever been known to display.

"By George!" Bailey exclaimed. "Talk about your long arm of coincidence! Who'd have dreamed that when I handed her that assignment I was sending the girl into an affair which involved her own sweetheart!" He paused. "But of course your story in its present shape is as dan-

gerous as dynamite, Hemment. Be mighty careful how you handle it, old man. You can have all the space you want in to-morrow's *Mercury*—in spite of the scarcity of news-print paper—but don't forget that libel suits are rather costly animals."

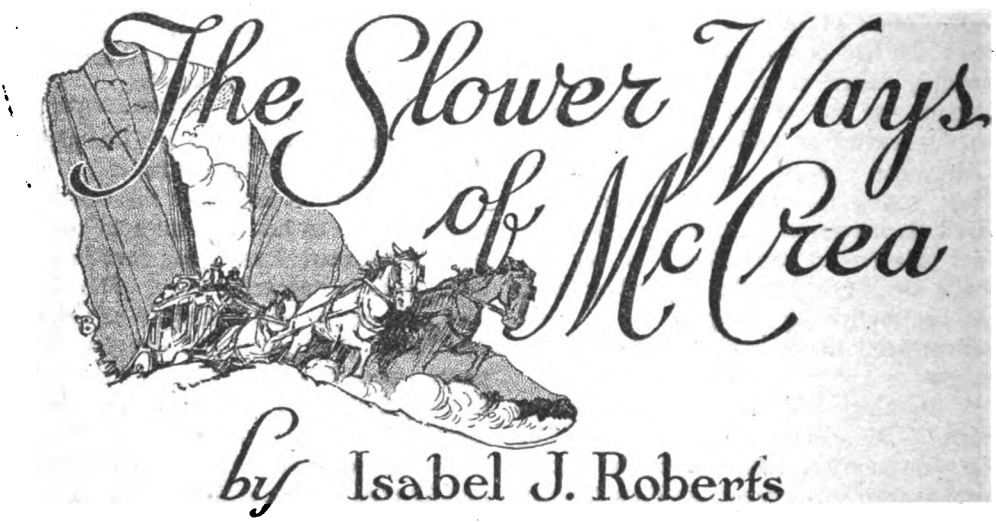
Hemment shook his head.

"I sha'n't need much space in to-morrow's paper," he declared. "The details I have given you were for your own information. I don't intend to spring them until we have got Mr. Ethan Underwood so dead to rights that there won't be any reason to fear a libel suit. It would be spilling the beans, I think, to print any of that stuff now."

"Use your own judgment about that," the city editor acquiesced.

And thus it came about that when Cecilie's fiancé scanned the columns of the *Mercury* with an anxious eye the following morning, he was greatly relieved to find that no mention was made of a certain experiment in lip-reading in which the victim of the city's latest sensational murder case had been engaged.

(To be continued NEXT WEEK.)



IT was not until the third day out that Jane manifested any interest whatever in the Grand Cañon literature with which the tourist-conductor had been deluging her. But it was the second morning in succession that she had had to make a mad dash for breakfast unwashed and uncombed while the Philadelphia telephone girl splashed audibly in the one washroom. If she could only make sure of a whole basinful of water to herself it would be worth getting off for; she had never felt so dirty in her life. But it was too much to ask for or expect; for when she consulted the tourist-conductor he looked grave. They were three hours late and she was the only passenger for the cañon. Travel was light just before Thanksgiving; they would hardly hold the train for one passenger. But as they drew in at Williams there, across the tracks in the still afternoon sunshine, was the small, cheerful-looking branch train with its handful of local passengers waiting for the belated westbound division of the Santa Fé.

Jane looked round frankly sorry to have kept everybody waiting; and she felt even more remorseful when, before they reached their station, an early twilight closed in. It was too late for scenery and thrills that day. She climbed into the bus with her ominously silent fellow travelers. The mail was tossed up to the driver and a lot of express packages and hand luggage loaded on.

Just as they were about to start, Jane very naturally thought of her telegram. Would they mind? It would take only a minute. They looked at the girl as if they would like to know how far she would go

and she suddenly lost interest in her telegram.

Everybody but Jane was for El Tovar, the inn where, as advertised in Information for the Tourist, the traveler seeking the best accommodations would naturally stop. The driver paused respectfully for her to get out along with the rest, but she kept on to the more modest Bright Angel Cottages—a solitary passenger. The figure aloft looked gigantic in a great fur coat and a wide-brimmed felt hat, and Jane could see a pair of huge gloved hands on the lines as the broncos plodded up-hill. After a while he turned round and spoke into the gloom below in the slow drawl of the Westerner:

"I'm sorry I couldn't oblige you, ma'am, but you see I was carryin' the United States mail and we were already—"

"Yes, I know—three hours late. I suppose it was all my fault, but I couldn't very well help it."

"That's all right, ma'am; I'm not blamin' you. What I was goin' to say was you could stay right on, if you want, and as soon as I'm unloaded I could take you back to the depot and you could get off your despatch. I'd offer to drive you back, but I've got to bed down my horses for the night. But I can show you your way home. It's only a short piece."

Jane said "All right" and got a little closer to the friendly shelter of the broad back, for it had turned suddenly cold. She watched the unloading at the Cottages, looking sedulously away from where she knew the great gorge yawned in the darkness. The brake ground hard against the wheels as the stage took the down trail.

"We're too late for the cañon to-night, ma'am," came the voice again, "but if you cared to you could see the Hopi Indians. They're billed as one of the attractions. You'd sure lose your way, though, if you went alone; maybe I'd better call for you."

She said "All right" again and laughed in her muff.

"You could wait for me in the sittin'-room off the office. I'll be there by eight. My name's McCrea. I wonder if you would know me in my other clothes."

He turned squarely round to give her a good look at him and she made out in silhouette against the dusk the fine, rugged, unsagging features of a man between twenty-five and thirty. He was a lot younger than she had taken him for from his slow voice and deliberate ways and she said "All right" for the third time.

He showed her the way back along the rim, but not once did she look over. She was saving it up for to-morrow. It wouldn't be fair to come upon it unawares. She would wait for the appointed hour for the curtain to rise on what she had been given to understand was Nature's supreme effort in the way of a cañon.

After supper she waited for McCrea at a writing-table. The office adjoining the sitting-room slowly filled with men—a picturesque lot of fellows in corduroy and khaki and broad-brimmed hats and loosely knotted kerchiefs, looking so much alike that Jane could hardly hope to identify her particular cowboy unless his "other clothes" meant something different. A figure detached itself from the group and she saw against the sudden flare of a lamp the same profile she had seen against the gray dusk. She got up and went out. With a curt "Good evenin', ma'am," McCrea joined her and, after pointing out the way, fell behind.

The great pit along which the path skirted was impenetrably dark. Below, right over the edge, under a velvet-black sky pricked with stars, was a world in chaos. A hidden force seemed to draw her to the brink. She came to a sudden stop. As if he understood he caught up with her at a step and walked along without comment. She liked his silence. He matched the silence and mystery of the great chasm: he was somehow a part of the elemental force of the heaped-up dark on dark below. He belonged. She was so used to men who prided themselves on losing no time with a girl that she studied with interest the newer ways of this man of the wilderness.

"I'll wait for you in the curio shop outside," he said when they came to the Hopi House.

"You won't go off and leave me to the Indians?"

"I wouldn't for all the world, ma'am. You can see me from the door."

She was laughing—he was very serious.

There was the rhythmic beat of drums and with a "Haya, haya, haya, hayya," half a dozen Indians with faces streaked with ocher and black paint and wearing superb war-bonnets of eagle feathers, swung into the slow, shuffling step of the rain dance and then the snake dance. The dance and the chant ended together at one beat of the drum and the braves in all their glory of paint and feathers went down solemnly on all fours in a scramble for the pennies tossed to them by the spectators. True to his word McCrea had kept himself in sight, although not once did he seem to look her way. She thanked him, adding:

"I wonder if I am keeping you from the party to-night? The waitresses were talking it over when I was at supper and arranging their dances with the men. They seem like nice girls."

"Yes, ma'am, they are nice girls—mostly from the back hills. No, I'm not goin' to-night. I'm not much for dancin'."

Jane was playing that the cañon wasn't there and then suddenly ran out on a jutting rock. He laid a firm hand on her arm.

"I wouldn't, ma'am, if I was you. Sometimes a boulder lets loose right under your feet and bursts like a thunder clap down below."

"It sounds awful!" And he saw she was laughing again.

When they came up to the Cottages he told her she would oblige him if she'd go in through the office—the way she had come out.

"But how funny! I'm right at my door."

"You'd oblige me if you'd do what I'm askin'," he insisted.

Somehow it wasn't hard to mind this big man of the hills and with a brisk "Good night" she ran on alone. The same, or a similar, picturesque group of men was still there, smoking and talking. They stepped aside respectfully for her to pass. How well-mannered they were, these big men that went so perfectly with the big cañon! She smiled up at them, and one of them, as if he couldn't help it, took off his hat and then looked horribly embarrassed. She ran up to her small, clean, comfortable room and turned on the light.

It wasn't ten yet. My word! Why had he sent her in so early? She stood for a moment irresolute and then, pulling up the collar of her beaver coat, and drawing down her little close-fitting beaver hat, turned out the light and ran down her quiet stairway. She felt the heady influence of the pure, thin air laden with the scent of pine and cedar. How still it was! That old cañon must be asleep down there, and Jane held her breath. Meeting him again, she said quietly over her shoulder:

"What made you send me in so early? It isn't ten yet."

"Maybe I was afraid if I kept you up any later you'd sleep over sunrise and miss the cañon at its best."

"I'm thinking it was just because of those nice men back there. You wanted them to see that I got home in good time. And I might have missed that star coming up over the edge. What is it—Jupiter?"

"Yes, ma'am; it's Jupiter. You can almost see his moons without a glass to-night. If you'd care to have a closer look at him we might stop at the tower and see if it's open. They've got a good binocular telescope there. It's free."

But the door was locked.

"It's a pity to miss it, ma'am. It's what they call 'good seein'' to-night. You notice the stars don't shake and tremble the way they do mostly. If you'd be interested I'd like to show you where I come for a pipe once in a while. I bunk down in the hollow with the other men so as to be near my horses, but this is where I get off by myself."

They broke through a thin pine woods and came upon a cabin built of native logs and boulders. A pleasant warmth and a pungent aromatic fragrance met them as he threw open the door. The coals were still red in the central fireplace, which was a rock-lined basin sunk in the floor with a metal hood to carry off the smoke; and on the table among a pile of books and papers was a wide-mouthed jar of wild sage. He made a light, stirred the fire and, drawing up a rush-bottomed chair for his guest, pushed back his hat and seated himself on his heels.

It was the first time that Jane had had

a good look at him and she drew a deep breath. He was the real thing! Lithe, muscular, lean, brown — a black-haired young giant, wild and picturesque; his face rather impassive, but with the possibility of passion and will in the level gaze of the clear eyes.

He looked at her, but less openly. There was, in fact, little to be seen of her between the fur collar that came up and the fur hat that came down. He stirred the fire again and carefully dropped a " fat " pine knot on the live coals. There was a torchlike blaze and an almost instant rush of heat. With an indignant " Goodness! " she slipped her arms out of her coat.

" Yes, ma'am, those beaver-skins are not much for inside wear," smiling with sudden frankness.

He missed nothing of the lines of the slim, almost boyish figure, or the droop of the slack, youthful shoulders under the soft white silk shirt-waist. Nor did he fail to notice the small, perfectly shod feet placed side by side on his hearth-stone.

" If you would take off your hat, ma'am, I'd be obliged to you and I'll tell you why."

She laughed and promptly laid aside her little toque.

He looked at her seriously. It was strange that hair so loose and thick and wavy could yet be so well-brushed and lustrous and orderly. And he had never seen before such a sparkling, animated face with its little waves of feeling running over it at every change of thought.

" Yes, ma'am, it's sure enough you. I have been on the lookout for you ever since I first came across your picture and read about your doin's. I'll show you. Here you are when you were a young one."

He picked up a *Town and Country* and showed her the picture of a charming child —" Little Margery N., daughter of a well-known New York banker."

" Here you are again. ' Miss Lucia Huntington, one of the future society-buds.' I reckon you're about sixteen now. And I've got you at the Horse Show."

He was turning over the pages of *Vanity Fair*. " ' Miss K., of Washington.' And I've got you as a ' distinguished ' Southern girl, this season's débutante.' "

He read slowly, stumbling over the foreign word, but without embarrassment.

" You mean I'm just a type?"

He nodded. He was still looking at the reproduction of the " distinguished Southern girl."

" I see you wear your feet together now; side by side. I like it better than where you showed so much stockin'."

He had already discovered the habit of the little perplexed frown that flitted like a shadow over the smooth brow; and the inquiring flash of the dark eyes. It made her look singularly young and appealing.

" But, somehow, you don't seem much older than this Miss Lucia Huntington— ' one of the future society-buds.' You are more like her, seems to me."

" I'm twenty-four—almost twenty-five. But none of us look our age; I mean girls like me. We're taken too good care of, and we don't live enough in our feelings to show. They see that we have plenty of good food and fresh air and enough sleep in the twenty-four to keep us fit. And, believe me, we're chaperoned to a finish. We merely exchange our nurses for our ladies'-maids. And I have seen you, too. I've seen you rolling down a mountainside and shooting over the dead body of your horse. I've seen you holding up trains and things and carrying off the railroad king's daughter. You just leaned out of your saddle, scooped her up with one hand, took a fence or two, and there you were! And I have seen you rope your little Indian cayuse in a stampeding herd of unbroken bunch-grassers—that's what it said, anyway—and tell her in her ear: ' Never mind, girl; you'll think a heap more of me before we're through than you do now.' "

" I make out you're talkin' about the movies."

She nodded, and then suddenly:

" It's like a campfire; and the smell of the sage—I love it; makes you feel like outdoors. Well, we have each other placed. It saves a lot of trouble to be able to place people at sight. We are both true to type, you might say. But there are too many of me. We're just thick where I come from. I feel like making a public manifestation of conscience to-night. Do you mind?"

For answer he settled himself back a little more comfortably on his heels, falling naturally into the traditional attitude of the cowboy ready for a story.

"You know how the old anchorites and anchoresses used to go into the desert—not together, of course—just to get acquainted with themselves? They probably began their penitential life on a tourist ticket. Only I have come into the wilderness to cut myself dead. I'm sick of myself. It gives a girl a jolt when she finds at twenty-five she has acquired as many settled habits as her old-maid aunt and that she can't eat her breakfast on the Dresden china when she had fixed her mind on the Sèvres. You know that sort—think themselves exquisitely dainty and precious when they are only finicky and tiresome. And I want to be afraid again! I have never been afraid since I was a child and was shocked out of all fear.

"It was like this: I was always desperately afraid of pigs—they were unbearably awful. They were an insult. And I would hang fascinated over the pig-sty and breathe out the horror of my soul. There was a coping that ran along the edge of the sty and I would walk along it and imagine what would happen if I ever lost my footing. And one day I did! Well, when they rescued me I was never afraid of anything again. I don't want to fall among the pigs again—but I want to have a wholesome sense of fear. I miss being afraid—it deprives one of a lot of sensations. It's only natural to be afraid. You know the fairy tale about the man who wanted to shiver? How he just couldn't shiver? Nothing registered—no horror by day, no terror by night. And then one day his wife got a pailful of little squirming fishes and poured them down his back. And he shivered for fair! It might take only some little thing like that to cure me of not being afraid."

She stopped short as if suddenly bored with it all. He waited a moment and then said:

"You're plumb unfortunate, ma'am, as I make it out—getting nothin' out of life but problems and takin' yourself up by the ears and lookin' yourself over like you were some strange little animal. But if you only want to be afraid; why, that's easy. I'd like to turn over my shack to you for a day. It's on a mountainside and down below is the desert and it's got as many veils as your Mary Garden in that play of hers. And sometimes a porcupine strays in at my door or a bear comes down for a drink. Or, maybe, it is a mountain-lion or a bob-cat. And if you're built that way you can get a good many shivers out of a day without askin' any artificial help, such as havin' little fishes poured down your back."

"Sounds like a Noah's ark! Nice selected lot of animals!"

"Well, I'm mighty glad you're not easily scared, or you wouldn't be sittin' here talkin' to me to-night. Not that you can say we're exactly strangers. It's like we'd met before with you seein' me on the screen and me followin' you in my books. But there's something you want to be afraid of special and ain't up to it. Maybe you'd like to tell me."

"You'd never guess it was a girl who wants to be afraid of herself! She's laughing herself into all sorts of entanglements with steam yachts and country houses and town houses. And she can't have them unless she marries them. You know the kind of man that sometimes goes with such things—well, he's that sort. But she's not afraid—not she! She hesitates. But she's trying herself out first. Maybe she can get along without the boat and things; but maybe she can't, all her tastes having been formed for her from the cradle. So being in a radical frame of mind she begins by traveling tourist. But she didn't make much of a success of it—she got off to wash her face and hands."

She smiled genially.

"I guess you've had too much roof. You'll get your answer out in the open. If you're in the mountains now it's because they're calling you and you're tuned right to get the message."

"Oh, you are much too much! How do you know it all?"

"I reckon you're laughin' at me, but after I got interested in the species I didn't let anything get by. I left my trappin' and my cruisin' and asked them to let me do their drivin' down here for the season. One

man hunts a bird, another a plant, another the source of a river. And they go into the jungles or hit the high trails—nothin' matters so they get what they're after. I didn't have to go so far for mine. But I didn't have much luck at first. Not that there haven't been heaps of people here—more tourists than you could shake a stick at. I was thinkin' I might as well throw up my job and go back to the hills when you held up my bus. You are the first, ma'am, that's got all the points."

"And now you will go back to Lizzie and make her a hat like mine out of the skins you have trapped."

"I'm not much for imitations and there ain't no Lizzie. But they haven't got you all down in their books. If you wouldn't think it fresh I'd like to say I sure do admire what goes with the breed. And I'm mighty glad I made a study of you or I'd be like a man in France without understandin' French."

She glanced at the clock.

"Is it late for you?" she asked casually. It was within a few minutes of twelve.

"It would be no use anyway, your mar'ryin' that steamboat you were speakin' of," he went on as if he had not heard her. "And I'll show you why."

He spread out the society sheet of a Sunday newspaper.

"Here you are at Reno and doin' your almighty best to get away from the man you weren't afraid to marry."

"Oh, I see! I'm Mrs. G. this time!" and she laughed.

The oil was getting low in the lamp and in the glow of the firelight his long brown leather wristlets looked like gantlets, his buckskin jacket like tarnished cloth of gold. He had taken off his hat and his hair was thick and dark and smooth—a knightly figure he looked to Jane as he went down on one knee to stir the fire.

"Now, ma'am, as our lights are about out we'll have to go. If you'll walk on ahead I'll cover the fire."

"Do I go through the office again?" she asked teasingly.

"No, ma'am; you'll oblige me by keepin' right on to your own cottage. If you'd care to see Jupiter's moons to-morrow night I'll have the key. It's goin' to be a pretty night."

The next morning at sunrise Jane went to the window in her kimono for her first look at the cañon. But there was no cañon. Only a vast sea of mist. She waited for it to change its mind, but it didn't. There was no stir of life in the brimming fog.

She went to breakfast, sitting up again at the quick-lunch counter where the same neat-looking waitresses revolved so cheerfully in the hollow square. Her seat faced the open windows that gave on the cañon. Over the edge of her thick china cup she could see the gray sea breaking up into little cottony clouds; and never did coffee taste so good. She ate her baked apple in the same spirit of recollection. How could a mere apple have such a flavor; and she stopped wondering about the cañon to wonder about the apple. She was acutely conscious of all her reactions. The simple life wouldn't be so bad if you had a cañon to watch waking up. But the cañon had no mind to wake up and, pulling up its blankets, turned over for another nap.

The stage making the eight o'clock train was waiting. The driver was drawing the lines over the backs of his great, sinewy horses when Jane came leisurely along with a porter carrying her bags.

"Good morning, McCrea. Reckon I'm holding up your bus again."

"Good mornin', ma'am. Maybe you'd be more comfortable up here 'longside of me. I didn't know anybody was leavin' this mornin', and I loaded up the stuff inside. It's liable to shift when we got on the hill."

She climbed in beside him and he doubled up a horse-blanket and tucked it under her feet.

"It doesn't seem right you should miss seein' the cañon. The sun's burnin' a hole in the clouds now; in another hour you'd see the gods and goddesses come for'ard. And the temples and cathedrals; and the gardens. 'Pears like a new cañon every minute. And you'd certainly be surprised, ma'am, to find the ground under your feet just a floor over the tops of mountain peaks and broken spurs."

"Yes, it's a good bit to miss. But my ticket won't hold out if I stay over. When

you are traveling on a tourist-ticket your time's all accounted for; and I want to play the game. But I really didn't come for the cañon, you know."

"No—just to wash your face and hands, I recollect."

"Well, it was worth it," she retorted. "I've never felt so clean in my life!"

She was looking at him in the morning light, her face brightening as she looked, and he returned her full-eyed gaze.

"Yes, ma'am, it's you," and he said it reverently.

When they got to the bottom of the hill she climbed over the wheel and ran in the telegraph office. She came out a few minutes later, a crumpled message in her hand, and looked round perplexed. The bus was gone! It was half-way up the hill before he looked back. Impulsively she put both hands to her lips and threw him a warm kiss full of regret. And then she stood trembling and laughing, her feet side-by-side, and looking very helpless and young, for he was turning so abruptly that it seemed as if the coach was going one way and the horses another. Down he came as inexorably as fate, grinding and rattling over the rough road. He brought up at the rear of the station and, holding the lines, jumped down.

"I was just thinkin', ma'am, I hadn't thanked you for last night. And this mornin' 'pears to me I haven't a mountain high enough for you, nor a desert worth a second look. And I feel like apologizin' for mentionin' them."

"But it's all real. Not pasteboard scenery—the kind I'm used to."

She looked down the tracks.

"She's late this mornin'. You'll see her first against the cut over there, and she'll seem right on top of you. But there'll still be ten minutes to the good."

"In the movies he runs off with her," with her inconsequential little smile.

"Yes, ma'am; and, as I recollect, the next reel shows him up in a full-dress suit and he looks uncommon like a fool."

There was a distant roar; the train made the bend and painted itself vividly against the gray walls under a suddenly brilliant sky.

"They didn't get off my message after all. It seems I was too late last night and I'm too early this morning. So I tore up my telegram and wrote another. Last night I was for taking the first train back; but this morning I feel like seeing it through. That's what kept me."

And then with the air of a spoiled child:

"Nothing is clear in my mind yet. I like things that are not all down for you two weeks beforehand. But have their seven veils like your desert. And everything can happen at the drop of the hat."

They were walking toward the front platform. But except for the station-master shoving boxes and bundles about, it was deserted. There was a sudden clatter of echoes—the red coaches were again aflame in the cut and then the rock-hewn walls came between.

"Looks mighty like she'd been in and pulled out again," he said thoughtfully. "I ain't usually so absent-minded. Looks like you were goin' to see the cañon after all. Don't worry about your ticket. There's another train goin' out this afternoon—the one you came in on yesterday."

With the same air of secret satisfaction with which he had watched the pine-knot flare in his hooded fireplace he lifted her and her pig-skin bags back on the bus again, and without asking her leave started off in an opposite direction from that by which he had come, taking the old stage route to the cañon.

"Looks like I was runnin' off with you—like you suggested—reckon I've got you scared this time. But that's what you wanted, wasn't it?"

"What makes you think I'm scared?" she asked carelessly.

He looked down at the slim, alert figure at his side and broke into an amused smile. "It sure beats me," he said.

A rattler crossed their path and McCrea adroitly caught it under his right front wheel. And then quite suddenly they came out on the rim road and the cañon was upon them. All that Jane was ever able to recall of that first moment was a blur of incredible color and a sense of vibrating space. She turned away with an instinctive search for something familiar, something human, and

buried her little nose in the great fur coat. He put his big hand tenderly over the round beaver hat as if it were a baby's head he was shielding from harm. Then she laughed it off: said it wasn't a landscape—just a highly colored poster, only exaggerated—bigger.

"You've got to soak in it a while, ma'am—got to swim in it. It ain't a picture—it's a—it's an element."

He drove close to the brink of a sheer wall thrust far out into the abyss with a a drop of two thousand feet within a few yards of the edge. The limestone gave under the horses' feet. Jane said, unmoved:

"It's no use your reciting that litany again—gods and goddesses; temples and gardens; thrones and angels; principalities and dominations. It doesn't touch me—it's been too well advertised."

He went on to the camp stables where mules and divided skirts were for hire. While Jane was getting into skirt and leggings, the bus horses were unharnessed, disappearing with heavy alacrity over a rise to the corral. McCrea put Jane on a mule broken to trail work and rode behind. He said little. He was like a man opening his treasures and letting them speak for themselves.

He took a new trail that went over a sunny wall of the cañon. But Jane was not to be surprised. With affected indifference she stared at the stupendous scene spread below with only her mule's ears between; and then, as coolly, at the empty sky as they came up like a ship out of the trough of the sea. They had luncheon out of a saddle-bag beside a spring; and then the trail left the gorge to follow a furrow down an inner cañon. The narrow cleft turned abruptly to right and left; down twilight depths the racing river dwindled to a seam; a livid scar.

There was a penetrating odor of wild sage: Jane took a deep breath, and he nodded and smiled as they came face to face at one of the sharp turns. She was happy, exhilarated. She could have gone on forever! Perched up there so high she seemed to see far below her own little world. How had she ever found room in it!

A sudden wind came up; a vulture circled overhead. There were patches of snow in sheltered spots where the trail turned from the sun. The mountains became violet. It was time to go back. Intrepidly she turned her horse at a point that gave the barest margin of safety. She met his eyes with an answering flash. And again she became conscious of the wild sage. In that throbbing light she somehow knew his consuming thought of her—his high estimate. She dreamed of sharing real dangers with him—of living in vast spaces, not show places. Endless days like this!

Seeing that dreaming figure now abreast of him, now ahead as the trail widened or narrowed, he wondered humbly if she were dreaming of him, so shadowy, so tender was her face.

"You know the girl we were talking about," she said. "Well, she's seen the things she set so much store by from the edge of the world and they are—just funny!"

And then as in a dream: "What she'd like is a shack on a mountainside and a little prickly porcupine coming in 'most any time and—maybe a man she'd scrub floors for, if she had to."

He turned red under his tan and answered haltingly:

"But he mightn't have a cañon every day to show her and maybe she might lose in'trust. And, ma'am, it ain't down in the books. Some way I don't see his picture 'longside of hers."

"Oh, one could dream 'most anything in this violet light."

The trail narrowed and she was again ahead. When he came up with her once more he said:

"Ever hear of the Oak Eggar moth? You can take her away in the cocoon and hide her in the heart of a city, but when she breaks out she sets the old air vibratin'. He's enjoyin' life on his native heath, as they say, but some way she gets her message across and he stops his foolin', and one fine day there he is clingin' to her cage."

He stopped and rubbed his chin reflectively.

"But, believe me, if they've got it straight, nobody's goin' to envy him his

courtin'." He grinned good naturedly, and then went on in his unhurried way:

"Well, ma'am, 'pears to me we haven't got any call to misdoubt the story with you and me ridin' together side by side. Only it was me operatin' the wireless and callin' you from your bricks and mortar to my mountains. Ever since I saw your picture I've kept the air vibratin', hopin' you'd take in my message. And one day you did and you came out on your little old tourist ticket and held up my bus, didn't you?" And then in hardly above a whisper: "And after to-day your ticket ain't no good."

As they climbed up out of the cañon a cold, gray sky came down to meet them. They were on top of the world again, and Jane was once more tucked in on the front seat. A sharp wind sprang up. The horses were the first to hear the low, distant voice of the storm. They strained toward each other with dilating nostrils and nervous, moving ears.

"I'm goin' to put you inside," he said, "till it blows over. And you may as well take the horse-blanket along."

"But I want to see it," protested Jane.

"Sure, you do," he said reassuringly.

The storm burst with a blinding, smothering wave of fine snow and sleet that cut like revolving knives. The horses plunged as under the lash; the bus rocked at the turns and the off-horse stumbled and fell. With a cry Jane saw McCrea shot headlong into the plunging, kicking, struggling legs. Out of the mass of teeth and hoofs he fought his way; and, swearing a blue streak, sprang for the control of his team. Huddled in her horse-blanket, in a pool of melted snow and sleet which, in spite of McCrea's precautions, had driven in through door and window and roof and, feeling miserably wet and uncomfortable, Jane rocked with the motion of the coach.

The storm passed as quickly as it had come. But a cold white fog pressed close to the windows—there was no sun. A new sound was on the wind—a sort of singsong refrain in a low, clear barytone. It was McCrea singing the song of the cowboy as he slowly rides round the herd when on night guard. The horses became less restive and after a while dropped into their accustomed gait.

Jane closed her ears to the spell of that voice. Shut up in those four white walls of fog she was thinking it out. Coldly, relentlessly, no less hard on herself than on him, she pursued the train of her thought. In fact, he didn't count. She was getting at the psychology of the moment; taking herself up by the ears as he had said, and lookin' herself over like she was some strange little animal. Stripped of her violet dreams she saw herself naked as in the stark light of day. She shuddered away from herself. But she'd get over it—she'd have to if she wanted to live comfortably with herself. But she didn't care! She trampled over the better self she had visualized in the mountains as men and women have been known to trample over their own kind to safety.

She would have to go back to the things she had run away from, because she just naturally had to have them. There was no argument. The next time Marie pulled her hair she'd rap her over the knuckles with the hair-brush and say "damn." She always knew that some day she'd say "damn" and be coarse and tiresome. It never occurred to her that she couldn't do just what she liked in the matter.

The fog pressed closer and closer. McCrea was blotted out. She did not miss him in her mental perspective. She thought only of getting out of it all. She could have cried, she was so anxious to get it over with. She rapped sharply at the window.

"Drive to the station!" she called very much as one would say "Home, James!" Almost at the same instant the bus stopped with a jolt. Through the gloom was a blur of red. It was the small, cheerful-looking branch train steaming up for its last trip that day. He hadn't been running away with her after all. No doubt he was as glad to get rid of her as she was of him.

She got out a little unsteadily, trembling from head to foot. She shook herself free from the wet like a small, half-drowned, cinnamon-colored bear, first one paw, then the other. Then realizing how funny she must look she laughed up at McCrea. But he made no move.

"Come down!" she commanded with a pretty air of wilfulness. "I can't scream good-by to you 'way up there."

He shook his head. "I've got to stay with the horses. They're nervous yet."

"Well, if you won't come down to me I've got to climb up to you!"

She got in over the wheel and, seating herself beside him, smiled up in his face like a good child. Then she saw that his arm hung useless at his side.

"Oh," she said pityingly, "you're hurt! You're driving with one hand. Give me the lines. I've driven four."

"Your train's about ready to pull out, ma'am," he objected.

For answer she tore her return ticket in two. He looked at her with fainting sight. The slim, almost boyish figure with the slack shoulders seemed a refuge, a place of rest—here alone should he find his cure. His heavy head drooped toward her. But she was only anxious he should see how well she was handling the lines—with what form she could drive.

"I wouldn't let you come along," he said presently, "if there was any risk. But there ain't. You wouldn't have sat by my fire last night unless you could sit by my fire always. You want to be afraid. Well, you're goin' to be afraid. I'm goin' to make you afraid of hurtin' the love you've put in my heart."

She looked up at him. He was once more a romantic and compelling figure.

"I'm 'most scared to death!" she said comfortably, shrugging herself a little closer to the huge wet overcoat. She saw herself in the violet light again—she had regained the identity she had won in the high hills.

"God in Heaven!" she breathed. "I'm glad I'm not what I thought I was!"

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THE HEART FOR SUCCESS

WHEN dazed by the blows and confusion
You meet in your struggle with Fate,
When life seems all stripped of illusion
And love is far weaker than hate,
When faced by the foulest of weather,
By buffets of wind and of hail,
Do you keep your forces together
Or, giving up, whimper, "I fail!"?

Do you, in the manner of older
Knights errant who suffered like you,
Take hold of yourself by the shoulder,
Breathe deeply, and see your task through?
Do you in the streets of the city
As well as on prairie or plain
Shake off the temptation to pity
Yourself and coddle your pain?

Do you with a smile meet and master
The trouble that tempts you to whine?
Do you, in your bout with disaster,
Arise, though the count be at nine?
Do you, when the tears seem to choke you,
Keep hidden the signs of distress
And pluck off the burrs that provoke you?
Then you have the heart for success?

Elias Lieberman.

East Is Not West

by Rex Parson

Author of "Southwest of the Law," "The Desert Thrill," etc.

CHAPTER I.

"OH, I SAY!"

"OH, I say!" the whole Slave Coast of West Africa gasped when Pete Winter came blowing down the delta only six months after everybody thought he had been safely bottled up in Suwali with "Old" C. R. Weaks, who was deaf as a post, and with seventy-five miles of bush to hush the big, booming voice which had made Texas anathema to every man with normal ears from Lagos clear around and up to Idda.

There he came — his huge height not stooped an inch by association with the meanest man in Africa, his vast breadth as vast as if he hadn't been starved on closely supervised eats, his wide grin and his noisy "How's everybody?" and his great horse laugh all as wide and noisy and horse as ever.

"Oh, I say!" they gasped when they saw him coming. "Oh, I say!" they gasped twice as gaspily when he left them to go on his breezy, sonorous way to Forcados down by the sea.

For Pete had told all that his sister was coming out to take care of him.

"And, believe me, one and all," he had roared in every station and settlement *en route,* "Cecilia is some girl, if I do say it myself. Here, you-all, just give this picture the once over and—"

Those who had accepted the invitation were gasping the hardest of all.

"A girl like that! *His sister!* Oh, the bally fool ought to have been chloroformed when we had him down here. To bring a sweet, innocent, gentle—"

"You're just chafed because you didn't keep him on. If his sister's got half his heart—"

"If she's got half his voice!"

"If she has any heart at all, she won't start singing 'A Long Way to Tipperary' off key before breakfast in the morning."

"Or yell 'Howdy, governor!' at the D. C. across the street full of niggers the morning after she's met him."

"Oh, you didn't see her picture. This girl's not that kind. How in blazes she can be his sister—"

"But—to take her up to Suwali—with old Weaks! I've always thought that Pete was decent. If I had a sister I wouldn't take her into Westminster Palace with that old goat unless I stayed to watch him all the time."

"He isn't going back to Suwali with her!"

"That's what he said."

"Bet he doesn't. Bet sixpence he bones Jamison for another chance down at Warree."

"I'll take that on." Six voices to this one.

"And I'll bet half a crown old Jamesey takes him back, if he shows that picture."

Nobody took that bet.

Meanwhile the male subject of their remarks was singing his off-tuneful way

down the black creeks; and the lady subject was coming, without much singing, getting more timid every time the Nigeria lay to off another dingy, tin port, each of which looked a little dingier and darker and more forbiddingly African than the last.

And, at length, the big Texan stood on the bow of a dirty river-boat, his helmet exchanged for a picturesque Mexican sombrero which so took the attention of the Kroo crew that the river-boat nearly rammed the Nigeria. He wasn't singing now. He was just staring up at the rail of the ship and—blushing until his cheeks almost matched the flaming hair that peeped from the under edges of the wonder hat. If a native had done as natives sometimes do when scared enough—dropped to embrace him below the knees—that native would have got up again and decided to fight it out. The knees were trembling.

"Oh, you sis!" Pete Winter had doped out that greeting with thought enough to give him three headaches. And he got it off with the solemn grandeur of a high-school commencement's valedictory, and with only about two-fifths of the voice he usually employed for indoor conversation.

The face of a girl at the rail turned almost the color of her simple, white frock, as her big gray eyes stared down at the startling figure. As if by a mighty effort she finally raised a hand in which was a suspiciously moist handkerchief. She tried to wave it, and a breeze snatched it from her shaking fingers and blew it across the deck.

"It's all right, little girl," the big red man called up to her. "Don't you-all be a scared of anything. I'll be up yondeh in a minute."

Pete Winter's grin was back on. The girl's lips turned to a smile that didn't quite stop their quivering at the corners. But the smile was in the eyes when Pete reached the deck, though it had to shine through some tears. In fact, the tears seemed to belong to it.

"Now you never mind," the big man murmured in a voice only pickaninnies had heard in West Africa—"I know it suah is one h-horrible place down heah. But you just trust yo' Uncle Pete to smash anything all up that dast take a cross-eyed look at you. Don't you go and forget that I'm yo' brother and—"

"Peter, aren't you going to—going to—"

"Why—why—I suah am!" He looked about three times as scared as she had looked two minutes before. But he did it—right on the upturned lips.

Whereat the third mate of the Nigeria, who would probably be a third mate twenty years later, but might possibly have got over being entirely a snob, turned and strutted off to the opposite side of the ship.

"By Jove!—who'd have thought her family was like that?" he was gasping to himself.

The big gray eyes were sparkling, and there was a laugh on the lips of Pete Winter's sister, as they stood together waiting for three of the Kroo boys to carry her small trunks down the accommodation ladder, then followed to the platform below and—

One of the trunks was heavy. The Kroo boy failed to give quite hunch enough to his shoulders, as he tried to swing it up on the river-boat's deck. Pete Winters caught at it with his two hands at arm's length, and tossed it in place. He leaped after it.

"Come on—sis," he bade, holding down his hands to her. The slight swell had moved the river-boat almost a yard from the edge of the ship's platform. But the girl held up her hands to his and laughed as he set her on her feet aboard the dingy smaller vessel.

"But—didn't he come at all?" she asked a moment later; and the query seemed to startle the big man.

"If I ain't just like a brother, to go an' forget all about him and his message and everything! You see—we couldn't both come. There's only the two of us up at Suwali. You've always got to leave one white man around. So—as things are—I had to be the one. Never mind—it won't take but fou' or five days to get up there. And he'll have the missionary preacher from Idda right there waitin' fo' us."

"You must pardon me for making you kiss me," she mentioned as another after-

thought. "You see, the captain and the mate and that simpering Mr. Hooker and —everybody—were waiting to see that my brother met me all right, and I had to—"

"Yes'm," Peter Winter said somberly. "I reckon I understood all right. Is—is there anything else I can do for you-all? Old Weaksy—excuse me—Mr. Weaks—he said anything I did for you was better 'n if I did it for himself. An' Weaksy—Mr. Weaks is a mighty good friend of mine. And I'll do anything for a friend any time."

She eyed him a moment. Then she laughed. So did he. The huge, husky, sonorous boom of his "Ho-ho-ho-ho-ho!" almost startled her laugh to death. She begged his pardon and fled, red of face, to the river-boat's dingy cabin.

Peter Winter's "sister's" name was Cecilia Baldwin. Previous to the last six months of the great world war, she had never been farther than New Smyrna from Tampa, Florida. She was seeing Mr. Peter Winter for the first time in her life.

The British government is very particular as to what white women get into West Africa or stay there. Wives, daughters, sisters, mothers of men with real business there are allowed. It is just possible that Miss Cecilia Baldwin could have obtained passage on the prospect of immediate marriage to C. Rhodes Weaks when she arrived. But not so sure as that Peter Winter's sister could get it. And Peter Winter was helping his friend to smuggle in a bride. Peter's worst enemy would have admitted that he would do anything for a friend.

But Peter, staring blankly at the cabin door into which she had vanished, was not whispering or yelling, "Oh, I say!"

"Gawd 'lmighty!" was putting his sentiments mildly.

CHAPTER II.

AFRIC'S WHITE WORST.

THE world war which has been responsible for so many multitudinous mix-ups in nations was also responsible for the meeting of C. Rhodes Weaks and Miss Cecilia Baldwin. Sherman was right.

The British government was hard up for men when it took Weaks on and tried to turn him into a soldier, catching him in England between times out. Maybe he had had some nerve once; but he was over most of it. Maybe he was decent enough to think his funk on the eve of his first trip over the top was a touch of malaria, and to try to cure it with about twice the dose of quinine a fever patient might be given in Africa.

He landed in the first shell-hole in no man's land. He said he had been blown there by concussion. He was stone deaf. Shell-shock. They took him to a hospital in England. Miss Baldwin was nursing in that hospital at the time.

She was the kind that are made to nurse babies and to baby men. He liked girls that would wait on him. He had always had them throughout the thirty-five years of his life—mother, big sisters, one wife in England, another in North Celebes. These last two and some other girls accounted for his being C. Rhodes Weaks and staying generally in West Africa, which is a long way from either England or North Celebes. Previously he had been somebody else.

Even in West Africa he had not been without the tender ministrations of feminine love. To be sure some Britons have a prejudice against showing much love for the natives, and the government shares the prejudice, largely owing to the fact that such love affairs are frequently more violently and suddenly fatal than fever in their terminations. But Weaks quickly fitted himself for the responsibilities of small, lonely stations. Then he was careful.

It was this carefulness which really differentiated him from plenty of other white traders in black lands. If he ever acted on an impulse, it was after putting up a wall around himself and the impulse, and seeing to it that the watch-boy outside was wide awake. It was his meanness rather than his morals that had made him so unanimously disliked in West Africa.

They said he could beat the sharpest black trader a little worse than any other man in the Coast Produce Association. They hinted that he beat his own company. If he did, the company could af-

ford to wink at it. He left it more profit than most men could get out of the places where he was sent.

The company's regular canoes were bringing more kernels and rubber and taking less gin and cloth for Suwali than the miserable place had ever accounted for before.

A year before this tale begins, however, there had been a change in Coast Produce Association agents down at Warree. Mr. Jamison had instantly decided that the improvement in Suwali's showings could be further improved by sending up an assistant to the lone white trader. His decision may have been strengthened by whispers about the old black trader.

Careful as usual, Weaks had sent back word that he needed assistance the worst way possible. Then he let nature take its course with the assistants. So deaf they shouted their hearts out to make him hear, and failed, he was just one more discouragement in a land calculated to break the nerve of Hercules. Nobody can live long with a broken nerve—in Africa.

Robby Davis lasted a month, and the agent had the job of writing one of those miserable letters that break the hearts of agents and the news to mothers. Jamie Prentiss came back with a wild stare in his eyes, and his jaw hanging so loose it seemed to wiggle when he walked, to spend the rest of his contracted two years in a sanatorium. Billy Law returned in a one-woman canoe to Idda and gave himself up to the authorities, declaring he had killed a native for singing too loud near his window at night.

It was no disgrace after that to throw up an assistantship at Suwali and come back to be a kernel clerk at some other station. Two weeks came to be the limit of a man's stay with C. Rhodes Weaks. Then nobody would go at all.

Though he was a pretty determined sort of man, Jamison had just about given up the idea of an assistant for Suwali, in spite of Weaks's constant pleas for help, when Pete Winter blew in upon a West Coast that had had about all the kinds of men there were from all the corners of the globe, but had never before been plagued with a roaring, roistering, happy-go-lucky Texas cow-puncher.

Plagued is right—for about six weeks it looked as if Winter would disorganize the Coast Produce Association. The West Coast is a low fever at its mildest, likely at any moment to run into a high one, with the patient never quite out of danger until he has been back in some other climate about two years recuperating. It is a thing to take seriously, a close second best to martyrdom for the missionaries, a misery for the less spiritual and more spirituous to drown in strong drink as frequently as possible.

Few things are deadlier in a climate like that than a man so physically tough he doesn't even know it is a climate, so flamboyantly cheerful he wants to kick up his heels and whoop for the joy of living every minute of the day, so infernally friendly to everything and everybody that he'll do all your work for you, just to be near and tell you what a glorious time you're having. Pete was all those things. He looked them when he was quiet. Generally he wasn't even quiet. He had a voice planned for thousand-acre prairies, a laugh that would rattle all the tin buildings on four "factory" beaches at once, and the habit, without the training, of singing when he thought he was all alone and wasn't. No doubt Texas had loved Pete Winter. Texas has good nerves.

Pete was transferred six times in half as many months, the managers of as many Coast Company "factories" having offered "Captain" Jamison the alternative of taking him away or sending them home. It looked like a sad case of a man not knowing his place and being a long way out of it.

Then it dawned on the general manager that one solution would answer both the problem of the man who couldn't keep an assistant and that of the assistant nobody wanted to keep. The idea must have satisfied almost the entire Coast Produce Association corps.

"Weaks will take the unholy joy out of him," was one side of it.

"It 'll serve old C. Rhodes Sneaks right!" was another.

"But Weaks won't be able to hear him," was the only objection.

"He'll make Weaks hear," was its answer.

And Weaks and Peter had got on beautifully together. Peter's voice couldn't trouble Weaks. Peter's willingness to work like a horse was exactly to Weaks's taste.

And Peter had found some one to help. He knew deaf people were queer. The more then they needed kindness and friendly attention.

Peter had been born too late to know the lurid wickedness of the really picturesque days in Texas. He was too clean to know much of any wickedness. He actually took Weaks's word for it that the unusually good-looking and well-formed Warree girl served Weaks in the place of other traders' "boys," because she had a strong treble voice that he could hear. To the pure all things are pure.

But Weaks had a special reason for making things more truly agreeable for the big Texan than he had even pretended to make them for Pete's predecessors. He still cherished an interest in the American girl he had not quite dared marry in England, since she was then nursing in a hospital not five miles from the home of his first wife, and there was a local paper with a foolish American-borrowed fondness for romantic personal stories and for pictures. Just how he could manage to import a bride from the States to Africa, had been a puzzle for which Peter, the American, provided the answer. Already, in one of the letters which told of his longing for her, he had explained in full why she could not come to him in Africa. Now, in a letter which told of his utter need of her, he explained how she could come.

The hot swamp climate hadn't even touched Peter yet. He quite believed that others imagined its dangers, besides enhancing them by too liberal libations of red-eye. He really had not the slightest notion as to what that climate might do to a beautiful woman. Since she felt that way about it, nothing could be better for his friend than a wife worthy of him.

C. Rhodes Weaks knew all about the climate. But experience of the world had taught him that there are always as many fish in the sea as were ever caught; and experience with himself had taught him that he tired rather quickly of one woman's affections, anyhow.

CHAPTER III.

CROSSED FRIENDSHIPS.

THE ruse worked like a charm. It couldn't help working. Of all the men on the Coast there was none of whom the Coast would more readily expect some such absurd thing as bringing out a sister, none less suspectible of a fraud, none more certain than Peter Winter to advertise to all the delta that he was bringing in a member of his family.

While C. Rhodes Weaks might have afforded to bring his bride up-river in a chartered launch and some style, that was so obviously beyond the purse of a clerk or assistant that it would never have done to let Peter Winter carry out such a program. The dirty river-boats run no Niger-by-Daylight excursions. There were a lot of stops for cargoes, a lot of shifts and changes. Sister Cecilia generally found hospitable accommodations at the missions. Peter found a welcome at the factory residences.

A *welcome!* Peter never lost an opportunity to introduce his sister to every white man who came near. If he hadn't met the gentlemen before, he met them now, and presented them. They forgot his big voice and bumptious manners. They invited him to bring his sister over for tiffin or chow. If that could not be, they went to the mission in the early evening to beg him to join them in stag celebrations—thereby getting a look, in the inviting, at the sister, perhaps a word, sometimes even a cup of mission tea in her presence. Nice white girls are scarce in West Africa.

To say that the big Texan was happy is like calling the Grand Cañon pretty. This brother-and-sister arrangement induced a delicious comradeship with the girl. She was fine and sensible in accepting the situation for exactly what it was—or in trying to. She had managed, in three and

twenty years, to mother a father and two brothers until, within a year, the former had died and the two latter gone to the war. Then she had gone oversea after them and mothered sick soldiers wholesale. Caring for other people was her job in life, and she liked her job.

But Pete was giving her a vacation. You couldn't refuse him the pleasure of doing everything and anything for you. And the horrible heat and humidity and naked ugliness of all Africa couldn't keep her from fairly blooming with the rest she was getting out of the vacation.

Pete was in his element. To wait on this beautiful girl had him fairly giddy at times.

Even if he saw through some of the rather too obvious efforts to cultivate him, made by youngsters who had actually snubbed him before—well, Pete had gone broke many a time to see a crowd of total strangers in a border-town saloon enjoy themselves. If the boys were enjoying Cecilia and Cecilia was being helped to escape the first horror of homesickness by their enlivening visits *en route,* Pete was more than satisfied.

He took even the night beer-fest invitations for all they were worth and then some, without worrying over the fact that there wouldn't be any more of them if he should come back and admit that Cecilia was his sister no longer. Pete was not the kind to let to-morrow spoil to-day.

Iluala was to have been the next stop but one; he had supposed that he would have to go on above the Suwali's junction with the Niger to secure a canoe at Idda. But the canoe was waiting for him at Iluala —a big eight-paddle affair sent down by Weaks himself. So that became the last stop of all. At Iluala Pete became a man's enemy, during the usual celebration tendered by hopeful future friends of his sister.

The man was Tammas Craig, the Coast Produce Association post's oil-clerk. He had been the oil-clerk down at Digo when Pete had served his very brief clerkship there.

Tammas was the Scotchest thing on the Coast, and possessed of one of the best Scotch thirsts. He got drunk enough to utter advice which had probably been in the heart of half the men who had celebrated with Pete the arrival of the girl on her way to Suwali.

"Mon—mon," he hiccuped—"keep an e'e on that boss of yourn doon theer. He ha'e a bad e'e for the leddies—he ha'e. I ken weel his sairt. If ye doon't, ye'll ha'e the auld beast marryin' that sweet sister of yourn afore ye ken ut. And he's none too guid to tell her a *ju-ju* chief's meenister eno' for the ceremony."

Peter had got to his feet very deliberately while this seemed to be coming. He was perfectly able to stand on his feet. He was perfectly sober, in fact. He had come from where a man might learn early, if he would, all the things to avoid letting red liquor do to him. And he had applied his knowledge to yellow Scotch liquor as well.

"Tammas," he said in his deep-throated drawl, for once reduced to a purring softness which almost cleared three or four foggy brains with sheer alarm—"I'll excuse just as much as you've said about a friend of mine, because you're too drunk to know what yo' saying. 'Most anybody can be my friend 'most any time, befoah he says anything wrong about any other of my friends.

"If you weren't so drunk I'd take you out and put you in the creek. As it is, I'll do you one more favoh by tucking you in your little bed. Come along—and the rest of you can show me which is his room as you go to your own."

Tammas went to bed. Pete did likewise. Tammas had annoyed him. But not enough to prevent his sleeping with the soundness and the peaceful smile of an untroubled mind and conscience.

He was not aware of certain things which had already happened to start currents toward events that would remind him forcibly of Tammas's words. To wit:

Four days after Peter had departed from Suwali to meet the steamer and Cecilia Baldwin, a canoe had arrived in Suwali from the mission at Idda. A pious-looking native had brought a letter from his pastor. Fortunately for C. Rhodes Weaks he had come just an hour before Weaks had meant

to start a letter down to that same pastor. The letter from Idda had made a vast difference in the one that went to Idda.

DEAR SIR:

A letter, signed by a Mrs. Edith Fordyce, of Fenshire, London, N. E., but alleging herself to be lately of Babore, Celebes, Id., has been forwarded by the original addressee, the Rev. Robert Hayfield, of Bonga, to the mission pastor at Onitsha, and by him to me.

The tone of the letter suggests a belligerent disposition on the part of Mrs. Fordyce, who alleges that, having married you in Celebes, she has just learned of a previous marriage of yours in Fenshire, from the legal bonds of which neither of the ladies knows of your having properly freed yourself.

I hope I shall not offend by saying that, from the specimen of disposition submitted, I should incline to think mercifully of a man who sought refuge at a wide distance. That is, of course, apart from the question of the previous marriage. I may add that I am not inclined to think too seriously of what the lady says are proofs positive in her hands of your identity with her alleged husband.

On the other hand, it appears that both the alleged wives of Fordyce are mothers of his children and without support from the father. This rather puts another face on things, and leaves me wondering whether I ought not to turn the whole thing over to the government for investigation. Knowing a little of the difficulties in the way of your leaving your station even for a couple of days, I shall postpone action for a fortnight, in the hope that you can come up to Idda and furnish me such proof that the lady is wrong as to your identity as will enable me to return my own positive assertion that she is mistaken.

Believe me sincerely your friend,

JAMES M. BURNS.

The letter C. Rhodes Weaks had purposed sending Dr. Burns invited the reverend gentleman to officiate at a wedding and backed the invitation by promise of every effort to give a comfortable trip and a fee that should compensate for putting the inconvenience of the journey upon the clergyman instead of taking it himself.

The letter he sent was as follows:

REVEREND, DEAR SIR:

Think I shall have little difficulty in proving to your satisfaction that I am myself. I beg of you, however, to be as patient as possible about my coming. My assistant has left me again—ostensibly on a business trip, but probably without intention of returning. It may be two fortnights or three before I can break the rule against leaving company properties without white oversight.

Very respectfully yours,

C. RHODES WEAKS.

"And," mused C. Rhodes Weaks, as he signed the note and sealed it in the dead silence of his own deafness, "that rather puts the Onitsha missionary out of the play as well. I wonder—I wonder—if that wild steer from Texas knows much about the missionary system out here?

"No, I don't believe I'd better take chances with Jawn Duba. Jawn might not like the idea of withholding his report. Don't know whether he has the authority to marry anybody or not; but he surely ought to with his bunch of disciples.

"Hell! Old Beli isn't any blacker than Jawn, and can look a heap more dignified. That old black suit of mine—I hate to lend him a good collar and cravat, but—but—"

He drew toward him a photograph that was propped against the back of his desk.

"By Heaven! she's worth it. And Beli would swear he'd never heard of such a thing, and then—just having the sister of an assistant living in the station won't turn bigamy into trigamy, or whatever they call it.

"But I'll have to create some little diversion to prevent her innocent 'brother' from witnessing anything. Don't believe he's ever seen Beli; but he may have. Of course I've got him pretty nicely tied up."

There was a crafty smile on his lips. As he still indulged that faint hum a man with regular ears could hardly have heard, and still gazed at the photograph, the smile became worse than crafty. Something about it led the black girl who held the "boy's" place in his ménage to creep up behind him and take a more careful look at that picture than she had ever given it before. She had rather thought she owned that smile.

CHAPTER IV.

WISDOM IN BLACK WATER.

"THIS is what you might call regular royal style, sis," Pete remarked as he helped Cecilia into her place in the canoe scarcely five hours after he had

brought the drink-fest with Tammas Craig to its abrupt termination. "I'll say there is class to this outfit all right!"

Travel by an eight-man canoe had hitherto just about hit his native democracy on its funny-bone. There was something so grandiose about sitting there at ease under a little canopy and watching four all-but-naked glistening slaves in front, and having four more all-but-naked glistening slaves behind, sending you speeding along over the water—and it was so damnably uncomfortable.

And yet it surprised him that Cecilia seemed to find the notion as mirth-provoking as he usually found it—surprised him and jarred a little. It seemed as if he didn't even want her to be happy to-day. Hitherto it had been one of the best things about Cecilia that she was capable of responding to his humor.

It was true that Cecilia had responded. The bigness and the undeniable boisterousness of his voice had rather startled her the first day or two. But she had not been so long graduated from the schooling of her brothers' boy noisiness as to require many days to get used to it over again. The fourth night, as she prepared for bed in the spare room of the Tabanga mission-house, she had admitted to herself that she enjoyed the big Texan as she had enjoyed few things in her life.

There was just a trace of shame in the admission—as a carefully dignified professor of ethics might blush to find himself roaring at slapstick farce comedy. Then she was more ashamed of that shame. It was too much like the titters she had overheard that day on the part of two very youthful clerks with the air of lords and the misplaced h's of north shire ox-drivers. His voice, she had ached to inform those cockney snobs, was the thing about him that least surpassed them in bigness.

But on this last day a strange silence seemed to have fallen upon the noisily hilarious Westerner. She missed his roaring mirth for a while; turned contemplative in the silence after all efforts to get him really going had failed; grew unhappy in her reflections, so as, at length, to lose desire for more hilarity.

Of course it all could have boiled down in a moment to the bare fact that both of them were thoroughly wretched because she was going to marry Cecil Rhodes Weaks. Of course neither would admit that. So Pete, who would almost as willingly admit horse-stealing as ill-health under any ordinary condition, was trying to convince himself that he had made a mistake in laughing at quinine.

Cecilia was more successful in discovering that the climate was beginning to tell on her. The discomfort of the cramped canoe became a complex of painful aches. The complex was further complicated with an unadmitted wish that Peter would notice her discomfort and—be a little sympathetic.

Of course there were reasons—perfectly natural reasons why that last day's run should have fallen short of being a joy-ride. Perhaps they were enough to account even for Peter Winter's lapse from hilarity to fairly blind gloom.

The day was of extraordinary heat, even for the Slave Coast. The Suwali is no stream of scenic beauty. Its water is black and its banks are miles of brush thicket, and the sky above hurts the eyes to look at it between sunrise and sunset—or between storms that turn it into an imitation of the creek below. Its fauna goes its flora one better; it consists of mud-caked hippos and snakes that wriggle their crooked way over the black slime of the water than which they are little slimier. There are birds, but they keep out of sight; and monkeys; but the natives eat them before you get there; and insects, but you wish there weren't.

There was not really enough of the canopy for two, and Peter managed most of the time to sit in the broiling sun which rose higher and hotter, while the air grew steamier and the black paddlers grew likewise, and every stench of a rotten country warmed to life. An electric storm—a West African electric storm—was brewing and stewing nerves with other things.

And yet it is not wholly improbable that Peter would have been boisterously happy if, for instance, he had not happened to catch a glimpse of Cecilia's lips, as she

turned her head a little, and recalled simultaneously that he had been permitted to kiss those lips just once; and if that had not happened to raise in his mind a question as to how much meaner than a rattlesnake or a horse-thief was a man who could even want to kiss the girl a friend had entrusted to his keeping. He somehow thought up a lot of problems like that. Perhaps Cecilia thought up some.

The run was fifty miles, and Weaks's message to Iluala had spoken of the wedding for not later than five, and given Pete the impression somehow that the missionary wanted to get off for Idda afterward and would naturally appreciate every minute of the next morning's sleep he could be spared by the earliest possible start.

Wherefore there could be no stops for siestas under some overhanging mango-tree, should one be found; they had to eat their tinned lunch as best they could in the canoe, without even weak tea to wash it down. It seemed to leave them as sticky inside as they had got outwardly; and the air grew heavy and so lifeless that the black men's tongues required frequent swallows of water to put them back in their mouths, Cecilia found herself gasping for air under the canopy, Pete could not inhale the smoke of a cigarette, even the hippos were blowing.

And then the vast, steaming hell broke loose. The sun went out as if some one had turned it off. From behind the canoe rose a mighty sound, a Stygian symphony of shrieking wind, crackling wood, hissing water, roaring, crashing thunder. The darkness was split by a single flash of white light that might have been the bursting of the sun itself, and left the white pair in the boat blinded and deafened by the simultaneous crash which seemed the ripping up of the world. The following moments of comparative silence heard the whines of natives whispering *ju-ju* prayers, and a gasp of unmitigated fright from Cecilia, who sprang back to cling to Pete's arms with a grasp of terror momentarily melting all intelligence into reasonless instinct for protection.

And Peter Winter, who had seen and heard dozens of such lightning explosions in his months on the Coast, and scarcely blinked an eye to shut out their blinding brilliance, found all his courage melting into fear as blindly unreasoning as hers—fear that did not dream he might not weather the storm, but could not sense that she was as safe as he. His brawny arms swept her closer to his breast, he bent his head over hers to shield her from the downpour which now came, not in drops but in streams and sheets.

Then, as the practically continuous play of dazzling flame and smashing roar followed close upon the single herald that first crash had been, his arms tightened and tightened with every fearful quiver of her body at each new crash.

A moment of this and he was getting a little grip on himself—then fresh cause for terror smote him. The wind had caught the canoe behind. With all their desperate expert efforts the black boys were barely able to keep it end-on to the gale down which they seemed to be slipping with a speed like that of falling. Just ahead the creek made one of its tortuous turnings.

It was beyond the dares of his wildest imaginings that the light craft could be stopped before the overhanging tangle of jungle growth should have swept them overboard into water filled with snags and swept with swirling currents made by the hurricane's push down the stream behind them and plainly shown by the fact that bits of floating log were going with them at hardly less speed than theirs. And Peter, with a fresh shudder that must have made breathing hard for the frightened girl in his arms, realized that he was the poorest of swimmers. Most cowboys are.

That a turn could be made was even farther from his thought. Once broadside—even given the least twist in that direction—the awning would carry the craft over as suddenly as a lightning stroke might have shattered it. And in this wholly new terror that was all for her, he was unable to conceive of loosing his clasp upon the girl to tear the light stanchions from their sockets and let the awning go.

But the Kroo boys were better seamen than he. A long, black arm reached past him from behind—a grunted word of warn-

ing sounded fairly in his ears, and startled with its loudness which was meant for the men ahead. A huge blade struck twice on the tough wood of the right-hand rear stanchion. There was no need to cut another. The rest went in snaps that blended into one. The dripping black heads of the four forward men rose as the awning shot high into the air from over them.

Then more quick grunts of black men's talk—the flash of paddles in the lurid play of lightning and glimpses of shining black skin drawn hard over bulging muscles and of gleaming teeth clenched in supreme effort—and—

Oh, incredible, wonderful boys! They had done it. They had swung about and up under the shelter of the windward bank at the sharp turn. Their hands were clinging now to the overhanging branches of a stout mango, hauling the boat closer and closer until it grated on a bit of sloping beach up which they hopped like cats, dragging the bow of the canoe with them until Peter could lift his light burden and step onto sure ground.

More nearly a hysterical wreck than he would ever admit that he ever could have become. Peter would have fallen on the necks of those boys and wept and kissed them if he had not held a handier and much more kissable load in his arms.

The first terrific rush and crash of the storm was over. And Cecilia recovered from her abject panic of fear to realize that the big man who was nearly crushing her in his shaking arms was also kissing her wet forehead again and again, while his big voice, reduced to a queer, croaking, throaty whisper, was not even whispering words, but gulping regular sobs.

Peter would never recover. He had discovered that there was something he cared for so much in the world that the feeling would never be all joyous—that it was so much bigger and stronger than he that it could hurt even him.

But he recovered somewhat after a little. And, slowly, reluctantly, he dragged his arms from her, drew himself a little away and ceased to shelter even one side of her from the pouring torrents of wind-driven rain.

"Gawd! Gawd! Gawd help me!" he groaned. "I'm worse'n the meanest greaser hoss-thief you ever made."

(To be concluded NEXT WEEK.)

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MAN OR MANIKIN

NO matter whence you came, from a palace or a ditch,
You're a man, man, man, if you square yourself to life;
And no matter what you say, hermit-poor or Midas-rich,
You are nothing but a husk if you side-step strife.

For it's do, do, do, with a purpose all your own,
That makes a man a man, whether born a serf or king;
And it's loaf, loaf, loaf, lolling on a beach or throne,
That makes a being thewed to act a limp and useless thing!

No matter what you do, miracles or fruitless deeds,
You're a man, man, man, if you do them with a will;
And no matter how you loaf, cursing wealth or mumbling creeds,
You are nothing but a noise, and its weight is nil.

For it's be, be, be, champion of your heart and soul,
That makes a man a man, whether reared in silk or rags;
And it's talk, talk, talk, from a tattered shirt or stole,
That makes the image of a god a manikin that brags!

Richard Butler Glaenzer.

Once a Plumber—

by Edgar Franklin

Author of "Beware of the Bride," "Everything but the Truth," "Face Value," etc.

WHAT HAS ALREADY HAPPENED

BLYN & WILSON, plumbers, of Olmford, have made a good profit on their fiscal year, but Wilson refuses to be content, being bit with jealousy of Henry Hoban, multimillionaire, whose country mansion can be discerned from the plumbing-shop. Comes to them Hoban himself, whose trade they have failed to secure, requiring a rush job for a bath-room leak. All their men being out, he persuades the partners to come up themselves, and carries them to his mansion in his limousine. Will Wilson grows more and more discontented when he sees the opulence around him and starts an argument with more phlegmatic Joe Blyn, an argument which Hoban chances to overhear. After a brief consultation with his house party, who are manifestly worried over something, he proposes to give Blyn and Wilson every chance to make as big a success in life as he himself has done, starting right off from that moment as his guests. Wilson eagerly accepts, but Blyn only reluctantly. They are voted in, the one as president and the other treasurer of the Sandia Copper Company, at salaries of twenty thousand dollars and fifteen thousand dollars respectively and sign papers accordingly. But Blyn gets cold feet and starts to escape, but finds the grounds guarded at every point. Returning to the house, he reports this to Wilson, who does not seem to mind. Just then Wilson, who has been flirting outrageously with a blond of the house party, is called to the telephone by Simms, the butler. Kate Beard—the young lady in the village to whom he is engaged—wishes to speak with him.

CHAPTER X.

OUTWARD AND UPWARD.

EVEN William Wilson started visibly.

"Er—Beard?" he echoed.

"If you please, sir," said Simms. "She wished to speak to you personal, Mr. Wilson. She said it was urgent."

Joseph felt himself shrinking. It had happened, then. Samuel Topp had neglected his deliveries and made straight for the little home town, and, once there, to the persons besides themselves most vitally concerned with the day's remarkable happenings.

William was clearing his throat.

"I'll speak to her," he said quietly enough. "You'll wait here, Joe?"

"I guess so, Bill!" breathed Joseph.

"At the rear of the corridor on that side, Mr. Wilson," Simms murmured in conclusion. "The only other phone on this floor is in Mr. Hoban's library."

He backed away. William, having straightened his collar for no obvious reason, set his jaw and strode off. Joseph gazed after him numbly.

He would remain right here. He had not the slightest desire to know what Bill intended saying to her who, such a little time ago, had been the greater part of his world. It would bring consequences and it would be insane, at the least, because Bill was far from himself to-day.

Or—would it, after all? Was it not possible that the beloved voice of Kate Beard might shock Bill back to pure reason? Things like that do happen, as Joseph well knew.

There had been the case of old Harvey

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for December 25.

Tucker, over at the Center; Harvey was a complete imbecile for eleven years, until one day his twin brother came back from the China coast and spoke to him—and after that Harvey had been as normal and intelligent as any other man. And Joe recalled Aunt Sally Manners, too. This poor soul had carried a firm conviction that she was of purest Bourbon blood, until one fine day—

Joseph went into motion just here. No eavesdropper in ordinary circumstances, something impelled him to hear just what William was saying and to note its, possibly happy, effect on William.

William was posed down there in the shadows, one leg jauntily perched on the telephone table, his cigarette in the hand that held the transmitter. William was smiling, too, as Joseph observed, but there was little of the soft and loverlike about that smile. It held a certain sneering dignity and perhaps a tinge of compassion, but that was really all.

"I know," William was saying. "Oh, yes, it's unusual, of course, Kate, but—oh, really, I can't let that matter. No, Kate, I don't feel justified in letting it matter. I beg pardon? I wasn't aware that I was talking oddly."

"Well, y' are, Bill," Joseph whispered hoarsely as he approached. "Let me—"

"Hush, please; I can't hear what she's saying!" William snapped. "No, I'm not speaking to you, Kate. What's that? Of course, I'll listen to whatever you care to say."

His smile grew pained and annoyed as he heard.

William shook his head, too, and pursed his lips in a slightly amused fashion. And then:

"My dear young lady, that abuse is unworthy of you! Oh, yes it is just that—abuse! Well, I consider it so, at any rate. Now may I be permitted a word or two?" He waited, smiling coldly.

"Hey! Before you ring off I want to speak to her!" Joseph interpolated.

"I beg pardon," said William. "Some one's talking to me here. Yes, I'm quite ready now, and what I wish to say, Kate, is just this: It is quite true that we are up here, and here to stay, and as to the precise reason I'll have to ask your indulgence. No; it's a matter I'm not at liberty to discuss just now. No, but it has made a very radical change in all our plans of every sort for the future, Kate, and—I beg pardon? No, I'm afraid that I can't discuss the ladies up here, either. Well, I'm very sorry, but I cannot discuss them in any manner. And if you don't mind, I wish you wouldn't gasp into the phone like that, Kate. It's annoying, and— What was that? Well, no. If you wish me to be perfectly honest, I *don't* feel that you have any right to ask. No, I do not, strange as it may seem to you."

He raised his brows and, with exaggerated patience, listened to the clatter of the little metal disk.

"Ah, that's just the point I'm trying to reach!" he broke out suddenly. "I am going to ask you to consider that all—er—silliness between us is ended now. We shall probably never meet again in any event, because we're done with Olmford and moving to New York to-morrow, and —what was that? Yes, I said that, essentially, Kate; I asked you to release me. Of course, I'm horribly sorry if the thing distresses you at all at the moment, but you'll understand in time, I'm sure, and see that I'm acting wisely. So that's how the matter stands, and—"

"Gimme that telephone! I want to speak to her!" Joseph panted.

Tigerlike, he crouched for a spring. And with one white-shod foot William pushed very violently at his old friend, causing him to reel a full five yards down the corridor.

"And one thing more, please," he concluded, in the smoothest and most measured tones. "Joe's standing here and he asks me to request you to give the same message to Mary, as coming from himself. Exactly! That he wishes to consider the engagement at an end. No, he doesn't care to say it himself, I think. Good-by!"

"That's a lie! That's a lie!" Joseph cried. "You gimme that phone, or—"

"It's no use," William smiled. "She rang off quite hastily."

"Then I'll call her back and tell her—"

"You'll have to lick me first," William explained suavely. "Anyway, if I know Kate, she isn't there any longer."

"And you told her—"

"The right thing!" William broke in sternly. "Stop the hysterics, Joe! I've settled the whole matter for both of us. It's over and done with, thank fortune, and we're free! Think of it! We're *free!*"

He threw out his hands. He seemed to glitter an uncanny, unholy satisfaction, did William—and over Joseph a strange weakness crept, and he found himself sagging uncertainly against the superbly done wall of Hoban's corridor.

"Who—who wants to be free?" Joseph mouthed faintly.

"I do. You will, when you get back your wits. Oh, I'm sorry, of course, if it's causing them any pain, but they're both dear, simple souls, and they will not be very long recovering. I wonder where the girls are?"

The telephone was unguarded now. Joseph failed even to touch it. Remarkably, too, his desire to flee to Olmford had dwindled swiftly. Beating Samuel Topp to the girls was one thing; crashing into the picture after Samuel had done his worst and William had added ten thousandfold to the effect, was another. Joseph shuddered. Kate's father, for example! Wallis Beard had been the village blacksmith and the village plumber as well, before Blyn & Wilson took over the latter half of his activities.

Now he was only the village blacksmith and welder, and he looked the part, being a large, hairy man with perfectly absurd muscles and a temper of peculiar brevity. More than this, Kate was his only daughter and— Joseph just caught another shudder.

Five minutes ago he had fairly burned to reach good old Olmford again; he had been upon the point of dashing into the Hoban study and demanding, in the loud-voiced and compelling manner of the true American when outraged, that all restraint upon his movements be ended forthwith, under penalty of the laws made and provided in such cases.

Yet now, for some strange reason, Joseph did not crave the sight of Olmford at all, nor did he feel even the smallest inclination to argue the point of restraint with their odd host. Indeed, had Henry Hoban appeared at that moment and ordered Joseph back to his plumbing establishment, it is probable that Joseph would have pleaded with him to reconsider.

"Well, come, confound you, if you're able to walk!" William said, and it was evident that he had said the same thing before. "Let's find the ladies."

He took Joseph's arm and shook it angrily. Joseph straightened up, smiling vaguely, and walked away at the side of his old friend. They were going—where? Oh, out to the lawn again, apparently, and the spreading maple. Joseph expelled one great gasp and straightened up still further.

It was not, be it understood, that he cared a solitary continental about the young women; but, at the same time, with a girl as undeniably pretty as Ethelyn Fenelon, no man wants to look the weak and wabbly thing that Joseph felt just then!

The girls were there, fifty feet away, and with them Parker and Fenelon. The four seemed to be involved in some discussion of their own. The young women were protesting mildly and—together—Fenelon and Parker burst into a perfect flood of low words, by way of overriding the protest.

"Well, you've *got to*—" Joseph caught, as coming from Fenelon, while in the Parker voice he heard an almost savage: "To the very limit! What? Well, you understand, of course. I mean the limit of conventional—or even a shade beyond the limit." And Fenelon was saying: "Positively the most vital importance, Ethelyn, that—"

Here, again, they ceased as one, and turned. A second they stared at Joseph and his partner; another, and they smiled beamingly; a third, and they moved toward the side veranda, whence Hoban himself was hurrying to the group.

Whatever may have been William's impression, it seemed to the recovering Joseph

that the strange Hoban perturbation had increased markedly. Frowning lines were on the millionaire's forehead; he bit his lips as he walked; and then he bit his lips no more, for he had sighted the new officers of the Sandia Copper Company, and he, too, was smiling brilliantly!

"Ah, there you are!" he cried. "I was wondering— See here! This is no day for you young people to be lolling around like this!"

"We tried—" Miss Parker began, with a crooked little smile.

"Why not take a thundering long ride?" Hoban continued. "We elder people don't enjoy that sort of thing, but you youngsters seem to get a lot of fun out of it. Take the closed car and shoot off across country. Where? Oh, in the general direction of Massachusetts," Hoban laughed. "Go over to the Camel's Head tea-room—you can make it before two if you start now—and see if their chicken luncheon's as good as ever."

"It seems to me," William began unsmilingly, "that we might better put in the time studying up the Sandia—"

"That be hanged!" cried Hoban. "You'll get enough of that in the coming years, Mr. Wilson. No, I will not listen to an excuse! I want you two to keep outdoors this last day and be full of energy to-morrow. Fenelon!"

"Yes?"

"Tell March to bring around the car. Girls," bubbled the host, "wind up the gentlemen and get them into motion. I leave it all to you. Don't bring them back before tea-time—five o'clock at the earliest."

There was no such thing as resisting him. Fenelon, having turned away with a jerk, disappeared, snapping his nervous fingers and leaving a trail of cigarette smoke behind. His daughter, with a pleased little cry at the prospect of motion, scampered for the house, while Miss Parker followed in more leisurely fashion with William's rapt gaze burning into her graceful back.

Joseph sighed, largely in relief. It was a sufficiently satisfactory way of spending the next few hours; it meant that if Wallis Beard should explode and make his way up-hill on the heavy motorcycle that carried him everywhere, the place would be barren of victims.

It seemed to please William tremendously, too; William was standing with his hands in his pockets, whistling a tune at the tree-tops, while Hoban watched him smilingly and Parker, in his own queer way, puffed and nodded a vague, general assent.

And now, after a remarkably short interval, the two young women, wrapped in sports coats, were tripping down to the drive, and the beautiful car was rolling into sight from the garage. William, with a courtly grace that seemed to hail from the late Queen Elizabeth's establishment rather than an Olmford plumbing shop, assisted Miss Parker to her place in the machine.

Joseph found that in a stiff, mechanical way he was performing the same service for Miss Fenelon. And then they were off, with William and his lady on the big seat, and Joseph and the dark girl on the smaller emergency one which the chauffeur had dropped for them.

They were close quarters, these latter. Joseph, sensing the extreme nearness of Miss Fenelon, experienced a rather guilty internal start—and almost immediately a misty feeling of relief. After all, to the best of his belief, he was no longer an engaged man; whether the condition was of his own making or not, he was, he assumed, at liberty to go motoring around with almost any girl and without giving an account of himself to any one.

Joseph turned and examined her, with queer and rather frightened interest, rather as if he saw her for the first time. He also smiled—and Miss Fenelon smiled back at him so thrillingly, so wonderfully, that Joseph turned hot and then cold, and quite hastily fell to watching the pair in the other seat.

To the best of his judgment, Miss Parker and William were in a world of their own just now and all unconscious of Joseph's existence or that of the lady beside him. William spoke softly and rapidly—so softly that Joseph could catch only a

word now and then. Miss Parker glanced up at him—and down again—and at him again; Miss Parker flushed slightly, and William, growing more earnest, took to gesticulating. He laughed suddenly; Miss Parker laughed.

Joseph shook his bewildered head; only last evening he had watched William in the act of saying good night to Kate Beard. He had, in fact, walked a block with the idea that William was following, and then walked back the whole block and literally torn William from his side of the gate. And because Kate was positively the only girl in William's life who had so affected and attracted him, this day was all the more astounding. Unless in cold fact some cog in William's brain had slipped—

Miss Fenelon's hand was on Joseph's arm.

"Isn't it a dear, quaint little town?" she asked softly. "We came through it on the way up."

"Eh? Town?" repeated Joseph as he stared from the window—stared and started and tried to shrink back into the woodwork of the limousine body. "Quaint—yes!"

For they were in Olmford! His preoccupation in the affair of William had kept his eyes from the road; they had accomplished the down-hill trip all unheeded and—they were here!

"Bill!" Joseph said thickly. "See—see the—the quaint little town!"

William glanced up and around and smiled perfunctorily.

"Oh, yes," he agreed, and went on whispering to Miss Parker.

"They—they call it Olmstead, I think," Joseph hazarded.

"Olmford!" William corrected, annoyedly, with a flitting glance, indicating by the word that he still reasoned.

He bent close to Miss Parker. Joseph gulped inaudibly. If William felt no particular emotion at all the familiar scenes, Joseph would gladly have given the thousand-dollar Hoban check in his pocket to find that they had passed down the main street without recognition! An instant he meditated, snatching up the speaking-tube and commanding the chauffeur to speed things up; then another of Joseph's unpleasant little chills arrived, for they were slowing down suddenly.

Aye, not only were they slowing down—they were stopping! Just to the right of them lay Henry Burrows's little hole-in-the-wall with its glaring sign, "Broadway Automobile Accessories Company," and the red gas-pump at the curb. Joseph started up—and collapsed again. It had been his hope to catch the chauffeur before he could begin any negotiations for gasoline; instead, the chauffeur had leaped from his seat and disappeared into the shop, in search of Henry—and Henry, beyond any question, was out in his back garden at this time of day and would have to chat at least five minutes before shuffling out to the pump.

And over there, right across the way, was Lew Stinson's little candy and stationery store, with Mrs. Lew arranging the window and likely to look up any second—and *there*, next door—Miss Fenelon was pointing at it, too, and exclaiming:

"Oh, the adorable little old house! Just see that window at the side!"

"I—see!" Joseph agreed, from the far side of the moon.

"And the sweet little fat old lady looking at her flowers, too! Do look at her, Mr. Blyn! Do, please!"

"I—looked at her before," mumbled Joseph.

It was the perfect truth, too; he had looked at her many, many times since his eyes opened upon Olmford and he first took to walking down the main street in his little calico kilts. This "sweet little fat old" lady was none other than Aunt Martha Patterson, and if a more hideous disposition than Samuel Topp's existed in Olmford, it was that owned and operated by Aunt Martha. These natures, born to brew trouble, reach their perfection in the feminine form; just about the time Aunt Martha looked up and recognized her neighbors—

"And the funny old man!" Miss Fenelon observed further, touching Joseph and indicating the sidewalk just beyond him.

Joseph whisked about and stared again and just contrived to stifle a shriek. This

latest interesting figure, with its long gray whiskers and its old, watery eyes peering from side to side as it thumped along toward them on the faithful old cane, was Zed Farman himself, grandfather of young Zed, who worked for them. An informal old soul he was at the very best, who took full advantage of his great age to stop and chat with any one who would listen—yes, and his wretched attention had been caught by the glitter of Hoban's car! The aged Zedekiah was pausing to gaze—was slowing further—had stopped and was peering into the car itself and—

"Why, I vum!" he cackled. "Joey Blyn!"

Joseph said absolutely nothing, albeit his hair rose politely. The aged one bent nearer and peered again.

"Hey, you! Ain't you Joey Blyn?" he inquired, and blinked rapidly, while his free hand patted his trousers pockets. "Where'n time's my specs gone? What in the name o'—what 'd I do with them specs, anyway? I swan I put 'em in that pocket when I left the house! I—Joey, ain't that you?"

Still Joseph said nothing.

"Well, if it ain't, my eyes are a dum sight wuss 'n I thought!" Mr. Farman mumbled. "Say, mister, would you mind leanin' over here so's I can get a good look at you? I dunno when I've mistook a person in—"

"Hey! Don't lean on this car, please!" William barked in a strange, new voice. "It's just been painted!"

The old man started back and scowled. "Who—who's hurtin' yer dog-gone car?" he demanded. "Can't a pusson—"

"Get away from it! Get away from it" William commanded.

"Well, I shud say I would!" Zedekiah responded. "I dunno what the world's comin' to—I dunno! Stop t' pass the time o' day with a pusson—just merely stop to chat a minute with a pusson, an'—"

However, he was moving off, little comfort as that might bring. He would keep on moving by easy stages, too, stopping every last individual to relate his recent harrowing experience and his suspicion that Joseph Blyn sat in that car up by Henry Burrows's place. Yet William was laughing.

"See, Joe?" he was saying quite mischievously. "That's what comes of your bad habit of scraping acquaintances with all the queer characters and letting them know your name! You've been through here, some time or other, and chatted with the old gentleman—eh?"

"I may have been—some time or other!" Joseph managed to utter.

Other things were happening, too, which Joseph noted, if William did not. There was the youth who had just passed, glanced in, and started to walk on again. He was walking faster now—and this was because the youth chanced to be Raymond Downs himself, unsuccessful suitor for the hand of Mary Foster, and, perhaps of all living people, the only one who hated Joseph Blyn.

Two minutes back Raymond had been loitering, plainly on his way home to lunch and using as much time as possible; now he was hurrying, and when he turned, at the corner, it was not toward his home. Nor was any clairvoyant needed here to tell Joseph just where Raymond Downs was heading: when he had walked one and one-half blocks more he would turn to the left and step into the carpenter and contracting shop of Foster Brothers, where Mary's four brothers, big and husky, made their excellent living. And then Raymond—

Why had the little girl stopped, over there? Why, if any little girl must stop, should it be little Jennie Welch, the star imp of all Olmford in the ten-year-old class? Jennie's eyes were bulging; emotion caused the two braids to stick straight out from her head.

"Lookit Joe Blyn!" Jennie shrilled, to nobody in particular. "Lookit! Lookit! Joe Blyn and Willie Wilson in the ot'mobile!"

And at this hail Mrs. Lew Stinson stared from her window, and the head of Aunt Martha came up. Mrs. Lew opened the little side show-window and spoke to Aunt Martha.

"Oh, what I know about Willie Wil-

son!" Jennie cried delightedly, and raced madly away to the other corner, around it, and, intelligent child that she was, directly toward the home of Kate Beard, just beside the blacksmith-shop.

Aunt Martha had waddled to the picket fence now. Head stuck forward, mouth open, she was staring across the street and into the Hoban car. And now her open mouth closed, lower lip outthrust; indignation blazed in her eye as she threw her apron over her head and waddled through the gate.

"Well, well, of all things!" Joseph just caught. "And him engaged to Wallis Beard's gal, too! Well, I do declare that—"

Her voice, too, died out, for Aunt Martha was speeding away on a mission of her own. Track for track, almost, she followed the course of little Jennie Welch, vanishing around the corner that led to the Beards.

"And they're always so peaceful and humdrum and sleepy," Miss Fenelon was saying rather seriously. "All these little villages. But I've wondered so often, particularly during the war, you know, what they look like when there's a really big excitement afoot and everybody roused and running around!"

Joseph Blyn dragged his eyes about to meet hers. "Wait about two minutes," he said simply if mysteriously.

CHAPTER XI.

EVER CLIMBING!

"WHAT did you say?" Miss Fenelon queried.

"Er—what did I say?" Joseph choked. "You'll—have to forgive me, but I was—thinking of something else."

"Something about waiting two minutes."

"Oh, yes—the confounded chauffeur!" Joseph stumbled on, with a wealth of feeling in his voice that was perfectly genuine. "What's the matter with the man?"

Perhaps the sharp note cut its way into William's brain.

William seemed to rouse as he peered at Joseph.

"Why?" he asked significantly.

"I don't like to stand around little towns like this!" Joseph said feverishly.

"No! I don't, either," William agreed, with a single sweeping glance at the community—at Mrs. Stinson particularly, who was conversing animatedly two doors from her home now and at several opening windows. "I—here, you! Why are we stopping here?"

"I'm trying to get some gas, sir," the chauffeur explained as he appeared from the Burrows establishment. "I can't find a soul about."

"Get it in the next town!"

"Well, I—don't know, sir," the chauffeur smiled. "I'm pretty low, and—"

William's gaze shot down the street again. Two extra ladies had paused to talk with Mrs. Stinson now; their eyes were all directed toward the limousine.

"Well, I know, if you don't!" William barked so violently that the chauffeur jumped visibly. "We're tired of standing here. Get your gas in the next town!"

He glared, too, and the chauffeur bobbed quite nimbly into his seat again and started his motor. And they were moving! Yes, they were moving on through Olmford! They were passing the fire-house now, where the ancient Zed conversed with a group of cronies, pointed frantically with his cane at the car—and then disappeared in the light dust-cloud.

They were passing the Olmford bakery and tea-room, too, with Sam Topp mercifully invisible. Joseph looked across the street. It was there; it existed; the Blyn & Wilson establishment, with the "Back in half an hour" card still sticking in the pane of the door, just as he had left it! Joseph closed his eyes for a moment; when he opened them they were spinning by the Baptist Church, with the open highway ahead and only a scattering of houses to pass now before Olmford lay behind them.

Joseph closed his eyes again and kept them closed for a little space. They and the head behind them ached rather severely.

What of their ride, up hill and down dale, through sweet-scented woods and between sunny meadows, along the edges of sparkling little rivers, past towns and little villages? Joseph's impressions were none too clear.

If the very air of Olmford had vibrated with their presence, none of the vibrations had reached either of the lovely young women who rode with them. Miss Fenelon was chatting along in her own easy, merry fashion, and Joseph—usually a conversationalist of parts—was answering her in the same detached, automatic way that had come upon him at their first meeting. Mainly also, as hitherto, his attention was upon William Wilson.

And if Joseph lacked vivacity, William did not. William was talking to Gertrude Parker, and there seemed no end to what he had to say. Closer did William come to Miss Parker as the miles reeled off behind them, and the more did he talk; and though it seemed to Joseph that Miss Parker must be talked into a state of coma, the visible fact remained that she was not displeased. She liked William.

For that matter, Joseph suspected presently, Ethelyn Fenelon was not displeased with himself. He wearied of watching William, and gave her a little more careful attention. She was infernally pretty, and she seemed to grow prettier as they rolled onward. If Joseph had never met Mary Foster, if he were not head over ears in love with Mary at this minute, and if a girl like Ethelyn had ever condescended to look at him and smile at him and talk up to him like that—why, of course, there was no telling what might have happened; but in spite of it all he was just as much in love with Mary.

Joseph's brain devoted three or four minutes to reeling, in a slow, luxurious way; he steadied it after a time, and scowled internally, and asked himself a question. He was bound to admit, in answer, that he still loved Mary just as much as ever—and another surge of terror went through him, and he stared at the landscape.

They were a long way from home now, and time was passing. Not for years had Joseph been in this particular section of his native State. He took to examining sign-boards at the crossroads, and discovered that they were rolling up to the tea-house Hoban had suggested.

Joseph squared his shoulders and smiled faintly; even though one be engaged, it is not a capital crime to lunch with another young woman than the intended bride. All this insane affair would straighten itself out; for the immediate present he understood that he was to watch Miss Fenelon across a table for an hour or so, and he admitted that there was nothing unpleasant in the prospect. He might be rather scared; he was scared now, indeed, but—

"Say! It isn't possible that you're coming to life?" William hissed, from one corner of his mouth, when Joseph had assisted his lady to the ground with a grace that matched William's own.

"Maybe!" Joseph conceded faintly.

"Stay alive!" said the stronger partner. "We're moving fast, Joe. Keep hold of my coat-tails, and we'll move faster!"

They were waiting on the tabled veranda—those two beautiful, fashionable, almost incomparable young women were waiting. Joseph straightened his white flannels and sauntered at William's side.

Nor, be it admitted in all honesty, did this newer mood dissipate as the exquisite meal progressed. Every dog, so they say, is entitled to one bite; after that he is either shot or returned to his kennel, to live on good behavior for the rest of his days. Never before had Joseph Blyn lunched at a tea-room where they charged five dollars the plate with a beautiful girl in three or four hundred dollars' worth of clothes not less than a month ahead of the mode; never, in all probability, would he do so again. But he was doing it this time, and in his own mild and somewhat timorous fashion he was enjoying the experience.

He was even regretful when the time came to start for the Hoban home once more. He sighed as he watched William, square-shouldered and haughty, address the chauffeur.

"There's another road home, isn't there?"

"The one that brings us up the other side of the mountain, sir—not the Olmford side."

"It goes through Powelton?"

"Yes, sir."

"Take it. I'll tell you where to stop in Powelton," William concluded as he stepped into the car.

They were off! Gertrude Parker and William chatted again, more briskly than before—and still with curious little lapses wherein they merely looked at each other. Miss Fenelon had fallen rather silent, and Joseph was sufficiently thankful for the fact, because he wanted to watch William once more.

William, all things considered, was getting far too familiar! William was holding the blond girl's hand. Joseph scowled at him vainly once or twice; whatever the quaint customs in Olmford, one does not hold the hand of a girl like Gertrude Parker—yet William was doing it, all unrebuked.

Joseph found his collar growing a little tighter and the neck beneath a little warmer. He scowled afresh, then, for he had caught William's:

"Gertie!"

Joseph's lips opened—and closed as rapidly. As a reward for his insolence, William had received merely one swift, terrifically soft glance, and Miss Parker was avoiding his gaze thereafter. Joseph glanced quickly at Ethelyn, by way of learning if she had heard. Miss Fenelon's great, deep eyes glowed mystically at him; the corners of her mouth moved in the smallest, most wistful little smile.

It meant something. Just what it meant Joseph did not know, nor was he speculating. They were on their way back now, and it behooved him to do some planning for the immediate future; because there was going to be a future of the most immediate kind, and, unless his judgment of the male element in the Beard and Foster families was all askew, it would be packed with exciting incident.

William had passed all reasoning; whatever planning was done would have to be done by the senior partner. He gazed from the window and noted that they were entering the brisk little city of Powelton. He gazed at William, and observed that that person, his whole-souled attention having left Miss Parker for a moment, was raising the chauffeur's speaking-tube. He heard:

"I say! There's a jewelry store three or four blocks down this main street—you'll know it when you see the big gold clock at the curb. Stop there."

He dropped the tube, and pursued his low-toned conversation, glancing up only when the car swerved into the curb and stopped in its pleasantly jarless fashion.

He winked slyly at Joseph then, did William.

"Come with me, will you?" he asked.

"Where?"

"Just to look at the tires, Joe," chuckled the junior partner, as he opened the door.

"But what—"

"Don't ask so many questions—just come," William said playfully. "The girls will excuse our deserting them for a minute or two."

He was out and waiting. Joseph started into action and followed, hurriedly and with new hope stirring in his bosom—for in a way he felt that he understood. William desired a few minutes of private conversation, by way of determining just what they had best do next; in point of fact, his madness was wearing off and William was returning to his reasonably sound senses.

Or—was he? Just now, having strode quite grandly through the door as the small page held it open, William was swaggering down the aisle of the jewelry establishment, past the silverware, past the display of purses and prettily mounted bags and beads of moderate price, straight to the show-cases devoted to diamonds!

William, despite the request pasted on the under side of the plate glass, leaned his elbows on the show-case and smiled faint condescension at the proprietor.

"Solitaires!" said William.

"Rings, sir?"

"Two!" said the president of the Sandia Copper Company.

"For a lady?" queried the proprietor, with a significant little smile, as he opened the back of the case.

"For two ladies!" William corrected.

A glittering tray was laid upon the plate glass. The proprietor's smile expanded.

"Now, at about what price, sir?" he hazarded.

"Not 'at about' any price," William said sharply. "I want the finest thing you have in stock at five hundred dollars—no more, no less. Apiece, that is, of course. Nothing off color in any way—nothing that isn't mounted in platinum—nothing a man has to apologize for later. Understand?"

"I think so, sir," the jeweler murmured pleasantly.

He turned a critical eye upon his stock, selected one ring and then another, and laid them on a little square of black velvet.

"There!" he said contentedly. "If you wish, you may hunt the world over before buying here; but I'll guarantee that you will not find two diamonds any finer or more beautiful than that pair at one thousand dollars!"

William picked them up, frowned blackly at them, shook them and watched them shimmer.

"They're not at all bad," he conceded—"not at all."

The jeweler merely bowed assent. William scowled on—and then turned to his friend with a slight, supercilious smile.

"Not half bad, old chap, are they?" he murmured. "And notice the sagacity of our friend here. One of them's considerably smaller than the other. I believe they'll do. Put them in separate boxes, please—or just put that smaller one in a box. I'll drop this one right in my pocket. Now you want—what was it? Oh, yes, just an even thousand."

Absently, boredly even, he felt in his vest, failed to find what he wanted, inspected his trousers pocket, and produced the bills so remarkably collected about Hoban's library table. Boredly, too, he counted them.

"Just!" he murmured. "Fortunate!"

And now the jewelry person, visibly impressed, had gathered up the money and was speeding to the rear of his store with the smaller ring; and Joseph tottered close to his friend and in a low, hoarse voice inquired:

"Say! What the—what did you buy them for, Bill?"

"I thought they might come in handy if we wanted to write our names on a pane of glass, William replied airily, and poked the ribs of his associate.

"No, I—"

"Oh, I'm not blowing you to anything; you'll pay me for yours when you get that check cashed, Joe."

"*Mine?*"

"Certainly. I'm having that smaller one wrapped for you. You might lose it if you took it without a box. I'll need mine sooner than you'll need yours, anyway."

"Listen, Bill!" pleaded Joseph. "I'm beginning to get it—at least, I think I am. But you're not lunatic enough to think that you're going to—that I'm going to—I mean that you even think of—of asking Miss—"

"Here's your ring, Joseph!" William broke in brightly, as he thrust it upon him. "Be careful of it!"

The proprietor was bowing them out. William, in his present exalted state, did not even glance at him. He was steering Joseph out of the establishment again—and to the curb and into the car.

"Whatever did you buy in there?" Miss Fenelon dimpled as the motor started.

"Aha!" said William, and turned to Miss Parker. "Now! What was I saying before?"

Whatever it may have been, he had no difficulty in picking up the thread once more. Joseph gazed at him for a long time and wondered. Joseph, eventually, found himself put to the necessity of answering Miss Fenelon and turned his gaze in her lovely direction.

And she *was* lovely! She was more darkly perfect, more superbly beautiful, than any girl— Just there Joseph caught himself angrily. Once before on this same ride he had thought all those things, had he not? He had determined also that, despite Ethelyn, has was just as much in love with Mary Foster as ever. Well, his affection for Mary had not dwindled one

particle; his only real ambition at this moment was to see the last of Miss Fenelon and everything connected with her and to make his difficult way back into the good graces of Mary.

However, though a man may feel himself plighted to one sweet girl for all eternity, the condition does not presuppose him to be stone blind. Not necessarily endowed with the soul of an artist, Joseph could hardly be expected to fail in appreciation of Miss Fenelon's charms. A sudden pang of regret shot through him—just a small pang and not at all traitorous or reprehensible, but a pang nevertheless. Why had he not been born to this elevated circle in the first place? Why, in the perfectly natural and respectable order of things, could he not have encountered a girl like Ethelyn, whose midnight eyes sent shivers all through one, whose— Again Joseph caught himself. He also scowled and blushed a trifle; his mind must be weakening much as William's had weakened, if he could sit here and think rot like that!

He glared at the speeding roadside for a time and found that they were making quick progress on the homeward route. Shadows were growing longer, grades were becoming steeper, and the landscape much more familiar. They were so near the Hoban place, to be sure, that when they had taken the five-mile grade into the shallow valley they would be at the foot of the Hoban mountain.

And when they had climbed it the ride would be over, and once the ride was over Joseph resolved to disappear for a while and think matters out. Even on an unusual day like this, one can have a severe headache and insist on lying down for an hour or so. Joseph even sighed heavily and wearily several times, by way of serving notice of the headache he was presently to acquire, but they gave no heed to his sighs.

Miss Fenelon was watching her girl friend—and the girl friend had ceased to smile so frequently these last few miles. Gertrude, in fact, had grown quite preoccupied; and when the car finally came to a standstill before the Hoban door Joseph fancied that she peered quite sharply at Fenelon, who walked up and down before the house.

He welcomed them with his quick, strained smile and spoke through the cloud of cigarette smoke that seemed literally a part of his anatomy.

"Er—Hoban wishes to see you, I believe," said he. "Either now or a little later—I'm not sure which. Will one of you go and ask him?"

"I will!" Joseph volunteered swiftly.

Miss Parker pouted at William.

"*You're* not going, too?"

"I'm not attending to business to-day!" William said, merrily. "Not that kind of business, anyway. Shall we walk down by—"

Joseph heard no more. He was hurrying down the corridor and all but gasping a great relief. It might be nonsense, but under the spell of those Ethelyn eyes a strange, delicious uneasiness was welling up in him that demanded but one sane course: escape! He yearned to hold private speech with Hoban, too, with William somewhere else. He desired a definite answer on the matter of his recent restraint and, since being treasurer of one of these things is a rather serious matter, there were several things he wished to ask about the Sandia Copper Company.

Thus it will be seen that, mentally, Joseph made some progress in his little trip down the corridor. He opened the door of the study without knocking and with a firm hand. He cleared his throat and paused to look over the situation.

Parker was puffing like a spent locomotive and walking up and down one side of the table. Hoban, who seemed to be in a temper, was walking on the other side. At a typewriter desk in the corner, the gigantic young Mr. Sefton pounded frantically at the keys of his machine—and Hoban, having discerned Joseph, was striding down upon him with:

"Out of here!"

"But—"

"I told you there'd be no more business to-day," the millionaire pursued, and though he smiled his tone was very firm indeed. "Unfortunately, I'm forced to

amend that a little. A lot of fool mail has been sent up here from the Sandia office and I'm attending to the urgent part myself. You'll have to sign some of the letters and Wilson some of them, but I'll send for you when they're ready and, until then —stay in the air!"

"But if I—"

"You can't—or you don't—or whatever it is!" Hoban laughed, and pushed him from the room. "Go and amuse yourself, lad!"

It seemed to Joseph that the key turned, too, and for a moment he was minded to try the knob again—but in the end he turned away and walked slowly back to the main corridor of the home. Queer? Oh, yes, it was decidedly queer, this thing of being hurled out of the affairs of a company that has named one treasurer. And on the other hand, it might be quite all right. Joseph did not know. The time had come, at any rate, to take his perturbed head up-stairs and do some door-locking on his own account. Joseph headed past the big, open doorway on his journey to the stairs and—

"Oh! Where are you going?" Miss Fenelon's voice inquired disappointedly.

"I—I thought I—" Joseph stammered.

"Come and walk with me. I'm all alone."

"Why—Bill and—that other lady—"

"Oh, they've deserted me," Miss Fenelon laughed. You, too?"

Her head was tilted to one side. Her remarkable eyes sparkled at him. As a man in a dream, Joseph floated out of the house and to her side—and Ethelyn's arm was through his own and they were moving.

"Let's go down by the lake," she suggested. "There's the dearest little rose arbor there, where we can sit until tea's ready. Shall we?"

"We'll do—just as you like!" Joseph said huskily.

Humming softly, apparently grown rather pensive, the wonder maiden led the way. Across a broad stretch of lawn they went and then into a thickly shrubbed byway for a little. Ahead of them the little lake glittered like a fairy pool, too shiny and perfect and attractive to be quite real; beside them now, on either hand, June roses bloomed by the thousands—and their perfume mounted to Joseph's abused brain and set it reeling slightly once more.

And here was the arbor itself, bosky in its wealth of leaves and flowers, and over there the coziest and most secluded little bench. Miss Fenelon settled upon it with a long, quivering sigh. Joseph faltered to his place beside her—and a deep, enchanted silence descended upon them.

This is merely a corner of the arbor. Beyond them the overgrown rustic woodwork twisted and turned, gracefully and mysteriously, for Hoban's landscape gardener had been an artist. There were other nooks and other benches somewhere.

Joseph started. Over there, through layers and layers of leaves, something yellow had stirred. It was the merest patch of color, yet the color was one he had learned this afternoon. The thing that had stirred was the hair on Gertrude's superb head.

And a voice had grown audible—and it was William's voice!

"—Queer, perhaps, but I know *you* won't think it's queer, Gertie! I know *you* understand me, as nobody understood me before."

"Why, that's Bill!" Joseph exclaimed.

"Hush!" breathed Miss Fenelon.

"—Not afraid, even now to ask you to marry me!" the voice went on. "Gertie! Will you? Will you believe that I love you so that—"

For some reason, the voice died out. The stirring came again. The yellow patch disappeared altogether. It was replaced by the white of William's sleeve!

"Gertie, I can't believe it!" William cried. "It doesn't seem possible for one man to have so much luck in one day!"

"Hey!" Joseph choked amazedly. "*He proposed to her!*"

Miss Fenelon's steady, smiling, upturned gaze, so fathomless was it, gave pause to his very breathing.

"Yes—*he* proposed to *her!*" she whispered.

"Yes, but—but she accepted him!" Joseph gulped.

"Well? Why not?" quivered from Miss Fenelon's full lips.

She seemed to be coming nearer and nearer. A giant thrill racked its way through Joseph Blyn, finding visible expression in his strange, sudden facial contortion which gave Joseph precisely the appearance of a gentleman about to burst into tears. Before him the whole world swam and danced, crazily, gloriously. Somewhere out in the general confusion there was a slender, soft, warm hand. Joseph gripped it. There was another hand, he discovered. He gripped that, too. And he was slipping, slipping, slipping—nor had he the slightest desire to stop slipping.

"Eth—Ethelyn!" Joseph gasped. "You don't mean that—you can't mean that you'd—ever—"

He was incapable of even one more gasp! The earth, usually so steady and dependable, spun from its axis at just that point and turned upside down. There remained only two great, dark eyes that came nearer and still nearer. There was a voice in space:

"Oh, Joe! *Joe!*" it breathed.

And there was something around Joseph's neck and there was a palpitant something in Joseph's arms!

CHAPTER XII.

ALL IN THE FAMILY.

JOSEPH closed his eyes and squinted hard for several seconds; he forced them open again and rather mistily discerned the rose-arbor, the lake beyond and —the something in his arms.

Not a detail of the whole dumfounding experience had been imagination. Ethelyn was there, her own arm about his neck, her head pillowed upon his shoulder as if she had found a long-sought haven of blissful repose!

And it was wrong! For a man engaged to Mary Foster to lose himself and—and cut up like this was—or was it? Joseph tried hard to think and failed completely. Perchance it was not wrong at all. Perchance Bill had been correct from the very beginning. Perchance this was all their natural due, deftly arranged by Destiny, and the whole past an unworthy nightmare?

Yes, that was the way to look at it! Joseph swallowed and nodded and smiled uncannily.

"Ethelyn!" Joseph exploded.

"Dear?" whispered the lovely young woman.

"I never—never thought—"

"You *knew!*" Miss Fenelon said accusingly, and lowered her lids uptil the adoration of her gaze bade fair to engulf his wits again!

"I didn't!" Joseph corrected. "But I —know now and—that's enough!"

He drew her to him. He was about to kiss her, with all the elemental fervor of his being! He had an impression that he must have done this before, in the first of the excitement, but there was no clear recollection of the proceeding, as there should have been. Then Joseph hesitated suddenly. There was an indefinable suggestion about Miss Fenelon that she did not wish to be kissed, even in this happy moment!

Joseph relaxed uncomfortably. Doubtless they did not go about such things in that crude manner in her circle and—he brightened quickly and dived into his coat-pocket. Agitatedly, as he tossed an expensive little white kid box over his shoulder and into the thicket, he snatched Miss Fenelon's left hand.

"Ethelyn!" Joseph said breathlessly, as he pushed a glittering circlet down its finger. "Y' like it?"

Miss Fenelon started, ever so prettily. She also drew back, her eyes sparkling.

"And you didn't know!" she cried.

"I thought — maybe — I didn't dare think—"

"Oh, you're such a dear, funny boy!" Miss Fenelon informed him, and abruptly snuggled down to his shoulder once more.

Well it was, to be sure, a very pleasing and very astonishing situation all around. Joseph took a deep breath and brought Miss Fenelon closer to him, and she sighed contentedly.

"And so we're to be married and live happily ever after!" her low, exquisitely musical undertone said dreamily.

"Er—yep!" Joseph agreed.

"Where are you going to take me?"

"When?"

"On our honeymoon, silly!;"

"I—I hadn't worked around to planning for that yet!" the prospective bridegroom gasped.

"There's such a dear little villa just outside of Florence," the young woman murmured on. "We had it for a while two years ago. We can take that for the fall and then go on to Paris and—"

"Yes, if—if I can get away from business!" Joseph put in hastily.

"Oh, but you can. Mr. Hoban will arrange it. He said he'd taken you under his wing—and you know what that means!"

"What—does it mean?" Joseph managed.

"Why, that you'll be a millionaire in no time, if you're not that already," the girl laughed, plainly astonished at the question's absurdity. "When he sponsors a person, that person's future is settled."

"Is that a fact?" the senior partner asked, quite thickly.

"But of course it is! He—oh, you're trying to tease me. You know it better than I do!" Miss Fenelon stated.

One long delicious sigh fluttered from Joseph's lips. He settled down more comfortably. His smile, a wild, glorified expression, grew fixed. Plainly, all freakish appearances notwithstanding, he was in the right place after all! Inside of Joseph a great surge of feverish gratitude took shape gratitude toward good old Bill. Bill, a wiser man than Joseph, had been absolutely right about everything. Only Bill's strong hand—and Hoban's precautions—had prevented Joseph's racing affrightedly away from it all and losing such a stroke of fortune as comes to one man in a million just once in a lifetime. Another great sigh came from him; and then he stirred suddenly.

"Psst!" said he, and sought to detach himself. "Somebody's coming!"

"Well? What of it?" tinkled from Miss Fenelon, who remained quite brazenly as she was. "It's only Gertie and your friend. Why should we move for *them?*"

"That's right—why?" cried Joseph, with a shaky laugh, and caught her to him. And he stared at William, who approached with Miss Parker leaning upon him.

"Well?" Joseph cried, quite boisterously. "*Well?*"

William halted, grinning widely.

"Upon my word!" he exclaimed. "You don't mean to say—"

"Oh, yes, we do!" Joseph answered blithely. "It's all settled here!"

Miss Parker clasped her beautiful hands in utter amazement.

"Why, it isn't possible!" she cried. "You two haven't discovered that you were made for one another, *too?*"

"*Too?*" chuckled Joseph.

"We made the discovery about ten minutes ago, Gertie and I," said William.

"Well, you didn't beat us to it by more than thirty seconds!" Joseph answered, and rose with a new dignity, although his knees wabbled slightly. "Miss—Miss Fenelon has consented to marry me and—"

"Ethelyn!" Miss Parker cried, explosively, and bounded to her friend—and her friend bounded up and toward Miss Parker, so that for a little space the two young women merely hugged each other and chattered, and, possibly, sniffed just a little.

William, the while, surveyed his partner with the first sign of real commendation.

"I'll have to hand it to you," he said simply. "I didn't think you had it in you!"

"I did, though!" Joseph grinned.

"What'll this start, when we tell them, up at the house?" William observed just a shade uneasily.

"Nothing that can do any damage," said the new Joseph. "The best thing to do is to go and find out."

Can there be any adequate description of the walk to the Hoban home. Magic old as the world, new as the morning dew, enshrouded them. It seemed to Joseph that he had floated away from the dreary earth and attained the realm of eternal happiness—nor did Wiliam seem to greatly dissatisfied with himself and with conditions in general.

And there was Henry Hoban on the side veranda, watching their approach and smiling quizzically as he gnawed his cigar.

"I've been looking for you two young men," he said. "The girls haven't been boring you, I infer?"

"Not exactly," William responded. We've been putting in the odd minutes in getting ourselves engaged."

"Eh?"

"All around, you know," added William, as he drew Miss Parker to him and indicated Joseph and Miss Fenelon with a nod.

"You — can't mean — engaged to — to marry?" Hoban stammered.

"Why not?" asked William.

"It has happened before, hasn't it?" Joseph laughed, quite pertly!

"Yes, I—I believe I've heard of something of the kind," the lord of the manor confessed. "But—oh, it's downright incredible!"

A great laugh came from him. William and Joseph waited serenely until his mirth came to an end with Hoban's breathless:

"Well, I—I'm sure that I congratulate you both! I—yes, and the girls, too. Their—er—people couldn't ask a finer or better pair of husbands. But the—the suddenness of the thing!"

William smiled very shrewdly.

"It's the suddenness of a thing, every now and then, that puts it over with such a successful smash, isn't it?" he inquired.

"Eh?" said Hoban, and considered him for perhaps two seconds with a most peculiar smile. "Yes, I believe it is, Wilson—I'm strongly inclined to agree with the notion. Well—let's see. You've fairly floored me for a moment, but I believe that your attention's required in the library for a little. Can you—er—force yourselves into business for ten minutes?"

"Anything that needs attention, gets it!" smiled William Wilson, and with a final, lingering pressure of her hand he turned from the lady who had so rapidly replaced Kate Beard.

Inwardly, too, he chuckled as they passed down the corridor with the now meditative Hoban. The wealthy gentleman admired speed and punch, vim and aggressiveness and all that sort of thing, did he? Well, they had given him a little demonstration of these qualities, as applied to their private lives, which had impressed him visibly and given him just a hint of what might be expected from them in a business way. Yes, they had jarred Mr. Hoban quite satisfactorily, for his expression was still bewildered as he opened the library door.

At his typewriter desk, Sefton was bunching loose papers. Parker and Fenelon sitting at either side of the big table, started up as the trio entered and then settled down again, with that peculiarly nervous and jumpy effect which Joseph had noted earlier and to which he gave no heed just now.

Sefton smiled and nodded at his employer.

"The letters are all—"

"Let them wait for a moment," Hoban interposed. "Parker, we—er—have some news for you. Mr. Wilson here—and your niece, Gertrude. They're announcing their engagement in a day or two."

"Eh?" Parker puffed, as he stared quite blankly. "What's that?"

"Just the latest bulletin from these two young live wires," Hoban went on smoothly, as he laid a hand on William's shoulder and another on Joseph's. "And a bit of good news for you, Fenelon: Ethelyn has consented to marry our friend Joseph Blyn and—"

"What the devil are you talking about?" Fenelon cried, savagely.

"Their engagement, my boy—Ethelyn's and Joseph's."

"Well, that—that's preposterous!" Ethelyn's father shouted, in quite the approved fashion. "I'll stand for some things, Hoban, but I'm damned if I'll permit that—"

"Fenelon!" Hoban's voice was as a surgeon's knife, slicing off the Fenelon bump of excitement. "You're a very fortunate man. Don't you think you're a very fortunate man, in having a prospective son-in-law like this?"

"I—I—yes, I—suppose so!" Mr. Fenelon choked, ever so strangely, as he dropped back in his chair.

"But—by gad!" cried Mr. Parker, as the idea seemed to reach him. "That's too much! If you've permitted—"

"Young folks will be young folks!" Hoban froze the gentleman with his hard stare. "Who are we to object, if they move a little faster than they did in our day? We are nobody at all; so we might as well rejoice with them. Have we re-

joiced enough now? Then let's get to business!"

Well, there had been no handshaking, but William was well enough satisfied. All in due time, the elder gentlemen would come around with their felicitations; for the moment business demanded that they forget all about the elder gentlemen—save Hoban, of course, who indicated the two neat little piles of letters, freshly typewritten, which his secretary was placing on the table.

"Well, there's your job, Wilson," said Sefton's employer. "Just sign that bunch, please. You are over there, Blyn."

Joseph coughed quite importantly and seated himself.

"Personal letterheads — so soon!" he cried.

"Oh, yes, I had some struck off for you," Hoban said, indifferently. "Do you want to read through the letters, Blyn? They're just routine junk of the company —nothing that can interest you."

"Well, I feel like interesting things this afternoon," said Joseph, as he signed his name flowingly to the first and pushed it aside, "so I won't bother reading them. They're all right, of course?"

"I dictated them myself, Blyn," Hoban remarked mildly.

Joseph signed on. William, watching him as he went forward with his own signing, chuckled afresh. Joseph was all over the shock now and had turned quite human; why, the way he was sitting back, while Sefton gathered up the papers and blotted the last few signatures, would have done credit to the president of a bank.

Hoban was smiling at him, too, and patting his shoulder, albeit he addressed William.

"And that's really all the business you'll have to bother with to-day," he said. "Now—out with you!"

Joseph smiled comfortably.

"Why not give us a general idea of this Sandia—"

"To-morrow!" Hoban declared firmly. "For the rest of this day: outdoors! Move on, young men! We'll join you for tea in ten minutes or so."

He opened the door and pointed, with mock majesty, to the outer regions. William, with a little laugh, sauntered out, his arm linked in Joseph's—and the door closed again.

As to their general direction, neither seemed to have the slightest doubt. They had left Miss Parker and Miss Fenelon near the side veranda; they drifted back to the side veranda as naturally and swiftly as the needle of the compass finds the northerly direction.

And Miss Parker and Miss Fenelon were absent. Over there, beneath the big maple, a wicker tea-table had been added to the collection of lawn furniture; William contemplated it approvingly as they approached and sighed luxuriously as they settled upon the larger settee.

"Think of it, Joe!" William muttered. "This morning—what were we?"

"Just two plumbers, Bill," Joseph said, in some awe.

"Just a couple of second-rate mechanics doing a two-cent business in a one-cent Connecticut town and thanking Heaven because we'd cleared a couple of thousand dollars by working like dogs for a whole year! A whole year!"

Joseph nodded.

"And we were slated to marry a couple of—nice, of course, but—ordinary country girls and then settle down in a couple of little wooden houses in Olmford, and probably never get more than fifty miles from Olmford till the day we died! And look at us now!"

"It's—hard to believe, isn't it?" Joseph murmured, for somehow, with the spell of Ethelyn's eyes removed, a certain faint, frightened feeling was stirring within him now.

"Not for me," chuckled William. "Think of it, Joe! We're going to marry a couple of society beauties! We're going to settle down in a suite of offices that cost —oh, around twenty or twenty-five thousand dollars a year, I suppose. We'll have clerks and giddy little stenographers and all that sort of thing. We're going to travel, too.

"Where?"

"All over the country during the summer, for one thing," William announced.

"Of course, this Sandia concern's about the biggest thing of its kind in the United States, but all the same, I'll be hanged if I'm going to be any chair-warming president of it; I've got to look all these properties over for myself and see precisely what they are and how the men are working and whether we've got efficient managers and all that. Hoban has a private car. We'll borrow that, of course."

He indulged in a deep, delighted sigh, did William.

"I'm pretty good, Joe?" he asked.

"You're a wonder, Bill!"

"I started it all?"

"Yes."

"And I carried you through by main force till you came to your senses! If it hadn't been for me, you'd still be trying to hide in Olmford?"

"I guess that's true, Bill," Joseph confessed, unsmilingly.

"Well, it's all right, old man!" William said magnificently, and patted the knee of his old friend in the kindest way. "You've nothing to thank me for; remember that. I'd do more than this for you. All I want is to see you make a few million dollars and get somewhere. Hey! What are you groaning about *now?*"

"I'm not groaning," Joseph smiled nervously. "Only, sitting here, Bill, I—I've got the funniest feeling. I don't know what it is, but I feel as if something awful was going to happen and—"

"Oh! You were born that way," William smiled, relievedly. "You'll get over all that in a day or two and—here they come!"

"The girls?" cried Joseph.

"The old birds!" William chuckled irreverently.

Smoking and chatting, the trio crossed the lawn—Hoban and Parker and the cigarette-consumer, Fenelon. They, too, had finished with business for the day, it seemed; they lounged into their chairs, smiling, and Hoban even permitted himself a stretch of the most infernal order and a wide-mouthed yawn.

"Well—it has been a big day!" he observed. "For this household, at any rate."

"Anything that we've been able to contribute toward making it a big day—" William began, genially.

"Oh, the honors aren't all yours!" Mr. Hoban chuckled. "Mrs. Duncan, my housekeeper here, has made even a bigger find than I made in you two!"

"Yes?"

"*Maids!*" cried the master of the house laughingly. "The rarest thing in the whole world these days, real flesh and blood maids—and she's captured two or three of 'em in a bunch!"

"I had no idea there were that many left on earth," Fenelon remarked.

"Neither had I, but there are, because she got 'em!" Hoban glanced at his watch. "Where the deuce are they, by the way? Tea's supposed to be quite a prompt affair here and—"

"Hush!" said Mr. Fenelon. "They're coming! Don't offend 'em, Hoban!"

His eyes moved significantly in the direction of the house. Mr. Hoban subsided quite abruptly. William, who had quite enjoyed this little satirical chat on the subject of domestic help, laughed outright at its climax—laughed loudly, indeed, and then, as if some one had thrown a switch and cut off the motive power behind his merriment, stopped laughing!

His gaze was toward the house. Not with tremendous interest, Joseph followed its course; and Joseph, too, sat just as William sat, which was with the general effect of a man unexpectedly frozen solid.

Because they were indeed coming—two trim little maids in black, with the smartest little aprons and the smartest little white caps. They had left a smaller door toward the rear of the house and they were crossing the lawn even at this moment, one of them with a tray of size, the other with a tea service.

Nor was there anything particularly startling in this, of course; the startling part came when one reached the faces, rosy and pretty, of the two young women who had entered the Hoban household. For one of these faces was that of Mary Foster, while the other was undubitably the personal property of Miss Kate Beard!

(To be continued NEXT WEEK.)

The Time Professor

by Ray Cummings

TUBBY pushed his coffee-cup away from him and stared at his questioner aggressively.

"'Tain't so," he declared.

"I ain't saying it is. I'm telling you what the book said. 'Time has no beginning and no ending.' That's what it said. 'No beginning and ending.'" He rolled out the phrase pleasantly.

"'Tain't so," Tubby repeated. "Anyway, it's all a fool argument."

"He's right on that, Jake," the second man put in. "It ain't got much sense, none of it."

They were sitting over their dinner at a little table on a gingerbread terrace of stucco. A string of colored electric-light bulbs stretched above them. Behind was the restaurant. Over the ornate parapet beside them Coney Island lay spread out, gaudy and alluring. The lights of a huge Ferris wheel loomed up into the sky; the splash of the "shoot-the-shoots" mingled with the music of a "merry-go-round" near at hand. A gentle breeze off the ocean fanned their flushed faces; it was a hot summer night, and they had eaten overheavily.

The first man returned to the attack.

"Who said it had sense? *I* didn't. *I* said I read it in print. 'Time has no beginning and no ending.' That's all *I* said."

"You're right, Jake. That's all you said," agreed the second man.

"And furthermore, and in the next place," the first man went on complacently, "you ain't got no knowledge to say it ain't so. You don't even know what time is. Do you, now?"

"Huh?" said Tubby.

"I said you don't even know what time is. Do you? Say, what's the matter with you? Are you deaf?"

Tubby blinked up his heavy eyelids with an effort. "No, I ain't deef. I heard you."

"He says he heard you, Jake," said the second man..

"I *do* know what time is," Tubby declared. He paused. "Time," he added slowly — "time is what keeps everything from happening at once. I know *that*—I seen it in print, too."

The first man stared in awe.

"Ain't I right?" added Tubby. He saw his advantage and pushed it. "I ast you. Ain't I right, or am I? That's all."

"He's right, Jake," said the second man.

Tubby sat up with dignity, enjoying his victory. "And furthermore," he continued impressively, "Time *has* got beginning and ending, and I can prove it."

"He says he can prove it, Jake," the second man elucidated.

"Ain't every minute got sixty seconds?" Tubby demanded.

"Yes," the first man admitted reluctantly.

"And ain't every hour got sixty minutes?"

"Course it has," said the first man. "Go on."

"Then when you come to the first minute you *begin* the hour, and when you use up the *last* minute you come to the end of the hour. Don't you?"

"You do, Jake," said the second man.

"Well, then," said Tubby triumphantly, "an hour is time, ain't it? And if it has a beginning and a ending, then time has too. Hasn't it? That's logic. Ain't I right?"

"He's right, Jake," said the second man.

The first man passed his hand over his eyes wearily. "I ain't saying what *I* think," he began.

"And furthermore, and notwithstanding," Tubby went on. "And besides that and in the next place—"

The first man threw down his napkin and rose to his feet. "I'm going," he declared. "We're all through here."

They left the restaurant and mingled with the joyous crowd in the street below.

"What 'll we do?" asked the first man. He looked at his watch. "It's twenty to nine. We ain't got much time."

A raucous voice reached them from over the heads of the crowd. "Come on in, gents and ladies. Step right in and see the mar*vee*leous monster — ten cents, with his head where his tail ought to be. Right from the banks of the Limpopo River—the great, gray, green, greasy Limpopo River, gents. Thirteen feet from the crown of his head to the tip of his tail, and thirteen feet back again, making a grand total of tweeenty-six feet."

"Bunk," said the first man. "Come on over here."

A huge lurid red electric sign stared down at them.

"Let's try that," Tubby suggested.

"That might be good," the second man agreed.

They pushed forward and bought their tickets.

A narrow stream of smooth-flowing water rippled past, carrying little blunt-nosed, flat-bottomed boats at intervals into the yawning, black throat of a tunnel. They waited, and finally clambered into an empty boat and settled themselves comfortably. Tubby sat alone on the front seat; its soft leather cushions pillowed him luxuriously. He sighed and rested his head against the back of the seat. The boat started off, sliding forward silently in the sluggish current. They turned a corner; the boat grated gently against the wooden side of the mill-race and entered Stygian blackness.

Tubby blinked confusedly. Then he sighed again and closed his eyes. It was all very calm and peaceful. The lapping water soothed him; a cool breeze from down the tunnel fanned his moist forehead.

A finger pressed into the back of his neck.

"Don't go to sleep," whispered a voice behind him. "We'll be in hell in a minute."

"Don't let him go to sleep, Jake," another voice whispered anxiously.

They rounded another corner. Tubby opened his eyes. Off to the left a red glow lighted up the gray canvas rocks. They floated forward into a vast cavern, lighted by red fires that Tubby could not see. The smell of sulfur was in the air. Tubby coughed and shook himself, a little thrill of fright running down his spine. Somebody was sitting beside him. That was funny, he had thought he was alone on the seat.

He turned toward his companion. It was a man—the longest, thinnest man Tubby had ever seen. He sat hunched forward, his back bent like a question-mark. His feet were jammed against the front of the boat and his knees extended upward almost to his chin.

Tubby felt very sorry for this fellow voyager. He looked so uncomfortable.

"You can't see very well over them knees, can you?" he whispered solicitously.

The man turned slowly toward him. Tubby thought he had never seen so sad a face before. It was long and thin, and seamed with folds of loose skin. It needed

a shave, Tubby thought; and its eyes were pale and watery looking. A thin wisp of scraggly hair was above the face; and below protruded a perfectly enormous Adam's apple. Tubby stared at it fascinated, for it bobbed up and down as though the man were swallowing rapidly.

"I don't want to see—particularly," said the man softly. His voice was deep and throaty—so throaty Tubby thought he was going to cry.

"I'm not interested in seeing *this*—I've been waiting to see *you*."

He *was* crying. In the lurid red light Tubby could see plainly two big tears that rolled down the seams of his leathery face; and the Adam's apple bobbed even more furiously.

Tubby swallowed hard. He put out his hand and touched the man's elbow—a round, bony knob underneath the sleeve of his black alpaca coat.

"I'm sorry I couldn't come no sooner," he whispered back sympathetically.

The man smiled sadly. His thin blue lips parted and showed Tubby two yellow teeth placed diagonally opposite each other above and below.

"We needn't be sorry now," said the man. "You're here at last, and I'm glad." He caught one of the tears on his fingertip and wiped it off on his sleeve.

"Yes," said Tubby. "I'm here, Mister —Mister—"

"My name is Waning Glory," said the man. "I'm a professor."

"Mine is Tubby. Pleased to meet you, Mr. Waning."

"Not Waning. Call me Glory." Two other tears welled out from under his red eyelids.

"Mr. Glory," Tubby hastened to correct. "Pleased to meet you."

His companion looked relieved. They shook hands. Tubby could feel the bony fingers crack under his grasp.

"I'm a professor," the man repeated impressively. "A Professor of Time."

"Of what?" asked Tubby.

"A Professor of Time. That's why I've been waiting to see you."

Tubby pondered this a moment. "Why have you been waiting to see me?"

"Because you are the only man in the world who can appreciate me."

"I do," said Tubby. "Why should I?"

"Because I am a Time Professor. And you and I are the only living beings who know what Time is."

Tubby's chest expanded. "*I* know. Time is what keeps everything from happening at once."

The professor's taloned hand rested lovingly on Tubby's fat little shoulder. "You are so very clever. It has been worth waiting for you so long. We are two sympathetic souls. We will become rich and famous together—you and I."

"Yes," said Tubby. "How?"

"I'll tell you. And you must listen very closely. I am a very wonderful man. I've made the greatest discovery since the beginning of the world."

"We're both wonderful," said Tubby. "What did you discover?"

The professor stood up, balancing himself gingerly in the little boat. "First we must go ashore," he said. "I can tell you better there."

They had reached the center of an enormous cavern. Red sulfurous fumes issued from the rocks all about. The professor gripped a rock as they passed, and stopped the boat. In a moment more they were ashore and the boat had floated on out of sight around another bend.

"This looks like hell," said the professor. He smiled, then frowned with concern. "Excuse me. I was not swearing. I mean—"

"It is hell," Tubby interrupted. "I paid ten cents to get here."

They sat down on the ground with their backs against the rock. The professor folded himself up like a jack-knife with his face against his knees.

"All my life," he began slowly. "Ever since I was a little boy I have been studying to find out what Time really is. You and every one else on earth are its slaves. It controls you; it rules your life—and in the end it kills you. Do you follow me?"

"Yes—no," said Tubby.

The professor went on in the same monotonous voice. "I wanted to conquer Time; but first I had to understand its ele-

ments. I have done that. I know *all* about it now."

"Yes," said Tubby. "What good does it do you?"

The professor hugged his knees closer. "You *are* a practical man. I like practical men. But first I must make you understand the elements of Time."

"Yes," said Tubby. "Go on."

The professor lifted his head and fixed his pale eyes on Tubby's face. "You must listen carefully. First I want you to conceive Time as a river flowing ceaselessly past, always at the same rate of speed. There is the river." He pointed at the little mill-race babbling at their feet.

Tubby nodded.

"This River of Time comes from the Beginning and flows onward to Eternity. We sit on the bank and watch it pass—the passing of Time. Do you understand?"

"Yes," said Tubby. "Go on."

"Now on this River of Time there are boats floating along with its current. These boats are all the same distance apart, and they never change their positions."

"How far apart?"

The professor smiled again. "That depends. The boats mark the passage of Time. Some are for the seconds—little ones—others for the minutes, hours, days, and so on. But they are always the same distance apart. Now do you understand?"

"No—yes," said Tubby. "Go on."

"These boats are started on their voyage by the Creator. Each of them carry events—the things that are going to happen. These coming events float down the River of Time until they reach the place on earth where they are predestined to act. Then they leave the boat, and the events occur on earth."

Tubby frowned. "I ain't with you now."

"I shall be more explicit," said the professor. "You see the boats there on the river?"

Tubby noticed now an endless procession of shadowy little shapes floating past. He nodded.

"Now let us take the event of your birth, for instance. The Creator decided, let us suppose, that you were to be born on a certain minute of the—"

"December third," said Tubby.

"December third, of the year—"

"Eighteen eighty-five," Tubby prompted him.

"All right," said the professor. "Now, then, we'll say you were to be born exactly at noon on—"

"Midnight," Tubby corrected. "Exactly at midnight."

The professor shifted his feet and frowned. "You're a methodical man. I like methodical men. Let us get on.

"When the Creator decided you were to be born at midnight on December third, eighteen eighty-five at—"

"Tomsville, New Hampshire," said Tubby.

"—He put the event of your birth in the boat that was destined to reach that place at that exact time. For countless eons that boat floated onward until at that moment of that day it reached Tomsville—and you were born."

"Yes," said Tubby. "I was born at Tomsville."

"Now further up the river—how far we do not know—there is another boat bearing the event of your death. When it reaches the predestined place at the predestined time, you will die. Then you will step into the boat and float on down into eternity. Do you understand?"

"Yes—no," said Tubby.

The professor went on imperturbably. "Now between those two boats—your birth and death—is the allotted span of your life. The River of Time passes you with its events that make up your life—until your death comes along."

Tubby shivered.

"No wonder you are afraid," said the professor kindly. "It is a very awesome subject, because the passing of the River of Time is inexorable—*when you are on the bank.*"

The professor paused.

"Yes?" said Tubby at length.

"You do not follow me, I see. I implied that in order to stop the passing of time you must float with it down the river."

"Oh," said Tubby.

"You see, if you are in one of those

boats"—the professor indicated one of the shadowy shapes drifting by—"you will float along and always stay ahead of your death—just as far ahead as you were at the instant you got in."

"Right," said Tubby. "How do you get in?"

The professor sat up very straight. "Your mind works very direct," he said approvingly. "I like that. You have reached the point exactly. How do you get on the River of Time without being unborn or having died? *That* is my great discovery."

"Tell me?" urged Tubby.

The professor's pale eyes burned; he held himself tense to keep from trembling with emotion. "Many learned men have known how to go *forward* in time—that takes you into the future."

"I know," Tubby interrupted. "I seen books on that."

"And other great men have told how to go *backward* in time—that takes you into the past."

"Yes," said Tubby. "*They* went forward and backward in time. Which way do *you* go?"

The professor drew a long breath. "I—I go sidewise," he said slowly.

Tubby stared.

"You see what a wonderful man I am. *I* follow nobody. *I* am original. *I* go sidewise in time. Nobody ever did *that* before."

"No," said Tubby. "How do you do it?"

"I will show you. That's better than telling. Do you want to go sidewise in time with me—now?"

Tubby hesitated. "Does it hurt?"

The professor laughed—a rumbling laugh that seemed to come from the very depths of his insides. "No, of course it doesn't hurt." He pulled a little glass vial from his pocket.

"These little pellets," he said, "contain a chemical I have compounded. They act upon the human body in such a way that it is freed from the shackles of time." He drew out his watch. "It is now one minute of nine. At nine o'clock we will take this powder. As long as its effect lasts the time will remain exactly nine o'clock for us—it cannot get even one second later."

"Right," said Tubby. "Let's do it."

Tubby held the watch, and as its second hand came round to the top he hastily swallowed the little pellet. The professor did likewise.

The pellet tasted sweet—a pleasant taste. Tubby felt his head reel, and he clutched at the professor to steady himself. After a moment he looked at the watch.

"It's stopped," he said.

It was still exactly nine o'clock. He held the watch to his ear; there was no sound of its ticking.

The professor was sitting close beside him in a shadowy, vague-looking boat. Tubby looked down at his own legs. They were shadowy, too. He held out his hand; its outlines were blurred, and he seemed to be able to see through it.

He grinned. "That's funny. I'm a ghost. You're a ghost too—we're both ghosts."

"We are in a state of suspended animation," explained the professor gravely.

"I can move," said Tubby. He wiggled his nebulous fingers to prove it.

"You *think* you can move. But it is only your intelligence that is alive. Your body is dead—temporarily. You have left it far behind you."

Tubby noticed now a great wind that was whistling and roaring past his ears. He felt no sense of movement—the boat seemed quite still; but he knew he was rushing onward at tremendous speed. Around him all was blackness; only the phosphorescent blurs of the boat, the body of the professor, and his own body, were visible.

"Where we going?" he asked after a moment.

"We are following nine o'clock," said the professor. "It travels very fast, but we are staying with it."

Tubby pondered this.

"You do not understand longitude and its relation to time, I see," the professor went on gently. "We were in Coney Island when nine o'clock reached there, weren't we?"

Tubby nodded.

"Well, what time was it then in—say Chicago?"

"I don't know," said Tubby. "What time was it?"

"It was only eight o'clock," the professor explained patiently. "An hour afterward it will be nine o'clock in Chicago. The nine o'clock boat gets there just as the ten o'clock boat is reaching New York. Do you understand?"

"Yes," said Tubby. "We're in the nine o'clock boat. Ain't I right?"

"Exactly. And we are moving westward at the rate of about a thousand miles an hour. When we have been here an hour we'll reach Chicago. But it will still be only nine o'clock. That's longitude and time. That's because the earth rotates on its axis at that speed. *We* are not moving, really. The earth is simply rotating under us. We are detached."

"Oh," said Tubby. He looked at the blackness around. "Won't we see anything?"

"Yes," answered the professor. "When the first effect of the pellet wears off we will see a little. You must be patient."

Tubby sat quiet, listening to the roar of the wind. It seemed ages before the professor spoke again.

"Suppose you were destined to die at ten o'clock to-night? *That* boat is an hour behind us—it can never reach us now, so long as we sit here. And you will be immortal. You see how wonderful my discovery is?"

"I don't want to be immortal," said Tubby, "if nothing ever happens to me and I can't never see nothing."

The professor smiled gently and took the watch from Tubby's hand.

"You will see many things. Be patient. Now I'll show you something else."

He held the watch up in front of Tubby's face and then let go of it. The watch hung there, motionless in mid air.

"Why don't it fall?" asked Tubby.

"It *is* falling," the professor answered. "At one second past nine o'clock it will strike the ground. But it's still only nine o'clock exactly, you know." Reaching for the watch he replaced it in his pocket.

There was another long silence which seemed interminable to Tubby. He sat staring straight before him, trying to pierce the darkness into which he was rushing headlong. A little gray seemed opening up ahead; Tubby held his breath. The gray spread until it mottled the black—making huge, misshapen shadows in the distance. He turned to the professor, whose glowing, luminous body wavered beside him.

"I see something," he whispered. But the professor only smiled and motioned him to look ahead again.

The shadows began to take form, until at last Tubby could make out the indistinct, gray outlines of a landscape—a countryside with trees and rivers, farmhouses here and there, and occasionally a town. He was looking down as though from a great height. There did not seem to be movement to the scene, yet it changed continually like dissolving pictures in a magic lantern.

"Where are we?" Tubby asked finally.

"We are approaching Chicago," said the professor. "See the lake there?"

Tubby saw the placid silver waters of Lake Michigan as though the moonlight were on it; and then the gray of a great city beneath him.

"This beats a airplane," he murmured ecstatically. "Can't we go down?"

The professor nodded. "It takes great will-power," he said. "But I think I can hold us here in Chicago a moment." He pressed his finger-tips against his forehead. Tubby could see he was thinking hard.

"Why, they're just like wax figures in the Eden Musee," said Tubby, surprised. "I seen them there when I was a kid."

He and the professor were walking down a crowded city street. Tubby stared in amazement. The people were there—trolley-cars, taxicabs and everything—and all frozen into immobility. "Like a movie when it stops," Tubby thought.

A man and a girl were standing on the corner. The man's mouth was open in the middle of a word and the girl's face was fixed in a set smile. Tubby did not see them at first, and inadvertently walked directly through them. He turned apologetically, but they did not move a muscle.

"They didn't see me," he said to the professor. "I guess I'm a ghost all right."

"You're a detached intelligence," said the professor. "They might see a ghost, but they can't see us, of course. We're not going to be here even a millionth of a second—not any time at all, in fact."

"That ain't very long," said Tubby.

A huge jeweler's clock stood before him; its hands pointed to nine o'clock.

"See that?" said the professor. "It's only eight o'clock now in Denver—it 'll be nine o'clock when we get there."

"Yes," said Tubby. "We're speedy. It don't take us no time at all to get places."

The professor again put his fingers to his forehead. "My head hurts," he said querulously. Tubby thought he was going to cry again. "I can't hold us here. I—"

"Them's mountains. What mountains?" Tubby asked, looking down over the side of the boat.

"The Rocky Mountains," answered the professor. "It's nine o'clock down there in Denver. We'll be out to the Coast soon."

The vague blur of the mountains swept beneath them. The Pacific Ocean came into view. It seemed to Tubby hardly a moment before they were over it. He turned to the professor. He felt very light and queer somehow, as though he didn't weigh anything. He wondered how he kept from blowing away in this violent wind.

"Where we going?" he asked.

"We're following nine o'clock," said the professor abstractedly.

Tubby frowned. "I know *that*. But where's nine o'clock going? That's what *I* want to know. Ain't that a fair question, or is it?"

The professor brought himself back with an effort. "Of course it is," he said kindly. "I see you do not understand. I shall explain further.

"The circumference of the earth is divided by geographers into three hundred and sixty degrees. Invisible lines—just for markers, you know."

"Yes," said Tubby. "They're there but you can't see them. Ain't I right?"

"We are only concerned with the degrees of longitude," the professor went on. "Longitude is the distance east or west of a certain line called Greenwich—England, you know. This line runs from the North Pole to the South Pole—through England, near London."

"Right," said Tubby.

"This meridian—all the north and south lines are called meridians—is the zero line—you start counting from there."

Tubby nodded.

"Now, when you go westward it is west longitude—west from Greenwich. New York is about seventy-four degrees west longitude—less than one-quarter of the way around. Do you see?"

"Yes," said Tubby. "Where are we now?"

"We're nearly one hundred and eighty degrees now. *That* meridian runs through the Pacific Ocean. After we cross it we go into east longitude—one seventy east, one sixty east, and so on till we get back to Greenwich. Then we've been all the way around—three hundred and sixty degrees. Do you understand?"

"No—yes," said Tubby. "How about nine o'clock?"

"Earth time starts at Greenwich," said the professor. "When it was nine o'clock there it was one hour *earlier* fifteen degrees *west*—two hours earlier thirty degrees west, and so on. Every fifteen degrees makes a difference of one hour. That's because there are twenty-four hours in a day, and fifteen times twenty-four is three hundred and sixty."

"Correct," said Tubby. "I knew *that*. How about nine o'clock?"

"We are going westward with nine o'clock," the professor answered. "It goes right on around the world. We cross the one hundred and eighty degree meridian soon. We go back a day then."

"Huh?" said Tubby.

"We lose a day," the professor reiterated. "Don't you see, when we get back to New York we will have used up twenty-four hours by the trip, but it will still be nine o'clock of the same evening we left. So of course we have to go back a day to allow for it."

"Of course," said Tubby. "If we didn't it would be to-morrow. Ain't I right?"

"You're always right," the professor agreed. "It's a pleasure to explain things to *you*." He looked down over the side of the boat cautiously. "Further than I thought," he said. "There's Japan. We'll be over North China in a moment."

It seemed to Tubby they were no time at all crossing Asia. The professor pointed out the Black Sea to him soon after that; then Constantinople, Rome, Madrid; and then they were over the Atlantic, nearing their starting point.

The professor seemed to have fallen into his abstracted mood again. Tubby sat quiet. There wasn't much room for them on the seat; he was glad they were wedged in so he couldn't blow away. The wind was very strong; it made him cough. Or was it the smell of sulfur that made him cough? He *did* seem to smell sulfur again; it was very unpleasant.

Off to one side he became conscious of a red glow, lighting up the gray of the sky. The wind seemed to have died away to a gentle breeze. He heard the lapping of water underneath the boat. The red glow grew brighter; he saw indistinct, motionless forms near at hand.

"Why, them's people," he thought, a little surprised. He could see the outlines of the cavern now, with rocks all about, and lurid red sulfurous fires. And not far away he saw a group of silent figures—devils, holding a man on a pitchfork over a flaming pit.

Tubby felt a little frightened.

"Them's only wax figures," he muttered, to reassure himself. The professor would explain. He— Why, where *was* the professor?

Tubby put out his hand and felt the empty leather seat beside him. The boat bumped around a corner, out of the red glow and silence into the yellow glare of electric lights and a confused babble of voices.

Some one behind him stood up; a hand touched his shoulder.

"Some ride," a voice said. "Come on, Tubby. It's nine o'clock. Let's see something else."

"We better hurry—it's nine o'clock, Jake," said the second man.

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This is the **127**th Novel, Originally Published Serially in this Magazine, to be Published in Book Form

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THUVIA, MAID OF MARS

BY EDGAR RICE BURROUGHS

Author of "Under the Moons of Mars," "The Mucker," "Pellucidar," the *Tarzan* Tales, etc

THIS is the fourth of the Martian series of which the first three, "A Princess of Mars" (our title "Under the Moons of Mars"), "The Gods of Mars," and "The Warlord of Mars" are already in book form. The present story deals with *Carthoris*, son of *John Carter*. Lost in a strange part of the planet he encounters strange beasts, white apes, and vanishing bowmen, finally rescuing a princess from a city far older than our earth. It is a story full of the thrills of which Burroughs is a past master. (*All-Story Weekly*, April 8 to 22, 1916.)

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The Buster

by William Patterson White

Author of "The Owner of the Lazy D," "The Brass Elephant," etc.

CHAPTER XVIII.

WHISTLER'S REST.

"I DON'T see why we can't camp here permanently," announced Miss Rowland at the end of the second day.

"Feed's no good," said Coryell.

Miss Rowland puckered her eyes to stare at the sun-drenched greenness of the lush flat that lay at their feet.

"I'd like to know what's the matter with with the grass in that meadow. Look how high and thick it grows. The horses are eating it, aren't they?"

"They're eatin' it right enough, but it ain't doin' 'em a power o' good. That fine-lookin' upstandin' stuff is a kind o' water-grass like. No strength to it. Eat a ton an' whatcha got? Nothin'. I wouldn't 'a' stopped here only for Eli's runnin' off an' boggin' himself down in that slue. They's better feed five miles farther on. We'll drag it to-morrow."

"But I like it here," objected Miss Rowland.

"Gotta think o' the hosses. They can't pack their grub like we can."

"But I don't want to ride forever. We must have come a hundred miles already."

"Sixty. That ain't far."

"Well—"

"Lookit, I'm figurin' on stoppin' at Tamarack Creek. From there we can take short two-three day trips off into the hills. They's fine feed there an' plenty of it. They's a old cabin too when you get tired of the tent. I don't believe they's *very* many pack rats in it."

"Rats!"

"Pack-rats. Cunnin' li'l gray fellers with whiskery tails. Steal anythin' they can carry away."

"Rats! Ugh! I sha'n't sleep in that cabin, thank you. Who owns this delightful place?"

"Nobody. It used to belong to an old prospector. Old Silver-tip they called him 'count of his white hair. But I guess old Silver-tip got tired out or somethin' one day 'cause he blowed the back of his head off."

"Committed suicide?"

"Shorely did. Lefty Bowers, foreman of the Barbwire outfit, found him four-five months later. Lefty said he never saw anybody keep so good so long. We'd had a tolerable dry summer that year, dryer'n usual, an' old Silver-tip was all mummied-up like."

Miss Rowland with difficulty suppressed a shudder. "How do you know the poor old man committed suicide?"

"He'd pulled off his right boot, an' his big toe was jammed in between the trigger an' the guard of his Winchester. Also the muzzle was still in Silver-tip's mouth. Even everybody agreed with the verdict o' Tom Jones an' his coroner's jury."

"We're not going to camp at that dreadful place," Miss Rowland declared with finality; "or anywhere near it either. I shouldn't sleep a wink, not a wink."

"But the horse-feed's fine."

"I don't care if it's the best in the world. We're to camp elsewhere, if you please."

"I didn't know you believed in ghosts."

"I don't, but I have an imagination. I

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for December 18.

can see that poor old man this minute—no one to love him, no one to care whether he lived or died, utterly friendless and forlorn, gradually being overcome by the awful loneliness of his life and blowing out his brains. Oh, it's dreadful!"

"Yeah, but he didn't blow his brains out. It was the back of his head, Lefty said. An' he wasn't friendless none. We liked him, all of us. An' I've often heard him say how he enjoyed livin' way off by himself."

Miss Rowland stared indignantly.

"You have no soul!" she informed him, and departed stiffbacked to draw Light Laurie into conversation.

Next day they stopped to eat lunch at the deserted mining camp of Whistler's Rest on Whistler's Creek. The scattered ancient shacks and houses were dilapidated, desolate. The roofs fallen in beneath the weight of snows of several winters did not appeal to Miss Rowland. Even the cheerful sunshine of a perfect summer day failed to take the curse off.

Sitting cross-legged on a spread saddle-blanket, she looked over the battered rim of her tin cup at her surroundings and shivered a lady-like shiver.

"This place gets on my nerves," said she.

"So soon?" Mrs. Rowland cocked an eyebrow at her temperamental niece and buttered another slice of bread. "Heavens! this butter's simply grease. We'll have to fall back on the jam sooner than I expected."

Miss Rowland bit into a thick roast beef sandwich and rolled discontented eyes.

"A person has to do without a lot of things in this country," she said between munches, slooshing the coffee in her tin cup round and round to stir up the sugar in the bottom. "I know that small mirror wouldn't be large enough," she added to Coryell's address.

"Yuh can't pack a cheval glass in a horse in spite of its name," said he.

"And where did you learn to speak French?" queried Mrs. Rowland, looking up.

"Smoky Nivette taught me all I know," was the explanation.

Mrs. Rowland found it a lame one. So did Miss Rowland. She sniffed audibly.

"You're a surprising person," she pronounced. "Where did you ever hear of a cheval glass?"

"I seen it in one o' Bud Thompson's furniture catalogues I was usin' for cigarette papers one time. Yuh sees lots o' queer thing in them catalogues."

"A furniture catalogue isn't the only place you see queer things," persisted Miss Rowland. "However—What's the name of this place? Whistler's Rest? Why was it abandoned?"

"Placers just naturally petered out," was the answer. "When they wasn't no more gold they wasn't no reason for miners, so they pulled their freight.

"Her picks is rust,
"Her bones is dust—
"It's fifteen year since she went bust.

"Only it ain't more'n five since the folks left Whistler's Rest. Good camp while she lasted. Lots o' life. You see that big buildin' there with the still good roof an' the saggin' door an' lots o' windows? That used to be the Palace Saloon. Jack O'Keefe owned it. He ran games in the back. The amount of dust O'Keefe used to ship out every month was scandalous, somethin' scandalous. They was rich claims along the creek, but the Palace was the real bonanza. O'Keefe's safe's there yet, or it was last time I was here. Big old box—must weigh a ton. Had a special-built wagon to freight it in. The miners used to bank their dust with O'Keefe. I'll bet sometimes just before a shipment they'd be three-four hundred thousand dollars in that safe. How about it, Smoky?"

"More'n dat mebbeso," said the half-breed.

"I'd like to see that safe," said Miss Rowland, interested in spite of herself. "Take me over there, please."

Together they walked down a Main Street grown up in grass and paused before the weatherbeaten facade of the old Palace Saloon. Coryell lifted up the sagging door and swung it open, the long-disused hinges shrieking violent protest. Miss Rowland peered in.

"Why, the back door's open," said she, crossing the threshold.

Coryell, following closely in the lady's wake, saw that the back door indeed stood open. Which was nothing to wonder at in itself. But that which lay in the middle of the broad rectangle of sunshine pointing the floor at the door's foot was something unexpected. It was a coil of rope. As he stared a packrat scuttled across it and out the back doorway.

Miss Rowland clutched his arm. "What was that?"

"A packrat."

The old saloon bar was at Miss Rowland's elbow. The bar top was no lower than the average, but Miss Rowland was on top of it before Coryell could wink. Bunching her divided skirt in both hands she squeezed her agitated ankles together and demanded protection.

"I guess that was the only one in the place," encouraged Coryell.

"Oh! there's another!" contradicted Miss Rowland, as a second furry little gray beggar scurried out through the doorway.

"They're both gone anyway. An' they won't hurt you. I've lived round this country a long time, an' I never yet heard of a packrat attackin' anybody."

"Horrid things!" shuddered the skeptical Miss Rowland, anguished eyes frenziedly searching the rubbishy floor. "Look at those old boxes. I just know there are some more rats there."

"Look at the safe," he urged, striding across to where a few old and splintery boxes littered the floor. "You wanted to see that. There she is in the corner, the Palace safe."

"Darn the safe!" she exclaimed. "I don't care anything about the safe! I don't want to see it! I wish I hadn't come! Take me out of here! O-oh! O-oh!" For he had kicked one of the boxes and promptly the very grandfather of all packrats, to judge by his size and corpulence, plumped out of the box and streaked it for the back door. "O-oh!" Miss Rowland continued in a despairing wail, "the place is simply *crawling* with them! Take me out of here *at once!*"

"Jump down," said Coryell, poking among the boxes with his feet. "Here's a packrat's nest. Come an' look!"

"If you don't come here at once I'll scream!" cried Miss Rowland hysterically. "I'm—I'm frightened!"

That brought him at once. He held up his hands. "Catch hold an' jump."

"Nun-no," she objected, clutching her skirt the tighter. "I won't step down on that floor. You—you've got to carry me."

"Carry you!"

"*Carry me!* Hurry! *Don't* stand there like a silly fool gawking at me! Pick me up and carry me right away!"

Knee-bent, she stooped to him, holding out her arms. Her lips were trembling and her poor little chin was wabbling.

"This is a fright!" grumbled Coryell, stepping close to the bar.

Somehow, he did not quite know the precise manner in which it was accomplished, she slipped and slid safely into his embarrassed embrace. One of his arms was round her legs, the other supported and held her body above the waist. Her arms were clasped round his neck, and her pretty nose was flattened against the hollow of his shoulder.

He headed hastily toward the front door. At his first step she clutched him the tighter and adjured him in muffled tones to hurry. The top of her head rubbed his ear. A lock of her splendid red-gold hair flicked across his mouth. The faint elusive perfume of her healthy young self was in his nostrils. He could not help but be conscious of the tumult of her bosom. He drew a quickened breath and stumbled, but caught himself in time to save them both from falling.

He sat her down on the hither side of the threshold, behind the protecting screen of the door-jam and end wall. Her hands unclasped and fell away from his neck. She looked at him a little wildly.

"Yo're all right now," he told her roughly, and immediately turned his back on her to walk the length of the long room and pick up the coil of rope that lay in the sunlight at the other end.

The rope in his hand, he straightened his tall figure. But did not look at the rope. He looked through one of the side windows

and glimpsed Miss Rowland returning to camp.

Glorious, vital youth was in her walk, the free swing of her arms and superb body, even in the set of the head on the neck above the broad strong shoulders.

As he looked she stopped and half turned to glance back at the Palace Saloon. Involuntarily Coryell ducked and dodged although he knew that she could not see him. He shook his shoulders sheepishly and looked again. The young girl started onward. She raised sunbrowned hands to her helmet of shining hair and patted and pulled it after the distracting fashion of womankind the wide world over.

He became suddenly aware that the lady was without a hat. She had worn one when she entered the place. He moved to the bar and went behind it. Her hat lay on the floor where it had fallen.

He dropped the rope he held and picked up the hat. As though it had been a strange and novel thing he turned it slowly round and over and over and round between his two lean hands. He stared down at the hat with oddly softened eyes. The lips beneath the stubby black mustache widened to a crooked smile. Slowly he raised the hat to his face. He breathed inward long and deeply through his nose. There it was again, the faint, elusive perfume of her.

He closed his eyes and crushed the hat against his face. Again he felt her body resting within his arms, the clasp of her hands at his back, the heave of her young breast against the muscles of his chest.

With a savage oath he slammed the hat down upon the floor and stamped upon it with both feet. Then he leaned back against the bar and made a cigarette with fingers that shook as with an ague.

"Same fool y' always was," he told himself in a whisper. "An' you been sensible so long. Idjit!"

When the cigarette was going well he retrieved the hat and smoothed it out as well as he could. Soberly he returned to the outer air and the party's halting-place at the end of Main Street.

"You dropped yore hat," said he, handing the headgear to Miss Rowland. "It got a li'l mussed. Shucks! I forgot that rope we found! I'll get it. It was almost a new rope."

CHAPTER XIX.

THE ROPE.

ENTERING the Palace he did not immediately go behind the bar to get the rope. He crossed the floor directly to the box containing the pack-rat's nest he had been on the point of examining when interrupted by Miss Rowland's insistent calls for help.

For the information of those unfamiliar with the packrat and his habits it is well to mention that the said rat is an inordinate collector of that which is small, bright and portable. Unlike that great thief, the jackdaw, the packrat will frequently replace that which he has stolen with a pine-cone, a bit of rock or some other small object which he considers a fair medium of exchange. This trading trait of his is entirely by the way. It has nothing to do with the story. We have to deal herein solely with his thievery.

Whatever the pack-rat steals and carries home with him he does not take into the small sleeping chamber in the midst of the veritable hurrah's nest of sticks, twigs and woodsy rubbish, which constitutes his bulwark against the world without. He is no miser to gloat in darkish solitude over his treasures. Not he. Out in plain sight on the roof of his residence he places his collection for all the world and himself to admire.

The pack-rat that lived in the box was no exception to the general rule. He had contrived to collect, besides pine-cones, pebbles and the bones of small animals, a complete set of poker dice, four pistol cartridges, six rifle cartridges, four buckles, a silver concha cut from either a saddle or bridle, and twenty-five cents in real money.

"Them dice look almighty new," muttered Coryell, picking them up one by one and rattling the five together.

"What yuh got, Bill?" It was the voice of Light Laurie speaking from the front doorway.

"Come an' take a look," invited Coryell.

"Quite a pocketfull," said Light Laurie when he stood beside Coryell.

"These dice are new." Displaying the poker dice for Laurie's inspection.

"Well?" Laurie stared inquiringly.

"We haven't seen no tracks goin' either way the last forty miles."

"We ain't—not since Eagle Mountain where Coombsy's tracks come in from the north."

"An' nobody uses this country round here much, do they?"

"Good huntin'."

"Thassall. You never seen no cows, didja—ever? No, an' you never will unless they're drove here."

"Whatcha drivin' at?"

"What's north of us about fifty mile, Light? Remember the Tamarack trail swings circlewise."

"Shore, I know that. Fifty mile north ought to be the Slash K."

"Yeah, she is. An' maybe a hundred an' fifty mile south is Virgin City. Folks goin' from one place to the other would mighty likely stop here one night."

"They might."

"Not everybody would have business takin' 'em ridin' between Virgin City an' the Slask K, I'm guessin'—not anyways frequent."

"Frequent—how you mean?"

"Lookit that collection of odds an' ends out o' somebody's camp the pack-rat rounded up. 'Tain't reasonable to suppose he got 'em all out of one camp at one time. They's been more than one camp, that's a cinch. It'd be kind of interestin' to know if the different camps was all made by the same fellers or feller."

"Shotgun Blue come from Virgin City, I heard."

"That's the report. I found a rope, too—right here on the Palace floor layin' in the sun. I'll get it." Coryell strode quickly to the bar and slipped behind it. He returned with the rope and slatted it down on top of the box. "Lookit, Light," he said, "this here rope ain't a new-bought rope by no manner o' means. Yuh can see easy she's been on some gent's saddle a long time."

"She ain't none too limber neither," said Light, twisting the rope between his fingers.

"You bet she ain't. Whoever owned her didn't use her much. She's practically a new rope as far as wear goes—yet anybody can see she's old. Lookit the honda. Rope ain't run through it much."

"Lessee if we can't locate them camps, Bill. Maybe they was in here."

"One of 'em was—the rope shows that much. But I'm bettin' they didn't stop here more'n one time. They's too few burnt matches on the floor."

"Maybe they camped in the woods."

"In a shack in town more like."

It was not necessary to search the woods. In a cabin whose roof was less stove in than most of the others, at the other end of town, close to the bank of Whistler's Creek, they found strong evidence that more than one man had made camp there at different times. This much Coryell was sure of, but he proved it by Smoky Nivette.

"Dis piece o' bacon," said Smoky, holding up between thumb and finger a dried bit of fried bacon, "ees five-seex week since she was cook een de pan. Dem ash yondair een de stove ees week or ten day ol'. Dees burnt match on de pan—some dem was light de fire cook dees bacon, I t'ink me. Un some was week ol', no more. I tell you w'at I t'ink: two men have camp here four tam."

"They's horse sign out round," said Coryell.

"I saw eet. She ees some five-seex week ol' un some tree week, two week, one week mebbeso. Lookit dem balsam een de bunk. Four deef'rent cuttin' o' dat, too. Four tam dey was camp, by gar."

Coryell, standing well over toward the stove, perceived a glint of white underneath the bunk in the corner of the room. The circumstances being what they were, anything and everything was to be investigated. He knelt down terrier-wise beside the bunk, made a long arm beneath the bottom boards and pulled out a newspaper.

"She's the *Saint Paul Pioneer Press*," said he, smoothing out its crumples. "Two months old, though."

"It was wrapped round that bacon," was Light Laurie's opinion.

"Shore," corroborated Smoky Nivette.

"*Saint Paul Pioneer Press*," mused Coryell, pushing back his hat and scratching his forehead. "I seen this paper before."

"This particular one?" demanded Light Laurie.

"Naw, one o' the same. Who'n'ell gets it much here reg'lar? Who? Who? Somebody does."

"You mean in Hatchet?"

"Shore I mean in Hatchet. Where 'djuh guess?"

"Gawd knows—you jump round too lively for me to follow. But then I'm only a poor brainless cow-puncher. I ain't no detective."

"Nemmind pokin' fun. This is serious. Who takes papers regular in Hatchet?"

"Dave Dawson for one, but he takes a Saint Looey paper. Wat Pickett subscribes to the *Denver Trybune* an' Tom Jones to the *Omaha Bee*. An'—an'—thassall, I guess."

"You guess wrong by a mile! She ain't all. I know she ain't. You think. You think hard."

"You think yoreself. Get a stick if yuh gotta an' stir up that li'l bowl o' mush yo're a-hangin' yore hat on an' give it a real chance."

"Bud Thompson, he tak' a paper," inserted Smoky Nivette.

"Thassit!" exclaimed Coryell. "Now we got it. I remember. Bud Thompson takes the *Saint Paul Pioneer Press* an' when he's through with it he uses her for wrappin'-paper. That's how come she was round the bacon."

"Then these fellers must 'a' got their supplies in Hatchet?" Thus Light Laurie.

"The bacon anyways."

"They're from the Slash K, that's a cinch."

"Shore."

"They may come by again."

"Dey weel, *bien sur*."

"If they been makin' trips every seven or eight days, an' the last one was maybe a week ago, they're pretty nigh due now is my guess."

"I'll stay here when the rest of yuh go on," offered Light. "I'm curious to see just who these towerists are."

"Me too, so I'll stay instead of you," said Coryell.

"W'y not me?" suggested the half-breed.

"Don't be a hog, Bill, an' glom *all* the fun," implored Light Laurie. "Be human for once in yore sinful life an' give somebody else half a show."

"Tell yuh! We'll throw for it. High man wins."

"Three throws apiece. Ace counts one."

"Awright—three throws goes an' she does."

They hunkered down on the floor and rolled those five poker dice with flourish and finger-snapping. Light Laurie threw first and when he had expended his three rolls he stood up with a hearty curse.

"A measly forty-five!" he scolded. "Whoever said I ever had any luck in my—life is a—liar. Forty-five! If you can't beat that, Smoky, yo're no good."

The half-breed threw and bettered Light with seventy-six. He looked up at Light with a cheerful grin and shoved the dice across to Coryell.

"The best he can get is ninety," interposed Light hastily. "Go yuh ten even, Smoky, he throws between eighty an' ninety."

The half-breed nodded, and Coryell rolled.

"Eighty-six!" cried Light Laurie when the five dice had come to rest after the third throw. "She's one helluva wonder to me he didn't make it ninety. Ol' rabbit's-foot himself! 'Sno use, Smoky, when it comes to dawg-hawg luck Bill's there with a four-leaf clover under his tongue an' a hoss-shoe in each fist."

Coryell saw the train and his charges ten miles farther on the leg to Tamarack Creek before he remembered having forgotten a most important article at their noon halting-place.

"I must 'a' dropped that knife right where I ate," he told Mrs. Rowland. "I mind now how I was spreadin' my bread with it. Lordy, I wouldn't lose that knife for a lot. Guess I'll have to go back. Smoky an' Light know what to do."

He bade them all "so long," and trotted out on the back trail. When he was within

three miles of Whistler's Rest he quitted the old traveled way and turned off into the woods.

The forest was not overly dense. Rather was it a thing of "shreds and patches" except where plantations of white spruce splayed their pale green against the hillsides.

Keeping carefully within the cover of the timber Coryell rode quite round Whistler's Rest and dismounted in a triangular cove west of the town. He had not picked up the trail of the travelers between Virgin City and the Slash K. But he knew that the cove was well out of their way. A spruce-grown V-shaped hill fenced it in on the southern and eastern sides and Whistler's Creek, with its doubling band of willows and cottonwoods, connected these two sides and formed the base of the triangle.

No, it was not in the least likely that any one would stumble on this grassy haven, and Coryell, with a reasonably contented mind, unsaddled Ranger and hobbled him.

Which being done he cached his saddle, bridle and blanket in the dry top of a windfall, removed his spurs, swung his rifle across his forearm and slid into the cottonwoods on the creek bank. Twenty minutes later he was making his way across the open to the head of Main Street. He looked at his watch. Four o'clock.

He decided that he would risk looking about the Palace once more before proceeding to his objective, a thick growth of willow near the cabin where the travelers had camped.

"I don't guess they'll nobody come traipsin' along to-day," he told himself. "Nor yet to-morrow neither. Maybe now I'll have to wait a couple o' days. Shore, that's the way it would be. Can't expect much better luck—if they come at all."

Accordingly he entered the Palace. This time he ransacked the place thoroughly. But he found nothing save two more packrats' nests. Which nests contained no treasures like those he had first examined. Here were merely pine-cones, rusty nails, a few bits of glass, and some bright pebbles. He was stooping over the second nest, when a horse sneezed, rein-chains jingled, and somebody said, "I told yuh I seen a smoke here when we stopped on top o' Saddlebag at noon."

"You got good eyes," said a second voice.

Coryell swept off his hat, crouched, skipped to one side and slowly raised himself till his eyes were slightly above the sill line of one of the four windows facing the street. Here he had an excellent view along the street as far as the spot where he and the Rowland party had stopped for lunch. He saw three men sitting their horses in the street midway between this spot and the Palace. One of the men was Swing Kyler, one was Shotgun Blue, and the third was a stranger—a wide-shouldered squat-bodied young man with a square heavy-jowled face. He was smooth-shaven, this man, with very long arms, wore two guns tied down, and he sat his center-fire saddle as gracefully as an Indian—more gracefully by far than Swing Kyler who was prone to slouch when tired. It was this third man who had complimented Swing on his excellent eyesight.

"Quite an outfit," went on Swing, jerking his head back toward the Rowland party's halting-place. "What'n'ell they doin' here, I'd like to know?"

"I ain't no mind-reader," said Shotgun Blue.

"If you was I'd double yore wages," he was told by his employer.

"That's somethin' for you to say," Shotgun said meaningly.

"I'm goin' back an' scout round," declared Swing, overlooking the opening. "Should 'a' done it at first."

He jerked his horse to the right-about and pounded back to the place in question. Shotgun Blue regarded the stranger with a wide, slow grin. He winked portentously as he slowly turned his horse to follow Swing, and said something in a tone too low to reach Coryell's ears. Both men rode off at a walk.

Now was the off side of Shotgun's saddle presented to Coryell's gaze, and he observed that the rope-strap had parted, both ends swinging free.

The rope Coryell had found in the Palace he had, after showing it to Light Laurie, tossed behind the bar. Moved by

quick impulse he ran to the bar, fished out the rope and hurried to the front door. Peering through the doorway he saw that the three men at the other end of the street all had their backs to him. With a quick flip of his arm he threw the coil of rope out into the middle of the street.

On tiptoe he ran the length of the long room to the back doorway, dodged through it and dove into a bunch of tall grass growing beside some low bushes just as Shotgun Blue rode round the corner of a house a hundred yards away. Wriggling as no snake was ever forced to wriggle he changed ground from grass to bushes with the utmost celerity. Lying among the bushes like a rabbit in its form he watched the mounted man ride past. For an instant Coryell thought Shotgun Blue had seen him, for the other's eyes appeared to become fixed on a point directly in front of Coryell's face. But Coryell was mistaken. The other's eyes swept on to the house next door.

"Hey, Shotgun!" bawled the voice of Swing Kyler from the street. "Here's somethin' that looks like yore rope!"

Shotgun Blue whirled his horse on a dime and spurred streetward between the Palace and the next house.

Shotgun Blue's rope, naturally. He might have known it, thought Coryell. For only such a man as Shotgun Blue, who would rarely employ a rope for any purpose other than catching up his horse, would possess an old yet unworn rope. Coryell wormed through his screen of bushes to the corner of the saloon. He could not see but he could hear.

"It's my rope all right enough," said Shotgun Blue after a moment's silence. "Now I had a idea I lost her in the Palace maybe when I stopped there the first time I come through from Virgin City. I was meanin' to look in there only I forgot."

"Funny how you didn't miss a big thing like yore rope almost soon's yuh lost it," commented Swing Kyler.

"She was night an' hotter'n the hinges of hell when I pulled out of here," explained Shotgun Blue. "I wasn't noticin' nothin' only how uncomfortable I was. I shore noticed *that*. I near sweat my brains out, y' betcha. An' it wasn't till next day I knowed my rope an' poker-dice too was all missin'."

"I wonder why that outfit goin' through to-day didn't pick up yore rope, Shotgun," puzzled Swing Kyler.

"Dunno. Maybe— Why say, tha's funny."

"What's funny?"

"They's a hoofmark underneath my rope. *Underneath*, mind yuh!"

Coryell did not wait to hear another word. He sat up, removed his boots, and sprinted for the woods as fast as he could lay the soles of his feet to the ground. For all his furious haste he ran as quietly as might be. He took good care to keep between his fleeing self and the two men in the street the solid and wide bulk of the Palace Saloon.

The present position of the stranger, the third man of the party, was what gave him food for thought and cause for worry. He might be with the other two and he might not. He might be anywhere. He might be drawing a bead on a spot midway between and a trifle below Coryell's shoulder'blades at that very instant. At any moment Coryell expected to hear the sharp cracking report of a Winchester.

It was not more than a hundred yards from the Palace to the edge of the woods. But to Coryell that hundred yards seemed as many miles—and the seconds of elapsed time as many dragging years, and himself as leaden-footed as one going to his own execution. His own execution! He relished not at all the idea of being shot in the back, but unfortunately he had never learned to run backwards. It was necessary to risk the most disgraceful of deaths in order to save his own life.

But luck, the luck that had given him eighty-six in three rolls, was with him. He reached the trees, shot into their grateful shelter, dropped flat and rolled behind the largest bole in sight.

He squirmed round to face the town and saw Shotgun Blue and Swing Kyler appear at the rear doorway of the Palace. He had won clear in the very nick of time.

"You will be smart!" he said savagely to himself You will get gay an' think yuh

know it all an' more too! Almost got yore come-uppance that trip, didn't yuh? Yeah, you sapheaded idjit, now will you be good?"

When Shotgun Blue and Swing Kyler withdrew from the Palace doorway Coryell wormed his backward way to another tree growing on a slight rise. The elevation was not more than thirty inches high, but it afforded sufficient concealment to Coryell for him to crawl on hands and knees to a snaggle-toothed outcrop between two spruce trees. The outcrop made an excellent breastwork. He sat upright behind it, crooked a leg and rested his foot on his thigh. With the utmost tenderness he extracted three thorns from the sole of the foot.

"I'm gonna learn to wear moccasins," he told himself grimly. "Then when I wanna go soft-foot, I won't have no trouble. I'll swear I could feel them thorns clear to my knees.

He pulled on his boots, leaned his chest comfortably against the outcrop and looked over its serrated top at Whistler's Rest. Swing Kyler and Shotgun Blue were nowhere visible. But the squat-bodied stranger was exceedingly in the public eye. With a long stick he was poking about among the bushes near the Palace where Coryell had lain hidden.

Coryell saw him stoop suddenly and pick up something. The something was a gray hat. Coryell clasped his hand to his head and swore softly. His hat was gone.

"Here's one fine note!" was his bitter comment. "First you just hadda find out whose rope that was an' almost got caught good an' plenty for yore pains an' now yuh go an' leave yore hat behind. Yore *hat!* My Gawd, Bill, yo're shore mother's li'l helper to-day!"

At that instant his eyes caught a glimpse of a black-and-tan shape that flitted out of the trees near where the Rowland party had lunched and disappeared among the houses of Whistler's Rest.

"Looks like a dog," muttered Coryell.

A moment later, when the squat-bodied stranger dragged it by the collar through the rear doorway of the Palace he discovered that it was a dog—a dog with the long, smooth, pendulous ears that typify the bloodhound.

The squat-bodied stranger spoke. In the windless air every word carried clearly to Coryell crouching behind the outcrop. "You *will* sashay off after a fox," he was saying, giving the great head of the bloodhound a playful shake. "Next time you stick with me, or I'll shore bend a club over yore ears." Here he thrust Coryell's hat against the bloodhound's nose. "Find him," he ordered. "Find him."

CHAPTER XX.

DOGRIB.

CORYELL'S first impulse was to stand pat and shoot the dog. But mother wit told him that a shot would reveal his presence as surely as the dog ultimately would, and much sooner. Furthermore, his position was unsuitable for defense. It was quite too open to attack, both flank and rear. And—he had but one of the enemy under his eye. Where the other two were he did not know. He could not wait for them to discover themselves. There was not sufficient time.

True, he could shoot the squat-bodied man as well as the dog. But it was not his purpose or wish to kill any one if he could avoid it. And obviously he could not hope to successfully hold up the squat-bodied gentleman while the latter's comrades were invisible. It was a case of hold up them all simultaneously or not at all.

Under the circumstances discretion seemed advisable.

After the squat-bodied man thrust the hat against the dog's nose the animal had bayed—once. Coryell, before the cessation of that ominous bay, was crabbing his way backward. He was not slow in the business either. Although encumbered by a rifle, a dangling six-shooter—which dangles most disconcertingly when the wearer is proceeding backward on all fours—and belts of cartridges for both, he made excellent time for the distance covered.

When several trees were between him and the outcrop he scrambled to his feet and, bent double, raced through the wood at his

best clip. Now it did not matter if his heels clackered on rocks now and again, for the three men would have mounted and all sound of his own progress would be lost in the thudding of their horses' hoofs.

He tore on, panting, his objective the triangular cove where he had left Ranger. The woods, composed of pine and tamarack, became thicker the farther he went. The branches swept widely and low, many of them not four feet from the ground. Here a man on foot had the advantage. It would puzzle the mounted men to get through without being jerked out of their saddles. But the dog at the last had the advantage of the man on foot.

Coryell realized this quite fully. He would finally be compelled to shoot the brute, he was certain. But if the wood were sufficiently dense a shot would not matter. The mounted men would still be at a disadvantage. The trees did not grow thickly enough yet for this purpose. Farther on—here a dry wash opened before his flying feet. He dug in his heels and skidded to a stop just in time to save himself from going over the edge to the bottom sixty feet below.

The drop was not precipitate. A horseman could negotiate it without danger. But the wash was absolutely devoid of anything even approaching cover. Long before Coryell could climb the opposite bank his pursuers would arrive in time to pick him off at their ease.

In the flash of a bird's wing under sunshine all this passed through Coryell's mind as he stood poised on the brink of the wash. Eighty yards behind his back the bloodhound bayed again—once. It had not seen him yet, else it would have continued to bay.

On a level with Coryell's shoulder stretched the limb of a thickly needled pine tree. At his feet lay an equally fortuitous rock the size of his two fists.

In a breath he had whipped off his neckerchief, tied the rock in it with the hog-tying knot he had so often used on a calf, and rolled the silk-wrapped rock over the edge of the declivity. He did not wait to hear it strike the bottom. He jammed the rifle through the slack of his belts at the back, seized the branch at his shoulder, and went up the tree like a scared cat.

As quickly as he could he climbed thirty feet and there waited. His rifle he wriggled out of the grip of his belt as the bloodhound, nose to the ground, passed under the tree and paused at the edge of the descent. The dog did not look up. It is not the bloodhound's custom so to do when on a hot trail, unless he knows he has treed the trailee. And this the squat-bodied man's dog did not know. How should it? The trail, apparently without a break, led over the edge down into the wash.

The dog went over the edge. Coryell could not see his progress, but he heard him snuffling and skittering in the sliding sand and pebbles of the steep. Somewhere at his back branches swished and men swore. Then out of the trees burst the three men and halted almost where Coryell had halted and arranged his deceptive rock. He could look right down on top of their hats. It seemed impossible that none of them would look up. Coryell sat as still as still. He held his breath till his temples ached. His rifle was trained rigidly on the hat in the middle.

Inwardly he was damning himself for not having returned toward the cove as he had come. Had he gone that way he would not have encountered this unexpected wash that was likely to prove his undoing. But the Fates are kindly ladies at times.

"What's that he's sniffin' at down there?" said the voice of Swing Kyler.

"Nothin' like findin' out," came from beneath the hat on Swing's right—the hard tones of the squat-bodied man.

The latter started his horse. So did the others. All three rode over the edge. They were not half-way to the bottom when Coryell was down from his perch and flat on his stomach behind a barrier of sword-grass growing at the rim of the slope. He parted the slim, flat stems and looked down.

There was the dog sniffing and slobbering at the neckerchief-wrapped rock. There were the three men making their way to the dog. At last the three men were together in the open. The opportunity was heaven-sent and triple-gilt.

Before they reached the dog Coryell shouted hoarsely to them: "Throw up yore hands!"

The three obeyed promptly. They were now at the bottom of the wash and about fifteen feet from the bloodhound. Their backs were toward Coryell.

"Whadda you babes in the wood think yo're a-doin' with that dog?" inquired Coryell in the same hoarse, unrecognizable voice.

They said nothing. There was nothing to say. Coryell continued calmly: "I could 'a' got you most any time from where I was cached behind that outcrop back of O'Keefe's, but I ain't downin' anybody unless I'm crowded. I aim to protect myself, but I draw the line at murder. I—" He broke off. His Winchester cracked. The hat of the squat-bodied stranger, the outside man on the right, jerked on his head. "Keep them hands *up!*" continued Coryell sharply. "I ain't through talkin' yet, an' till I am through, don't yuh try to gamble with me. An' if you think I can't repeat on the shot I just put through Mr. Right Hand's hat, watch this one."

Bang! The dog sank down. Its hind legs kicked a time or two. Then it lay still. A cry of hearty rage was uttered by the squat-bodied stranger. He began to mouth unintelligible curses.

"I hadda do it," Coryell told him. "Next time you keep yore *next* lapdog to home an' don't go trailin' folks with him an' he won't get hurt. Here endeth the first lesson. An' now, dearly beloved, beginnin' with the gent who has been callin' me names, you fellers will take off yore belts an' drop 'em on the ground. One at a time, beginnin' with Mr. Loud Mouth."

"Damfiwill!" averred the squat-bodied man.

Bang! A bullet scored the swell-fork of his saddle. "'Scuse me," said Coryell. "If you won' take the belts off I'll have to cut 'em off. You mustn't pay any attention to that first shot. I always shoot wild at first. I'll get the range in a minute."

But the stranger obviated the necessity for further range-finding by hastily unbuckling his belts and dropping them, together with their filled holsters, on the ground.

"Yo're forgettin' the rifle under yore left leg," reminded Coryell.

The Winchester clattered on the ground beside the cartridge-belts.

"Now the other two—middle gent first," suggested Coryell.

With Swing Kyler and Shotgun Blue he had no difficulty. They had evidently derived great benefit from the demonstration accorded the squat-bodied man.

"Now ride away slow," ordered Coryell when all the visible weapons were on the ground. "No, to yore right. That 'll do. Halt-t! Get off an' tie the hosses' heads together. Oh, you can face my way if yuh like. I dont' care. You can't see me—only my right eye, an' that ain't enough to remember me by. Tie them hosses' bridles together good, or you'll be sorry. Aw right, hit the trail an' be quick about it!"

"You ain't settin' us afoot!" remonstrated Swing Kyler.

"I'm doin' the best imitation o' that I can think of," explained Coryell thickly—this business of sustained, hoarse speaking was a strain on the vocal cords. "But I can't see what yuh got to kick about. I ain't makin' you take off yore boots. You'll be able to walk fine. Get a goin', fellers, get a goin'!"

They got. Hump-shouldered, scuffing their toes, swearing each after his own fashion, they walked away along the stony bed of the wash. Two hundred yards from the horses they halted, conversed together, then started to retrace their steps. A bullet that smashed into chips on a stone between the feet of Shotgun Blue pointed out the trio's error in judgment. Hurriedly they faced about and resumed their retreat.

Coryell waited till they had disappeared past the shoulder of a bend a mile away before resuming his. Forced to skirt the wash in the opposite direction to that taken by the enemy he followed it to its bitter end in the midst of a large and healthy plantation of cat-brier in a hollow. He recognized the hollow immediately. He had passed it by on the other side when coming from the triangular cove.

At the hollow Coryell, thoroughly scratched and clawed as to the hands and face, changed direction and headed straight

toward the cove. He traveled a-hobbling, too, for fast walking in tight and high-heeled boots was having its effect. Besides, the three thorns had left behind them more than a memory.

It was with a greater sensation of relief than he had experienced in some time that he reached the cove and caught up Ranger.

Four hours later he rode into Dogrib, a small but lively collection of houses on the trail between Hatchet and the fourteen-saloon metropolis of Surry Side. Dogrib had a post-office, and it was Dogrib that served the men of the Barbwire, Rafter T, and Frying-Pan outfits with mail, whisky, and supplies.

Coryell tied leg-weary Ranger to the hitching-rail in front of the Say When Saloon and went into Asheim's Gents' Emporium to buy a hat. Asheim, a well-nourished little Hebrew with shrewd, kindly eyes, looked up from an account-book as fat as himself at Coryell's entrance. Instantly he slammed the book shut and bounced out of his chair with a chirp of delight.

" Vell, vell," he cried, eyes beaming, welcoming hand outthrust, " if it ain't mein old friend Bill Coryell! How you vas, Bill? By gollies, I ain't seen you for t'ree year."

" Two an' three-quarters," corrected Coryell with a grin, gripping the other's hand. " Why don't you come down our way once in a while?"

" I ain't peddle no more," was the explanation. " I have vife now, Bill, an' I own all dis store—all. But, you know, I miss de road," he added with a touch of wistfulness. " I miss seein' de country an' I miss stoppin' at dis ranch an' dat ranch an' talkin' to de people. Dot vas life, dot vas. Now I stop still in one place an' I get fat an' lazy. By gollies, I bet you I pick up an' go peddlin' again. I still keep my vagon. You seen Lander, or Dave Dawson or Jim Rockerby lately?"

" Shore, just the other day—seen all of 'em."

" Bill, don't say no more—not another vord or Solomon Asheim go on de road tomorrow at sun-up. What happen your hat?"

" My hat, Solly, is on one of yore shelves. Gimme a good one."

" Size seven says my memory, an' she ain't never wrong. Here is a fine hat, gray like you like best, an' not so dear."

" She don't want to be, Solly. I ain't packin' the Philadelphia Mint in my pants' pocket this evenin'."

" Bill, dot hat is tventy-von dollar an' four bits," said Asheim reproachfully. " I ask you, look at the price-mark an' see. I give it you for eighteen an' if you have not got de money handy what do I care? I hang you up. Sometime you pay me, yes."

" Oh, I got the eighteen, old-timer. I ain't broke complete. Hat seems to fit pretty good."

" Wow!" yelped a familiar voice from the doorway. " Look at the blushin' bride buyin' herself a lampshade! Ain't she the sweet thing?"

Coryell wheeled to meet the forward rush of Lou Taylor, the friend whose life he had saved from the bowie of Swing Kyler in Hatchet. Lou strove to clap Coryell upon the back, but the latter dodged and jabbed his knuckles into Taylor's ribs. Taylor clinched and they staggered into the counter with a force that shook the building.

" Gents! Gents!" cried Asheim. " You vill vake mein babby!"

Instantly they quieted and fell apart.

" Sol," said Lou Taylor, nodding his head at Coryell, " don't charge him no more than double. Remember he's a stranger in a strange land an' treat him accordin'. Which reminds me, speakin' of treatin', I ain't had a drink for ever so long, an' this is gonna be a large evenin' with me. Le's us all three go out an' make it larger. C'mon, Solly, climb over yore counter an' be a sport. This aint' no time for stayin' indoors outside of a saloon."

But Asheim pleaded family cares as an excuse for not joining the prospective revelers, and they departed without him.

" Good feller, that Solly is," said Coryell as he and Lou turned into the Say When and breasted the bar.

" You bet," assented Lou Taylor. " He's a white man clear through. ' I was broke when I come here to work for the stage company after I'd spent three weeks findin' out they wasn't no job to be had in the Hatchet country, an' I needed underdrawers

an' socks the worst way. Solly didn't know me from Adam's off-ox, but he trusted me without a peep. You can gamble he got his money right after pay-day before I even looked inside a saloon. A bottle of yore private stock, Jack, the kind you drink yoreself, which don't mean nothin, but sounds well. Bill, shake hands with my friend, Mr. Jack Haney, the famous barkeep of the Wild West. Jack, this here's Mr. Bill Coryell, o' the Staple Box over near Hatchet, an' don't forget to fill up for yoreself. We like company."

The barkeeper, a solemn-faced citizen with a long upper lip, acknowledged the introduction wtih a grave handshake.

"This is on the house," said he. "Mr. Coryell, welcome to our city."

Happened in then a long, tall individual with enormous hands and small feet. This gentleman was introduced to Coryell as Timmy Osborne, a cow-man of the neighborhood. A notable gunfighter was Mr. Osborne. He had at various times and places killed seventeen men. By reputation he was well-known to Coryell. The three drank together and then the man from the Staple Box withdrew to put up his horse. He should have done it before this, and he knew it. Having seen to Ranger's watering and feeding at the hands of the hotel landlord, he preempted a bed in one of the hotel's three rooms by throwing his bridle across the blanket and returned to his friends.

He found them knee-deep in a game of freezeout. He sat in together with a man named Todd and they made it draw. Native caution caused Coryell to sit facing the door. He considered it strange that Mr. Osborne had not taken that particular chair. For a gentleman who has put out of the way seventeen opponents must of necessity have made enemies. And enemies are not always scrupulous as to methods of revenge. Two hours later Coryell, after a most indifferent run of luck, cashed in. The town marshal took his place, and Coryell, leaning back against the bar, lazily watched the game.

Later he called for a drink. He poured out a short two fingers. He did not at once raise the glass to his lips. Instead he stood abstractedly making a geometrical design of wet circles with the bottom of the glass on the bar-top. He was wondering what Miss Rowland was doing—what she had done that evening rather. She must have been asleep by this time. It was nearly twelve, he thought. Involuntarily he turned and raised his eyes to look at the clock on the wall above the doorway. Eleven forty-eight. As his gaze dropped one entered catfootedly. A wide-shouldered, squat-bodied young man with a square and heavy-jowled face, wearing two guns tied down, he attracted and held Coryell's attention immediately.

Halting within the doorway a scant four feet from Coryell's shoulder, the stranger called softly: "Oh, Tim!" and dropped his hand to his gun-butts.

Acting purely on impulse Coryell swung a quick arm and dashed the contents of his whisky-glass straight into the stranger's eyes. Automatically his left fist impinged upon the angle of the stranger's jaw. Now Coryell was possessed of thews and sinews strong and tough and he had struck with all his might. It is not surprising then that the stranger's feet left the floor, his body described a short arc, and the crown of his head thumped solidly down upon the upturned bottom of an empty cracker-box occupying a corner of the room. The box was at once reduced to simple ends, sideboards and splinters. Incidentally the stranger went limp as the proverbial dish-rag.

The card-players, especially Timmy Osborne, lost all interest in their game. They assisted Coryell in separating the wreck of the cracker-box from the stranger and spreading him out decently upon the floor. Not that he was in the least dead. He was merely very unconscious. There was a lumpy bruise at the angle of his jaw and a bump half the size of a hen's egg on the top of his head. By reason of several jagged scratches and a bloody nose, all acquired when the stranger's face smashed its way through the box boards, it might be said that the stranger's most intimate relation would have been troubled to know him. But not so Timmy Osborne. An ancient enmity sharpened his eyesight.

"Reb Stanley, by Gawd!" said Osborne,

"He shore acted like he knowed yuh," said Coryell. "I wouldn't 'a' horned in the way I done only yuh had yore back turned."

"Don't apologize," Timmy Osborne begged him warmly. "You done just right. Reb Stanley has been lookin' for a chance to shoot me in the back for two year, ever since I had to down his brother over in Kalispell. Got his guns out, didn't he, before he tumbled? Head's shore wet. Smells like whisky."

"I had a glass in my hand," explained Coryell. "I was fixin' to spoil his aim."

"Which you done proper. His eyes 'll burn when he comes to. Jack, give us that bucket o' water you got behind the bar for washin' glasses in."

The bucket was passed, and the contents slopped the length of Reb Stanley. After a time he came to.

"What's the matter with my eyes?" he demanded, sitting up and rubbing the organs in question. "I can't see nothin'."

"The curse of drink," explained Timmy Osborne. "You'd oughta be more careful how you run round, Reb. You lookin' for yore guns, huh? They're all right. I got 'em both. Stand up on yore hind legs, Reb, an' the marshal will maybe oblige me by leadin' you out to the water-trough so's you can wash yore eyes up good. Then you can have yore guns back. I think they's moonlight enough," he added. "But if they ain't an' you'd rather we can wait till mornin'."

"They is an' I don't," was the surly return. "But they aint' gonna be no fuss between you'n me *this* evenin' nor yet tomorrow mornin'. I hurt my hands when I hit that chair, an' if she's alla same to you I'd just as soon wait."

"I expect you would," said Timmy Osborne, staring unwinkingly at the brazen Stanley. "But I wouldn't figure too strong on me sittin' with my back to the door the *next* time."

"I wouldn't," Reb Stanley chuckled with a most feline grin. "It ain't always sometimes safe. My eyes are still full o' nose-paint," he added pointedly. "Who's gonna lead me out to that trough?"

The marshal led him forth. Timmy Osborne and his fellow players resumed their game. It was to be observed that Mr. Osborne no longer sat with his back to the doorway. Not he. He faced it squarely. Coryell gossiped with the bartender.

"Say," said the bartender, lowering his voice, "you done made a friend to-night. Who? Tim Osborne, an' don't you forget it, 'cause he won't. A squarer gent don't live than him, an' he don't forget no favors —nor injuries neither, when it comes to that. Yes, sir, mister, if yo're ever in trouble any time an' need help, lil or much, you can bank on Timmy Osborne to back you with his body, soul, roll *an'* gun. That's Timmy. Huh, here's that dam' assassin comin' back."

Reb Stanley, red-eyed and blinking, preceded the marshal into the room. Ostentatiously the former rubbed his hands and felt of his wrist-bones.

"This is shore tough we can't finish this, Tim," he announced with feeling. "But you can easy see how it is yoreself—I can't exactly afford to take any chances with *you*."

"So I noticed," Timmy Osborne said dryly.

"Yeah," nodded the unabashed Reb. "I thought maybe you would. Now I want my guns before I drag it."

"Say," remarked the man named Todd, "I'm free to admit this talkative party gives me a pain. By what he says, an' likewise not forgettin' to remember what we all seen him tryin' to do when he dropped into our midst I'm for takin' him right out to the nearest tree an' puttin' a period to his conversation."

"I got a rope," suggested Lou Taylor.

"This here is my idea from the beginnin'," averred the marshal. "But as stringin' him up thisaway is illegal, I'll just take my official capacity some'ers else till the session is over."

"Well, I like this, I do!" cried the malingering visitor. "You sports don't seem to guess that I got some ideas in the matter. I don't care nothin' about bein' hung for one thing, an' for another the riot is personal between me an' Tim. Whyfor are you buffle-heads a-hornin' in, I'd like to know?"

"Lookit here—" Todd began angrily.

"He's right," interrupted Timmy Osborne. "It's my play—an' his, like he says. An', after all, I'm still alive. I guess you can slide out, Reb, for now. But there are limits. If you ain't a heap absent in five minutes you'll stay with us permanent. I ain't gonna take no advantage of any gent who claims his hands are hurt unless I have to. Five minutes, Reb, an' yo're the doctor. They's yore guns on the bar. I took the shells out."

Reb Stanley spat on the floor, scooped up the guns, and slipped the weapons into the holsters that sagged low down.

"I guess," Reb Stanley said slowly, turning to look upon Coryell. "I guess yo're the gent throwed that whisky in my eyes."

"You'd oughta be a gambler," Coryell told him. "Yo're guessin' is fine."

"Yeah, I sometimes do guess right. I'll remember yore face, stranger. Maybe we'll be meetin' again."

"Don't strain yoreself."

"I won't have to—if the marshal didn't make no mistake when he said that Staple Box hoss tied to the hitch-rail is yores."

"My hoss all right."

"Might yore name be Coryell—Bill Coryell. Yeah? I thought so."

Coryell gazed critically at Rebel Stanley. "The last time I seen you," he announced softly, "I could 'a' took my oath you was travelin' north—"

"On foot?" interrupted Reb Stanley quickly.

"I didn't say. You'd oughta know."

"Oh," murmured Reb Stanley. "Oh, then that was yore hat."

"I think," pronounced Coryell judicially, "that you'n me will take a lil walk."

The crowd between them and the door parted to allow them gangway. None had the bad taste to follow as they withdrew to the street.

"Which way are you goin'?" Coryell asked quietly.

Reb Stanley paused with foot in stirrup. "What's that to you?" he demanded.

"Just wonderin', thasall," was the mild reply. "You come in *from* the north."

"Whatcha gettin' at?" snortingly.

"Just this, feller: I don't like to be trailed."

"An' you think I was trailin' you?"

"I never think. Now, listen, go'n back to Swing Kyler an' tell him that this trailin' me all over the country has gotta stop. Likewise bushwhackin' me has gotta cease a whole lot. I don't like bein' shot at, see, when I'm busy."

"Why don'tcha go preach this sermon to Swing yore own self?"

"'Cause I got too much on hand, an' most anybody will do for a messenger. Thats' why I picked you. Them guns of yores are unloaded, an' they's nothin' calculated to make a gent feel so cheap as pullin' a unloaded gun, but—I'll let you load 'em *if* you want to. They ain't a dam' thing the matter with yore hands, an' you know it."

"You through yet?" Reb Stanley was in the saddle, but Coryell was holding the horse by the bridle.

"Well, if you don't wanna load them guns—" drawled Coryell, and waited expectantly. "Aw, right," he went on when Reb Stanley made no move toward his belts, "listen here an' I'll give you a message for Swing. Just tell him that if they's any more trailin' of me by him or his men, or any more shootin' at me from hidy-holes I'll have to take it as a sign he's bad friends with me, or somethin'."

"That 'll bother Swing a lot," sneered Rebel Sanley.

"Oh, I ain' done yet, Mr. Stanley. Have a lil patience. I was goin' on to say that if I ever do get it into my head that Swing's intentions ain't honorable—one more trailin 'after me, one more shot for instance—I'll get Swing the first day he leaves the ranch."

"S'pose some other jigger pops at you? You cant' blame Swing Kyler—not that I know anythin' about the Slash K, of course."

"Of course, an' if some other feller shoots at me I won't blame Swing Kyler, I'll just down him. 'Cause, do you see, I'll know Swing is behind the man behind the gun. 'What she said you said I said,' sort of, ain't it? But I'm detainin' you, yeah—don't forget what I told yuh. Let her slipper."

Coryell dropped his hand and stepped up on the sidewalk.

"I won't forget the dog neither." Rebel Stanley's voice was an ugly snarl.

"Yeah," drawled Coryell, "an' don't forget next time it might be somebody else besides a dog."

Without another word Rebel Stanley rode away northward.

CHAPTER XXI.

TAMARACK CREEK.

FROM Dogrib in the morning Coryell rode over the hills directly to Tamarack Creek and the old cabin of the defunct Silvertip. There he struck again the trail he had left the day before at Whistler's Rest. The trail, angling round a finger of high and rocky ground outthrust from a gaunt, partly wooded hill, swung past the cabin to march up-stream to its useless end in the deserted town of Tamarack, a misfortunate contemporary of Whistler's Rest.

He did not find his party in the neighborhood of the cabin. But he found the tracks of its passing. And the hoofmarks pointed down-stream. Within the mile he found his people. They were encamped for the night at the upper edge of a wide, gently sloping meadow bordering the creek. The horses grazed on the flat, the men and women were eating the evening meal in front of the wall tent that stood out whitely against the dark, cool greenness of a belt of stately singing pines.

"I see you have a new hat," observed Miss Rowland, when Coryell had turned Ranger loose and provided himself with a plate and cup.

"Yeah," said Coryell, emptying a can of sardines across a thick slice of Smoky Nivette's camp bread. "My old one was sort of gettin' fusty-lookin like, so I got me a new one. Like pullin' teeth to spend the money. But anythin' to look civilized, as the feller says."

"You never went all the way back to Hatchet! Don't tell me! Why, it must be —how many miles is it?"

"Too far to make it in a day. No, I didn't go to Hatchet. I went some'ers else—Dogrib. You wouldnt' know the place."

"Dogrib! What a funny name!"

"The town ain't," slipped in Light Laurie. "That's where the Rafter T, Barbwire, an' Fryin'-Pan outfits push the bridge over after pay-day in the mornin'. But it ain't a circumstance to Buck Snort when she's goin' good."

"Buck Snort!"

"Buck Snort. Shore, Buck Snort."

"Do you mean to tell me there is actually a town with a name like that?"

"They is, an' why not?"

"Buck Snort! Good Lord! What a name! Buck Snort!" Miss Rowland threw back her head and laughed till the tears rolled down her cheeks. "Why on earth did they call it that?" she asked when she could speak.

"I dunno. I wasn't there at the christenin', but from all accounts it was a shore-'nough, up-an'-comin' celebration."

"Celebration? Christening?"

"Shorest thing you know. The day the gov'ment give 'em a post-office an' postmaster an' put 'em on the map thataway they had a christenin', an' busted a bottle of Old Crow on the door-sill of the Golden Rule where they put the post-office an' then they was a barbecue an' hoss-races an' most everybody got reasonable drunk an' delirious. An' right in the middle of this riot along comes the sheriff—no, not Wat Pickett—feller before him, a poor, triflin' jigger named Higgins—an' one of his deputies with five hoss-thieves they was takin' to Hachet for trial. An' what do them Buck Snorters do but whirl in an' take the rustlers away from the sheriff an' hang 'em every one to a cottonwood in front of the Golden Rule.

"Then after the hoss-thieves are dead a-plenty what do the drunken sots do next but bury 'em without waitin' a minute or for advice. Oh, they must 'a' shore been orv-eyed to the ears 'cause when the town recovers from its party three days later they's one fine large grave right plumb spang in the middle of Main Street.

"Well, bein' it's summer an' hot nobody has the ambition to dig them rustlers up an' bury 'em out from underfoot. What's regarded as simple pastime when they're drunk becomes shore hard day labor when

they're sober. So they let 'em lay. They did put a fence round 'em, though, after Sim Batten goes through town on the jump one night on his hoss an' trips on the grave an' busts his own neck an' the hoss's inclusive. An' they she is, Buck Snort, by gosh, the only town in the territory with a cemetery in the middle of Main Street."

"Where," inquired Miss Rowland, "is this amazing place?"

"East of Hatchet a ways on Buck River —aw, maybe twenty-five or thirty mile. The I. Up-an'-Down outfit, an' Jim Rockerby's boys, an' Shack Ruley's Circle R bunch an' some lil two-by-tamarack ranchers ownin' four cows an' a bad reputation between 'em use Buck Snort to get action in when they don't feel like draggin' it to Hatchet. An' they get their money's worth. Yep, Buck Snort is shore one active handful of folks while the boys are spendin' their coin.

"Why, say"—Coryell's glare of disapproval which had been ineffectually trained on the speaker for the last several minutes finally struck him smack in the eye, and his tongue stumbled—"or so I've always heard," Light Laurie went on lamely and incoherently. "Not that I know a thing about it myself. I never use no liquor personal—except maybe a lil smile now an' then for a cold. You know colds is dangerous. Feller's like to catch his death from 'em—pneumony, plus or minus, an' the like o' that. Yes, ma'am."

"'Plus or minus,'" said Miss Rowland puzzled. "Wha-whats that?"

"He means pleurisy," Coryell explained kindly. "He never does get things straight, Light don't. He dunno how. Outside of that he's all right. I'll tell anybody so."

"Nemmind tellin' nobody nothin'," Light said, stabbing an enormous dill pickle with the point of his clasp knife. "One name's as good as another, an' how do you know ploorisy is right an' plus or minus ain't? Shucks, you don't know. You *can't* know. You ain't no doctor—not even a hoss-doctor."

"Which I'm dead shore you ain't—both of 'em," said Coryell with a sly smile. "Who was it cooked up that stuff for Riley to drink when he had a cold an' burnt the insides out of poor Riley an' like to killed him? Who was the gent done that, huh? Pepper tea, you called it. Pepper tea! I tipped a lil bit on the end o' my tongue just to see, an' I'm tellin' yuh I didn't eat noways comfortable for a week. Naw, sir."

"Well, s'pose I did put in too much pepper with the ginger. It wasn't my fault the bottle upset into the pan. I couldn't help that. It cured Riley's cold, you gotta admit that."

"Yea, it cured the cold like it cured the white-nosed hoss when he got a lame back. Light slaps what he calls a special liniment warranted to cure all strains, sprains, an' windpuffs—all his own makin', too, y'understand—he slaps an' smears this liniment all over the hoss's back an' rubs it in good an' allows the cayuse will be O. K. in a week. Next day they's a blister two feet long an' thirty inches wide on the hoss's back. She's a grand blister, an' sticks to that hoss like a affectionate brother for a week, an' after a while most of the hair comes out an' I had to ride to town for salve, pounds an' pounds of salve, an' by the beginnin' of winter, five months later, that hoss is just gettin' to be so he can *look* at a saddle without dyin' of pure fright."

"Looks like I was elected to wash the dishes," said Light nervously. "S'no use expectin' nothin' like that of Bill, the lazy hound! He'll just set there an' eat an' stuff hisself an' stuff hisself till yuh wonder where he puts it or is he *all* hollow."

Disgustedly Light started to gather up the cups and plates and cutlery. Coryell helped him carry them down to the creek.

"Listen here, you poor hickory," said Coryell when they had passed out of earshot, "don't you know no better'n to tell her stories like that about Buck Snort?"

"Stories!" yapped Light indignantly. "That wasn't no story! That was the truth an' you know it! You know damn well them fellers got drunk an' lynched them rustlers an' buried 'em—"

"Shore I know," interrupted Coryell. "I know they done all them things just like you said, only them things ain't fitten to be told this lady."

"An' why not? Whatsa matter with 'em, I'd like to know?"

"Because this particular lady is curious a whole lot about what she don't understand. She's got imagination an' first thing you know she'll be wantin' to go see this curiosity of a Buck Snort with its Main Street graveyard."

"An' where's the harm in that?"

"My Gawd, Light, use yore head for somethin' besides a hat-peg. I ain't carin' a thing about goin' to Buck Snort. I ain't got a friend in the place, an'—an'—shucks, I dunno. But I don't wanna go there."

"But that aint' no kind of a reason, Bill. No kind at all. What's yore real reason? Deep down under yore vest, I mean?"

"My reason's good enough. I don't wanna go there, thasall. When I plan to do a thing I like to carry out that plan, an' I was plannin' to go west across Tamarack farther into the hills."

"Oh, yeah, shore, farther into the hills, o' course. An' that's why you don't wanna go to Buck Snort. Well, I'm glad to know yore reason, Bill. I was just curious. I was thinkin' maybe you had somethin' against the town, or somethin'. Whatcha gettin' all so red about, Bill?"

"I ain't gettin' red. Yo're a idjit. C'mon, keep a-movin', Light. Gotta get these dishes washed."

"No hurry. I ain't in a bit of a hurry. Le's stop a while right here. I wanna find out what yo're—"

"Nemmind what you wanna find out," cut in Coryell. "Somebody's comin' after us."

"You'll never reach the creek and get those dishes washed if you dawdle along this way," observed Miss Rowland, as she joined them. "Look here, Mr. Coryell, why can't we route our trip so as to pass through Buck Snort?"

"We might—maybe," hesitated Coryell.

"Well, I want to go there. You fix it up. If we'll need extra provisions, why can't we get 'em there?"

"I s'pose we could."

"Then why can't we?"

"Why, we can. I'll—I'll see about it—if we have time."

"Time! There's all summer. I want to see this Buck Snort, and I expect you to take me there. You must arrange it."

"You'd better speak to yore aunt first."

"I have. She's willing, of course. Another thing, my aunt tells me that Buck Snort is not far from the L Up-and-Down, where Connie Dawson is visiting the Landers. Twenty miles, isn't it?"

"About that."

"Then while we're at Buck Snort you can take me over to the Landers. I want Connie to join us for the rest of the summer, and I know she'll come if I coax her. So it's all settled—we're going!"

Miss Rowland turned on her heel and marched back to the white tent.

"I told you so," Coryell whispered to his comrade as they proceeded. "Just see what yuh done with yore fool history of Buck Snort. Connie Dawson! An' she wants her to come for the rest of the summer! I knowed it! I knowed it!"

Light promptly halted at this and, facing Coryell, spread his legs wide.

"So that's it," said he, his head on one side. "So Connie Dawson is what's botherin' you, huh? I *thought* they was somethin' else besides yore plans to make you sidestep Buck Snort. That story was a lil too thin—just a mite too thin, yessir. Whatever's the matter with you 'n' Connie Dawson, Bill? Connie's a fine girl."

"She's all of that, an' I like her sort of, but I wouldn't have her in this outfit for a hay ranch on the Missouri. We got enough women now an' I knowed if we got within hailin' distance of Connie, Miss Rowland would want her to come along. She's been restless for her, I could see that. Night before last I heard her say to Mis' Rowland two-three times how sorry she was she hadn't asked Connie, too. An' now she thinks she's gonna have Connie."

"Well, don't cry, Bill. I'll forgive yore lyin' to me so shameless an' brazen about yore *plans* this time, but dontcha go makin' it a habit. Yo're in luck, you bet."

"Luck, hell!"

"Shore y'are, only yuh don't know it. All these here women right at hand thisaway—the refinin' influence o' females aworkin' on yuh day in day out. Bill, come winter you'll be a changed man. Yore friends won't know yuh. You'll be a reformed character."

"Reformed! Reformed! Light, if yuh wanna get along friendly with me stop usin' that word 'reformed.' I don't like it. It's bad luck, that's what it is, an' I ain't got a bit of use for it."

"Gawd, an' you so young! Where does it hurt the most, Bill? Do you see blood spots, or visions like, an' does raw meat make you wanna growl or bark or yell that-away. They say that's the way it begins when a feller's mind starts to slip its cinches."

"Aw, you can laugh. This is serious to me, damn serious. I dunno what I'm gonna do, I don't. Here this Miss Rowland will frizzle an' fret an' fret an' frizzle till she gets her own way, which she won't this trip, an' you can stick a pin in that. Alla same, Light, you've made me a fine bunch of trouble an' yuh'd oughta had better sense."

"Alla same, so should she. Tell yuh what, Bill, send me back to the ranch, like a good feller. I ain't crazy about workin' for no women any longer, I tell yuh those."

"How about that refinin' influence o' women you was yowlin' about a while back? Ain't you soppin' up any of it?"

"Plenty too much. It takes a regular two-legged constitution for that sort o' thing to act on proper. Yo're all right—a big, slack-jointed citizen with bones and muscles as thick as his head—dontcha throw that dirt or I'll splatter this grease down yore neck! As I was sayin', yo're a fit subject an' I ain't. Nawsir, not lil me. I ain't got neither the heart nor the strength. Besides, I don't need no refinin' influence. That hasher in Hatchet gimme enough to last a long while yet. You stay an' fight it out, an' lemme go home."

"Ain't this sort o' sudden?"

"Not so's yuh could notice it. I was gonna ask you pretty soon anyway. Listen here, I ain't sayin' or meanin' nothin' against Mis' Rowland, who's one fine lady if they ever is one. She knows how to treat a feller, you bet. But the niece don't. Nawsir. She's pretty—pretty as a lil red wagon, an' got a mighty pleasant way with her when she feels like usin' it. But—she's one too exactin' kind of a lady to suit me. It's this an' that an' the other till a body can't draw breath without wonderin' what's comin' next.

"To-night we was two hours waitin' for her to finish a argument with her aunt where the lamp was to be. Lil thing like that an' it took two hours! An' her a-askin' us what we thought alla time, an' then not payin' no attention to what we said. Of all the fool arguments I ever see! An' at noon, Bill, honest, I was so darn mad I felt like quittin'.

"Whadda yuh think, after we've et an' got started, she's just gotta have a lil book out o' that bunch o' doorstops she brought along, an' she's got to have it quick an' prompt an' right away. An' o' course we have to stop an' unpack the bald-faced hoss down to the bottom, an 'we can't find the book. All the others—an' that bookcase which rides like a cook-stove—but not *the* book. An' she's gotta have that book, I'm tellin' yuh. She's gotta. No two ways about that. What her aunt says, an' she says a-plenty, don't count for nothin'. Well, sir, Smoky an' me are just gonna start in unpackin' the other hosses when she finds the book in her off-cantina. *Her off-cantina!* It had been there alla time."

Light Laurie slammed the dishes and tin cups into the creek and dropped with a thud on his outraged knees. Smoky Nivette joined them silently and slid to a seat on a convenient boulder.

"An'," Light Laurie resumed, swabbing off the plates with a fistful of grass, "she was always a-askin' when you'd get back, Bill. Wasn't you takin' a jo-awful time about it? Was they any danger of yore not bein' fit an' able to follow our trail where we turned off at old Silvertip's cabin? Mightn't you think maybe we'd gone on up to Tamarack instead? Of all the fool questions I ever listened to! I'm gettin' sick o' this, Bill, I tell you flat."

"She ees young," observed Smoky Nivette placidly. "She jump from dees ting to dat ting lak de small, leetle bear-cub she play wit' de pine-cone. Dere ees no harm een her."

"'Course they ain't," Coryell said warmly. "She means all right. Country's strange to her. So are the folks. She's bound to act different an' strange like, too.

It don't mean nothin'. Put hosses in a strange stable, an' they'll act the same way. To put it mild an' gentle, Light, yo're a damn fool."

"I am. I admit it. For comin' on this here expedition I'm shore the most all-fired idjit in pants. But I ain't the only one. They are others—two others to be exact. You'n Smoky, Bill, sort o' take the curse off, as the feller says. But alla same, don't yuh think, Mr. William Coryell, o' the Staple Box an' points west, that they is lots o' work at the ranch for a good, energetic young gent about my size, weight, an' complexion?"

"Soon, Light, soon. We ain't got to the end of our travels yet. When we do you can go back to the ranch for a spell."

"But you'll be wantin' me to come back later?"

"Naturally. Of course, Light, you can get yore time if you shore gotta have it, but I'd a heap rather you wouldn't under the circumstances. Yore smilin' face is necessary to my happiness. I've sort of got attached to you, Light."

"Like a boil on a man's neck—you bein' the boil. Honest to Gawd, Bill, I wish I knowed what it is about you makes me let you walk over me thisaway. If I wasn't so good-natured—ouch! Leggo my leg, you pie-faced sheep! This ain't no benefit! Lemme be, you frawg or I'll shore pat yore face with this fry-pan! You better leggo!"

Released, Light Laurie sat up and rubbed his ankle, swearing lurid threats against Coryell. But he calmed down immediately when the other began to detail an account of the occurrences at Whistler's Rest and Dogrib.

(To be continued NEXT WEEK.)

The Policy Sleuth

No. 3. Baccarat at Cowes

by Edgar Wallace

WHEN Henry B. Vandersluis determined to break into English society he went about his work in the same thorough, businesslike manner which had enabled him to create in the Vandersluis Furniture Corporation the largest wonder of the furnishing world. Nobody knows accurately how many acres of ground are covered by the Vandersluis Works at Grand Rapids, Michigan, and now that Mr. Vandersluis is a British citizen, having forsworn his allegiance to the United States, it is inexpedient to ask him, since he would probably fix his uncomfortable monocle and ask:

"Is there such a place as Grand Rapids?"

He brought to Europe in the late nineties twenty million dollars and a passionate admiration for the British aristocracy, into

the ranks of which he set himself to climb. And Henry B. was *some* climber. His feet were so impervious to the icy blasts of British indifference and to the rugged character of the stony steps he was mounting that they grew neither cold nor sore.

He bought a wonderful estate in Somersetshire, a town house in Grosvenor Square, which has more dukes to the inch than any other square. He bought a racing stable and equipped it with thoroughbred race-horses which pranced down to the starting-gate very proudly and came back to the winning-post at their leisure, and he purchased with real money that curiosity which is so often described in the public press but which is so very seldom seen—"a floating palace."

The only people who can float palaces are company promoters, and they only float picture palaces, anyway; but the steam yacht Oisa, or as it was commonly designated in Southampton, the Oh I Say, was palatial in its fittings, furnishings and feedings. It was beautiful as to line, most powerfully engined, skilfully captained, officered and manned, and lacked only one thing to complete its palatial character. To cut a long story short, the Oisa was a palace with a king but without courtiers.

There were wonderful suites which were suitable for the habitation of princes. They were mostly occupied by Mr. Vandersluis's portly city friends who had no titles and few "h's" to their names. There was a wonderful reception saloon in which Mr. Vandersluis was wont to receive letters from the aristocracy saying that they deeply regretted that owing to a previous engagement they were unable to avail themselves of his kind invitation to be present at the gala performance he had arranged and begged to remain his very sincerely, *et cetera.*

Cowes week was beginning. The roadstead was gay with dainty white craft. The lawn of the Yacht Squadron was packed with hot but exclusive humanity. On every yacht, however small, was a gay little party, except on the Oisa, where the party was Henry B., who was neither gay nor little, for he weighed two hundred and sixty pounds in his stocking feet.

He stood on the high poop of the Oisa, surrounded by comfortable but empty deck-chairs and his secretary, a sallow young man who chewed gum all day long and far into the night, gazed through his *pince-nez* over the sun-kissed waves, and wondered how long the old man would give him ashore.

Henry B. turned from a contemplation of the well-filled yachts to his own tenantless poop.

"What was all that rumpus about on Lord Crouboro's yacht this morning? You started in to tell me, but something interrupted you."

The secretary smiled.

"Somebody tried to pinch her jewels—"

"Who is 'her'?" demanded Henry B.

"His daughter — Lady Mary — what's the name—"

"Glendellon," said Henry B. promptly, for he was a living guide to the peerage.

"That's the name. It appears that a woman—some say it was that dame who lifted the Croxley Plate at Palm Beach—Swift Sarah."

"She ain't at Cowes?" exclaimed Henry B.

The secretary nodded.

"That's the story I heard from Vastor's secretary."

Mr. Vandersluis experienced a jealous pang, for the Vastors were now veritably British, and noble to boot.

"And—" continued the young man, but for the second time the story was interrupted.

"I thought my idea would have brought Lord Crouboro on board," he said, the name suggesting a theme more interesting than the fate of Lady Mary's jewels. "They say he and his daughter gamble and I got the best roulette table that he could find on any of these yachts. D'ye think they know they can have a game."

"Sure," assented the secretary. "I have put it about very thoroughly. I have seen a lot of fellows from the other yachts. I have talked with the servants and passed the quiet tip that if anybody likes to come aboard they will be welcome."

"Did you put in the paragraph I told you?"

George nodded, slipped his fingers into his waistcoat pocket, and pulled out a folded newspaper cutting.

"Here it is."

Mr. Vandersluis adjusted his glasses and read:

A FLOATING BANK.

American Millionaire Carries Half a Million Pounds On His Yacht.

Mr. Henry B. Vandersluis, a well-known figure in London society—Mr. Vandersluis groaned—does not bother about banks when he is on a yachting cruise and is ready to move off to any part of the world and with this possibility in view he carries aboard with him an enormous sum of money, reputed to be half a million. There is method in this apparent eccentricity because Mr. Vandersluis is a great art collector and the necessity for cash transactions in this business is obvious.

"I put a million first," explained George, "but the newspaper fellow asked me to be reasonable, so I cut it down to half."

"You would have thought that would get them," commented Mr. Vandersluis. "I have never known money that didn't, and I don't suppose my money's different from anybody else's. But somehow we only attract the fellows we don't want. Who is this?"

He pointed over the side where a boat was rowing direct for the yacht's gangway.

"Perhaps it's a real fellow," remarked Mr. Vandersluis hopefully.

"He looks like a clerk to me," said the unimaginative George. "Lords don't wear white flannels and black boots—not the lords I've met."

The boatman brought his little craft alongside, and the passenger stepped up the ladder. He lifted his straw hat to Mr. Vandersluis and produced carefully from his inside pocket a letter.

Henry B. was used to receiving letters. He turned it over and read on the flap, "The Federated Assurances."

"Business, eh?" he said, ripped it open and read:

DEAR SIR:

I have read with some uneasiness in the morning press an account of the large sums of money which you are carrying on the Oisa and I am sending you this letter by special messenger and as you may be sure in no interfering, but in a helpful spirit, to ask you in view of all the circumstances, and particularly bearing in mind the fact that you are heavily insured against burglary at this office, whether you would agree to receive as your guest our best detective, Mr. Robert Brewer, of whom no doubt you have heard in America.

Mr. Brewer informs me that there is at present in the Isle of Wight a particularly dangerous band of crooks and he fears that the announcement in the papers may induce them to visit you. ("Let 'em!" grunted Mr. Vandersluis.) Our suggestion is that Mr. Brewer should come to you to-morrow, disguised as a deckhand—our Mr. Brown, the bearer of this, will point Mr. Brewer out to you, but it would be inadvisable that he should meet you. Society, as you know, is a prey to the malefactors of all nationalities and it would be a great pleasure to us to offer you this service, for which no charge is made."

The letter was signed "Douglas Campbell."

Mr. Vandersluis folded it and looked at the bearer over his glasses.

"Do you know the contents of this?"

"Yes, sir."

Henry B. pursed his lips.

"I don't like having sleuths on board," he said, "and I think I am quite capable of looking after my own money, but if this insurance fellow worries, I don't mind. You can send a wire telling Brewer he can come along. My secretary will despatch it."

He called to that worthy.

"George, put Mr. Brown up for the night. What do you drink?"

"Lemonade, sir," said the virtuous Mr. Brown, and Henry B. Vandersluis, who had fifty unopened cases of Moet and Chandon 1906 in the hold, groaned.

In the evening at dinner, however, Mr. Brown, in a spirit of reckless dissipation, took no less than two glasses of port, which he insisted upon calling port wine, and under the mellowing influence of alcohol he babbled freely. He and George and Henry B. were the sole occupants of the long table which filled an almost regal dining saloon.

"Society, bah!" exclaimed Mr. Vandersluis.

"That's what Mr. Campbell says," rejoined Mr. Brown; "he says that society—"

"I don't want to know what Mr. Campbell says," put in Henry B. inconsistently. "He has no right to discuss society the way he does. In the first place, he is not a society man, in the second place he is society's servant—my servant."

"That's what Mr. Brewer tells him," quoth the undaunted Mr. Brown.

"Brewer? Oh, that's the fellow who is coming to-morrow. What's he like? I seem to remember that I heard about him."

"He is a very nice man," said Brown enthusiastically. "He's a most wonderful disguiser."

"Bah!" exclaimed Mr. Vandersluis, "You needn't point him out to me. I would spot him in a thousand. I know these detectives. There's something about 'em that is unmistakable. It's a mare's nest, this crooks' dope. What chance have they got of getting on board here? I've twenty deck-hands and stokers. I am half a mile from the shore, and I can pull quicker and shoot straighter than any man lying off Cowes to-night."

"I am sure you can," agreed Mr. Brown, helping himself to more port. "The moment I saw you I said, 'that man can pull quicker and shoot straighter than any man lying off Cowes to-night.'"

"They've all tried to skin me, the Moore gang and the O'Donovans, and that fellow that went over the water for twenty years. They've all failed. They can't skin me, boy."

"The first thing I said to myself when I saw you," said Mr. Brown a little drowsily, "was, 'that's the fellow they can't skin.'"

Henry B. looked at him with an amused smile.

"It doesn't take much to affect you and I think you ought to have stuck to lemonade."

"I'm all ri—" answered Mr. Brown heroically attempting to rise, and sitting down unexpectedly, to judge from the look of pained surprise which crossed his face.

"Make yourself comfortable in that chair. Here, give him a hand up."

They lifted Mr. Brown and dropped him into a luxurious armchair originally designed for the comfort of royalty.

Henry B.'s secretary, under a deck light was playing patience, and Mr. Vandersluis had left his seat and was leaning over the rail when a voice in the darkness hailed him: "Yacht ahoy!"

The hour was close on midnight, and Mr. Vandersluis hesitated, for the voice was that of a woman, and it might have been directed to any of the yachts within a radius of two hundred yards, for it was a still night.

Presently the voice spoke again, and this time it was nearer.

"Help me, will you please? I've lost an oar."

He peered down in the water, and only a few yards from the yacht's gangway he detected a small boat. Without waiting to call a deck-hand, he ran down the companion ladder.

It was a woman, and in the darkness he saw she was in evening dress. He lifted her on to the little platform, made fast the dingey, and supported her to the deck. In the overhead lights he saw she was young and beautiful. Her dress was expensive, and the rope of pearls about her neck represented a fortune. This he saw at once, because it was Henry B.'s way to classify humanity in dollar units.

The girl was apparently overcome by fatigue and dropped limply into one of the padded chairs.

"Get some brandy, George," said Mr. Vandersluis, thrilled by the adventure; "or open a bottle of that wine," he added, brightening at the thought.

The girl drank the amber liquid eagerly, and looked up with a grateful smile.

"I have been very foolish," she said. "I thought I could row to my father's yacht. When I came out of the club the man was not in the boat, so I rowed by myself. I am Lady Mary Glendellon," she introduced herself, "and my father is the Earl of Crouboro."

"Glad to meet you," said Mr. Vandersluis huskily. "I was hoping to meet your father, but he has had an important engagement in Wales. I didn't know he was back."

The girl smiled faintly.

"Oh, yes, he's back," she said. "I am

awfully grateful to you. You have probably saved my life, and my father will never be sufficiently thankful to you. It was so silly of me. I stayed later at the club than I should—you see, really, we weren't at the club at all," she added in a burst of frankness, "but at Lord Bentel's place; but you mustn't tell father that we were playing baccarat."

Mr. Vandersluis smiled politely.

"Oh, you modern girls," he said, "what would your grandmother think about playing baccarat."

She laughed, and he laughed, and they were good friends at once, so good that she refused his offer to provide a boat for her to row back to her yacht.

"It's lovely here. What a beautiful boat!" she exclaimed with an admiring glance around. "Do let me see it."

He escorted her on the rounds, and everything delighted her.

"I will come to-morrow and bring father," she said. Mr. Vandersluis took a deep breath. "He really ought to see this yacht. It's lovely. And I'll bring the Duchess of Thatcham. She is a most delightful creature."

By this time they had reached the door of the saloon, and the girl was in before Henry B. realized that the occupant of one of the large chairs was a disheveled clerk. He nodded to his secretary, who went in advance and skilfully swung the chair round so that only its back was visible.

"And this is the saloon!" she said.

The table had been cleared, and great bowls of roses had taken the place of the silver and glass. She sat herself down at one end of the table, laid a big silk bag before her, and Mr. Vandersluis sat on her left, his ear sensitive for any snores which might come from the chair.

"This has been a very exciting day for me," said the girl.

"Are you sure I ought not to order a dingey for you?" suggested Mr. Vandersluis. "Won't the earl be worried?"

"Oh, no," she laughed. "I don't think you are quite used to our ways, Mr.—I didn't get your name."

"Vandersluis," he informed her.

"You see we keep extraordinary hours, and really in society nobody worries about people unless they don't come in to breakfast."

"And you say it has been an exciting day," said Mr. Vandersluis, desiring to continue a conversation which was wholly delectable.

"Don't you think so?" she replied, ticking off her fingers. "I have been nearly lost at sea. I won one thousand pounds at baccarat. I was nearly robbed of my pearls."

"Nearly robbed of your pearls?"

"Haven't you heard. There's an awful lot of people at Cowes. What do you call them—it's an American word?"

"Crooks?" suggested Mr. Vandersluis.

"Yes, that is the word. There are two men and a woman. You've heard about them?"

Mr. Vandersluis had not heard about them, but he nodded. It was not his practise to admit that any secret of the world was a secret to him.

"Well, it was this horrid woman herself—what do they call her—Swift Sarah—isn't it a ridiculous name?"

"Oh, I have heard of Swift Sarah," said Mr. Vandersluis in truth. "What happened?"

"She came on board this morning," explained her ladyship, "pretending that she had been engaged by me as a lady's maid. I was ashore at the time, and as I had engaged a maid, nobody questioned her. They showed her down to my cabin, and if it had not been for the astuteness of our chief steward, who wouldn't let her open a single box until I returned, she would have taken everything."

"You're a very fortunate young woman. Did she escape?"

Lady Mary nodded.

"She made an excuse to go ashore and she hasn't been seen since. It worried me terribly. Otherwise I would not have worn my pearls to-night."

Mr. Vandersluis tried to continue the conversation, but he found the lady absent-minded.

"I wonder if you would get your man to row me ashore," she said.

"Ashore?"

She nodded.

"It is the fever," she laughed gaily. Dipping her hand into her bag, she produced, first a thick pack of cards and then a large roll of money.

Mr. Vandersluis was amused.

"Come, come, you're not going back to lose that money," he said.

"I sha'n't lose it," answered the girl with confidence. "Why, I have won consistently for twelve months."

"Look here, if you want to play baccarat you can play with me," said Henry B. "I don't want to take your money," he added hastily as he saw the girl hesitate.

"Oh, please don't be horrid," she pleaded. "If you like, I'll play, but you mustn't tell my father."

So they played, and Mr. Vandersluis won and won, and the lady's roll grew thinner and thinner. He was wondering what excuse he could make for returning the money, and congratulating himself upon having touched the top-notch in the most exclusive set—for who does not know that the patronage of the Earl of Crouboro is equivalent to a presentation at court—when she produced an even bigger roll from the depths of her bag.

"It's all winnings, so you needn't mind taking it," she said. "It is my bank, and I will make it two thousand pounds."

"Banco!" said Mr. Vandersluis obligingly, and lost.

With alternate winnings he lost consistently for the greater part of an hour. George was dispatched to the safe under Henry B.'s bunk, and came back with a large wad of one-hundred-pound notes.

Mr. Vandersluis was getting hot. It was one thing to win from the aristocracy and devise means whereby the money could be returned without hurt to the fair loser, but when the fair loser had devised a method which hurt nobody's feelings but his—

"Open that port-light," growled Mr. Vandersluis; "the saloon is getting hot, and bring some more money."

The money came, and half-way through it, her ladyship looked at her watch and uttered a little scream of consternation.

"A quarter past two," she said, thrusting some loose notes into her bag. "Really, I must go now."

A little light passed the port-hole and she jumped up and looked out.

"Oh, it is father's steam launch. He must have heard I was on board. Good night, Mr. Vandersluis, I'll come and see you in the morning."

Mr. Vandersluis, who was perspiring heavily, and was conscious of severe financial loss, held out his large hand.

"Won't you say good night to me?"

It was Mr. Brown who stood by the door, his hands in his pockets, smiling.

"I beg your pardon," she said coldly.

"Won't you say good night to me, Sarah," went on Bob Brewer. "It's years and years and years since we met. Do you remember the night I pinched you at what the newspapers picturesquely described as your Long Island bower, for robbing James H. Seidlitz of everything except his beautifully embroidered shirt?"

"Aw, you make me tired!" said the girl, then leaped like lightning to the port-hole and cried a word of warning.

"Don't worry about your pals," said Bob lazily. "There's been a police boat waiting for them since you came aboard."

"Then," gasped Mr. Vandersluis, "she's not the Earl of Crouboro's daughter?"

"I know nothing about the earl's private life," answered Bob carefully, "but if she is, he's quite unconscious of the fact."

"Of course," said Mr. Douglas Campbell, "he had no claim on us, even if he lost his money at cards. That is a risk we do not take, but you will get your commission just the same, Bob. It only shows you that what society wants—"

"What I want," said Bob, "is ten per cent on the gross savings, and I suggest to you that you put it up to old man Vandersluis that he hasn't a dog's chance of getting into the peerage unless he pays it!"

The fourth adventure of the Policy Sleuth, "A RACE AT OSTEND," will appear next week.

Treasures of Tantalus

by Garret Smith

Author of "After a Million Years," "Between Worlds," "On the Brink of 2000," etc.

CHAPTER XXV.

OLANDA'S PLOT OVERREACHES.

PROFESSOR FLECKNER'S delight was unbounded at his discovery.

"Treasure of Tantalus!" he raved. "Here we've been hunting for months to find the puny stealings of the crime trust and right beneath us, right under little old New York is treasure greater than the present combined wealth of the world. And, it's ours, ours for the taking! Wait till I get my instrument to working perfectly again and we'll make old Madga our slave. He'll bring cartloads of gold and jewels to our door whenever we send for him. I believe Chandler told the truth now. He wouldn't be wasting time trying to be President if he had known where this treasure lay."

"But," I broke in, "do you really think this Madga is the real head of the crime trust? Why should he need to direct a big organization for plundering society when nature gave him such wealth?"

"Ah, my boy!" Fleckner countered. "It was power he wanted. What is treasure without the power it brings? He created his organization to give him that power. He had to use wealth as a bait to make them work for him. Why should he reveal his great natural treasure-house or pay them out of it when he could make them steal their own pay and then hand it over to him to keep as well? The stealing was just to jolly them along. You see, he employed the same methods that he is using below ground with this mysterious other Treasure by which he rules his barbarous followers!"

"And those other people in the cave, who are they?" I persisted.

"Oh, doubtless the green men are prehistoric savages who got lost underground ages ago. The white men are probably descended from early white settlers who wandered into the cave and also got lost. But I must get busy and tinker up this old machine so I can find the entrance to our cave of Tantalus."

While Fleckner worked over the telephonoscope controls, Priestley, more restless than ever, was unable to sit still two minutes in succession. I could read his thoughts in his transparent countenance as easily as though he had spoken them. The duplicity of the beautiful Olanda had not destroyed his infatuation. He was consumed with a fever to get to her before the lover she so far favored could reap the fruits of her trickery and claim her from her father. If the Professor was right in his conclusions Priestley might be able within a few hours to present himself before her in person.

I confess that I myself was more than half convinced and not a little anxious to bring on the dénouement. To mitigate my impatience I whiled away the time by reading the newspapers which in our excitement over the affairs of Tantalus we had neglected for some days.

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

Professor Fleckner's preoccupation with other matters and his inability any longer to use his telephonoscope at will had, of course, removed his guiding hand from the malicious activities of the crime trust for many days.

But a glance at the papers showed that the reign of terror he had started had gone on under its own momentum, increasing like a snowball rolling down a hill. It was to be assumed that organized trust activities had ceased, as the gang would not dare to act without its leader's orders. But the publicity given to the series of inspired robberies and blackmailing plots had evidently stirred to life the morally defective traits of many individuals all over the globe who had not been enrolled in the organization. For the papers teemed each day with reports of a world-wide crime wave.

The distrust in banks and business corporations that he had started had grown until the nations were in the throes of a financial panic. Countless business and bank failures were noted. Unemployment for the first time in half a century had again become epidemic.

In the political world the results were even more serious. The two or three instances of apparent bad faith on the part of statesmen, manufactured by the professor, had set the imagination of the politicians to work. No one any longer trusted any one else. Dissensions were breaking out everywhere between the component nations of the League. The League Council was rent with strife. It looked as though the permanence of the League itself were threatened and as if another world war were imminent.

A minor phase of the activities of Fleckner's Frankenstein was an epidemic of reports of disappearing persons, started by the kidnaping of the twelve men who knew the telephonoscope secret.

Every man, woman or child who was lost sight of by family or business associates for a few hours was reported kidnaped. Miss Stimson's disappearance had been noted in lurid headlines among others.

I had nearly finished my reading when, on the front page of the paper of the day before there leaped before my eyes a story that at first amused me greatly in spite of my heartsickness over the tales of havoc I had been digesting. Then, as I read it through, I was filled with consternation. This was the headline.

WORLD FAMOUS SCIENTIST REPORTED AMONG MISSING.

Professor Rufus Fleckner, Celebrated Inventor, Believed Kidnaped by South American Bandits—Last Seen in Northern Chile.

The fiction of a trip through the Andes which Fleckner had arranged as an alibi, by projecting his image into various South American cities and giving out interviews there, had proved a boomerang.

There was a sensational interview with Dr. Bonstelle of Columbia University in which he told of the telephone call from Professor Fleckner and the strange language he had consulted him about. Hearing nothing from Fleckner after his second phone call, Bonstelle, eager to learn more, had tried to get in touch with the professor through brother scholars in Chile. But when they attempted to trace him from town to town, it had become apparent that he had disappeared in the mountains. After he had been missing for some time the Chileans became alarmed, reported it to the government and searching parties of soldiers were now beating the mountain passes for news of him.

Meanwhile his friends in New York had become greatly exercised and now proposed asking the police to break into his apartment to seek possible clues as to the itinerary he had planned.

It was this last proposal that filled me with alarm. I tried to show the article to Fleckner but he waved me away so impatiently that I decided to wait a little till I could get him to give his attention to the seriousness of this new development.

In case of a legalized attempt to enter his home, Fleckner had counted on getting any such order revoked by his hold on the legal machinery through his power over crime trust agents. With the telephonoscope out of control this of course, was impossible.

I, therefore, became as interested as Fleckner and Priestley in seeing the repairing of the instrument hastened. He was now putting the finishing touches on a new set of generators. I watched with breathless eagerness while he was connecting them up. If he found this time that he could now break the rays away from the terrestrial current and use them at will as before, I meant to show him the last newspaper article I had read and warn him to take steps at once to head off the proposed police raid on the laboratory.

But just as he tightened the last screw of the new battery, something happened on the screen that diverted my attention from affairs on the surface of the earth. I was destined to forget for some time to come all newspapers and their sinister warnings.

Grudga, the favored suitor of Olanda, was stealthily entering the little dell by the river to dig up, as the girl had told him to do, the measure of " treasure " that she had so craftily gathered and buried there. He reached the point she had indicated and with trembling eagerness dug in the sand with a golden spade until he uncovered the measure the girl had buried.

He clutched it to his breast and drew a fold of his tunic over it. Then as stealthily as he had come he started to leave the ravine.

" Now, Olanda, dear heart, you are mine!" he murmured joyously.

But at that the shrubbery parted and a sinister figure stepped forth. Grudga stopped in alarm.

" Hendriga, the half-breed!" he gasped.

He turned to flee but the other leaped forward and bore him to the ground.

The newcomer was a powerful figure, with the heavy, muscular development of the green men, and the tall straight frame of the white men combined. His hue was light but a slight greenish cast showed the strain of inferior blood. His youthful features were regular but their expression was one of cruel cunning.

" So O'anda is yours?" he sneered. " Not while Hendriga has power in his arms."

He clutched his mighty fingers into the throat of his prostrate rival until the latter's gasping breath ceased. Then he transferred the measure of treasure to his own tunic and contemptuously tossed the lifeless body into the stream.

" Now Hendriga will go and claim the fair Olanda," he muttered as he walked swiftly away.

CHAPTER XXVI.

TIME SLIPS ITS COGS.

IT was the voice of Priestley that first broke the spell of horror that held us.

" We must stop him! We must stop him! Try the projector now!" he cried, leaping for the control-board.

But Fleckner was ahead of him and already working frantically at the lever that might project our images down and confront the fleeing murderer.

It was of no use. The projector failed. Fleckner had to content himself by following with his ray the form of Hendriga who was now well on the way to the house of Madga his prospective father-in-law.

The rest period was just ended. Beyond the golden stockades could be heard the bustle of the awakening household. The green men who had stood guard during the rest period were about to change watches with the work period guards. There was a voluble chatter of greetings and scraps of gossip.

Hendriga made known to the guard at the gate that he wished to see Madga, the chief. While the guard took the message within the half-breed stood eagerly eying the shining gold wicket as if he could ill-restrain his impatience to state his triumphant errand. We heard the shuffling steps of the guard returning and heard him fumbling at the chain within.

At that instant there was the snap of a broken circuit in the network of the telephonoscope wires under the control-board and the screen went blank.

" A curse on that fuse!" Fleckner muttered, throwing open the fuse-box, ripping out the melted metal and slipping in a new one with the swift precision of his practised fingers. " That added battery of generators overloads the thing a little."

He made some rapid adjustments among the bewildering mass of coils and switches.

"There," that's better," he announced. "I'll get a little more power in the ray now."

I had anxiously watched the clock while this was going on. A shade less than three minutes passed between the cutting off of the picture on the screen and the instant when it flashed back as Fleckner switched on the power of his repaired instrument.

We stared in bewilderment. At first it seemed that the ray must have shifted and given us an entirely different outlook.

But closer inspection showed the same outline of overhanging precipice and the house in its deep cleft. The dwelling was of the same form and size. The river passed it at the same sweeping curve. There was the same vista of the valley visible from the gate.

Yet the gate which three minutes before had been in perfect repair now hung half open from a single hinge. A broken bit of chain dangled from its latch. The golden palings when we last saw them had gleamed with the brilliancy of frequent polishing by green-hued slaves. Now they were dull and battered as from long neglect and lack of repair.

The roadway in front of the house that had been kept in perfect condition showed great cracks and worn gaps. What had been neat grass-plots between the road and the paling three minutes before were patches of weeds. Between the palings and the house, where before had been close-clipped shrubbery, were big trees.

And the sturdy, laughing young guards, who had stood alertly in front of the palings a moment before, some dozen strong, were all gone. In their place there perched on a boulder by the gate a dirty, dejected old man, looking more like a beggar than a guard.

What could it mean? This could not be the same place. Our rays must have been diverted by the blowing out of the fuse. This must be another near-by cavern. I conjectured, in which a prosperous race had formerly dwelt. Perhaps Madga himself had once lived there and built this house and later for some reason moved to the other and strikingly similar valley and duplicated the structures in it. It would not be out of keeping with the other performances of this strange master-defective. I voiced these theories to Fleckner.

"That may be," he agreed. "I was thinking something of the sort myself. We'll soon find out."

He started to swing the rays about and search for another cave when we heard voices within the great house, high-pitched, angry voices, speaking in the now familiar tongue of the cavern.

Fleckner sent our rays through the open gate past the neglected garden into the house. His last addition to his generator power had enabled them once more to penetrate surfaces.

In the main hall were three people engaged in a heated wrangle. There was something about each of them strangely familiar yet weirdly different. There was a middle-aged woman, tall and still slender and fair of skin. Her features were strikingly like those of Olanda, daughter of the chief. Indeed she might well be the girl's mother. But the expression of the face was hard, cold and petulant.

The old, well-preserved man beside her was even more like Madga, father of Olanda, than was the woman like his daughter. His was the same erect figure, arrogant bearing, and crafty, avaricious expression. The features seemed an almost exact duplicate of Madga's, save for more pronounced lines of age. The only difference between them was in their flowing hair and beard. Madga's was rusty gold. This man's snowy white.

And the third member was startlingly like Hendriga, the half-breed, excepting that he was older and his hair streaked with gray.

The first words of the woman startled and bewildered us even more than what we had already seen.

"You treat us like children, my father!" she complained, facing the older man with blazing eyes. "They call me Olanda, daughter of Madga, Chief of the Valley. I am more like Madga's slave. Not for twenty years now have I so much as seen a bit of 'treasure,' not since this creature

bought me from you, with a full measure of it."

We looked at each curiously, each wondering if the others saw and heard the same thing.

"Yes, he bought you dearly, worthless girl, and I made well in the selling. You ask me for 'treasure' now? Have I not kept and clothed you both these many years, and when did you pay me any 'treasure' for it?"

"We have worked and slaved for you when your old slaves fled from you because you abused them and never gave them pay except useless promises of 'treasure,'" the man broke in. "If I had not had in my veins some of the blood of the green men and been able to control them they would have murdered you long ago."

The woman looked at the speaker in loathing.

"Don't talk of murder, Hendriga," she shuddered. "I have not forgotten how you won me. And don't boast of your blood before me. I—"

She broke off suddenly.

"Enough of this," she added in a whisper. "Here come the children. It is not necessary that my boys hear how their father won their mother by killing the man she really loved."

"Nor how their mother furnished her purchase 'treasure' by robbing a score of other suitors," he retorted.

At that three half-grown boys rushed into the room.

"Mother! Mother! Don't let them get me!" cried the smallest of the three, rushing up to the woman.

"He's found 'treasure,' mother," one of the others cried. "We're just playing, you know. We're robbers, trying to steal it from him."

"What has the boy got?" demanded the old man excitedly, snatching the chubby fist of the youngest boy and prying out of it a small nugget.

The old man gave one look at it and threw it away in disgust.

"Nothing but gold!" he muttered. "Will no one ever give me any more treasure?"

At that there was another loud report under the telephonoscope control-board, and again the screen went blank.

We sat and stared at each other for a full minute without speaking. Priestley was trembling like a man with the ague. He was the first to break silence.

"Did you two see and hear what I saw and heard?" he demanded.

Fleckner, who was himself visibly agitated, looked at me as if to read my face. I could only nod dumbly.

"We think we did," Fleckner said at length. "What it means I can't imagine."

He began mechanically repairing the blown-out fuse, while Priestley and I communed with our bewildered thoughts.

This time he took some fifteen minutes at the work, and seemed in no hurry to turn back to that sordid, maddening mystery of the underground.

But at length he threw on the current.

"I put in a larger main cable," he said. "It 'll carry the current better and give the ray more power."

The golden palace again flashed on the screen. At the first glance we saw that still another change had taken place. Now the road in front of the building was almost obliterated. The palings were torn away; the yard was a tangle of underbrush and big trees that almost hid the house from sight.

Fleckner handled the control levers in a half daze. He sent the ray once more into the big room, where we had just witnessed such a strange scene.

Here we got another shock, for which, it is true, the appearance of things on the outside had in a measure prepared us. On a couch by the far wall lay an emaciated old man gasping for breath. Twice we looked before we recognized Madga, the chief.

His appearance was as though twenty years had passed since we had last seen him, erect and virile, scarcely twenty minutes before.

Beside him sat a gray-haired woman, a little bent, a little wrinkled, but still strong and alert. Her face was as cold and cruel as that of the aged wreck on the couch. But it was, nevertheless, the

face of Olanda, the singer—Olando suddenly grown old and terrible by some malignant alchemy that left us doubting whether, after all these years of scientific skepticism, the Arabian tales of black magic were not the literal truth.

"Food! Food! Olanda, give me food! Will you starve your old father to death?" quavered the sick man.

"I will," answered the harsh, cold voice of the metamorphosed Olanda. "You get no food till you tell me where you have hidden the treasure. This is the last time I'll ask you. Tell me now or I'll leave you to die."

"I give up," he gasped. "Lean close, or your sons may hear."

She bent over him, while he whispered something we could not catch. Then she arose and sped from the room, not seeming to hear the feeble cry from the couch of "Food! Food!"

In the next room four people awaited her eagerly. One, Hendriga, now an old man, still erect and sturdy, ugly, malignant, avaricious as ever. The others were men in early middle life, fine of form and regular of features, but in the complexion of each a faint touch of green hue and in their countenances a predominant expression of cruel avarice.

They were young dandies in dress, tunics, trousers, and sandals new and bedecked with glittering gems. About the head of each was a circlet of gold, each bearing over the forehead a single great gem, one a diamond, one a ruby, and one an emerald. So closely did they resemble each other that they could be distinguished only by these gems.

Olanda looked at her husband, then at the younger men.

"My sons," she said haughtily, "leave us. I wish to speak to your father alone."

The three young men glanced at each other questioningly and nodded with secret understanding. He of the diamond circlet acted as spokesman.

"No," he said firmly, addressing his father. "We can no longer be ordered about like children. The old man, our grandfather, has told you where he has stored the treasure. That is not a secret for your keeping. The old man's life is done. Let him die. You, too, are old, and could not rule for many years. You have already shown yourselves unfit to rule as we believe this valley should be ruled. The green slaves have fled. Our white race, too, has nearly deserted us.

"We have decided to take the rule into our own hands and bring back the old days of prosperity. You will tell us the secret of the treasure. We will take it and use it rightly. Don't deny us. You are but two and old, and one a woman. We are three young, strong men.

"We have already barred the windows. Tell us where the treasure is or we will go out and bar the door, and leave you here to starve as you have starved our grandfather. We will leave you now for a little time to think it over, and then will return for our answer."

As the three unnatural sons strode out of the room, the fuse of the telephonoscope again blew out and left the screen in darkness.

CHAPTER XXVII.

AFTER A THOUSAND YEARS.

TO me it was an intense relief when the breaking down of the instrument gave us another respite from watching this tragic, sordid miracle unfold. I was limp with horror and amazement. Yet, shaken as I was myself, my pity went out to Priestley. He had seen his high ideal dashed down.

"It simply can't be! It's absurd, utterly impossible! And yet— Tell me, Blair, what did you see? I wonder if I've been dreaming."

I shook myself together and considered my answer.

"I saw, or seemed to see," I replied finally, "a generation pass in less than an hour, fifty years of time roll away in a flash, characters changed in a twinkling from fresh, youthful innocence to sordid age, through the evil influence of a perverted lust for material wealth."

"Did you see that, too, Professor Fleckner?" Priestley asked.

Fleckner looked at me searchingly. I think my reference to the degeneration of character stung him a little.

"I seemed to," he admitted. "Or else I was looking upon some equally mysterious picture prophecy of events to be, or perhaps what some hidden prophet believes they will be."

"Then we have all been hypnotized!" Priestley exclaimed. "I wonder if Olanda ever existed or if she was merely a dream picture of some one's imagining?"

"The answer to that is our complete cinema and phonograph records," the professor reminded him. "You can't hypnotize a wax disk or a celluloid film."

As if to verify his own faith, he tried several of the familiar records, one or two of them reproducing the scenes in which time had apparently slipped a cog.

"There is no doubt that the pictures we thought we saw on the screen and the sounds we thought we heard, we really did see and hear. I'm beginning to wonder, however, if we have not been the victims of some colossal hoax, though what it may be I can't imagine. Depend upon it, nevertheless, miracles don't happen. This thing has a natural explanation, and I'm going to find it."

"Why not consult Miss Stimson?" I asked, suddenly remembering the clever young woman who was supposedly listening and watching in over her auxiliary telephonoscope from her near-by prison room. "Feminine intuition, coupled with a brain as clever as hers has been shown to be, might have some good suggestions to offer."

"Thank you, Mr. Blair; I heard that." came her voice from the screen. "I have seen and heard the same things as you gentlemen, apparently. Perhaps I'm silly, but here's what I thought might be the explanation. Perhaps we've been simply looking at a motion-picture show. No, I'm not joking. Some one in the crime trust may have learned of the telephonoscope, and with the aid of a clever scientist invented a counter-instrument that has caught and held your telephonoscope ray.

"Then they may have conceived the idea of getting up this fantastic film picture with the idea of baffling and bewildering you. They could put it on a screen in front of your ray and get the effect, couldn't they?"

"They could, my dear young lady," Fleckner agreed, "but they didn't. Pictures of dummy gold and diamonds would not respond to the spectrum test. That cave of gold is real, as I proved when we first saw it.

"That might be," she persisted, "and at the same time they could stage a picture play there, couldn't they?"

"Well," Fleckner agreed, "improbable as your suggestion seemed, at least it has a scientific basis and isn't as absurd as the jumping ahead fifty years in time that we seemed to see. I'll get my instrument going again and try to test that theory out a little. I'm hoping I'll be able to get a second ray in operation and work it independently of the first. Then I can locate our picture again, and, by placing the second ray around it, discover if there are any stage-trappings or other trickery."

It was nearly an hour this time before the instrument was again ready for use. Fleckner made several readjustments. Finally he turned on the ray and disclosed once more the dilapidated golden palace as we had seen it last. There had been no great slip in the passage of time since our last view, for in the big sealed-up room where their unnatural sons had imprisoned them we still found old Olanda and her half-breed husband.

Nevertheless, more time seemed to have elapsed in the picture story than the clock on our laboratory wall showed, for the old couple had the appearance of having starved for several days. They were weak and emaciated. The arrogance had gone from their countenances.

"I can stand it no longer," Olanda whispered. "When our sons return again we must tell them the hiding-place of the treasure and beg for food."

"Yes, I suppose we must—curse them!" Hendriga muttered feebly.

Fleckner had been adjusting his reflection-spectrum analyzer and testing the materials reflected in the picture.

"See!" he exclaimed. "Those mate-

rials are real gold and precious stones and actual human flesh. If we were looking at photographs reflected on a screen at the other end the analyzer would show nothing but the material in the canvas of their screen.

"We'll check it another way now if I can work the rotater of the ray end after that last readjustment. We'll be able to look in turn at all sides of the bodies in the picture and determine if they are solid or merely flat reflections."

He tried the rotation control, and this time the ray responded perfectly. The room and the two wretched occupants slowly revolved on the screen, showing the scene from every angle.

"No doubt of it!" Fleckner concluded. "We're looking on a real spectacle containing real people."

"But," protested the voice of Miss Stimson from the other apartment, "it may be play-acting for our benefit, nevertheless."

"Well," said Fleckner, "let's try a second ray on the outside of the house."

He turned on a second ray, and, as he had hoped, it worked independently of the first. Keeping the interior on one end of the screen, we showed the outside of the house on another section.

But now another amazing change had taken place. Inside of the house seen by the first ray was still the period of Madga's death and Olanda's and Hendriga's old age, of their sons' middle age. Outside the house was the state in which we had seen it that day when we had found Olanda and her husband, then in early middle life and their sons small boys. There was even the single old green-hued slave guarding the half-broken gate.

While we were wondering at this we were struck with new amazement. Around the corner of the house came the middle-aged Olanda, her three little boys playing around her.

By now our capacity for experiencing the emotion of amazement had been overstrained. We gazed dully at the parallel pictures of the sturdy, matronly Olanda without, and the aged, emaciated Olanda within.

Even as we looked there entered into the picture of the interior of the room, by way of our first ray, the three grown-up sons to make final demand for revelation of the secret from their aged parents, and at the same time outside of the house, seen over the second ray, were those same sons, innocent children playing around their mother's robe.

In this strange underground world it would seem that time did not merely leap forward with lightning speed, but in some places leaped back again. But Professor Fleckner had suddenly lost his late bewilderment. He was manipulating his levers with an intent eagerness. I knew the old scientist was on the trail of a clue to this puzzle.

"I'm going to swing in a third ray," he muttered half to himself.

At once another section of the great cave valley appeared seen through the third ray on the other end of the screen. And here time had slipped back still another notch. The valley, once more spruce, trim, and prosperous, was teeming with the life we had first seen there.

Fleckner shifted this first ray about till he located the little ravine where we had first seen Olanda. Again our ears were enchanted by that marvelous song, and again we saw her in the beauty of her fresh maidenhood, and, beside her, her murdered lover returned to life."

At this Priestley leaped to his feet, his face aglow with incredulous joy. I think for the moment he was half mad. He seemed to have forgotten our presence.

"Olanda! Olanda!" he cried. "I knew I'd see you again. The rest has been a bad dream!" He recovered himself immediately. "Let me handle that third ray," he pleaded. "I—I want to watch her a little."

"Go as far as you like, my boy," Fleckner conceded. "I think by increasing the strength of that ray you can follow the lady right back to her infancy if you wish. For I'm sure I've solved the riddle."

But this was lost to Priestley, who was raptly watching the picture of his Lady of Tantalus living her life over again.

I watched the professor with intense cu-

riosity while he set down elaborate calculations on his desk-pad, stopping now and then to make readings of ray directions and strength on his instrument dials.

At length he looked up and regarded Priestley curiously, a touch of pity in his hard, old face.

"I've got it," he said quietly. "Our cave of Tantalus and its treasure and its people are not on our earth at all, but on a distant planet so far away that it takes its light a thousand years to reach us. Priestley, my boy, I'm sorry. Your Olanda was very real once, but she lived her life and died a thousand years ago."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

FLECKNER DETHRONED.

"LIKE everything else, it's very simple when you understand it," the professor went on, while we stared at him stupidly, unable to grasp his astounding statement. "I wouldn't have been deceived so long if I had kept track of the direction our rays were turned after I got the control apparatus restored.

"You see, the first time I got the direction of our ray and found it pointing straight down, I jumped to the conclusion that our Tantalus land was in the bowels of the earth directly underneath us. That idea seemed to be confirmed by our finding that land to be located in a great cave. I was so absorbed in our treasure hunt that it didn't occur to me to test the ray direction again until a few minutes ago. Then I found it pointing straight up.

"I knew at once that our cave of Tantalus was on another heavenly body than ours. Our earth had of course swung around in its orbit and revolved on its axis, and the direction, naturally, was changing constantly.

"In a flash the whole explanation of the apparently miraculous shifting back and forth of time came to me. I was right in believing that a general electrical current had caught and held our feebler ether ray out of control. But instead of a mere earth current it was a great interstellar torrent of electrical energy.

"Now, the ether wave motion that carries light, electricity, and other radio manifestations, as every student of physics knows, travels at the rate of one hundred and eighty-six thousand miles a second. That is practically instantaneous, for all ordinary distances, but distances between stars are another matter. Some stars are so far away that it takes centuries for light to reach us from them.

"Such a star is this one on which our cave is located. By certain computations based on the known power of my various rays and the lapses in time between the visions they showed, I have found that sights and sounds that started over the ether waves from this star—Tantalus we'll call it—a thousand years ago would just be reaching us now, a thousand years after they happened.

"Well, our rays from the telephonoscope, which is variable in speed according to its intensity, shot out into space against this current only a comparatively short distance at first, perhaps twenty light years. In other words, it picked up the scenes and sounds from Tantalus only a little before the ether waves bearing them would naturally reach the earth. Our ray with its vastly greater speed transferred those scenes to our screen practically instantly. They happened to be the scenes of Olanda's youth.

"Then I doubled the power of our ray, and it shot out twenty light years farther and gathered scenes coming over the ether waves twenty years later all in an instant. Again I increased its speed another twenty light years, and in an instant we saw Olanda as an old woman.

"Just now we set three rays of three different lengths and speeds at work. As a result we saw the same general locality in Tantalus in three different periods at once.

"But now I must readjust the rays to still higher speed and watch Olanda's sons claim the grandfather's wealth. I must find out what is that mysterious Treasure of Tantalus that is so much more precious than gold and jewels. It may give us a hint of something valuable on our earth that we have overlooked. I want to see,

too, what success those three young men had in rehabilitating their valley."

Thus while Priestley and I sat, still overwhelmed with this stupendous revelation of vast spaces and the solemn moral lesson that had been borne to us over the bridge of a thousand dead years, the old scientist dismissed the marvel with a contemptuous wave of the hand and set out again on the trail of his sordid curiosity. He fell to work at the adjusting of his instrument, at first with methodical precision; but I noticed presently that his hands trembled and that he was laboring under suppressed excitement.

The work didn't proceed smoothly. He made little mechanical slips more and more frequently, and had to undo and repeat parts of his work. He would fly into a rage each time this happened. I fell to studying his face. I noted for the first time how haggard and deathly pale he had become from weeks of neglect of sleep and proper food, during which his brain had been continually afire with his mad obsession.

At length he threw on the power of the ray section he had been working on, and it failed to work at all. He had forgotten to replace a perfectly simple connection of one of the main cables.

At that he flew into a still more violent rage. He thrashed about the laboratory, waving his arms in the air and snarling inarticulately like a maddened animal. Priestley, John, and I leaped to our feet and stood back in alarm. The man was evidently mad.

Suddenly he stopped short in the middle of the floor and clasped his head tensely between his hands.

"My mind has failed me!" he shrieked. "I can't find the treasure! The sons of Olanda will hide it from me! I can't—"

He swayed, and before any of us could catch him he fell forward on his face and lay there, deathly quiet.

Gently we raised the gaunt figure, now so completely powerless, and laid him on the bed in his own room. He was breathing heavily, but was unconscious.

In this emergency Priestley became the embodiment of cool, masterful efficiency. He despatched John to the drug-closet for a stimulant and administered it. The professor revived partially under its influence and began muttering incoherently.

"Go and release Miss Stimson, John," Priestley directed next. "We need an emergency nurse at once, and only a woman will answer. You stay in the room here with her to help in case he gets violent.

"Now we must get a doctor in immediately. We've got to throw secrecy to the wind, and before the doctor arrives we've got to get up a plausible story to account for things. I'll start off by calling a doctor and giving him a yarn."

At this moment Miss Stimson returned with John. I could not see clearly what effect her long confinement and intense excitement had on that remarkable young woman, for her face was, as usual, partly obscured by the green eye-shade. I felt a wave of tenderness and embarrassment pass over me when I saw her once more, but my heart sank again with the old hopelessness when I perceived that she scarcely noticed me, but was shyly studying Priestley's alert face.

But he was already calling up Dr. Arthur Thorndyke, who, he learned from the girl, was Fleckner's physician. We waited with breathless interest to hear what explanation he would give the doctor.

"Dr. Thorndyke," he said when he reached the physician, "this is Thomas Priestley—yes, Thomas Priestley, the very same, the man who's wanted by the district attorney. What's that? Oh, don't let that worry you. I'm going to give myself up as soon as I can. I'm the victim of a conspiracy, that's all. I'll clear myself easily enough. It's a long story, and I'll tell you all about it later. This is professional confidence now.

"I've been kept prisoner by the conspirators who've been using Professor Rufus Fleckner's apartment as a rendezvous and prison for me ever since the professor went to South America on his trip. They waylaid the professor in Chile and kidnaped him, too. He escaped and got back last night by airplane. The bunch here fled when they found he'd escaped.

"Now we want you up here at once, please. Professor Fleckner's experience knocked him out. He collapsed a few minutes ago. He's unconscious and in a critical condition. You'll be right up? Thank you.

"Now," he said, as soon as he'd hung up, "get James and John and the cook in here, and we'll frame up our story. Well," he went on, when we were all present, "it's obvious we can't reveal the true story of the crime trust. That would create worse world-wide panic even than already exists.

"Consequently we can't give Fleckner's performances away, even if we wanted to. We don't want to. If he dies, there's no use in disgracing the memory of a great scientist whose mind temporarily went wrong. If he lives we'll need him to help undo the harm he has done.

"Now our story, I suggest, should be this: We'll admit the existence of a band of criminals, but we'll profess to know nothing of their identity. We'll give no hint that any prominent persons were involved. We'll allege that they learned of Professor Fleckner's invention, the telephonoscope, and wanted to make use of it. They had to get everybody out of the way who knew about it. They learned that the professor and Blair, here, were starting for South America, so that automatically disposed of them. They hatched up a charge against me to make my disappearance plausible, and then kidnaped Miss Stimson and me out from under the nose of the law and hid us here after Fleckner went. Then they meantime captured the twelve other gentlemen who knew the secret.

"When the criminals' representatives, sent to South America to keep track of the professor, learned he was about to return they kidnaped him and Blair. They escaped and returned here last night by airplane, entering, of course, by the roof, and surprising the gang here, who promptly fled.

"That makes it possible to give out the secret of the telephonoscope and explain in a measure the mischief it has wrought, but put the blame on an unknown person. We have several tangled situations to unravel and several mysteries to solve. We must move with extreme caution, and, I'm afraid, practise some justifiable deception, or we will do more harm than good.

"First, the telephonoscope itself. What shall we do with it? We've seen the terrible results of this power to invade privacy. Shall we force Fleckner to destroy it and let his secret die with him?

"Then, what shall we do with the crime trust? If we expose it and its entire personnel we'll smite every community in the country with tragedy and disgrace. We'll fill the world with even greater distrust than at present. We must find some way to stop its evil activities without creating a revolution in the present social organization by exposing it.

"We must restore the plunder of the trust. We have three mysteries to solve there: Was there a man higher up than Chandler? Where is the secret plunder of the old trust? Where is the plunder that Fleckner gathered?

"Then there is the problem or retiring the immense amount of counterfeit money in the country without causing further financial panic.

"Now, in order that I may be free to help solve these mysteries and the problems involved, I'm going to give myself up to the district attorney at once, get released on bail, and have my trial put off until Fleckner is well enough to testify, in case he lives and his reason is restored.

"Now the doctor will be here at any moment. Is our story all straight? Are there any other problems we haven't thought of?"

I looked at Miss Stimson at that moment, and again caught her shy glance toward Priestley. I thought then there was a serious heart problem that promised to be the most difficult of all in the solving.

CHAPTER XXIX.

PRIESTLEY HEADS THE CRIME TRUST.

OF all the lurid tales that had filled the papers since the beginning of Professor Fleckner's reign of terror, none created a greater sensation than those

which followed his breakdown. I had returned to my own paper that afternoon, and had the great glory and poor satisfaction of writing the first story. The fact that I was scoring the biggest " beat " in my newspaper career was entirely offset in my own mind by the knowledge that for the first time in that humble career I had perpetrated a " fake." I assure the reader that the writing of this true history after all these years has been a great relief to my conscience.

After outlining briefly in my introduction the story Priestley had suggested, I told how our party, after being kidnaped in the Andes by supposed Chilean bandits, had discovered that our captors were New York gangsters, whose names, however, we had not learned. We had escaped in a running fight during which we had killed the leaders of the gang.

We had returned the whole distance to New York by plane and surprised another section of the gang in Fleckner's apartments. They had been so taken by surprise that they had fled.

Then followed a description of Professor Fleckner's great invention, the telephonoscope, and an attributing of all the mysterious invasions of the world's privacy in recent months to the unauthorized use of that instrument by the gang while occupying his apartment in his absence.

I told of the capture of Priestley, Ruth Stimson, and the twelve men who knew of the telephonoscope. All these prisoners, I went on to relate, had been found in the Fleckner group of apartments and released. The twelve capitalists had been kept drugged and could tell nothing of how they got there or what happened.

Dr. Thorndyke was quoted as having found Professor Fleckner suffering from a complete nervous collapse and temporary insanity. The doctor, however, predicted his gradual recovery.

The rest of the story hinged on Priestley. The afternoon following Dr. Thorndyke's visit he had called at the district attorney's office and given himself up. He had been arraigned, pleaded not guilty, and released on heavy bail to be tried when Fleckner was able to testify.

To the district attorney Priestley confided that he and Miss Stimson had overheard some things which led him to believe that, given time, he would be able to make certain that the criminal band had been broken up and possibly restore much of the loot of the recent epidemic of thieving, as he believed most of it had been accomplished by that gang.

Priestley promised to bring this about by organizing a secret detective corps and following up the clues he had picked up while a prisoner of the gang. He pledged half of his fortune, if need be, to the task.

The district attorney, at Priestley's request, assigned Assistant District Attorney Winter, secret member of the Upper Council of Three of the crime trust, to assist Priestley in this work.

The conversation that took place a little later between Priestley and that crime trust representative in the latter's private office in the Criminal Courts Building was a memorable one to both of them.

" Mr. Winter," Priestley said when they were alone, " for your own good, much more than mine, I warn you before I begin that there must be no record made of this conversation and no eavesdropping. So if you will kindly disconnect your dictograph, please?"

They sat looking each other hard in the eyes for a moment. What Winter saw in the face of his *vis-à-vis* taught him discretion. He smiled a little sheepishly, opened a drawer in his desk, and threw off a secret switch.

" Now do you feel better?" he asked with a forced attempt at gaiety.

" No, not exactly," Priestley replied evenly, " but in a minute you will feel not quite so bad as you would if you realized that other ears or eyes than yours were going to take in what I'm about to say. Perhaps you'll understand what I mean when I say that I am the head of the crime trust."

" What!" cried Winter leaping to his feet.

He was too surprised and alarmed to think of pretending not to understand.

" Sit down and don't be excited, Mr. Winter," Priestley adjured him. All you

have to do is to listen and obey. I'll do the talking.

"When I say I am the head of the crime trust I don't mean that I am the original head. I am a usurper of late date. I have overthrown your secret chief and have him entirely in my power. I know all of his secrets. Furthermore I have on file a complete list, with records of each, of every member of the secret organization. I have also an interesting collection of photographs and phonographic records of various crime trust episodes and conferences. These might interest you as samples."

He laid on the desk before Winter some of the photographs Fleckner had shown Chandler that memorable night when the Professor had taken over the leadership of the crime trust, omitting, of course, the ones in which Chandler himself was portrayed.

With trembling hands Winter turned them over one by one.

"Well," he said at last, "this is rather convincing. I assure you I will give you the same loyal service I gave the old chief whoever he was. I hope you will overlook the treatment that was given you while you were prisoner. I was not personally responsible for that."

Priestley raised a deprecating hand.

"We'll overlook that," he said. "I've picked you because for many months now I have been studying you over Professor Fleckner's telephonoscope, which you've just heard me describe to the district attorney. I've made up my mind you are the best man to act as my lieutenant."

Winter began to regain his poise at this.

"I'm sure I'm glad I have your confidence," he said.

"Now let me explain further," Priestley went on. "A complete set of such photographs as this, together with moving pictures of the episodes they are taken from and phonographic records of conversations, and also a full list of all trust members with their careers, is in the hands of each one of a little group I'm working with. Also several sets are in safe-deposit under control of trustees with instructions to open and publish them if anything happens to me or any one of our group.

"So any attempt on the part of the old organization to put me or any of my associates out of the way will be automatically punished by exposure. And if that happens, God pity you. The public will never let you get as far as a prison farm. You'd be torn to shreds by a mob. Any refusal to carry out my orders will be likewise punished. We'll know because we'll keep you checked up with the telephonoscope."

"I understand," Winter replied humbly. "Tell me what you want me to do. I have no choice in the matter."

"There's where I have a surprise for you," Priestley went on. "From this moment on the crime trust is going to cease being a criminal organization and to become a secret association for the enforcement of law and recovery of stolen property, organized by myself and my associates, as far as the general public will know, and cooperating with the New York County District Attorney's office through you. A single criminal act by any member hereafter will mean instant exposure of his past record."

Winter leaped to his feet, his face alight with incredulous joy.

"Do you mean that, Mr. Priestley? I can't tell you how glad I am to hear it. I'm sure a lot of the rest of us will feel the same way. We made one little slip once and attracted the attention of the organization. We got caught in the net and couldn't escape."

"I'm glad to hear you say that," Priestley replied heartily. "Now it's up to you to pass the word along to every last man. But you've all got to atone for your past. You have all been receiving a share of the crime trust profits. You must restore it, every man of you. Set the machinery of the organization in motion. Call for a report of money transferred to every branch and demand it back, by instalments, where necessary, but get it. Have each consignment go by van at night to Point No. 20, in Putnam County, where that $2,000,000 treasure van was lost. A van manned by men from the district attorney's office will meet it there and bring it into one of the trust companies which you will name as repository.

" Meantime compile a list from all over the country of every one who has been robbed since the crime trust began operation. Announce that our secret agents are locating the lost plunder through crooks who have turned State's evidence, and begin paying back the money in instalments as fast as it comes in."

" But," Winter demurred, " much of our money is counterfeit."

" I've thought of that," Priestley admitted, " but it can't be told from real. To announce publicly that our paper money had been inflated by such an enormous amount of indistinguishable counterfeit stuff would complete our present panic, depreciate our currency almost to the vanishing point, destroy all confidence in our government issues and create general financial ruin. No. We must simply stop the counterfeiting plant at Fall River, utterly destroy it, and then let our present currency run its course. It will begin to rectify when I discover the secret hiding-place of the stolen gold and we get it back into circulation. When the acute danger has passed a few years from now we can use indirect methods to get the government to retire all present issues gradually. That's the best policy.

" Now I'll leave you to carry out these orders while I get after the hiding-place of the crime trust's treasure. I'll admit that the old head of the trust hasn't revealed it yet, but he's in my power and he'll do so rather than face exposure. Then I'll begin to ship gold to Point No. 20, and let you know when to meet it."

This interview with Winter, Priestley reported to me in detail, but of course I printed only the version meant for public consumption. A few days later I had the pleasure of publishing the first results of the new régime of the former crime trust under the leadership of Priestley, when the first vanload of restored money was met at the trysting-place by the district attorney's men. Winter had some trouble getting his chief, the district attorney, to agree to Priestley's terms that the criminals who were supposed to have turned State's evidence should not have their identity revealed, but he finally conceded the point.

The radical element of the public, however, were loud in criticism of this blind following of an indicted man. Some radical papers even hinted that Priestley had guilty knowledge of the original thefts. To the day of his death my old friend suffered from this suspicion but refused to let me write the truth in his vindication as long as he or the other principals in this secret episode were alive.

He was soon cleared of the technical charge against him, however. When it became apparent that Fleckner would be a very sick man mentally and physically for many weeks to come, Priestley's counsel consented to go to trial without his testimony. The evidence of the rest of us proved sufficient and Priestley was acquitted. It was ruled that the long distance method he used for getting his cousin's signature to the release of his fortune was valid and the telephonoscope was thus given a definite standing under the law.

CHAPTER XXX.

TREASURES REVEALED.

BUT all this time the mystery that had baffled us so long, the puzzle that had unseated Fleckner's reason, remained as much a mystery as ever. We were no nearer than ever to locating the hidden wealth of the crime trust. For that matter the second collection of loot gathered and hidden by Fleckner himself, during the months of his régime proved as elusive.

Our earthly Treasures of Tantalus were still as much out of our reach as that mysterious treasure of the star Tantalus a thousand light years away.

Between us and those great stores of hidden wealth were the disordered minds of two sick men, Chandler and Fleckner.

For the ex-President-elect was still pitifully weak, though convalescing, and common humanity forbade our applying threats to him in the hope of getting a clue to the funds of his old organization.

As for Professor Fleckner he had occasional lucid intervals as he gradually grew stronger in body, but all inquiry regarding his secrets at such times threw him into a

fury which resulted in a relapse into irrationality. So Ruth Stimson, who continued to care for him as tenderly as though he were her father, finally forbade our troubling him further.

The old man grew very fond of her and never wanted her out of his sight. One night after he had been restless and almost violent at times, he settled down at last for a fitful sleep, muttering deliriously now and then.

"Ruth! Ruth!" he whispered suddenly, half rousing.

She bent over him solicitously.

"Yes. What is it?"

"I can't keep it from you any longer. You've been so good to me. It's under the old mill race near where the treasure van was lost that time. It's all yours."

Then he fell into the first natural sleep he had enjoyed since his attack.

The reader will recall that Fleckner's two men John and James had, according to his statement when he first boasted to us of his stealing of the treasure van, assisted in hiding that loot. Afterwards he had evidently arranged with another agent by way of the telephonoscope. But John and James had departed for parts unknown the moment the Professor collapsed that day, so we got no chance to quiz them.

However, they did not seem to have dared touch any of the treasure, for Priestley's agents found it intact where Fleckner in his delirium indicated, and it was presently back in its home vaults.

That left the big mystery of the original treasure to solve. There was also the problem of what should be the future of the telephonoscope which had proven itself such a dangerous implement. Professor Fleckner was convalescing now. He had never been irrational again since he unconsciously gave away his secret. He was still confined to his bed and was gentle and affectionate with Ruth Stimson but cold and uncommunicative toward us. He was evidently unrepentant. He did not know yet that his treasure had been restored to its owners and he still discussed his schemes with Miss Stimson for finding the crime trust loot, alternating this with speculation as to what was finally accomplished by the three sons of Olanda on Tantalus, the star, and what their mysterious treasure really was.

It was a serious problem, then, as to what would happen if the unrepentant Fleckner continued to use his invention against the privacy of the world. There was no law to prevent his so using it if he chose, though now that his invention was known he could no longer employ it for criminal purposes. On the other hand, if he turned it over to general use, what mischief might not be done with it by an irresponsible public?

We were discussing these vexatious problems in the laboratory one evening, Priestley, Ruth Stimson and I. It had been a light day on the paper and I was off early. Professor Fleckner was asleep and Ruth had tiptoed out of his room and joined us.

Priestley had turned the telephonoscope on Chandler's home earlier in the evening and found him much improved in health. He was alone in the house with two nurses and his servants. It was generally known that relations between him and his family had become strained since his breakdown had lost him his political honors. Mrs. Chandler was a cold, selfish woman and their children shared her disposition.

Priestley was inclined to regard this as just retribution for his sins, but Ruth was warmly sympathetic. I recalled her strange visit to Chandler's home that time when she had procured Priestley's release by impersonating the President-elect. I also remember the night when she warned Chandler away from the van when we were about to trace him to his treasure-trove. I wondered what had been her relations to the Chandler household and again recalled my vague suspicion that she might once have been a member of the crime trust herself.

Priestley was arguing that now was the time to appear before Chandler and compel him to give up the secret of the treasure, or, if he was telling the truth about a man still higher up, to force from him some clue by which we might locate that person.

"No!" Ruth demurred vehemently. "It isn't the best way to force people to do right. Better to persuade them. My woman's intuition tells me that there is no man higher up, that he really knows where the

treasure is and would like to get if off his soul. I'm going to try it."

Wonderingly we watched her go to the telephonoscope board and throw on one of the lesser rays that had not been tuned up for the long distance work on the star Tantalus. She found Chandler's house and in a moment she revealed him asleep in his bedroom.

Then she threw on the projector and stood in front of it. It was dark in his room, but our rays were independent, as you know, of light that the eye can see.

"Are you awake?" she asked gently.

The man in the bed miles away opened his eyes and stared unseeing into the darkness.

"Who's there?" he cried out.

"It is I. Don't be alarmed. I want to talk to you," she replied.

"Agnes!" he exclaimed hoarsely. "Where are you? Am I asleep? Oh, I've wanted you so much lately since they've left me alone. Oh, I loved you after all. Have you forgiven me after all and come back? It can't be! I'm dreaming!"

"No, you are not dreaming," the girl answered with a little catch in her voice. "And I'm not Agnes. Agnes has been dead ten long years. I'm Agnes's daughter and your daughter, Ruth."

Priestley and I started violently and stared at her in amazement.

"You are Ruth? Agnes is dead?" the sick man was saying. "How did you get in? Where have you been all these years? Light the light so I can see you! You were a little thing a year old when I left your mother. Light the light so I can see you."

"No," she answered. "You can't have a light now. The nurse has forbidden it. You can see me in the morning if you tell me what I want to know."

"What must I tell you?" he asked tensely.

"That you are sorry for the wrong you've done in the world and are ready to give back the money you stole."

"You know about that!" he gasped.

"Everything," she said, "except where the money is. I want to help you give it back."

He was silent for a long time.

"Will you tell me?" she prompted.

"I can't give it back," he answered at length, "but I can tell you where it is. It is in the bottom of the deepest part of the Pacific Ocean, ten miles below the surface."

Again Priestley and I gasped.

"I never wanted the money," the sick man explained. "I wanted only the power. I didn't dare use the money or let any one else use it for fear it would be traced. So I invented a counterfeiting scheme to pay my followers. Then I was afraid to hide the money anywhere for fear it would be found. I had to keep ordering robberies to satisfy my followers, but the money worried me. So I took it each time in a big seaplane, flew out over the ocean and dumped it where it would never betray me. That's all. I find I'm very weak still. I can't talk any more."

"I'll come to you in the morning," she promised and threw off the ray. She was weeping when she turned on us.

"Now you know my secret," she said, without waiting for our questions. "He divorced my mother when I was a baby, to marry this other woman. His marriage to mother was a secret one. She wasn't in society and he grew ashamed of her. But she continued to love him. When I was a little girl she used to bring me secretly to his house and leave me with his housekeeper so I could see my father. I came to love him, wicked as I knew he was. I'm going to him in the morning. He needs me. I'm going to my room now. I want to cry all alone."

She hurried out, tears streaming from under the green eyeshade.

Not till that moment did we see Professor Fleckner. He stood in his bedroom door, a gaunt figure in a flowing bathrobe. He was smiling sardonically.

"So," he said, "the Treasure of Tantalus has been located under ten miles of sea-water!"

Evidently he had been standing and listening for some time. We made no answer.

"Well," he went on. "It's a pity to lose all that money. Chandler was an awful fool. But there's more where that came from.

"Meanwhile I'm going to satisfy my curiosity as to that other mysterious treasure that made so much trouble on our star Tantalus a thousand years ago. I'm feeling pretty fit to-night. I'm going to play with the telephonoscope a little while. I've thought up a way of giving that No. 1 ray a little more speed. I'm going to have another look at Tantalus. I recalled a little while ago where old Olanda told her enterprising sons to look for their treasure. You two were so busy at the moment watching the young Olanda that you missed it."

He made a rapid adjustment of the instrument and flashed on the ray. It was still under control of the interstellar current and instantly the great cave on Tantalus was on our screen once more.

But now it was a scene of absolute desolation. Not a sign of human life. The houses were broken, empty wrecks.

Fleckner was a little taken aback at this.

"I expected to see the valley flourishing again," he said.

He drove the ray along the river to the great ravine and up to a point where he picked out back of some bushes the low entrance to a cave.

"Here's where she told me to look," he said, sending his ray into the opening.

A little way in, the passage opened into a cave of considerable size.

Near together in the center of the cave lay three skeletons. Their torn robes and the heavy gold clubs told the story of a death battle long ago. A band of gold, jewel-studded, around the crown of each grinning skull identified the remains of the three sons of Olanda.

A little apart from the other two lay the skeleton crowned with the diamond-studded band, once the oldest and strongest of the three sons of Olanda. He lay with his arms thrust into a little pile of rusty nuggets, the mysterious treasure-trove at last.

Professor Fleckner turned on his analyzer, did a little figuring on a pad and without a word showed us the result. It was the climax of absurdity in the midst of this scene of tragic desolation.

The Treasure of Tantalus was ordinary every-day iron ore!

Fleckner left his gruesome picture on the screen and fell to pacing the floor with slow rather uncertain steps. At length he stopped and gazed at us intently.

"So iron was the treasure beyond price in a land where gold and jewels were common dirt! What is treasure anyhow? One says gold. One says iron. The Indian said glass beads. It seems to be anything that a man has so little of that he doesn't dare make any real use of it when he has it. Chandler had a lot of it and it bothered him so that he threw it in the ocean. It makes trouble, any way you look at it. I guess I've been a lot of a fool for the last year or two—a little crazy, I guess. I'm sane again now. Boys, I'm going to undo the trouble I've made, give back the money I've stolen and bust up the crime trust. That has finished the business. I'm converted."

He pointed a bony finger at the cave of death.

"I'm going to give the telephonoscope to the world and retire. I've just discovered something out there in Tantalus that will make it safe. People can defend their privacy as well as ever. See that gray spot on the opposite wall of the cave about a foot wide? I flashed the ray into that wall while I was adjusting the ray on the interior of the cave. The ray pierced the wall all around that spot but wouldn't go through it. That spot's ray proof. I analyzed it at the same time that I did that fool treasure there. It's made up of minerals common here. I'll work out the formula in the morning for a ray-proof paint and you boys can manufacture it along with the telephonoscope. It'll be cheap. Everybody can paint every part of his house with it except a little section where he wants to give and receive telephonoscope messages. So we'll all be happy and private again.

"I'm all in! Good night."

At that the amazing old inventor staggered off to bed.

Priestley and I sat for a time in thoughtful silence. At length he arose hesitantly and approached the screen. He stood and stared for a time at the gruesome picture.

"So that's the end of the story of the

Treasure of Tantalus!" he said at last. "I wonder if I couldn't throw the ray power back far enough to see Olanda again and hear her sing once more, before we leave her to rest in her thousand-year-old grave."

He turned to the control-board and swung the ray out of the cave and down the valley to the little dell where we had first seen the singer of Tantalus. But before he could readjust the ray power to throw time back again to the days of Olanda's youth, there was a flash and another girl figure appeared on the screen apparently in the very spot where we had first seen Olanda.

But it was not Olanda. It was one to me far more alluring at that moment than Olanda had ever been. She wore a modern American dress. Her figure was slender and straight; her face was not too perfectly oval, but fine, sweet and sincere. Over it was a mass of wavy brown hair. And above all else was the glory of her eyes.

And dangling from one capable little hand was a big green eyeshade.

We both stared at her for a moment before I saw that Priestley still failed to recognize her.

"It's Ruth!" I exclaimed. "She's thrown her image on the screen from the little telephonoscope in her room."

"Ruth!" he exclaimed. "Why, Ruth! I don't believe I ever really saw your face before!"

She was looking into his with a light in her eyes that shines for only one man in the world. And from where I stood I could catch a little of the expression of his.

I turned and tiptoed out of the room with an ache in my heart that wasn't entirely cured until I met the lady who is sitting placidly beside me at this moment while I write these lines.

For I knew when I saw the answering light in Priestley's eyes that he had found at last his Treasure of Tantalus.

(The end.)

"LOOK there, Pap!" The exclamation came from Clell Tobias as unexpectedly as the flash of lightning out of the dull, low-hanging clouds.

"It's Dan Powers," added Clell hurriedly.

Pap Tobias and the other rivermen of the landing were watching the hapless Dan Powers who was out on the swirling rapids of the Susquehannock River, riding a raft of pine logs that was dancing and careening in the grip of the mighty stream; cuffing the rolling logs in a riverman's style, balancing himself with superb skill in the boisterous water, high from the rising spring rains.

"Dan's been caught in the flood," cried Clell. "He's been working on the unfinished raft and it has broken loose."

The men realized this fact as they stared at the helpless Dan. Driven onward, he held to his insecure craft stolidly. His face seen over the tempestuous water showed determination and no signs of fear. His young, lithe body was bent forward like a hickory tree swayed by the wind. His sturdy legs were planted squarely on the two center logs of the runaway raft, the spikes of his corked boots being firmly embedded in the soft fiber of the pine.

Onward he rode silently. His dark eyes peered for one slight moment toward the shore where Clell Tobias and the lumberjacks of the logging camp stood, as if petrified by the sight of Dan Powers riding toward a sure death in the swirling rapids of the Nicktown Falls.

Dan Powers did not call for help because there was bad blood between the two camps. The crews of Powers and Tobias had often fought for the ownership of a piece of disputed timber. Pap Powers was a life enemy to Pap Tobias. Naturally young Dan held his father's views. The trouble had started years ago over the tract of timberland. Both men claimed it, but Powers had not dared to put an ax to the straight yellow pine that sang the forest rime of the murmuring woodland over the ridges and hills which flanked the swiftly running Susquehannock.

The fight forest had stood an eyesore to Powers and Tobias. They could not agree to a settlement. Neither would give up their claims to it. For this reason Powers nursed a deep, deadly grudge that had grown with the advancing years. The spirit of tolerance and of good-will toward men was unknown to Pap Powers—he would not budge an inch. In this atmosphere of hate and malice had grown young Dan, his son. He hated Clell, the son of Pap Tobias, without knowing why. His father's bitterness had crept into his heart. He was taking up the quarrel. Some day he, too, would meet up with Clell and fight it out.

"Son, take nothin' from a Tobias," had been Pap Powers's early advice, and young Dan had absorbed it literally. As he grew strong and hardy in the logging camp of the winter's cuttings and on the river during the summer, Dan's spirit had also become belligerent and boastful.

His loud talking and threats had reached young Clell Tobias. The latter regretted young Dan's unreasonable attitude, and it had been his hope that some day the feud over the fight forest might be settled in a manly way. Therefore, as young Dan stood on the runaway raft that had crept out from the Powers's landing when the only rope that held it had been sawed in two over a jagged stone in the rising water, Dan thought of his boasts of his enmity toward Clell and his heart in the face of peril was still brave. He would not call for help from his enemy. That was why his lips were pressed together so that he would not utter a sound, which might stamp him as being afraid; yet like every person in danger, Dan felt with apprehension his probable fate in the swirl of the falls below Nicktown. He had noticed that the sinewy hickory thews which held the raft were pulling apart; the distance between the bobbing logs was widening and the water was splurging over his boots.

Would his raft hold? It was not finished; the timber sticks were not properly lashed; the wooden pegs were working out of the gimlet holes. Dan had been strengthening the raft when it had slipped away. Before he knew it he was out in the rapid current, carried onward with no chance of getting off. The river was full of floating ice from the early rains. The cold grip of King Winter had been broken and the Susquehannock River had been swelled into a raging torrent. The high water had broken the icy crystals into cakes which grated against Dan's leaky raft. The grinding with the swishing and splashing of the current whispered the warning of destruction.

It was wild—Dan knew it. In the gray mist that hung like a fleecy veil over the white-capped water he could see no signs of hope, nor could he hear the voice of rescue in the wind that bent the straight pines of the fight forest. On his right rose the rangy hills, rock-strewn and dangerous; on his left, the river passed through a winding swirl as it curved by the out-jutting base of the shore's upstanding, rocky wall. Dan's raft, caught in the mighty swirl, lunged forward.

He balanced himself with rare skill to

stick to the quivering logs. They groaned in the grip of the current. The hickory switches, strained to the utmost of their resistance, were beginning to peel and splinter. Dan held on grimly. He passed the Tobias camp without looking their way, neither did he call for help or ask for assistance.

Dan rode on the foaming rapids with his lips firmly pressed together, fighting his battle alone.

"He's gone!" cried Pap Tobias slowly. He knew the treacherous Susquehannock when brimful with high water. The river was more than a match for the ablest raftsman when filled with ice and, too, Dan's raft was not finished. "That's the last o' Dan," concluded Pap Tobias with an emphatic shake of his head.

But Pap Tobias had entirely forgotten about his son, Clell. Upon beholding Dan's peril Clell had raced to the logging stable and thrown the saddle and bridle on Black Nellie, his riding horse. It was the work of a few minutes for Clell to find a long, slim fiber rope that he slung over the saddle-horn, and when Dan Powers passed around the curve into boisterous rapids below the Tobias camp, young Clell, riding Black Nellie, dashed down the old logging road in pursuit of his enemy who was now in dire peril on the wildly raging river.

Through the mountain gap, Clell caught a glimpse of Dan as he was being tossed in the water's whirligig in the narrows. A red flush of admiration swept over Clell's face. Dan could certainly ride the logs. To make the narrows was a feat achieved by few rivermen in the manner that Dan was doing it. In an instant Dan was gone round the twisting current and Clell breathed easier. He had passed that danger safely. Below the gap the water ran into the Bullrush meadows where the Susquehannock's force was not so swift, where the water spread over the sandy bottom in a placid manner. Now that Dan's raft had withstood the tossing of the rough water, it would likely weather the smoother, yet deeper current of the Bullrush swamp.

"Old hoss," whispered Clell, bending low of Black Nellie's neck, "show the road your heels."

Black Nellie answered with a burst of speed.

"That's the way," encouraged Clell, petting the sleek, shining neck. "We've got to make the Williamsburg Bridge. It's going to be nip and tuck between you, ol' hoss, and Dan's raft. Down to it! Go, girly, go!"

Black Nellie, her graceful legs stretching out in a long-reaching gallop, heard Clell's urging voice and she ran over the mountain road like a bird in its flight. Clell, bending low to avoid the overhanging branches, kept whispering: "Good hoss! Keep it up and we'll beat the raft to the bridge."

Onward they sped between the bushes of the tree-arched road; a rabbit dozing sleepily by a fallen tree sprang up in alarm as Black Nellie and Clell thundered by; a pheasant drummed a hurried flight at their rapid approach and a saucy red squirrel scolded them from the bole of an oak tree as they disappeared in the distance. Presently the trees grew sparser and the dull, gray morning mists cleared away from the forest arch of the road.

"We're almost at Williamsburg," encouraged Clell. "I wonder if we've beat Dan and his raft?"

On the bridge Clell flung himself off Black Nellie. He uncoiled the rope and, winding the one end around the big steel girder after he had looped a noose on the lower end, he waited for Dan to appear. Around the stone abutments the water was churning to a white foam as if in a huge cauldron, and the ice was grating and breaking in a hissing roar as it passed onward in its mad rush. Was he too late? Had Dan Powers passed under the bridge? Or had the river taken its toll when Dan's raft had gone apart, or had Black Nellie made the run in a swifter pace than the white-foaming current? With these questions shooting through his mind, Clell stood on the bridge with his rope looped in cowboy fashion, watching the swirling water intently.

Far up the river on the dancing crest of the white-foaming Susquehannock, Clell saw Dan Powers coming. His horse had won in the race. Dan's strong, sturdy legs

still held the center logs, the spikes of his boots were planted firmly in the pine fiber. Yet his face was haggard, his lithe, muscular body tired, but grimly he held on, fighting gamely, his mountain spirit still stanch and unbroken. The falling water roared as it dashed under the bridge and on it came Dan, swiftly and rapidly.

"Look up!" shouted Clell.

Dan did. For a moment a glad light came into his face. Then he shook his head and dropped his gaze into the swirling water. Clell was his enemy. He would accept no assistance from him. The noose nearly touched Dan's head. He did not clutch it; rather he threw it away. Deliberately, he missed his chance for safety because he had recognized Clell. With a swish he was carried under the bridge and out of reach in the maw of the water.

"Oh," sobbed Clell, hurt, turning to look with awe at the disappearing Dan for having spurned his efforts to save him. Clell could not understand why Dan should deliberately choose to perish rather than to accept the rope which Clell had thrown him. Then Clell remembered the spite forest, the fight between his father and Dan's father. Even in death, Dan's stubborn mountain nature would not yield an inch and, therefore, he had elected to stick to the runaway raft which was carrying him to a certain end in the Nicktown Falls.

Clell stood as if in a trance on the bridge, holding the useless rope. His effort had failed. Black Nellie's splendid run was wasted; and then, an inner voice whispered that he should make one more attempt. There was still another chance. On the Nicktown Bridge, Clell could throw his rope once more. Should he try it? Dan had refused his assistance, but would he if Clell offered to save him again? Possibly Dan would relent. He must know what awaited him below the Nicktown Bridge. Would he refuse the rope when he heard the roar of the falls?

"Let's go!" cried Clell, throwing himself into Black Nellie's saddle and she did go—rather, flew over the ground. Up the rising ridge she sped, down the other side the horse lunged with Clell whispering:

"Run, for the peace of the mountains, so that the fight may end. Go it! That's the way! Fine work, old pal! Faster, Nellie!"

The wind whistled around Clell's face and he had to cling to Black Nellie's neck because the valiant horse was running at a pace that was furious. She was hunched low along the ground, her belly nearly touching as she shot forward at a gallop. Nicktown was in sight when Clell felt Black Nellie faltering. She tried to keep up the rapid pace, but her legs were unsteady and she was swaying from one side of the road to the other. She could go no further. Clell stopped her. He sprang off and unloosened the saddle while at the same time he threaded the loosened rope over his arm.

"Good old Nellie," said he quickly before he started to run the last lap of the race alone. He could see the Nicktown Bridge. A fear that he would be too late lent him speed. Onward Clell sprinted. All the faculties in his body urged him on. The peace of the hills, of the rival logging camps was the prize that Clell was trying to capture. What could be more worthy than the saving of Dan's life? What race could call for greater exertion? Clell, true to the core of all that is elevating in sport, did run a good and speedy race to save, if possible, Dan Powers from going to a certain death in the Nicktown Falls.

He hit the bridge winded and reeled against the railing to keep from falling. His heart was pounding and the blood coursed hotly through his veins. He looked into the falls. No sign of Dan was to be seen. Had he missed him or beaten his raft again? Then he looked up the foaming river, and there, riding the crest of the violent water, came Dan, his raft still intact, and his fighting spirit at the fore. He was bent over and he appeared haggard, and near the giving-up point.

With his heart beating trip-hammer blows against his ribs, Clell, with the rope ready, waited for Dan's raft to shoot under the bridge as he had done at Williamsburg. Would Dan refuse aid again? Would he throw away his last chance because Clell was offering it to him? Would he grasp the rope?

The raft swept closer. Dan looked up.

He saw Clell. He raised his hand. A prayer for assistance was on Dan's face. The hatred in his heart was gone. Out flew Clell's rope, uncoiling in the air. Dan grasped at it, missed, but caught it on the rebound as he shot under the bridge. The rope tightened. Dan straightened up. Clell leaned backward, all the strength of his body concentrated in pulling Dan to the bridge. For a brief space Dan swung back and forth over the water while his raft plunged over the wild Nicktown Falls in a crashing roar.

The timber sticks were splintered in the white foam while Dan was lifted upward, to finally land safely on the bridge. Clell knelt by his side. Dan struggled to get to his feet. He staggered to the bridge rail. He was looking for his raft. It had gone to its destruction. Dan shuddered, his muscular body quivered after its terrible strain. A cold sweat covered his haggard face.

" You've licked me, Clell Tobias, and I'm beholden to you for life," said Dan slowly.

" No, you're not," replied Clell, " I only wish I could ride a raft like you did, Dan. Your feat will be remembered on the Susquehannock. Dan, let's be partners and cut the fight timber. You'll ride the rafts and I'll look after the logging. What do you say?"

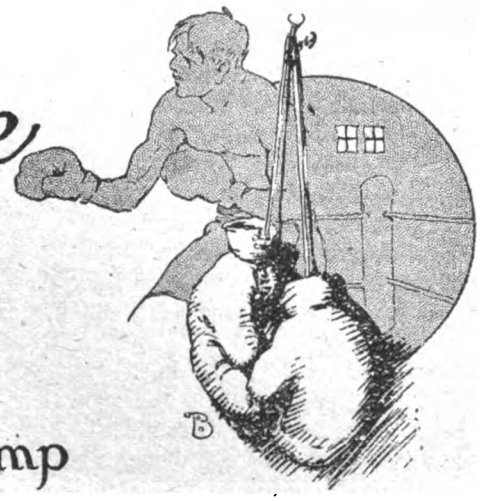
Dan Powers smiled. " I'm licked again by your offer, Clell. But I'm taking it."

" Fine!" exclaimed Clell. " Let's go back and tell our fathers that we are partners and that the spite-forest will be cut by us this winter as our first real job."

In One

by

Samuel G. Camp



IT was because I was a fight fan that I had that old grudge against Abe Weinberg. And the chance to get all square with Abe—it was too good to lose. Anyway, that's how it looked. All the same, you'd think that a man knowing as much as I do about the inside workings of the fight game, and especially the sort of work you can expect these fight managers to hand you—you'd expect that anybody that was wise to all that would have known enough to lay away from the whole business, wouldn't you? Well, you'd be surprised.

Then there was the wife—always wanting me to go after some of the easy money that she said was lying around loose in the theatrical business. You understand I married her out of the musical comedy trenches, and ever since then musical comedy has been going down grade. All the critics say so, and so does my wife.

Anyway, what with one thing and another, you can see there was some excuse. Yes, I can dig up plenty of alibis—and what's more, I agree with you as to what they amount to. Thinking up alibis is like trying to find the answers to some of those Sam Lloyd things: What's the use? Well, of course it's good for the old brain.

Eddie Hurley got the first break in the game when he picked out that particular morning to crash in on me with that little proposition of his —Eddie and his fellow, Herb Hoppin. He couldn't have picked a better time if he'd asked Ouija. The wife's past had caught up with her again that morning and before I found out what had happened to me I'd been handed a half-hour of uplift stuff on "How to be a Millionaire," by investing a moderate amount in the theatrical business, of course.

I'd just got to the office—I sell fire and life insurance, you know, when I sell it—and I was still thinking over that stuff of Irma's about the big opportunities there are to make money in the show business, when here they came—Eddie Hurley and another fellow that was a stranger to me. I've got that lowlife leaning of mine toward the manly art of assault and battery to thank for knowing Eddie Hurley—the same as Mr. Abraham Weinberg.

"'Mornin', Joe," said Eddie.

"I wish you the same," said I.

"Joe," said Eddie, "I want you to meet my friend, Mr. Hoppin."

"Anything to oblige," said I.

Then Eddie explained him.

"Mr. Hoppin is a director," he said.

"Standard Oil, Chemical Bank, or movie?" I asked.

"Stage director," said Eddie.

So Mr. Hoppin was in the show business, it seemed. Then there must be something wrong somewhere, I thought, because, anyway, if Mr. Hoppin was a millionaire he certainly didn't look it. Well, maybe he was a trifle near-sighted and hadn't noticed all the coin that was lying around in loose heaps in the dramatic industry with nobody to claim it—according to Irma. If so, that would account for it.

"You know what I mean," Eddie went on. "He works up these revues and puts 'em on for the restaurant people, stages vaudeville sketches, and the like. For a while he worked with Belasco, but somehow Dave and Herb here couldn't seem to agree about some things, and so finally Herb pulled out. You know how it is, working with somebody that's all the time disagreeing with you. So finally Herb decided to let Belasco go his way, and Herb would go his. It was the only thing to do."

"Too bad," I said. "To be sure, Mr. Belasco's been fairly successful, but of course there's no telling how far he might 'a' gone if Herb had only stuck. But as I was about to say, Eddie, is there something I can do for you?"

"You've guessed it," said he. "I'm here to put a little proposition up to you, Joe; but before we come to that let me put you wise to the situation. When you know how I'm fixed—well, maybe we can do business."

"Possibly," said I, very conservative.

"Now, Joe, it's like this," Eddie starts building up the foundation for the little proposition which is to come. "As you already know, of course, I'm managing Willie Gegan, the California Fat Boy."

"I've heard it rumored," I said. "If there's anybody in the world that doesn't know you're managing Willie Gegan, the California Adipose Kid, it's his own fault, not yours. And, by the way, Eddie, I saw Willie's little mealy with Longshoreman Burke, and I'd like to say that Willie certainly handed Mr. Burke a proper pasting. Of course I'm no authority, just a fan, as you might say, but the kid is clever!"

"I'll tell Willie you said that," said Eddie. "He'll be glad to hear it. Clever? I'll say he is! But, Joe, listen: the fight with Burke, and all the other matches that Willie has won, too—they aren't getting us a thing! Not a thing!"

"How do you mean?" I asked.

"We ain't an inch nearer," said Eddie, "to a match with Champion Jack Quinn than we were when Willie first came on from the Coast. Not an inch!"

"So?" said I.

"Absolutely," said Eddie. "And in spite of the fact that Willie holds a decision over the champion in one of those California four-rounders! You've heard about that, Joe?"

"Eddie," I said, "there ain't a single person from Index, Alaska, to Epilogue, Florida, no discrimination as to sex, that hasn't heard about that decision of Willie's over the champion. You've told the world!"

"Well, anyway," said Eddie, "I've tried

to. But, Joe, it hasn't got me one little thing. No, sir, we've laid away some of the best men in the division and got the rest of 'em up a tree and afraid to come down; I've worked that four-round decision for all it's worth and one to carry, and I've yelled fight at Quinn till I'm black in the face, and—there we are! Right where we started. And you know the answer."

"How do you mean?" I asked.

"Weinberg," said Eddie.

Now if the truth were known, up to that point I hadn't been so all-fired interested in the proceedings; but when Eddie cut in with that one word Weinberg—right then I began to sit up and take notice. Up till then, I guess, I must have forgotten all about this man Abe Weinberg's being the official manager of Mr. Jack Quinn, heavyweight champion of everywhere. And when I forgot that—well, I forgot a lot.

"Good old Abe!" said I. "Here's wishing him no more harm than a serious operation which is unsuccessful!"

"So that's the way you feel about it, eh?" said Eddie. He appeared to be considerably interested, I noticed, and he and this Herb Hoppin exchanged a couple of those meaning glances. "What did Weinberg ever do to you?" he asked.

"Oh, nothing much," I said. "Nothing but add mine to a lot of other sucker money—about one hundred hard-earned seeds, if I remember right, and I do—by handing me a regular inside tip on a scrap that I found out later was fixed the other way round. Fixed—and I'll always say Abe Weinberg knew it before he ever said a word to me!"

"Stick to that!" said Eddie. "You can't go wrong. And, Joe, it looks to me like I've come to the right party. You see, Joe, it's this bird Weinberg that's blocking the game. It's like this: he and Quinn are making a killing right now, what with the coin they're pulling down from the movies, trouping with burlesque shows, and the like. And so—why take a chance and fight? That's the idea, Joe, though I'm willing to hand it to Quinn: I think we could get him into the ring if it wasn't for Abe."

"No doubt," I said. "And if I had Mr. J. D. Rockefeller's money I'd be rich."

"That's the idea," said Eddie. "Not a chance. And besides all that, Joe, here's another thing, something only a few of us are wise to. I'll put you next. Listen. Joe, as sure as you're a foot high, Willie Gegan has got the old Indian sign on Jack Quinn!"

"No!" I said. "You don't mean to tell me!"

"It's a dead straight, open-and-shut fact," he assured me. "If Jack Quinn and Willie Gegan ever get into a ring, Joe, you can take it straight from me there'll be nothing to it but Willie! Of course, they call Willie the comedian of the ring, and all that, and I'll admit he's got a style that's all his own and maybe kind of peculiar; and of course his sort of running to fat, like he does, doesn't tend to make him the popular choice against the champion; but, Joe, you mind what I tell you: nothing to it but Willie! You know what the Indian sign means—and so does Abe Weinberg. And so—but, you see what we're up against."

"At a hasty glance," I hazarded, "I should say you were up against pretty nearly everything there is. And there's something else I see, too: which is a chance to make quite some profit out of Willie Gegan if he ever does get a chance to exchange a few hearty slams with Mr. Quinn. But, Eddie, to sort of illustrate, you know the condemned man always sleeps well the night before the execution, and also eats a hearty breakfast—I'll leave it to any newspaper. And so, Eddie, as long as you know you're up against it fair and square, why not stop worrying?"

"I'll tell you," said Eddie.

With that Eddie turned in and handed me five minutes of rapid-fire stuff on the subject of publicity and what it can do for and also to you—which is everything. And it seemed that Eddie still believed there was a chance of getting Willie Gegan, the California Fat Boy, into the ring with Mr. J. Quinn, champion, provided old John J. Public Sentiment could be worked up to the point where the champion would have to take on Willie or lose a large mess of this so-called prestige; and of course if the match did come off, we insiders, knowing that Mr. Gegan had the well-known Indian sign on Mr. Quinn—in other words, that

Willie, the Adipose Kid, had the champion's pet angora—would be right in line to make some fairly regular money.

If I hadn't known that Eddie Hurley was a square-shooter—I'll say that for him, anyway—I'd 'a' thought that he'd rung in this Indian sign stuff just by way of bolstering up that little proposition. But I knew Eddie, and so I knew it was a straight tip—and valuable.

Then Eddie announced that in collaboration with Mr. Herb Hoppin, the celebrated stage director, he had worked out a whale of a scheme—a scheme whereby public opinion could be aroused to the boiling-point of demanding that the champion yield the fat boy from the movie belt his just due, a Queensberry debate for the title—and at the same time a proposition which in itself would pay a large dividend to all concerned!

"And, Joe, what could be fairer than that?" Eddie wanted to know.

"I don't seem to think of anything just now," I had to admit. "But of course not knowing what the proposition is, or where I come in, I'm not in a position to speak with authority, so to say."

"Tell 'im, Herb," said Eddie.

"Why," said Mr. Hoppin, "it's like this. The idea is to star Mr. Gegan in a vaudeville sketch. Now get me right. Don't get the idea it's old stuff. We admit frankly that there ain't anythin' original about a fighter appearin' in vaudeville. *But*—what we don't admit is that this is any ordinary vaudeville act of the sort that these celebrated members of the cauliflower fraternity usually appear in—not that sort of vehicle at all! Nothin' like it! Besides which we don't admit for one minute that Willie Gegan, as an actor, is in the same class with the rest of these Butcher Lowbrows and Battlin' Boneheads, and the like! He ain't! He's as far above 'em as a prima donna is above association' with a spear-carrier!"

"Attaboy, Herb!" chirped Eddie. "You're going great!"

"No, sir," Herb continued, "in my opinion, which is worth somethin', this fellow Willie Gegan is a real comedian, a natural-born funny guy, and as a fighter he's merely wastin' his opportunities—though, of course, as a friend of Eddie's, here, I wouldn't tell him so. And as for the act—the little vaudeville vehicle in which Eddie and I propose to star Mr. Gegan—well, I want to ask you somethin': Did you ever see one of these vaudeville acts featurin' some Queensberry hero or other that didn't bore you pallid after the first few minutes—as soon as the novelty had worn off—the novelty of actually beholding, with a naked eye or two, the great fistic celebrity? Admit it! You never did!"

"I never did," said I.

"Why?" asked Mr. Hoppin.

"Oh, different reasons," said I. "But I never stopped to figure 'em out."

"Then I'll tell you," said he. "As you say, there were different reasons. But the two chief reasons were these: No originality and no girls."

"No originality and no—what?" I asked.

"Girls!" said Mr. Hoppin.

I thought for a minute. Then I said:

"In case you ever need a recommendation, come to me. I'll say you know your business!"

"Thanks," said Mr. Hoppin.

And then he went on to put me in possession of the facts—all except one. Mr. Willie Gegan was to star around in a little playlet entitled "The Boxing Lesson," by Herbert Hoppin. The scene is laid in the gymnasium of a girls' school. Willie has been hired as a boxing instructor, and the rise of the curtain catches Willie right in the act of earning his money—teaching *la boxe*, as they say in Germany, to six—count 'em—one complete half-dozen of the most beautiful young ladies ever beheld by the eye of man. Herb had already composed the gymnasium costumes to be worn—just here and there—by the cast of six cuties, and take it straight from Herb they'd prove very fetching indeed!

There was a bunch of clever lines, a lot of comedy stuff for Willie to pull in his own inimitable way, and a little bout between Willie and a gentleman sparring-partner by way of illustrating to the sextet of leading stage beauties and, incidentally, the audience, the various fearful blows that Willie

used in bumping off his opponents. Then, following another little piece of business that was sure to go big with the customers, Willie would close each and every performance by following his chest straight down to the footlights, where he would then utter a loud, piercing challenge to J. Quinn, champion heavyweight of America!

And, even if he did invent it himself, Mr. Herbert Hoppin would say that all this was some clever little contrivance!

I had to agree with him. What with one thing and another it certainly looked to me like sure-fire stuff. Yes, sir, other things being equal—equal to Mr. Hoppin's advance notices—I saw no reason in the world why the act shouldn't knock 'em dead.

That was Mr. Hoppin's idea exactly. And he went on to say that he knew the manager of a local vaudeville house who would give the act a tryout; and of course from that to twenty weeks or more, according to taste, on the big time—why, it was only a mere step. That's all; just a mere step! And he supposed I knew what that meant—twenty weeks or more on the big time—in the way of profits to those chiefly interested!

Well, I had a pretty fair idea as to all that. In my opinion they'd be fairly attractive—the profits—or even more so.

"But what I don't get is this," said I. "Why pick on me? Where's my cue in this game?"

Eddie answered the call for information.

"Joe," said he, "where you come in is right here. Never mind why, but—we're broke. All of us. Herb, Willie, and me. Flat! And somebody's got to back this show!"

"I see," said I. "Well, that explains. Even a child could understand it."

I thought. If I knew anything at all about the vaudevilles, "The Boxing Lesson" would be a sure-fire hit. And the profits worthy of comment. Besides which, there was more than an even chance that if Willie kept whaling away at the champion, right out in public like that, results would follow. The California Fat Boy would get his chance at the titleholder and—I knew something! And there—right there—was my opportunity! An opportunity as big as a house to get all good and square with one Abraham Weinberg! In fact—though he might not notice 'em for a while—all I had to do to put the skids under one Abraham Weinberg was to say "Yes" to this little proposition of Eddie Hurley's. One word and Abe would start slipping!

Then there was the wife—Irma. Well, maybe in some respects this wasn't exactly the sort of thing that Irma had had in mind. No, maybe not—in some respects. But—

"Suppose we talk a few figures," said I.

On a night something under a month later the missus and I might have been observed occupying seats 4 and 6, row E, center, at the Orpheum, a well-known local vaudeville theater with the usual rules regarding the use of vulgarity by the performers. In fact, we probably were observed and, no doubt, the observer, if he was any good at it, must have noticed that I was looking kind of pale and anxious about something or other. Anyhow, I know I was—looking pallid and feeling all nervous and everything.

Yes, sir, you can take it straight from an authority that this being angel to a show is quite a sensation, especially the first night.

WILLIE GEGAN & COMPANY

in

"THE BOXING LESSON"

Featuring Willie Gegan, the California Fat Boy Prize-Ring Comedian and Future Heavyweight Champion of the World,

and

A SCINTILLATING SEXTETTE OF STAGELAND BEAUTIES

was No. 6 on the program. And I wished those other five foolish acts would quit cluttering up the stage and make room for the real business of the evening—Willie Gegan & Co.! Win, lose, or draw, I'd feel better as soon as it was over with. Of course, we had a hit. Sure, we had a hit! But can you ever tell? You never can! And just between you, me and the celebrated gate-post—well, I had a little something at stake.

We won't go into figures. Seems to me I'm coming across pretty clean as it is, and —I draw the line right there. No figures. Suffice it to say, before "The Boxing Lesson" was ready for the boards, what with one thing and another, and so forth, I'd been nicked deeply; in fact, unless all went well, the scar would probably show for life. As for the rest, Eddie and Herb and I would split the profits three ways—when there were any profits to split. I didn't say we'd split 'em even. Eddie, including Willie, came in for something more than a third. Then—but never mind all that. No figures! Anyway, I'll say that I was satisfied with what was coming to me—if it came.

For that matter, as I sat there with the wife, waiting for the bell, a feeling seemed to steal over me that I'd be pretty well satisfied if I got back my original investment.

Well, after holding down the stage for three hours and a half, like it seemed, the trained animal-man finally called off his dogs. Mr. Herb Hoppin had done a lot of effective press-agent work regardless of expense—I can testify to that!—and during the short wait you could see that the audience was now expecting something extra special. Then—

Willie Gegan & Co.!

Now I want to say that right from the first this man Hoppin had shown a lot of good judgment; or so it seemed to me, anyway. Yes, sir, provided of course I was any judge of such matters myself, Mr. Hoppin was there forty ways. Anyway, I'd say that, as a picker and chooser, so to speak, Mr. F. Zeigbaum, the Midnight Frivols' expert, had nothing at all on Herb. And when the curtain went up on the opening performance of "The Boxing Lesson" —well, there was a large and uncultivated audience and it went right to work and told me I was right. In a word, the customers took one good unanimous look and—handed out a regular ovation!

And I'll say it did me a lot of good! I began to feel better right away and collapsed back into my chair—I'd been sitting right on the edge—with a sure enough all wool and a yard wide sigh of relief. That settled it! There was nothing to it! We had 'em going right off the reel!

"Look!" I said to Irma. "That's her—the one on the end; right end."

"Who do you mean?" asked the wife.

"Why," says I, "you know. I told you about her. Remember? That English girl —Miss Beauty Marlowe. The one I hired for the act myself."

"Oh," sniffed the wife.

There wasn't any particular reason for the wife's taking it that way—with a sniff —like it was smelling-salts or something, except—well, to tell the truth, maybe I sort of slipped when, right away after meeting Miss Beauty Marlowe, I told the wife about it. What I mean is, I wouldn't be surprised if maybe I sort of forgot and let myself get a little bit too enthusiastic and all. Sort of threw myself, in a manner of speaking. And if you're a visiting fireman yourself—I mean one of the regular married bunch—no doubt you know how it is.

And speaking of enthusiasm, Irma hadn't shown a whole lot of it about this little enterprise of mine, anyway. Fact is, the wife ain't so strong for the fight stuff. And of course there were one or two little things about the affair that the wife didn't understand—because she'd never heard of 'em. Somehow I forgot to say anything to her about Abe Weinberg and—well, all that. Maybe if she'd understood better she might have taken more interest. But as it was, I was kind of disappointed. After all she'd said about my taking some kind of a whirl at the theatrical business, I'd hoped it would please her. But I guess maybe the thing was a little bit too closely connected up with the so-called prize-ring to suit the wife's taste, which is very refined.

Sure, women are people, but—queer. I'll say so.

Well, anyway, the act went big. Anyhow, that's the way it was going. When Mr. Herb Hoppin said that Willie Gegan, the California Fat Boy, was a natural-born funny guy, he remarked a faceful. Willie, you know, is short, broad, with what you might call outgoing and incoming legs, and a reach like a boarding-house lifer. He's the original red head, all the rest of these so-called Titian-haired birds being just pale and uninteresting imitations, and he has a grin that reaches from his good ear to his

bad one—and he had a line of jazz stuff that just fox-trotted right out over those old footlights and made everybody happy. Yes, sir, Willie was good!

And as for that scintillating sextet of stageland beauties—quite some word-twister, Mr. Herb Hoppin, if you ask me!—as for Willie's support—oh, boy! But I've already handed it to Herbert, and that tells the story. I'll simply add this: right away after the young ladies of the company went to bat with a little ballad entitled, "You Make a Hit With Me," the box score showed that Miss Beauty Marlowe surely struck a very popular note.

And, seeing I discovered Miss Beauty Marlowe myself it seemed to me that I was entitled to hand myself a little something right there. Now they've got to be said some place, and maybe this is as good a place as any, and so—just a few kind words about Miss Marlowe.

On the very next day after I agreed to finance this vaudeville venture of Willie Gegan's, Eddie Hurley's, and Herb Hoppin's—well, about the usual time, I dropped in at the Blue Goose Grill for lunch. Been lunching there for years. First thing I saw, soon as I'd crashed into the place, was one of the most lovely scenic effects I've piped in a long, long time. About one minute afterward, I found out that her name was Miss Beauty Marlowe—because the fellow that was with her, a young man pretty well known in the so-called theatrical and sporting worlds, one Wilson Bliss by name, happened to be an acquaintance of mine, and he very kindly invited me to sit at their table. I thanked him and did that little thing.

"Miss Marlowe," I said. "Beauty. A kind of curious name, if you'll pardon me, but—how true!"

Well, maybe it was sort of sudden, but otherwise not so bad, eh? Anyway, she said something appropriate and then, one word leading to another, I found out that she was an English girl over here looking for some sort of a theatrical position, and that she'd been looking for one of those things for quite some time without finding it.

I came across with a good strong letter to Director Hoppin, and told her I'd see him myself, personally—which I did—and assured her it was nothing at all—oh, absolutely nothing at all!—when she was so much obliged that it had me all sort of hot and uncomfortable. It did, for sure. She was certainly mighty grateful.

And as for Director Hoppin—well, believe Herb, I'd picked a winner! And so—that's that.

Well, Mr. Herbert Hoppin's little skit entitled "The Boxing Lesson" was now drawing along toward the grand old finale, a song number entitled "Schooldays"—Mr. Gegan and company.

Willie's bout with a sparring partner remained to be gone through, and then—

But, anyway, Willie and his accomplice, a professional punching-bag named Kid Carter, went through the motions, the fat boy getting many a laugh on the way. Then Mr. Kid Carter fitted a pair of gloves to the hands of one of the blue-ribbon blonds and brunettes.

Herb said that this business of Willie boxing with those six remarkable stage-effects was sure to grab a lot of laughs; and most of all when, at the wind-up of each of these coeducational affairs, Willie would stick out his plump but reliable jaw and let the young ladies—one at a time, of course—whale away at it *ad lib.*, *au gratin*, and so forth.

Yep, sure-fire stuff! said Herb.

Well, maybe Herb was right. Maybe that little piece of business was good for more laughs than a straw hat in December. But one-sixth of it is all we'll ever know! And if there was a laugh in that—and the audience seemed to think so—you had to show me!

The facts are these:

Willie dropped his hands and offered his chin as per directions—not forgetting his celebrated grin. The young woman that Willie had been boxing with—well, sir, now that I think of it, there was certainly something mighty suspicious and businesslike, too, you might say, about the way she stepped back and sort of measured Willie off. Yes, sir, I'll say there was something suspicious about it. She hadn't acted like that at all in rehearsals.

Without mentioning any names, I mean Miss Beauty Marlowe!

And then, all of a sudden, something happened! Something hit Mr. Willie Gegan on the chin. Willie just sort of slowly lay down Out? Yes, Mr. Gegan was gone—all gone. And no telling when he'd be back!

Eddie Hurley, looking all smoked up about something and very pale around the gills—Eddie dashed right out onto the stage and tried to bring Willie back with some of this first-aid stuff. Willie didn't respond worth a cent. Didn't seem to pay any attention at all. It was kind of discouraging work for Eddie. So finally Eddie gave it up and signaled for the curtain—and got it.

Just about then I told Irma to wait—I'd be back in a minute—and started backstage. When I reached his dressing-room I found that Willie was back, but still a little hazy as to where he'd been and why. Eddie was there, too, of course, but in no fit condition to print. And I don't think there's much about that scene in Willie's dressing-room that will bear repeating, anyway.

And so, leaving all that aside—

Here are a few samples of what the papers did to us next day: "Gegan Has Glass Jaw! Rocked To Sleep By Chorus Girl! Loses Chance at Championship!" That's what one of 'em said! Another one pulled something like this: "Fat Boy Takes the Count from Lady of the Ensemble! Chorus Cutie Slams Willie Gegan for Ten! Adipose Kid Eliminated as Contender for Championship!" And another one of 'em came across with this: "Just as Easy! California Fat Boy Crashed by Show Girl! Stage Beauty Knocks Willie Sour with One Punch! That Will be all from Willie!"

Yes, sir, all the like of that, and maybe not such uninteresting reading—for anybody in a position to enjoy it.

Well, a couple of days after the great disaster Eddie Hurley, looking like he wasn't feeling well or something, staggered into my office and collapsed into a chair.

"Well, Joe," said he, "I've got the dope. And it's just like I suspected. I got next to a bird that's close to him—"

"Close to who?" I put in.

"Weinberg!" Eddie shot at me. "Abe Weinberg! I got next to a fellow that's close to Abe and he came across. And, Joe, it's like this: Hoppin spilled the beans. You know Herb. He's a talker. Well, after you agreed to put up the money for that act, I guess it took Herb somewhere from three to four hours to spill the news from one end of the main stem to the other—including every little detail of the act. Of course it gets to Abe Weinberg. And Abe sees where this publicity stunt is liable to make him trouble.

"So next day this fellow Wilson Bliss—one of Abe's heelers—and this dame calling herself Marlowe are laying for you at the Blue Goose Grill. It was a plant, Joe—and you fell for it. Of course, this Marlowe woman, as she called herself, might have got by if she applied to Herb in the regular way. In fact, I'll say she would! But they weren't taking any chances, Joe—not a chance! And the rest was easy! Do you get it, Joe?"

"All except this dame calling herself Marlowe," I said. "What do you mean, calling herself?"

"Joe, listen," said Eddie. "In the first place, her name ain't Marlowe. It's Hobbs! Jane, or Mary, or something Hobbs. And in the second place, she isn't English. She's an Australian. Abe knew about her—knew that she had just come to this country, and was in the city looking for a job. And Abe gave her one! You see, Joe, she wasn't known over here, and so there wasn't a chance that anybody 'd suspect that she was a professional strong woman, and rated one of the strongest in the business! You know, Joe, they don't show it—the strength—like a man. But it's there!"

"I'll say it's there!" I said. "And what's more, it's my idea that when they rated Miss Beauty Marlowe, alias Hobbs, one of the strongest in the business they rated her about right! I've seen her work!"

"How about Willie?" I asked.

"Back to the Coast!" groaned Eddie. "It's all off!"

"An act in one"—that's an expression I've heard vaudeville players use. And I guess ours must have been that kind of an act. Anyway, it opened, and closed, in one night, one scene, and—one punch!

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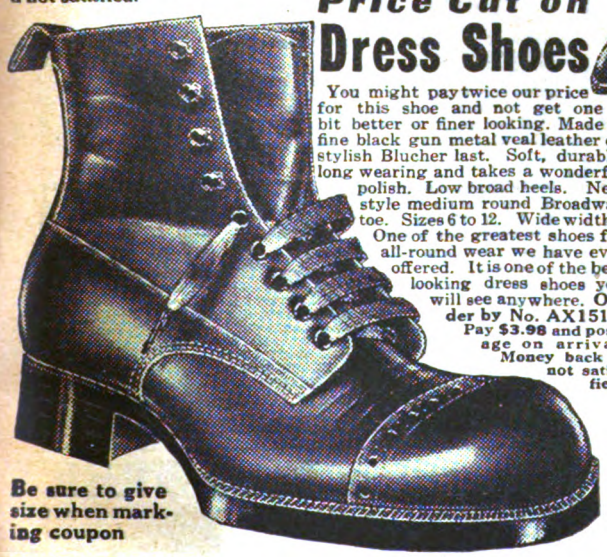

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