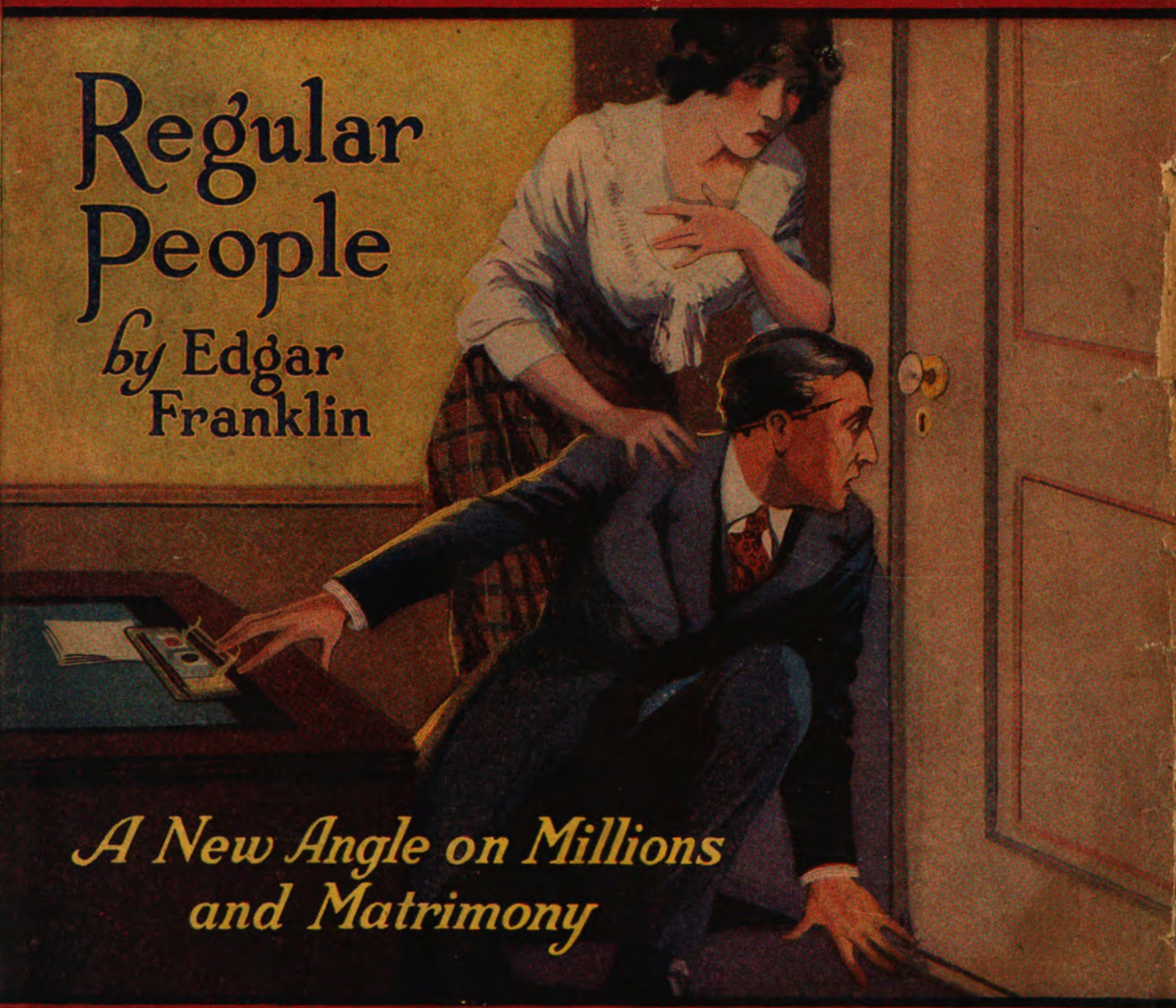
ARGOSY ALL-STORY WEEKLY



Regular People

by Edgar Franklin

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Full Room Size—9 Feet by 12 Feet

This splendid Velvet Rug bargain shows how Hartman has smashed prices—and you not only make a tremendous saving, but get the rug on easy credit terms. Only $1 to send now and we ship the rug. Use it *30 days* on *free trial*—then, if not satisfied, return it and we will refund your money and pay transportation charges both ways. If you keep it, take a full year to pay. You don't risk a penny.

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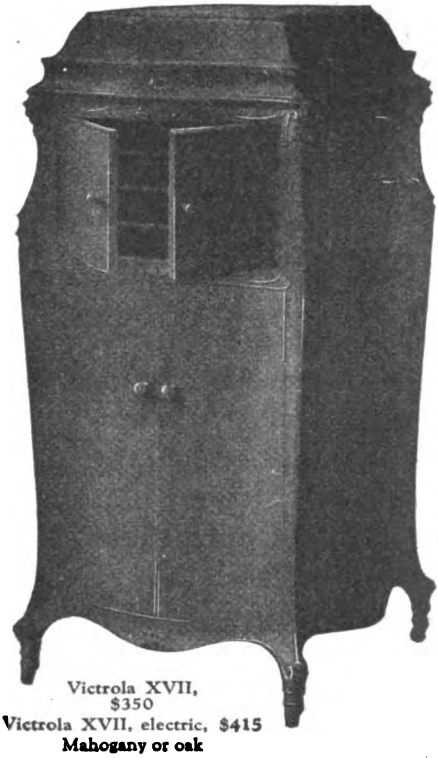

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Mahogany or oak

Victrola

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ARGOSY-ALLSTORY WEEKLY

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"PIRATES AIN'T ALL DEAD YET"

A long complete story

BY H. BEDFORD-JONES

Author of the *John Solomon* stories, etc., etc.

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Short Stories by C. C. Waddell, Garret Smith, Howard Rockey, and others

NEXT WEEK

THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY, 280 BROADWAY, NEW YORK, and TEMPLE HOUSE, TEMPLE AVENUE, E. C., LONDON

FRANK A. MUNSEY, President RICHARD H. TITHERINGTON, Secretary CHRISTOPHER H. POPE, Treasurer

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PUBLISHED WEEKLY BY THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY.

Entered as second class matter July 15, 1920, at the Post-Office at New York, under the Act of March 3, 1879

Free Proof You Can Eat A Pound a Day Off Your Weight

Famous Scientist Discovers Remarkable Secret That Shows Results in 48 Hours! No Medicines, Starving, Bathing, Exercises or Bitter Self-Denials of Any Kind!

AT last the secret that scientists have been searching for has been discovered. No more self-denials or discomfort. Just follow the simple new secret, and a pound or more of your weight will disappear each day—the very first week! Most people begin to see actual results in 48 hours.

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You'll enjoy reducing this new way—it's so simple and easy. Nearly everyone can count on a pound a day from the very start. You'll be down to your normal weight before you realize it—and without the least bit of discomfort. Why you'll actually enjoy your meals as never before and you'll feel refreshed, invigorated, strengthened!

What Users Say

Takes off 20 pounds

"Eugene Christian's Course has done for me just what it said it would. I reduced twenty pounds. . . . I will need to reduce some more, and with the directions of the course I can do that as fast or as slow as I desire. Many thanks for your interest and the course."
Mr. ——— Detroit, Mich.

Now 40 pounds lighter

"It is with great pleasure that I am able to assure you that the course on Weight Control proved absolutely satisfactory."

"I lost 40 pounds. . . ."
Mrs. ——— Glen Falls, N. Y.

Reduces 32 pounds

"Both my husband and myself were benefited by following the suggestions given in Weight Control. I lost thirty-two pounds. . . . We find our general health very much benefited."
Mrs. ——— Charleston, W. Va.

Weighs 39 pounds less

"Am thankful that my attention was called to your course on Weight Control. Since January 30th of this year I have reduced 39 pounds. . . . I have taken off five inches around my 'silo,' which helps some.

"When I first started reading weight control I weighed 267 pounds, and could hardly walk a block without resting. I now walk ten miles by section lines every morning, weather permitting, and do it easily."
Mr. ——— Holton, Kansas.

The above excerpts form only a few of hundreds of letters on file at our office, describing amazing weight reductions through Weight Control.

The names are withheld out of deference to our subscribers, but will be furnished to any one, sending for the course on free trial, who requests them.

Here's the Secret!

Food causes fat — everyone a d m i t s that. But Eugene Christian, the famous Food Specialist, has discovered that certain foods, when eaten together, are converted only into blood, tissues and bone. And in the meantime your excess flesh is *eaten up in energy* at the rate of a pound or more a day!

For instance, if you eat two certain kinds of foods together at the same meal, they are immediately converted into fat. But if you eat these same foods at different times, they are converted into blood and muscle, no fat. It's a simple *natural law*—but it works like magic.

Don't s t a r v e yourself! Don't punish yourself with violent exercise or any discomforts whatever. You can

eat whatever you like and do whatever you like. Just observe this new simple system of food combinations as worked out by Christian, and watch your excess weight vanish!

How You Can Have Free Proof

Realizing the importance of his discovery, Eugene Christian has incorporated all his valuable information into 12 simple lessons, called "Weight Control, the Basis of Health," which will be sent free to anyone who writes for them. These lessons show you how to control your weight and bring it down to normal by the wonderful new method. They reveal all the startling facts about the recent food discoveries and show you how to eat off a pound or more of weight a day.

Prove it! Test this wonderful new way of reducing at our expense! See results in 48 hours—and if you don't there is no cost to you. Fat people are not attractive; they suffer many discomforts; doctors say they die young. Why continue to carry this harmful weight, when you can lose it so quickly, so easily, so naturally?

Let us send you Eugene Christian's Course in weight-control on free trial. It's the only sure way to lose weight quickly and safely. We want to prove it. We want you to see your own unnecessary flesh disappear. Dieting, medicines and exercising touch only the surface; this new discovery gets right down to the real reason for your stoutness and removes it at once.

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This is a special Free Proof Offer. You need not send any money in advance. The complete 12 lesson course, containing all of the valuable information regarding the wonderful new food combination discoveries, will be sent free to your door. Just mail the coupon and the course will be sent to you at once.

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Don't delay. Get your coupon off at once—*now*. No money, just the coupon. When the course is in your hands, give the postman $1.97 (plus postage) in full payment. It will be refunded immediately upon request if you do not see a remarkable improvement after 5 days.

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Corrective Eating Society, Inc.

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You may send me prepaid, in plain container, Eugene Christian's Course, "Weight Control—the Basis of Health" complete in 12 lessons. I will pay the postman only $1.97 (plus postage) in full payment on arrival. If I am not satisfied with it I have the privilege of returning the course within 5 days after its receipt. It is of course understood that you are to return my money if I return the course.

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Address.....

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State.....

Price outside United States, $2.15. Cash with order.

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The Purpose of this Department is to put the reader in touch immediately with the newest needfuls for the home, office, farm, or person; to offer, or seek, an unusual business opportunity, or to suggest a service that may be performed satisfactorily through correspondence. It will pay a housewife or business man equally well to read these advertisements carefully.

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Classified Advertising continued on page 2, back section.

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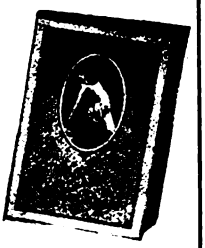

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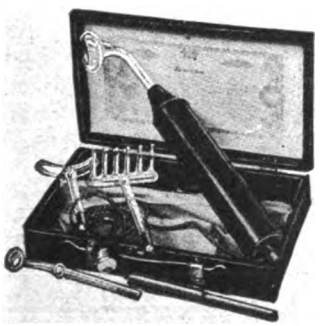

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ARGOSY-ALLSTORY
WEEKLY

VOL. CXXXVI SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 10, 1921 NUMBER 6

Regular People

Part I.

by Edgar Franklin

Author of "Whatever She Wants," "Everything but the Truth," "The Wicked Streak," etc.

CHAPTER I.

BEYOND THE KEYHOLE.

"*RRRMP!*" said Albert, the office-boy, altogether to himself. This *rrrmp*, of course, does not record with any real degree of precision the sound, indicative of great merriment, which came from Albert. On the other hand, it seems a good deal better than the conventional "tee hee." Nobody, in point of fact, ever heard a person express merriment by saying "tee hee." "Tee hee" is at best a clumsy symbol, while *rrrmp* is at least an attempt at accuracy. However, be this sound of Albert's set down as it may, or be its actual phonetic quality left entirely to the imagination, it was a thick and throaty gurgle, bespeaking a vast, an amazed, even an unholy mirth.

One minute back, while passing the door of William Vanluyn's private office, Albert —for no plain reason—had paused. His impudent gaze had rested inquiringly on the panels for an instant; then it had passed briefly to gray-headed Archer, who worked gravely over his books as usual, and to Miss Simms, who was bringing from her typewriter endless meticulous ticks, also as usual.

They were safely occupied; Albert's ear had inclined toward the door, and he had frowned incredulously for a moment, then edged a little closer.

Now, crouching, Albert seemed wholly dead to all the world on that side of the door occupied by his own lean and loose-jointed body.

Albert's hands gripped his knees; his shoulders hunched oddly and with great expression. Indeed, in the curve of those shoulders alone one read the indecent pleasure, the downright disreputable joy that possessed Albert.

"Albert," remarked Archer, gently as always, and not looking up from his work, which was a trick of Archer's.

Albert grew a trifle more tense. A de-

lighted little tremor ran visibly through him, and his lips moved.

"Steady, bo! Steady!" Albert whispered.

"You may—mail the—letters now," Archer intoned, and wrote on.

Albert twitched slightly.

"Oh, boy—*boy!*" he muttered ever so faintly.

Sensing, as from a great distance, that Albert was not rendering the lightning obedience of the perfect employee, Miss Simms glanced at Archer for the slightest fraction of a second and continued her ticking. She sniffed just once and then relaxed with a sound of her own, which was something like "tuh!" After all, managing the office-boy was Archer's job; but it did seem to Miss Simms that, were it her job instead, she would not have had to speak twice.

"That is the—third time I've—told you to mail those letters, Albert," Archer's uninterested voice stated patiently.

It seemed that total deafness had stricken Albert; that and a queer nervous disease which caused him to shake just now from head to foot and to give forth the strangest, most senseless, and yet the wickedest little sizzling giggle.

"Wow!" he observed to himself.

Now, there may be offices where in a situation this kind would be tolerated indefinitely, even to the limit of an office-boy's sweet pleasure. Most emphatically, the chaste establishment in which William Vanluyn managed his inherited fifteen-million-dollar crumb of the giant Vanluyn estate was not one of them.

In this little executive plant, as William himself so frequently pointed out to business friends, care and discipline, together with a nice selection of original material, had brought efficiency to the well-known and much-admired point of perfection. Here the wasted minute, the wasted motion, were all unknown—which was the chief reason for William's force being limited to four instead of to fourteen.

Yet thirty full, scandalous seconds had drifted into history since that last word of Archer's, and still Albert had failed to leap at the pile of letters and to bear them to the mail-chute in the corridor; nor, as a matter of shameful fact, did he show the slightest hint of any intention so to leap.

Archer, then, ceased writing and looked up in the detached and fretful fashion that was characteristic of him when forced to desist from work; he frowned absently at the empty chair beside the little desk at the door, where Albert should have been sitting. Simultaneously, Miss Simms discontinued her ticking and also looked up, although there was nothing absent or detached about her cold, gray eye. This stopping of the typewriter alone should have brought Albert back to earth with a crash; it did nothing of the kind. The happy grin that was distorting his countenance just then caused Albert's ears to wiggle slightly; his lips moved, and he spoke again, more loudly:

"Atta boy! Atta boy! One more for luck! Oooooh!"

Miss Simms looked straight at Archer, and her lips became one thin, pale line. Archer stared at Miss Simms and scowled a little; and then, as his gaze followed the darting one of Miss Simms, he scowled more than a little. Archer, in fact, laid down his pen and glared unbelievingly at Albert's back. Archer slid down from his stool, paused a moment to remove the eyeshade which might have detracted a little from his impressiveness in the awful scene about to take place, and then stalked soundlessly across the outer office. One yard from the erring office-boy's guilty back he stopped.

"Albert!" said Archer, and his voice was a saw cutting through steel.

With quite a startled jerk Albert came away from his keyhole. He wabbled to an erect position and, grinning happily, gazed at them like one coming out of a pleasant, mischievous dream.

And that grin, as Miss Simms reflected with grim enjoyment, would disappear in one more second, and Albert would seem to be impersonating a whipped, cringing pup! Miss Simms had seen office-boys—light-minded young men who had hitherto failed to take Archer quite seriously—wither to nothingness before that particular fixed stare.

Indeed, it was a peculiarity of this office

that between them Miss Simms and Archer could wither the most hardened boy that ever drew the breath of life. Alone with the mature and faithful pair, the boy of the outfit occupied a position rather like that of unruly child to harsh, disapproving parents; however permanent the rest of the force, they changed office-boys frequently in the William Vanluyn establishment.

Hence, Miss Simms watched and waited for the first crumpling of Albert, now in his third week—watched and waited, and then herself frowned in astonishment, because instead of crumpling Albert abruptly clapped a hand to his wide and irregularly toothed mouth, permitted a long, whining squeal of laughter to filter through the fingers, and with the other hand pointed hysterically toward the closed door.

Archer stiffened and narrowed his eyes a shade more, were that possible.

"What—were—you—doing?" he demanded.

"I—umph! They—oh!" Albert exploded.

"*Albert!*" barked Archer.

And at last he seemed to have penetrated the tough outer covering of Albert's sensibilities. The youth's merriment died; instead of cringing, though, he faced his immediate chief rather indignantly.

"What's the idea?" he demanded. "I ain't made o' stone! I hafta laugh when I get a laugh handed me!"

"How dare you," Archer wanted to know, "look through a keyhole?"

"Why not," Albert giggled surprisingly, "when there's as much to see as there is through that keyhole?"

"*What!*" rasped Archer.

"Have a look!" Albert invited, with some irritation. "Take an eyeful, boss; it's free."

Miss Simms arose in protest.

"I said when you engaged him that the boy was utterly unfit, Mr. Archer," she stated irrelevantly.

"I know," Archer all but faltered. "But— What do you mean, Albert?"

"Look!" advised the youth. "Don't ask me. *Look!*"

"Young man," contributed Miss Simms, since it was plain that Albert had not the smallest realization of his crime, "that is Mr. Vanluyn's *private* office, and—"

"Private is right, I'll say!" Albert retorted defensively, and backed away a pace. "He couldn't get away with that stuff anywhere but in private."

"Albert!" Archer began almost helplessly. "You dare—"

"Listen, boss!" Albert interrupted and his voice grew pleading. "Do you wanter look, or can I look again? This is something you don't want to miss."

Archer glanced around rather wildly. Miss Simms turned pale.

"Just a moment!" she cried. "It—it isn't possible that Mr. Vanluyn has—has had a seizure of some kind? A fit? Something the boy's perverted mind is interpreting as comic? Something—"

A small whoop escaped Albert.

"No—no, of course not!" Archer said. "Miss Thayer is with him. If anything like that had happened, she'd have called for help."

"She don't want no help!" Albert guffawed, and in that second the whole incredible coarseness of him leaped forth naked. "He's busted a coupla ribs for her by this time, but she don't want no help!"

"Busted— What do you mean?" Archer cried.

"He's hugging the life out of her—out of the pippin that takes his letters!" Albert informed them. "He's got a strangle-hold on her you couldn't break with a sledge. He kissed her fifty million times while I was watchin' 'em, and he didn't show no signs o' stoppin'. And, believe me, *she likes it!*"

"Miss Thayer!" gasped Miss Simms. "I don't believe it."

"There's the keyhole!" suggested Albert.

"*We* do not look through keyholes," Archer informed him.

Miss Simms was breathing heavily.

"I'm not at all sure that *I* shall not make this case the exception and look!" she said. "Not that I credit the boy for one instant, Mr. Archer, but—well, as long as I have known Mr. Vanluyn I've always felt that this was the sort of place in which I

preferred to work. If I've been mistaken—"

She hesitated. She looked at Archer, who was himself staring toward the keyhole. Wholly because of the nervous excitement that had arisen within her, not at all, of course, because she feared being beaten to the keyhole, Miss Simms stepped forward quickly.

More, she bent her dignified knees and placed the right lens of her nose-glasses before the little circle. And her lips parted and her pallor turned to a rather vivid flush; and now her mouth opened frankly, widely, and for many seconds not a muscle of her moved.

"I guess I was lying?" Albert observed significantly.

Miss Simms started, peered just once more, and rose with dignity. Her lips were set, her eyes utterly outraged.

"I *never* should have believed it!" she said.

"It isn't—so?" Archer asked.

"Not of Mr. Vanluyn," continued Miss Simms, and looked at Archer as if to suggest that *he* might well be the chief philandering demon of the whole universe. "Of all men, not of Mr. Vanluyn!"

"Lady, they're all alike," philosophized Albert, who, now that she had seen for herself, seemed to feel himself of the company again. "Lock 'em up with a pretty little chicken, and—"

"Boy!" gasped Archer. "Mail those letters! D'ye hear me? Mail those letters!"

All unafraid, Albert bestirred himself and shuffled across the office.

"Right, chief!" he chuckled genially.

The door closed behind him. Archer, succumbing suddenly, did the keyhole genuflexion and clucked his tongue, to rise reluctantly after a moment and scowl toward the windows and away from Miss Simms.

"We'll have to fire that boy," he said.

"And let him leave here with—with a grudge against the office, and then talk and have *this* get out?"

"Well, then, we—we'll have to keep him," Archer muttered.

"Yes, and raise him," Miss Simms added feverishly.

Every so often, the drawing of a capital jury is jammed fast by a succession of conscientious souls who refuse flatly to consider the legalized butchering of a man on purely circumstantial evidence. It is well enough that a proportion of these minds persists; circumstantial evidence is a long, long way from being infallible.

As in this case of William Vanluyn and Joan Thayer and the—appearances notwithstanding—perfectly respectable and ordinary thing that was going on in the private office of the former. Before jumping to keyhole conclusions, these two deserve at least a little study and consideration.

Joan had passed the ripe age of twenty-three. She was, perhaps, the prettiest private secretary in New York—a town where pretty private secretaries are as plentiful as leaves on a maple tree. Mentally, too, Joan was quite as fine and rare as in her purely physical aspect.

William was much more mature, being within three years of thirty. He was large and very sane and human, with that handsome cast of feature which crops out so frequently in the Vanluyn generations. His share of the Vanluyn millions had come to him at twenty-five; and, since the handling of their varied interests was all of one man's job, certain not too compelling inclinations toward the wild, free life of a mechanical engineer had been shelved forever, and William had settled down comfortably to the task of seeing that his dollars earned at least as much as, and frequently a trifle more than, they had earned in the good old days of the fortune's founding.

They had been working together in this office, William and Joan, six days a week for two full years—ever since the month following Joan's graduation from college—sitting side by side. In a fashion which began, late in the first year, by being just a trifle difficult, later became curiously dogged and recently had grown downright agonizing, they had devoted themselves to the perpetuation of the idea that their relations, their interest in each other, were of the most strictly impersonal and business character.

Had Joan been sixty or so, or even cross-

eyed and pimpled at her actual age, the thing might have been relatively simple; as it was, the chill formality of their good mornings and their good evenings, taken side by side with the far from chill glances that darted unexpectedly between them all through the course of every business day, must have brought tears from the angels.

Save that they were based upon the flat impossibility of the obvious and inescapable, their separate reasonings were perfectly sound. William's creed included the pathetic delusion that he was simply one of the kind who do not care to fall in love, and therefore never will fall in love. William's was a strong character, so that settled William's end of it.

Joan, who was given to occasional fits of self-analysis, had faced the matter squarely —she tried to do that with everything—had put cold reason to bear on the possibilities, and had ended, several times, by laughing it all away quite contemptuously. With the most exquisite exactness she had determined just how remote from herself anything like sex-love was and must remain, both because of her ordained career and because of certain external quantities. When you have been taught to reason, you can reduce almost anything to absurdity. And for another thing, as she knew so well, a less impressionable young woman than Joan Thayer never existed; and for still another thing, were still another necessary, if there was one type of creature she detested above all others, it was the girl who ensnared and married her rich employer. So that settled Joan's side of the case, of course.

They had been sitting side by side in that office for two years—and that was all. William barely knew where Joan lived; uptown, of course; he could have told where by looking in the book. Joan, to be sure, knew that William abode in the huge old mansion with his married sister; for some reason or other, she had avoided walking past the house for a year or more. It must be said for William that he had never so far presumed upon his position as to invite Joan to dinner or the theater; it must be said for Joan that, had he done so, he would have been repelled with that frigid courtesy of which she was mistress. They were like that, sound, strong young creatures with breeding and a perfect sense of proportion and propriety.

Thus the abstract, uncomplicated survey of the past; the thing that had happened this afternoon does not lend itself so readily to calm, clear explanation.

It was late spring, which may have had some bearing—one of those maddeningly balmy days when every puff of dust-laden city breeze manages in some mysterious fashion to suggest new green leaves and sprouting stalks and noisy little brooks. Joan had been taking dictation of a most important character matter which involved the accuracy of many figures and proper names; in the little pauses—since there need be no dissembling at this stage of the affair—she had been watching William Vanluyn's hands. They were the most perfect hands in the world—big and shapely and brown, with a coarse, dark fuzz on their backs that suggested tremendous muscular power; much as Joan loathed jewelry on a man, that quaint old family ring of William's must have hunted through the centuries to find the one hand that could wear it fittingly.

And William had been giving dictation, and, without bothering about any little pauses, his clear eyes had been devouring the back of Joan's lovely neck, the soft cloud of her adorable hair, the distractingly unmatchable curve of her shoulder. Now and then William frowned, because several times this last half-hour he had made an idiotic blunder and found himself forced to go back for a correction.

He had been doing that more and more of late; he seemed to be getting seedy; briefly, he considered a fortnight's fishing in Canada. He shook his head almost immediately and sighed. He must be getting old—or something. Once upon a time he had loved to go up there and fish; now the very thought of leaving New York sent through him a surge of what really felt like terrified disgust. He resumed his contemplation of Joan's neck and sighed again.

And then the dictation came to an end; not crisply as usual, but in a sickly, frittering-out way.

William forced a smile.

"Too nice a day to work, isn't it?" he muttered.

"It's a beautiful day," Joan admitted almost primly.

They smiled at each other briefly; only this time there was something in William's smile which caused Joan's eyes to drop. William's pencil, possibly more intelligent than either of them, picked this moment to roll toward the edge of the desk. Joan reached for it hurriedly; so did William.

And in some strange manner their gripping hands met suddenly and clung fast, and as Joan gave the weakest little tug William's hand clung even faster. Suddenly William rose, so suddenly that he startled Joan into rising also. After that, as concerns specific motives for minor acts and the acts themselves, nothing was particularly clear for some time. Except that the eyes of two such well-balanced young people could not possibly have done anything so elemental, it might be said that their eyes flamed at one another. Then William's arms opened suddenly, and when they closed, which was almost instantly, Joan Thayer was within them. Apparently she had forgotten to resist. Her lips had met William's. In the most shameless and abandoned manner Joan was clinging to William, and William was saying jerkily:

"Joan! Joan, darling! You're going to marry me, Joan!"

And Miss Thayer, without ever a thought of contradicting her employer, was whispering:

"Yes—yes, Will!"

It was at this point, approximately, that Albert paused on the far side of the door.

CHAPTER II.

FOR AND AGAINST.

AFTER a lapse of minutes a certain calm stole back to them—not by any means the flat, uninteresting calm of all the previous years; but a glorified, celestial quiet so wonderful that Joan scarcely dared breathe, lest the whole beautiful dream vanish. She did not move. There in William's arms, she had not the slightest desire to move, now or ever. As for William, his frank countenance told it all; William wore much the amazed, exalted expression of a man who, stepping through the door of what he assumes to be a humdrum business office, has suddenly found himself in the very center of heaven.

However, he too had reached the stage where he could speak without gasping, and, even if it happened all to be along the same line of thought, he had much to say.

"Joan, do you really love me—*really?*" was the burden of one query that seemed to give William a good deal of concern.

Looking into his eyes, Joan breathed raptly:

"Oh, Will, I do! I do!"

In substance, this conversational fragment was repeated some thirty times—a rather odd thing in some ways, because William was usually quick of comprehension, and surely he knew his private secretary to be the very soul of outspoken honesty. One answer should have been enough. Later on Joan developed an anxiety of her own, which found expression in a shy upward glance at William, a burrowing into the yearning depths of his shoulder, and a barely audible:

"Will! Tell me again, dear! I want to hear it."

And William, to the best of his ability—which was astonishingly considerable, now that the impossible had happened and he admitted himself to be more wildly in love than man had ever been before—William indeed told her. And there were divers other little soft murmurings, too, which, however they might have appeared to an alienist, seemed perfectly satisfactory to William and Joan.

Presently a mighty sigh escaped William, indicating that he was coming up for air and a survey of the world he had left so abruptly. He beamed around the office for a moment; he held Joan the tighter.

"Sweetheart," William said huskily, "when are you going to marry me?"

"Whenever you like, dear!" Joan said submissively.

"Next week?"

"Why—why, no! Not next week!" Joan protested. "I couldn't possibly—"

"I know—clothes—all that sort of thing," William laughed. "They don't matter, you know. I want *you!*"

"But—"

"Afterward, you can buy all the clothes in the world, and change 'em fifty times a day if you like; but—next week, Joan?"

"Will!" Joan said weakly.

"Next week it is, then!" rejoiced William. "We'll just step out of the old shop and let Archer and Simms run things for a month or so, and— Where shall we go?"

"I don't know," Joan murmured.

"I do. There's a place down in Virginia that I can borrow; absolute paradise this time of year. Huge old house and hills and woodsy roads and flowers by the billion and little streams, with the regulation old mammy to fry the chicken and everything. We'll put in a week or two there, and then go on, if you like, and— Oh, Joan, it doesn't seem as if it could be true!" William concluded.

For a moment Joan's arms tightened about him—oddly, had William but realized it, which he did not.

"Dear," he breathed, "day after day, and week after week, I've watched you sitting there beside me, and come to know you better and better, and to feel how wonderful you were, and all the time I've been trying to believe that some day you might care a little bit, and yet not daring to believe or— Joan, dearest, *were* you caring all the time?"

Miss Thayer said nothing. Instead, she pressed just a little closer to William and a tremor ran through her slim form; and William, interpreting these things as confession and even fuller surrender, settled the powerful arms more securely about her and laughed softly.

And William was wrong.

The most inconvenient thing about a brain is that, unless drugged, it will sooner or later begin to function after any sort of shock; and the more highly it has been trained, the more efficiently will the functioning go forward. This mental machinery of Joan Thayer's, which had made her honor woman at college and had since been further tuned and lubricated by two years of perfect business service, doubtless had its weak and sentimental side—although it had resisted to the very last. Then, as it seemed to Miss Thayer, there had been a brief and complete breakdown, wherein she had dared to believe in fairies and miracles; and now, after fifteen minutes of hallowed disruption, the machinery was clicking back into action again, coldly and relentlessly.

So that Miss Thayer, gently and insistently, pushed until she was quite free of William Vanluyn, who eventually released her and asked with directness:

"What's the matter, Joan?"

"There's—nothing the matter," Miss Thayer smiled, with a rather difficult calm. "Except that we're both absurd."

"Oh—that!" William laughed gaily. "People are always absurd when they've reached our condition, sweetheart. You happen to realize it because you're so—so fine and highly cultivated, and all that sort of rot, I suppose. I don't, and you mustn't. So far as I'm concerned, the whole silly old world may go to blazes with its ideas and conventions. There's just you and I and nobody else, and— Come here to me!"

He was following her, and his arms stretched forth to recapture her; and then they dropped, because Joan's hands were out to ward him off, and there was a definite something in her expression that William did not at all understand.

"It isn't—that!" Joan said. "It's just that we mustn't be—silly like this any more and contemplate things that really—can't be."

"What do you mean?" William asked blankly. "We're engaged, aren't we?"

"We were, for a minute, I think," Miss Thayer murmured, and her smile was a queer, pained little expression. "We're not now."

"But—but—Joan, *don't* you love me?"

"Will, I love you so much that— Oh, please, let's not talk any more about that." She turned away from him abruptly. "Can't we—just sit down and go on working together and forget all about this?"

"No, you bet we can't! We—"

"You're right, of course; we can't," Joan said, and faced him again. "I'll go away."

"Where?" gasped William.

"To a position somewhere else, and—May I go *now?*" Miss Thayer asked somewhat breathlessly.

"Yes, if you can lick me first," William said firmly; and having caught and kissed both her hands, he caught the young woman herself and held her beyond any possibility of escape. "Joan, dear, what on earth is troubling you, just when everything's turned perfect? Five minutes ago—"

"Yes, but that was because I was—well, swept away, I think," Joan answered quietly enough. "I'm all sane now."

"Fine! Then kiss me again and—"

"No!"

"Why not?" young Mr. Vanluyn inquired.

"That's just what I'm trying so hard to tell you. Will, if I were the sort of girl you've been knowing all your life, or if you yourself weren't so wretchedly rich, marrying you would be the sweetest thing in the world. As we are, it's just one of those things that cannot happen."

"Oh, good Lord, Joan!" William cried impatiently, and kissed the top of her head. "I thought you were above that sort of piffle! Is that all?"

"I'm not above common sense," said Joan. "There's your family, too."

"It's a perfectly good family, I guess," William retorted vaguely.

"It's too good; that's just the point! It's so old and proud and full of ancestors and traditions and things that it's downright terrifying. Why, Will, your family sailed around in Mayflowers and founded tradings-posts and governed States and—"

"Well, you can't blame me for any of that stuff," William said cheerily. "None of 'em were hung for horse-stealing or anything like that, and that's all that really matters with a family, you know.

"Joan, dear, I suppose every girl, secretly anyway, has her own idea of what she'd want her engagement ring to be like, and I've always felt that if I ever did happen to get engaged I'd like to come up to the girl's idea. What's yours, sweetheart? A diamond about the size of a duck's egg, or something little and ghastly artistic?"

"Will, dear, we're not engaged," Joan said, with a miserable little catching sigh. "Please don't try to change the subject. Your family never would tolerate your marrying the girl who pounds out your letters."

"Well, with all due respect to one sister, a couple of aunts and uncles and possibly half a dozen cousins, any one who begins 'tolerating' *you,* my child, will start something of a slightly violent nature." Mr. Vanluyn smiled complacently as he tilted her chin upward. "So now that that's out of the way, can't we drop all this tommyrot and just talk about ourselves?"

"No! Because there's another family to be considered."

"Eh?"

"Mine!" said Joan; and if William had been analyzing smiles this afternoon he would have found something curiously brave in this one.

He was not—but he seemed distinctly startled at the thought itself.

"That's true," he muttered. "You're so perfect and complete in yourself that I'd never thought of that. They won't put up too much of a kick, will they?"

"I don't know. That wasn't what I had in mind. But a—a personage like you, Will, has to consider the kind of family he's marrying into."

"Well?"

"Well, I'm trying to tell you that perhaps we're not just the sort of family you've ever known before. We're just a very plain one living in a rather cheap flat on a rather cheap block up-town. Oh, don't think that I'm ashamed of them or apologizing for them!" Joan said swiftly.

"Eh? No! Not that, to be sure," William muttered, rather mystified.

"Because they're the dearest and best family in the whole world, and they've given me ten thousand times the love and self-denial that any one ever could deserve!" the girl cried passionately. "But—but—"

"Quite so," William said soothingly. "Only what's the row about, Joan? There's none of them we can't talk into letting us get married, is there?"

"I—oh, no, I suppose not."

"Then, what else matters?" Mr. Vanluyn chuckled happily.

Joan's smile grew forlorn. Her hands tightened on his arm.

"You're too big and too decent even to try to understand, I suppose," she said. "But your own people, your own friends, might not feel quite that way about it—afterward, especially. And I couldn't bear it!"

"Bear what?"

"Well, it's a hateful way of putting the thing, but—to know that people felt you'd married beneath you!"

She tried to disengage herself again. This time William drew her even closer; and because of the heart-breaking shortness of the poor little romance's destined life, there was something terribly sweet about being in his arms, and Joan ceased her struggling.

"My child," William said, "I've got a glimmering of what you mean. That's really all—and it's a lot less than nothing. I've never seen your family, and your family never has seen me; but just the fact that they're *your* family makes them the rightest people in the whole world; and if I can only prove to them that I'm good enough to have you, I'm not asking anything more."

Albeit William waited fully ten seconds, Joan did not reply. William soared again.

"So *that's* out of the way," he stated. "And now we—"

"It isn't," Joan corrected. "It's there and just as big as ever—the difference between us. And there's more."

"*More?*"

"We've always been poor, you know. Father has worked hard and spent all he made on us, and he's no longer young. My sister will marry within a year or two, I fancy. Frank—my brother—will want to marry, too."

"And?"

"Will, I've got the dearest parents that ever lived, and the time is pretty near when they'll look to me for a good deal more of their support than they do just now. I'd rather die than fail them."

"Er—yes, of course. But why fail them? After we're married there'll still be a spare dollar or two about, won't there?"

Joan shook her head.

"That wouldn't help. He— Oh, I suppose you actually don't understand how really poor people might feel about that sort of thing, but dad would regard it as charity and be furious. I know him."

"Then, as I understand the affair, we can't possibly be married because there's a little lack of money somewhere?"

"That and—and because it's best for you that we shouldn't be and—"

"Well, there *isn't* any other reason, is there? Nobody that—that you like better than me?"

"Will! Do you think—"

William drew one long breath.

"No, I don't. I beg your pardon, Joan. Only—listen," said he. "You know pretty well how I feel about money as a general proposition; bore, too much of it, and all that. If I hadn't had such a pile wished on me, I'd try to earn enough to see the jolly old earthly span through to a reasonably comfortable end, and then stop. Anyhow, money's no use beyond a certain limit, and letting it get into a really important affair of this kind and jam the wheels is plain bosh.

"The day we're married I'll settle a separate million on you, and if you want to devote the income to the folks, so much the better. If that doesn't seem to be the answer, I'll get your father alone and talk to him; and whether it takes ten minutes or six months, I'll make him see that accepting a decent life income is the only thing a self-respecting parent can do in the circumstances.

"Assuming that to fall down, I'll call in our man Clanborne; and there's no bigger lawyer in the country than Clanborne, and he'll rig a way of making your father accept a— Oh, I say, it's all ridiculous, wasting time on this when we might be talking about our own plans."

"But—"

"But the gist of it all is," William concluded, "that I've found you at last, and, money or no money, families or no families, no power under the sun can ever get you away from me again. Is that reasonably clear, or shall I try to make it plainer?"

He was a large person and, at present, a compelling one. Looking up at him, Joan

realized just how much she had loved him for months, loved him now, and, for that matter, always would love him. And although the capable little brain refused to be shaken one whit as to the soundness of its convictions, the material Joan was indubitably weakening. She was weakening fast, indeed; she could feel the weakness growing more marked with every second, and she fought hard for strength, or at any rate believed that she fought. But William's arms were tightening once more and William's lips were coming near and—

Somewhat later he whispered:

"Now we're engaged again, Joan."

"Yes," breathed Joan.

"And this time it sticks forever."

"Yes, Will."

Miss Thayer contrived to draw back a little. She took his wholesome countenance between her little palms and held William with her curiously sober gaze.

"Only one thing, dear: I *have* done everything I could to discourage you, haven't I?"

"Oh, that was hopeless from the beginning, of course," laughed William, and dismissed the subject.

"But I have, and if—if you're ever sorry you'll remember that?"

"When I'm sorry, fifty centuries after the end of the world, I'll make a point of remembering it," said William. "What's the time?"

"I've no idea. It must be nearly three."

"It's after four," announced William. "Let's get out of here."

"But there's so much to be done in connection with—" began the practical side of Joan, leaping back to existence.

"I know, Joan; but we can't bother about business when we've so many more important things to attend to outside."

"Where, Will?"

"Why, we're going to make a bee-line out of this shop now and go home—to your home, that is—and break the news."

Joan caught her breath; her intelligent eyes widened suddenly.

"Oh—no! Not now—not right away!"

"We don't have to keep this engagement secret, do we?" William asked blankly.

"I didn't mean that, of course. But let's finish the day here just as if—as if nothing had happened," Joan said hastily. "You see, dad will not be home till evening, anyway, and even mother's likely to be out now. And I—I think I'd rather do it alone, the first of it."

William's brow developed that perplexed line which appeared now and then when Miss Thayer, in that particularly quick and positive fashion, began to make statements which his slightly slower mind could not immediately grasp.

"I don't know about that, Joan," he muttered. "Of course, I've never done anything like this before, and I'm not up on the technique. I've a mighty strong suspicion that the decent thing would have been for me to see your father first and ask his permission, but since I neglected that it seems to me we'd better go up together and—"

"No! I can break the news alone ever so much more easily. I know, you see," said Miss Thayer.

William shook his head.

"You probably do," he mused dubiously. "You're so beastly clever, Joan; you're usually right about things, and I suppose you're right about this. But I—I do appear up there some time or other before we're married, eh?"

"You come in after dinner to-night and meet them all, I think," said Joan. "About eight, or a little after." She dimpled suddenly. "You've never even been inside our house!"

The dimples flitted, deepened again, disappeared. Taken with all the rest of her, they were too much for William. With a pounce, he recaptured the unresisting young woman.

"I know. Makes a chap feel rotten odd to realize a thing like that at a time like this," he said. "But you'll be in my house for the rest of your blessed little life!"

"I'm so glad of that, Will!" Joan whispered.

And now, for some seconds, the elemental and ecstatic William reverted to that performance which had so excited Albert, viewing its beginning through the keyhole. A long sigh, then, and his eyes lifted, wan-

dered about the room in slightly troubled fashion, and snapped back to Joan. Plainly, William was still a bit perturbed.

"Your doing it all alone," he muttered, "not letting me go along to help you face the music, Joan—does seem queer."

CHAPTER III.

AT HOME.

IT did not seem at all queer to Joan, who knew. Since he had elected to glorify the whole world by confessing the love for which she had yearned this long, long time, there would be little shocks aplenty coming William's way, concerning her home life. Not shocks, to be sure, of such magnitude that they might shatter a love like William's; but Joan was acquainted with William's nature down to its last few secret ramifications, and these were the sort of shocks much better impacted upon him successively than collectively.

If, subconsciously or otherwise, he had given the matter thought, William doubtless had pictured his lady love as living somewhere in a little home of ten or twelve rooms, with not more than two or three servants. Perhaps he had filled in a car, not of the most expensive kind, and a modest little bungalow out of town where the family passed the summer.

And had he done these things, William had erred somewhat, because Joan's private life was not at all like that.

There was the block itself, for one thing, up in the Hundred-and-'Teens, to the east. Apartment houses from one end to the other, nevertheless this had been a sufficiently decent and habitable block a decade or two ago. That is to say, it had not up to that time occurred to a single landlord to augment his income by leasing out the front of the cellar to the retail fruit and vegetable trade; several of them had done that now, and somehow it failed to accent that quiet, esthetic note so desirable in a home center.

Nor had any one up to that period knocked out the front of his ground floor apartments and replaced it with plate glass, behind which hats and suits, cloaks and shirtwaists, strove patiently to catch the passer's eye. Several had now done that, too, although so far Joan's particular house had escaped.

For another thing, in the good old days, English had been the language of the block. At present the dialects ran irresponsibly from the Russian to the Sicilian, and the children who played about in summer-time were mainly black-eyed and strident and much given to plain English invective of a sort that would have brought that Old Home Week feeling to a mule-driver. And still, throughout the block, there was a sprinkling of American Family, unable as yet, for this reason or that, to migrate.

Oh, it was all hideous and depressing enough. Joan, a human being and not at all a superior soul, never walked down that block without a series of internal writhings. Nor had escape failed to suggest itself. At her present earning capacity she could have broken away and managed something rather satisfactory in the way of bachelor-girl quarters, somewhere in civilization. But the memory of dad's suddenly stricken eyes, on the one occasion that she had hinted some such thing, inevitably brought a quick flush to her cheeks and sent her down the accursed block with springy step and what passed for a cheery, contented smile.

As to the house, it was by no means so bad. In fact, unless one had a marked objection to walking up two passably clean flights and sniffing a variety of dinners on the way, it was a very fair flat indeed. The rooms might not instantly suggest so many baronial halls in the matter of size; but at least one could move about them with no more than a nominal number of bruises. And as to the sufficiently comfortable, reliable, well-used furnishings—just here, time and again, Joan closed her eyes and wished and wished that some well-disposed Wall Street power would give her a tip whereby her tiny savings might be turned to ten thousand dollars or thereabouts.

As young women go, Joan's character was strong, without a particle of false pride in its composition, nor was she unduly sensitive about the unavoidable annoyance. But, just the same, when William made his first trip down that block, through that

entrance, up those stairs, and into that flat, Joan wished him to do it all alone and not where she might be forced to watch his expression.

William, wealth and all considered, was almost weirdly free from any snobbishness; he had lived much alone and passed much time among cruder peoples, hunting and fishing and prowling about. But—

Then, too, there was the family itself—not that the family needed any apology whatsoever. There was mother, who was comfortably plump, comfortably resigned, a little tired, and, in her own dear way, a little stupid. Years ago mother had been a vivacious young creature, with plans for the future. And time and monotony and the demands of a little family, disillusionments and disappointments accepted philosophically enough, all had combined to do their work.

Nowadays mother could listen to troubles and love and sympathize, and when evening came around, if there was nothing particularly promising at the near-by movie house, doze over the papers or a book that one or another of them had brought in. Mother was far from old—and very far from young.

Dad, latterly, had been the one to show more marked signs of slowing down. Ever so imperceptibly, his temper was losing its evenness; he seemed to have lost the habit of making little jokes, and substituted one of scowling at nothing in particular for minutes at a time, and trying apparently to think it all out to a satisfactory end that would not appear.

Thirty-odd years back dad had gone into the offices of Hankey & Brown, hardware, with every intention of owning the firm before he reached forty. Now sixty loomed visibly in father's future, and for no very clear reason the firm remained in the hands of the surviving Hankey, a soured citizen enough younger to feel that the head bookkeeper was growing decrepit and that some time soon—in Hankey's own language—the head bookkeeper would have to be ditched. Father made no pretensions to mind-reading; yet a certain suspicion of Hankey's mental attitude caused father to arrive mornings ten minutes before the opening time and to linger at night until the last crumb of work had been brushed away.

Joan's brother Frank worked in the Hankey office, too, and had for a matter of seven or eight years. In due course, perhaps, Frank would own the firm, but he was an extremely quiet and retiring soul who never aired his plans.

Nor was this the full extent of the little family, for there still remained Helene—born Helen—who was Joan's younger sister, and her cousin, Henry Thayer, son of father's only brother, who had died when Henry was a little boy.

Helene was abundantly a type of her time. She had disapproved the whole educational system, and early in her final year had abandoned the high school to its fate. Indubitably, Helene was pretty in her own way; and the way varied to some slight extent on different days, for Helene's dressing-table displayed virtually everything advertised in the way of beautifying compounds, in jars, bottles, small cans and collapsible tubes. She ornamented a small broker's office far down-town; her skirts terminated possibly six millimeters below her knee-joints; she must have owned hundreds of pairs of silk stockings; in the conventional sense Helene was, of course, a strictly moral person. Enough of her.

Henry Thayer was a good deal more of a personality. He had hurried through the annoyance of school; now he toiled here and there and, as it seemed at times, almost everywhere. Dull, fossilizing employers had a way of disagreeing with Henry's methods, to their utter confusion if one accepted Henry's version of the encounters, but with a result that was unfailingly the same: next morning found Henry scanning the "Help Wanted—Male" columns, and starting out blithely to take, not to hunt, another job—which, rather curiously, he invariably did.

Henry was fairly intelligent, a rather convincing and indefatigable talker, and a radical, without any very clear idea of what a radical was or ought to be; he took sharp exception to almost everything on earth, and had a better suggestion to offer. Once upon a time Joan had been able to listen to Henry and to answer him; now, though he

talked by the hour, she could still sit, smile perfunctorily at regular intervals, and think her own thoughts.

Such, then, was Joan's family; and in his bemillioned existence it was safe to say that William Vanluyn never had established intimate contact with a group just like them. What would William think of them? Fitting her key to the lower door at precisely quarter to six, as usual, Joan's chin elevated abruptly. Really, much as she adored William, how could it matter what William thought of them? They were her people!

Sitting down quietly at the dinner-table she surveyed them with some little trepidation. Oddly, even now she had not told the great news.

Two minutes after entering the flat she had raced, all bursting with the tidings, to the kitchen, where mother was preparing the two steaks. And in the strangest way she had kissed her mother rather hysterically and swallowed the words; in the strangest way also Joan's knees had turned weak, and something akin to stage fright had set her whole being to vibrating. This was hardly to be explained, because since earliest childhood Joan had gone to her mother with every little confidence; but it had happened nevertheless.

Now they were dining away cheerfully, all unaware of the shock that impended. And Joan, usually so self-contained, was unaccountably nervous. She had meant to break the news just when they were all served; she had not done that, either. At present it seemed rather better to wait until after dinner, and then whisper to mother first and— No, that meant a series of minor excitements and outbursts and individual questionings and comments. And still, unless she mustered up courage pretty soon, William himself would arrive, expecting to be welcomed as the bridegroom-elect, and the thunderstruck, unenlightened family—

"Oh—everybody!" escaped Joan quite unexpectedly.

"Meaning me?" Henry queried brightly, for he was ever ready with the pert response.

"Meaning everybody this time," smiled his cousin, and sipped her water by way of relieving the slight dryness in her throat. "I have something to tell you all."

Her father glanced up quickly and fearfully. There was one subject which, in one form or another, did a good deal of revolving in father's brain these days: losing one's job. Had Joan, by any chance—

"I'm going to be married!" Joan stated in a gentle explosion, and then relaxed.

"You're *what?*" Helene cried shrilly.

"Why—why, Joan!" gasped her mother, and dropped both knife and fork and stared blankly at her eldest daughter.

"Married, Joan? *Married?*" her father mumbled as if somewhat dazed. "Married to whom?"

"Mr. Vanluyn."

"The billionaire bird you're working for?" Henry inquired swiftly.

"Er—yes."

"When?" Helene contrived.

"Well—er—he insists on next week," Joan answered.

Once more her father glanced up quickly. He was an old-fashioned person, nor was he one who could conceal his innermost thoughts; for an instant, unflattering as it might be, it really seemed that father feared the very worst.

"Why the—the hurry?" he asked thickly.

"Oh, he didn't really mean next week, I suppose." Joan dimpled. "But some time soon."

Helene's neck was still thrust forward. Helene, indeed, seemed petrified in the position she had assumed just after the first shock.

"But—*you!*" she said frankly, if incoherently. "You've always been so quiet and mousy and— Why, he's worth millions and millions of dollars, isn't he?"

Occasionally Joan failed to reply to her sister; this was one of the occasions.

Henry, however, grinned broadly.

"A modest little exhibition of telepathy and so on—by me," he declaimed, settling the grin on his younger and gaudier female cousin. "I look the lady in the eye and read her thoughts as from an open book. They're this: if any billionaire's marrying

into this family, why did he overlook the one best bet? If any rich—"

"Oh, shut up, Henry!" Helene said courteously.

"Right, though—what?"

Complete silence had fallen on the rest of them.

Joan's smile faded.

"Isn't any one going to—to congratulate me or—something?"

"Why—Joan!" her mother endeavored, and the tears rolled suddenly from her fading eyes. "My little baby girl—I—can't realize—"

Her father, on the other hand, pushed back his chair and hurried around to Joan; and their hands met and clasped tight, and one of his arms went around her and he kissed Joan and said huskily:

"Joan, dear, I—I'm mighty glad, if you—if you love him and he loves you. You'll have everything!"

"Everything! I should say she would have everything!" Helene breathed fascinatedly; and then, because she was by no means a spiteful person, and because she really adored her sister, and also because Helene had a wonderful eye for the main chance: "Can you beat it? Isn't it wonderful? Think of having a Vanluyn in *this* family—a *Vanluyn!*"

"There's nothing the matter with your own family, Nellie," her father said somewhat tartly as he returned to his own chair. "Some of the Thayers have—"

"I know, pa. I didn't mean to rap the Thayer line," Helene answered indifferently. "But, of all people—a Vanluyn! I can't get over it, even yet. Little me, sister-in-law of Bill Vanluyn!"

"That means nothing!" Henry snapped. "Money's nothing. The finest man living to-day, whoever he is, probably hasn't got an extra shirt to his back—and a hundred billion dollars can't make a born mutt anything but a mutt!"

"All the same, Henry, money means a lot in the way of—of comfort and peace," Joan's father suggested, and blinked at his elder daughter. "I— Oh, darn it, Joan, I'm so glad for your sake! I—I—he's everything you'd want him to be?"

"Oh, dad, he's perfect!"

"He—yep, of course," said the father of the family, and applied a handkerchief to his nose suddenly.

He was endeavoring to resume dinner; he seemed to have much difficulty in swallowing. Joan, after their eyes had met again, avoided his gaze; poor dad had looked just like that the day she suggested going off by herself for a while.

Joan smiled whimsically at her brother.

"Not a word from you, Frank?"

"Me? What? Oh—I dunno," Frank said uncomfortably. "I suppose it's all right, sis. These things are, if they work out."

"Sounds enthusiastic and optimistic," Joan sighed.

"Well, I don't know that I'm particularly enthusiastic about seeing you marry a fellow like that," Frank explained irritably. "He's all right, of course; he's the kind of fellow that would fascinate any normal girl and—oh, there's no such thing as class nowadays, of course."

"There isn't, hey?" Henry put in. "Well, let me tell you, old top, that—"

"But at that, if you're going to get married, it seems to me it would be a great deal better to stick to somebody something like ourselves, Joan," Frank concluded.

"Meaning your friend George Stevens?" Joan smiled.

"Well? George is all right, isn't he? He's been good enough to take you around everywhere for a couple of years."

"George is all right," Joan laughed, "if you're terribly interested in the woolen trade—and I'm not. Beyond the woolen trade and some kind of unconquerable desire to hold hands—I think it must be inherited, it's so absolutely instinctive, like a cat finding its way home—George is essentially a blank. And by the way, Frank, it's not very kind to imply that I've been using him, because I think I've gone to the theater with him twice and the movies three times."

"*Twice?*" Frank echoed warmly and indignantly. "Say, you went with George to see—"

"Oh, forget that dead one!" Helene said impatiently. "Joan, dear, tell us all about it!"

"All right," Frank concluded with a grunt. "But I'm telling you that George is a lot more the sort of man Joan ought to marry."

"Oh, do tell us about it, Joan," Helene persisted. "How did it happen? When did it happen? How long's it been going on?"

"Nellie, you're not—not delicate!" her mother protested damply.

"Maybe I'm not, but I'm alive and curious," the younger daughter responded. "Come, Joan! You've been trotting around with him for weeks and never breathing a word of it, you little rascal!"

The elder Miss Thayer flushed slightly. Loyalty, of course, had forbidden too much speculation on the probable reactions of her family to the great announcement; but it did seem rather plain that she had made no error in judgment by omitting William from this first scene.

"Well, the startling thing is that he's coming to meet you all this evening," she said.

"Coming to *this* dump?" Helene gasped; and, catching her father's eye, even Helene blushed. "Oh, I know, pop; we can't afford anything better till rents come down and so on. But a fellow like that, used to butlers and solid gold chairs and everything, coming here!"

"There's no reason why he shouldn't," Henry put in. "He's no better than any of—"

"What time are you expecting him, Joan?" her father asked hastily and stared down at the shirt-sleeves which, despite their semiweekly renewal, did acquire a certain grayish effect from the Hankey & Brown desk.

"Oh—eight or so."

Joan's mother grew wild-eyed and looked at her in alarm.

"Why, it's after half past seven now!" she cried. "We'll have to get the dishes out of the way and— He won't come out here, though, will he? I suppose he— Oh, that parlor ought to be dusted! Nellie, you hurry up and dust the parlor."

"Nothing but a fire 'll help that parlor any, ma," Nellie sighed somewhat brutally, and pushed back her chair. "Joan, what does he really look like? Is he as handsome as his pictures? Is he— Oh, I don't get it at all! You've never raved about him; you've hardly ever talked about him."

"Joan's not the raving kind," her father said briefly, and rose with a rather bewildered little grunt and considered the shirt-sleeves again. "I suppose I'd better go and— I dunno, though. Be all right with a coat on, I guess. This darned laundry of ours and the things it does to the shirts, I hate like sin to put on another clean one before Sunday."

Over his own peculiar problem he lapsed into silence. Joan's mother was violently busy with dishes. Helene, oily duster in hand, had paused in the doorway for a last perplexed contemplation of Joan's straight back. Henry had reached the actively thoughtful stage and was visibly about to deliver unending sentiments and opinions upon Joan's engagement. Frank merely sat and frowned, darkly and dubiously, over his cigarette.

Well, the news had been communicated to them and the world still revolved. A soft, tremulous little sigh passed Joan's lips. As yet they seemed entirely at sea and, her parents at any rate, unable to realize the magnitude of the thing that had happened. Then Joan shuddered, just the smallest shudder, instantly controlled herself and unseen by any one else. Not nearly so frank with her own inner consciousness, about some few matters, as Helene felt called upon to be with all the world, nevertheless the impending juxtaposition of that parlor and William Vanluyn, who had grown up among old masters and ancient tapestries and rugs that were periodically reproduced in color for authoritative publications on the subject, was enough to send a shudder through sterner stuff than—

Joan sat up suddenly.

Her startled eyes flashed to the door of the kitchen and remained there, fascinated. So did Frank and Henry sit up and also stare at the kitchen door. Similarly did her father and her mother and her younger sister pause in their several tracks and gaze at the same doorway.

Because out there in the faintly redolent

darkness the front-door bell was ringing with a vigorous and resounding peal.

CHAPTER IV.

CALLERS.

FRANK broke the spell, just as the bell began a second ringing. "Early, eh?" he muttered.

"Hey?" Joan's father also returned to life with an irritable little grunt. "Well, why doesn't one of you push the button and let him in? Going to have him stand down there?"

"I—I'll do it!" cried her mother, and hurried into the kitchen. "I—oh dear, that parlor's filthy, and you haven't touched it yet, Nellie!"

"Oh, darn the old parlor!" said Helene, and hurled the oily rag from her. "I want to see what's coming into the parlor. Can I come in, Joan?"

"What? Why—yes, of course—later," replied the elder Miss Thayer, and be it admitted that even on the night of her graduation she had not been nearly so flustered. "I—that is—did you press the button, mother dear?"

"Yes, Joan. What shall I—"

"Hold on, Jo!" Frank interpolated rather tartly. "What about the rest of us? Do we happen in one by one, or will you shout a cue and have us march in in a body or—what?"

"Oh, I—I think you'd better happen in. Or—no, I'll come and tell you when," Joan stammered.

"Deary, you'd better hurry and open the front door," her mother said gently. "He won't know where to go."

Joan nodded and sped down the length of the apartment. There was no light in the parlor, of course; she switched it on and gave one terrified glance at the lamp-shade, which was in its own way an antique. She smiled then, strainedly, and opened the door a little and waited.

He was coming up briskly. Miss Thayer stood back and wondered just what happens if a heart really succeeds in pounding its way through the ribs, and why this particular heart should thump so just now, and whether it would always be like that when William approached.

For he was approaching. He had reached the latter of the two flights; he was on their own floor now and not hesitating, which was a trifle odd. He was coming directly to the front, and Joan swung the door wide open and—confronted Mr. George Stevens!

Briefly, it seemed that she would faint. George smiled slowly, quite unaware that he was anticlimax incarnate. George always smiled slowly, for that matter; it was an expression which seemed to have much difficulty in making its way to his broad, preoccupied, not over-intelligent features—and about as much difficulty in leaving, once it had become established.

"Hello, Joan!" said George.

"Er—yes—oh, good evening, George!" Miss Thayer managed.

"Didn't expect me, eh?" pursued George, and seemed to have entered. "Well, I was going to call up first, but I had bad luck calling you up, Joan. Every blamed time I do it you seem to have something else on."

"Oh!" said Joan profoundly.

"So I thought I'd just run in and see if you didn't want to—go out somewhere?"

In his own peculiarly laborious way he drank in Joan's rare beauty. He sighed noisily and waited.

"I—I'm so sorry, but I can't go anywhere this evening," Joan said. "I'm expecting—"

"I knew it!"

"Not this," Joan smiled. "I'm expecting my—my fiancé."

It was, almost, as if a wall had fallen upon George Stevens. He winced visibly under the shock; he closed his eyes for an instant and opened them again almost in fright.

"Your what?" he gasped.

"Mr. Vanluyn, you know. I'm going to marry him."

"The—the fellow you work for," George choked. "You're going to marry *him?*"

"Well?"

His smile had faded out at last, never, never to return, one might assume. He was paler by several shades. He swallowed

once, and his face puckered a little, incredulously.

"Well—well, it's all right, of course," he mumbled. "I— He's rich as blazes, isn't he? He—well, I congratulate you, Joan, if—if he's the man you want to marry, I congratulate you."

With a mighty effort his hand went out. Joan took it and found it painfully cold.

"Thank you," she dimpled. "He's the man I want to marry, George. I want you to meet him and—"

"What? Me? *No!*" escaped young Mr. Stevens in three gasps. "That is, I mean, if you don't want to go to a show somewhere—well, you don't, of course, under the circumstances. But *since* you don't," said George, making a fresh start, "I think—well, the fact is, I'll have to run along right away."

"But—"

"No, I can't stop!" George puffed, and looked about quite crazily for his hat, which he had laid upon a chair just before the world came to an end, and which was still there. "You see— Oh, there it is! He—he's all right, of course. Fine fellow! Only I don't want to—yet—I mean, good-by, Joan!"

He captured her hand once more. He squeezed hard. Kick a faithful dog for ten minutes, and he will look at you just as George looked at Joan in that painful moment.

"Good-by, if you really will not wait," Joan sighed.

"I didn't mean that kind of good-by," George said hoarsely. "I meant, *good-by*, Joan!"

He waited for comment which did not materialize. He moaned very, very faintly and tightened his grip.

"Only I want you to remember one thing, Joan," he said. "Everything—everything's rosy and lovely, of course, only—oh, you never know how anything's going to turn out. If you need any one to help you any time—any kind of help, Joan—I want you to call on me. Because—because I'd be mighty glad to die if it 'd make you any happier, Joan."

The numbed eyes clung to her. Something stabbed inside of Joan.

"Poor old George," she murmured. "I—I never knew that—"

"Well, you know now," George gasped, and kissed her hand—and the door slammed suddenly and Joan was alone.

So that unimportant little episide was over! Joan sighed and smiled a little. She might be wrong, but she cherished a certain suspicion that about eleven to-morrow morning, when he was figuring Scotch tweeds, George would have to think twice to place her. Or maybe not. Maybe she had become the one consuming passion of George's existence and—oh, it didn't matter. What really mattered was that she was positively weak for the moment. She was altogether absurd, too. She would have to take a real grip on herself before William really appeared.

"False alarm, eh?" Henry chuckled as she returned to the dining-room.

"George," Joan explained simply.

"Why didn't he come in here and see the rest of us?" Frank frowned.

"He was going elsewhere, I believe."

"Did you tell him about—" Frank inquired further, pausing as if the thing itself fell within the category of matters not mentioned aloud.

"Of course."

"What 'd he say?" Frank snapped.

"Well, really, you might have come in with me," Joan said coolly. "I'll help you with the dishes, mother."

"No. You'll get all hot. Nellie 'll dry."

"She will if you can catch her," Henry grinned. "Nellie's putting on the war-paint with an airbrush about now. I'll dry 'em, Aunt Mary. You go calm yourself, Jo; you look as if you'd been running to a fire."

Whistling, he sauntered into the kitchen. The elder Miss Thayer sat down rather limply. Her father, apparently, had lost track of that little affair of the shirt; he was deep in the evening paper now, and his faithful old pipe gurgled in the same unpleasant fashion. Not that William would be coming out here, of course, and not that it would matter if he did come, but—

"*That's* him!" Henry announced pro-

phetically. "Skip in for the grand welcome, Joan."

"No, I'll go!" Helene called frantically from somewhere in the depths. "I'm all ready and I have to see him."

Joan arose hurriedly. Even now it was too late. Through the rather flimsy wall, William's step—and it was his step this time—was audible on the stairs; and Helene was now seen hurrying from the rear to the front door of the apartment and opening it, and now there was a murmur of voices.

And, that dying out, Helene's light tread approached quickly. Her eyes sparkling, Helene burst in and threw her arms about her sister.

"Oh, he's wonderful! He's absolutely adorable!" she squealed softly. "If he didn't have a cent in the world, he'd still be the very darlingest thing that ever lived!"

"You'd better put the soft pedal on that mushy stuff, Nellie," Frank said harshly. "He's Joan's—not yours."

"I can't help it; he *is* adorable! You never saw anything like him! He's so big and so good-looking and—"

"Hush!" breathed Joan, and broke away and fled.

She would have to see him instantly. Another five minutes of this, and William's first greeting in the apartment home would be baptized in hysterical tears. Ridiculous and unworthy it might be, little-souled and all the rest, but her heart positively refused to resume its beating until she had looked squarely at William and seen whether—whether—oh, why not be honest about it?—whether this sordid setting made any real difference.

There have been happier young women than was Joan, as she tiptoed through the flat. In the foreground of her mind blazed the joy of seeing William again; in its background lurked the grim suggestion that, when she had read the truth in his eyes, this first visit of William's would also be his last and— There was William himself! Just behind the too heavy hangings which cut off the parlor Joan stopped and looked at him.

Hands in his pockets, humming a little tune, William was examining the art work on the far wall. As nearly as one might judge, it represented a slightly groggy cow standing in a stream of Neapolitan ice-cream and contemplating with justified wonder a distinctly delirious sunset. Poor, long-departed Aunt Sarah had committed that in her reckless youth; long before this, on earth and elsewhere, Aunt Sarah doubtless had been forgiven that and other paintings, but—oh, if Joan had only thought to steal it and tuck it behind the bookcase before William arrived!

William was grinning broadly. Joan caught her breath and edged to the side of the curtains for a better view of his profile. Awful as that picture might be, if William actually dared to sneer at it—well, he wasn't sneering, at any rate. He was grinning the appreciative amusement of any normal being; Joan breathed again and stepped into the room.

William's attention had wandered to the massive golden-oak Morris chair; he detached it with a jerk and turned, beaming, to Joan, and a shamed little sigh of happy relief escaped her. William's mind was very near his eyes, his thoughts were rarely an impenetrable mystery: block, flat, nothing really mattered!

As to the finer details of that greeting, they may well be passed. For an inexperienced lover, William did amazingly well. But his normal conversation, which began some minutes later and found them still standing, was a shade less happy in the opening.

"Some maid you have, dear!" chuckled William.

"Maid?"

"She's decorative!"

"Oh!" said Joan. "That happened to be my younger sister!"

William stared for an instant and then laughed whole-heartedly.

"Really? Then we'll have to revise it and say frankly that she's a pippin, Joan. Which she is. But—oh, my darling, there couldn't be two of you in a family or in the whole world!"

"It's probably just as well, Will," dimpled the elder Miss Thayer. "We might sit down, I suppose."

William settled on the elderly sofa just as if he had been settling on similar sofas every day of his life, and drew Joan down beside him. More than this, William so arranged matters that her head was upon his shoulder, and heaved a sigh of deep content. Joan heaved no like sigh. Something had gone definitely wrong inside of Joan. There in the office, with the costly mahogany desk and the Persian carpet in Will's room, they were two human beings of the same kind. Here they were not—that was all.

Here the undersized room seemed to be closing in on them and the inartistic bits of furniture to be gibbering at them, and the very air to be vibrating with the ghastly fact that William Vanluyn, with fifteen millions of dollars and a whole regiment of distinguished ancestors, had so far forgotten himself as to fall in love with a young woman who lived in such a place as this!

"I told Sallie at dinner," William said.

"Sallie?"

"My sister, dear."

"Oh!" Joan started. "Yes?"

She waited. William merely beamed across the room. He was happy.

"What did she say?" Joan murmured.

"Sallie? Oh, she didn't say much of anything. Sallie never does say much," William answered indifferently. "Pleased, of course. Very thing she's been dinning into me this last three years, about getting married, you know."

"Yes, but she hasn't been urging you to marry your stenographer," Joan said quickly.

William merely chuckled and caressed her hair with slightly awed fingers.

"Sallie knows me too well to make suggestions about that sort of thing," he murmured. "Tried it once, you know—just once, in fact. Little blond thing—all clothes and stuff—dancing doll—moron type. Awful blond mother, too; used to ogle me. I think it all got out of Sallie's control, or something. Too thick after a while, anyway. That was the time I licked it for Japan and stayed a year. You don't mind my dwelling on these ancient conquests of mine, do you?"

Joan laughed softly.

"Tell me about her—Sallie, not the moron."

Also, Joan settled comfortably and contentedly against the large person who was apparently to be her husband at no distant date. She wished him to talk, about himself and his people; not only because she loved to hear him talk, but because it would consume time that needed consuming just now.

Half an hour ought to be enough. By that time mother and dad would look a little more as people should who are about to meet an impending son-in-law for the first time. Then? A little line appeared between Joan's eyes. Was it necessary or desirable that he meet the whole family this evening? Hardly that. Helene's mood was a trifle too obviously enthusiastic. Frank, too, needed a little period for solitary meditation before he would grow quite accustomed to the idea of the new brother-in-law; two or three days hence he would be able to step up and shake William's hand with fitting heartiness—but not at the moment. And much as Joan loved her irresponsible cousin Henry, there were certain little things she wished to impress upon him before presenting him to William.

No, after a little she would go and find mother and dad and bring them in; and that would be better and infinitely more dignified; and as a situation this one needed all the dignity that could be injected. Joan, then, snuggled closer and prepared for a happy little period of hearing William; and William shifted restlessly and sat more erect, and favored her with the funny little smile which, as she had come to know, meant that William was about to become unmanageable.

"Oh, you've met Sallie; you know what she looks like, I mean," he said. "You'll have a whole lifetime to get acquainted in, I hope. Your people interest me a lot more just now."

"I know, but—"

"Where are they?"

"Oh, they—they're out back, in the dining-room," Joan murmured.

"Let's go there," suggested William.

"Not—yet."

"Why not?"

"Why—why, because—"

Unexpectedly, William turned her face upward and looked straight down into her eyes.

"Look here, Joan," he said forcefully. "I understand to some extent. I'm a lot brighter than you imagine. Sixteen of my ancestors were diplomats, but I didn't get any of it. I can't worm around to saying a thing by seeming to say something else. Whatever I say has to come straight."

"Well?" Joan breathed fearfully.

"Well, I'm intelligent enough to know that there was probably some excitement when you came home and told 'em you were going to be married—and to me, with all the money and all that rot. By the way, was there any real kick?"

"No."

"That's all that matters, then. What I'm trying to get at is this: I don't want the merry old family plate shined up and the fatted calf slaughtered before his time. I don't want any fuss and formality, is what I'm trying to say. This kind of first interview's awful enough anyway; I feel a perfect ass, you know. I'm cold all over and my knees wabble. I don't know why they should wabble, but they do."

Joan laughed again—and caught the laugh. There was no cause for relief or merriment just yet; William was rising.

"So what I want to do," he was saying, "is plunge into the bosom of the family, as it were, and, if they'll be decent enough to take me in, just sit down and belong!"

Joan too rose, quite hastily. It was apparent that William had located that farther door as the one which led to the private hallway and, eventually, to the dining-room.

"I'll see if mother and dad are ready," she breathed.

Whatever the precise cause, William Vanluyn had turned downright impossible.

"Hang it! That's just what I want to avoid—idea that there has to be any getting ready for a person whose only ambition is to be good enough to deserve you, Joan," he said forcefully. "I—I just want to join the family."

He slipped an arm through Joan's limp one. His gaze turned on that fatal door once more.

"That way?" he asked briefly.

"Oh, Will, I think—I think perhaps—" was the very best the elder Miss Thayer could do in that wild moment.

"Nobody dangerously ill out there, or anything like that?" William asked.

"What? Of course not!"

"Then, come along," said William, almost boisterously, and tucked the arm about her waist instead.

And then, quite as if the last dish had not ceased clinking less than one minute ago, quite as if the elder Thayer had entered his bedroom and, what was vastly more important, had left it again immaculate, quite as if all the family were set and posed and fully ready for the shock of meeting a Vanluyn who planned to marry into their midst, in fact:

"We're coming, people!" William cried gaily, and stepped with Joan into the long hallway.

(To be continued NEXT WEEK.)

"Where There Ain't No Ten Commandments"

by Rex Parson

DICK ADAMS'S eyes shone as he looked around the pavilion. That marked the big difference between Dick Adams and the rest of us up there on that big back porch over the pier which was the café portion of Stillwell's store.

Dick Adams isn't his real name. None of the other names in here are real names. I'll call the island Ki'wauee, because that's fairish Malay. Most of us have some folks back home. Most of us will never see those folks back home again; but we keep kidding ourselves that we'll go back some day and stay.

The rest of the "bunch" of the white men of Ki'wauee smiled and made complimentary speeches or jests along with their greetings to Dave Brown. Dave had certainly made changes in Stillwell's. It was a wonderful thing to have a place like this, after the years we'd put up with it under the régime of old Jackson.

But our eyes didn't shine. We've got past the stage of shining eyes. Of course, a man may get a "shiner" occasionally, when Dutch Schneider's liquor works crosswise on him. And we're not strangers to the glassy sheen of eyes blistered from the stomach up and staring fixedly at doubled objects. But not the kind of shine that sparkles.

Dick was still young. He had kept younger than most men do in Ki'wauee or any other tropical climate. He was younger now than Teddy Morehouse, who had landed only a year and a half ago no older than Dick Adams was when he came five years since.

But Dick was headed the same way. Everybody is out in this country. He had made a grand fight to keep up the old ways, the old notions, the old standards or ideals or whatever you like to call them. I've heard a lot of our men argue that the missionaries were missing fire and doing more harm than good, trying to fit other races into a white man's religion they could never wear. I've put up that argument myself. But anybody could do a lot better with an argument about fitting white men to heathen religions. There is a regular misfit for you.

I may sound a little like a fake mind-reader, telling what Dick was thinking now and then. But I know. Dick has talked a lot with me. I could have told what he was thinking even without that. I'm human, and he's human, and we've both gone over the same trails, and all the real places on them are just the same for everybody.

Dick's eyes lit up. He was really joining us that night. And Dave had fitted the place up to make it seem a little like a real clubby layout.

Of course, we hadn't any formal organization. But when a man really settled down as a regular at Stillwell's, he went down to the Chink's place and bought a long lounging chair of reed and cane. He got one with just the particular rolls to its bottom which best met his notions of solid comfort. I think the Chink started to make a new chair the minute he saw a new white man. He didn't keep a whale of a stock; but he always had exactly what a man wanted for a seat at Stillwell's.

Five years it had taken Dick to make up his mind to get his own chair in there. It had taken Teddy Morehouse six months, and that was really rather slow work. Of course, the man who had lived in other Ki'wauees went down for his chair as soon as the bunch had decided he could be endured and let him know what was expected if a man wanted a regular seat of his own. Once in a great while we froze a perfect rotter out and never told him. But—he had to be pretty bad.

"'Lo, Dave," Dick greeted the new proprietor. "Say, you've made a place of it all right. Glad I got a chair in here. Never wanted to—not while Jackson had it. How is everything in the States, Dave?"

The spark went out of the eyes as Dick asked that. It was replaced by a look of longing. Dick was homesick. Everybody is always homesick for the old times somehow. Dave Brown had just taken the complete cure. He had gone home.

Drunk and sober, all through the week's spree that had celebrated Dave Brown's departure eight months back, he had sworn by all things holy and unholy that nothing would ever get him again onto a deck of a ship which could even conceivably be driven out of its course to wreck him on any coast or island inhabited by others than civilized white men.

The bunch had laughed in its sleeve. It had known better. For that matter, Dave himself had known better. He had made two home trips before in the sixteen years of his life in the Far East. His solemn oaths were mostly meant to convince himself that he really would keep them.

Everybody rather liked Dave. He was missed from the bunch. And, when old Jackson had the stroke of paralysis that made him permanently and continually as helpless as drink had kept him half the time anyhow, Prentiss cabled the word to Dave Brown. Dave admitted that he had got into communication with the owners of Stillwell's three hours after getting the cable. He had been the one of the gang most eager in his talk of what he would do with the joint if he had it.

Dave's answer to Dick was not calculated to satisfy much of home-longing:

"Oh, they're still right there—one or two more than the last time I saw them. What are you taking? Everything's on the house to-night, you know."

Adams mentioned the name of his usual brand of whisky.

"Don't want to mix drinks, you know," he explained sagely. "I know what this does to me."

It was not a great dose of the red stuff he put at the bottom of the tumbler; it was about three times the size of the first drink I ever saw him take. He filled up with Carabañas water. He took about half the glass, then stood still at the bar. He was summoning courage to put a certain question to Dave Brown.

Morel and Schneider and Roberts all came in just then—the last to arrive. They had not been in during the two days it had taken Dave to fix things up—they had stations on the other side of the island in their respective lines of trading.

"By gad!" Roberts cried in his somewhat thin English drawl. "Welcome to our island once more! I knew you'd be back. And—I say! It's rippin'! Jove! It's a bloomin' shame we didn't kill old Jackson years ago. Morel! I say! Are you sure now you've got enough to do for all this proper?"

"Sh!" Morel hissed with a wink. "I've got the goods. If the cops in the States would stand for it, I'd take this little dancer right in and eat up a million dollars with her."

Dave Brown emitted a good-natured chuckle.

"You haven't been to the States lately," he remarked. "They're showing the kids at the movies dances that the natives here

would stop. I guess you fellows know it would take a lot to make me blush. The first show I took in was being billed at a swell Frisco theater as the masterpiece of the master producer of them all. Two tow-headed little girls of eleven or twelve were sitting next the down front seat I took.

"Far as I could make out, the show was got up to make a chance for a girl to do a couple of dances. Say, any of you fellows remember what the police did to Little Egypt's wiggles in a dress they'd call long on the streets in America now? Well, this dance was some more of that same—only the lady was wearing a skirt of silk rope fringe about two feet long—the ropes, I mean. Didn't have on another devilish thing the camera could see."

"Aw, go on! How many did you drink before you went in there?" was shouted from half a dozen at once.

"Drink? You couldn't get a drink you could trust. I stayed on the wagon the whole time in America. But this show—when the dance got up to what I figured was meant to be its most interesting contortions, the little baby blonde next me turned to her little cousin and said:

"'I can do that—but not good like her.'"

Dick Adams hadn't got a brown wife. He gave up being a regular white man hard. When he came out here he had the same job he was still keeping five years later—buying cacao for the Chocolate Superior people in the States. It payed him a nice salary. He had it all figured out that he could save six thousand dollars in three years, take that back home and get thirty thousand more of credit with it, to start importing cacao on his own. There was a girl named Bessie Smith.

Often as he could make it, he went over to Dr. Wiston's mission at N'anwa, to the Sunday services. It was ten miles of row in open sea. He was a nice, clean boy of twenty-five. He was pleasant company when he met the members of our bunch. But he kept away from Stillwell's. And that meant that he didn't see much of us. For we were busy at our own stations or asleep when we were not there.

I mean the Stillwell back-porch café. He had to come there for some things. It was the only general store on the island.

All Jackson's children were girls. There was only one of them really white-man bright enough to manage the store at all. She kept the part that wasn't café in the daytime. At night, when the old man was so drunk he couldn't keep awake or anything else, she tended the bar.

One of his native boys had stolen Dick's tobacco the time he came first to the porch. He had to come to find Luana to sell him some more. I remember the half-scared look on his face as he nodded to us members of the club. It got worse when he saw old Jackson.

Old Jackson was not a pretty thing to look at. He was in the last stages of too much living in Ki'wauee. By six o'clock any night he was snoring on one of the Chink's chairs. A suit of booze-stained pajamas was his regular uniform. Half the time the coat was half open. His greasy-fat chest stuck out of it. His flabby jowls hung down on the rim of the collar. His mouth hung open. His face was a bluish white where the red rum-blotches weren't. Of course, he was far past minding the flies. He was a beautiful object for a "horrible example."

"There's what I'll be like if I don't get away from this damned island pretty soon," was a remark somebody would get drunk enough to make every evening.

It was poor Saunders who made it oftenest—he was getting the nearest to Jackson's stage of Ki'wauee. He died suddenly, less than a year after that. It was Saunders who spoke the familiar words as Dick Adams came in that first time. Saunders had been staring with drunken fixedness at old Jackson for quite a while, and hadn't even seen Dick's entrance.

Swiftly the scared boy swept over the crowd with his eyes. He saw confirmation of Saunders's words. He could tell almost accurately, by the looks of the seven or eight men present, how long they had been in Ki'wauee. They were so much more like Jackson and less like himself, the longer they had stayed.

He had a theory that it wasn't necessary to go that way. He pointed to the perfect-

ly healthy Dr. Wiston and Mrs. Wiston, who had been on the next island even before Jackson got here. All you had to do was to keep away from Stillwell's, away from booze, away from the white man's variation of heathenism.

We'd all had that theory once. We'd all lived up to it for a while.

Weak, weren't we? All right—come out and live in Ki'wauee ten years, and then tell me we're weak.

It was two years and a half before Dick Adams took a drink in Stillwell's. He holds the record at that. He worked all day, rushing hither and yon about the big tin shack the company had out here, dickering with natives, trying to hurry them up in getting cargoes onto lighters, watching to keep them from stealing everything in sight, eating food he had to teach them to cook, sleeping on a bed he couldn't teach them to make, getting up in the steaming morning to begin it all over again.

He could talk the native language in no time. He could talk it about cacao and lighters and his food and the infernal bed and—everything but the kind of thing a man wants to talk about. Of the things a white man thinks about there was nothing in the native language to talk.

Never a white man's joke to laugh at, never a white man's argument to take his mind off the dreariness, never a white man's game to play. God! He stuck it out for two years and a half. In six months he'd read all the books he had brought with him. By that time the war had stopped the shipment of books. He was tired of reading; but he borrowed all the things in Dr. Wiston's library, even to the works on theology. He got so he knew them by heart.

But his rigid total abstinence broke up at the end of two years. The loneliness had got on his nerves; his nerves had prepared him for the fever. A ship's doctor happened to be in port. He gave Dick Adams whisky with the quinin. And so Dick got acquainted with the warm "kick" for which the climate always keeps one more or less in need.

All the while he knew us all. Maybe we were not quite his sort; we were, at least, of his race. We were friendly—we all liked him for the nice, quiet, upstanding youngster he was. And he got over thinking we were so bad.

At last he came to Stillwell's to see us where we could really be seen. He understood now—it was that or madness or the trip home in a long box. He hadn't got together the six thousand he needed yet. It cost more to live in Ki'wauee than he had imagined.

For a while he wouldn't drink anything with the bunch. We were not the sort to monkey with another man's scruples. But he must have felt it was foolish to refuse in company what he did not hesitate to take alone. He carefully cut down his day drinking when he got to joining with the bunch at night. All the drinking he did any time wouldn't hurt a child.

Dr. Wiston took a furlough home for a year. No doubt he's a good man. Possibly his notions about drink are the real thing. He would surely be Anti-Saloon Leaguer if he lived in the States. Drinking is capital crime in his ethics. And he draws his line between good men and men who drink.

A month before he went home the missionary chanced to be rowed right along the water-front past Stillwell's and to hear Dick laughing at—I guess it was Prentiss's story of the Chinaman in the Frisco police court. Dr. Wiston knew, or got to know, Dick's particular Bessie Smith while he was at home.

What he told Bessie was probably nothing but the truth. The kind of man who would drink in the States in the kind of hole Jackson kept on Ki'wauee would not be the kind of man for any decent Bessie Smith. The correspondence that followed ended the long-distance, long-time engagement.

II.

Dick was teetering in the balance. He had lost a lot of what had made the idea of going home attractive. In her last letter Bessie had hinted of another man—who wouldn't drink in a place like Stillwell's or anywhere else. No doubt she had married him long before this.

And yet, home is home. He had never counted anything else as his real life. Ki'wauee was an incident, a vast sacrifice for the future, a thing to forget as soon as might be.

Dick knew he was no longer the same as he had been. His well-trained conscience exaggerated the vices he had acquired. It all scared him, as it had scared him from that first night when he had marked the progress of the various members of the bunch toward old Jackson's wretched estate.

He drank to steady the nerves his thinking shook. He began to feel the liquor, a sensation of pleasant dreaminess. Dave, too, was a bit gone in his cups, drowning his shame, perhaps. He reiterated his feeble excuses for himself, as a drunken man will. Then suddenly—

"Gol-lee!" he exclaimed. "Look who's here! By gad, old Morel did pick a winner. Lord! I didn't think anything brown ever grew as pretty as that."

It was the little dancer Morel had mentioned as the real show of the evening. As she trotted out on the newly planed and polished mahogany of the floor, the clumsy cane chairs shifted on their springy legs. The jaded interest of the drink-sodden beholders was alive at the first sight of the girl.

Long before Dick's time, or Dave's, the people of Ki'wauee adopted the dress of civilization to some extent. The first sight of Wiwi brought a gasp and a blush from Dick Adams's throat and to his face. She wore a tiny skirt of filmy gauze and shoulder straps of strung blossoms.

Then the sheer beauty of her lithe little body in motion destroyed the thought of shame. Her dance was not Oriental. It was invented and perfected by white men. Only here and there some sinuous quality had been adapted from the dancing of women who were bred and trained where the body was not cramped by garments of wooden stiffness.

But venomous snakes and spiders may be beautiful. A drop of dirty oil on water takes the hue of a rainbow. Wiwi was beautiful; her dance was beautiful.

And Dick Adams was clean. He was clean enough to see the beauty and to forget the rest. Partly that—partly he was too drunk to distinguish between what was beautiful and what was vile.

It may be doubted if the girl comprehended at all the nature of what she did. She had been trained to do it. The worst of what was suggested could hardly have seemed bad to her heathen child mind untaught to know good and evil.

But she danced to Dick Adams. Her gestures, her eyes came back again and again to him. That, too, was part of the training. In a far-off country, she would be taught to choose some man—or to accept a choice made by a wiser manager with eyes upon the price to be obtained—and to dance to him. Now she was left to make the choice as she would. Dick Adams was far the best-looking man in that crowd.

Whisky whirled his head; the dance pounded with his pulses. He lost sense of everything but the fascination of the vivid, swirling, scintillating little brown figure, as perfect in its grace as a fawn's. And the big dark eyes in the piquant little face would have had him drunk without the whisky he had swallowed.

He tried to lift his glass from the socket in the wicker arm of the chair. It slipped from his fingers, crashed to the floor. He made a futile move to pick it up, unaware that it had broken. It ended in a mere wave. He forgot it and watched the furious movements as the dance reached its climax in a dizzy whirl. He thought of it only as the little dancer suddenly whirled straight to his chair and with a graceful flourish of her brown arms, flung them about his neck and dropped to her knees on the floor beside him. Luckily, the broken glass was on the other side.

"*Io ti quero,*" the girl whispered in broken Spanish. "I love you." The Frenchman planned to take her to South America.

Above the hearty applause sounded words of feigned and some real envy on the part of the others. Then a drunkenly bright inspiration struck somebody—

"Take her, Dick—Lord sakes, take her! She'd never get away from me. Come on, Dick—let's finish up with a wedding. Dare

you to. Come on—old Tom Mua'ali would get off his deathbed for ten Straits dollars. Come on to the parson."

Morel hesitated a little before assenting. He spoke to the girl in a dialect a little too difficult for Dick to follow with his ears and brain in their present condition.

"Sure, she'll take you, Dick—let's go."

The girl clung to him, her eyes seeming to him to ask the question a man may ask a woman the world over, but a civilized man finds hard to refuse a lady anywhere.

"Don't you like me?" she inquired at last in her own tongue, enough like that of the Ki'wauceans to enable him to understand that much.

He was lost. He staggered to his feet. Others with a little better control of their muscles steadied him down the stairs. They started to walk to the native missionary's humble shack.

Vaguely he sensed that the loss was infinite—he was going to throw away his life. He had never approved, never got over a feeling of moral shock at the easy notions of his companions. He had never dreamed that he could live as they lived, then go back to a clean girl like Bessie Smith and ask her hand.

But there was no Bessie Smith for him. There was—the lovely little dancer. Yet there were other things in life besides Bessie Smith. The broken engagement had never broken his purpose to go home.

And now—he was fixing things so that he could not keep to it. Dick hadn't got far enough to imagine any amount of decent living would make a man decent who had a deserted wife on the opposite side of the world. He was not drunk enough to imagine it.

No—it was taking this for life. But it was making it mighty pleasant. Wiwi—he wondered if that was her real name—would make his rooms in the big tin shed almost too pleasant to leave for Stillwell's. As in a dream he saw her graceful form before him.

She had drawn on a light dress, but it seemed rather to accentuate her fineness of figure. Her very walk was more than half a dance, as of a child skipping in sheer joy. She kept running back to throw her arms about him as if to make sure he should not change his mind.

There was little danger. He was in that relaxed condition of inebriation where any suggestion acts almost hypnotically on the will. The men with him were all congratulating him, urging him along, dilating on the prize he had secured.

Only once he balked.

"N-no—damn 'f I do. Ain't goin' marry any black wench. N-not me. I—I'm going to go home—an' marry decent woman. I'm goin' stay decent—m'self."

"Decent!" guffawed his companions. "Oh, hear him! Say, Dick—you've got past that missionary palaver. You don't believe all that bull about marriage."

"I—I know I don't," Dick mourned. "But I—I wanta b'lieve it again. I'm goin' to." In wine is truth—even when it sounds least logical. But the girl turned back, her big eyes glistening in the moonlight. It was too much for him.

The native missionary's shack lay at the far end of a backward bent crescent of shore along which strung the big iron "warehouses" and stores and the native huts behind them. The party walked a trail that went straight from tip to tip through a cleared path in the jungle.

There was not much physical energy in the drink-weakened bodies of the men. Half the distance had their talk slowed down to occasional efforts with panting breaths. Dick Adams had gone dull; went on with the momentum of his last flicker of will, without enough will left to stop.

The ugly little church appeared ahead. They were at the edge of the jungle again. Dick grunted with relief at sight of the end of his trudge.

"What's that?"

It was Morel who asked the question in startled voice. Not in the memory of any of them had the natives of Ki'wauee made a hostile demonstration. But Morel had been in other islands where things were different. His ear was keyed, even above the jingle in his head, to the stealthiest of sounds.

The drunken crew halted groggily.

"Wh-what's — what?" Prentiss asked thickly.

"Vot?" Schneider demanded belligently.

As if in answer came a yell—a yell in a woman's voice. It was not a yell of terror or of pain—it was the war-whoop of a brown Amazon.

"My God!" Dave Brown whispered thickly.

"Her mother!" Morel gasped. "Look out!"

Dick, in his start, felt some impulse to protect the girl. There had been something of manhood in his feeling toward her. He took a step forward to shield her, his fuddled brain without any notion as to how he could do so or against what. Then he blinked—brushed his eyes with his whisky-sticky fingers—blinked again. The girl was not there.

Only jungle people have the real art of becoming instantly invisible. Wiwi had sensed danger and vanished.

And the danger sprang up before the white men—twenty strong warriors from Paumi's, the wickedly skewered blades of their long bolos flashing in the moonlight, their voices howling like those of a pack of hounds in sight of the quarry.

Not one of the white men was armed. They never were.

"Beat it—quick!" It was Dave Brown who snapped the order for retreat. "Quick—old Jackson's place!" This came from Prentiss. "Jackson's got guns."

He led the way. One or two others knew the hut in the edge of the jungle to which the old wreck had removed his helpless remains and his numerous family. Luckily it was but a step.

Apparently Wiwi's mother had guessed that the native missionary's place would be the most likely wind-up of her child's escapade. She had once been a white man's wife herself, and knew how easily such marriages were made and unmade. She had followed the launch in which the Frenchman had sent his entertainers, with the score of men in their proas. Far behind the launch in landing, afraid to attack the building or within its vicinity, she had led her little army to where she could watch the shack of a church.

They had marked the open trail and counted on their ability to beat any white men back through it. They had not seen the side-path into Jackson's hidden hut.

Perhaps Luana's mother warned her; perhaps inherited instinct shot the meaning of that war-cry into the mind of Jackson's girl. She met us with a rifle in her hands. Time was when Paumi's people were ever at war with those of Ki'wauee.

Luana did not shoot at us; she knew our voices too well. She pumped the gun into the brush between us, at those behind our backs. We found a trail or two of blood in the morning to show she had found a mark or so. And Dick got a nasty scratch through a ripped back of his jacket. He was slow in coming—we had to drag him along. He was anxious about Wiwi's fate.

We waited a long time in the close atmosphere of Jackson's hut. Once, twice we had to sit on Dick to keep him from going out. Then a grunt in the corner of the squalid room drew his attention—to Jackson.

We had no light. We were afraid the Paumi's men might have guns and fall back on them now that we were out of reach of their knives. Of course, they would have used the knives first. Dick couldn't have seen much of Jackson—no more than an outline of his grimy pajamas against a dark mat on the floor. He could hear the man's breathing; he could remember the man's looks.

His own face caught the full light of the moon through an open window. I watched him. It grew sober, solemn, scared. I understood. I got in close beside him and whispered in his ear:

"It's all right—you didn't marry her. I thought you would—I thought you'd be better here than back home—like me. But I was wrong, Dick. I was wrong. You're not too far gone yet.

"And listen, Dick—I didn't tell you before—I figured I'd better not tell you ever. I was wrong about it all, I say.

"I met up with Bessie Smith—your Bessie Smith, Dick. And—she's waiting for you. Oh, I gave you a dandy character. She'd only half believed old Wiston, anyhow. I put it that, if you drank at all,

it was because we all had to take it for medicine.

"And I explained that Stillwell's was a store as well as a saloon. Yep—it's all right at that end. And you're all right here. And her father made a pile at something in the war. He'll put up enough to get you going with what you have, if you want."

Dick just sat down on the floor with a groan of relief. He was still white enough to do all he could to see that Wiwi wasn't killed or anything. Morel found out that the Frenchman lost her; her mother married her to the native missionary of Paumi's. Two weeks later Dick sailed for home.

Yes, I envy him. Of course, you see now that I'm Dave Brown. Not white man enough any more to do what Dick did. But I could be white enough to square things with my Luana. Good little woman, she is—too good for me, I guess. I took her over to Dr. Wiston's mission at N'anwa and made her my wife for good and all.

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LOCHINVAR JONES

OH, Lochinvar Jones has come out of the West,
With press-agent notices all of the best;
And Lochinvar Jones was extremely la mode,
Instead of a horse, a Fierce-Arrow he rode.
He hit her on sixty and drove through on high,
Ignoring the cops as they watched him whizz by.

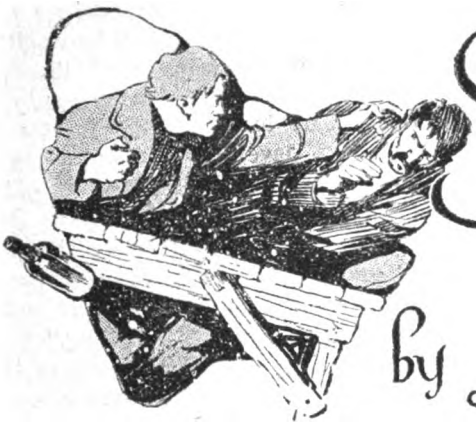
He stayed not for brakes and he stopped not for gas,
He shot through the traffic where none else could pass;
But ere he slowed up at the mansion of stone,
The bride had accepted another by phone.
For a laggard in golf and a dastard in war
Was to wed the fair Ellen of brave Lochinvar.

So boldly he ventured, and cut all the wires,
And boldly he punctured the bridegroom's new tires.
Then spoke the bride's father—the bridegroom stood numb—
Demanding the reason for which he had come.
And Lochinvar, dauntless, replied that he came
To drink just one cup and to dance with his flame.

The bride passed the home brew, but first kissed the cup,
The knight kissed it too, and then drank it all up.
The jazz band tuned lively; he led the bride out
And left the groom watching them both in great doubt.
So stately his figure, so lovely her face
That never a hall such a toddle did grace.

One touch to her hand, and one word in her ear;
They soon reached the hall door; the motor stood near.
So light to the car the fair lady he swung,
And light to the wheel right beside her he sprung—
Director yelled "Great!" and excitement ran keen,
For Lochinvar Jones, the delight of the screen!

Rose Pelswick.



Snowdrift

Part II

by James B. Hendryx

Author of "The Gun-Brand," "Prairie Flowers," etc.

WHAT HAS ALREADY HAPPENED

CARTER BRENT, mining engineer of the S. and R., loses his job because of his boozing tendencies. But he worries little, having always found work without trouble. He is present in the Ore Dump saloon of Patsy Kelliher when Jim McBride, formerly night telegraph operator, with the con, comes back with a sack of coarse gold gathered in the early Klondike strike.

Because Kelliher has staked him nine years before when the doctors told him he had only six months to live, McBride tells the men in the bar, who, Patsy assures him are all his friends, where more gold can be obtained, and Brent joins the mad rush of the howling mass to go after it.

CHAPTER II.

TRAIL LORE.

IN a drizzle of cold rain forty men stood on Dyea Beach and viewed with disfavor the forty thousand pounds of sodden, mud-smeared outfit that had been hurriedly landed from the little steamer that was already plowing her way back southward. Of the sixty odd men who, two weeks before, had stood in Patsy Kelliher's Ore Dump Saloon and had seen Jim McBride toss one after another upon the bar twenty buckskin pouches filled to bursting with coarse gold in his reckoning with Kelliher, these forty had accomplished the first leg of the long north trail. The next year and the next, thousands, and tens of thousands of men would follow in their footsteps, for these forty were the forerunners of the great stampede from the "outside"—a stampede that exacted merciless toll in the lives of fools and weaklings, even as it heaped riches with lavish prodigality into the laps of the strong.

Jim McBride had said that each man must carry in a thousand pounds of outfit. Well and good, they had complied. Each had purchased his thousand pounds, had it delivered on board the steamer, and in due course had watched it dumped upon the beach from the small boats. Despite the cold drizzle throughout the unloading, the forty had laughed and joked each other and had liberally tendered flasks. But now, with the steamer a vanishing speck in the distance and the rock-studded Dyea Flats stretching away toward the mountains, the laughter and joking ceased.

Men eyed the trail, moved aimlessly about, and returned to their luggage. The thousand-pound outfit had suddenly assumed proportions. Every ounce of it must be man-handled across a twenty-eight mile portage and over the Chilkoot Pass. Now and then a man bent down and gave a tentative lift at a bale or a sack. Muttered curses had taken the place of laughter, and if a man drew forth a flask he drank, and returned it to his pocket without tendering it to his neighbor.

When Carter Brent had reached the seclusion of his room after leaving Kelliher's saloon, he slipped his hand into his pocket

and, withdrawing his roll of bills, counted them. He found exactly three hundred and seventy-eight dollars, which he rightly decided was not enough to finance an expedition to the gold country. He must get more—and get it quickly. Returning the bills to his pocket he packed his belongings, left the room, and a few minutes later was admitted upon signal to the gambling-rooms of Nick the Greek, where, selecting a faro layout, he bought a stack of chips. At the end of a half-hour he bought another stack, and thereafter he began to win. When his winnings totaled one thousand dollars he cashed in, and that evening at seven o'clock he stepped onto a train bound for Seattle.

He was mildly surprised that none of the others from Kelliher's were in evidence. But when he arrived at his destination he grinned as he saw them swarming from the day coaches ahead.

And now on Dyea Beach he stood and scowled as he watched the rain-water collect in drops and roll down the sides of his packages.

"He said they was Injuns who would pack this here junk," complained a man beside him. "Where'n hell be they?"

"Search me," grinned Brent. "How much can you carry?"

"Don't know—not a hell of a lot over them rocks—an' he said this here Chilkoot was so steep you had to climb it instead of walk."

"Suppose we make a try?" suggested Brent. "A man ought to handle a hundred pounds—"

"A *hundred pounds!* You're crazy as hell! I ain't no damn burro—me. Not no hundred pounds, no twenty-eight mile, an' part of it cat-climbin'. 'Bout twenty-five's more my size."

"You like to walk better than I do," shrugged Brent. "Have you stopped to figure that a twenty-five-pound pack means four trips to the hundred—forty trips for the thousand? And forty round trips of twenty-eight miles means something over twenty-two hundred miles of hiking."

"Gawd!" exclaimed the other in dismay. "It must be hell to be eggicated! If I'd figgered that out, I'd of stayed on the boat! We're in a hell of a fix now, an' no ways to git back. That grub 'll all be et gittin' it over the pass, an' when we git there, we ain't nowheres—we got them lakes an' river to make after that. Looks like by the time we hit this here Bonanza place all the claims will be took up, or the gold 'll be rotted with old age."

"You're sure a son of gloom," opined Brent as he stooped and affixed his straps to a hundred-poung sack of flour. "But I'm going to hit the trail. So-long."

As Brent essayed to swing the pack to his shoulders he learned for the first time in his life that one hundred pounds is a matter not lightly to be juggled. The pack did not swing to his shoulders, and it was only after repeated efforts, and the use of other bales of luggage as a platform that he was at length able to stand erect under his burden. The other man had watched without offer of assistance, and Brent's wrath flared as he noted his grin. Without a word he struck out across the rock-strewn flat.

"Hurry back," taunted the other. "You ought to make about four trips by supper-time."

Before he had covered fifty yards Brent knew that he could never stand the strain of a hundred-pound pack. While not a large man, he was well built and rugged, but he had never before carried a pack, and every muscle of his body registered its aching protest at the unaccustomed strain.

Time and again it seemed as though the next step must be his last, then a friendly rock would show up ahead and he would stagger forward and sink against its side, allowing the rock to ease the weight from his shoulders. As the distance between resting-places became shorter, the periods of rest lengthened, and during these periods, while he panted for breath and listened to the pounding of his heart's blood as it surged past his ear-drums, his brain was very active.

"McBride said a good packer could walk off with a hundred, or a hundred and fifty pounds, and he'd seen 'em pack two hundred," he muttered. "And I've been an hour moving one hundred pounds one mile! And I'm so near all in that I couldn't

move it another mile in a week. I wonder where those Indian packers are that he said we could get?"

His eyes traveled back across the flats, every inch of which had caused him bodily anguish, and came to rest upon the men who still moved aimlessly among the rain-sodden bales, or stood about in groups. "Anyway, I'm the only one that has made a stab at it."

A sound behind him caused him to turn his head abruptly to see five Indians striding toward him along the rock-strewn trail. Brent wriggled painfully from his pack-straps as the leader, a big-framed giant of a man, halted at his side and stared stolidly down at him. Brent gained his feet and thrust out his hand.

"Hello, there, old Nick o' Time! Want a job? I've got a thousand pounds of junk back there on the beach, counting this piece, and all you gentlemen have got to do is to flip it up onto your backs and skip over the Chilkoot with it, and I'll pay you good wages. Do you speak English?"

The big Indian nodded gravely. "Me spik Eengliss. Me no nem Nickytam. Nem Kamish—w'ite man call Joe Pete."

Brent nodded. "All right, Joe Pete. How much are you and your gang going to charge me to pack this stuff up over the pass?"

The Indian regarded the sack of flour. "You *chechako*," he announced.

"Just as you say," grinned Brent, "I wouldn't take that from everybody, whatever it means, but if you'll get that stuff over the pass you can call me anything you want to."

"You Boston man?"

"No—I'm from Tennessee. But we'll overlook even that. How much you pack it over the pass?" Brent pointed to the flour and held up ten fingers.

The Indian turned to his followers and spoke to them in guttural jargon. They nodded assent, and he turned to Brent. "Top Chilkoot fi' cent poun'—honder poun', fi' dolla'. Lak Lindermann, three cent poun' mor'—hondre poun' all way, eight dolla'."

"You're on!" agreed Brent. "Thousand pounds, eighty dollars—all the way."

The Indian nodded, and Brent produced a ten-dollar gold piece which he handed to the man, indicated that he would get the rest when they reached Lake Lindermann.

The Indian motioned to the smallest of his followers and, pointing to the sack of flour, mumbled some words of jargon, whereupon the man stepped to the pack, removed Brent's straps and producing straps of his own swung the burden to his back and started off at a brisk walk.

As Brent led the way back to the beach at the head of his Indians he turned more than once to glance back at the solitary packer, but as far as he could see him, the man continued to swing along at the same brisk pace at which he had started, whereat he conceived a sudden profound respect for his hirelings.

"The littlest runt of the bunch has got me skinned a thousand miles," he muttered. "But I'll learn the trick. A year from now I'll hit the trail with any of 'em."

Back at the beach the Indians were surrounded by thirty-nine clamoring, howling men who pushed and jostled one another in a frenzied attempt to hire the packers.

"No, you don't!" cried Brent. "These men are working for me. When I'm through with them you can have them, and not before."

Ugly mutterings greeted the announcement. "Who the hell do you think you are?" "Divide 'em up!" "Give some one else a chanct."

Others advanced upon the Indians and shook sheaves of bills under their noses, offering double and treble Brent's price. But the Indians paid no heed to the paper money, and inwardly Brent thanked the lucky star that guided him into exchanging all his cash into gold before leaving Seattle.

Despite the fact that he was next to useless as a packer, Brent was no weakling. Ignoring the mutterings he led the Indians to his outfit, and while they affixed their straps, he faced the crowding men.

"Just stay where you are, boys," he said. "This stuff here is my stuff, and for the time being the ground it's on is my ground."

The man who had sneered at his attempt

to pack the flour crowded close and quick as a flash, Brent's left fist caught him square on the point of the chin and he crashed backward among the legs of the others. Brent's voice never changed tone, nor by so much as the flutter of an eyelash did he betray any excitement. "Any man that crosses that line is going to find trouble—and find it damned quick!"

"He's bluffin'," cried a thick voice from the rear of the crowd. "Let me up there. I'll show the damn dude!"

A huge, hard-rock man elbowed his way through the parting crowd, his whisky-reddened eyes narrowed to slits. Three paces in front of Brent he halted and stared into the muzzle of the blued-steel gun that had flashed into the engineer's hand.

"Come on," invited Brent, "if I'm bluffing I won't shoot. You're twice as big as I am. I wouldn't stand a show in the world in a rough-and-tumble. But I'm not bluffing—and there won't be any rough-and-tumble."

For a full half-minute the man stared into the unwavering muzzle of the gun.

"You would shoot a man, damn you!" he muttered as he backed slowly away. And every man in the crowd knew that he spoke the truth.

Three of the Indians had put their straps to a hundreds pounds apiece and were already strung out on the trail. Brent turned to see Joe Pete regarding him with approval, and as he affixed his straps to a fifty-pound pack, the big Indian stooped and swung an extra fifty pounds on top of the hundred already on his back and struck out after the others. At the end of a half-mile Brent was laboring heavily under his load, while Joe Pete had never for an instant slackened his pace.

"What's he made of? Don't he ever rest?" thought Brent as he struggled on.

The blood was pounding in his ears, and his laboring lungs were sucking in the air in great gulps. At length his muscles refused to go another step, and he sagged to the ground and lay there sick and dizzy without energy enough left at his command to roll the pack from his shoulders. After what seemed an hour the pack was raised and the Indian who had gone ahead with his first pack swung the fifty pounds to his own shoulders and started off. Brent scrambled to his feet and followed.

A mile further on they came to the others lying on the ground smoking and resting. The packs lay to one side, and Brent made mental note of the fact that these packers carried much of the weight upon a strap that looped over their foreheads, and that instead of making short hauls and then resting with their packs on, they made long hauls and took long rests with their packs thrown off. They were at least three miles from the beach, and it was nearly an hour before they again took the trail. In the mean time Joe Pete had rigged a tump-line for Brent, and when he again took the trail he was surprised at the difference the shifting of part of the load to his head made in the ease with which he carried it.

Two miles farther on they came upon the sack of flour where the Indian had left it, and Joe Pete indicated that this would be their first day's haul. Six hundred pounds of Brent's thousand had been moved five miles, and leaving the small Indian to make camp, the others, together with Brent, returned for the remaining four hundred.

This time they were not molested by the men on the beach, many of whom they passed on the trail laboring along under packs which for the most part did not exceed fifty pounds weight.

On the return Brent insisted on packing his fifty pounds, and much to his delight found that he was able to make the whole distance of three miles to the resting-place. Joe Pete nodded grave approval of this feat, and Brent, in whose veins flowed the bluest blood of the South, felt his heart swell with pride because he had won the approbation of this dark-skinned packer of the north.

Into this rest-camp came the erstwhile head barkeeper at Kelliher's, and to him Brent imparted the trail-lore he had picked up. Also he exchanged with him one hundred dollars in gold for a like amount in bills, and advised Joe Pete that when his present contract was finished this other would be a good man to work for.

Day after day they packed, and upon the

last day of trail Brent made four miles under one hundred pounds with only one rest—much of the way through soft muskeg. And he repeated the performance in the afternoon. At Lindermann Joe Pete found an Indian who agreed to run Brent and his outfit down through the lakes and the river to Dawson in a huge freight canoe.

The first stampeders from the outside bought all available canoes and boats so that by the time of the big rush boats had to be built on the shore of the lake from timber cut green and whip-sawed into lumber on the spot. Also, the price of packing over the Chilkoot jumped from five cents a pound to ten, to twenty, to fifty, to seventy, and even a dollar, as men fought to get in before the freeze-up—but that was a year and a half after Brent floated down the Yukon in his big birch canoe.

CHAPTER III.

THE SEEDS OF HATRED.

FAR in the Northland, upon the bank of a great river that disgorges into the frozen sea, stands a little Roman Catholic mission. The mission is very old—having had its inception in the early days of the fur trade. Its little chapel boasts a stained-glass window—a window fashioned in Europe, carried across the Atlantic to Hudson Bay in a wooden sailing vessel, and transported through three thousand miles of wilderness in canoes, York boats, and scows, and over many weary miles of portage upon the backs of sweating Indians. Upon its walls hang paintings—works of real merit, the labor of priestly hands long dead. A worthy monument, this mission, to the toil and self-sacrifice of the early fathers, and a living tribute to the labor of the grave Gray Nuns.

The time was July—late evening of a July day. The sun still held high above the horizon, and upon the grassed plateau about the buildings of the mission children were playing. They were Indian children, for the most part, thick-bodied and swarthy-faced, but among them, here and there, could be seen the lighter skin of a half-breed. Near the door of one of the building sat a group of older Indian girls sewing. In the doorway the good Father Ambrose stood with his eyes upon the upreach of the river.

Like a silent gray shadow Sister Mercedes glided from the chapel and seated herself upon a wooden bench drawn close beside the door. Her eyes followed the gaze of the priest.

"No sign of the brigade?" she asked. "They have probably tied up for the night. To-morrow maybe—or the day after they will come." Ensued a long pause during which both studied the river. "I think," continued the nun, "that when the scows return southward we will be losing Snowdrift."

"Eh?" The priest turned his head quickly and regarded Sister Mercedes with a frown. "Henri of the White Water? Think you he has—"

The sister interrupted: "No, no! To school. She is nineteen now. We can do nothing more for her here. In the matter of lessons, as you well know, she has easily outstripped all others, and books! She has already exhausted our meager library."

The priest nodded. The frown still puckered his brow, but his lips smiled—a smile that conveyed more of questioning than of mirth. Intensely human himself, Father Ambrose was no mean student of human nature, and he spoke with a troubled mind.

"To us here at the mission have been brought many children, both of the Indians and of the Metis. And having absorbed to their capacity our teachings, the Indians have gone stolidly back to their teepees, and to their business of hunting and trapping, carrying with them a measure of useful handicaft, a smattering of letters, and the precepts of the Word."

The smile had faded from the clean-cut lips of the priest, and Sister Mercedes noted a touch of sadness in the voice, as she watched a slanting ray of sunlight play for a moment upon the thinning, silvery hair.

"I have grown old in the service of God here at this mission," he continued, "and it is natural that I have sought diligently among my people for the outward

and visible signs of the fruit of my labor. And I have found, with a few notable exceptions, that in one year, or two, or three, the handicraft is almost forgotten, the letters are but a dim blur of memory, and the Word?" He shrugged. "Who but God can tell? It is the Metis who are the real problem. For it is in their veins that civilization meets savagery. The clash and the conflict of races—the antagonism that is responsible for the wars of the world—is inherent in the very blood that gives them life. And the outcome is beyond the ken of man. I have seen, I think, every conceivable combination of physical and mental condition save the one most devoutly to be hoped for—a blending of the best that is in each race. That I have not seen. Unless it be that we are to see it in Snowdrift."

"I do not believe that Snowdrift is a half-breed. I believe she is a white child," said Sister Mercedes.

Father Ambrose smiled tolerantly. "Still of that belief? But it is impossible. I know her mother. She, too, was a child of this mission—long before your time. She is one of the few Indians who did not forget the handicraft nor the letters."

The old man paused and shook his head sadly. "And until she brought this child here I believed that she had not forgotten the Word. For she continued to profess her belief, and among her people she waged war upon the rum-runners. Later, I myself married her to a Dog Rib, a man who was the best of his tribe. Then they disappeared and I heard nothing from her until she brought this child, Snowdrift, to us here at the mission. She told me that her husband had been drowned in a rapid, and then she told me—not in confessional, for she would not confess—that this was her child and that her father was a white man, but that he was not her husband."

"She may have lied. Loving the child, she may have feared that we would take her away, or institute a search for her people."

"She loves the child—with the mother love. But she did not lie. If she had lied, would she not have said that after the death of her husband she had married this white man? I would have believed her. But, evidently the idea of truth is more firmly implanted in her heart than—other virtues—so she told the truth—knowing even as she did so the light in which she would stand before men, and also the standing of her daughter."

"Oh, it is a shame!" cried the nun. "But still I do not believe it! I cannot believe it! Snowdrift's skin, where the sun and the wind have not turned it, is as white as mine."

"But her hair and eyes are the dark hair and eyes of the Indian. And when she was first brought here, have you forgotten that she fought like a little wildcat, and that she ran away and trailed her band to its encampment? Could a white child have done that?"

"But after she had been brought back and had begun to learn she fought just as hard against returning to the tribe for a brief vacation. She is a dreamer of dreams. She loves music and appreciates its beauty, and the beauty of art and the poets."

"She can trail an animal through country that would throw many an Indian at fault."

"She hates the sordid. She hates the rum-runners, and the greasy, smoke-blackened teepees of the Indians. In her heart there has been an awakening. She longs for something better—higher. She has consented to go to the convent."

"And at the same time we are in mortal dread lest she marry that prince of all devils, Henri of the White Water. Why, she even dresses like an Indian—the only one of the older girls who does not wear the clothing of white women."

"That is because of her artistic temperament. She loves the ease and comfort of the Indian garments. And she realizes their beauty in comparison to the ugliness of the coarse clothing and shoes with which we must provide them."

"Where is she now?"

"Hunting."

Father Ambrose laughed. "And I predict that she will not return until she has brought down her caribou, or her moose. Would your white maiden of nineteen be off hunting alone in the hills with her rifle?

No. By our very contentions we have established the dual nature of her. In her the traits of civilization and savagery are not blended, but each in turn dominate and order her thoughts and actions. Hers is what one might term alternating ego. And it is a thing that troubles me sore. What will happen down there—down at the convent, where they will not understand her, and where there is no hunting? To what end will this marvelous energy exert itself? For it will not remain pent-up within her breast. It will seek outlet. And then?"

"Who can tell?" answered the nun thoughtfully. "At least, I shall be glad indeed to know that she will be far from the baleful influence of Henri of the White Water. For, devil that he is, there is no gainsaying the fact that there is something attractive about him, with his bold, free manner, and his handsome face, and gay clothing. He is a figure that might well attract a more sophisticated woman than our little Snowdrift. As yet, though, I think he has failed to rouse in her more than a passing interest. If she cared for him she would not be away hunting while every one else is eagerly watching for the brigade."

Father Ambrose shrugged. "'Tis past understanding—the way of a maid with a man. But see, here she comes now."

Both watched the lithe form that swung across the clearing from the bush. The girl was hatless, her mass of black hair, caught up and held in place by an ingenious twist of bark. Her face and full, rounded throat that rose gracefully from the open collar of a buckskin hunting-shirt, showed a rich hazel-brown in the slanting rays of the sun. Buckskin gloves protected her hands from the ever-present mosquitoes. A knee-length skirt of heavy cloth, a pair of deer-skin leggings tanned with the hair on, and Indian moccasins completed her costume.

"What luck?" greeted the priest.

The girl paused before them, and flashing a smile, disclosed a set of teeth that gleamed like wet pearls.

"Good luck," she answered. "A young bull caribou, and two wolves that were just closing in on a cow with a young calf. Every bullet went true. I shot three times. Has the brigade passed?"

The priest shook his head.

"No, not yet. They will have camped before this for the night."

As he spoke the girl's eyes strayed to the river, and at the extreme reach of glistening water they held.

"Look!" she cried. "They are coming now!"

Around the bend into view shot a scow, and another, and another, until the whole surface of the river seemed black with them. The playing children had seen them, too, and with wild whoops of delight they were racing for the bank, followed by the older Indian girls, and by Father Ambrose. For the annual coming of the brigade is an event in the north, bringing as it does the mail and the supplies for the whole year to these lonely dwellers of the far outlands.

Sister Mercedes remained seated upon her bench, and standing her rifle against the wall, Snowdrift sat down beside her, and in silence the two watched the scows swing shoreward in response to the strokes of the heavy sweeps, and listened to the exchange of shouted greetings.

Of all the rivermen, the bravest figure was that of Henri of the White Water. The two women could see him striding back and forth, issuing orders regarding the mooring of scows and the unloading of freight. They saw him pause suddenly in his restless pacing up and down, and eagerly scan the faces of the assembled group. Then his glance traveled back from the river and rested upon the two silent figures beside the door, and with a wave of his hand, he tossed the sack of mail to the waiting priest, and stepping past him, strode rapidly up the bank in the direction of the mission.

The face of Sister Mercedes hardened as she noted the flaunting air of the approaching man, his stocking cap of brilliant blue, his snow-white *capote* thrown open to reveal the flannel shirt of vivid red and black checks.

With a royal bow, he swept the blue stocking cap from his head and saluted the two upon the bench. "Ah-ha, greetings, *ma chères!* From Henri of the White

Water to the fairest flower of the north, and her—ah, guardian angel—*non?*" His lips flashed a smile, and he continued: "But there are times when even a guardian angel is not desired to be. Come with me, Snowdrift, and we will walk yonder to the edge of the bank, where we will still be within sight of the ever-watching eye of the church, but well out of hearing of its ever-listening ear. You see, Sister *religieuse,* I am a respector of your little laws!" He laughed aloud. "Ah, yes, Henri of the White Water is a great respector of laws, *voila!*"

Seating themselves upon the high bank of the river the two watched the sun dip slowly behind the scrub timber. And as the twilight deepened, the man talked rapidly and earnestly, while the girl listened in silence.

"And so," he concluded, "when the scows return, in one month from now, you shall leave this place forever. We shall go away and be married, and we will journey far, far up the rivers to the cities of the white men, and only upon occasion will we make flying trips into the north—to the trade."

"It is said that you trade hooch," said the girl. "I will not marry any man who trades hooch. I hate the traders of hooch."

"Ah-ha! *Ma chère!* Yes, I have now and then traded hooch. You see, I do not deny. Henri of the White Water must have adventure. But upon my soul, if you do not want me to trade hooch, I shall never trade another drop—*non.*"

"When the scows return in a month, I shall go with them," answered the girl dispassionately. "But not to be married. I am going to school—"

"To school! *Mon Dieu!* Have you not had enough of school? It is time you were finished with such foolishness. You, who are old enough to be the mother of children, talking of going to school! Bah! It is to laugh! And where would you go—to school?"

"To the convent, at Montreal."

"The devil take these meddlers!" cried the man, rising and pacing rapidly up and down. Then sudenly he paused, and looking down upon the girl, laughed aloud. "Ha, ha! You would go to Montreal! And what will you do when you get there? What will you say when they ask you who is your father? Eh, what will you tell them?"

The girl looked at him in wide-eyed surprise.

"Why, what do you mean? I shall tell them the truth—that my father is dead. Why should I not tell them that my father is dead? He was a good man. My mother has told me."

Again the man laughed, his laugh of cruel derision. "Such innocence! It is unbelievable! They will have nothing to do with you in the land of the white men. They will scorn you and look down upon you. You never had a father—"

The girl was upon her feet now, facing him with flashing eyes. "It is a lie! I did have a father! And he was a good man. He was not like the father of you, old Boussard, the drunken and thieving old hanger-on about the posts!"

"Aye, I grant you that the old devil is nothing to brag of. I do not point to him with the finger of pride, but he is nevertheless a produceable father. He and my Indian mother were married. I at least am no *enfant natural*—no *bâtarde!* No one can poke at me the finger of scorn, and draw aside in the passing, as from a thing unclean!"

The girl's face flamed red, and tears of rage welled from her eyes.

"I do not know what you are talking about," she cried. "But I do know that I hate you! I will find out what you mean—and then maybe I will kill you!" In her rage she sprang at the man's throat with her bare hands, but he easily thrust her aside, and sobbing, she ran toward the mission.

It was long after midnight that Snowdrift emerged from the room of Sister Mercedes. The girl had gone straight to the nun and asked questions, nor would she be denied their answers. And so explaining, comforting, as best she could, the good sister talked till far into the night.

Snowdrift had gone into the room an unsophisticated girl—she came out from it a woman—but a woman whose spirit, instead of being crushed and broken by the

weight of her shame, rose triumphant and defiant above it. For in her heart was bitter hatred against the white men, whose code of ethics brought shame upon the innocent head of one whose very existence was due to the lust of a man of their own race.

Silently the girl crossed the clearing to the building in which was her room, and very silently she made up a pack of her belongings. Then, taking the pack, and her rifle, she stole silently out of the door, and crossing the broad, open space, entered the bush. At the edge of the clearing she turned, and stood for a long time looking back at the mission with its little buildings huddled together in the moonlight. And then, with a choking sob that forced itself past her tight-pressed lips, she turned and plunged into the timber.

CHAPTER IV.

"ACE IN THE HOLE."

ON the outskirts of Dawson, city of tents and log buildings, Brent pitched his own tent, paid off his Indian canoeman, and within the hour was sucked into the mad maelstrom of carousal that characterized the early days of the big gold camp.

It was the city of men gone mad. The saloon was the center of activity—and saloons there were a-plenty; Dick Stoell's place, which was "the big game" of Dawson; the "Nugget," of uproarious fame; Cuter Malone's "Klondike Palace," where, nightly, revel raged to the *n*th power—where bearded men and scarlet women gave themselves over to debauch magnificent in its wild abandon; and many others, each with its wheels of chance, its cards, its music, and its women.

And into the whirl of it Carter Brent plunged with a zest born of youth and of muscles iron-hard from the gruelling trail. And into it he fitted as though to the manner born.

No invisible lines of demarcation divided the bars of Dawson as they had divided Kelliher's bar. Millionaires in blanket-coats and mukluks rubbed shoulders with penniless, watery-eyed squaw-men. Sourdoughs, who spilled coarse gold from the mouths of sacks; misfit *chechakos* and painted women danced and sang and cursed and gambled the short nights through.

The remnant of Brent's thousand dollars was but a drop in the bucket, and he was glad when it was gone three days after his arrival. Not that he particularly wanted to be "broke," but in the spending of it men had taken his measure—the bills and the coined gold had branded him as a man from the "outside," a *chechako*—a tenderfoot.

An hour after he had tossed his last yellow disk upon the bar in payment for a round of drinks he had hired out to Camillo Bill Waters to sluice gravel at an ounce a day. An ounce was sixteen dollars. Thereafter for the space of a month he was seen no more in Dawson.

Then one day he returned. He presented a slip of paper signed by Camillo Bill to the bartender at Stoell's and received therefore thirty ounces of gold—raw gold, in dust and nuggets. He bought a round of drinks, glorying in the fact that at last he, too, was spending coarse gold. He bet ten ounces on an Indian foot-race, and won. More drinks, and an hour later he bet his pile on a seven, a ten-spot, a deuce, and a king in a game of stud poker. Two players called the bet and he flipped over his hole-card—it was a seven-spot and again he won.

He quit the game and danced for an hour, and between dances he drank whisky. He got the hunch that this was his lucky day and that he could win, but the hunch called for quick, big bets, and not for long, continued play. He rode his hunch, and at Cuter Malone's wheel he tossed fifty ounces on No. 21. The ivory ball rolled slower and slower, hesitated on the 10, and then with a last turn settled into 21. He pocketed twenty-eight thousand dollars with a grin. The news of the bet spread swiftly and Brent became a man of sorts. Four times more that night he placed big bets—and three of the times he won.

One of these plays, also in a game of stud, earned him the name by which he became known in the north. With a king

and a queen showing in his own hand he mercilessly raised an exposed pair of jacks. Of the six other players in the game five dropped out. The holder of the jacks stayed for the last draw and checked the bet. Brent laid fifty thousand dollars on his cards, a king, a queen, an eight, and a four-spot. The other stared at the hand for a long time.

He was a man known for his nerve and his high play, and he knew that Brent knew this. Whispers of the big bet had gone about the room and men and women crowded the table. At length the other turned down his cards in token of surrender, and with a laugh Brent turned his hole-card face up. It was the ace of diamonds, and an audible gasp hissed from twenty throats. Thereafter Brent was known as Ace-in-the-Hole.

The next morning he deposited one hundred and thirty thousand dollars in Dick Stoell's safe, and his pockets still bulged with dust. For two days and nights he drank and danced, but not a card did he touch, nor did he lay any bet. When questione he answered that his hunch was not working. The sourdoughs respected him and treated him as an equal. He spent dust lavishly, but he did not throw it away.

Then suddenly he bought an outfit and disappeared. When the first snow flew he was back, and into Dick Stoell's safe went many sacks of raw gold. He drank harder than ever and spent gold more freely. His fame spread to other camps, and three men came up from the Circle to relieve him of his pile.

He was gambling regularly now, and in a game of stud he caught them at the trick by means of which they had won forty thousand dollars from him. Many miners, among them a goodly sprinkling of old-timers, were watching the play, and many of them had already detected the swindle, but after the custom of the country they held their peace. Brent never batted an eye upon discovering the trick, but when, a few moments later, it was repeated, things happened in Stoell's—and they happened with the rapidity of light.

One minute after the trouble started there was an ominous silence in the room. A circle of men stood and stared at the wreck of a table, across which sagged the body of a man killed with his own gun. Another man with his jaw shattered lay on the floor, and a third lay white and still across him with a wide, red mark on his forehead where a sack of gold-dust had caught him fair. And over all stood Brent with one leg jammed through the rungs of a broken chair.

The incident placed Ace-in-the-Hole in the foremost ranks of the big men of the north. He was regarded as the equal of such men as old Bettles, Camillo Bill Waters, Swiftwater Bill, and McMann. Sourdoughs sought his acquaintance and *chechakos* held him in awe.

When the snow lay deep he bought the best string of dogs he could find, hired an Indian musher, and again disappeared. He was back at Christmas for a two-weeks' carousal, and when he hit the trail again he carried with him several gallons of whisky. The sourdoughs shook their heads and exchanged glances at this, but a man's business is his own. In July he sent his Indian down for ten men to work his sluices and much whisky. In September he came down himself and he brought with him a half-million in gold.

Others had cleaned up big during the summer, and that winter saw Dawson's highest peak of wild orgies and wild spending. Riding a hunch when he first hit town Brent doubled and trebled his pile, and then with Jimmie the Rough, McMann, Camillo Bill, and a few others inaugurated such a campaign of reckless spending as the north had ever seen, and never again did see.

Brent was never sober now—and men said he never slept. He was the youngest and by far the strongest of the spenders, the urge of the game was in his blood, and he rode it as he rode his hunches—to the limit of his endurance. All men liked him—open-hearted, generous to the fault, and square as a die in his dealings, he spent his money like a prince. And where the men liked him the painted women worshiped him—but they worshiped from afar.

For, despite the utmost blandishments of the most intriguing of them, he treated all

alike—even Kitty, who men called "The Queen of the Yukon," failed to hold him in thrall. This dancing girl, who had taken the north by storm, who was the north's darling and beautiful plaything, whose boast it was that she had never sought any man, fell violently in love with Brent. Men saw it and marveled, for it was known in the camps that she had spurned men who had laid fortunes at her feet.

It was not that Brent feared women, rather he sought them. He danced with them, frolicked with them—and then promptly forgot them. His one real passion was gambling. Any game or device whereupon big bets could be laid found him an enthusiastic devotee. And his luck became a byword in the north.

"Some time your luck will change," warned the dancing girl as the two sat one evening in the early fall at a little table in Stoell's and drank champagne which cost Brent fifty dollars the quart. "And then you'll be broke and—"

Brent, who had been idly toying with the rings upon her fingers, returned the slender hand to the table.

"It can't change. It's a part of me. As long as I'm me, I'll be lucky. Look—I'll show you! You want to marry me—you've told me so. Well, I don't want to marry you, or any one else—wouldn't know what to do with you if I did marry you. You want me to go back on the claim— Well, here's a bargain—just to show you that I can't lose."

He pulled a buckskin sack full of gold from his pocket and held it before the girl's eyes.

"See this sack? It isn't very big. It can't cover many numbers. I'm going to stand up in this chair and toss it onto the roulette table over there, and play every number it touches.

"If I lose, I lose the dust—Stoell will get that. But that isn't all I'll lose—I'll lose myself—to you. If one of the numbers that this sack falls on don't win, I'll marry you to-night, and we'll hit for the claim tomorrow."

The girl stared at him, fascinated. "Do you mean that—you'll quit gambling—and you'll sober up and—and live with me?"

Again Brent laughed. "Yes, I'll quit gambling, and sober up, and live with you till—how does it go?—till death us do part."

"Toss it!" The words of the girl came short, with a curious indrawing of the breath, and her fingers clutched at the edge of the table till the knuckles whitened. The men who were crowded about the wheel glanced toward the table at the sound, and, standing in his chair, Brent waved them to fall back. Then he told them of his bet—while the dancing girl sat with parted lips, her eyes fastened upon his face.

The men at the wheel surged back to give room. The proposition caught their fancy. Ace-in-the-Hole, prince of gamblers, was betting himself—with the odds against him. And every man and woman in the room knew that if he lost he would keep his word to the last letter.

Carefully measuring the distance, Brent balanced the sack in his hand, then with a slow movement of his arm tossed it onto the table. It struck almost squarely in the center, covering Nos. 13, 14, 16, 17, 19, and 20. The croupier twirled the wheel and sent the ivory ball spinning on its way. The men who had been playing and the men from the bar crowded close, their eyes on the whirling disk. Brent sat down in his chair, lighted a cigarette, and filled the two empty champagne glasses from the bottle.

He glanced across at Kitty. She was leaning forward with her face buried in her arms. Her shoulders were heaving with quick, convulsive sobs. In Brent's heart rose sudden pity for this girl. What to him had been a mere prank, a caprice of the moment, was to her a thing of vital import. The black fox fur had fallen away from about her neck, exposing a bare shoulder that gleamed white in the light of the swinging lamp.

She looked little and helpless, and Brent felt a desire to take her in his arms and comfort her. He leaned toward her, half rose from his chair, and then, at a sound from the table, settled back.

"No. 13 wins," announced the croupier, and the room was suddenly filled with the voices of many men. The croupier scrib-

bled a notation upon a piece of paper and, together with the sack of dust, laid it upon the table between Brent and the girl. A moment later she raised her head and stared, dry-eyed, into Brent's face.

"Here, little girl," he said gently. "Forgive me. I didn't know you really felt—that way. Here, this is all yours—take it. The bet paid six to one. The weigher will cash this slip at the bar."

With a swift motion of her hand the girl swept sack and slip to the floor. "Oh, I—I hope you *die!*" she cried hysterically and, gathering her wrap about her, sped from the room.

CHAPTER V.

LUCK TURNS.

BEFORE the advent of the tin-horns, who invaded the Yukon at the time of the big rush, a "limit" in a poker game was a thing unknown. "Table stakes" did not exist, nor did a man mention the amount he stood to lose when he sat in a game.

When a player took his seat it was understood that he stood good for all he possessed of property, whatever or wherever it might be. If the play on any hand ran beyond his pile, all he had to do was to announce the fact, and the other players would either draw down to it, or if they wished to continue the play, the pot, including the amount of the "short" player's last bet, was pushed aside until the last call was made, the short player only participating in the portion of the pot so set aside.

If, in the final show-down, his hand was the highest, he raked in this pot, and the next high hand collected the subsequent bets.

Stud poker was the play most favored by Brent, and when he sat in a game the table soon became rimmed with spectators. Other games would break up that the players might look on, and they were generally rewarded by seeing plenty of action. It was Brent's custom to trail along for a dozen hands or more, simply calling moderate bets on good hands, or turning down his cards at the second or third card. Then, suddenly, he would shove out an enormous bet, preferably raising a pair when his own hand showed nothing.

If this happened on the second or third card dealt, it invariably gave the other players pause, for they knew that each succeeding bet would be higher than the first, and that if they stayed for the final call they would stand to lose heavily, if not be actually wiped out.

But they knew also that the bet was as apt to be made on nothing as on a good hand, and should they drop out they must pass up the opportunity to make a killing.

Another whim of Brent's was always to expose his hole card after the play, a trick that aggravated his opponents as much as it amused the spectators.

The result was that many players had fallen into the habit of dropping out of a game when Ace-in-the-Hole sat in—not because they disliked him personally, but because, as they openly admitted, they were afraid of his play. Many of these spent hours watching his cards. Not a man among them but knew that he was as square as a die, but every man among them knew that his phenomenal luck must some time desert him, and when that time came they intended to be in at the killing. For only Brent himself believed that his luck would hold—believed it was as much a part of himself as the color of his hair or his eyes.

Among those who refused to play was Johnny Claw from whom Brent had won ten thousand dollars a month before on three successive hands—two cold bluffs, and a club in the hole with four clubs showing, against Claw's king in the hole with two kings showing.

Unlike the others who had lost to him, Claw nursed a bitter and secret hatred for him, and he determined that when luck did turn he would profit to the limit of his pile.

Johnny Claw was one of the few old-timers whom men distrusted. He was a squaw-man who had trapped and traded in the country as far back as any man could remember. With the coming of more white men, and the establishment of saloons along

the river, Claw had ceased his trapping, and had confined his trading to the illicit peddling of hootch, for the most part among the Indians of the interior, and to that uglier but more profitable traffic that filled the brothels and dance-halls of the Yukon with the painted women from the "outside." So Claw moved among his compeers as a man despised, yet accepted, because he was of the north and of the civilization thereof a component part.

Brent's luck held until the night before Thanksgiving, then the inevitable happened—he began to lose. At the roulette wheel and the faro table he lost twenty-five thousand dollars, and later, in a game of stud, he dropped one hundred thousand more. The loss did not worry him any; he drank a little more than usual during the play, and his plunges came a little more frequently, but the cards were not falling his way, and when they did fall he almost invariably ran them up against a stronger hand.

Rumor that the luck of Ace-in-the-Hole had changed at last spread rapidly through the camp, and late in the afternoon of Thanksgiving Day, when the play was resumed, spectators crowded the table ten deep. Men estimated Brent's winnings at anywhere from one to five millions, and there was an electric thrill in the air as the players settled themselves in their chairs and counted their stakes of chips.

The game was limited to eight players, and Camillo Bill Waters, arriving too late to be included, promptly bought the seat of a prospector named Troy, paying therefor twenty thousand dollars in dust.

"We're after yer hide," he grinned good-naturedly at Brent, "an' I'm backin' the hunch that we're a goin' to hang it on the fence this day."

"Come and get it!" laughed Brent. "But I'll give you fair warning that I wear it tight, and before you rip it off some one's going to get hurt." Cards in hand, he glanced at the tense faces around the board. "I've got a hunch that this game is going to make history on the Yukon," he smiled, "and it better be opened formally with a good stiff round of drinks."

While they waited for the liquor his eye fell upon the face of Johnny Claw, who sat at the table, the second man from his right. "I thought you wouldn't sit in a game with me?" he asked truculently.

"An' I wouldn't, neither, while yer luck was runnin'—but it's different now. Yer luck's busted—an' you'll be busted. An' I'm right here to git my money back an' some of your'n along with it."

Brent laughed. "You won't be in the game an hour, Claw. I don't like you, and I don't like your business, and the best thing you can do is to cash in right now before the game starts."

A moment of tense silence followed Brent's words, for among the men of the Yukon open insult must be wiped out in blood. But Claw made no move except to reach out and finger a stack of chips, while men shot sidewise glances into each other's faces. The stack of chips rattled upon the cloth under the play of his nervous fingers; and Kitty, who had taken her position directly behind Brent with a small slippered foot upon a rung of his chair, tittered. Claw took his cue from the sound and laughed loudly.

"I'll play my cards, an' you play your'n, an' I'll do my cashin' in later," he answered. "An' here's the drinks, so le's liquor an' git to goin'."

He downed his whisky at a gulp, the bartender removed the empty glasses, and the big game was on.

The play ran rather cautiously at first, even more cautiously than usual. But there was an unwonted tenseness in the atmosphere. Each man had bought ten thousand dollars of chips, with the white chips at one hundred dollars, the reds at five hundred, and blues at a thousand—and each man knew that his stack was only a shoestring.

After five or six deals Camillo Bill, who sat directly across the table from Brent, tossed in a red chip on his third card, which was a queen. Claw stayed, the next man folded, and Brent, who showed a seven and a nine spot, raised a thousand. The others dropped, and Camillo Bill saw the raise. Claw, whose exposed cards were a ten-spot and a jack, hesitated for a moment, and tossed in a blue chip.

Camillo Bill's next card was an ace; Claw paired his jack, and Brent drew a six-spot. With a grin at Brent, Claw pushed in a blue chip, and without hesitation Brent dropped in four blue ones, raising Claw three thousand. Camillo Bill studied the cards, tilted his hole card and glanced at its corner, and raised Brent two thousand. Claw also surveyed the cards.

"Ye're holdin' a four-straight damn high," he snarled at Brent, "but I've got mine—my pair of jacks has got anything you've got beat, an' Camillo hain't got no pair of queens or he'd of boosted yer other bet. I'd orto raise, but I'll jest stay." And he dropped five blue chips into the pot.

Camillo Bill paired his ace with the last card, Claw drew a deuce, and Brent a ten-spot. Camillo Bill bet a white chip; Claw stared at Brent's cards for a few moments, and merely called, and Brent laughed:

"Here's your white chip, Bill, and I'll just lift it ten thousand—I'm that much light in the pot for a minute."

Camillo Bill called after a moment's deliberation, and Claw sat staring at the pot. He had just two blue chips left before him.

"I ain't got ten thousan'," he whined. "I figger I've got about five thousan' outside this here stack, an' if I call fer that an' lose I'm busted flat."

His hand pushed the two blue chips toward the pot, hesitated, and was quickly withdrawn.

"Damned if I do!" he snarled. "My jacks-up ain't worth it—not ag'in' luck like your'n." He turned over his hole card, which was a deuce, and again Brent laughed and flipped his hole card over. It was the king of spades.

"I haven't got a damned thing, and I never did have. What have you got buried, Bill? Another ace?"

Camillo Bill grinned and shook his head. "Nope. My down card's a king, too. All I got is them pair of aces. Where's yer guts, Claw?"

Claw glared at Brent as the latter bought a new stack of chips, scribbled an I. O. U. for ten thousand upon a scrap of paper, and tossed it across to Camillo Bill. Then, clutching his two chips, he rose from the table.

"You jest done that to git me!" he growled. "I ain't got no show in this game—if you can't beat me yerself you'll run me up ag'in' a better hand till I'm busted, if you lose money doin' it!"

"You've got it doped right, Claw," said Brent evenly. "I told you you wouldn't last an hour, and if you'd have listened to me you'd have been eight thousand better off. Your hour isn't up yet; we've got plenty of time to get the rest of it."

"You'll raise hell gittin' the rest of it!" muttered the man, and as he walked toward the bar Troy, who had sold his seat to Camillo Bill, slipped into the vacated chair.

The incident served to liven up the game, and thereafter red and blue chips outnumbered the whites ones in nearly every pot.

There was no thought of stopping for supper, and when the game broke up long past midnight Brent had lost three hundred thousand dollars. He turned to Kitty, who had never left her post at the back of his chair.

"Come on, girl, lets go find something to eat and some fuzzy water," he smiled. "They sure had my number to-night, but I'll go after them to-morrow."

Brent ordered and drank three glasses of whisky while waiting for the meal to be served, and after it was over the girl leaned back in her chair and studied him as she sipped her champagne.

"You're different than you were a year ago," she said.

Brent laughed: "Sure, I was a poor man then—"

The girl straightened in her chair and interrupted him abruptly. "And you'll never amount to a *damn* until you're a poor man again!" she exclaimed, with such feeling that Brent stared at her in surprise.

"What! What do you mean?"

"I mean just what I said. A year ago you were *some man*. Folks say you're a mining engineer—educated in a college. What are you now? You're a gam, that's what you are, and the hooch is putting its mark on you, too—and it's a shame."

"What in the world is the matter with

you, Kitty?" The man stared at her in surprise. "The hooch don't hurt me any—and I only play for the fun of the game—"

"No, you don't! You play because it's got into your blood, and you can't help playing. And you'll keep on playing till you're busted, and it'll be a good thing when you are! Your luck has changed now, and they'll get you."

"I'm still playing on their money," retorted Brent a little nettled at the girl's attack. "If they clean me out, all right. They'll only win the half million I took out of my two claims—the rest of it I took away from them. Anyway, whose business is it?" he added sullenly.

"It ain't nobody's business but yours. "I—I wish to God it was mine. Everybody knows the hooch is getting you—and that is just what they all say—it's a shame—but it's his own business. I'm the only one that could say anything to you, and I'm—I'm sorry I did."

"They're right—it's my business, and no one else's. If they think I'm so damned far gone let them come and get my pile—I'll still have the claims, and I'll go out and bring in another stake and go after them harder than ever!"

"No, you won't—they'll get the claims, too. And you won't have the nerve nor the muscles to go out and make another strike. When you once bust, you'll be a bum—a has-been—*right*."

"I suppose," sneered Brent, thoroughly angry now, "that I should marry you and hit out for the claim, so we could keep what's left in the family—and you'd be the family."

The girl laughed a trifle hysterically.

"No—I wouldn't marry you on a bet—now. I was foolish enough to think of it once—but not now. I've done some thinking since that night you tossed that sack of dust on the board. If you married me and did go back to where you were—if you quit the cards and the hooch and got down to be what you ought to be—where would I stand? Who am I, and what am I? You would stick by your bargain—but you wouldn't want me. You could never go back outside—with *me*. And if you wouldn't quit the cards and the hooch, I wouldn't have *you*—not like you are now—flabby, and muddy-eyed, and your breath so heavy with rot-gut you could light it with a match. No, that dream's busted, and inside of a week you'll be busted, too."

Setting down her glass, the girl quitted the table abruptly, leaving Brent to finish the bottle of champagne alone, after which he sauntered down to Cuter Malone's "Klondike Palace" and made a night of it, drinking and dancing.

The week that followed was a week of almost unbroken losses for Brent. In vain he plunged, betting his cards wilder and more recklessly than ever before, trying to force his luck, but it only hastened the end, which came about midnight upon the Thursday following Thanksgiving Day, at the moment he looked into the eyes of Camillo Bill Waters and called a bet of fifty thousand.

"That's good," he announced as Bill showed aces-up. "And that just finishes me—I held the claims at a million, and that's the last of it."

CHAPTER VI.

ON THE TOBOGGAN.

ON the morning after the final game of stud in which he had slipped the last dollar of his fortune across the green cloth, Brent threw back his blankets and robes and sat upon the edge of his bunk. He had long since discarded his tent for a cabin, and his eyes took in the details of the rough furnishings in the gray light that filtered through the heavily frosted window-panes.

He drew on his shirt and trousers and glanced at his watch. It was ten o'clock. He built a roaring fire, broke the ice that had formed upon the surface of a huge pail of water, filled his coffee-pot, and set his wash-pan beside it upon the stove. Then he returned to his bunk and, feeling beneath his pillow, withdrew a flat quart bottle and took a long drink.

When the water had warmed in the pan, he shaved before a small mirror that hung

above his rude wash-stand. Twice during the process he returned to the bottle for a swallow of liquor.

"Kitty was right," he confided to his reflection in the glass. "My luck did turn—and now I'm broke."

He finished shaving and, as he was about to leave the wash-stand, paused and thrust his face close to the mirror, subjecting it to careful scrutiny.

"Eyes *are* a little muddy," he grudgingly admitted, "and face a bit pouchy and red; but, hell, it isn't the hooch! I don't drink enough to hurt me any. It's being indoors so much, and the smoke. Two days on the trail will fix that. I've got to slip out and make another strike. And when I come back—that bunch will be in for an awful cleaning."

He threw a handful of coffee into the pot, sliced some bacon into a frying pan, and when the grease ran he broke a half-dozen eggs and scrambled them with the bacon.

"She said I wouldn't have the nerve nor the muscles to hit out and locate another claim," he grinned as he swallowed a draft of scalding coffee. "I'll show her!"

He finished his meal, washed the dishes, and drew on his mukluks and blanket coat. As he opened the door he was met by a blast of wind-driven snow that fairly took his breath, and drew back into the room.

"I thought it was pretty dark in here for this time of day—some blizzard!"

He drew down the ear-flaps of his fur cap, hunted up his heavy mittens, and, once more opening the door, pushed out into the storm.

Twenty minutes later he entered Stoell's place, and as he stamped the snow from his garments and beat it from his cap and mittens, Camillo Bill greeted him.

"Hello, Ace-in-the-Hole! I'm buyin' a drink." The room was deserted except for the bartender, who promptly set out bottle and glasses. "Let's go over here," suggested Camillo Bill when the empty glasses had been returned to the bar. He led the way to a small table.

"Bring the bottle and glasses!" called Brent over his shoulder, and Camillo Bill seconded the order with a nod.

"Now," he began as Brent filled his glass, "let's get this here deal straightened out. In the first place, is them two claims of your'n worth a million?"

Brent flushed hotly, but Camillo Bill forestalled his reply. "Hold on now. I didn't mean what you're thinkin' about—an' you orto know me well enough to know I didn't. When you said them two claims was worth a million, not me nor no one else questioned your word, did we? Well, what I'm gettin' at is, are they worth more than a million, an' how much more?"

Brent laughed. "They're worth more than a million. How much more I don't know. I took out half a million last summer, and I don't think I'm half-way to bedrock at the deepest."

Camillo Bill nodded. "All right, that's what I wanted to know. You see, there's five or six of us holds your slips an' markers that totals a million over an' above what was in Stoell's safe. I'll jest cash them slips an' markers, an' take over the claims."

Brent shrugged. "Go ahead. It don't make any difference to me how you divide them up."

Camillo Bill grinned. "It does make a hell of a lot of difference to you how we divide 'em up," he said. "It's like this: I like your style. You're a *tillicum*—a natural-borned sourdough. You're white clean through. When you said there's so and so much in Stoell's safe, the dust was there. An' when you knowed yer claims was worth more than a million, you says a million instead of stretchin' it to two million, an' maybe stickin' some one. Now when I cash them markers that's out ag'in' the claims, an' figger in the slips an' markers I hold myself, I'll have a million invested, won't I? An' that's what I won—a million—not a million an' a half, or two million—just a million. Well, when I get that million back, you get the claims back—see?"

Brent stared at the man in amazement. "What do you mean? I lost the claims—lost them fair and square—"

"No, you didn't," interrupted the other. "You lost just what yer slips an' markers says you lose—an' not a damn cent more.

The claims was only a sort of security for the dust. C'latteral the banks would call it. Am I right or wrong?"

Brent drank the whisky in his glass, and, refilling it, shoved the bottle toward Camillo Bill, but the man shook his head. "No more for me. Too much of that stuff ain't no good. But about them claims—am I right or wrong?"

"You're the whitest damned white man that walks on two legs, if that's what you mean," answered Brent in a low voice. I'll make the claims over to you now."

"Don't say that," replied Camillo Bill. "They was five or six of us that figgered out this play—all friends of your'n. We all of us agreed to do what I'm doin'—it was only a question of who could afford to carry the load till next fall. I kin. Right's right—an' wrong ain't deuce-high nowheres. A million's a million—an' it ain't two million. An' you don't need to make over them claims to me, either. Jest you sign a paper givin' me the right to go into 'em an' take out a million, an' we'll tear up them slips an' markers."

"But what if there isn't a million in them? I believe there is—much more than a million. But what if they're 'spotted,' and I just happened to hit the spots, or what if bed-rock shows a lot shallower than I think it will—"

"What if! What if! To hell with what if! If the claims peter out I ain't no better off if I hold title to 'em, am I? If they ain't good for the million, what the hell difference does it make who owns 'em? I'd ruther some one else holds a bum claim than me, any day," he added with a grin. "An' now that's settled, what you goin' to do while I'm gettin' out my dust?"

Brent drank his liquor and reached for the bottle. "Why, I'm going to hit out and locate another strike," he said, a trifle thickly.

Camillo Bill regarded him thoughtfully. "Where at?"

"Why, I don't know. There are plenty of creeks—Eldorado—Ophir—Doolittle—"

The other laughed. "Listen here," he said. "While you be'n here in town rollin' 'em high an' soppin' up hooch, they'se be'n a hell of a change on the creeks. Ain't you stopped to notice that Dawson's more'n twict as big as she was in August, an' that the country is gittin' full of tin-horns an' *chechakos?* Well, it is—an' every creek's filed that's worth a damn—an' so's every one that ain't. They ain't a claim to be took up no more on Bonanza, nor Ophir, nor Siwash, nor Eldorado, nor Alhambra, nor Sulphur, nor Excelsis, nor Christo, nor Doolittle, nor not hardly none on no pup nor dry wash that runs into 'em."

"All right—I'll go farther then," retorted Brent, pouring more liquor into his glass. "I'll go beyond the last creek that's staked. And, by Heaven, I'll find gold!"

Camillo Bill shook his head. "Look-a here," he said, "you ain't in no shape to hit out on no long trip. You've laid up too long to tackle it, an' you've drunk to much of that damned hooch. It ain't none of my business what you do, or what you don't do—maybe you ain't drinkin' enough of it, I don't know. But that there's damn poor stuff to train on for a long trail in winter—an' I'm tellin' it to you that winter's sure hit these diggin's, an' hit 'em hard. Tell you what I'll do. I've be'n nosin' round buyin' claims while you be'n layin' abed daytimes sleepin' off the hooch. I've got more'n what I kin 'tend to alone. I'll give you two thousand a month to help me look after 'em, an' you can sort of ease off the hooch, an' get broke in easy agin. If you sleep nights, an' keep outdoors daytimes, an' lay off the cards an' the hooch, you'll be good as ever agin spring."

"Not on your life!" flared Brent. "I'm as good a man right now as I ever was! And a damn sight too good a man to be anybody's pensioner. You know damned well that you don't need me at two thousand a month, or any other figure, except at an ounce a day, the same as any one else gets. What the hell's the matter with everybody?" A querulous note had crept into Brent's voice. "I tell you I'm as good a man as I ever was! Kitty told me the same thing—that I'm drinking too much! Whose business is it if I am? But I'm not, and I'll hit the trail to-morrow and show you all!"

"So-long," said Camillo Bill as he rose from his chair. "I told you it wasn't no

one's business but your'n, so they ain't no argyment there. Only, jest you remember that I'm a friend of your'n, an' so is Kitty—an' a man might have a damn sight worse friend than her at that."

Later in the day Stoell accosted Brent as he stood drinking alone at the bar. "They romped right up your middle, didn't they, the last week or so?"

Brent nodded. "They cleaned me out. I played them too high for the cards I was holding."

"What you figuring on doing now?"

"Going to hit out and locate another claim when this storm lets up."

"You've got a long trip ahead. Everything's staked."

"So they say; but I guess I'll find something somewhere."

"Why don't you take an inside job this winter? Hell of a lot of grief out there in the snow with only a tent and a bunch of huskies?"

"What kind of a job?"

"I'm figuring on starting up a new layout—faro. How'd you like to deal? Just till spring, when the weather lets up a little. You can't tell what you're staking under ten foot of snow anyhow."

"I never dealt faro."

"It won't take you long to learn. I only run one big game now because I can't trust no one to deal another—but I could get plenty of play on one if I had it going. I figure that the boys all like you and you'd be a good card. They all know you're square, and I'd get a good play on your layout. What do you say? It's a damn sight better than mushin' out there in the cold."

"What will you pay?"

"Well, how would five hundred a month and five per cent of the winnings of the layout do? You wouldn't need to come on till around nine in the evening and stay till the play was through. I'll throw in your supper, and dinner at midnight, and we won't keep any bar tab. You're welcome to what drinks you want—only you've got to keep sober when you're on shift."

Brent did not answer immediately. A couple of men came through the door in a whirl of flying snow, and he shivered slightly as the blast of cold air struck him. Stoell was right—there would be a hell of a lot of grief out there on the long snow trail.

"I guess I'll take you up on that," he said. "When do I start?"

"It 'll take me a day or so to get rigged up. Let's make it day after to-morrow night. Meantime you can do your eating and drinking here—just make yourself at home. The boys 'll be tickled when they hear the news—it 'll spread around the camp pretty lively that you're dealing faro at Stoell's, and we'll get good play—see?"

During the next two days Brent spent much time in Stoell's, drinking at the bar, and watching the preparation of the new layout over which he was to preside. And to him there, at different times, came eight or ten of the sourdoughs of the Yukon, each with a gruff offer of assistance, but carefully couched in words that could give no offense.

"You'll be on yer feet agin 'fore long. If you need any change in the mean time, just holler," imparted one. Said another: "Here, jest slip this poke in yer jeans. I ain't needin' it. Somethin' 'll turn up d'rectly, an' you can slip it back then."

But Brent declined all offers, with thanks. And to each he explained that he had a job, and each, when he learned the nature of the job, either answered rather evasively or congratulated him in terms that somehow seemed lacking in enthusiasm.

Old Bettles was the only man to voice open disapproval.

"Hell," he blurted out, "any one c'n deal faro. Any one c'n gamble with another man's money, an' eat another man's grub, an' drink another man's booch. But it's along the cricks an' the gulches you find the reg'lar he-man sourdoughs."

At the words of this oldest settler on the Yukon, Brent strangely took no offense. Rather he sought to excuse his choice of profession.

"I'm only doing it till spring, then I'm going to hit into the hills, and when I come back we'll play them higher than ever," he explained. "I'm a little soft now and don't feel quite up to tackling the winter trail."

"Humph," grunted Bettles. "You won't be comin' back—because you ain't never goin' to go. If ye're soft now, you'll be a

damn sight softer ag'in' spring. Dealin' from a box an' lappin' up hooch ain't a goin' to put you in shape for to chaw moose meat an' wrastle a hundred-pound pack. It 'll sap yer guts."

But Brent laughed at the old man's warning, and the next evening took his place behind the layout with the cards spread before him.

As Stoell had predicted, Brent proved to be a great drawing card for the gambling-house. Play at his layout ran high, and the table was always crowded. But nearly all the players were *chechakos*—men new to the country, who had struck it lucky, and were intent upon making a big splash. Among these tin-horns and four-flushers Ace-in-the-Hole was a deity. For among petty players he was a prince of gamblers. Rumors and fantastic lies were rife at all the bars concerning his deeds. "He had cleaned up ten millions in a summer on a claim." "He had killed three men with three blows of his fist." "The Queen of the Yukon was all caked in on him, and he wouldn't have her. He tossed her a slip for half a million that he had won on a single bet at the wheel, and because she was sore at him she ground it into the floor with her foot." "He had bet a million on an ace in the hole—hence his name." "He had gambled away twenty million in a week." And so it went.

Men fell over themselves to make his acquaintance that they might ostentatiously boast of that acquaintance at the bars. One would casually mention that "Ace-in-the-Hole says to me, the other day, he says—" Or, "I was tellin' Ace-in-the-Hole about one time I an' a couple of dames down in Frisco—" Or, "Me an' Ace-in-the-Hole was eatin' supper the other night, an' he says to me—"

It was inevitable that this sudden popularity should in a measure turn Brent's head. Personally, he detested the loud-mouthed fawning *chechakos,* but as his association with them grew his comradery with the real sourdoughs diminished. They did not openly or purposely cut him. They still greeted him as an equal; they drank with him, and occasionally they took a fling at his game. But there was a difference that Brent was quick to notice, and quick to resent, but powerless to dispel. He was a professional gambler now—and they were mining men—that was all.

Only once since he had taken up his new vocation had he seen Kitty. She had come into Stoell's one evening, and, slipping behind the table, stood at his elbow until the end of the deal. As he shuffled the cards preparatory to returning them to the box, she placed her lips close to his ear.

"Who are all your friends?" she whispered, indicating the tin-horns and *chechakas* that rimmed the table.

Brent flushed and answered nothing.

"So this is what you meant by hitting the trail when they broke you, is it?" Kitty went on. "Well, take it from me, it's a short trail, and a steep grade slanting down, and when you're on the toboggan it ain't going to take long to hit the bottom—with a bump."

And before Brent could reply she had slipped away and lost herself in the crowd.

Night after night, although his eyes sought the crowd, he never saw her again, nor did he find her upon his excursions to the Nugget, or to Cuter Malone's Klondike Palace. If she were purposely avoiding him she was succeeding admirably.

Along in February, Brent was surprised one day to receive, in his own cabin, a visit from Johnny Claw.

"What do you want?" he asked as the man stood in the doorway.

Claw entered, closing the door behind him. He removed his cap and mittens, and fumbling beneath his parka produced a sealed bottle of whisky, which he set upon the table. "Oh, jest dropped in fer a little visit. Been 'outside.' Try a shot of this hooch—better'n anything Stoell's got."

Brent sat down upon the edge of his bunk and motioned the man to a chair.

"Didn't know that you were so damned friendly with me that you would lug me in a bottle of hooch from the outside," he said. "What's on your chest?"

Claw produced a corkscrew and opened the bottle, then he poured a half tumbler into each of two glasses.

"Le's liquor," he said, offering one to Brent. "Good stuff, ain't it?"

Brent nodded. "Damned good. But what's the idea?"

"Idee is jest this," announced Claw, eying him shrewdly. "You damn near busted me, but I ain't holdin' that ag'in' you." He paused, and Brent, who knew that he was lying, waited for him to proceed. "You told me right plain out that you didn't like the business I was in! That's all right, too. I s'pose it ain't no hell of a good business, but some one's got to bring 'em in, or you bucks wouldn't have nobody to dance with. But, layin' all that aside, you're dealin' the big game for Stoell."

"Yup."

"Well, listen: You're hittin' the hooch too hard fer to suit Stoell. At the end of the month you're out of a job—see? He's goin' to let you out, 'cause ye're showin' up too reg'lar with a bun on. Says it's got to where ye're crocked so often he might's well be dealin' the game hisself."

"Who did he tell this to—you?"

The other leered. "Naw, not to me. He don't like me no more'n what you do. But I happened to hear him tellin' it to Old Bettles an' Camillo Bill. 'That's right,' says Bettles. 'Fire him, an' maybe we kin git him into the hills.' 'I'm 'fraid not,' says Camillo Bill. 'Leastways not till spring. An' at the rate he's goin', by that time he'll be countin' bees.' 'It's a shame,' says Bettles. 'There's a damn good man gone wrong.' 'He is a damn good man,' says Stoell. 'They ain't many I'd trust to deal that big game. He's square as hell—but the hooch has got him.'"

"The hell it has," said Brent with a short laugh. "They're damned fools! I don't drink enough to hurt me any. I'm as good a man as I ever was!"

"Sure you be," assented Claw. "What little you drink wouldn't hurt no one. What's it any of their business? You don't need no guardian to tell you when to take a drink." He paused and refilled Brent's glass. "Ye're 'square as hell,' says Stoell—but what's it gittin' you? He's goin' to fire you, ain't he?"

"Well?"

"Well—why not git even with him, an' at the same time clean up big fer yerself? They ain't no chanct to git caught."

"What do you mean?" Brent's voice rasped a trifle harshly, but Claw did not notice.

"I got it all doped out. Cold deck him—an' I'll play ag'in' the fixed deck an' make a cleanin'—an' we'll split."

"You mean—"

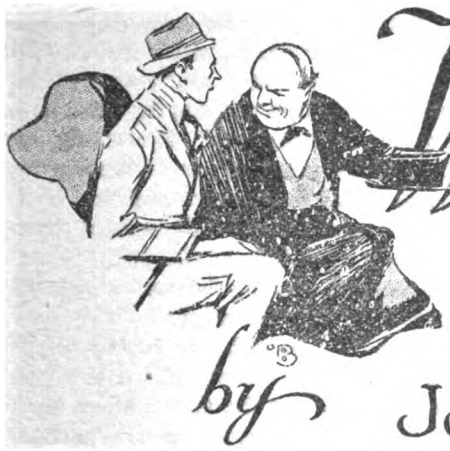
"I mean this. Me an' you will fix up a deck, an' I'll copy off how the cards lays. Then you slip 'em into the box an' start the deal, an' I'll lay the bets. Of course, knowin' how they'll fall, I kin win whenever I want to. No one 'll ever b'lieve it's a frame-up, 'cause they know you're square, an' likewise they know you hate me, an' they wouldn't figger we'd git together. I'll make the play strong by comin' in fer a night er two before we spring it an' braggin' that I've got a system. Then I'll have my slip of paper an' I'll look at it, an' make bets, an' of course I'll lose—'cause they ain't no system. An' the next night I'll do the same, an' the third night we'll slip in the fixed deck—an' then my system 'll win. An' all the time I'll be sneerin' at you, like I hated yer guts—"

The sentence was never finished. In a blind rage Brent hurled himself upon the man, and both crashed to the floor together. The fight was fast and furious while it lasted. But, flabby, and with his brain befuddled with liquor, Brent was no match for the other, who a year before he could have killed with his bare hands. He got in several good blows at the start, which slowed up his antagonist and rendered him incapable of inflicting serious damage later, when Brent, winded and gasping, was completely at his mercy.

A referee would unhesitatingly have declared it Claw's fight, for when he slipped from the cabin it was to leave Brent nursing two half-closed and rapidly purpling eyes, with nose and lips to match.

When, four days later, he showed up at Stoell's, the latter called him aside and, weighing out what was coming to him in dust, informed him that his services were no longer required.

(To be continued NEXT WEEK.)



Working People

by John Wilstach

IT was quite a problem to Jack Vandertop just which hotel he should honor with his patronage.

A taxi-driver took the jaunty pigskin bag from his hand, and he followed the man to a machine, looking quite a dashing figure in his English tweed suit and Panama hat, rakishly cocked on one side.

One hand in pocket he idly played with some coins, jingling them. As a matter of fact, he was counting them with practised fingers. Five quarters and three dimes and a nickel; one dollar and sixty cents.

Aside from his wits all that Vandertop had in the world was a passable-looking trunk, decorated with many pretty labels.

What hotel should he go to? It must be a good one, among the very best; ah, the Waldmore would do.

"Driver, the Waldmore," commanded Vandertop, and sank back in the cushions with a sigh of relief.

He never worried, nor planned ahead. Just now he was returning to the city after several years' absence in the West, where he had promoted himself in—and out—of a movie company that supported a number of players, but couldn't support itself.

Indeed, he felt like a nice rest in the big city, at whose cost troubled him not at all. He had picked the Waldmore because it was expensive and exclusive. At cheap hotels one is insulted by being asked to pay in advance, or annoyed immediately by bills.

The Waldmore was close to Fifth Avenue, and as the car swung in front of the door, Vandertop realized, with annoyance, that he would have to deplete his bank-roll to the extent of paying for the machine.

Sure enough, he was obliged to part gracefully with sixty cents, ten of which was a tip, and then, with a dollar left in his pocket, but looking like a young millionaire, he breezed into the lobby after the boy carrying his bag.

Appearances are a great factor in this world of snap judgments: there is no financial X-ray machine that can let another know how much money you have concealed in your pockets.

Vandertop signed the register with a swagger.

"A small suite will do for now," he said, "for I haven't my man with me. Later on when I shall have some informal business conferences here I shall need larger quarters."

"I hope you will be pleased," answered the clerk humbly. "Will you kindly look at a suite recently occupied by Mr. Griffith?"

"Certainly. I met him in the West. We both have big picture interests; of course I'm only in the business end of the game."

He followed a uniformed attendant to a handsomely furnished series of rooms, third floor front, which Vandertop said would suit him nicely.

"Never ask the price of things," he chuckled to himself, "and you naturally give the impression of money. I'll wash up, and then touch the cashier for some ready cash. Very embarrassing to be without

currency; but as long as you look like it you can get by."

Just as Vandertop had removed some of the stains of travel the telephone rang.

It was the manager of the hotel on the wire.

" Mr. Vandertop, we have a hotel publicity man to interview our more prominent guests, who are always gracious. May we send him up for a few minutes?"

" Never too busy to oblige," replied Vandertop cheerily, " I shall wait in for him."

Right then he started to think fast.

It was his theory, founded on a long experience of getting things for nothing when in a hole, for a week or a month—or a year—never to call attention to the past. It was dead and gone, an outworn thing in all men's lives.

But the rosy future, beckoning like a fairy with an armful of flowers! One couldn't really lie about that. For who could tell what *might* possibly take place, and it was in the future that all men's hopes were always cradled in the arms of beautiful dreams.

So he had no idea of calling attention to his recent experiences with the movies; they had indeed been a case of " fade in " and " fade out "—the later process transpiring at the same time as the closure of the Fearless Photoplay Company, an expensive investment that had eaten up the studio, eaten up the profits—in fact, had eaten up everything except the actors, and had only stopped there, probably, because they were indigestible. Vandertop had himself only got out with enough money to get East, " to start anew," as Horatio Alger used to say.

No, he would have to think up something original, and plant it a little ahead. If he only had some relatives to leave him a fortune.

But aside from an Uncle Bertrand, who lived in Brazil, he had no near connections that he knew of.

Suddenly Vandertop clapped a hand to his brow and laughed quietly to himself.

Why not kill off Uncle Bertrand? The old soul would be none the wiser and it would give him a breathing spell to look around and find out where real money grew in this man's town.

Brazil was far, far away, and he had always connected it with the place where the nuts come from. But stay, as the hero says, wasn't that the country that had the big rubber plantations? Everybody, except those folks who for some unknown reason boasted that they never wore them on rainy days, was addicted to the sensible habit of rubbers; and look at all the tires on the automobiles, making the contents of rubber-trees wear themselves out!

He would be a future rubber king.

As Vandertop thus decided there was a modest knock at the door, and at his word of welcome, it opened, and a young man entered, to be greeted with graciousness personified.

" Yes, I have just been called from the West," explained Vandertop in answer to questions; " big moving-picture interests are on the verge of combining, but this is more or less of a secret, so I will only say that Wall Street is at last to be welcomed in to finance a twenty-million-dollar proposition.

" Of course the real reason for my coming East is that I have just heard the sad news that my Uncle Bertrand, my sole living relative, the rubber king of Brazil, has died, leaving me heir to his vast possessions in South America. I am deeply grieved, and as my interests will stop me from going down to Brazil, I am waiting for his representative, who has already set sail from there with all the papers.

" Really, I do not think it fitting that I do any work, on top of this bereavement, so you may say, for the time being, I am just looking about, upon my return to the East after an absence of some years."

Vandertop drew a deep breath. The press-agent apologized for having bothered him, and made a quick exit.

After smoking part of a really excellent Havana cigar that had been presented him by a fellow passenger on the incoming train, Vandertop rang up the Tyson Theater ticket agency, and started a charge account over the phone. The mere mention of his hotel had its magic effect.

" I wish two seats sent over for ' The Tom-Boy,' for to-night," he drawled, " if you are certain that you have good ones."

He was reassured on that point. Then,

bracing his shoulders, Vandertop took two bundles of certificates from his bag and placed them in his inside pocket.

He descended to the lobby, and went immediately to the cashier's cage, where he proffered one of the bundles.

"I wish these stock certificates kept in a safe place," he said, "until I get some instructions from the West. Meantime, kindly give me fifty dollars in small bills. I will arrange with a bank to handle my affairs to-morrow."

"Certainly, sir; will that be enough?" returned the cashier as he accepted the important-looking sheaf of beautifully printed and scrolled worthless bond and stock certificates, which in certain markets you can almost buy by the pound, like butter or sugar. "I will take the best of care of these, and put them in our burglar-proof safe immediately."

"Fifty will do for now," replied Vandertop indifferently, as if he were speaking about something of utter unimportance.

He received the money, however, with a kindly word of thanks, and strolled out of the hotel, feeling a little better. Being down to his last dollar had worried him—a little—he was bound to admit to himself.

It was just two o'clock, and as he walked toward Broadway he passed a window that bore the imprint:

JOHNS & JOHNS
Members N. Y. Stock Exchange

There was an old saying that always appealed to Vandertop, one that seemed like a piece of philosophy he had repeated to himself many times in his thirty odd years of life. It was, "You can't be arrested for trying!"

Some of his wildest successes had been the result of ventures that on the face of the thing looked quite impossible. But when there was nothing to lose there was everything to gain.

"You can get 'most anything given to you if you ask in the right way," he muttered to himself as he walked in the office.

"I wish to see the manager," he announced to one of the men on the floor.

Immediately he was shown into an inside office, for he looked as much as possible like a would-be client. The manager, an urbane individual, greeted him pleasantly, and asked what he could do for him.

Vandertop smiled in return.

"I know what you *can* do," he said, "but if you *will* is another question. Of course I am well aware that to start an account you desire a cash deposit, a check, or securities. It so happens that I came East suddenly with my affairs, as regards banking, in such a state that I await a report from my agents before opening an account with a bank here. I have some unlisted securities, however, that have at least an approximate value of twenty thousand dollars. If you will accept them for the time being I would like to buy a hundred shares of Bixton Motors on a twenty-point margin."

Of course the manager of Johns & Johns knew it was a little irregular to accept unlisted securities as collateral, and that it was against the unwritten rule of his house, but he was out to get trade, which at the time was a little slack, and, like all business men, he worked on appearances—and Vandertop looked, as regards value, like a certified check on the Bank of England.

"I will be glad to take your order," he replied, and Vandertop passed him the second imposing bundle of engraved certificates, all of either nonexistent companies, or of those which had been watered to such an extent that they had drowned in the flood. Wildcat copper and gold mines, that had yielded neither copper nor gold, nothing but sorrow for the investor; oil-well companies that had been but holes in the ground, to sink the money of the credulous; airplane stock of a company that went up in the air—though its machines never did; in all, nothing that was worth the paper it was printed on, save as an example of the engraver's art.

But they *looked* good, and they were of companies that had boomed and died far, far away. No Eastern broker, save after making inquiries, could have told their worthlessness.

So when Vandertop left the office in five

minutes, he had a memorandum that he had held there for him, at a twenty-point margin, one hundred shares of Bixton Motors, selling at ninety on the Exchange.

Every point they rose he would be making one hundred dollars.

Of course every point they dropped he'd lose a hundred, too, but only *on paper,* as he hadn't put up any money.

He breathed a sigh of relief as he strolled toward Broadway. The day was smiling on him; there wasn't the tiniest cloud in the sky.

Already he had a nice hotel, cash in his pocket, and was dabbling in stocks.

To-night he would eat a delightful dinner at the hotel, and then go to a nice show with some chance acquaintance or if need be, alone.

And he still had a dollar left of the original capital of one dollar and sixty cents, which he had in his pocket on alighting from the train.

He took a walk around the Times Square district, and returned to his hotel with a fine appetite; so he did justice to the cuisine of the Waldmore, and even sent a compliment to the chef—after signing a tab for the meal.

Going to the desk he found the seats for "The Tom-Boy" had been sent over promptly by the theater ticket agency and charged to his account. Who to take with him? That was the question. He had few acquaintances in New York, and those he didn't choose to look up, as he found that he could get more out of new ones.

Strolling around the elaborate lobby of the Waldmore, he came face to face with the manager of Johns & Johns.

A fresh and boyish look of surprise passed over Vandertop's face as he rushed up and shook the man's hand.

"I have forgotten the name," he said questioningly.

"Graham," returned the other.

"Well, Mr. Graham, I have a couple of seats for a musical show. As I told you I am a stranger in town, and I haven't a soul I can call upon to go with me. If your time is open this evening I'd be pleased to have you accompany me."

"Thank you. It just so happens that a business associate was forced to break an appointment with me because of sickness in the family, so I'll be glad to go."

Vandertop made a note to open a taxi account with one of the reliable companies the next day. He'd forgotten all about that in the stress of other accomplishments for his personal benefit. How careless to have to use some of his money for riding, even though he'd received it freely from the hotel!

"We'll get a cab and run about a bit in the evening air before going to the show," he announced grandly.

They went out and took a ride up Fifth Avenue in the fading twilight, whitely illuminated by the links of lights on either side of the street.

Then to the Counsular Theater, where they had quite a little dispute upon alighting from the machine. Graham, however, finally won.

He had insisted upon paying for the taxi. Vandertop wouldn't allow it for a time, but at last he reluctantly gave in with good grace.

They enjoyed the show, a good evening's entertainment, that opened Vandertop's account with the ticket agency.

Afterward Vandertop invited Graham to supper at his hotel, but the latter insisted, as his host had treated to the theater, that it must be his pleasure to take his new friend and client to a place he favored. So they went together to a tiny French restaurant on a side street, off Broadway, where the lights were low and the prices high.

Vandertop entertained his new acquaintance with a more detailed story of the death of his poor Uncle Bertrand in the forests of Brazil. He told of his early life, how he had run away from home, thrilled with an early wanderlust, and finally struck root in that South American republic, where the material for goloshes and motor tires comes from. Vandertop knew rubber had many other uses, but these were two that forcibly struck the imagination.

No wonder Vandertop was tired when they had taxied back to the hotel, and he had parted from Graham. He had gone through a strenuous day, pursuing his gentle

art of painlessly acquiring the best there was to be had for himself.

The next morning he did not arise bright and early, according to the precepts of old Ben Franklin. At ten o'clock he telephoned for the morning papers, coffee and rolls. He had formed, years before, the habit of the Continental breakfast, and found that it agreed with one who did no physical labor.

He spread the *Times* out in front of him on the table, and whistled softly. This was a little more than he had expected:

BRAZILIAN RUBBER KING DIES SUDDENLY ON ESTATE

Young American His Heir

The sudden death of Bertrand Vandertop, one of the greatest of the Brazilian rubber kings, has been reported to Jack Vandertop, his heir, who is now stopping at the Waldmore Hotel, awaiting a representative bearing the will and all papers, now on his way to New York on one of the fastest steamers.

Though busily occupied with his motion-picture interests in the West, Mr. Vandertop threw them all up for the time being upon receipt of the news, and hurried to this city.

He dropped a hint, but refused to be quoted, to the effect that there is a possibility of a combination of some of the largest motion-picture interests, to allow Wall Street to wedge its way into the business in a still larger way.

However, until the matter of his uncle's estate is settled, Mr. Vandertop states that he will himself do nothing actively in a business way.

The article could not have been more explicit and dignified if Vandertop had written it himself. This would give him a chance to look about and see if he couldn't promote himself into something interesting, as well as lucrative.

Already he had established a wonderful line of credit, on nothing at all except pretense and assurance. But that would only be good for a few weeks.

No one knew better than Vandertop just how far one can go in the gentle art of "working people." They can be worked just so far, but no farther. If only the stock of the Bixton Motor Company would start to swoop upward from ninety so that he might cash in on it!

Well, in the mean time he would have to look around and see if he couldn't get in on something paying. But that day, and the days that followed, Vandertop found that he was up against a tough proposition.

To be sure men advertised in the papers that they had thousands to invest in some feasible scheme, but they always wanted to be shown something more tangible than conversation, or the blue sky. Squirm and twist though he might Vandertop found that he couldn't run up against capital.

The competition was too great; big money had so many wooers that his pleading voice didn't have a chance.

Of course the whole trouble was, and he knew it, that he didn't have any definite project to offer those who desired to invest their hard-earned cash. The ideas he thought up were too nebulous.

Investments, he decided, went in cycles. There had been copper and gold, real estate, and then oil-wells, all profitable in their turn. Last of all, motion-pictures had been a great field for investment.

What next to turn to that would be legitimate and still paying Vandertop didn't have the slightest idea, but he tried here and there, investigating one company after another that inserted glowing advertisements in the financial trade papers without coming upon anything that looked like money to him.

Meantime, of course, he was getting more and more in debt. After two weeks, their first bills not having been paid, his accounts at the ticket agency and with the taxi company were both cut off.

The Bixton Motor stock refused to move upward, and the Stock Exchange house had time to look up the securities he had left with them, and finding most of them worthless, had asked him to come in and see the manager of accounts. This, wisely, he did not do.

Then the hotel started to treat him a bit coldly since he could not pay two weekly bills that had been presented to him with little urgent notes to please remit.

Tuesday of the third week Vandertop awoke feeling, for him, unusually discouraged. His mind felt dull and stupid as he went to the telephone and ordered the

morning papers, his coffee and rolls. He certainly was a fine dumbbell not to be able to start anything.

A week or two more, at best, and he would certainly be up against it. Something *must* come up to get him out of this hole.

Vandertop opened the morning *Times* languidly, expecting nothing of any particular interest to greet his eye.

Suddenly he felt a peculiar dizziness as a little item, well near the top of the page, stared at him:

RUBBER KING NOT DEAD, AS WAS REPORTED

Bertrand Vandertop Lands in New York to Explain Reason of Rumor

Bertrand Vandertop landed in New York last night, too late to dock, to learn from the ship news reporters on the boat that he was supposed to be dead and buried. The report had been received by his nephew, Jack Vandertop, at the Waldmore Hotel, who had been waiting for a representative to arrive with the will and papers relative to the estate.

Mr. Vandertop said that he had been laid low with fever, in the interior, and one of the natives had brought news to the coast that he had died. In this way the rumor spread, and one of his business associates had undoubtedly notified his nephew, who would be pleased to discover that his relative was in good health.

The rubber king said that he had come to New York to interest capital in some newly discovered sources of the world supply of rubber, and that he expected to be in this country for a lengthy stay. He will stop at the Waldmore.

Vandertop dressed just as quickly as he could.

He had no idea of being on hand to welcome his uncle. What a fine dressing down the latter would certainly give him, for having circulated the report of his death. He had smoothed the whole story over by giving an explanation of how he happened to receive the report, but Uncle Bertrand *knew* that he had lied, and would probably suspect *why*.

Jack Vandertop decided to give his uncle the day to quiet down in before meeting him. Their coming together, of course, was unavoidable, as Bertrand had announced he, too, was coming to the Waldmore to stay.

But Jack didn't desire to be on any reception committee; he would soften the blow that was to fall upon him by putting off the meeting until late that afternoon.

He dressed quickly and left the hotel. How he passed that morning and afternoon Jack Vandertop could not have told, except that he walked miles; and when he returned to the hotel at five o'clock he found, as he had feared, that his uncle desired to see him at once in his private suite.

For once Jack was without a single thought of any possible explanation to give his relative. Meekly he knocked at the door and was gruffly told to enter.

His Uncle Bertrand was seated behind a large table, a heavy, weather-beaten looking man, with frowning brows.

"Sit down, young man," he growled, and Jack, without a word, did as he was requested.

"You are my nephew, and blood is said to be thicker than water, but I *would* like some plausible explanation as to why you circulated the report of my death?"

Jack, still speechless, lowered his eyes.

"I suppose by so doing you desired to put yourself in the seeming position of heir to a large fortune, so you could be enabled to get credit."

So Uncle Bertrand had heard of his debts.

"The hotel management has taken me into its confidence, and when *I* called up the theater agency for seats for a show tonight I was told that Vandertop—an honored name—had a black mark on their books. How much do you owe, all told, young man?"

"A thousand dollars will let me out," replied Jack weakly, thinking of two or three suits of clothes he had ordered.

Uncle Bertrand took a large roll of bills from his pocket, counted off ten yellow ones and threw them across the table.

"Pay your debts at once and—"

Jack clutched at the money and rose to go. This was the end; with the harbor in sight he had to put out to sea again.

"Sit down," growled Uncle Bertrand, "I

didn't say this interview was ended. You have displeased me greatly—in some ways—in others I have come to a different conclusion. You're a lad after my own heart."

Jack gasped. "What do you mean, sir?"

"Only this—I never knew a thousand dollars better spent than the one I have just given you."

"How is that?" exclaimed Jack wildly.

"I took this trip to New York to interest capital in some wonderful rubber plantations in Brazil. All the properties need is money to develop them. I hoped to start a stock company, but *first* I expected to be obliged to spend thousands of dollars in advertising, and making myself known."

"You mean that—"

"By these two stories, the first of my death, and then of the false report, I am naturally placed in the mind of the public, through news advertising, much better than the paid article, as a Brazilian rubber king. I have no great fortune in money; it is all in land that has to be worked. A stock company must be formed, and *we*—"

"You mean that you are going to take me with you?"

"You are a true member of the Vandertop family, though you must learn the art of 'working people' on a larger scale."

"Then you're not really mad at me?"

Uncle Bertrand beamed at his nephew. "Mad at the boy whom I expect to sell half a million dollars' worth of stock of the Brazilian Rubber Company, Inc., stock for me? I should say not!"

The Vandertops smiled, and shook hands. They understood each other, and between them knew they could not fail to be successful in the polished art of "working people."

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WHAT IS A POEM?

"OH, what is a poem, pray tell me?"
I asked of a poet one day,
"The heart of the springtime," he answered,
"The spirit of blossoming May!

"The call of the brook to the river,
The voice of the whispering pine,
The roar of the waves of the ocean,
The tang of the billowing brine!

"The dream in the heart of the maiden,
The romance of young love's first bliss,
The light in the window at evening,
The sweetness of motherhood's kiss!

"The wisdom of scholars and sages,
The glory of battle's mad strife,
The sorrows that cannot be uttered,
The riddle of Death and of Life!"

"Pray, what do you think is a poem?"
I asked of an editor sage,
"A poem?" he absently answered—
"A few lines to fill up a page!"

Glen Allen.

The Wedding Gift

by Kenneth Perkins

"YOU see, Barbara is all I've got," the mother confided to Miss Cotton. "I'm not going to fight with her over every little thing that comes into her life."

Mrs. Jessel, judging from the tired blue eyes and the mild drooping of the lids, was quite calm. Even the subject at hand—a headstrong, dissatisfied daughter—failed to ruffle her.

"Of course, she ain't satisfied with what I can give. What pretty little girl would be? There's no color to our life here—excepting that horrible broom corn and flax. And for Barbara there are no friends—not an unmarried man within thirty miles—'less you count the Cherokees and Poncas—not even a boy in town without he's got something radically wrong with him."

Miss Cotton did not look at the situation with quite the sweet resignation of her older companion. In fact, she always put herself to considerable trouble in analyzing problems between young girls and well-dressed men—such as pertained at that moment to Mrs. Jessel's daughter.

She had trouble even in talking about such things, as evidenced by the excessive swallowing between words, and the wry faces she made when every corner of the conversation was turned. Miss Cotton's bulging spectacles and splotchy skin gave her an intensely excited appearance.

"You've always kept your daughter out of mischief," she went on to Mrs. Jessel, who was clearing the dinner plates of their bones. "But now—"

"I don't want nothing said against my Barbara!"

"I'm not going to say a word about her," Miss Cotton explained. "But about the man I must!"

"Do you know anything about him definite?" Mrs. Jessel was vigorously powdering her dishes with the soap shaker.

"That's what I've come to talk to you about," Miss Cotton pursued, watching her companion's red, wrinkled hands. "What did you think of him?"

"I didn't like him. I felt funny here when he first talked to me. But then every one else in town likes him. He's made a hit with some of the women—selling them things—then he gives dancing lessons and knows how to shine up with folks like us."

"I know, I know!" Miss Cotton interrupted impatiently. "But what did you really think of him? I mean about himself—did you think he was straight?"

"I kind of knew he wasn't." Mrs. Jessel poured out the scalding water which filled the little kitchen with steam clouds.

"Why don't you tell Barbara?"

"I have told her," the old lady rejoined. "But then what good comes of telling your children these things? Barbara knows what to say when I talk to her. She reads

novels and such. She said I had 'intuitions.' Then she explained what intuitions was. And I knew that was all I had on this man Brutus Cripps."

"I happen to have heard of him when I paid Aunt Molly a visit in Nebraska." Miss Cotton folded her bony hands and spoke with a crisp eagerness. "They talked of him up there so much that he had to leave town. I guess maybe he had to leave the State. But this I remember Aunt Molly saying: he proposed to a candy-counter girl up there in the drug-store. Then they scrapped—at least, that's what Cripps said—and the girl left town. Her parents lost all trace of her till she was found in San Francisco. Then this man Cripps was set on marrying somebody else."

"But, you see, if I told that to Barbara, it wouldn't mean anything definite," the mother explained.

Miss Cotton waved away the flies, which had kept her on the jump during her entire visit. "I'll get something definite!" she threatened dryly. "I'll write up to Aunt Molly and ask her what happened to the drug-store girl and the girl who was Cripps's pianist and others they tell of up there."

"His pianist?" The mother looked up.

"Well, he gave dancing lessons, same as he's working at here. And he had a girl as his pianist for a while—traveled with her from town to town and registered as Mr. and Mrs. Cripps."

"But maybe it was Mrs. Cripps."

"Maybe that," Miss Cotton rejoined belligerently, "and maybe not. Neither way lets him out—that is, if he intends flirting with Barbara."

"Well," Mrs. Jessel brooded for some time. "I've always succeeded in keeping my girl safe."

The regularity of the dishes piling up on the oilcloth of the table, and the buzzing of the flies, perfected the monotone. It was a depressing tune until broken by the childlike laughter of Barbara Jessel in the hall, greeting a caller. Mrs. Jessel wiped her hands on her wet gingham apron and left the kitchen.

Barbara was at least one note of beauty in that dun life. Ringlets parted over a vivacious almost boyish face. Freckles touched a deft childish tone to the cheeks and little nose. They transformed her from a rather pallid sun-faded type into a winsome schoolgirl. From the mother's point of view they kept her young. Mrs. Jessel could feel the excited warmth of the little soft hand.

"I want for you to talk with Mr. Cripps, ma," the girl said, beaming with her happiness. "He's got something to tell you that means more to us than anything ever did in our lives."

The mother sensed the fact that what the girl had said was probably true. She realized that the danger she had so long feared had suddenly swooped down upon them. When she looked at Brutus Cripps, she knew by his difficult beginning that her first premonition was true

He was a very good-looking man from certain points of view—perhaps rather too flabby about the mouth, but a woman would at first see the black eyebrows always raised pleasantly, and the thick, wavy, black hair. There were no wrinkles in the olive skin, though the portliness of the man, the full, fleshy face, the pudgy, perfumed hands suggested something like thirty-five years of an easy life.

"We've been talking over for a long time your little daughter's ambitions," Mr. Cripps began. "I saw her last night in the musicale down at the church. I like the idea—a fine thing for a girl belonging to these church clubs. Been prominent that way myself."

"Barbara is very fond of ragtime and acting," the mother said with a suggestion of banter. "I always knew she wouldn't care much about my buckwheat and flax."

"Of course not," Cripps rejoined pleasantly. "She's got a future—a great future on the stage if she can just get started."

"Ah don't care much about it," was Mrs. Jessel's rather cooling comment.

The man mopped his brow and pretended not to have heard her—after the manner of a salesman meeting an unlooked-for objection.

"Now, that ragtime of hers is immense," he went on bravely. "Every one I spoke to in praising Barbara said I was right."

"He wants me to play for his dancing," Barbara put in, unable to wait for the climax to which Mr. Cripps was leading.

"Of course, she can stay here with you and play for me in town," the man explained.

"You don't mean to tell me that you're giving her a position!" Mrs. Jessel said coldly.

"Of course he is! And thirty a week—more than we ever made in our lives!" was the girl's joyful interruption.

"A position which will take her out of town with you?" persisted the mother.

"Not at first," Cripps rejoined quickly. "Of course not at—"

"But later?" the mother cried.

"You see, I was telling Barbara that in a very short time I can get her on the stage—I know a stock company in Lawton looking for a jazz pianist, and—"

"Absolutely not." The mother was kneading her handkerchief excitedly.

Miss Cotton stared pale-faced through the kitchen door.

"Just a minute, let me explain!" Cripps rubbed his well manicured fingers, trying to calm everybody with a bland smile.

"Ma, listen. He says I can't get on the stage without experience of some kind or another—professional experience he calls it. Don't you see he's giving me a chance to start as a professional pianist, and then I can get into the Lawton stock company and maybe get a chance to act a little and—"

"Don't say anything more about it," Mrs. Jessel interposed in such a soft tone that Cripps, Miss Cotton, and Barbara all understood the chilling finality of it.

"All right, ma!" the girl retorted. "I knew all along you'd act this way about the thing. But it's not going to make any difference. I'm going to accept the job anyhow."

The mother went back into the kitchen, where she resumed wiping the dishes. Miss Cotton tried to interpret the pale-lipped smile.

"Of course," the spinster remarked icily, glaring at the little gray-haired woman through her thick spectacles—"of course you'll take some steps—"

"Don't talk about it, please," Mrs. Jessel rejoined. "I've never let anything harm her yet."

II.

Both Mrs. Jessel and Miss Cotton, as a result of the former's insisting that something should be done immediately, went into town that afternoon. Mrs. Jessel, driving her dusty buckboard, refused to say a word during the entire journey. The sun blazed down upon the red clay loam and sandstone, and the dust choked them; furthermore, there was nothing very agreeable to talk about.

The town, a dun-colored bunch of shacks and signs and broad, glaring streets, lay at the end of several miles of sorghum cane. Little Mrs. Jessel puckered her nose at the pungent smell of enchiladas frying at a Japanese chow-stand, and at the same time a mechanical piano from an up-stairs dance hall pounded hideous tunes into her brain. They echoed the big, insistent fear.

"We'll see what Mrs. Benijah Smith has to say," Miss Cotton announced. "She ought to put a stop to it." And Mrs. Jessel agreed.

The two drew up before the largest building on the main street. It was a brand-new Indian-red structure, disfigured with yellow and red signs for hair-dyes, fertilizers, corsets. The door into which Mrs. Jessel and her companion entered was printed over, as were the windows, in speckled gilt, announcing that down-stairs were the offices of an oil company, a cultivator and truck sales agency, while up-stairs were the headquarters of the Civic Welfare Board. On each step going up Mrs. Jessel saw signs on enamel plaques advertising chewing gum, asbestos brake linings, and Brutus Cripps's dancing lessons.

Mrs. Benijah Smith's office was a rather impressive bit of femininity in the heart of this Western background. She herself, when she came in after the two visitors had waited an hour, was a contrast to her office as well as to the whole town. A large woman with a florid face and quite a respectable accent, she gave Mrs. Jessel a sudden feeling of security.

Her visit to this office, she felt assured,

would solve her problem completely. The townsfolk—represented by Mrs. Benijah Smith—would most certainly see the danger of her daughter's position and would protect her from this well-tailored, strongly perfumed Mr. Cripps. With the opprobrium of the community hanging over her admirer, Barbara would most certainly come to her senses.

After drinking tasteless water from a filter in the corner of the room, the three ladies gossiped for some time about the town's most problematical characters. The mother eschewed the main topic with a certain dread. It seemed to be an admission that she could not take care of her daughter; and, worse, that her daughter could not take care of herself. The nearer Miss Cotton approached the subject at hand, the less Mrs. Jessel had to say.

"There's a little matter we wanted to discuss with you," Miss Cotton finally began, mouthing her words with her usual difficulty so that her face was quite distorted on certain syllables. "It's about this man Brutus Cripps."

"Oh, yes, yes, yes," Mrs. Benijah Smith smiled affably. "A very fine gentleman—an interesting character. He has helped us a lot in some of our socials."

This was a rather disconcerting beginning. Mrs. Jessel, who for a moment had felt a great refuge in the power of Mrs. Benijah Smith, sensed a sudden qualm.

"But sure the town 'll stand behind me," the mother told herself. "The town 'll stand behind any mother protecting her girl."

Miss Cotton phrased Mrs. Jessel's convictions. "You represent the town in these matters, Mrs. Smith, and what you say is generally very important if not—if not—"

"Final, as folks say," supplemented the mother.

"This man Brutus Cripps," Miss Cotton pursued relentlessly, "has caused Mrs. Jessel some trouble which I think is very, very serious."

Mrs. Benijah Smith opened wide steel-blue eyes. "I cannot imagine Mr. Cripps doing anything that would—"

"He has offered Mrs. Jessel's daughter a position which will take her out of town," Miss Cotton went on triumphantly. "And as ragtime pianist!"

"Barbara has always loved the piany," the mother remarked casually, "but I don't want that she should be an actress."

"Yes, I understand your position perfectly, Mrs. Jessel," the chairman of the board replied graciously. "If I had a daughter I would not care to have her take up the stage as a profession. But what has this to do with Mr. Cripps? I understand that he has merely offered your daughter a position?"

"But that's only part of it," Miss Cotton interrupted hotly. "*I* have heard of Cripps before. He sent some girls to San Francisco who were working for him in Nebraska, going around to different towns as his pianists and such. He's a bad man, Mrs. Smith, I am convinced of it."

"But there should be proof of such accusations as that."

The mother flared up. She suddenly realized that the whole town—which she felt was represented by Mrs. Benijah Smith—was against her. "I can tell what kind of a man he is—a mother can always tell."

"I am sure that I shall do all that I can to help you if anything serious is impending," Mrs. Smith said calmly. "But the mere fact that a man has offered your daughter a position which you do not want her to take—I can't quite see that that is a case for—"

"I knew it wasn't a case for the board all along," was Mrs. Jessel's retort.

"But can't you understand?" Miss Cotton cried excitedly. "Barbara Jessel does not know what sort of man Cripps is. She is in love with him and his turquoise rings and such. We can't convince her that it is wrong to have anything more to do with him. She is walking right straight into his net. I can see it plainly, and Mrs. Jessel can see it."

"Why can't you have a talk with Barbara? Forbid her—"

"You can't forbid her," Mrs. Jessel put in. "You can't manage Barbara that way."

"I'm afraid I can be of no help," Mrs. Benijah Smith said despairingly. "I've found Mr. Cripps a most delightful person

in every way. He has even asked to call several times. I'm sure you must be mistaken about what you say. And as for Barbara, we of course can do nothing about girls of her age who refuse to abide by their parents' wishes. The whole affair, it seems to me, is up to Barbara herself."

"It seems to me that if you represent the town," Miss Cotton concluded icily, "you should not laugh at Mrs. Jessel's view-point like that! It is the same as if the whole town were laughing at her."

A few more words were said, which convinced Mrs. Jessel that Cripps had the backing of the town as far as his intentions toward her daughter were concerned. The chairman of the board smiled and even laughed politely at the mother's absurd fears.

Mrs. Jessel withdrew as quickly as she could in order to avoid the quarrel which she knew was certain to break out between Miss Cotton and the chairman. But when she left the office she regarded Mrs. Smith —as well as the morality of the whole town which she represented—with a red consuming hatred.

"I'll take care of my own daughter. I've always took care of her, and she's been safe so far. Nothing will come of it this time if I can just manage it all myself." The two women hurried down the elaborately lettered staircase.

"Perhaps we would better see the minister," Miss Cotton proposed rather diffidently.

"I guess not!" little Mrs. Jessel retorted. "He'll probably tell us Cripps is a deacon or something like that!"

III.

THE old woman drove home after she had got rid of Miss Cotton by buying her a red soda at a combination drug-store, fountain, and hot-dog counter.

As she rode through the dust every one seemed to have changed into a mortal enemy—from the huge Seminole squaw driving her greasy child before her, to the highest representative of civilization in the neighborhood, a man with a derby, frock coat, thickly caked boots, and a star. This man could arrest the Seminoles or Choctaws who stole her chickens, but if she wanted him to arrest a man for stealing her daughter she would be laughed at as a woman fearful in ignorance, given over to tantrums.

The steel star flashing on the man's calico vest seemed as barbaric as the squaw's blanket with its green zigzag of legendry. The syncopated tunes of a merry-go-round in an empty lot shouted raucous jeers at her as she drove on.

In the tattered old songs it was whistling out, and in the barking of the street dogs, the mother could still hear the echo of Mrs. Benijah Smith's laughter—Mrs. Benijah Smith, who represented the town and what the town thought.

After she had passed the Choctaw Reservation on the way home she saw a man she knew, shuffling up clouds of dust as he hiked down the road ahead of her. When she caught up to him she stopped for a moment to talk about some work she had for him in the stable. One of the mares had developed dobie itch, and Bartolo understood these matters.

But Bartolo was not interested. He had other things—very momentous things—to do. As he turned his dark-red face up to her, she caught a good waft of garlic and gin.

"Why ain't you doing any more work, Bartolo?" Mrs. Jessel asked. "You're wasting all your time up there at the reservation. Those Indians haven't any use for you."

"Damn right they had use for me, ma'am, while I had money. They had plenty of use for me—the dogs' sons." He leaned over the wheel, breathing heavily. She saw the sullen, repressed hatred in his black eyes. "They ain't got any use for me now though!"

"Been gambling, eh?" the little old lady remarked dryly. "Better quit and come over to the ranch. I've work a plenty for you."

"I've got enough to do," the cholo grunted. "I've got a little job to settle up first."

"What's wrong now, Bartolo? They been skinning you, eh? That's it, I'll bet!

They've been skinning you, have they? Pretty sharp, those Choctaws, when you get to gambling. What was it you was playing?"

"Crack Loo," the man mumbled belligerently.

"Ah, yes, Crack Loo. Funny they'd play that now, and them being rich as princes with their oil wells."

"That's it! That's it—rich as princes, and me only having a parcel of hogs and a mortgaged corn-field," the half-breed flared up. "And here's the dirty joke of it. The guy I was playing cheated right when he knowed I'd everything staked up. I know he was cheating 'cause he used a trick I've played myself."

He puffed heavily for a while and went on: "Every damn cent I got — gone to that fat shaman. He's a half-breed, too—damn Choctaw and Fox half-breed who dances the fire dance for 'em and makes 'em alkali whisky. I'll get him for what he's done to me! Damn me if I don't get him."

"Can't you get your money back? Show him up!"

"Show him up?" The other raised his guttural voice. "Show him up? To who? To who, I ask yer? To his tribe, eh? A fat chance I have!"

"Yep," the old lady rejoined, putting her reins in between her horny little fingers. "It's pretty hard, I reckon, to know a man's taking all you got and not being able to show him up. Pretty hard." She drove on. "Come up in the morning if you need some more cash. You can give me advice."

"I can't get the law on 'em," the cholo threatened as she left him to continue his way in the dust cloud. "The law won't do me any good. But I've got a couple of bare hands I can use when the law don't work."

As she rode on she felt a strange kinship with the frenzy of Bartolo, drunk and beaten as he was. She felt as infuriated against the world, as utterly helpless to right her wrongs, as he had been. He had lost "all that he had," yet he could take no refuge in the law. But he had bare hands.

A smile came over her face as she looked down at her own trembling beet-red fingers.

IV.

DURING the next week Mr. Cripps was a regular caller, even in the face of a studied opposition both on the part of Miss Cotton and Mrs. Jessel. He disregarded the two ladies with a gracious smile, showing little gold fillings; smiles came very easily in situations like these, undoubtedly common to his life.

Barbara of course sided with Cripps, whom she had come to look upon more in the light of a lover than a prospective employer. Wide as was the gulf between the girl and her mother, Barbara was as considerate as she could be of the little old lady's feelings, barring perhaps her consistent and open slurs on her mother's best friend, Miss Cotton.

When Barbara finally set a date for her first appearance as Mr. Cripps's assistant, Mrs. Jessel knew that she would have to make her last appeal. The crisis was considerably more serious than she had expected. Both Mr. Cripps and Barbara, angered at the mother's violent objection, decided to leave immediately for Lawton and open a season of dancing in that town. Barbara, of course, would have to stay at a hotel alone.

"There are only one or two things I will say," the mother pleaded. "One is that you are a blind little fool not to see that the man is bad through and through."

"But, ma, how can you say that, when you are the only one in town who thinks thataway about him—you and that four-eyed old spinster who would be glad enough if he would only pay some attention to her."

"You're in love with him, and can't see. Believe what I say; I'm your mother, and I can see things that other people can't."

"If I was the only one, you might be right," the daughter replied. "Then it might be on account that I love him. But every one else thinks as I do. He's a gentleman and perfectly all right in every way."

The mother sat motionless for a while, her raw hands folded in her lap. She felt it was time to play her last card.

"Then I'm for telling you this: I don't like to do it, because I know it 'll break your heart. But I'll do anything to save you from that man."

The girl looked down at the tragic face, the white hair, the pleading eyes. "Now, what is it, ma, what more have you dug up about the poor dear feller?"

"Well, the pianist he had up in Nebraska was a bad woman."

"He's told me about her. All men have a bad streak and have to reform."

"And they used to register at hotels as Mr. and Mrs. Something-or-Other. I've been thinking maybe the girl weren't bad—not until he got her for his pianist—same as he wants you to be his pianist."

The girl saw the mother's victory in this, and she blurted out a counter-stroke. It was something that she had hidden for several days. "That don't apply to me, ma, none of it. He loves me. He wants to marry me."

"Wants to marry you!" Mrs. Jessel sensed a new and more dangerous net. "It's a lie! What he says is a lie!"

"All right, ma, we won't talk no more about it. Not another word. I'm old enough now to know my mind. We're going to get married just as soon as the dancing school gets a going proper again."

"If you go away with that man, you'll kill me—that's what you'll do!"

The mother's dry eyes and pale lips showed the anger that inspirited her. As for the daughter, there was no such terrific emotion. The girl burst into a fit of weeping like a little child, and hurried from the room.

Mrs. Jessel sat for a while stunned and motionless, except for the shaking of her hands as they lay upturned in her lap. Then she went to the door of Barbara's room.

It was warped so that it could not be tightly shut. Through the half inch opening she could see her daughter dressing hurriedly before the varnished bureau. She was trying to do up her curls in a hair-net, tearing two nets before she succeeded.

The mother could see her flushed face reflected in the glass. It was a distorted mirror, on the rim of which were inserted a score or two of dance cards from the girls' social club and high school parties. There was happiness written on the face even while the tears continued to flow.

V.

A FEW hours later Miss Cotton drove to the ranch. Her cheeks were moist and red, her spectacles coated with a light film of dust. Mrs. Jessel proposed some iced tea, but Miss Cotton was too excited about the news she had to deliver.

"I've got an answer to my letter," she gasped, wiping the big smudges of dust from her face, which left black triangles on her handkerchief. "Everything is as I thought, and much worse. Cripps has ruined girls. He is going to ruin your—"

"Let me see the letter," Mrs. Jessel remarked softly.

She read it to herself—a final and perfect confirmation to the fears of both women. Cripps had been arrested in Nebraska for his immorality. Proceedings had even been brought against him concerning a girl who had been sent to San Francisco. The details were unspeakable, and the most horrible part of it all, as Miss Cotton pointed out, was that the law had been unable to catch him.

"But Barbara has already gone," Mrs. Jessel said in a toneless voice.

"Gone? Gone where—not with him?"

"It must have been with him. She didn't drive to town. She must have met him in his machine down the road."

"But they are coming back."

"No," the mother rejoined. "I think she is going to Lawton with him tomorrow."

"But are you sure? Did she take her things?"

The mother shook her head. "That wouldn't mean anything. Just her powder, nail file and such—no money. We had a little quarrel. She didn't want to say good-by because she cried so about something I had said. I told her she was killing me. I don't think she will say good-by—not now.

She's thinking maybe she will come back afterward and tell me—in a week, maybe, something like that."

"Did she take the seventy-five dollars she's been saving?"

"Nothing."

Miss Cotton thought for a while, still panting heavily. "I don't believe she's gone—not without telling you good-by."

The mother did not turn her head. She sat looking blankly through the open door and at the fly-specked mirror with its dance cards.

"Yes, she's gone."

"Then I'm too late with this letter," Miss Cotton wailed.

"No, not too late," the mother answered huriedly. "Not too late."

She repeated it over and over, as if trying to persuade herself that it was true. In another moment she got up and walked around the room. Miss Cotton thought she was looking for her knitting, but when the old lady went completely around the table she knew she was only pacing.

In a long silence both women could hear the last distant rumble of the firing at Fort Sill.

Miss Cotton fidgeted, then went to the kitchen to get some water in a tin cup, which she sipped, frowning.

"Why it is you let the girl go—I can't see!" she brought forth presently.

The mother stopped and looked at her.

"Did you think I should chain the girl here?" she asked in her cooler tone. "No, I couldn't do that."

"I am going to take this letter to town. Some one will help us." Miss Cotton came back to the sitting-room, dabbing her mouth with her handkerchief.

"Who will help us? Who will help us?" Mrs. Jessel retorted angrily. "No one will help me. They all think I'm crazy."

Miss Cotton looked at the patterns of black on her handkerchief with a wry face. "If I had a gun I would shoot that man. It would be just!"

"Land sakes! Don't talk like that, woman!" Mrs. Jessel cried. "What a horrible thing to say!"

The spinster looked at her quickly. "I'm not saying I'd be fool enough to do it! They'd string me up for it. They'd even string you up if you did—you, the girl's mother!"

Mrs. Jessel laughed softly. "Course they would—that makes me laugh! And for protecting my girl."

"No, you couldn't do that," Miss Cotton said seriously. "They wouldn't let you free for doing that—because you see he hasn't done anything but just plain offer the girl a job. That's all. You couldn't shoot a man before he got your girl."

"Not before!" The mother laughed again. "Of course they'd let me go free if I shot him *after* though! Wouldn't they now? Just answer me that?"

Miss Cotton thought the question over for a moment, scratching her nose with a long, awkward finger.

"After he had got the girl—oh, yes, of course, of course! Then a mother could do anything."

"She could kill him when it's too late. That's it—eh?" The lips closed tightly.

Miss Cotton paled.

"I am not thinking of that," the mother said quietly. "I was just thinking how the world was against me—even so much against me that it protects *him!*"

"There's some one at the door," Miss Cotton announced.

Both women went to the veranda to see.

"It's Dinkey Waloon with a note," the spinster exclaimed, as they peered down into a boy's burned, freckly face.

Mrs. Jessel read the note hurriedly, holding it close to dim eyes instead of hunting up her spectacles. Barbara wanted her suitcase packed and sent to town. She mentioned the brooch her grandmother had left her as well as the seventy-five dollars.

"Kinder what I suspected," Mrs. Jessel remarked. "She's afraid to see me again—can't face me before going away." She turned suddenly upon the little fellow. "Where is Barbara? Where is she?"

"I don't know, ma'am," was the frightened retort. "It was Mr. Cripps what sent me with the note. He's waitin' for me on the county road."

"But Barbara wrote it," Mrs. Jessel objected.

"Most likely she's in town, and the man

brought it out for her," Miss Cotton opined definitely. "He it is that wants the money."

"But are you sure you don't know where Barbara is?" the mother asked with a palpable note of pleading in her voice which seemed piteously futile under the circumstances."

"I tell you I ain't even seen her. How do I know?" the boy almost cried as he sensed the seriousness of the matter.

"Go back and tell them—tell him—if he's all you've seen—that I want Barbara. She must come to me herself and not send for her things like this."

"Of course that's the only thing to do," Miss Cotton declared.

Both women went back into the sitting-room and waited. The cannonading at Fort Sill had ceased as the cool, fragrant night was falling. They sat there in the dark, saying nothing for interminable moments. Finally Miss Cotton's voice crashed in upon her brooding.

"I'm thinking Barbara ought to be here soon. She'll be needing her stuff."

"No, Barbara won't come." The answer reached her from the deepening dusk.

"Then the man will come." Miss Cotton's voice had developed a nasal viciousness. "For it's he that wants the money and the brooch and the garnet."

"Yes, it's him," the mother rejoined quietly. "He's coming. Keep him in the sitting-room a while. I'm going into the kitchen to think these things over. I ain't quite settled what we should do."

Miss Cotton caught a glimpse of the huge figure of a man coming up to the veranda. As there was no light in the sitting-room, she could see out through the pane into the gloaming. She looked back anxiously at the little slight figure of the mother slipping into the kitchen.

In the dark Mrs. Jessel began cleaning out a pail with the sink-brush. She could hear Brutus Cripps's affable voice making elaborate greetings and apologies to Miss Cotton. They lit a lamp so that a finger of light darted into the kitchen and onto the mother's excited hand. She listened for a moment to the voices—one loud and affable. and the other nasal, belligerent.

"Barbara was busy doing a little shopping in town," the affable voice said. "She is tired, so I said I'd get her things for her. We're having supper later on and then motoring to Lawton. Very, very sorry she couldn't come back with me for another good-by."

"Where is Barbara now?" Miss Cotton asked bruskly.

"Hope Mrs. Jessel isn't taking it all too much to heart," the man's voice replied with a triumphant politeness. "I know she's not in sympathy with the move."

"Where is Barbara now, Mr. Cripps?" The nasal voice sharpened relentlessly.

"Rather warm day we've been having, Miss Cotton," was the answer, "but delightful now."

As Mrs. Jessel held the sink-brush immovable in her hand she heard some one tapping at the kitchen window.

She knew partly from intuition, partly from the zarape thrown over the man's shoulder, that it was Bartolo. She opened the door and let in a shivering wisp of a man, strangely small, strangely shrunken compared to the defiant, drunken Bartolo she had seen a few days before.

"What should you want at this time of the evening?" Mrs. Jessel asked, bewildered.

"I've got to hide here, missus. You'll be good to me. You've always been good to Bartolo."

"Hide you from what, man? Is the sheriff after you?"

"Not yet, missus. It's them Choctaws." The man shrank into a corner of the kitchen. She heard him gasping heavily and unevenly because of his running, and she could smell the perspiration. "Don't light the lamp, missus, I beg you. Don't light it. They'll pot me through the window."

"Then you've—" The little old woman recoiled as she thought of what Bartolo had done. She tried to open the door into the next room. It stuck in the warped sashing, but as she pulled at it she moved it enough to admit a big band of light, which fell across the kitchen and shone on Bartolo's Indian-red zarape. The man screamed voicelessly:

"Don't let in that light, for God's sake,

missus! Be good to me. They could spot this zarape a mile away." He threw it from his shoulder and kicked it angrily under the kitchen table. "That must have been how they spotted me—my zarape. They don't know me—none of them Choctaws. The only one of 'em what knowed me was the guy I—" He checked himself, then added: "The guy I licked."

"But if they know you're here—" Mrs. Jessel began in a perplexed voice. "If the Choctaws know you're here—"

"They won't come in here, missus—not in here. They're too afraid of the town. They wouldn't touch a white woman. It's me they'll get—"

"You've killed one of them, then? That's the way you got even on them for what they did?"

She waited for the man to answer. The pause was broken by the rapid voices of Miss Cotton and Cripps in the sitting-room.

"The sheriff will get you, then. The Choctaws will tell the sheriff. Now that you've killed one of them, they're in the right. The sheriff will get you. All they have to do is go and tell him."

"They won't tell the sheriff!" The man's voice shook so that she thought he was crying. "They want me first—before the sheriff gets me." He crawled over to the woman on his knees. "Let me stay here till daylight. Give me some other clothes, then in the morning I will try—maybe I can get to the tracks. A freight-train could save me."

"I'll keep you here," the woman said quietly. "Get in the closet."

"Wait a minute, missus, before you go; there's something I want to ask yer."

"Mrs. Jessel turned around impatiently. She had weightier matters on her mind than gossiping with this cholo.

"It's about your daughter, I think, ma'am," Bartolo whispered. "Ain't that fellow Cripps been hangin' around Barbara?"

"Yes, he has. What have you been finding out?" the mother asked suspiciously.

"You'd better be finding her then, missus. Better find her quick. Cripps got his Chink servant to ride ahead to Lawton."

"Yes, they're going to Lawton to-night; I know that already," the mother replied.

"But the Chink was sent to open up a ranch-house belonging to Cripps, and take booze there, and pluck some Minorcas."

"But they're going up to Lawton," the mother repeated, bewildered.

"Maybe that's what he told the girl. But it ain't what I figured out, missus. He's really going up on the way to O. K. City, and he's a going to stop at that ranch-house, where there ain't going to be nobody 'cepting hisself and the girl and the Chink."

"Hide in that closet a while," the mother said hurriedly. "I'm goin' to let the light in."

In another moment Mrs. Jessel entered the sitting-room, where she found Miss Cotton and Cripps, their faces red and perspiring because of the heat of the oil lamp as well as their own nervous discomfiture.

Mr. Cripps arose, but had sufficient understanding of the situation not to hold out his hand to the mother. He smiled stiffly and repeated most of the rubber-stamp phrases with which he had greeted Miss Cotton.

In answer to his sweating, grinning words and to Miss Cotton's announcement that "Mr. Cripps wants Barbara's hand-bag and things," Mrs. Jessel finally answered:

"I want for you to bring my daughter back."

This necessarily precipitated the conflict. Cripps knew that placation at such a time amounted to little. He must show the mother the hard, plain truth: he had won.

"I hoped very much, Mrs. Jessel, that we would not have to argue that part of it all over again."

"I ain't arguing," from Mrs. Jessel.

"All right, the game's over."

"Do you call it a game?" the mother asked.

"Perhaps not, exactly, but whatever you want to call it, it's finished."

"But it ain't finished. I want that you should bring Barbara back to me."

"We've found out something about you," Miss Cotton interposed, for the first time getting up courage enough to face Cripps down. "We've found out something about what you used to do up in Nebraska—"

"My dear ladies! My dear ladies!" Cripps found himself suddenly getting into a very tight situation, as if he were against a wall with two animals baying at him. "Let's call it quits. The girl has consented to marry me. I'm going to marry her as soon as our school gets going good. Now, isn't that square? If you don't think it is, all right, then. You've both given me a lot of trouble all along. But I've won. I've won!"

"Yes, you've won," the mother admitted. There was a curious change in her voice. "But before you go I wish for you to think it over. For your own good I want for you to think it over."

"What 'd you mean by that 'for my own good'?" The man felt himself on the defensive. He knew that he must keep the upper hand. "You don't think there's anything you can do about it, do you now, Mrs. Jessel?"

"A man can't steal a mother's young from her!" Miss Cotton, now that she felt that the mother was in the room, regained her native garrulousness. "It's the same with a bear or a prairie dog—or a woman!"

"What's that got to do with it, Miss Cotton?" Cripps laughed.

Miss Cotton really didn't know. She merely realized that she had said something which made the mother flare up again.

"Everything to do with it, Mr. Cripps!" Mrs. Jessel broke out. "Think hard now before you go, and tell us you will bring Barbara back—to-night."

Cripps looked down at her and smiled. It was a forced smile and rather sickly, but yet triumphant, taunting.

"Don't smile. That I won't stand!" the mother cried. There was an interminable pause before she spoke again. "I'm begging you for the last time, Cripps. Because I don't want to do what I'm a going to do."

In the man's outburst of laughter there was a great discomfort. He seemed to be laughing to cover up a sudden qualm of fear that had attacked him.

"Well, I'll be going," he said.

"Wait!" The mother stared at him as he turned around. Miss Cotton held her breath. The mother was trying to say something, but kept her lips lightly pressed together. Finally she brought out as she looked into the man's eyes:

"Maybe you've won!"

Cripps looked at her, startled.

"Maybe Barbara knows her own mind," Mrs. Jessel continued.

"Why, of course, Mrs. Jessel. There's no doubt about that."

"But she ain't had much to do with men before. She's green about such things. If you're really taking her away, you must be good—very, very good to her."

Miss Cotton could sense a sudden unnatural coolness of tone in the mother's voice which Cripps missed entirely.

"Why, my dear Mrs. Jessel," Cripps said, "of course I'll be good to her. I've always been good to every woman I ever met. There's a chivalrous strain right here." He pointed to his breast.

"Then you'll be taking Barbara her things?" Mrs. Jessel remarked in the same icy tone to which the man was still deaf. Miss Cotton gasped, but Cripps felt a sudden enormous relief. "And the money she said in her note that she wants!" the mother continued. "I'll get them for you."

"Why, of course, Mrs. Jessel," Cripps answered. "I'll wait. I'm very glad you are taking this view of the matter."

The mother looked at him piteously this time. She started to say again, "Won't you please, Cripps— I don't want to—" then turned and hurried out of the room.

She stuffed a random armful of Barbara's waists into a hand-bag; threw in her own brush, a cheap bottle of perfume, and swept everything off the top of the bureau—hairpins, ribbons, rouge, and freckle lotion. Then she went into the kitchen.

For a moment she looked out through the window, panting heavily. It was almost pitch dark.

"Better stay in a bit longer," she whispered to Bartolo.

"That I will, missus. You're very good, missus. Can you take a slant out of the window and see if any of them Choctaws are hiding—maybe behind the barrel cactus or—"

"Too dark," Mrs. Jessel rejoined as she went back to the sitting-room.

"Here is Barbara's things," she said to Cripps. "And the money what she's been collecting."

"You aren't really giving him the money, Mrs. Jessel?" from Miss Cotton.

"Ah, yes, and the brooch, too." She handed it to Cripps.

"I'm thanking you kindly, Mrs. Jessel. I'm glad you—"

The mother cut him off. "And here is this zarape I want for you to take her as—as a wedding gift. You can take it, can't you—here, over your arm like this." She put it partly over his shoulder, partly over his arm, as it should be worn.

"Thank you very, very much, Mrs. Jessel," the man said stiffly.

"That's all then; you can go now."

She went to the window and watched him step out on the veranda. As he passed through the parallelogram of light which shone through the old window curtains she could see the red gleam of the zarape on his arm.

"Then, you're giving your daughter up?" Miss Cotton almost jeered.

"I reckon not," the mother answered quietly. She waited a moment breathlessly. "I reckon I'm keeping her safe."

She strained her eyes eagerly, trying to see beyond the corn rows to the road as it went down over the scarp of the hill into the dry wash. For a moment a streak of fire silhouetted a pronged cactus, and a shot followed it, though hardly so loud as the woman had expected. There was no suggestion of an echo. The immediate noises in the room—the insects buzzing around the oil lamp, the warped door of the kitchen creaking, seemed more clamorous and of infinitely greater moment.

"I'll be hitchin' up the mare and going to town directly," she said. "Barbara 'll be waitin'—for him."

(The end.)

HAYMAKING

HAZE of heat and buzzing bees,
Scent of sweet red clover;
Cattle seek the shade of trees,
Day is nearly over.

Patient horses drowsily
Stand while we are piling
On the wagons merrily,
Food to keep them smiling.
Toss the fragrant bundles high,
Fill with heaping measure,
Till the wagons groan and sigh
With their costly treasure.

Now we ride on loads so sweet,
Safe and free from danger;
Horses turn their willing feet
Toward the barn and manger.
Barns are filled with pleasant smells,
Timothy and clover,
Clouds are looming o'er the dells,
But haymaking's over!

Locusts trilling songs of heat,
Bees among the clover;
Growing corn and waving wheat,
Haying time is over!

Ray H. Gross.

Diana the Hunted

Part III

by

Elizabeth York Miller

Author of "The Greatest Gamble," "Which of These Two?" etc.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE ONLY HONORABLE WAY.

"ARTHUR, it was too embarrassing—his coming up to us like that," Mrs. North was protesting. "You really must let him know how matters stand. He hasn't an inkling."

Hempstead laughed in a way that made Diana almost dislike him.

"Of course he hasn't. Do you think I'd be such a fool as to let the cat out of the bag so prematurely? I've got to get Mme. la Marche over and the French doctor, and procure Mrs. Croft's sworn testimony and —oh, no end of things, before we tell that puppy what he's up against. He'd be sure to head us off in some way."

Diana's eyes blazed with sudden indignation, but she went on eating the delicate sole Morny which the waiter had placed before her.

"Oh, no, Dick isn't that sort," Mrs. North said quickly.

"Isn't he? Ask Diana. She knows the sort he is. The very night he asked Alice to marry him he made violent love to Diana. Alice saw it. She told me all about it. She was generous enough to forgive him, but that's her funeral. I don't take any chances with a youth of Dick Morley's stamp."

Diana's impulse was to cover her face with her hands and flee the place. Oh, the shame of having to hear Hempstead coolly narrate what had been so vital and altogether heart-breaking to her! She remembered just in time where she was, and that well-bred people do not make scenes in fashionable restaurants. However, Fannie North saw how disturbed and unhappy she was. Fannie began to talk quickly to Hempstead.

"You say Dick called on you—that he saw you with Diana at the station and demanded an explanation. What on earth did you tell him?"

Hempstead shrugged his shoulders.

"I said the only possible thing—that Diana and I were engaged to be married, and that you were chaperoning her."

"It is not true that I'm going to marry you," Diana broke in impulsively. "You had no right to say that."

There was a slight pause. Then Hempstead inquired politely:

"What would you have had me say, Diana?"

"Dear me, are you two going to quarrel?" Mrs. North fluttered into the breach. "I want to enjoy my dinner. I'd be obliged to both of you if you'd postpone your arguments until we've discussed the bird. It is much more interesting to me."

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for August 27.

Diana was abashed into silence, but Hempstead, taking the cue from his cousin, launched upon more agreeable topics.

During the meal Diana conceived her first distrust of Arthur Hempstead. In spite of what he said, and in spite of how cruelly Dick had lacerated her feelings, she wished that this affair of getting her birthright could be more aboveboard from the beginning. Of course it was all nonsense about her marrying Hempstead, but he shouldn't have told Dick that.

She was very tired when they got back to the flat and excused herself almost immediately for bed, leaving Hempstead and his cousin to discuss whatever they chose about her.

She was a long time getting to sleep, however. When she drifted off finally it was with the firm conviction that she must see Dick Morley at the earliest opportunity and tell him straight from the shoulder the fate that was in store for him. It was the only honorable way.

The opportunity came sooner than she could have hoped for; the very next morning, in fact.

Diana, used to early rising, was awake before the household and begun to stir. She thought it odd, indeed, that none of the servants should be about at an hour when even at Morley Hall most of the before-breakfast work would have been finished. What late hours London folk kept!—late at both ends of the clock.

Timidly, feeling that she had scarcely a right to take such liberties, she made use of the wonderful tiled bath and boudoir placed at her disposal, and dressed herself in the neat costume and plain little hat. It was such a lovely morning, and just below was the park.

The flat was still quiet when she emerged from it, although by this time there was the familiar rattle of cups from the kitchen premises. Diana's courage was not equal to demanding tea from one of the servants. She had conceived a sort of dread of them. They must know that she was only a masquerader.

Down the stairs, into the quiet side street she crept, and started forth in the direction of the park, only a step away.

And there at the gates she came face to face with Dick Morley—a haggard, wretched Dick, whose love was leading him to gaze upon what might be his lady's curtained window.

She saw him first, and with a sob in her throat, rushed to meet him.

Diana was breathless with excitement. This unexpected encounter seemed like a sign from heaven telling her that she had been right in her decision. No doubt Hempstead would be very angry, but she simply must lay the facts before Dick. They were enemies, of course, and he would hate her, but she felt that his hatred would be rather a relief.

"How lucky!" she exclaimed. "You're the very person I want to see, but I wasn't expecting to meet you here at this hour. London's a curious place. One keeps running into people one knows everywhere. It was very strange seeing you last night at the hotel, but I suppose you often go to such fine places." She spoke rapidly and almost at random, to cover her excitement.

Dick gave a low laugh in an oddly bitter fashion.

"It isn't so curious as you think. I was at the Ritz last night because I knew you'd be there—and this morning I couldn't sleep, and I thought I'd come around and have a look at the place where you were staying."

Her expression of bewilderment tended to increase his bitterness.

"Oh, yes—I'm hard hit! You see I—I *meant* that kiss."

She drew in her breath with a queer little gasp. The conversation was not going at all as she had planned.

"How do you mean—you 'meant' it? You asked Miss Powell to marry you just after. Oh, it wasn't fair—"

"Come into the park. I'll try to tell you. And there are things I want you to tell me, too."

"Yes—yes! So many things!" she replied.

Her heart was beating madly. Perhaps—could it be possible?—there might be an explanation on his side. If there was, she was ready to listen to him. But how could there be?

He looked so white and haggard under

the morning sunlight that she felt herself to be the meanest creature in the world. Yes, he would hate her when he knew the underhanded game she had allowed Hempstead to lead her into.

"I like you in that dress and hat," he said when they had crossed the little bridge. "Do you remember? You were wearing them when—when first we met."

"Yes, I remember," Diana replied. "And you were so gay—and jolly. Do you remember the 'country bumpkin' you had to keep an eye out for? Oh, I did feel such a fool!"

"I wish you were the same kind of a fool now," Dick said wistfully. "I—I really thought you cared."

Diana's eyes flashed.

"Oh, you thought I cared! Did you want me to care all by myself?"

"Heaven's no!"

"I was only a servant, so it didn't matter—"

"You have no right to say that," he interrupted hotly.

From the pensive tenderness of reminiscence they had dashed into the midst of a quarrel. Neither quite knew how it happened, but Diana was conscious of having been wronged all over again.

How dare he accuse *her* of loving lightly!

"No, you have no right to say such a thing," he repeated. When I held you in my arms and kissed you, I meant it—just as any chap would with a scrap of honor. I knew that I loved you—"

"And the next moment you saw how impossible it was to love me, so you asked Miss Powell to marry you. Many thanks for the compliment, Sir Richard."

"If you talk like that I—I'll shake you!" Dick cried angrily. "What about you and Hempstead? How on earth did you get to know him so well in such a short time?"

"He was interested in me," Diana said quietly. Should she tell him now?

"And so—you're going to marry him!"

"No—I'm not," she flashed back.

"What do you mean—that you've broken it off?"

"No. There was never anything to break off. I—I can't tell you, after all. I'm too frightened. You'd be angry with me, and I couldn't bear to be near you when—when—"

"Tell me at once, Diana," Dick broke in sternly.

He had led the way across the dew-drenched grass to the comparative shelter of a group of shrubs, and as there were few people about it seemed almost as though they were alone in the world.

"Diana, you terrify me. What does it all mean? Why did Hempstead bring you to London and put you in charge of his cousin—if you're *not* going to marry him? I want to know. I have a right to know."

"Mr. Hempstead will tell you," Diana said stubbornly.

"I asked him last night—and he said you were to be married."

"In a week or so he will tell you the truth. It's nothing to do with marriage at all. Oh, I wish he had told you at once—or that I had the courage to now—but I can't!"

"Diana—" He thought to coax her and in another instant she was drawn within the circle of his arms. "Diana, my sweet darling, I love you more than everything else in the world put together. You must believe that and—and trust me. We're going to belong to each other some day for ever and ever. Then I'll be able to explain to you how I came to get into such a ghastly fix. I can't explain now, because of Alice. When I'm free I'll come to claim you, my darling. Only trust me, just as I must trust you, and tell me the truth about Hempstead. You said last night we had much to forgive on both sides. You don't know how that little remark has tormented me."

Diana twisted away and tried to hold him at arm's-length.

"Dick, I do love you!" she exclaimed. "But I can't tell you the mystery now—oh, it isn't too late! I'll speak to Mr. Hempstead at once. It was all a mistake! Such a dreadful mistake! You'll have to trust me, too—really trust me. Good-by—oh, good-by!"

She was afraid to say any more or to remain longer with him. She turned and fled across the grass so quickly that he could not catch her up if he had tried, be-

cause of the injured ankle which had brought him back from the war.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE BLOW FALLS.

MRS. NORTH was up and arrayed in a becoming negligée for breakfast when Diana made her appearance. The girl's eyes were like stars; her cheeks glowing.

"Good gracious, where have you been!" her hostess exclaimed.

"I went for a walk in the park," Diana replied, pushing back the loosened strands of her hair.

Mrs. North yawned.

"Well, if I could get up a color like that by rising at an unearthly hour and strolling in the park, I'd be strongly tempted to follow your example. I'm afraid, however, that you'll be tired when it comes to the serious business we have on hand for to-day."

Diana cast an apprehensive glance at her companion.

"What is our serious business?" she asked.

"The dressmakers, of course. You've got to have heaps of things, you know. The frocks you will wear in court are most important, for one thing."

"Oh, Mrs. North—"

"Well? What is it?" Fannie passed her a cup of tea and smiled into the eager troubled face.

"I don't want Mr. Hempstead to think I'm ungrateful—nor you either. But I've changed my mind. I'm going to be a real Cinderella and go back to the kitchen. I can't take the money."

"You must be mad! However, the real Cinderella married the prince, didn't she?"

If anything, the glow on Diana's cheeks deepened. *Her* prince had said she was to trust him. She wouldn't begin by making him a pauper.

"It's just that I feel differently," she said. "I can't take that money away from Sir Richard."

"It's your own money," protested Mrs. North. "You have every right to it."

"Yes, but you see, he's been brought up to look upon it as his, while I never expected to do anything but work for my living."

"Really, you're rather a provoking girl. It's all very well for you to change your mind, but what about Arthur? He's in love with you, but he couldn't afford to marry you if you were penniless—"

"I don't want to marry Mr. Hempstead. I said so last evening, if you remember. I never dreamed of marrying him. You couldn't marry a man when you cared for some one else."

"Oh, so there's some one else! May I ask who? It can't possibly be! Why, I believe it's Dick Morley himself you're in love with!"

Diana's trembling lips and brimming eyes were all the answer Fannie North needed. Suddenly she had lost her appetite and rose from the breakfast-table, pushing back her chair with more haste than grace.

"Do you want to tell Arthur of this mad decision on your part, or shall I?" She tried hard to remain amiable.

"I'd rather you did," Diana replied.

Mrs. North went into the room which she called her study, carefully shut the door, and then sitting down at the dainty Empire writing-desk, picked up the telephone and was soon talking to her cousin, who had not yet left his bed. In fact, the sound of the telephone awakened him, but in a few minutes he was alert enough.

"The deuce!" he ejaculated. "I was afraid something like that would happen. I wonder if she could have seen Dick this morning."

"It's scarcely likely," Fannie replied. "I don't fancy he'd be roaming about in St. James's Park at seven o'clock. She seems quite determined, Arthur. I don't believe you'll be able to budge her. She's got a stubborn streak in her and something has happened to bring it out."

Hempstead thought rapidly for a few seconds, then he spoke, giving his cousin directions in a crisp, authoritative manner.

"Don't combat or argue with her, Fannie. Say you told me, and that I wasn't in the least angry. Say that it's my opinion she knows her business best. *But keep her*

with you, Fannie. Take her out and get those clothes. Pretend that you want her to stay with you for a visit anyway—that you're devoted to her already, and the new dresses are a present from you. Don't let her be in the least nervous about meeting me, and for Heaven's sake cut out the marriage talk! I'll do my own courting if you don't object."

"Really, Arthur, if that's all the thanks I get for turning my house upside down and taking in a girl who's been a servant—"

"Be quiet, you angel!" Hempstead interrupted. "I don't want to start a quarrel with you. Be a good cousin and do as I tell you. Leave the rest to me. I'll look in for tea, if I may, and you might contrive to leave Diana and me alone together."

Fannie promised somewhat grumpily. As she had intimated, why should she put herself out so tremendously on his or Diana's account?

She entered the dining-room, however, with a cheerful smile. Diana was sitting where she had left her, a disconsolate figure, apprehensive yet at the same time, resolute.

"My dear, Arthur doesn't mind a bit. I'm so glad! I was afraid he'd be annoyed. He says of course you're to do exactly as you please—only we want you to stay here for a little visit. If you went away just as we were looking forward to enjoying your society, that would be really unkind—and ungrateful."

"Indeed, I'm not ungrateful! But I couldn't accept—"

"Not for your mother's sake? She would turn in her grave if she knew what had happened to you. You simply *can't* go back to that life. We must think of something else for you, if you persist in refusing to go on with the case."

"Oh, dear, I don't know what to do!" Diana cried.

Fannie coaxed and pleaded with her in a very sensible fashion, and finally she gave in to the extent of promising to stay a week.

Meanwhile Hempstead, whose final nap had been interrupted to such purpose that he was unable to resume it, set his wits to work to undo the mischief Diana's whim threatened to cause. By this time he had conceived as great a passion for the girl as for her money; the combination was irresistible. He wanted them both.

He had realized, even when the subject was first broached, that Diana might possibly give him a great deal of trouble, but having rushed her to London on the plea of necessity and begun at once to fit her into her proper niche, he had been feeling secure.

Confound Dick Morley, anyway! Why couldn't the fellow stop down in the country where he belonged, and remember what was expected of him by Alice Powell?

Hempstead was quite sure that Dick was at the bottom of Diana's sudden change of heart. Had she confided to him, and had he—to protect his own interests—made love to her? It was the sort of thing Hempstead would have done himself, and in his jaundiced opinion all men were the same.

Scarcely had he dressed and breakfasted when the all-knowing Saunders appeared with the air of a conspirator.

"It's Sir Richard Morley again, sir. I didn't quite know what to say."

Hempstead smiled grimly. His plans were by no means perfect, and as he had sat up late last night drinking, his head was a bit cloudy, but he felt that Dick's coming was in the nature of an opportunity.

"Show him in, Saunders. And bring me a pint of 'the bubbly.'"

"Very good, sir."

Hempstead surveyed himself complacently in the mirror. His mustache was freshly waxed and the luxurious brocade dressing-gown suited his style of beauty perfectly. He fitted a cigarette into an amber holder, lighted it, and strolled into the sitting-room.

"This is an early call," he said to the visitor, who stood glowering in the center of the floor. "Sit down, Dick. What's the news?"

Dick remained standing.

"I've come for another explanation about—about Miss Croft," he said stiffly. 'I have it from her own lips that she is not engaged to marry you."

"You've had several things from her lips, old chap—more than I have, worse luck—"

"You—you scoundrel!"

"Steady on! Calling names won't do any good. And speaking of names, why not give Diana her proper one? Ah, thanks, Saunders. Set the tray down there. Will you join me, Dick, or is it too early for you?"

The servant padded in and out, closing the door behind him with exaggerated care.

Hempstead poured himself a glassful of champagne and drained it in two gulps, drawing in his lips with a fine appreciation of its flavor.

Dick stared at him, angry and a little bewildered.

"What do you mean by her proper name? I am not here to discuss—"

"Oh, yes, you are, although possibly you didn't know it. I thought likely she'd told you. Diana's name is Morley, the same as your own. Your father knew it—and the knowledge killed him. You'd really better sit down. You look quite faint; and a glass of this stuff is just what you need."

Hempstead became at once the courteous host.

Dick dropped into a chair. He really did feel faint, as well as look it, but he declined the refreshment.

"Is this a joke?" he asked.

"No. I don't think you will call it one, at least. Do you remember when I first made your acquaintance?"

Dick nodded.

"Do you remember my saying that I'd particularly wanted to meet you because once I'd known a very beautiful Lady Morley and her husband, a kinsman of yours?"

Dick nodded again.

Hempstead let him wonder while he poured himself the remainder of the wine.

"Well, there was a reason behind it all. Sir Douglas Morley had a daughter—born a month or so after he died. He also left a considerable fortune which, since his wife followed him, should have gone to that daughter. I believe your father was the only person in England who knew of the infant's existence. He brought her over here and put her out to nurse with a farm-laborer's wife, by the name of Croft—"

"Good Heavens!"

"I see you're getting the idea, Dick. That baby has grown up. She is nineteen now, and her name is Diana Morley, not Diana Croft. I told you I had the promise of some big business on hand, and this is it. Of course you will want proofs. Possibly you'd prefer the case not to come into court at all. If so, I'm sure it can be arranged."

"So that's what she meant!" Dick exclaimed to himself. Aloud he said, "If this is true it will kill my mother."

"I'm very sorry for all of you," Hempstead said indifferently. "Perhaps you'd prefer to fight the case. I am acting for Diana, and am at your service whenever you choose to appoint a meeting with your own solicitors. I hadn't intended to spring this on you for a week or so, but Diana's repudiation of my little invention regarding an engagement between us makes the explanation necessary. However, it will not affect the final issue."

It would be difficult to put into words the state of Dick Morley's feelings. He knew Hempstead for a rogue, but a man would need to be considerably more than that to carry off a scheme where thousands and the reputation of an old family were concerned.

One by one Hempstead laid the facts, as already narrated, before him. There would be the incontravertible testimony of the birth record and the French physician who had attended the late Lady Morley during her last illness; there would be the testimony of Mme. la Marche and of Mrs. Croft; the undoubted physical likeness between Diana and the beautiful Frenchwoman; the somewhat melodramatic incident of the locket, which had occurred to Mme. la Marche as the thing to do when in doubt as to Sir Philip's intentions toward her helpless charge.

Dick listened in a dazed fashion. It seemed a story which could have nothing to do with him and his comfortable twenty thousand a year. And it seemed to have as little to do with Diana.

"There's no time like the present," Hempstead went on. "Of course you want to think it over—about actually taking the case into court—but we can go into the details at once. I've wired Mme. la Marche

and Dr. Fargey, and to-day I'm running down to see the Crofts. I haven't the slightest objection to your solicitor accompanying me, and taking details of the interview. A case of this sort, as you know, would be no good unless it was bonafide."

Dick left Hempstead's flat like a man in a nightmare.

Was anything ever more strange, if true! He doubted his senses; he doubted the earth beneath his feet, and the smiling heavens overhead.

If the story was true—and he had a canny feeling that it was—Diana, his girl of dreams, had been cruelly cheated. He himself had been cheated—allowed to grow up believing himself to be the heir of a rich man, while all the time he was nothing of the sort.

His mother! She had a little income of her own, thank Heaven! It wasn't much, but at least it would keep her from starvation. He felt that he would give his soul to hold this cruel knowledge from her. Her pride was her life. She wouldn't have minded poverty, bless her heart, but to have his father's shame paraded in the limelight, would kill her. Oh, if only there was some way to keep it from his mother!

In a mechanical way he sought out his solicitors, and after a long interview with them—went to his own rooms, thinking to pack at once and return to Morley Hall to forestall any rumors which might precede him if he delayed.

In his chambers he found an angry and peremptory note from Alice, which had been delivered by hand. She wished to see him at once, or know the reason why. Apparently he had forgotten that they were to go together that morning and choose her engagement-ring.

It was curious how completely Alice had faded into the background of his mind.

Well, he must see her and get it over.

He took a taxi to the big and hideously ornate house in the Bayswater Road, which old Powell had bought at the height of his prosperity, and was admitted at once to the rose Du Barri drawing-room, where Alice had been awaiting his arrival for well over an hour. It was then past tea-time, and his fiancée had every reason to feel herself neglected.

She began to rail at him almost before the maid had left the room.

"Where were you last evening—and where have you been all day? This is a nice way to treat me, I must say! Good gracious, you look as though you'd been on a spree! I'm not going to stand for anything of that sort. I—"

With a groan, Dick sank down into a chair and buried his face in his hands. Every nerve was on edge and her hard, jangling voice set them dancing. Little specks floated before his eyes. He wondered if he was going to be ill.

"Well, haven't you anything to say?" she demanded.

His hands dropped lifelessly and he raised his head. There was something about him that suggested a beaten animal.

"Quite a lot," he announced. "Only I don't quite know how to begin. Alice, I think I'm—I'm ruined, as far as money is concerned. Another heir has turned up—an heiress, to be exact—and it's pretty certain she is Sir Douglas Morley's daughter—his legitimate daughter. If it's true I sha'n't have a penny piece to my name. Moreover, there'll be a horrible scandal—disgrace the like of which I've never dreamed of!"

Alice leaned forward, her lips parted. Slowly the color drained from them.

"Dick—you aren't mad, are you?" she whispered.

He laughed drearily.

"It sounds like it, doesn't it! But I'm afraid I'm as sane and sober as you are. What I'm telling you is the truth."

"It's lucky for me you found out in time," Alice said with a long-drawn sigh. "What a blessing our engagement hasn't been announced!"

CHAPTER XV.

NEW ALLIES.

"THE rats have begun to desert the sinking ship," said Dick with a mirthless laugh. "I don't blame you in the least, Alice. Of course I release you from our engagement."

Alice glanced at him quickly.

"I haven't asked to be released. I only said it was lucky it hadn't been announced."

"I see. You intend to await developments."

"If you care to put it like that," Alice said coldly. "But please tell me more about this mysterious heiress who has turned up. Who is she? It's the strangest thing I've ever heard. Of course you'll fight the case."

"I don't think I will."

"What! Are you mad?"

"Possibly. The girl is—or claims to be—the daughter of my father's cousin, Douglas—"

"The Morley who was wild and married a Frenchwoman?"

"I don't know that he was so very wild. He merely preferred to live abroad, and his wife was a very lovely woman. Their daughter—and I have little doubt that she *is* their daughter—is extraordinarily like the portrait of her mother."

"Oh, you've seen her!"

Dick was fain to smile, in spite of his misery. Alice would get a bit of a shock.

"Yes—and so have you. She's Diana Croft."

For the better part of a minute Alice was stunned into silence, but when speech came to her it poured forth in torrents. She demanded information so clamorously that Dick could scarcely get a word in edgewise to answer her.

"So that's why Arthur Hempstead wanted to borrow money of me!" she exclaimed. "Oh, I'll pay him out for this! And the girl—the sly, tricky thing! Of course it's all a trumped-up affair. I know Arthur and unless I'm mistaken, I know Diana, too. She's a born adventuress—"

"Alice, you're not being fair. You must try to realize that if all this is true, Diana has been wrongly treated from her infancy. We—my father and the rest of us—have been living on her money all these years, while she's—oh, Heavens, I can't bear to think of it."

He broke off with a groan and dashed a hand across his forehead. Alice was observing him critically.

"You act to me as though you were in love with the girl," she said. "Only love madness could explain your silly attitude. I tell you, she's an impostor, and Hempstead is using her for a tool. They're a precious pair. I haven't a doubt but what you'll allow yourself to be blackmailed by them, and then they'll go off together and enjoy the swag."

Dick flushed angrily.

"I dare say you know Hempstead well enough to pass judgment on him, but you don't know Diana. You have no right to talk so about her—"

"I'll talk as I please. If you don't like it, you needn't stay to listen."

"I don't mean to," Dick said, getting up and moving toward the door. "So I understand that our engagement still exists?"

Alice laughed softly.

"Do you think I'm going to leave you free to make love to the 'heiress'? I know your little game. I suppose you've had this up your sleeve for a long time—"

"Stop! You are detestable! In another moment you'll make me forget that you are a woman."

"Really!"

"And before I go there's one thing I want to make clear to you—in no circumstances are you to mention a word of this to the mater. I'm going down to-morrow myself, but I don't want her to know anything about it until—well, until it's absolutely necessary. You understand me, don't you?"

"Oh, you make me supremely tired!" Alice said with a yawn. "I have no object in telling Lady Morley anything. Good-by, and for Heaven's sake, try to be in a better temper when we meet again!"

She seemed now as anxious to get rid of him as she had been to see him, and he realized that her love was preparing to cool, if necessary. He was to be dangled until his fortune was settled one way or the other. A grim determination not to be treated in this humiliating fashion possessed him. He had tried to behave decently because he thought she really cared for him, but now he saw that it was merely his money that made him precious.

As soon as he had gone Alice rang up Hempstead's flat, only to be told by the faithful Saunders that his master was out.

She glanced at the clock and seeing that it still lacked more than an hour before dinner, ordered a taxi and drove around to Brook Street. Hempstead and she understood each other very well, and she would be able to get more out of him than she had out of Dick. He had been in the country all day and arrived at his flat about two minutes in advance of Alice.

She found him mixing a drink and looking extremely satisfied with himself and all the world, including even her.

"Hello, Alice! To what am I indebted for the pleasure of—"

"I want that money back I loaned you," she interrupted with withering scorn. "I've only just learned why you borrowed it. Of all the low tricks—"

Hempstead raised his eyebrows, drained off the contents of his glass, and then, without a word, went to his desk and made out a check for the sum she had lent to him. He could afford to do it, since, up to date, Diana had cost him nothing, and he was his own solicitor. Moreover, he had been lucky enough to get that loan from Dick as well.

"Here you are," he said pleasantly. "Very much obliged, I'm sure. I didn't know you were hard-pressed."

"I'm not—but I don't care to be taken for a complete mug," she returned inelegantly. "You and your precious Croft may make a fool of Dick, but you can't make one of me."

"Oh, that's what's biting you!" Hempstead laughed. "So he's told you. Have you jilted him yet?"

Alice crimsoned and her eyes flashed dangerously.

"Not—yet," she said quietly. "I want to know what's up. Dick will fight, you know—"

"I somehow don't imagine he will."

"I'll make him."

"And if he loses?"

"Then it will be time enough to talk about jilting him."

"Thank goodness you're so sensible!" Hempstead exclaimed with a heart-felt sigh. "If you threw Dick over now nothing would please him better. He'd simply rush Diana into marrying him, and so stop the whole business. The girl is difficult enough as it is."

Alice cooled down. She seated herself and accepted a cigarette that Hempstead offered her. He had suggested something which had already occurred to her.

"What do you mean by the girl being difficult?"

"Oh, she wants to clear out before it's even begun, and return to the exciting life of a domestic servant."

"I don't wonder," said Alice. "She's probably discovered by this time that your pretty little scheme may land her in jail."

Hempstead threw back his head and laughed.

"Come, Alice, you don't take me for such an idiot, do you? You might as well prepare yourself for the inevitable. Dick will be absolutely penniless. Only, for Heaven's sake hang on to him until it's all over. I'll make it well worth your while!"

She looked up languorously.

"Will you be very rich?" she asked.

Hempstead chuckled.

"If *all* my plans succeed I shall. Keep Dick tied hard and fast for a couple of months, and you'll get your reward."

"How much?"

"A thousand, eh?"

"Make it two."

"I'll split with you—say, fifteen hundred. But you'll have to earn it."

"Naturally. What do you want me to do, particularly?"

"Go back to Morley Hall, for one thing, and make yourself very charming to Lady Morley. Drop her a hint, if you can, how matters stand—"

"Dick said I wasn't to tell her."

"That's all right. She'll notice that he's down in the mouth, and you can say you know why, and then she'll coax you to tell her. Heavens, have I got to teach you your alphabet, Alice?"

"I don't think so. But why do you want her to know?"

"Because I think she'll strengthen Dick's resolution to keep the affair out of court. It would be a beastly expense on both sides, and can only end in one way. He can make everything over to Diana by deed of gift."

"I like your cool cheek! And I'm to help ruin the man I'm engaged to!"

"He'll be ruined without your aid, my dear. And, Alice—"

"Yes?"

"Afterward—I'll be pretty well to do, you know. That was the only obstacle before to our hitting it off. I can get anything I like out of that simpleton of a Diana. I think I'll take Morley Hall in lieu of a bonus, and my fees as her solicitor can be endless. I'll get the management of the whole estate in my hands. Come, old girl, what do you say?"

Alice was quivering from head to foot with excitement. Hempstead had always attracted her; at times the sense of his fascination had been well-nigh irresistible.

"It's a bet!" she exclaimed. "Oh, Arthur, do you still care for me?"

She let him take her into his arms and seal the unholy compact with a kiss.

"Of course I care. You're the only woman I've ever loved," he replied fervently. "Why, ever since I first knew of this, it's been in my mind to win you back again—you mercenary darling!"

"It's all very well to call me mercenary," she said with a sigh, "but people like you and me can't live without a great deal of money."

With a smile she tore up the check he had given her, and Hempstead sighed also—with relief.

"Now I must go. Papa would be furious if he knew what an unconventional thing I'm doing. When shall I see you again?"

"Oh, perhaps not for some time," Hempstead replied. "You must fulfil your part of the bargain, you know. Off with you to Morley Hall to-morrow, and, mind you, keep Dick safe as eggs."

"Sha'n't you be jealous, Arthur?"

"Don't! I can't bear to think of it!" Hempstead exclaimed. "However, it won't be for long, I promise you."

He saw her off gallantly. The minute the door closed upon her he ran up-stairs two at a time, whistling merrily. He had fixed Alice, quite to his liking, and she had never so much as suspected that he had already fallen head over heels in love with Diana, and hadn't the slightest intention of keeping a single one of his reckless promises.

He felt that he owed all this to Alice, who had once chosen Dick Morley in preference to his worthier self.

During that day and the several which followed, Fannie North kept Diana so busy having a good time that the girl did not trouble about what might be going on over her head. She supposed that Hempstead had dropped the whole thing, respecting her wishes in the matter as he had said he would do.

She wrote to her foster-mother, but was not in the least surprised to receive no reply, since at all times Mrs. Croft was a poor correspondent. She said she thought she wouldn't go on with the affair she'd hinted at previously, but Mrs. North, the kind friend with whom she was staying, didn't want her to go back into service, so she meant to take a little time to think it over.

Mr. Croft, after this letter had been received, gave her address to the bank in Pennington, where her little fund had been placed, and they sent her a check for nearly forty pounds. It seemed wealth, indeed, and Diana insisted upon paying for the three frocks Mrs. North had ordered for her. This made a big hole in the money, but Diana preferred to have it that way. Her hostess's generosity had extended to hats, shoes and countless small articles of apparel, but as many of these came from her own abundant wardrobe, Diana was gracious enough to accept them in the spirit in which they were given.

Fannie North was really a thoroughly good sort, and since she had grown very fond of Diana and had never been able to see Hempstead's faults, her plotting was amiable and had Diana's best interests at heart.

The girl's first intimation of what was afoot came in a letter from Dick, addressed to "Miss Morley," in care of Fannie.

She turned a little pale when the envelope was handed to her, and then excused herself and went to her own room to read its contents.

Her heart sank. There was not a word

of love in the letter—not a single reference to that mutual trust he had said they must have for each other. It was almost cold, and very businesslike.

DEAR MISS MORLEY:

It will be necessary for you to meet me and my solicitor as soon as may be convenient to you. I hope you will be able to come down to Frome at once, and am engaging two rooms for you at the Rose and Lily, our local "pub," which isn't so bad as it sounds. I want to have a personal interview with you before you see the mater, and would esteem it a great favor if you would be kind enough to continue to call yourself Miss Croft, just for the moment. I haven't told her yet, and our village is such a one for gossip that I'm sure you'll understand and respect my wishes.

Could you come down on Friday? Hempstead will see you through, no doubt. I am writing to him.

With best wishes,

Sincerely yours,

RICHARD MORLEY.

For what had she been hoping? Diana herself scarcely knew. It was not to steal another girl's lover. After all, *was* he another girl's lover Wasn't he—or hadn't she thought of him as—her very own? He said that the kiss had meant everything in the world to him, and that the time would come when he could explain.

They were to trust each other.

Very well, she would trust him—but Arthur Hempstead had played her false. She hadn't meant Dick to know what power she held over his destiny.

There was a gray look about her lips when she returned to the room where Fannie sat lounging over a novel.

"Read that," she said. It was no love letter that needed to be cherished in secret.

Fannie read it, and seemed to be very much surprised—cheerfully so.

"Well, my dear, you'd better go. Arthur will look up the trains and both of us will see you through, of course."

"I'd rather go alone," said Diana.

She was not unmindful of the favors she had received, but the spirit of her rankled. *Somebody* had betrayed the secret that she had determined to keep.

"Arthur is your solicitor, my dear," Fannie reminded her.

"No, he isn't! I mean—if I have a talk with Sir Richard quite by myself I might be able to straighten everything out. I don't want that money. Nothing could persuade me to take it. I hate the very thought of it. Oh, Mrs. North, can't you see how unhappy I am?"

"I see how mad you are," said Fannie, who was trembling from head to foot with a horrible sense of indecision.

After all, it was Diana's affair, and Fannie North had grown quite unaccountably fond of Diana during the past week. The girl had shown power in restraint—a rare quality. There was a country directness about her, a trait that perhaps she would never lose, but it only added to her charm. She saw things straight from the shoulder. It was a deliberate taking aim that Fannie was forced to admire.

"Arthur's made a hash of this," she observed to herself.

"I'd be very grateful if you let me go alone," Diana said quietly.

Fannie, a rather impulsive creature, threw her arms around the girl and kissed her.

"You *shall* go alone. I'd simply hate anybody telling me what to do when in my heart I knew what was best for myself. I'll send a wire and Fagg will pack for you. If we hurry you can get off at once. Let's have a look at the A. B. C. My dear, you can be in Frome by eight o'clock! Arthur isn't coming to take us out to dinner until seven thirty. You can leave him to me. He'll be cross, of course, but—well, good luck to you!"

Fannie jumped up without more ado, and—being practical—began to set things in motion.

For about half an hour Diana was the center of a whirlwind.

At the end of that time she was off; within the hour she was again in a train.

She felt like a runaway, but the sensation, though fearful, was rather pleasant.

Every moment she was speeding nearer and nearer some one she dearly loved. Yet he had written so coldly!

Fannie North said that meant nothing. Mrs. North was older and wiser and knew the world, so perhaps she was right.

Once more there was the familar station

at Frome. It wasn't much of a station, and on this occasion Diana was the only passenger to alight. In spite of the telegram Dick Morley did not meet her.

"The Rose and Lily—and I'd like a cab, please," she said to the solitary porter, who eyed her up and down with deep interest. He had seen her before and remembered her, but some indefinable change had taken place that he found difficult to put a finger on—whether of luggage or attire, he couldn't rightly say.

"Yes, miss, thank you kindly."

Diana followed him with an aching heart and smarting eyes. She had cherished a rather absurd sense of home-coming and it was disappointing not to be met.

"Of course Dick hates me!" she told herself. "He thinks I want to rob him, but perhaps when I've explained he'll forgive me."

Never for a moment now did she hold her grudge against him. Their brief interview in the park had swept away all misunderstanding on her part. She was to trust him. It seemed a sweet and easy philosophy.

At the Rose and Lily she found that her rooms were ready, although she was not expected until the following day. The daughter of the house brought supper to the quaint little sitting-room that overlooked the village common, and while the table was being laid, Diana changed from her traveling dress into the soft gray frock which had been one of her purchases under Fannie North's advice. She wanted to look particularly well this evening, for Dick might come, after all. Possibly he hadn't been home when the telegram arrived, or had decided to dine first. Of course, that was it! Dinner at the Hall was a ceremonious affair, even in war time.

Little by little Diana recovered her flagging spirits. She dressed her hair in the simple but becoming fashion that Mrs. North's competent maid had taught her, and pinned a sprig of pink rambler roses at her belt. The effect against the gray was charming.

Then she ate her supper, and by that time night had fallen and a golden moon was climbing the sky.

It was very peaceful in the little inn—the sweet peace of the country that Diana loved. She was a country girl, through and through. London, all right in its way, had made an appeal to her intellect, but not to her heart. She wondered about her former comrades at the Hall, the superior Trigger and overworked Rose Carr—did they know the curious things fate was doing to her? Not likely, since she didn't quite know herself.

Oh, why didn't he come!

Here she was, waiting for him not a stone's throw from his gates—waiting and longing—and he did not come.

The moon beckoned her out of doors, and finally she was unable to resist its appeal.

She put a scarf around her shoulders and went out. It was impossible not to walk toward the gates of the Hall, for if he was coming it would be from that direction. And having reached the gates and found them open, she ventured inside.

Was this *really* her home, too? Her heart was filled with awe and reverence for the splendid old turf and giant elms. *Her* home—the home of *her* forefathers, as well as of Sir Richard Morley's. Yet she felt herself to be an interloper.

Choosing the mossy side path under the elms, her footsteps made no sound. She was like a little gray ghost or shadow flitting among the larger shadows of the trees.

The poetry and beauty of the night cast a spell of enchantment over her. It was so lovely that it made her heart ache.

After a while she sat down on a bed of dry moss and rested herself against the trunk of a tree.

Scarcely had she done so when she heard quick footsteps coming from the direction of the gates and caught the glow of a lighted cigar.

It must be Dick.

She started up, but shrank back again instantly when the man's silhouette came into view. It was Arthur Hempstead. He had followed her from London by the very next train.

He walked briskly on until he was directly opposite the spot where Diana crouched on the turf.

She thought he had seen her, but ap-

parently not, for his gaze was directed toward a clump of shrubbery some distance along, and he stopped and gave a low whistle, which was answered at once from the shrubbery.

He walked on for a few more steps and then a girl's figure emerged from the shrubbery and ran toward him.

"Oh, Arthur, I was so afraid you wouldn't get my telegram in time! Thank goodness you've come. There's the very dickens to pay!"

It was Alice Powell.

Diana was so amazed that she quite forgot her position as eavesdropper.

CHAPTER XVI.

ONE HUNDRED AND FIFTY POUNDS.

IT was very puzzling to Diana that Hempstead and Alice Powell were meeting as conspirators, when by all the laws they should bear each other no good will. Wasn't Hempstead endeavoring to despoil and disgrace the man Alice was engaged to marry?

Yet they were meeting not only as conspirators, but as lovers.

Diana's honest young soul was sick within her. She wanted to fly; on the other hand, what they were saying concerned her so vitally that she felt she had every right to listen—that it was even more of a duty than a right.

In the moonlight she saw Alice raise her arms to Hempstead's shoulders, and he stooped and kissed her.

"Where's Dick?" he asked.

"Comforting his mother. I let the cat out of the bag this afternoon, as you told me—'by accident.' Lady Morley is absolutely crushed—but she's on your side, as you predicted. She made Dick tell her everything. Oh, it was a sobby affair! We both wept and I said I would stick to him through thick and thin—just as you told me to do. Then that girl's telegram came, and luckily the flap of the envelope was loose and I opened it. Dick was not in at the time. I'm going to give it to him tomorrow morning—pretend I forgot about it in all the excitement. I wired at once to you. I suppose the Croft girl has arrived. Have you seen her?"

Hempstead answered angrily:

"No—hang her! That is, she's come right enough, but I haven't seen her. She's mooning about the village somewhere. Fannie North is a sentimental fool! I ought never to have trusted her. She let Diana go off—I believe she deliberately encouraged her. All the time I knew Diana would be difficult to manage. If she and Dick get together, it's all up with us. We'll never lay hands on a penny of his precious fortune. He'll persuade Diana to marry him."

"You're forgetting me," Alice interrupted. "He thinks he's going to marry me."

"Yes, you're a brick, Alice!"

"Oh, I wish it was all over and we were free to have each other. Don't you, Arthur?"

"Yes, of course," Hempstead replied a little shortly. "But go back to the house now. We mustn't risk being seen together. Dick may miss you and wonder where you are."

"Dick never misses me," Alice said passionately. "I think that's one reason why I hate him so."

"Well, don't let him suspect your real sentiments, my dear. Good night, old girl. I must trot along and find the fair Diana. I wonder what her game is!"

They separated, Alice returning to the house by the path through the shrubbery, and Hempstead retracing his steps toward the village.

Tears of shame and anger stood in Diana's eyes. She felt debased by what she had seen and heard. Could such wicked people live in a world that to-night was so beautiful!

But once more Dick was vindicated. His faithless fiancée had read and kept back the telegram Fannie North had sent in Diana's name. Those two—Hempstead and Alice Powell—were plotting evil. What money was it they expected to get?

Diana waited until the footsteps had died away and then she rose wearily and walked back by way of the mossy side path.

Her heart beat fast with fear and excitement. She did not want to see Hempstead,

She sensed in him a power for evil which every one who treads this earth has to fight. However, it is something to know the devil when you meet him, and at last Diana saw Hempstead in his true colors.

"There's a gentleman called to see you, miss," said the landlord's daughter when she got back to the inn. "Mr. Hempstead, miss. I showed him up."

The girl, who was enjoying a gossip in the moonlight with a farmer of the neighborhood, regarded Diana with veiled curiosity. She knew Hempstead well, but she did not know who Diana was.

"She's a lady right enough," she observed to her swain when Diana was out of hearing, "but there was a parlormaid name of Croft at the Hall for a short time, and Billy Smart, at the station, swears this is the same 'un. But Billy's an awful liar!"

"He be," agreed the farmer. "Only larst week he be telling me this war 'll finish come Michaelmas. That's a proper young lady, her is—but that there Mr. Hempstead now, why for bea'nt he stopping at the Hall? Him's put up for t'night at Joe Grimes's—"

"You don't say!" gasped the landlord's daughter. "Why not here? Perhaps the Rose and Lily aren't good enough for him."

"'Cos along o' the young leddy, of course," said the farmer. "Ef he be coorting of her it's more genteel to bide in separate houses."

"Is that a fact?" the young woman commented. "I never heard tell on it before."

During the short walk back Diana had come to a definite conclusion with regard to the unpleasant scene which she had just witnessed. It would be madness to let Hempstead know that she had overheard his interview with Alice Powell. He was the sort of man who concealed the weapon with which he meant to strike. The devil has to be fought with fire. Her knowledge about him was a weapon, but if he was aware she possessed it he would find some way to gain the upper hand.

By this time she had quite forgotten the pains taken with her toilet and was unaware how sweet and lovely she looked, when she stepped into the little sitting-room. The dew had kissed her hair into glistening tendrils and ripples; excitement had paled her cheeks and made her eyes like stars. Her finely poised head was held at a haughty angle, and the slight lift of her upper lip hinted at rebellion and disdain.

For all of his simulated tenderness with Alice, Hempstead was madly in love with Diana. As soon as Alice had served his purpose he meant to fling her to the winds. It was difficult for him to conceal the jealousy and mad passion that surged over him when Diana entered and stood for a moment in the doorway, regarding him with a cold assumption of surprise.

He sprang to his feet and started toward her, but she checked him instantly with a gesture.

"Sit down, please. I don't know why you have followed me here, but perhaps it's just as well—"

"Diana, are you going to spoil everything?" Hempstead demanded wildly. He could scarcely keep control of himself. He wanted to take her into his arms or strangle her—so torn was he between a madness of love and of rage.

He did not sit down again, and she, too, remained standing. They were not more than three feet apart, and his nearness had a stifling effect on her.

"I told you I did not mean to go on with the case," she said, trying to speak calmly, "and you pretended to agree that I had a right to do as I pleased. Then you went over my head and plotted and planned without my knowledge. It was a miserable, cowardly thing to do."

Hempstead tried to smile, but the effort was scarcely successful.

"My dear girl! These accusations are not merely unkind; they're preposterous. If you mean that I told Dick—I'd done that already. Further than acquainting him with the true facts of your birth nothing has been done."

Diana's eyes flashed indignantly.

"That is not true. You told him after I had asked you not to."

There was a short silence. Then Hempstead asked: "Well, what are you going to do about it?"

Diana plucked the spray of roses from her belt and thrust them gently into a bowl of flowers. Every movement was grace personified. A sort of dignity sat upon her. The man felt a reservation in her nature that he longed to break by physical violence. No other woman had ever made him feel like this. He took a step nearer and endeavored to touch her arm, but she drew away sharply.

"Diana, it's too late to turn back now. Dick knows and so does Lady Morley. They daren't keep from you what is your own—"

"If I am willing that they should, the matter is entirely between them and me. It has nothing to do with you, Mr. Hempstead.

"But you—you have a great deal to do with me, Diana. I want you. I've imagined myself in love with plenty of women—but it was never like this. I'm simply mad with love of you. I know now how a man feels when he kills the woman he loves—if he thinks another might get her. That's the way I feel about you. Have a little pity on me. Say you care, too. Give me a chance against that cad of a Morley, who was only trifling with you. I'm not trifling. I'm in dead earnest. I'd marry you if you hadn't a penny, or the hope of one."

Diana heard him out in stunned silence. She was no longer frightened, but her scorn was increasing by leaps and bounds. There seemed to be no limit to Hempstead's daring, and the thought flashed across her mind that he was an uncommonly good actor. After what she had witnessed not half an hour ago in the grounds of the Hall, this passionate declaration filled her with disgust.

"You've taken me for a fool all along, haven't you?" she asked with dangerous sweetness. "And fools—particularly if they are women—may be insulted with impunity. Now will you go, please? I do not care to see you again. I'd be very much obliged to you, Mr. Hempstead, if you'd just keep out of my way for the future."

"Indeed!"

The glitter in Hempstead's eyes changed subtly to one of craft. She had spurned him, and one day he would make her pay dearly for that speech of hers, but it wasn't the right moment now. He must change his tack at once.

Instead of obeying her command to go, he took out his case and without asking permission, lit a cigarette and coolly threw himself into a chair, flinging one knee over the other and regarding his reluctant hostess with veiled insolence.

"There is just another little matter before we part company—for good and all," he said. "What about the money I've spent on your behalf? If you are really thinking about going back to domestic service—which perhaps, after all, is your true métier—I'm afraid it will take too long to pay me back. I've flung about a hundred and fifty pounds to the winds over you. I'm sure you hate being in my debt, but I dare say it mightn't have occurred to you if I hadn't thought to mention it. Young ladies are apt to overlook trifles of that sort."

Diana's delicate face quivered. Every word had struck fairly and squarely at her pride. She hadn't any idea that her debt was so great. Mentally she reviewed her resources. There was in her purse a little over three pounds left from what she had squandered on clothes, but thank Heaven that was her own. She could offer it to him, but what were three pounds against the hundred and fifty he claimed?

"I can give you all the items," Hempstead went on, seeing his advantage. "My time is worth something, I suppose you'll admit. I dare say Fannie won't charge for your board and the presents she made you—that's between you and her. But I'm afraid I can't afford to be so sentimental. Perhaps the easiest way would be for you to ask Dick for the money?"

He was testing her to see if that was in her mind. If it was, he was wasting his valuable time now, for he knew that Dick Morley would do all that, and more. Hempstead's object was to keep Dick and Diana from meeting.

"I shouldn't dream of asking Sir Richard for it!" Diana exclaimed proudly.

Hempstead was so relieved that he nearly forgot himself in a chuckle, but checked it in time.

"And who, may I ask, is paying for this charming little suite? Dick?"

"I—I am paying for it myself," Diana faltered, making rapid mental calculations as to how far her meager store would go.

"See here, my child," Hempstead cried, springing to his feet and throwing his cigarette into the empty grate, "I don't want to torture you. It isn't fair." He became instantly melting and tender. "I'll cut my little account down to actual costs, and reckon the time as nothing. If you're determined to chuck all the possibilities, you can't have it both ways, you know. You either acknowledge yourself as Sir Douglas Morley's daughter and force others to do the same, or you step down and out and pretend that your claim was not a legal one. I don't imagine that you care to become a left-handed pensioner of Dick's."

"Oh, no!" she cried.

"Well, then—you must earn your own living. Come back to London and begin. Fannie will find you something to do, and little by little you can clear off what you owe me. I think you're very foolish, when you might have twenty thousand a year and a fine old estate, but if sentiment impels you to chuck it, well and good. Only you can't play at being the lady forever. It costs money. Somebody has to pay, and, honestly my dear, I can't afford to go on being your banker. Now I'm off. I'll see you first thing in the morning, and by that time you'll have thought things over."

It was not until after he had gone that Diana began to realize fully how desperate her position was.

Hempstead was a villain with the gift of a parson's tongue, at times. When she remembered that scene between him and Alice she grew more and more bewildered.

But her own position which she had defined with such painful clearness presented the greatest difficulty, and, after all, it was the only thing that concerned her.

Why was she here? Because Dick Morley had beckoned her in a letter. A miserable worm of doubt began to gnaw at her trust in Dick. Was it possible that he meant to propose some such compromise as Hempstead hinted? Was it his intention to offer her an income in consideration of her silence?

The whole or nothing—Hempstead was right about that—and since she was firmly determined not to take the whole, it must be nothing.

Only she hadn't thought about that sum owing to Hempstead. It fairly crushed her. What could she do?

Up at the Hall next morning three people sat down to breakfast with very mixed emotions as regarded themselves and each other.

Lady Morley had spent a restless night. Her heart ached for her son and her pride was tortured over the disgrace that her dead husband had earned for his memory. She had wandered about the splendid old mansion which had been her home for so many years, looking like a ghost in her white wrapper, carrying a lighted candle. Several times she stopped before the portrait of her handsome predecessor, Diana's mother, and studied it carefully. Once she went to the door of Dick's room and listened for the regular breathing which told her that he, at least, was able to sleep. She was grateful for that.

So breakfast found her grave and pallid, her tears all washed away. She would shed no more tears. She would only yearn over her son and by her great love try to make it easy for him to bear this trouble.

Alice was quietly demure; sympathetic to outward appearance; inwardly seething with curiosity about what might have happened at the interview between Hempstead and Diana, which she was right in assuming had taken place.

Dick, the last of the three to come to table, paused before the heap of letters by his plate, and frowning a little, lifted from the top a brown envelope.

"Oh, I forgot to tell you, Dick," Alice explained hastily; "that came yesterday afternoon and I slipped it into the pocket of my jersey, meaning to give it to you when you came in. But poor Lady Morley's being so upset made me forget it entirely. I do hope it isn't very important."

"It is—rather," Dick replied, thrusting it into his pocket as soon as he had read the contents.

For a brief moment he was suspicious of Alice, but the loosened flap which had

enabled her to open the envelope was now securely gummed down, and her expression was so entirely innocent and anxious that he felt he had misjudged her.

Indeed, he seemed to have misjudged her in many ways, for here she was, bravely upholding his mother through this hour of trial, and announcing her intention of keeping to her part of the sorry matrimonial bargain, no matter what happened. Her outburst when first she heard of the misfortune was not unnatural. Dick had to remember that the girl had been petted and spoiled all her life, and was given to a freer method of speech than he had been brought up to feel was permitted.

And she was so very kind to his mother, in spite of the fact of having betrayed what he had hoped to keep secret just a little longer. However, he knew that keeping it secret was only a matter of a few days, and Alice had explained tearfully how she had been driven to tell by Lady Morley's wild anxiety about him.

It was really his own fault at bottom. The generous boy knew how incapable he was of hiding the fact that something was worrying him. Unlike Hempstead, he was no actor.

So while every instinct impelled him to turn away from Alice, sheer gratitude and kindness of heart filled him with bitter self-reproach.

He had misjudged her; she loved him, and not only did he not love her, but he positively disliked her.

And there was another torture added to all these. Even were he free to go to Diana and ask her to marry him, what would she think? What would anybody think? That he was a coward and a fortune-hunter rolled into one. Had she been the little beggar-maid she seemed in the first instance, nothing would have given him greater joy than to lay everything he possessed at her feet. But now he was the beggar. For years he had been living on her bounty. To say to her—even were he free—"Marry me," would be to crown injury with insult.

So he had written to her coldly, lest she misjudged him as he had misjudged Alice. He couldn't have borne that.

"Aren't you going to have anything to eat?" his mother inquired with pleading in her eyes.

"Surely," he replied. "Suppose we all try to eat something? I'll run you a race."

To her dismay he took her own empty plate and heaped it with buttered eggs and bacon.

"Oh, my dear!" she cried. But she was able to smile at him since he had turned the tables on her so neatly. It was more like the old whimsical Dick than he had been of late.

"What are we going to do this morning?" asked Alice. "I want you to drive me over to Hemming, Dick, if you can spare a couple of hours. I promised your mother I'd look at a cottage for her. She likes this district, you know, and there's such a scramble for empty houses that we'd better nail this one at once."

She leaned forward anxiously. If only she could keep him with her all the morning and leave Hempstead free to get rid of Diana! She felt that she could trust Arthur to play his part, and she knew that he expected her to play hers.

"With pleasure," Dick replied.

Alice sprang up, her face sparkling.

"Then we'll start at once. I told them to have the dog-cart ready. I won't be a minute." She was on the point of leaving the room, but Dick called out to her:

"I can't possibly go for an hour or so. I have a most important errand in the village to do first."

She knew what that meant. Diana was on his brain, and he intended to see her.

"Can't your errand wait?" she asked sharply.

"I'm afraid it can't."

"Then you'll risk somebody else snapping up the cottage that your mother has particularly set her heart on?"

"Oh, my dear," Lady Morley expostulated. "Surely an hour or so won't make any difference about the cottage!"

For once Dick seemed callous to an appeal on his mother's behalf, or else he inclined to her point of view that the empty cottage would not run away if left to itself a little longer.

"Thanks for ordering the cart, Alice. I'll be back just as soon as possible."

She followed him out of the room with a gaze of burning hatred, which Lady Morley was thoroughly startled to behold. It was not meant for her to see, but certainly she did see it, and it set her wondering. Mothers often possess a sixth sense, and instantly Lady Morley's mind reverted to the incident of the withheld telegram. Such missives, as a rule, were left on the hall-table and not carried about in other people's pockets. She felt that Dick's sudden errand in the village had to do with that telegram, and that Alice knew it. However, being a wise woman, she held her peace.

Dick hurried around to the stables and jumped into the cart, which was waiting, owing to Alice's thoughtfulness. He could have walked to the Rose and Lily in ten minutes, but somehow he had not cared to name the inn as his destination.

A sudden lightness came over him in spite of all there was against feeling happy. At least, he would see Diana. He wanted so much to be happy, if only for a moment. The little horse carried him along at a spanking rate, and it was no time before he drew up at the quaint old inn, throwing the reins to the boy who dashed out with a grin to receive them. The young squire was more than popular with his tenants; he was loved, which is better.

"Is Miss Croft anywhere about?" he asked the landlord's daughter, who was busy sweeping down a flight of stairs.

"Miss Croft's left, sir," the girl replied.

"Left!" Dick repeated blankly. "Why—she only came last evening."

"Yes, sir. Her went by the six thirty this morning. There's a letter for you, sir. I'll just fetch it."

Dick groaned in spirit. The world was empty again.

CHAPTER XVII.

REFUGE IN FLIGHT.

YES, the world was an empty place! Dick did not see how he was to endure the emptiness of it. He wished that he were of the sex which feels no shame for weeping with disappointment.

Why had Diana come, and then run away again, without giving him the chance of seeing her? Was she hurt because he had failed to respond at once to the telegram? If only Alice hadn't taken it upon herself to take charge of the message he would have received it last evening, and then he would have seen Diana.

"Her left a letter for you, sir," the daughter of the house repeated. "Here it is."

"A letter? Ah, yes, thank you, Minnie."

He took the envelope and turned away into the little tea-garden to be quite alone when he read its contents. They were brief and shocked him terribly. What could Diana mean?

DEAR SIR RICHARD:

I hope you will try to forgive me, and even to think kindly of me sometimes. It was all a dreadful mistake. I cannot claim anything from you, and I feel so badly about what I've done that I am going back to London and try to earn my living honestly.

DIANA CROFT.

Dick read and reread the tear-stained missive, and at the end he was convinced that it could mean but one thing—Diana had lent herself to a fraud proposed by Hempstead, and then, at the eleventh hour, repented.

He was more shocked by the thought of her being that kind of girl than he had been at the prospect of losing his inheritance. Yet his own solicitors were of the opinion that her claim could be proved. They had discovered that Sir Douglas Morley was the father of a girl-child born a few months after his death, and that the baby had been christened Diana. The doctor mentioned by Hempstead had signed the birth-certificate. Only, of course, there was the possibility that Diana Croft was not the same child.

In her letter she practically acknowledged that she was not, although she did not say it in so many words.

The first person Dick ran into as he was leaving the premises was Arthur Hempstead. By this time the latter also had discovered that Diana was gone, and he was in a furious temper. For him she had left no note or message of any kind. He had been to the station where, finding that she

had really started back to London, he sent off a wire to Fannie North to meet and keep an eye on her until he could get there himself. But there was doubt of Fannie's receiving the wire in time, particularly as she was a late riser. In that case Hempstead hoped devoutly that she would have the sense to send her maid to the station.

He realized now to what lengths his interview with Diana had driven her. He shouldn't have frightened her so about the money. The sum he had mentioned was a gross exaggeration, but the poor little simpleton had believed him.

The two men met in the road just outside the Rose and Lily, and instantly they halted to take stock of each other.

The girl was gone, and the two were alone with their mutual hatred for each other. What a contrast they presented—Dick in his country clothes, his boyish face healthily tanned, his body held splendidly erect, suggested the soldier as well as the young squire; the other, negligently slouching, dandified and dissipated, looked pretty much what he was, a rogue and a gamester.

"So the little bird has flown, eh?" Hempstead asked with a smile on his lips and a sneer in his eyes.

His gaze wandered to the letter which Dick still held in his hand. Hempstead had heard about that letter from the landlord's daughter, and at the very moment he met Dick he had been on his way to volunteer to deliver it. He would have sold what passed for his soul for a glimpse of its contents.

Dick carefully placed the letter in an inner pocket, and then with a cool, appraising glance he measured his man. The time had come when he felt he really must thrash Arthur Hempstead. Until he had done that he couldn't breathe freely.

"I am going to give you a hiding," he said very gently. "You'd best take off your coat. You'll be able to give a better account of yourself if you do."

The boy who was holding Dick's horse stared at them with popping eyes, and Minnie, watching idly from the doorway, threw her apron over her head and screamed faintly.

But neither expectation nor apprehension was fulfilled. Discretion being the better part of valor, Hempstead—while not actually taking to his heels and running—did what was virtually the same thing. Instantly he recognized that Dick was in dread earnest, he turned sharply and made off down the road in the direction of the station. He had a long, dusty walk before him with the chance of being overtaken, but Dick was too disgusted to give chase.

So he departed, followed by the shrill laughter of Minnie and the catcalls of her little brother.

Dick, his face like a thunder-cloud, mounted his cart, and drove back to the Hall. When Alice saw him she knew at once that he had not achieved the object of his errand. She was wildly curious, but afraid to betray too much knowledge by asking questions. Surely, however, Hempstead would find some way to communicate with her.

She was entirely off the self-proposed trip to Hemminge, and pleading a headache which the glare of the sun would not improve, betook herself to the summer-house in the shrubbery, where she could watch for any messenger who might be coming from Frome.

She watched all day, and whenever the telephone rang she hurried into the house to be near at hand when it was answered, but no message came for her. Toward evening she grew so restless that she could scarcely contain herself.

What had happened?

Unless she heard from Hempstead in the morning she meant to go up to town herself and find out what his silence meant.

Dick went straight to his mother's boudoir after returning from the village. He had long known that she was the best friend he had in the world, and it was no new thing for him to confide in her.

Explaining that he had sent for Diana for a business consultation and that she had come and gone without seeing him, he gave Lady Morley her letter to read.

"I can't make it out, mater," he said. "She—she was such a fine, sweet girl, so wonderful, so—"

"My boy!" Lady Morley exclaimed,

aghast with surprise. "How do you come to know so much about the young woman?"

Dick flushed guiltily. What a one he was for giving himself away!

"Well, she was here for a fortnight, you know," he said lamely.

"She was certainly here, and she made quite a creditable parlormaid in some respects," Lady Morley said, more mystified than ever. "But how you could discover her 'fine, sweet, wonderful' nature in such circumstances, I'm sure I don't know."

"Oh, I saw her once or twice in town, too," Dick explained with a casual air.

"Come, Dick, out with it! When did you fall in love with this pretty impostor?"

"Mater—there were probably reasons why she did it. I wouldn't call her an impostor exactly."

"Undoubtedly—financial reasons," Lady Morley interrupted dryly. "But apparently she has a conscience. That, at least, is one point in her favor."

"Yes—it is, isn't it?" Dick assented with too great eagerness.

"But I should like to know when you fell in love with her?" his mother insisted. Light was beginning to dawn on her. She remembered how unhappy he had been almost from the first moment of his engagement to Alice.

"What on earth makes you think I'm in love with anybody?" he grumbled.

Lady Morley smiled tremulously.

"You *ought* to be in love with Alice, but you *are* in love with the pretty adventuress, or think you are, which for the moment amounts to the same thing. Now, my dear, I'm beginning to think the scheme was trumped up long before Croft set foot in this house. Hempstead had probably worked it all out, and she came here to spy upon us, and question your poor father. Probably the real Diana Morley—since you seem to think it's proved there was such a child—died ages ago, and no doubt your poor father knew no more about her than we do. Croft scared him literally to death."

"Oh, mater, how you talk!" Dick exclaimed. "I can't believe she was an impostor, even though she says so herself—"

Lady Morley veiled her clever eyes.

"Now, if you and she had fallen in love with each other—though Heaven knows where you found the opportunity—I think I could explain this letter."

"Well?" he asked tensely as she paused. 'I said 'if.'"

"I know you did. For argument's sake let's say we have fallen in love with each other."

Lady Morley sighed deeply. She had got what she was after, but it did not please her very much.

"You said you think you could explain the letter," he prompted.

"Yes, dear. You see—if she cares for you—she doesn't want to take the money away from you. She—she'd rather sacrifice herself. A woman very much in love would do a thing like that."

Dick stared at his mother in amazed admiration. What she was telling him had been there before his very eyes and he hadn't seen it.

All the boy of him came back at once. His eyes glowed as he read the letter again.

"She wept when she was writing it," Lady Morley said, pointing with a shaking finger. "Those are tear-stains. My dear, it breaks my heart—but I *must* be fair to her."

"Mater, I'd rather lose everything I possess than my faith in Diana!" Dick exclaimed. "You don't know how I feel about it—"

"Yes—and what about Alice? She stood by you nobly. Is she to be thrown over?"

Dick's fine mouth quivered.

"Speaking of fairness—would it be playing the game to marry Alice when I don't care for her in that way?" he asked. "You know it wouldn't, mater. And, as a matter of fact, it would be beyond me. There are some things a chap can't do and still feel that he's decent."

"Can he throw a girl over?" Lady Morley asked gently.

"That's a riddle I can't answer. All I know is I wouldn't thank a girl for marrying me when she was in love with another chap—and I should think girls would feel the same way about it."

"There are girls—and girls," observed Lady Morley.

She had nothing for which to be at all happy. There was every chance that her son might be beggared, after all; and while she had encouraged his lukewarm attentions to Alice, it was quite a different matter to discover him to be genuinely in love with an unknown somebody who, whatever she might prove to be, had once served Morley Hall in the capacity of parlormaid. Lady Morley was just, but she was also human.

"I think," said Dick, digging his hands into his pockets and knitting his brows furiously in an effort to appear detached in the matter; "I think, mater, I'll just run across to Pennington and have a chat with Mrs. Croft. It's really necessary that I should see her anyway, and—" He hesitated, a suspicion of his old merry twinkle betraying him.

"Yes, I know—and Diana may be there. Well, Dick, I should be off with the old love before I was on with the new, if I were you."

Dick started to say that it had nothing to do with love, but remembering in time what a poor hand he was at lying, decided to keep quiet. He could never get the better of his mother. She was always so infernally right.

Diana had not returned to her foster-parents.

There was something like a panic in the simple little household when it became evident that she had strayed out into the world all by herself.

Dick settled one last, lingering doubt when he showed Mrs. Croft an old photograph of his father and asked her if she could say she had ever seen the original.

She did not answer him too promptly, and he watched her troubled face while she studied it.

Then she looked up at him, her honest old eyes full of wondering pity.

"I wasn't sure, sir—not altogether—for it's a long time ago. But the little cross makes it certain. I noticed it particularly when the gentleman brought little Diana. I thought perhaps he were a clergyman."

"The little cross" referred to was an antique trinket which Dick's father had picked up in the street as a young man on his honeymoon in Rome, and regarded as a mascot. It was the only jewelry he ever wore, except the watch and chain to which it was attached, and he was never without it. Lady Morley had insisted upon its being buried with him. In the old-fashioned cabinet photograph it came out with remarkable distinctness.

"It's the same gentleman, sir, as brought little Diana to me. Ah, may the Lord ha' mercy on her—for I don't know where she is! You'll find her, sir? It wasn't the money, nor yet her rights, that she wants. She wrote and told me so. She said she couldn't do it, because of you, sir. She's so kind hearted. I told that Mr. Hempstead the same. He can't do nothink with her if she's made up her mind not to go to law about it—and I should hate for her to, anyway. Oh, if we'd only kept her safe to home and never told her nothing!"

At this point Annie, the plain-featured family drudge, burst into sobs, and old Abraham Croft, who wisely allowed his wife to do the talking, drew a horny hand across his dim eyes."

If only they hadn't sent her out into the world!

Dick respected them too much to offer them money for all they had done for Diana. They loved her, and that constituted a bond between him and them to which an offer of money would be in the nature of an insult.

"You'll find her, sir?" Mrs. Croft pleaded for the tenth time as they went with him down the garden-path to the gate.

"I'll find her, right enough," Dick replied, much more cheerily than he felt. "Don't you worry a bit."

Annie's gaze followed him with lingering wistfulness.

"Perhaps him and Di' 'll get married one of these days," she said. "Fancy Di' a real lady—but she always was one, wasn't she, ma? How she picked up all she knew beats me."

Old Abraham shouldered his big rake and strode back to the fields from which he had been summoned. The whole world was at war and his little adopted daughter's fate hung in the balance together with the fate of Europe, but it was a hot day, with the

promise of showers in the offing, and the hay had to be got in.

Mrs. Croft remembered her heavy churning, but she stood long enough at the gate to murmur:

"I hope he finds her soon, Annie; I never could abide suspense."

But for many a long day she abided not only suspense, but fear and heart-breaking worry—all those gnawing anxieties to which a loving heart is prey when things go wrong in the way they had with the Croft family.

It is true they heard from Diana. She had not been so cruel as all that, but she said merely that she was quite well and had found work. There was no address, and the letter which was sent on to Dick had been posted from the north of London, with no further clue as to where she was.

So October came and two months had drifted by since Diana walked out of the Rose and Lily in Frome and set her face toward the wide world, to earn her living and pay back Arthur Hempstead all the money she owed him.

It was the only thing she thought of—just to live in order to save as much as she could, and free herself from the horror of that unclean debt.

After her third-class ticket to London had been purchased she surreptitiously inspected the contents of her purse. The account at the inn had not been as heavy as she had feared. There were still nearly two pounds left—one pound, nineteen and fivepence, to be exact. It was enough for a healthy girl to face the world with; only, besides health, employers generally require a reference as to other things.

Diana was afraid to go to Fannie North even for a favor of that sort. Mrs. North might betray her to Hempstead, under the guise of kindness.

Adversity makes strange bed-fellows, they say. As far as Pennington Diana had the carriage all to herself and then in hopped three vivacious girls with suit-cases and miscellaneous bundles, chattering like birds and as full of life and spirits. One of them was rather pretty; all were thin, obviously underfed, and a bit shabby.

Diana forgot her own difficulties and regarded them with awe when their conversation revealed the fact that they were young ladies of the chorus from the "Mignonette" first touring company, lately disbanded on their way back to London to hunt another engagement. They talked largely of thirty and even forty shillings a week, and discussed managers with an intimacy that included the use of their Christian names.

Obviously they were seeking to impress Diana, whose interest made her a splendid audience, but after a while she fell to considering what the difference might be between these girls and herself that enabled them to earn such princely salaries. She was not only prettier than any of them, but she was healthier and better built. The beautiful leaf-brown color of her hair was its own and owed its luster to the sun. It would have been mistaken modesty to deny these things.

Quite suddenly—because if she hadn't done it without consideration she couldn't have nerved herself up to doing it at all—she plumped straight into their conversation. Her face, pink with embarrassment, her eyes shy and at the same time confiding, she put her question.

"I wonder if one of you could tell me how I might earn my living in London?"

Luckily for Diana they were very nice girls and thoroughly generous. They were surprised, naturally, for her need did not advertise itself in her appearance, but they knew a little themselves about that sort of camouflage.

They all began talking at once, and Diana soon found herself the center of their good-natured interest. She had too fine a nature to be in the least ashamed of her homely upbringing and the sort of work for which she had been trained, and she told them about it frankly, adding that it was only because of a pressing need for money that she craved a higher wage than domestic service granted.

Ella Ponting, the leader of the three—a thin, little, dark thing with eyes too big for her face—laughed knowingly.

"Yes, my dear—the money's what we're all after. I want 'big money,' and if I get my rights I'll be on the way to it this season."

Diana did not want to be misunderstood. She loathed their thinking that she might consider herself above the station in life into which fate had cast her as a baby. And it would have meant disloyalty to Mum and Dad and Annie, too.

"It's because I have debts to pay off," she said anxiously.

Ella nodded. She knew something about that, too, but in a limited way.

"Yes—it's fierce the way life runs away with money. Why don't you go on the stage, kid?"

The other two chimed in, and there was a hasty consultation. They could put up an extra bed in one of the two rooms they shared among them, and somehow they could get along, the whole lot of them.

"Can you dance?"

Diana's education had not included the art of Terpsichore, nor yet did she know if she could sing—well, yes, she could sing a little.

"You've got the looks," Ella Ponting said, eying her with friendly criticism, "and if your feet live up to the shape they're built, Suzanne could teach you enough so you wouldn't fall over yourself at rehearsals. Old Georgie Mahon is putting on a new show at the Merrily Theater, and we're all going to line up for a job there to-morrow. You come along with us. I'll tip you off how to behave. Believe me, dear, it's easy if you've got the looks. Georgie won't know that you aren't one of us. Seeing you with us he'll think you've just come off the 'Mignonette' company, same as we have."

"Would that be—honest?" Diana faltered.

The three girls roared with laughter.

"How do you suppose any girl ever gets her first job, unless there's influence behind her?" Ella cried between hysterical shrieks.

How Diana, or the other three were to live through August and September, when their combined resources amounted to about five pounds, is another story and deserves a book of miracles all to itself. There are plenty of pawn-shops in London, however, and occasionally odd jobs in the way of needle-work to do for more affluent sisters of the stage. "Georgie" Mahon happened to be short of girls and he took the four of them, but Diana was unquestionably his first choice. As Ella Ponting said, she had "the looks."

In October the new piece at the Merrily opened and Alice Powell had engaged a box for the first night. Dick was in town, where he had remained consistently ever since Diana disappeared, and Alice nagged him into making one of her party. She would have preferred to ask Hempstead, but things were still very much up in the air concerning their little affair, and of course she could not ask him with Dick. By this time she knew of the bad blood between the two men.

Hempstead, however, was in the stalls, directly below the Powell box.

In the middle of the first act Alice looked down and saw that his attention was riveted through opera-glasses upon some member of the chorus. She turned to get her own glasses, and found Dick similarly employed. Both of them were staring at the same girl, who was placed at the extreme right of the first row.

It took Alice but half a minute to discover that the girl was Diana Croft.

(To be continued NEXT WEEK.)

White Flannel Trousers

by John Holden

ANDY HURLEY was a tennis player who did not believe in what he called "dolling up." He was accustomed to playing on the public courts after his day's clerking at a department store was over, and when he had donned tennis shoes and doffed his coat, collar, and necktie he considered that he had made a quite sufficient concession to the sartorial requirements of the ancient game. He claimed that white trousers, of either the flannel or duck variety, looked "sissy."

That was before the department store cut down its force and he lost his job. With no employment in sight, and only twenty-five dollars between himself and destitution, it is perhaps unnecessary to state that Andy had no more idea of purchasing extra tennis equipment than he had of joining the fashionable tennis club that he passed on his way to the park courts.

In fact, he was loath to play at all. Even if he did not lose a ball or break a string in his racket, there was always the possibility that his girl friend with whom he played would develop a thirst during a game that could only be assuaged by the purchase of expensive sundaes or sodas on the near-by business street. Andy played only because Nettie Mahoney wished him to.

On a particularly hot evening, after he had run down enough newspaper advertisements to stuff a wet shoe, Andy looked forward to his customary game with no more enthusiasm than he would have welcomed a marathon race.

"Have to put on my old trousers, I guess," he muttered dismally. "Can't take a chance on getting my one and only good pair soiled or torn." He examined his extra trousers with no excess of confidence in their strain-resisting quality. "Pretty near all in; have to be careful I don't split 'em."

On the court Nettie Mahoney did nothing to restore Andy's customary good cheer. She was an athletic girl, with a firm chin and a strong arm, and she played tennis in a masculine manner that forced Andy to his best pace in order to win.

"Land a job yet?" she queried, with a disapproving glance at Andy's sport costume.

"No," said Andy, rather shortly because he was conscious of her disapproval.

"Well, don't let hard luck spoil your game. You don't seem to have so much pep lately. Ready?"

She slammed a service at Andy that would have knocked the racket out of a novice's hand, and the game was on. Andy, nettled a bit by her manner, served his fastest ball in return; and, before he knew it, he was playing the game with no regard whatsoever to a possible weakness that might develop in his old trousers.

He was reminded of his danger in a somewhat startling manner. As he dashed across the court, in a wild effort to return a neatly

placed line shot, he was conscious of a sharp ripping sound. He flubbed the ball into the net, and, with a sickly smile on his face and one hand behind his back, surreptitiously examined the damage. It was considerable. He stepped up to the net, his manner embarrassed, his face as red as a dog's tongue.

"You'll excuse me a minute, won't you, Nettie?" he queried. "Just remembered something. I've got to run over to the street for a minute. Be right back."

"Well, hurry up." Her manner was not as gracious as it might have been.

Andy backed away from the net, picked his coat up from the grass, and, holding it against his person with pseudo carelessness, made his way across a corner of the park to what purported to be a cheap clothing store. He entered hurriedly and quickly stated his need of new trousers.

"Something cheap but strong," he stipulated. "Knockabout pants, you know—the kind that looks like overalls—not to be worn for best—trousers I can play tennis or do 'most anything in."

"Tennis, is it? I got what you want—cheap, too." The proprietor brought out a spotless pair of white flannel trousers and displayed them with pride. "There! The very thing for tennis. Wear what's right, and make a hit with the ladies."

Andy was on the point of angrily exclaiming that he had stipulated a much cheaper type of garment, when the significance of the dealer's last remark came to him.

"Make a hit with the ladies." Come to think of it, he needed to make a hit with one particular lady. He recollected with singular vividness the glance of disapproval Nettie directed at his workaday trousers.

Doubtless she had been watching the white-flanneled club players again, and was mentally comparing him with them, to his disadvantage. Aside from that, her erstwhile loving attitude seemed to be cooling a bit. He regarded the trousers with awakened interest.

"What price?" he queried.

"Ten dollars—worth fifteen."

"Good night! I won't pay half that. Let me see what I asked for."

"Wait a minute." The dealer spread out the garment and dilated upon its extraordinary value. "Eight dollars. For you I make the reduction. Wear the right thing and look like a gentleman!"

Andy hesitated. His entire cash capital was twenty-five dollars, and he had no more job than a jack-rabbit. He had always detested the idea of wearing white flannel trousers, too. Still, there was Nettie. Probably he could get a job in a day or two. Nettie's favor must be retained at any cost. Steve Brodie took a chance; why shouldn't he?

"All right," he said. "I'll put them right on." He did so.

"Ah! Now you look like a regular tenniser. Lucky you're wearing a white shirt and white shoes. Tuck in the neck-band and roll up the sleeves, and no one 'll know it's not a regular sport shirt. Fine! The swell club players don't look a bit better."

"I hope so." Andy bestowed upon his eight dollars a long, lingering look, then surrendered them with a silent prayer that he would be able to replace them soon. "Guess this 'll convince Nettie I'm not a dead one even if I haven't got a job," he endeavored to reassure himself as he hurried back to the tennis court.

"Oh, Net!" He could not see her at first; the court was bare. "Nettie!"

No answer. He looked all around. Nettie was not seated on any of the near-by benches. Her racket was gone. Her hat, which she had thrown on the grass, had vanished, too. With the sickening sensation of a man who drops from a balloon to certain destruction, Andy realized that Nettie herself had departed.

"Eight dollars! And she wouldn't wait!" Andy dropped into a seat and sat gaping at the empty court. "And it's for good, too," he muttered. "She'd never have gone off that way if she'd wanted to see me again." He murmured caustic comments on femininity in general. "I might have suspected it; she's been acting queer lately."

A pleasant male voice interrupted Andy's bitter reverie, and he glanced up at a nice-looking young man garbed in expensive and befitting tennis attire.

"I'm with two ladies, and we need a man

player." The stranger indicated an adjacent court upon which two pretty girls—one of them extremely attractive, in fact—were batting balls about. "Would you care to help us out?"

Andy was about to say "No" with emphasis when he cast a second glance at the extra attractive girl.

"Why—er—I don't mind," he stated with a moiety of renewed interest. "Very good of you to ask me."

"Some of the club courts are being torn up for repairs, so we just dropped in on the public ones," explained the young man. "I offered to play both of them, but my sister"—he indicated the good-looking girl—"wouldn't have it. She made me go after you."

Andy experienced a little thrill. A stunner like that had sent for him? A member of the fashionable club? It must have been on account of his white flannel trousers. He could not imagine such a girl wanting to play with a man who did not dress correctly. And she wasn't the young fellow's sweetheart, either; she was his sister. Andy began to regard Nettie's abrupt departure with a certain degree of resignation.

"Wilson is my name," announced the stranger.

"Hurley is mine," said Andy, and a moment later he was introduced to Marion Wilson and her chum.

"I sent for you, so you've got to be my partner," explained Miss Wilson, and play was begun.

As he became better acquainted with the new one, Andy's regret over the loss of his best girl grew less and less, until, for the time being at least, he almost forgot it entirely. Miss Wilson did not tell him he was losing his pep; she made no remarks to the effect that he had better hurry up. On the contrary, she complimented him upon his skill in a manner that Nettie had never approached; she insisted that the credit for their winning of the set belonged to him and him alone.

"You don't belong to the club, I presume?" she queried just before they parted.

"I'm sorry to say I don't," answered Andy; and, for the first time, regret that such was the case crept into his voice.

"Well, I hope we'll play together again, just the same," rejoined Miss Wilson. "Couldn't you find it convenient to drop in at the tennis club to-morrow evening as our guest?"

Andy blushed.

"Why—er—yes," he stammered.

"Very well—don't forget," and with an electric-like pressure from her dainty hand, the most attractive girl that Andy had ever met was gone.

"Oh, Nettie, Nettie; I should worry." Andy hummed the words to a little tune. But his head was only momentarily turned. "I'm a nut," he told himself presently. "She's only interested in me for the time being, because I helped her beat the other two. A nice guy I am for a girl of her class to be friendly with—don't belong to her club, only seventeen dollars to my name, and got no job."

Nevertheless, Andy was at the handsome clubhouse of the tennis court the following evening. His day had been spent, like others, in a fruitless running down of help-wanted advertisements, but he did not feel dispirited either about that or about losing Nettie Mahoney.

His friends were on hand, and they repaired to the best clay court that Andy had ever played on. The park courts had been good, but never as good as this one. It was a new sensation to see a ball bound straight and true every time it was hit—a keen pleasure to play on a court that possessed the adequate backstops which the public courts lacked.

Andy and Miss Wilson won two sets out of three against the same opponents as on the previous evening. After the match they sat on the clubhouse veranda and discussed tennis affairs in general.

"I've got to get a new racket," said Marion Wilson. "This one is warped all out of shape. It had double stringing down the center, you see. I figured when I bought it that the extra strings would enable one to get a better hold on the ball for a chop stroke, but I see my mistake now. The extra strings put an extra strain on the frame and are apt to warp it sooner or later. I noticed, at the championship tournament at Forest Hills last year, that

the rackets used by the best players have no extra strings."

Thus did Andy learn something he had not known before.

On his way home Marion Wilson's brother Tom joined him.

"Have you ever thought about joining the club?" he queried.

Andy had often scoffed at the club, declaring that the public courts were more democratic and quite good enough for him, but that was before he met Marion Wilson.

"I've thought of it," he said, "but never very seriously. In the first place, I did not know any members, and in the second I didn't think I could afford it."

Tom Wilson expressed surprise at the last statement.

"Why, it only costs fifty dollars," he said. "Twenty-five for the initiation fee and twenty-five for dues. That's cheap."

Andy winced. Fifty dollars! When his entire worldly wealth was now fifteen, and his prospects for earning more looked slim. He did not state that he was financially embarrassed, however. He was conscious of the fact that his new white flannel trousers gave him quite an air of opulence, and he saw no reason why he should not at least try to live up to them.

"The girls would like to have you join, and so would I," continued Wilson. "So all you've got to do is say the word, and I'll put your name up. Of course," he added quickly, "I'll have to ask you to tell me something more about yourself first. You'll readily understand that I must get a line on a stranger's character before putting him up for club membership."

Andy readily agreed, and, by means of letters and documents in his trunk, quickly satisfied his new-found friend that so far as character went he was all right.

"When it comes to asking where I work, you've got me stuck, though," he admitted. "The fact is, I don't work anywhere. I used to be a clerk in the clothing department of a big department store, but poor business caused them to lay me off. I'm hunting a job at present."

"I see," said Wilson. "What are you doing to find one?"

"Running down help-wanted ads."

"That's rather slow and unsatisfactory, isn't it?"

"I'll say it is."

Wilson mused over Andy's problem. He did not look like a young man who could solve a business problem of any kind, but Andy had already learned never to judge a man by his appearance.

"Why not try a new way of getting a job? Let's see—is there anything that you're specially interested in?"

Andy admitted that there was not.

"Except tennis and sports in general," he added. "But of course one can't count those."

"No? How do you know you can't?" Wilson puzzled over the problem again, then suddenly brightened. "There are a good many stores in New York that sell sporting goods, aren't there?" he queried.

"A couple of thousand, I'd say."

"And you're keenly interested in sports; a sort of sporting authority, in fact, especially on tennis. All right, then; what's the matter with making the rounds of all the sport stores in Manhattan to see if one of them can't use an experienced salesman who has the knowledge and enthusiasm to sell more goods than the ordinary clerk who isn't particularly interested in sports?"

Andy thought about it.

"That sounds like a real idea," he agreed. "I'll do it."

"Good! And now how about putting you up at the club? The board meets in two weeks to pass on new applications. In the mean time you can play there as my guest. As I said before, the fees are only fifty dollars."

Fifty dollars! To raise that much money in two weeks, even for a necessity, seemed as impossible as journeying to the moon in a sky-rocket. And yet there was Marion Wilson. She wanted him to join. And he wanted to see her again as he had never wanted to see Nettie Mahoney.

In fact, he could not understand now why he had ever been attracted to the Mahoney girl at all. He must decide quickly—say yes, and take a chance on securing fifty dollars and a job in two weeks; or say no, and renounce the once-in-a-lifetime oppor-

tunity to get better acquainted with the one and only girl in all the world. Andy gritted his teeth.

"I'll join," he said. "I'll be delighted to."

"Fine! Come around to-morrow night and tell us about your new job. Good luck!" And Wilson was gone.

"Great Scott!" muttered Andy. "What an idiot I am! Fifty dollars in two weeks, when I haven't got— Well, it's a case of do or die, that's all."

At a large sporting-goods store next morning Andy entered boldly and accosted the proprietor, who was standing at the end of the tennis-goods counter.

"I'm looking for a selling job, and I'm particularly interested in tennis goods," he stated. "Can you give me a trial?"

The proprietor shook his head.

"Got all the clerks I want," he stated in the gloomy manner that Andy encountered everywhere he had applied for work. "Business is poor. I'm more likely to lay off a clerk than take one on."

"But I'm a particularly efficient salesman," insisted Andy. "If business is poor, might it not pay you to engage an extra good man, even if you have to let an ordinary clerk go?"

"How can you prove that you're so good?" queried the proprietor.

A would-be purchaser had entered, and, only a few feet distant, a clerk was showing him some tennis rackets.

"Let's watch this sale, and maybe I can show you."

Andy knew that he was grasping at straws as does a drowning man, but his decision to acquire fifty dollars and a further acquaintance with Marion Wilson had given him a quality of determination that he had never possessed before.

"What I want," said the customer, "is a first-class racket with double stringing down the middle, so the strings will take hold of the ball and put plenty of spin on it."

The clerk pawed around among the rackets.

"Sorry, sir, but we don't seem to have that kind in stock," he said, "except in the cheap rackets, and you don't want one of those."

"No, I don't. It's queer that a big store like this doesn't keep what a man wants." The customer started to leave.

Andy suddenly recollected what Marion Wilson had said about double-strung rackets. He turned quickly to the store owner. "Let me try to sell that man a racket," he requested.

"Do it and I'll give you a job," said the proprietor.

Andy approached the customer.

"Pardon me, sir," he put in, "but have you ever considered that the rackets used by the Davis Cup players have not got double stringing down the center?"

"What's that?" The customer paused on his outward way to look at this new salesman.

"You see," Andy went on, "double stringing means boring extra holes in the racket frame, and extra holes mean extra strain and a short life for the racket. It is quite true, as you state, that extra strings enable you to put more spin on the ball, but, on the other hand, extra strings cannot be strung so tightly for fear of breaking the frame, and it is tight strings that give resiliency to your racket and put pep in your game."

"Well! I never thought of that," said the customer. "Are you sure you're right?"

"Let me prove it." Andy reached for a book on tennis. "Look at the pictures of the leading players with their rackets in their hands, and see if those rackets are double-strung down the center or not."

Andy did not know what the pictures would show; he was relying solely upon Marion's statement, made the previous evening, that the best players did not use double stringing. He waited with keen anticipation while the customer thumbed the book.

"You seem to be right," said the man. "I'm glad you told me that. I guess I'll take one of the ordinary rackets, after all."

"See what comes of knowing one's business?" said Andy to the proprietor, after the sale had been made.

"I see that you're the clerk I want behind that counter," said the boss. "How will forty dollars a week do to start?"

The day before Andy would have jumped

at this offer. But now he was canny. Forty a week would scarcely enable him to associate with moneyed tennis-club members.

"Make it thirty-five a week and a two-per-cent commission on all the sales I make," he countered.

"Two per cent—let's see—why, you're liable to be making sixty or seventy dollars a week at that rate."

"Well, I'll have to earn it, won't I? The more commission I earn, the more profit I'll make for you. In fact, I hope to make a hundred dollars a week."

The merchant did a little further figuring.

"I suppose one must expect to pay high for expert help," he capitulated. "All right—your terms are accepted. When can you start?"

"Right now," said Andy.

Three weeks later Andy Hurley, now a regular club member and impeccably dressed, was on his way to the clubhouse when he met Miss Nettie Mahoney.

"Why, Andy, how prosperous you look!" she exclaimed. "I'll bet you've got a new job. When are we going to have another game on the park courts? Honestly, I'm sorry now that I ran away that night."

"I was sorry, too—at the time," said Andy with a smile. "But now—well, to tell you the truth, Nettie, I'm all dated up for weeks in advance."

Later Andy was seated on the clubhouse veranda with the radiant young lady who was the direct cause of his rise in the world.

"Now that you've admitted that you liked me from the start, just as I liked you," he remarked, "won't you please tell me why? I mean, why did you send your brother after me to play before you'd even got a good look at me?"

"Certainly I'll tell you; I remember quite well," said Marion Wilson. "It was because you were dressed so nicely."

Alone in his room that night Andy reflected upon that remark.

"And once I was fool enough to sneer at white flannel trousers!" he exclaimed to himself.

SONG OF THE SEA

SINGER and sailor am I. Tinker or tailor? Not me!
Under the boundless sky, over the bounding sea,
Riding the rollers and climbing the combers,
Sing I the song of the sea.

Singer and sailor am I. Doctor or lawyer? Not me!
Where beryl shallows lie, and gulls blow down to lee;
That's where you'll find me, with fair winds behind me,
Singing the song of the sea.

Singer and sailor am I. Plank-owning lubber? Not me!
Where crimson sunsets die, and stars come out to see,
Where wandering breezes bring quick thaws or freezes,
Sing I the song of the sea.

Singer and sailor am I. Sea-going songster? That's me!
The white-fanged crests ride high, the spindrift whiffles free,
The ratlines are shrieking, the snatch-blocks are creaking—
Hark to the song of the sea!

Lew Wallace Bagby.

Tophet at Trail's End*

Part IV

by George Washington Ogden

Author of "The Duke of Chimney Butte," "Steamboat Gold," etc.

CHAPTER XII.

IN PLACE OF A REGIMENT.

MORGAN rode back to town in thoughtful, serious mood, after conducting the six desperadoes across the small trickle of the Arkansas River. He was not satisfied with the morning's adventure, no matter to what extent it reflected credit on his manhood and competency in the public mind of Ascalon. He would have been easier in all conscience and higher in his own esteem if it had not happened at all.

He thought soberly now of getting his trunk over to Conboy's from the station and changing back into the garb of civilization before meeting that girl again; that wonderful girl; that remarkable woman who could play a tune on him to suit her caprice, he thought, as she would have fingered a violin.

Judge Thayer's little office, with the white stakes behind it marking off the unsold lots like graves of a giant race, reminded Morgan of his broken engagement to look at the farm. He hitched his horse at the rack, where other horses had stood fighting flies until they had stamped a hollow like a buffalo wallow in the dusty ground.

Judge Thayer got up from the accumulated business on his desk at the sound of Morgan's step in his door, and came forward with welcome in his beaming face.

"I asked the Governor for a company of militia to put down the disorder and outlawry in this town—I didn't think less than a company could do it," said the judge.

"Is he sending them?" Morgan inquired with polite interest.

"No, I'm glad to say he refused. He referred me to the sheriff."

"And the sheriff will act, I suppose?"

"Act?" Judge Thayer repeated, turning the word curiously. "Act!"—with all the contempt that could be centered in such a short explosion—"yes, he'll act like a forsworn and traitorous coward, the friend to thieves that he's always been! We don't need him, we don'e need the Governor's petted, stall-fed militia, when we've got one man that's a regiment in himself!"

The judge must shake hands with Morgan again, and clap him on the shoulder to further express his admiration and the feeling of security his single-handed exploit

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against the oppressors of Ascalon had brought to the town.

"I and the other officers and directors sat up in the bank four nights, lights out and guns loaded, sweatin' blood, expecting a raid by that gang. They had this town buffaloed, Morgan. I'm glad you came back here to-day and showed us the pattern of a real, old-fashioned man."

"I guess I was lucky," Morgan said, with modest depreciation of his valor.

"Maybe you call it luck where you came from, but we've got another name for it here in Ascalon."

"I'm sorry I couldn't keep my engagement to look at that farm, Judge Thayer. You must have heard my reason for it."

"Stillwell told me. It's a marvel you ever came back at all."

"If the farm isn't sold—"

"No," said the judge hastily, as if to turn him away from the subject. "Come in and sit down—there's a bigger thing than farming on hand for you if you can see your interests in it as I see them, Mr. Morgan. A man's got to trample down the briars before he makes his bed sometimes, you know—come on in out of this cussid sun.

"Morgan, the situation in Ascalon is like this," Judge Thayer resumed, seated at his desk. "We've got a city marshal that's bigger than the authority that created him; bigger than anything on earth that ever wore a star. Seth Craddock's enlarged himself and his authority until he's become a curse to the citizens of this town."

"I heard something of his doing from Fred Stilwell. Why don't you fire him?"

"Morgan, I approached him," replied the judge, with an air of injury. "I believe on my soul the old devil spared my life only because I had befriended him in past days. There's a spark of gratitude in him that the drenching of blood hasn't put out. If it had been anybody else he'd have shot him dead."

"H-m!" said Morgan sympathetically.

"Morgan, that fellow's killed eight men in as many days! He's got a regular program—a man a day."

"It looks like something ought to be done to stop him."

"The old devil's shrewd, he's had legal counsel from no less illustrious sources than the county attorney, who's so crooked he couldn't lie on the side of a hill without rollin' down it like a hoop. Seth knows he fills an elective office; he's beyond the power of mayor and council to remove. The only way he can be ousted is by proceedings in court, which he could wear along till his term expired. We can't fire him, Morgan. He'll go on till he depopulates this town!"

"It's a remarkable situation," Morgan said.

"He's a jackal, which is neither wolf nor dog. He's never killed a man here yet out of necessity—he just shoots them down to see them kick, or to gratify some monstrous delight that has transformed him from the man I used to know."

"He may be insane," Morgan suggested.

"I don't know, but I don't think so. I can't abase my mind low enough to fathom that man."

"It's a wonder somebody hasn't killed him," Morgan speculated.

"He never arrests anybody, there hasn't been a prisoner in the calaboose since he took charge of this town. Notoriety has turned his head, notoriety seems to put a halo around him that makes a troop of sycophants look up to him as to a saint. Look here—look at this!"

The judge held out a newspaper, shaking it viciously, his face clouded with displeasure.

"Here's a piece two columns long about that scoundrel in the Kansas City *Times*—the notoriety of the town is obscured by the bloody reputation of its marshal."

"It must be gratifying to a man of his ambitions," Morgan commented, glancing curiously over the story, his mind on the first victim of Craddock's gun.

"It's a disgrace that some of us feel, whatever it may be to him. I expected him to confine his gun to gamblers and crooks and these vermin that hang around the women of the dance-houses; but he's right-hand man with them; they're all on his staff."

Morgan looked up in amazement, hardly able to believe what he heard.

"It's enough to disgust any decent man," Judge Thayer nodded. "You remember his first case—that fool cowboy he killed at the hotel?"

"I was just thinking of him," Morgan said.

"That's the kind he goes in for, cowboys from the range—green, innocent boys, harmless if you take 'em right. Yesterday afternoon he killed a young fellow from Glenmore. It's going to bring retaliation and reprisal on us; it's going to hurt us in this contest over the county-seat."

"I shouldn't wonder," said Morgan, hoping the reprisal would be swift and severe.

"I think the man's blood mad," Judge Thayer went on, in a hopeless way. "It must be the outcome of all that slaughter among the buffalo. He's not a brave man, he lacks the bearing and the full look of the eye of a courageous man; but he carries two guns now, Morgan, and he can sling out and shoot a man with incredible speed. And we've got him quartered on us for nearly two years unless somebody from Glenmore comes over and nails him. We can't fire him, we don't dare to approach him to suggest his abdication. Morgan, we're in a three-cornered hell of a fix!"

"Can't the fellow be prosecuted for some of these murders? Isn't there some way the law can reach him?"

"The coroner's jury absolves him regularly," the judge replied wearily. "At first they did it because it was the routine, and now they do it to save their hides. No, there's just one quick and sure way of heading that devil off that I can see, Morgan, and that's for me to act while he's away. He's gone on some high-flyin' expedition to Abilene, leaving the town without a peace officer, at the mercy of bandits and thieves. I have the authority to swear in a deputy marshal, or a hundred of them."

Morgan looked up again quickly from his speculative study of the boards in Judge Thayer's floor, to meet the older man's shrewd eyes with a look of complete understanding. So they sat a moment, each reading the other as easily as one counts pebbles at the bottom of a clear spring.

"I don't believe I'm the man you're looking for," Morgan said finally.

"You're the only man that can do it, Morgan. It looks to me like you're appointed by Providence to step in here and save the town from this reign of murder. You can supplant him, you can strip him of his badge of office when he steps from the train, and you're the one man that *can* do it!"

Morgan shook his head, whether in denial of his attributed valor and prowess, or in declination of the proffered honor, Judge Thayer could not tell.

"I believe you'd do it without ever throwing a gun down on him," the judge went on.

"I know he could!" broke in a clear, hearty, confident voice from the door.

"Come in and help me convince him, Rhetta," Judge Thayer said. "Mr. Morgan, my daughter. You have met before."

Morgan rose in considerable confusion, feeling more like an abashed and clumsy cowboy than he ever had felt before in his life. He stood with his battered hat held flat against his body at his belt, turning the old thing foolishly like a wheel, so unexpectedly confronted by this girl again, before whom he desired to appear as a man, and the best that was in the best man that he could ever be. And she stood smiling before him, mischief and mastery in her laughing eyes, confident as one who had subjugated him already, playing a tune on him, surely—a tune that came like a little voice out of his heart.

"I didn't know, I didn't suspect," he said.

"Of course not. She isn't anything like me." Judge Thayer laughed over it, mightily pleased by this evidence of confusion in a man who could heat his branding iron to set his mark on half a dozen desperadoes, and would turn to dough before the eyes of a simple maid.

"No more than a bird is like a bear," said Morgan, thinking aloud, racing mentally the next moment to snatch back his words and shape them in more conventional phrase. But too late; their joint laughter drowned his attempt to set it right, and the world lost a compliment that might have

graced a courtier's tongue, perhaps. But not likely.

Morgan proffered the chair he had occupied, but Rhetta knew of one in reserve behind the display of wheat and oats in sheaf on the table. This she brought, seating herself near the door, making a triangle from which Morgan had no escape save through the roof.

Judge Thayer resumed the discussion of the most vital matter in Ascalon, pressing Morgan to take the oath of office then and there.

"I wouldn't ask Mr. Morgan to accept the office," said Rhetta when Judge Thayer paused, "if I felt safe to stay in Ascalon another day with anybody else as marshal."

"That's a compelling reason for a man to take a job," Morgan told her, looking, for a daring moment, into the cool clarity of her honest brown eyes. "But I might make it worse instead of better. Trouble came to this town with me; it seems to stick to my heels like a dog."

"You got rid of most of it this morning —*that* gang will never come back," she said.

Morgan looked out of the open door, a thoughtfulness in his eyes that the nearer attraction could not for the moment dispel. "One of them will," he replied.

"Oh, one!" said she, discounting that one to nothing at all.

"The gamblers and saloon men are right about it," Morgan went on, turning to the judge; "this town will dry up and blow away as soon as it loses its notorious name. If you want to kill Ascalon, enforce the law. The question is, how many people here want it done?"

"The respectable majority, I can assure you on that."

"Nearly everybody you talk to says they'd rather have Ascalon a whistling station on the railroad, where you could go to sleep in peace and get up feeling safe, than the awful place it is now," Rhetta said. She removed her sombrero and dropped it on the floor at her feet, as though weary of the turmoil that vexed her days.

Morgan noted for the first time that she was not dressed for the saddle to-day as on the occasion of their first meeting, but garbed in becoming simplicity in serge skirt and brown linen waist, a little golden bar with garnets at her throat. Her redundant dark hair, soft in its dusky shade as summer shadows in a deep wood, was coiled in a twisted heap to fit the crown of her mannish sombrero. It came down lightly over the tips of her ears in pretty disorder, due to the excitement of the morning, and she was fair as a camelia blossom, fresh as an evening primrose of her native prairie land.

"I wouldn't like to be the man that killed Ascalon, after all its highly painted past," Morgan said, trying to turn the matter off lightly. "It might be better for all the respectable people to go away and leave it wholly wicked, according to its fame."

"That might work to the satisfaction of all concerned, Mr. Morgan, if we had wagons and tents, and nothing more," rejoined the judge. "We could very well pick up and pull out in that case. But a lot of us have staked all we own on the future of this town and the country around it. We were here before Ascalon became a plague spot; we started it right, but it went wrong as soon as it was able to walk."

"It seems to have wandered around quite a bit since then," Morgan observed, sparing them a grin.

"It's been a wayward child," Rhetta sighed. "We're ashamed of our responsibility for it now."

"It would mean ruination to most of us to pull out and leave it to these wolves," said the judge. "We couldn't think of that."

"Of course not, I was only making a poor joke when I talked of a retreat," Morgan assured them. "Things will begin to die down here in a year or two—I've seen towns like this before; they always calm down and take up business seriously in time, or blow away and vanish completely. That's what happens to most of them if they're let go their course — change and shift, range breaking up into farms, cowboys going on, take care of that."

"I don't think Ascalon will go out that way—not if we can keep the county-seat," Judge Thayer said. "If you were to step into the breach while that killer's away and

rub even one little white spot in the town—"

Morgan seemed to interpose in the manner of throwing out his hand, a gesture speaking of the fatuity, and his unwillingness to set himself to the task.

"Not just temporarily; we don't mean just temporarily, Mr. Morgan; but for good," Rhetta urged. "I want to take over editing the paper and be of some use in the world; but I couldn't think of doing it with all this killing going on, and a lot of wild men shooting out windows."

"No, of course you couldn't," Morgan agreed.

"The railroad immigration agent has been trying to locate a colony of Mennonites here," Judge Thayer explained; "fifty families or more of them; but the notoriety of the town made the elders skittish. They came out this spring, liked the country, saw its future with eyes that revealed like telescopes, and would have bought ten sections of land to begin with if it hadn't been for two or three killings while they were here."

"It was the same way with those people from Pennsylvania," said Rhetta.

"We had a crowd of Pennsylvania Dutch out here a week or two after the Mennonites," the judge enlarged, "smellin' around hot-foot on the trail as hounds; but this atmosphere of Ascalon and its bad influence on the country wouldn't be good for their young folks, they said. So *they* backed off. And that's the way it's gone; that's the way it will go. The blight of Ascalon falls over this country for fifty miles around, the finest country the Almighty ever scattered grass seed over. You saw the possibilities of it from a distance, Mr. Morgan; others have seen it. Wouldn't you be doing humanity a larger service, a more immediate and applicable service, by clearing away the pest spot?"

Morgan thought it over, hands on his thighs, head bent a little, eyes on his boots, conscious that the girl was watching him anxiously, as one on trial at the bar watches a doubtful jury when counsel makes the last appeal.

"There's a lot of logic in what you say," he admitted; "it ought to appeal to a man big enough, confident enough, to undertake and put the job through."

He looked up suddenly, answering directly Rhetta Thayer's anxious, appealing brown eyes. "For if he should fail, bungle it and have to throw down his hand before he'd won the game, it would be Katy-bar-the-door for that man. He'd have to know how far the people of this town wanted him to go before starting, and there's only one boundary—the limit of all the law. If they want anything less than that a man had better keep hands off."

Rhetta nodded, her hands clenched as if she held on in desperate hope of rescue. Judge Thayer said no more. He sat watching Morgan's face, knowing well when a word too many might change the verdict to his loss.

"The question is, how far do they want a man to go in the regeneration of Ascalon? How many are willing to put purity above profit for a while? Business would suffer; it would be as dead here as a grasshopper after a prairie fire while readjustment to new conditions shaped. It might be a year or two before healthy, legitimate trade could take the place of this flashy life, and it might never rebound from the operation. A man would want the people who are calling for law and order here to be satisfied with the new conditions; he wouldn't want any whiners at the funeral."

"New people would come, new business would grow, as soon as the news got abroad that a different condition prevailed in this town," Judge Thayer replied. "I can satisfy you in an hour that the business men want what they're demanding, and will be satisfied to take the risk of the result."

"I came out here to farm," Morgan hazarded.

"There'll not be much sod broken between now and late fall, from the present look of things," the judge said. "We've had the longest dry spell I've ever seen in this country—going on four weeks now without a drop of rain. It comes that way once every five or seven years; but that also happens back in Ohio and other places men consider especially favored," he hastened to add.

"I didn't intend to break sod," Morgan told him. "A man couldn't sow wheat in raw sod. That's why I wanted to look at that claim down by the river."

"It will keep. Or you could buy it, and hire your crop put in while you're marshal here in town."

"And I could edit the paper. Between us we could save the county-seat."

Rhetta spoke quite seriously, so seriously, indeed, that her father laughed.

"I had forgotten all about saving the county-seat — I was considering only the soul of Ascalon," he said.

"If you refuse to let father swear you in, Mr. Morgan, Craddock will say you were afraid. I'd hate to have him do that," urged Rhetta.

"He might," Morgan granted, and with subdued voice and thoughtful manner that gave them a fresh rebound of hope.

And at length they had their will, but not until Morgan had gone the round of the business men on the public square, gathering the assurance of great and small that they were weary of bloodshed and violence, notoriety and unrest; that they would let the bars down to him if he would undertake cleaning up the town, and abide by what might come of it without a growl.

When they returned to Judge Thayer's office Morgan took the oath to enforce the statutes of the State of Kansas and the ordinances of the city of Ascalon, Rhetta standing by with palpitating breast and glowing eyes, hands behind her like a little girl waiting her turn in a spelling class. When Morgan lowered his hand Rhetta started out of her expectant pose, producing with a show of triumph a short piece of broad white ribbon, with City Marshal stamped on it in tall black letters.

Judge Thayer laughed as Morgan backed away from her when she advanced to pin it on his breast.

"I set up the type and printed it myself on the proof press," she said, in pretty appeal to him to stand and be hitched to this sign of his new office.

"It's so — it's rather — prominent, isn't it?" he said, still edging away.

"There isn't any regular shiny badge for you; the great, grisly Mr. Craddock wore away the only one the town owns. Please, Mr. Morgan—you'll have to wear *something* to show your authority, won't he, pa?"

"It would be wiser to wear it till I can send for another badge, Morgan, or we can get the old one away from Seth. Your authority would be questioned without a badge; they're strong for badges in this town."

So Morgan stood like a family horse while Rhetta pinned the ribbon to the pocket of his dingy gray woollen shirt, where it flaunted its unmistakable proclamation in a manner much more effective than any police shield or star ever devised. Rhetta pressed it down hard with the palm of her hand to make the stiff ribbon assume a graceful hang; so hard that she must have felt the kick of the new officer's heart just under it. And she looked up into his eyes with a glad, confident smile.

"I feel safe *now*," she said, sighing as one who puts down a wearing burden at the end of a toilsome journey.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE HAND OF THE LAW.

THE stars came out over a strange, silent, astonished Ascalon that night. The wolf-howling of its revelry was stilled, the clamor of its obscene diversions was hushed. It was as if the sparkling tent of the heavens were a great bowl turned over the place, hushing its stridulous merriment, stifling its wild laughter and dry-throated feminine screams.

The windows of Peden's hall were dark, the black covers were drawn over the gambling tables, the great bar stood deserted in the gloom.

As usual the streets around the public square were lively with people, coming and passing through the beams of light from windows, smoking and talking and idling in groups, but there was no movement of festivity abroad in the night, no yelping of arriving or departing rangers. It was as if the town had died suddenly, so suddenly that all within it were struck dumb by the event.

For the new city marshal—the interloper as many held him to be—the tall, solemn, long-stepping stranger who carried a rifle always ready like a man looking for a coyote, had put the lock of his prohibition on everything within the town. Everything that counted—that is, in the valuation of the proscribed.

Early in the first hours of his authority the new city marshal, or deputy marshal, to be exact, had received from unimpeachable source no less than a thick volume of the statutes, that the laws of the State of Kansas which he had sworn to enforce, prohibited the sale of intoxicating liquors; prohibited gambling and games of chance; interdicted the operation of immoral resorts—put a lock and key in his hand, in short, that would shut up the ribald pleasures of Ascalon like a tomb. As for the ordinances of the city, which he also had obligated himself to apply, Morgan had not found time to work down to them. There appeared to be authority in the thick volume Judge Thayer had lent him to last Ascalon a long time. If he should find himself running short from that source, then the city ordinances could be drawn upon in their time and place.

Exclusive of the mighty Peden, the other traffickers in vice were inconsequential, mere retailers, hucksters, pedlers in their way. They were as vicious as unquenchable fire, certainly, and numerous, but small, and largely under the patronage of the king of the proscribed, Peden of the hundred foot bar.

And this Peden was a big, broad-chested, muscular man, whose neck rode like a mortised beam out of his shoulders, straight with the back of his head. His face was handsome in a bold, shrewd mold, but dark, as if his blood carried the taint of a baser race. He went about always dressed in a long frock coat, with no vest to obscure the spread of his white shirt front; low collar, with narrow black tie done in exact bow; broad-brimmed white sombrero tilted back from his forehead, a cigar that always seemed fresh under his great mustache.

This mustache, heavy, black, was the one sinister feature of the man's otherwise rather open and confidence-winning face. It was a cloud that more than half-obscured the nature of the man, an ambush where his passions and dark subterfuges lay concealed.

Peden had met the order to close his doors with smiling loftiness, easy understanding of what he read it to mean. Astonished to find his offer of money silently and sternly ignored, Peden had grown contemptuously defiant. If it was a bid for him to raise the ante, Morgan was starting off on a lame leg, he said. Ten dollars a night was as much as the friendship of any man that ever wore the collar of the law was worth to him. Take it or leave it, and be cursed to him, with embellishments of profanity and debasement of language which were new and astonishing even to Morgan's sophisticated ears. Peden turned his back to the new officer after drenching him down with this deluge of abuse, setting his face about the business of the night.

And there self-confident defiance, fattened a long time on the belief that law was a thing to be sneered down, met inflexible resolution. The substitute city marshal had a gift of making a few words go a long way; Peden put out his lights and locked his doors. In the train of his darkness others were swallowed. Within two hours after nightfall the town was submerged in gloom.

Threats, maledictions, followed Morgan as he walked the round of the public square, rifle ready for instant use, pistol on his thigh. And the blessing of many a mother, whose sons and daughters stood at the perilous crater of that infernal pit, went out through the dark after him, also; and the prayers of honest folk that no skulking coward might shoot him down out of the shelter of night.

Even as they cursed him behind his back the outlawed sneered at Morgan and the new order that seemed to threaten the world-wide fame of Ascalon. It was only the brief oppression of transient authority, they said; wait till Seth Craddock came back and you would see this range wolf throw dust for the timber.

They spoke with great confidence and kindling pleasure of Seth's return, and the amusing show that would attend his re-

sumption of authority. For it was understood that Seth would not come alone. Peden, it was said, had attended to that already by telegraph. Certain handy gunslingers would come with him from Kansas City and Abilene, friends of Peden who had made reputations and had no hesitancy about maintaining them.

As the night lengthened this feeling of security, of pleasurable anticipation increased. This little break in its life would do the town good; things would whirl away with recharged energy when the doors were opened again. Money would simply accumulate in the period of stagnation to be thrown into the mill with greater abandon than before by the fools who stood around waiting for the show to resume.

And the spectable of seeing Seth Craddock drive this simpleton clear over the edge of the earth would be a diversion that would compensate for many days of waiting. That alone would be a thing worth waiting for, they said.

Time began to walk in slack traces, the heavy wain of night at its slow heels, for the dealers and sharpers, mackerels and frail, spangled women to whom the open air was as strange as sunlight to an earthworm. They passed from malediction and muttered threat against the man who had brought this sudden change in their accustomed lives, to a state of indignant rebellion as they milled around the square and watched him tramp his unending beat.

A little way inside the line of hitching racks Morgan walked, away from the thronged sidewalk, in the clear where all could see him, and a shot from some dark window would not imperil the life of another. Around and around the square he tramped in the dusty, hoof-cut street, keeping his own counsel, unspeaking and unspoken to, the living spirit of the mighty law.

It was a high-handed piece of business, the bleached men and kalsomined women declared, as they passed from the humor of contemplating Seth Craddock's return to fretful chafing against the restraint of the present hour. How did it come that one man could lord it over a whole town of free and independent Americans that way? Why didn't somebody take a shot at him? Why didn't they defy him, go and open the doors and let this thirsty, money-padded throng up to the gambling tables and bars? There were plenty of questions and suggestions, but nobody went beyond them.

The moon was in mid-heaven, untroubled by a veil of cloud; the daywind was resting under the edge of the world, asleep. Around and around the public square this sentinel of the new moral force that had laid its hand over Ascalon tramped the white road. Rangers from far cow camps, disappointed of their night's debauch, began to mount and ride away, turning in their saddles as they went for one more look at the lone sentry who was a regiment in himself indeed.

The bleached men began to yawn, the medicated women to slip away. Good citizens who had watched in anxiety, fearful that this rash champion of the new order would find a bullet between his shoulders before midnight, began to breathe easier and seek their beds in a strange state of security. Ascalon was shut up; the howling of its wastrels was stilled. It was incredible, but true.

By midnight the last cowboy had gone galloping on his long ride to carry the news of Ascalon't eclipse over the desolate gray prairie; an hour later the only sign of life in the town was the greasy light of the Santa Fé café, where a few lingering nondescripts were supping on cove oyster stew. These came out at last, to stand a little while like stranded mariners on a lonesome beach watching for a rescuing sail, then parted and went clumping their various ways over the rattling board-walks.

Morgan stopped at the pump in the square to refresh himself with a drink. A dog came and lapped out of the trough, stood a little while when its thirst was satisfied, turning its head, listening, as though it missed something out of the night. It trotted off presently. It was the last living thing on the streets of the town save the weary city marshal, who stood with hat off at the pump to feel the cool wind that came across the sleeping prairie before the dawn.

At that same hour another watcher turned from her open window, where she

had sat a long time straining into the silence that blessed the town. She had been clutching her heart in the dread of hearing a shot, full of upbraidings for the peril she had thrust upon this brave man. For he would not have assumed the office but for her solicitation, she knew well. She stretched out her hand into the moonlight as if she wafted him her benediction for the peace he had brought, a great, glad surge of something more tender than gratitude in her warm young bosom.

In a little while she came to the window again, when the moonlight was slanting into it, and stood leaning her hands on the sill, her dark hair coming down in a cloud over her white night-dress. She strained again into the quiet night, listening, and listening, smiled. Then she stood straight, touched finger tips to her lips and waved away a kiss into the moonlight and the little timid awakening wind that came out of the east like a young hare before the dawn.

CHAPTER XIV.

SOME FOOL WITH A GUN.

MORGAN was roused out of his brief sleep at the Elkhorn Hotel shortly after sunrise by the night telegrapher at the railroad station, who came with a telegram.

"I thought you'd like to have it as soon as possible," the operator said, in apology for his early intrusion, standing by Morgan's bed, Tom Conboy waiting just outside the door with ear primed to pick up the smallest word.

"Sure — much obliged," Morgan returned, his voice hoarse with broken sleep, his head not instantly clear of its flying clouds. The operator lingered while Morgan ran his eye over the few words.

"Much obliged, old feller," Morgan said warmly, giving the young man a quick look of understanding that must serve in place of more words, seeing that Conboy had his head within the door.

Morgan heard the operator denying Conboy the secret of the message in the hall outside. Conboy had lived long enough in Ascalon to know when to curb his curiosity. He tiptoed away from Morgan's door, repressing his desire behind his beard.

Knowing that he could not sleep again, after that abrupt break in his rest, Morgan rose and dressed. Once or twice he referred again to the message that lay spread on his pillow.

> Craddock wired Peden last night that he would arrive on No. 7 at 1.20 this afternoon.

That was the content of the message, not a telegram at all, but a friendly note of warning from the night operator, who had come over to the hotel to go to bed. The young man had shrewdly adopted this means to cover his information, knowing that Peden's wrath was mighty and his vengeance far-reaching. Nobody in town could question the delivery of a telegram.

Morgan had expected Craddock to hasten back and attempt to recover his scepter and resume his sway over Ascalon. But he did not expect him to return so soon. It pleased him better that the issue was to be brought to a speedy trial between them. While he had his feet wet, he reasoned, he might just as well cross the stream.

Conboy was sweeping the office, having laid the thick of the dust with a sprinkling can. He paused in his work to give Morgan a shrewd, sharp look.

"Important news when it pulls a man out of bed this early," he ventured, "and him needin' sleep like you do."

"Yes," said Morgan, going on to the door.

Conboy came after him, voice lowered almost to a whisper as he spoke, eyes turning about as if he expected a spy to bob up behind his counter.

"I heard it passed around late last night that Craddock was comin' back."

"Wasn't he expected to?" Morgan inquired indifferent'ly, wholly undisturbed.

Conboy watched him keenly, standing half behind him, to note any sign of panic or uneasiness that would tell him which side he should support with his valuable sympathy and profound philosophy.

"From the way things point, I think they're lookin' for him back to-day," he said.

"The quicker the sooner," Morgan replied in offhand cowboy fashion.

Conboy was left on middle ground, not certain whether Morgan would flee before the arrival of the man whose powers he had usurped, or stand his ground and shoot it out. It was an uncomfortable moment; a man must be on one side or the other to be safe. In the history of Ascalon it was the neutral who generally got knocked down and trampled, and lost his pocketbook and watch, as happens to the gaping non-participants in the squabbles of humanity everywhere.

"From what I hear goin' around," Conboy continued, dropping his voice to a cautious, confidential pitch, "there'll be a bunch of bad men along in a day or two to help Craddock hold things down. It looks to me like it's goin' to be more than any one man can handle."

"It may be that way," Morgan commented, lingering in the door, Conboy doing his talking from the rear. Morgan was thinking the morning had a freshness in it like a newly gathered flower.

"It 'll mean part closed and part open if that man takes hold of this town again," Conboy went on. "Him and Peden they're as thick as three in a bed. Close all of 'em, like you did last night, or give everybody a fair whack. That's what I say."

"Yes," abstractedly from Morgan.

"It was kind of quiet and slow in town last night, slowest night I've ever had since I bought this dump. I guess I'd have to move away if things run along that way, but I don't know. Maybe things would pick up when people got used to the new deal. Goin' to let 'em open to-night?"

"Night's a long way off," Morgan answered, leaving the question open for Conboy to make what he could out of it.

Conboy was of the number who could see no existence for Ascalon but a vicious one, yet he was no partizan of Seth Craddock, having a soreness in his recollection of many indignities suffered at the hands of the city marshal's Texas friends. Yet he would rather have Craddock, and the town open, than Morgan and stagnation. He came to that conclusion with Morgan's evasion of his direct question. The interests of Peden and his kind were Conboy's interests.

"When can I get breakfast?" Morgan inquired, turning suddenly, catching Conboy with his new resolution in his shifty, flickering eyes, reading him to the marrow of his bones.

"It's a little early—not half past five," Conboy returned, covering his confusion as well as he could by referring to his thick silver watch. "We don't begin to serve till six—the earliest of 'em don't begin to come in before then. If you feel like turnin' in for a sleep, we'll take care of you when you get up."

Morgan said he had had sleep enough to carry him over the day. Dora, yawning, disheveled, appeared in the dining-room door at that moment, tying her all-enveloping white apron around her. She blushed when she saw Morgan, and put up her hands to smooth her hair.

"I had the best sleep last night I can remember in a coon's age—I felt so *safe*," she said.

"You always was safe enough," Conboy told her, not in the best of humor.

"Safe enough! I can show you five bullet holes in the walls of my room, Mr. Morgan—one of 'em through the head of my bed!"

"Pretty close," Morgan said, answering the animation of her rosy, friendly face with a smile.

"Never mind about bullet holes—you go and begin makin' holes in a piece of biscuit dough," her father commanded.

"When I get good and ready," said Dora serenely. "You wouldn't care if we got shot to pieces every night, as long as we could get up in the morning and make biscuits."

"Yes, and some of you'd be rootin' around somebody else's kitchen for biscuits to fill your craws if this town laid dead a little while longer," Conboy fired back, his true feeling in the matter revealed.

"I can get a job of biscuit shooter any day," Dora told him, untroubled by the outlook of disaster that attended upon peace and quiet. "I'd rather not have no guests than drunks that come in stagger blind and shoot the plaster off of the wall,

It ain't so funny to wake up with your ears full of lime. Ma's sick of it, and I'm sick of it, and it 'd be a blessin' if Mr. Morgan would keep the joints all shut till the drunks in this town dried up like dead snakes!"

"You and your ma!" Conboy grumbled, bearing on an old grievance.

Morgan recalled the gaunt anxiety of Mrs. Conboy's eyes, hollow of every emotion, as they seemed, but unrest and straining fear. Dora had gone unmarked yet by the cursed fires of Ascalon; only her tongue discovered that the poison of their fumes had reached her heart.

"I'd like to put strickenine in some of their biscuits!" Dora declared with passionate vehemence.

"Tut-tut! No niggers—"

"How's your face, Mr. Morgan?" Dora inquired, out of one mood into another so quickly the transition was bewildering.

"Face?" said Morgan, embarrassed for want of her meaning. "Oh"—putting his hand to the forgotten wound—"about well, thank you, Miss Dora. I guess my good looks are ruined, though."

Dora half closed her eyes in arch expression, pursing her lips as if she meant to give him either a whistle or a kiss, laughed merrily, and ran off to cut patterns in a sheet of biscuit dough. She left such a clearness and good humor in the morning air that Morgan felt quite light at heart as he started out for a turn around the town.

He was still wearing the cowboy garb that he had drawn from the bottom of his trunk among the things which he believed belonged to a past age and closed period of his life's history. He had deliberated the question well the night before, reaching the conclusion that, as he had stepped out of his proper character, lapsed back, in a word, to raw-handed dealings with the rough edges of the world, he would better dress the part. He would be less conspicuous in that attire, and it would be his introduction and credentials to the men of the range.

Last night's long vigil, tramping around the square in his high-heeled, tight-fitting boots, had not hastened the cure of his bruised ankles and sore feet. This morning he limped like a trapped wolf, as he said to himself when he started to take a look around and see whether any of the outlawed had made bold to open their doors.

Few people were out of bed in Ascalon at that hour, although the sun was almost an hour high. As Morgan passed along he heard the crackling of kindling being broken in kitchens. Here and there the eager smoke of fresh fires rose straight toward the blue. No stores were open yet; the doors of the saloons remained closed as the night before. Morgan paused at the bank corner after making the round of the square.

Ahead of him the principal street of the town stretched, the houses standing in exclusive withdrawal far apart on large plots of ground, a treeless, dusty, unlovely lane. Lawn grass had been sown in many of the yards, where it had flourished until the scorching summer drought. Even now there were little rugs of green against north walls where the noonday shadows fell, but the rest of the lawns were withered and brown.

Morgan turned from this scene in which Ascalon presented its better side, to skirmish along the street running behind Peden's establishment. It might be well, for future exigencies, to fix as much of the geography of the place in his mind as possible. He wondered if there had been a back-door traffic in any of the saloons last night, as he passed long strings of empty beer-kegs, concluding that it was very likely something had been done in that way.

Across the street from Peden's back door was a large vacant piece of ground, a wilderness of cans, bottles, packing boxes, broken barrels. On one corner, diagonally across from where Morgan stood, facing on the other street, a ragged weathered tent was pitched. Out of this the sound of contending children came, the strident commanding voice of a woman breaking sharply to still the commotion that shook her unstable home. Morgan knew this must be the home of the cattle thief whose case Judge Thayer had undertaken. He wondered why even a cattle thief would choose

that site at the back door of perdition to pitch his tent and lodge his family.

A bullet clipping close past his ear, the sharp sound of a pistol shot behind him, startled him out of this speculation. Morgan did not believe at once, even as he wheeled, gun in hand, that the shot could have been intended for him, but out of caution he darted as quick as an Indian behind a pyramid of beer-kegs. From that shelter he explored in the direction of the shot, but saw nobody.

There was ample barrier for a lurking man all along the street on Peden's side. From behind beer cases and kegs, whisky-barrels, wagons, corners of small houses, one could have taken a shot at him; or from a window or back door. There was no smoke hanging to mark the spot.

Morgan slipped softly from his concealment, coming out at Peden's back door. Bending low, he hurried back over the track he had come, keeping the heaps of kegs, barrels and boxes between him and the road. And there, twenty yards or so distant, in a space between two wagons, he saw a man standing, pistol in hand, all set and primed for another shot, but looking rather puzzled and uncertain over the sudden disappearance of his mark.

Morgan was upon him in a few silent strides, unseen and unheard, his gun raised to throw a quick shot if the situation called for it. The man was Dell Hutton, the county treasurer. His face was white. There was the look in his eyes of a man condemned when he turned and confronted Morgan.

"Who was that shot at you, Morgan?" he inquired, his voice husky in the fog of his fright. He was laboring hard to put a face on it that would make him the champion of peace; he peered around with simulated caution, as if he had rushed to the spot ready to uphold the law.

Morgan let the pitiful effort pass for what it was worth, and that was very little.

"I don't know who it was, Hutton," he replied, with a careless laugh, putting his pistol away. "If you see him, tell him I let a little thing like that pass—once."

Morgan did not linger for any further words. Several shock-haired children had come bursting from the tent, their contention silenced. They stood looking at Morgan as he came back into the road, wonder in their muggy faces. Heads appeared at windows, back doors opened cautiously, showing eyes at cracks.

"Some fool shootin' off his gun," Morgan heard a man growl as he passed under a window of a thin-sided house, from which the excited voices of women came like the squeaks of unnested mice.

"What was goin' on back there?" Conboy inquired as Morgan approached the hotel. The proprietor was a little way out from his door, anxiety rather than interest in his face.

"Some fool shootin' off his gun, I guess," Morgan replied, feeling that the answer fitted the case very well.

He gave Dora the same answer when she met him at the blue door of the dining-room, trouble in her fair blue eyes. She looked at him with keen questioning, not satisfied that she had heard it all.

"I hope he burnt his fingers," she said.

CHAPTER XV.

WILL HIS LUCK HOLD?

DORA escorted Morgan to a table apart from the few heavy feeders who were already there, indicating to the other two girls who served with her in the dining-room that this was her special customer and guest of honor.

A plain breakfast in those vigorous times was unvarying—beefsteak, ham or bacon to give it a savor, eggs, fried potatoes, hot biscuits, coffee. It was the same as dinner, which came on the stroke of twelve, and none of your six o'clock pretenses about *that* meal, except there was no pie; identical with supper, save for the boiled potatoes and rice pudding. A man of proper proportions never wanted any more; he could not thrive on any less. And the only kind of a liver they ever worried about in that time on the plains of Kansas was a white one.

Dora was troubled; her face reflected her unrest as glass reflects firelight; her blue

eyes were clouded by its gloom. She made a pretense of brushing crumbs from the cloth where there were no crumbs, in order to stoop and bring her lips nearer Morgan's ear.

"He's comin' on the one twenty this afternoon. I thought maybe you'd like to know," she said.

Morgan lifted his eyes in feigned surprise at this news, not having it in his heart to cloud her generous act by the revelation of a suspicion that it was no news to him.

"You mean—"

"I got it straight," Dora nodded.

"Thank you, Miss Dora."

"I hope to God," she said, for it was their manner to speak ardently in Ascalon in those days, "you'll beat him to it when he gets off the train!"

"A man can only do his best, Dora," he said gently, moved by her honest friendship, simple wild thing though she was.

"If I was a man I'd take my gun and go with you to meet him," she declared.

"I know you would. But maybe there'll not be any fuss at all."

"There'll be fuss enough, all right!" Dora protested. "If he comes alone—but maybe he'll not *come* alone."

A man who rose from a near-by table came over to shake hands with Morgan and express his appreciation for the good beginning he had made as peace officer of the town. Dora snatched Morgan's cup and hastened away for more coffee. When she returned the citizen was on the way to the door.

"Craddock used to come in here and wolf his meals down," she said, picking up her theme in the same troubled key, "just like it didn't amount to nothing to kill a man a day. I looked to see blood on the tablecloth every time his hand touched it."

"It's a shame you girls had to wait on the brute," Morgan told her.

"Girls! He wouldn't let anybody but me wait on him." Dora frowned, her face coloring. She bent a little, lowering her voice. "Why, Mr. Morgan, what do you suppose? He wanted he to *marry* him!"

"That old buffalo wrangler? Well, he is kind of previous."

"He's too fresh to keep, I told him. Marry *him!* He used to come in here, Mr. Morgan, and put his hat down by his foot so he could grab it and run out and kill another man without losin' time. He never used to take his guns off and hang 'em up like other gentlemen when they eat. He just set there watchin' and turnin' his mean old eyes all the time. He's afraid of them, I know by the way he always rolled his eyes to look behind him without turnin' his head, never sayin' a word to anybody; he's afraid."

"Afraid of whom, Dora?"

"The ghosts of them murdered men!"

Morgan shook his head after seeming to think it over a little while. "I don't believe they'd trouble him much, Dora."

"I'd rather wait on a dog!" she declared, scorn and rebellion in her pretty eyes.

"You can marry somebody else and beat him on that game, anyhow. I'll bet there are plenty of them standing around waiting."

"Oh, Mr. Morgan!" Dora was drowned in blushes, greatly pleased. "Not so many as you might think"—turning her eyes upon him with coquettish challenge—"only Mr. Gray and Riley Caldwell, the printer on the *Headlight*."

"Mr. Gray, the druggist?"

"Yes, but he's too old for me!" Dora sighed. "Forty if he's a day. He's got money, though, and he's perfec'ly *grand* on the pieanno. You ought to hear him play 'The Maiden's Prayer'!"

"I'll listen out for him. I saw him washing his window a while ago—a tall man with a big white shirt."

"Yes"—abstractedly—"that was him. He's an elegant fine man, but I don't give a snap for none of 'em. I wish I could leave this town and never come back. You'll be in for dinner, won't you?" as Morgan pushed back from the repletion of that standard meal.

"And for supper, too, I hope," he said, turning it off as a joke.

"I hope to God!" murmured Dora fervently, seeing no joke in the uncertainty at all.

Excitement was laying hold of Ascalon even at that early hour. When Morgan

went on the street after breakfast he found many people going about, gathering in groups along the shady fronts, or hastening singly in the manner of men bound upon the confirmation of unusual news. The pale fish of the night were out in considerable numbers, leaking cigarette smoke through all the apertures of their faces as they grouped according to their kind to discuss the probabilities of the day. Seth Craddock was coming back with fire in his red eyes; their deliverer was on his way.

There was no secret about Seth's coming any longer. Even Peden leered in triumph when he met Morgan as he sauntered outside his closed door in the peculiar distinction of his black coat, which the strong sun of that summer morning was not powerful enough to strip from his broad back.

None of the saloons or resorts made an attempt to open their doors to business. The proprietors, on the other hand, appeared to have a secret pleasure in keeping them closed, perhaps counting on the gain that would be theirs when this brief prohibition should come to its end.

Opposed to this pleasurable expectancy of the proscribed was the uneasiness and doubt of the respectable. True, this man Morgan had taken Seth Craddock's gun away from him once, but luck must have had much to do with his preservation in that perilous adventure.

Morgan had rounded up the Texas men quartered on the town under Craddock's patronage, also, but they were sluggish from their debauch, and he had approached them with the caution of a man coming up on the blind side of a horse. Yesterday that looked like a big, heroic thing for one man to accomplish, but in the light of reflection to-day it must be admitted that it was mainly lucky.

Yes, Morgan had closed up the town last night, defying even Peden in his own hall, where defiance as a rule meant business for the undertaker. But the glamour of his morning's success was still over him at that time; Peden and his bouncers were a little cautious, a little cowed. He could not close the town up another night; murmurs of defiance were beginning to rise already.

And so the people who had applauded his drastic enforcement of the law last night became of no more support to Morgan to-day than a furrow of sand. Luck was a great thing if a man could play it forever, they said, but it was too much to believe that luck would hold even twice with Morgan when he confronted Seth Craddock that afternoon.

Morgan walked about the square that morning like a stranger. Few spoke to him, many turned inward from their doors when they saw him coming, afraid that a little friendship publicly displayed might be laid up against them for a terrible reckoning of interest by and by. Morgan was neither offended nor downcast by this public coldness in the quarter where he had a right to expect commendation and support. He understood too well the lengths that animosities ran in such a town as Ascalon. A living coward was more comfortable than a dead reformer, according to their philosophy.

It was when passing the post-office about nine o'clock in the morning that Morgan met Rhetta Thayer. She saw him coming, and waited. Her face was flushed; indignation disturbed the placidity of her eyes.

"They don't deserve it, the cowards!" she burst out, after a greeting too serious to admit a smile.

"Deserve what?" he inquired, looking about in mystification, wondering if something had happened in the post-office to fire this indignation.

"The help and protection of a brave man!" she said.

Morgan was so suddenly confused by this frank, impetuous appreciation of his efforts —for there was no mistaking the application—that he could not find a word. Rhetta did not give him much time, to be sure, but ran on with her denunciation of the citizenry of the town.

"I wouldn't turn a hand for them again, Mr. Morgan—I'd throw up the whole thing and let them cringe like dogs before that murderer when he comes back! It's good enough for them—it's all they deserve."

"You can't expect them to be very warm toward a stranger," he said, excusing them according to what he knew to be their due.

"They're afraid you can't do it—they're telling one another your luck will fail this time. Luck! That's all the sense there is in *that* bunch of cowards."

"They may be right," he said thoughtfully.

"You know they're not right!" she flashed back, defending him against himself as though he were another.

"I don't expect any generosity from them," he told her, gentle in his tone and undisturbed. "They're afraid if my luck should happen to turn against me they'd have to pay for any friendship shown me here this morning. Business is business, even in Ascalon!"

"Luck!" she scoffed. "It's funny you're the only lucky man that's struck this town in a long time then. If it's all luck, why don't some of them try their hands at rounding up the crooks and killers of this town and showing them the road the way you did that gang yesterday? Yes, I know all about that kind of luck."

Morgan walked with her toward Judge Thayer's office, whither she was bound with the mail. Behind them the loafers snickered and passed quips of doubtful humor and undoubted obscenity, but careful to present the face of decorum until Morgan was well beyond their voices. No matter what doubt they had of his luck holding with Seth Craddock, they certainly were not of a mind to make a trial of it on themselves.

"I think the best thing to do with this town is just let it go till it dries up and blows away," she said, with the vindictive impatience of youth. "What little good there is in it isn't worth the trouble of cleaning up to save."

"Your father's got everything centered here, he told me. There must be a good many honest people in the same boat."

"Maybe we could sell out for something, enough to take us away. Of course we expected Ascalon to turn out a different town when we came here—the railroad promised to do so much. But there's nothing to make a town when the cattle are gone. We might as well let it begin to die right now."

"You're gloomy this morning, Miss Thayer. You remember the Mennonites that wanted to settle here and were afraid?"

"There's no use for you to throw your life away making the country safe for them."

"Of course not. I hadn't thought of them."

"Nor any of those cold-nosed cowards that turn their backs on you for fear your luck's going to change. Luck! The fools!"

"They don't figure in the case at all, Miss Thayer."

"If it's on account of your own future, if you're trampling down a place in the briers to make your bed, as pa called it, then I think you can find a nicer place to camp than Ascalon. It never will repay the peril you'll run and the blood you'll lose—have lost already."

"I'm farther out of the calculation than anybody, Miss Thayer."

"I don't see what other motive there can be, then," she reflected, eyes bent to the ground as she walked slowly by his side.

"A lady asked me to undertake it. I'm doing it for her," he replied.

"She was a thoughtless, selfish person!" Rhetta said, her deep feeling stressed in the flush of her face, her accusation as vehement as if she laid charges against another. "Last night she thought it over—she had time to realize the danger she'd asked a generous stranger to assume. She wants to withdraw the request to-day—she asks you to give it up and let Ascalon go on its wicked way."

"Tell her," said he gently, holding her pleading, pained eyes a moment with his assuring gaze, "that a man can't drop a piece of work like this and turn his back on it and walk off. They'd say in Ascalon that he was a coward, and they'd be telling the truth."

"Oh! I oughtn't have argued you into it!" she regretted, bitter in her self-blame. "But the thought of that terrible cruel man—of all he's killed, all he will kill if he comes back—made a selfish coward of me. We had gone through a week of terror—you can't understand a woman's horror of

that kind of men storming the streets at night uncurbed!"

"A man can only guess."

"I was so grateful to you for driving them away, for purifying the air after them like a rain, that I urged you to go ahead and finish the job, just as if it were a great favor! I didn't think at the time, but I've thought it all over since."

"You mustn't worry about it any more. It is a great favor, a great honor, to be asked to serve you at all."

"You're too generous, Mr. Morgan. There are only a few of us here who care about order and peace—you can see that for yourself this morning—no matter what assurance they gave you yesterday. Let it go. If you don't want to get your horse and ride away, you can at least resign. You've got justification enough for that—you've seen the men that promised to support you yesterday turn their backs on you when you came up the street to-day. They don't want the town shut up—they don't want it changed, not when it hits their pocketbooks. You can tell pa that, and resign—or I'll tell him—it was my fault; I got you into it."

"You couldn't expect me to do that—you don't expect it," he chided, his voice grave and low.

"I can want you to do it—I don't expect it."

"Of course not. We'll not talk about it any more."

They continued toward her father's office in silence, crossing the stretch of barren in which the little catalpa tree stood.

Rhetto looked up into his face.

"You've never killed a man, Mr. Morgan," she said, more as a positive statement than as a question.

"No, I never have, Miss Thayer," Morgan answered her, as ingenuously sincere as she had asked it.

"I think I know it by the touch of a man's hand," she said, her face growing pale from her deep revulsion. "I shudder at the touch of blood. If you could be spared that in the ordeal ahead of you!"

"There's no backing out of it. The challenge has passed," he said.

"No, there's no way. He's coming—he knows you're waiting for him. But I hope you'll not have to—I hope you'll come out of it *clean!* A curse of blood falls on every man that takes this office. I wish—I hope you can keep clear of that."

The few courageous and hopeful ones who remained loyal to Morgan were somewhat assured, the doubtful ones agitated a bit more in their indecision, when he appeared on horseback a little past the turn of day. These latter people, whose courage had leaked out overnight, now began to weigh again their business interests and personal safety in the balance of their wavering judgment.

Morgan, on horseback, looked like a lucky man; they admitted that. Much more lucky, indeed, than he had appeared that morning when he went limping around the square. It was a question whether to come over to his side again, openly and warmly, or to hold back until he proved himself to be as lucky as he looked. A man might as well nail up his door and leave town as fall under the disfavor of Seth Craddock. So, while they wavered, they were still not quite convinced.

Prominent among the business men who had revised their attitude on reform as the shadow of Seth Craddock approached Ascalon was Earl Gray, the druggist, one of the notables on Dora Conboy's waiting list. Druggist Gray was a man who wore bell-bottomed trousers and a moleskin vest without a coat. His hair had a fetching crinkle to it, which he prized above all things in bottles and out, and wore long, like the man on the label.

There was so much hair about Mr. Gray, counting mustache and all, that his face and body seemed drained and attenuated by the contribution of sustenance to keep the adornment flourishing in its brown abundance. For Gray was a tall, thin, bony-kneed man, with long flat feet like wedges of cheese. His eyes were hollow and melancholy, as if he bore a sorrow; his nose was high and bony, and bleak in his sharp, thin-cheeked face.

Gray expressed himself openly to the undertaker, in whom he found a cautious but warm supporter of his views. There would be fevers and ills with Ascalon

closed up, Gray said he knew very well, just as there would be deaths and burials in the natural course of events under the same conditions. But there would be neither patches for the broken, stitches for the cut, nor powders for the headaches of debauchery called for then as now; and all the burying there would be an undertaker might do under his thumb-nail.

They'd go to drugging themselves with boneset tea and mullein tea, and bitter-root powders and wahoo bark, said Gray. Likewise, they'd turn to burying one another, after the ways of pioneers, who were as resourceful in deaths and funerals as in drugs and fomentations. Pioneers—such as would be left in that country after Morgan had shut up Ascalon and driven away those who were dependent on one another for their skinning and fleecing, filching and plundering—did not lean on any man. Such as came there to plow up the prairies would be of the same stuff, rough-barked men and women who called in neither doctor to be born nor undertaker to be buried.

It was a gloomy outlook, the town closed up and everybody gone. What would a man do with his building—what would a man do with his stock?

"Maybe Craddock ain't no saint and angel, but he makes business in this town," said Gray.

"Makes business," the undertaker echoed, with abstraction and looking far away as if he saw already the train of oncoming independent, self-burying pioneers over against the horizon.

"If this feller's luck don't go ag'in' him, you might as well ship all your coffins away but one—they'll need one to bury the town in. What do you think of him ridin' around the depot down there, drawin' a deadline that no man ain't goin' to be allowed to cross till the one twenty pulls out? Kind of high-handed deal, I call it!"

"I've got a case of shrouds comin' in by express on that train, two cases layin' in my place waitin' on 'em," the undertaker said resentfully, waking out of his abstraction and apparent apathy.

"*You* have?" said Gray, eying him suddenly.

"He stopped me as I was goin' over to wait around till the train come in—drove me back like I was a cow. He said it didn't make no difference how much business I had at the depot, it would have to wait till the train was gone. When a citizen and taxpayer of this town can't even cross the road like a shanghai rooster, things is comin' to a hell of a pass!"

"Well, I ain't got no business at the depot this afternoon, or I bet you a cracker I'd be over there," Gray boasted. "I think I'll close up a while and go down to the hotel, where I can see better—it's only forty minutes till she's due."

"Might as well—everybody's down there. You won't sell as much as a pack of gum till the train's gone and this thing's off of people's minds."

Gray went in for his hat, to spend a good deal of time at the glass behind his prescription case setting it at the most seductive slant upon his luxuriant brown curls. This was an extremely enticing small hat, just a shade lighter brown than the druggist's wavy hair. It looked like a cork in a bottle placed by a tipsy hand as Druggist Gray passed down the street toward the hotel, to post himself where he might see how well Morgan's luck was going to hold in this encounter with the meat hunter of the Cimarron.

As the undertaker had said, nearly everybody in Ascalon was already collected in front and in the near vicinity of the hotel, fringing the square in gay-splotched crowds. Beneath the canopy of the Elkhorn many were assembled—as many indeed as could conveniently stand, for that bit of shade was a blessing on the sun-parched front of Ascalon's bleak street.

Business was generally suspended in this hour of uncertainty; public feeling was drawn as tight as a banjo head in the sun. In the court-house the few officials and clerks necessary to the county's business were at the windows looking upon the station, all expecting a tragedy of such stirring dimensions as Ascalon had never witnessed.

(To be continued NEXT WEEK.)

MY SHIP

I

I KNOW not when my ship may come
O'er life's broad sea;
Whether at morn or blazing noon,
At sunset hour or when the moon
Throws her bright highway o'er the deep,
And all the heaving waters sleep;
But may I be
Awaiting her whene'er she land—
Not pacing idly on the strand,
But working with an honest heart,
And hailing her as but a part
Of what life's sea
Shall bring to me.

II

I know not whence my ship may come
O'er life's broad sea;
From Southern clime with cargo sweet
Or from the East with rarest treat,
From West, with stores of varied worth
Or rugged rich, from frozen North—
But may I be
Receptive of each present there,
Of homely gift, or treasure rare,
Using each one as best I may
As offerings of thanks that they
Were brought to me
Across life's sea.

III

I know not how my ship may come
O'er life's broad sea;
Whether she come all trim and neat
Or staggering in while tempests beat,
Or if the cargo be intact
Or tossed and spoiled by storms that racked—
But may I be
Ready to take whate'er she bring
And make of it some goodly thing
Of service to my fellow men,
Thus turning to account again
What comes to me
Up from the sea.

IV

I know not where my ship may land
From o'er life's sea;
Whether on her my eye shall rest
Just 'merging from the golden West,
Whether her port be East or South
Or in some Northern river's mouth—
But may I be
Near to that port, where'er she land,
And ready there to bear a hand
Upon the pier, to make her fast
And claim my glorious prize, at last,
That came to me
From o'er life's sea.

V

I know not why *my* ship should come
O'er life's broad sea;
Why should *I* wish or hope or sigh
When ships are daily passing by—
When others watch and wait in vain?
I will not murmur or complain,
But I will be
Content if, when the chill winds blow
And I shall see life's sunset glow,
My working and my waiting o'er,
My " Pilot-Ship " draws swift to shore
To carry me
Beyond the sea.

Roland Coles Treadwell

An Exponent of Preparedness

by

Nettie Bartlett Dews

'SAMBO, whut's disyear prepahedness I done heerd de white folks talkin' 'bout?"

"It's doin' eve'ything befo'han', so when yo' stahts in yo' is ready an' dey ain't nothin' lef' ter do."

"Huh," sniffed Lize, "I done made out it reelly meant somethin'."

"Sho," said Sambo disgustedly, "dey talks big, dey talks big, but it don' signify."

"Sho don'."

"Honey, yo' sho am de onliest coon in de worl' whut kin bake cawn-bread." He reached across the table and helped himself to a couple of generous squares. "Dey ain't no niggah gal nowheres dat kin brown de po'k chops like yo' kin, an' dem dere yams yo' cooks jes natchally—"

Sambo's eulogy of his wife's culinary art was rudely interrupted by a knock.

"Sam in?" asked a male voice as Lize opened the door.

"Howdy, Mistah Simpson. Step in an' res' yo' hat."

"Not to-night, Lize. I came over to see if Sam would come and work about the yard to-morrow. The lawn must be mowed and the rose bushes need a little attention. I thought Sam could do it as well as any one."

"He sho kin," said Lize. "I'll sen' him ovah in de mawnin'."

Sambo's appetite seemed to have taken wings and flown away by the time Lize closed the door and seated herself again at the table.

"Hab a piece ob cawn-pone, Sambo," urged Lize, as she noted the old-time symptoms, at the mention of work, creeping over her spouse.

"I sho hab a mighty bad feelin' comin' ovah me, honey. He'p me inter de bed," he moaned dismally. Lize took him by the arm and dragged him to the small sleeping-room.

During the first two months of their married life Lize had been thoroughly frightened by these sudden, violent attacks, but it soon dawned upon her that she was being systematically "worked." She did family washings at home, and her customers had tried in vain to force labor of various kinds upon her lazy husband. Sambo had a furious temper which Lize did not care to arouse. She knew that one word of condemnation or accusation would precipitate a whirlwind that would make a white squall on Lake Michigan tame in comparison. Many an hour had she lain awake during the long nights trying to figure a way out of the position in which she found herself.

When Sambo was taken with one of his "spells" he usually moaned and tossed about on the bed until midnight, when he settled himself down for a good rest. In the morning at seven he would declare he couldn't eat a bite, and would explain how near death he had been. At one time he declared he heard "Gabe's horn a tootin' fo' me." Another time, "Saint Petah done opened de gate fo' me las' night. I heerd

de creakin' ob de hinges an' I mos' slid fru." By eight o'clock he felt that a cup of coffee *might* stop his headache, and by nine he reluctantly consented to partake of a hearty breakfast.

Believing it would be a mistake to recover too soon, he would settle himself for another two hours' sleep, and by afternoon was able to creep out to the back yard and look at the friers Lize was raising. He gathered enough strength to "tote" the washings home and collect the money. On the return trip he invested the greater part of the coin in pork chops and cornmeal. When Lize began counting the change he explained the shortage of fifteen cents by saying: "Honey, I done took an awful spell on de way home. I felt so weak an' faintylike I drapped inter de saloom an' bought a li'l' dram."

On the morning that he was supposed to trim the Simpsons' lawn he awoke at seven to find Lize dressing for the street. No cheery fire crackled in the stove, and the morning air bore no appetizing odor of brewing coffee.

Such a strange state of affairs had never occurred before. It frightened him. He must do something at once to impress his wife with the gravity of his condition. Uttering an unearthly groan, he whimpered: "Honey, come kiss yo' baby good-by. Mah time's done come now fo' sho. I ain't nevah no mo' gwine ter spen' de happy days wid yo', Lize. I done heerd de flippin' ob de angel's wings las' night an' I knowed it wah all ovah fo' me."

"Yo' jes' res' yo'self, Sammy." Sammy was the name she used when in an especially tender mood, and it reassured him at once. "Miss Perkins done sent ovah fo' me dis mawnin' ter come see huh 'bout some wuk. Yo' res' yo'self till I gits back an' fix mah baby a nice breakfas'."

As Lize walked down the street a devilish gleam lit her eyes as she murmured: "I done figgahed out dat some day mah brain would hook inter an idear dat wud settle dat niggah."

At ten o'clock she was back home bustling about the stove and pretending to fix Sambo's breakfast, but never had she seemed so slow. It was long past the usual breakfast hour, and he was decidedly hungry, and longed for his cup of coffee.

"Some one's knockin' at de do', sweety," called Sambo.

"Why, good mawnin', Dr. Timms," said Lize as she opened the door.

Now Timms was not a physician, but he was a wizard with herbs. He compounded remedies that were unfailing for fits, worms, and chills, and his fee was only fifty cents. It gratified him wonderfully to be classed as a medico.

"I done heerd down de street dat Sambo was sick agin, an' I jes' drapped in ter gib him a little *ad*vice free ob charge."

Timms walked into the little bedroom and after greeting Sambo pleasantly, said:

"Now, Brudder Thomas, lay back on de piller, draw in yo' bref fo' times an' turn yo' eyeballs up ter de ceilin' so I kin see de whites." As he was talking he rammed a thermometer under Sambo's tongue.

This medical attention had come so suddenly that Sambo had no chance to ward it off. He couldn't explain how well he felt with Lize standing by.

He lay but a minute as Timms directed when he heard a hissing sound and then a grunt issue from the doctor's lips. He was on the verge of leaping from the bed and flooring him for his interference, but as he raised up Timms whipped out a kerchief, wiped his eyes, and stepping over to Lize, said:

"Sistah Thomas, accep' mah keenes' sympathies in dis year hour ob yo' trial."

They gazed at each other for fully a minute, then shook hands solemnly.

Sambo shifted the thermometer to the corner of his mouth as he watched this tableau suspiciously.

"Whut's de mattah wid me," mumbled Sambo disdainfully.

"Lawdy, lawdy, man, yo'-all bettah ask whut *ain't* de mattah wid yo'. Eve'ything wrong wid yo'. I kain't figgah how come yo'-all ter las' dis long."

The doctor's convincing manner made Sambo feel that maybe all wasn't right with him. Now that he thought about it he did feel pretty bad. Strange pains darted here and there about his body and his heart was thumping wildly.

"Brudder Thomas, I hates t' tell yo', but yo'-all done got de collision ob de brain cells. De vermifuge hab ceased t' functuate on de aspendix an' de cardiac solution done quit flowin' inter de vertebra. Man, oh man, I hates t' tell yo' de res', but de spyroid glan' hab grown fas' t' yo' throat an' yo' is liable t' choke t' deff mos' any minute." Slowly he drew the thermometer from the patient's mouth.

"Bring a pail ob watah, *quick!*" bawled Timms as he fell back against the thin board partition which served to divide the cabin into two rooms. "Mah Gawd, man, yo'-all done got a tempychure ob a hundred an' fawty."

"Huh," said Sambo, "I knowed a man whut had a worse feber dan dat."

"White man or cullud gen'leman?" inquired Timms craftily.

"White man."

"Dere yo' is, dere yo' is. White folkses hab dis year col' fish blood whut a little ex'ra heat don' huht none, but niggah blood am hot blood. Yo' know whut's gwine happen addin' all dat feber, don' yo'? Yo's jes' natchally gwine ketch fire an' *burn up.*"

By this time Sambo was thoroughly frightened, and when Lize burst into tears and said: "Honey, I knowed it wah all ovah when yo' 'heerd de flippin' ob de angel's wings,'" Sambo really thought he had heard something, and he was seized with a mighty trembling that shook the bed.

"Hol' yo' breff an' don' move while I spits out de do'," commanded Timms.

No sooner had he reentered the room than there came a loud knock, and Lize, sobbing gently, opened it to admit Rev. Spriggs, their minister. He entered the room on tiptoe and bowed impressively to the three inmates.

"De Lawd comfo't yo' an' hol' yo' up in yo' trubble, sistah. I jes' drapped in on dis mou'nful occasion t' fin' out whut fawm ob expostulation yo' wish me t' gib ovah de body ob our belubbed brudder."

"Git outen heah," shrieked Sambo as he jerked the quilts up around his neck and crouched against the headboard of the bed, his eyes bulging with excitement and terror.

"De niggah's outen his haid," murmured Spriggs. "Doctah Timms, whut's de cause, an' how long yo' countin' de po' man will las'?"

"I figgahs on fo' hours, an' it's bin brung on by a lack ob propah exe'cise ob de entiah muscles ob de whole body. An' den de stomach hab bin ovahwo'ked wid too much po'k chops an' cawn-bread. Yo'-all has t' move consid'able t' be able t' diges' disyear rich food."

"*Correc' yo' is,*" agreed Spriggs, then stepping into the outer room he spat vigorously out the door. As soon as he returned to the bedside Lize hastened out to admit Brother Sims.

As Sims came in he gazed in commiseration at the occupant of the bed.

"I'll remembah yo', Sambo, I'll remembah yo' eve'y time I shakes de bones an' thinks ob de good ol' times we had togedder. De choir-leadah ob de Ebony Temple ask me t' traipse ovah an' fin' out whut yo'-all wanted in de way ob vocalization so we could practise de hymns."

By this time Sambo was beyond speech, and only a distressing gurgle issued from the lips of the miserable figure which huddled beneath a mound of bedclothes.

"Wait till I gits a fresh chaw ob terbaccer," said Sims as he walked to the front door and threw his quid into the yard. By the time he had extracted a new plug from his greasy trousers a fourth party was clamoring for admittance to the cabin. A murmur of voices and then Lize led Brother Brown into the sick room.

Now Brown and Sambo hadn't been on the best of terms, so Brown gazed at the victim with a look of real pleasure as he whipped out pencil and paper and said:

"Miss Thomas, whut does yo'-all care to awdah fo' de coffin decorations? We done talked it ovah at de green-house dat we might fix yo' up a piller ob geeraniums fo' 'bout a dollah an' thuthy-five cents, wid 'At Res'' or 'Sweepin' T'rough de Gates' in der middle."

Before Lize could decide on the flowers a raucous voice, in a business-like manner, demanded that some one within: "Open de do'." Once more she hastened out to admit a caller. Sambo recognized the voice as one belonging to Ducie Pound, who worked

for the colored undertaking establishment. He entered the place slowly, cast an appraising glance over Sambo, and tossed a bunch of pamphlets on the foot of the bed.

" Miss Lize, Tommy done sent me ovah wid he cattylogs ob de coffins an' de caskits, so yo'-all could pick out de colah and de price yo' wants."

This brought Sambo up with a jerk. He looked far from human. His eyes were distended, his lower jaw sagged nearly to his chest and a cold, clammy sweat had gathered on his brow. Short, rasping breaths came from his hot, dry throat contracted by fear. He thought the " spyroid glan' " was doing its best to kill him before his other ailments had a chance.

" He'p yo'self t' yo' own choice, honey," bawled Lize as she covered her eyes with the corner of her apron. " It am de las' thing yo' little Lize kin do fo' yo' is t' let yo' pick yo' own box. Don' be backward 'bout takin' de one yo wants, Sammy, 'cause Tommy Watkins has done spoke mah han' in matterimony an' he said as how it would be he'ping me out t' gib me de coffin fo' a little weddin'-present."

Sambo's eyes rolled back and forth like those of a trapped animal when psychic perception tells it that it has met its destroyer. With a shriek of frenzy he gathered a quilt close about his head and with one bound crashed through the window, a shower of glass falling about him.

Up the road he scudded on bare legs, the quilt held firmly together across his chest. One point of it trailed in the dust behind him. A mob quickly fell in line to follow the crazed negro and learn the cause of his wild flight, but fear lent agility to the terrified creature and he soon left them far behind.

As he neared Black Swamp, three miles from home, tales he had heard of the mammoth rattlers which infested the place drifted through his mind and he slackened his pace. Glancing over his shoulder he discovered that he had no pursuers. He turned off from the road, and creeping into the shelter of a wild grape-vine, wiped the dust and sweat from his face. Thoroughly exhausted, he lay back on the ground and was soon fast asleep.

At dusk he awoke, hungry as a wolf from his twenty-four hours' fast, but otherwise feeling fine. All the terrible symptoms of his numerous diseases seemed to have left him.

The doctor contended that lack of exercise had been the cause of his illness. With the vigorous efforts of the afternoon he had cured himself. It was a fine idea. He decided to continue the treatment. He gathered the quilt about him and started back to town.

News of the affair at the Thomas cabin, and Sambo's wild flight, clad only in the scantiest of night robes and a bedquilt, had been noised about, so Mr. Simpson was in a way prepared for the sight which met his eyes when he was summoned to the side door to see Sambo on business. They held a very earnest conversation. As Mr. Simpson turned to reenter the house, Sambo inquired, timidly:

" Mistah Simpson, would yo'-all let me use yo' telefoam?"

" Certainly, Sambo. Go around to the back door and Wong will let you talk on the kitchen phone."

As Sambo crept into the kitchen, his bare legs covered with grime and one corner of the quilt trailing on the floor behind him, Wong looked up from the sink where he was busily washing dishes.

" All samee clazy man," he gasped, and scuttling across the kitchen he entered the pantry, closed the door, and turned the key in the lock.

Now Lize had been expecting to hear from Sambo, so as soon as she heard the telephone bell she took the receiver from the hook, and without waiting for him to make himself heard, said:

" Who evah yo' is I don' want no mo' wuk. Mah man's done gone out an' I 'xpect he's got hisself kilt. I don' want no washin', I gotter hab time t' mou'n."

" Is dat yo', honey?"

" Bress Gawd, if dat don' soun' like mah li'l Sammy."

" 'Tis yo' Sammy. I bin out by de Black Swamp on a li'l' bizness " — this for the benefit of Simpson, who might be listening —" an' I jes' drapped in t' tell Mistah Simpson dat de reason I didn't come ovah

t' mow de lawn was dat I didn't keer t' accep' none ob dese li'l' no-'count, one-day jobs. Whut I's lookin' fo' is a *position* by de month. So he done hiahed me fo' fawty dollahs. Hab all those triflin', good-fo'-nothin' niggahs done lef', whut was litterin' up de house dis mawnin'?"

"Dey sho hab."

"Hab yo'-all had yo' suppah, Lize? I's pow'ful hungry."

"I's jes' puttin' on de po'k chops and cawn-pone now. Yo' git a move on."

As Sambo turned from the telephone he murmured confidently:

"Dat dere Tommy Watkins nevah made no imprint on dat niggah gal's feelin's."

Lize at the other end of the line gleefully told herself:

"Disyear prepahedness bizness sho am fine if yo' know how t' wuk it right."

TYPES

As like were they in circumstance
As any men I knew,
Of equal health, of equal wealth,
And social status too;
But far apart were they in their
Respective points of view.

For Smith found work a keen delight,
His friends a jolly crowd;
Jones found the same work drudgery,
The same friends dull or proud,
With scandals in their private lives
Not to be breathed aloud.

To both woods, hill and streams called loud
In sultry summer-time;
Smith brought back courage, joy and tan
From any sort of clime.
Jones told of heat, mosquitoes and
Hotel men black with crime.

It was the same in every scene,
Or group, or chance, or deal;
Where Smith found Christian charity,
Jones found a shameless steal;
In place of worth, depravity
Too dreadful to reveal.

Last month both died, and where they bide
Of course one cannot tell,
Nor does it greatly matter
To us who knew them well—
Jones would object to either place,
And Smith find good in hell.

Frederick Hall.

The Guide to Happiness

by Max Brand Part V

Author of "Tiger," "The Night Horseman," "The Untamed," "Clung," "Trailin'," etc.

CHAPTER XXIX.

NANCY SHELVES A BURDEN.

THEY welcomed her back to Grogan's with a shout, and a great happiness came singing back in Nancy as she stood at the door. They turned towards her from the bar, from the gaming tables. They threw up their hands and roared a greeting to her. What a crowd they were! What color! What variety!

There sat the dark, thin-faced Latin, and beside him the Scandinavian with blond hair bleached almost white by the sun of the mountain-desert, with his skin always peeled and burned to a bright red by that unaccustomed heat. And there was the Englishman, very quiet, with colorless eyes, stodgy, determined. And there the New Englander, gaunt and tall and bristling, with bones loosely tied together with great sinews. And yonder the teeth of a negro flashed; and here a Chinaman stared at nothingness.

It seemed as if strong men had been gathered from all parts of the world, and the whirlpool of adventure, love of danger, discontent like a burr under a saddle blanket, had brought them together at length here in Number Ten. They had met danger, and they were dangerous. The air about them was surcharged with possibilities of action. They knew their own strength; they feared nothing; they were not ashamed to let the world see them as they were. Their natures flared like the colors they wore—bandannas of every hue, shirts of red and blue and yellow, indifferently blended by dirt or fading.

She would have given anything in her possession to have seen the conflict between Jerry Aiken and these men. It did not seem possible that he could have withstood them for even an instant. Then she remembered him as he had stood in his tatters before her at the jail, alert, poised, with a suggestion of subtle speed. Decidedly he was dangerous, but in a way differing from the danger of this crowd.

A wild spirit of mischief rose in Nancy. If they could have read her mind, the smiles would surely have froze on the mouths of the men in Grogan's.

They were no sooner inside the door than a swirl of men rolled toward her from the bar, pleading for another song, and swept her back with them. The marshal left her, downcast, thoughtful. He had a feeling, as soon as she was away from him, that he had been handling fire, delightful, but decidedly hot. He looked after her with a touch of amusement and a touch of concern.

She was having a wonderful time. His own heart leaped as he saw the brightness of her face, and she danced through the

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crowd, scattering smiles and words. In front of her all was expectancy, but the moment she had passed men began crowding after to get close again, elbowing each other aside, and exchanging bitter looks. Bitter looks, in Grogan's, do not come very long ahead of bitter deeds. And Marshal Bud Levine knew it very well.

For one thing at least he was thankful. Jerry was in the jail and safely retained there. The thought of him joining forces with this girl was like the thought of oil added to fire. The marshal shivered a little.

As the crowd gathered up Nancy again, much in the manner that a wave licks up the beach and sweeps down to the ocean a bit of driftwood, Pete the Runt used his massive shoulders to get close to her, and Red Mack came closely in his wake.

"Nancy," said Red Mack, lowering his voice so that it might not be heard by any save the girl, "it's time we was out of here."

"Why?" she asked, and looked up to him with a frown.

She was beginning to feel that both Red Mack and the Runt were a weight which she was dragging after her as a ship drags a sea-anchor. They spoiled her party with their serious faces and their warnings.

A sudden desire to get rid of them swept over her.

"Why?" echoed the Runt gravely. "Because this ain't no place for a lady. I been here long enough to see that."

"Pete," she said sharply, "I'll decide what places are fit for me." She turned toward Red Mack. "Won't I, Mack?" she appealed.

"Of course she will," said Red Mack, rather illogically. "Don't she know her own mind?"

The crowd bore Nancy away; but Pete and Red were facing each other, glaring.

"Who called for any lip from you?" queried the Runt savagely.

"It don't need no call to keep a gent from makin' a fool of himself," declared Red Mack. "Don't you know better'n to talk to a lady like that?"

"Mack," said the Runt, "I've bore a lot from you. If you was born ignor'nt, it ain't no call for you to show it all the time."

Over the heads of the crowd he saw Nancy. She had turned back toward him, smiling, and the Runt took the smile as a warrant to go forward; but Red Mack had seen the same smile and received it as a special encouragement.

"They ain't no doubt that we ought to get her out of Grogan's," continued Mack; "but you ain't goin' to get her out by insultin' her—nor insultin' me."

The Runt turned a dark and angry red.

"Why," he exclaimed, "you red-headed scare-crow, you walkin' skeleton, since when have you been readin' the minds of ladies?"

"Hell!" hissed Red Mack, and smote the Runt upon the root of the nose. For a moment the Runt was too astonished to make any rejoinder. Then he leaned back, rested his weight securely on his right foot, and swept forward his right hand with force enough to have knocked Red through the wall, had it landed. But before it came near him, Red Mack ducked under that terrible blow and came up close to the Runt whaling away with both fists at close range. Pete the Runt received a stunning blow upon one side of the jaw, and then his face was knocked straight by an equally hard punch on the opposite side; and an instant later Red's lean fists sank to the wrist in Pete's stomach.

Any one of these strokes would have laid up a lesser man for repairs, but the Runt merely grunted, and brushed Red away to full-arm distance with a back-hand sweep. Then he smashed Red on the ribs with bruising force. It doubled Red over like a closing jack-knife, but as he stooped he launched an overhand swing, doubly strong with the pain of his contracting muscles. It landed squarely upon the Runt's already damaged nose and brought out a spout of blood. At that point the battle really began, for the Runt went mad with the sight of his own blood, and Red Mack fought like a demon to plant another blow on the same point.

Marshal Levine was by no means idle in the mean time. He was struggling desperately to get to the two combatants, but

around them had gathered with uncanny speed every man in Grogan's. A good many of them had already felt the bruising of fists earlier in the evening, and now they danced with glee to see the damage the two giants worked.

For it was veritably an engagement of giants. The Runt struck with thrice the power that Mack could possibly put into his lean arms, but on the other hand Mack hit with thrice the speed. His flashing hands whacked the Runt on head and face and body like the play of a trip-hammer, but the Runt, grunting at every stroke, stuck by his guns. Somewhere in the distance he heard the voice of Levine yelling that the fight must stop, threatening the jail for any one who kept him away from the combatants. Before going to jail the Runt wanted to get home one finishing wallop which would square all accounts and leave a considerable sum in his favor.

He commenced to press in. Blows glanced from his forehead, cracked on his jaw, thudded on his chest and ribs, and still he shook his head and came in doggedly waiting for an opening. If Mack had had room he might have kept away, but the circle about them grew smaller and smaller as the audience, in its growing enthusiasm, pressed in to watch every blow. So eventually, when Mack leaped back, his retreat was stopped by a wall of flesh, and the next instant the massive fist of the Runt whacked against his jaw, and Mack struck the man behind and literally rebounded to the floor.

He was hurt rather than stunned, however, and just as the Runt stepped back to wipe the blood from his face and survey the conquered, Mack leaped to his feet again and charged like a wildcat. They clinched, struggled a moment, and then rolled under the feet of the crowd in an inextricable, cursing tangle.

All of this Nancy had watched from the outskirts of the mass. She had known when she left the two that there was apt to be trouble between them, but she could think of no better way of getting rid of them than by playing one against the other. She had felt like the marksman with his finger pressing the trigger, but when the rush began to watch the fight, she floated to the edge of the circle.

From this point she could see the heads of Runt and Mack rising aloft above the surrounders, and she saw the fists dart out and land, and saw the heads bob and sway under the impact of the blows. Once, twice, and again she strove to slip into the mass of spectators and get to the combatants to separate them, but every time the hustling backs crowded closer together and shut her out. There was nothing to do but stand and watch.

She was sorry for the fight; she would have given a good deal to stop it; but she would not have been the new Nancy if she had not felt something more than regret. She was the cause for which they fought, and the strength behind every punch was a tribute to her power. This was some of that danger she had sensed in the very air over Grogan's. What if the whole place should break into turmoil, with her the center of it all?

There was a shouting from the center of the crowd: "They're down!"

Then, as the group scattered, she saw the two writhing, twisting fighters on the floor; the next moment Marshal Bud Levine, his hat off, his bandanna torn from his throat by the struggle to get through the crowd, leaned over the two and placed a hand on either shoulder. They were under arrest.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE OUIJA BOARD.

THE hand of the law had a remarkably sobering effect upon both the Runt and Red Mack. They rose, much bedraggled, blood-stained, glaring at one another, but decidedly amenable to reason; for Bud Levine carried that in his eyes which usually cleared the minds of even the most violent.

"Jest face that door and start marchin'," said the marshal. "And don't march too fast. If you do, I'm apt to halt you, and when I halt you, you may stand still a long time."

He did not show a gun, but there was a certain nervousness about his right hand

which said many things to the eye of the initiated. Number Ten had watched Marshal Bud Levine at work long before this. And now Number Ten stood aside as meekly as a shorn lamb and did not even bleat. Only Nancy dared to interfere. She stepped to Levine.

"Marshal," she said, "are you really going to arrest them?"

"Miss Scovil," answered the marshal, "it sure looks like I am."

"But what harm have they done to any one except themselves?"

The marshal looked at the bloody face and the red-stained shirt of the Runt and then grinned.

"They ain't been no murder here, ma'am, and I aim to keep it away. But they was a killin' jest next door to us. These gents can rest up in the coop."

She turned to them, her eyes soft with pity. One hand received the brawny fist of the Runt; the other hand took the hard, lean fingers of Red Mack.

"I'm sorry," she murmured. "So sorry!"

"Don't think nothin' about it," said Mack reassuringly. "He had this comin' to him for a long time. He never knowed nothin' about how to talk to a lady."

The Runt wiped the blood from his face with his free hand. With the other he squeezed the fingers of Nancy.

"I'll finish him later," he said. "He was always in your way, lady."

"Forward!" commanded the marshal, and the procession wound out through the door.

It was no sooner gone than it was forgotten. The card-games at the tables began again; the roulette once more spun; the glasses flashed and tinkled across the bar; and a considerable group waited with an eye upon Nancy. Number Ten had been diverted, but now it resumed the serious business of spending money.

"Noisy pair of gents, them two that come to town with you," remarked Baldy, hobbling to the side of Nancy; "mostly Number Ten is uncommon quiet till strangers blows in. You foller me the rest of the evening, lady, and you won't be havin' no fights around you. They ain't been so much noise in Number Ten since the night old Wendell made his strike and hung the weejee over yonder on the wall."

Here the great Grogan himself approached the girl with a request for a song, and a clamor rose to back him, but Nancy had caught a spark of interest in Baldy's remarks.

"Tell me about old Wendell," she said.

"He was a queer old nut," said Baldy, "and he come here and sat over yonder at that table with a big piece of paper spread in front of him and a piece of board with a pencil at one end of it. He put his hand on the board and the pencil began writing —leastwise, old Wendell said it was writing, but we couldn't make much out of it. Jest a big scrawl. But old Wendell got pretty excited. He called the thing a 'weejee' and he said the weejee had told him where there was a big lead of gold up in the hills."

"Was he crazy?" asked the girl.

"Sounds like it, ma'am," nodded Baldy, "but old Wendell hit off through the hills where nobody never thought of ever lookin' for a smell of gold, and three months later he come back through Number Ten loaded with dust, and he kept Number Ten drunk for two days and hung up his 'weejee' on the wall, yonder. Since then they ain't been so much noise agin, askin' your pardon, miss—until you come to town."

On the wall in the corner, hanging from a nail by a bit of string, Nancy saw a little triangular piece of thin wood. When she asked to see it more closely, Baldy brought it and she noted it in detail. It was a perfectly plain bit of wood cheaply varnished. It was rudely heart-shaped, and from the top showed nothing except a hole through which the pencil passed. Underneath, at the broad end of the triangle, were two more or less wabbly little wheels. They made two points of support, and the third was at the apex of the triangle, being the tip of the pencil thrust through the hole in the board.

The device was very plain. When it was placed upon paper on a smooth surface, the wabbly wheels stirred here and there under the slightest pressure, and the pencil tip was bound to move irregularly up and

down and to and fro, carrying on a scrawling line which might and might not look like writing.

Having come so far in her examination of the "weejee" board, Nancy was about to hand it back to Baldy when she saw something like letters on the under side of the board. She blew off the dust, and then she found, written in pencil which had dug into the soft wood the following: "The hand which writes with me shall describe the past, the future, and the hearts of men." Nancy read it aloud, laughing up to Baldy.

"Do you believe in it?" she asked.

"I dunno," muttered Baldy, scratching his head. "It ain't the sort of thing I like to fool with. It brung gold to old Wendell. Maybe it 'd bring somethin' else to the next man that handled it. No, I don't believe in it; and I don't disbelieve; I'm sort of betwixt and between."

But Nancy wished to try out the weejee board, so Grogan himself brought out a stray roll of wall-paper. The under side of it presented a broad, smooth, white surface, ideal for the clumsy scrawl which would result from the pencil of the board. A chair was drawn up for Nancy to the table on which the paper and the board were placed, and a curious group stood around to watch.

"As I remember," suggested Grogan, "old Wendell jest rested his finger-tips real light on it, and the thing writ right off. I couldn't make out what it said, but old Wendell he seen through it right away. He made words, but it looked to me like a baby's scribblin'."

"You try," said Nancy, and pushed the board toward Grogan.

He took it, grinning sheepishly.

"It ain't that I believe in it," he assured the smiling crowd. "But they's something queer in it. Seemed to sort of hit off the right thing for old Wendell, boys. But they's got to be a question asked before it 'll write. Old Wendell he kept mutterin' a question, and then the thing would scribble. What are you askin', gents?"

A wit immediately bawled from back of the circle: "What sort of a gent is Grogan?"

"Well," grinned Grogan, "we'll see what it says to that."

He laid his big fingers on the little board. At first there was not the slightest mation.

"Fake," grunted a bystander. "They ain't nothin' goin' to happen. Must have all been drunk, includin' Wendell, when it writ last time."

But he had no sooner finished speaking than the board stirred. Perhaps it was because Grogan had shifted the position of his hand a little. The clumsy wheels wabbled a little, and the pencil trailed out several dots and dashes, and then a long, scrawling line. Grogan lifted the board, and a cluster of heads crowded above the table to read the verdict.

"N-o," spelled Nancy. "It says they weren't drunk when it wrote last. Now try again, Mr. Grogan: 'What sort of a gent is Grogan?'"

There was less laughter now. Grogan, with a look of dull wonder which seemed perilously close to apprehension, rested his hand on the board again. This time, without the slightest hesitation, it started wabbling across the paper, trailing the pencil-line swiftly out. It stopped; Grogan raised the little instrument, and once more there was the swift shadowing as heads crowded above the paper.

"C-r-o-o-k," spelled Nancy. "Crook!"

The shadowing heads suddenly removed themselves.

"Ha, ha, ha, ha!" roared some one. "Grogan's a crook. He says so himself!"

"Who was laughin' there?" shouted Grogan, balling his hand into a huge fist. "What empty nutshell that calls itself a brain started laughin' at that?"

He searched the crowd in vain for a challenging face, and growled as he found none.

"It's a fool idee," proclaimed Grogan, glaring around in dumb desire to find some object on which to wreak his vengeance. "It's a fool game and no sense to it."

And he stamped off toward the bar, followed by a soft, controlled murmur that might have been low laughter or might have been a thoughtful whisper.

"You try it now," suggested Nancy to Baldy, and she pushed it toward him.

But Baldy shook his head in instant decision.

"That weejee don't do no good. It's finished diggin' gold, and most like it's started to raise somethin' else. I don't want to use it none, ma'am."

"Maybe it's got some pet names for you, Baldy," said one of the men; and the laugh began again.

"You, then," said Nancy to the last speaker.

But he snatched his hands away and held them behind him like a boy.

"Not me, ma'am. Which I got no hankerin' particular to use it."

Another laugh, for McIntosh was a known man.

"You try it," they urged Nancy, and she obediently rested her slender fingers upon the little board.

CHAPTER XXXI.

PROPHECIES.

ATENSION had grown up in Grogan's since the little board was first placed on the paper. A whisper of it had reached the poker tables, and thinned the group at chuck-a-luck, and drawn many from the roulette; and even those who still played their games, or idled at the bar, kept an eye open for the weejee board and its pronouncements.

Nancy tried her hand upon the board; it wabbled oddly to the touch, but she found that it was possible to control the shaking, give it direction, and, without apparent effort on her part, make the pencil write at her will—a sufficiently unimportant discovery, but it thrilled Nancy Scovil. These men about her were gathered from a hundred quarters of the globe—strong men seeking action—and in her hand was an instrument that could control them all. She watched them, smiling from face to face, and under her eyes they lifted their glances for an instant, but on the whole the air was charged with an uneasy, superstitious distrust. They looked at one another, and they stared at Nancy's white hand upon the board.

"Questions?" she asked.

"Nothin' about gents in particular," said one man hastily. "Let's get somethin' by and large—something about the whole room—"

He stopped short, for though Nancy was still looking in his face, the weejee board was moving under her hand, and it scrawled a long line across the paper, and it was writing still when it reached the edge of the paper. Such fluent writing roused a hum of interest, and they commenced to spell out the words:

"In this room there is a cattle thief and—"

"And what?" grunted a score of voices.

A cattle thief? Among all the men in Number Ten there were few indeed who had not occasionally rustled a stray, but one of these innocents—because he had followed the mines from boyhood—spread out his feet and growled: "Let's get the name of the damned crook! Go ahead, lady, and see if the board will get his name?"

A stir came from the group about the questioner.

"Are we a sheriff's posse?"

"Let the marshal get the rustler. That ain't our business."

"You ask too many questions, partner."

"And what? Put her back on the paper, lady!"

So Nancy obediently lifted the weejee and started it again. Bobbing, swaying, staggering as if the spirit of an imp controlled it, the little heart-shaped board moved along the paper, and the hand of Nancy rested so carelessly on it that it seemed to be dragging her unwilling arm after it.

This time it completed the sentence:

"And the silent man with the long spurs is on his trail."

Another stir, but this time less open. Each man surveyed his neighbors with covert glances, and found many a silent man, and at least two out of five wore very long spurs.

The change which came about in Grogan's was accomplished in the twinkling of an eye. Just an instant before all had been hail-fellow-well-met, but now the noise was blanketed. Men began to look toward

the door. They attained a comfortable distance from the rest; the compact little crowd sifted apart until a man could have worked his way in any direction through the mass.

Jaws set hard; eyes with a cold glint in them moved with restless glances here and there; hands became extremely nervous; and each man grew a little irritated because there were others behind him. Scratch the surface of a dog and you're very apt to find a wolf. Nancy had scratched the surface of Number Ten, and now teeth were beginning to show.

"It ain't no point talkin' about men," put in another member of the crowd. "What I'd like to know is why the roulette here ain't never been beat much?"

"This here ain't no mind-reader," replied his companion scornfully. "What d' you expect from it?"

But Nancy was remembering how the foot of Dago Lew had fumbled as though reaching for something, and then withdrawn. She was suddenly very angry. She, in fact, had escaped without a great loss, but—if the wheel were indeed crooked—it was a crime beneath contempt to cheat these big, strong, careless spendthrifts. Even as they were, money slipped like fire through their fingers, but to lead them into an ambuscade to wheedle away what might almost be had for the asking was a depth of villainy that made Nancy cold inside. And she felt toward the men of Number Ten, in a peculiar mixture, sisterhood and impish desire to torment them.

Now, under the cunning pressure of her fingers, the weejee began to write the reply to the last question.

"Look under the floor behind the wheel."

This was what the clustering heads around Nancy read trailing across the paper behind the board.

"A brake, by the Eternal!" rumbled a voice of low thunder at Nancy's very ear. "And I've dropped five hundred on that crooked frame-up if I've dropped a five. Boys, let's tear up the floor and see."

They melted away from around the weejee board; even Nancy was forgotten as they poured toward the roulette wheel. The first wave of their coming scattered the few who were already playing the game. The vanguard surrounded the wheel and Dago, while the more providential gathered hammers and axes to strip up the floor. Then they flooded back to do their work. There was no shouting, no cursing, but a little murmur much like the humming of angry bees—a sound which will make the strongest beast of prey in the world take to its heels.

They swept about Dago and carried him staggering back by the weight of their numbers. The first ax fell and splintered a board.

"Hey!" yelled Dago Lew. "Lay offen that stuff."

His voice was sharp and shrill and small as the voice of a small boy. He was almost sobbing with rage as he shook off those who shouldered him. His words came squeaking out:

"Scatter, will you, you big dubs—you ham-and four-flushers!"

Grogan himself came with a rush on the opposite side, roaring: "What the hell's up here? Where'd you get that ax, Pete? Damn you, you will, will you?"

For Pete raised the ax to gouge the floor again, and Grogan wrested the thing from him with ease.

"Now, you gents," he bellowed, "tell us what's gone wrong with you? Been chewin' loco weed?"

They fell back a little, partly because of the ax in the ample grasp of Grogan, partly because of the shrill fury of Dago Lew.

"We're goin' to get up part of this floor and see what's under it," stated Pete, who elected himself spokesman. "We don't mean to harm you, Grogan—not less'n we find something wrong. But they's always been something kind of queer about this wheel."

"Rip up my floor?" thundered Grogan, his eyes contracting to points of dangerous light. "I'll see you in hell first! Drop that wedge, Shorty, or I'll bean your blockhead."

Shorty was lately from the mines; and he had dropped most of his stake at this same roulette wheel. He dropped the wedge obediently, and the hammer as well; but as he

stood up his right hand was resting significantly on his hip.

"You get this straight, Grogan," he said quietly. "We're going to look into this. Don't make no fool of yourself. If we spoil some of the floor I'll stand good for it."

He snatched out a number of gold coins and jingled them in the hollow of his left hand.

"I guess that 'll be enough to cover the damages. We ain't sayin' they's anything wrong with you, Grogan, but they was always something different about Dago. He don't belong in these here parts."

It afforded a loophole of escape to Grogan, and being desperate he took it.

"Go as far as you like, boys," he said, "if you think they's something crooked with the wheel. Maybe Dago *has* doctored it."

"Doctored it? Me? You put it all on me?" screamed Dago Lew. "Why, you cheap lifter, wasn't you in on it? Lemme out of here; I'm done with it all!"

"But we ain't done with you," said Shorty. "Not by a hell of a pile. Hey, Pete, stop the little rat, will you?"

"Get back in the corner!" roared Pete. "Get back, or I'll squash you, Dago."

Dago had been trying to wriggle through the crowd, but now he went back to the corner in a single leap. As his shoulders struck against the wall a gun jumped into his hand. It was a short-barreled forty-five, a pudgy, ridiculous-looking gun, but it had about it the air of having been well-worn, and in front of Dago Lew an empty circle appeared, widening every instant like a ripple around the stone which is dropped in a pool. For the face of Dago was colorless with something more than fear, and there was murder in his beady eyes. He shook from head to foot, not with terror, but with a frenzied desire to kill.

"Now you got me here," he said, whining the words shrilly through his nose, "what d' you want with me?"

"We'll tell you, in words of one syllable," announced Pete. There was a long forty-five in his hand; a dozen other weapons gleamed. "Throw your gun on the floor, Dago," advised Shorty. "You ain't got a chance."

"You fool," cried Dago, "I'd go to hell happy if I could send some of youse guys there along with me."

No one spoke in answer to that—there was only one answer which could be given. Silence entered Grogan's place and stole about like a living thing. There was no chance to bluff, no chance to escape. Dago Lew had to die, but before his eyes closed his bullets were bound to find flesh in the closely compacted crowd around him.

CHAPTER XXXII.

JERRY REFUSES PAROLE.

MARSHAL BUD LEVINE was a connoisseur of dangerous men. He knew them as a music-lover knows Beethoven; he told them at a glance as your art critic distinguishes between pictures of the same school. He knew when the noisy man had a bite as well as a bark; and he knew when silence sprang from stupidity and from sullen venom. By the sound of a man's step he could judge very nearly the voice that would come from the unseen stranger's throat, and by the ring of the voice he could presume the light of the eyes.

He could tell by the swagger of the step how many years a man had lived in the saddle, and by the movements of hand and wrist he distinguished the agility of the card-sharper from the lightning address of the gun-fighter. He read in humanity as a book-lover browses in a library. He tasted the danger of Number Ten in all its varieties as an expert tastes wine and names vintage and locality.

Yet, for all his skill, Marshal Bud Levine was puzzled as he drove the two big men out of Grogan's place and toward the jail. By all the signs of step and gesture and voice and eye, these men were dangerous; these men were familiar with gun-play, and yet they had stood up like two schoolboys and slugged each other from pillar to post—and the true gunman loathes nothing so much as the impact of bare fists. So the marshal was puzzled. When the fight began he had kept his gun in readiness. He was too far away to break between the

fighters, but if a gun flashed he had determined to try a flying shot to knock down the arm of the first man on the draw.

But no gun had flashed. They stood toe to toe and smashed away like two harmless lumber-jacks. And Bud Levine stood shamed; he had failed utterly to understand them, and if his eye kept failing him at this rate he would soon be taking a mine-mucker for a long-rider. So he listened with pained intentness while the two growled at each other on the way to jail.

"Anyway," said Red Mack, "this 'll teach you how you ought to talk to a girl after this."

"The girl!" muttered the marshal. He canted his head to listen again.

"Why, damn your eyes," answered the Runt with fitting warmth, and he snorted away the blood which still trickled down over his upper lip, "d' you think I need teachin' in manners from you?"

"Runt," answered Red Mack, "you never was able to see yourself. Take that music you play on that damned mouth-organ. You got yourself doped so's you think it *is* music. D' you know what it really is?"

"What?" queried the Runt in a choked voice of passion.

"Did you ever hear the brayin' of a mule, partner," went on Red Mack, "when it got real lonesome in the middle of the night?"

The marshal sighed his relief. The men were apparently old pals, and that was sufficient reason for them to keep from the guns when they fought. His opinion of his own judgment rose.

"Well," grunted Pete harshly, "what about the brayin' of the mule?"

"Nothin'," said Red Mack in quiet answer, "except that when you tuned up on your mouth-organ I always thought that you was tryin' to imitate a lonesome jack-ass singin' in the night."

The marshal heard a great indrawn breath from the Runt, a breath so deep that it shook his massive shoulders.

"Mack," he queried solemnly, "d' you mean to say you been lyin' to me all these days about how you loved music, but my music particular hard?"

"Runt," answered the truthful Mack, "I been tryin' to keep off hurtin' your feelin's; but sometimes when I had to sit and listen, I only wished to God that I had something to stuff in my ears."

The Runt sighed.

"Well, Mack," he said, "they's some people that way. They're born without any ear for music. I used to have hopes for you, but if you don't like none of the things I play I give you up. You got queer ideas anyway, Mack. Look at them jokes you read out of that almanac."

"You don't like 'em?"

"Mack, I got to tell you the truth."

"Then why have you been laughin' and haw-hawin' about 'em all these years?"

"To keep from hurtin' your feelin's, Mack. But some of them jokes is so old that my granddad used to tell 'em when he was rememberin' back to his childhood days, and the rest of 'em has got gray beards and they're musty. Mack, a hundred years ago, if you'd told them jokes you'd been doin' fine, but the way it is you jest put people in misery. We bein' about to part, they ain't no reason why you shouldn't know the truth."

Red Mack walked with a thoughtfully bowed head.

"If you'd used your head, Runt," he said, "they wouldn't of been no need of fightin' or separatin' like this. But you got to learn that you can't talk to a lady like she was a buckin' bronco."

"Why, you fool," snorted the Runt, "when she left she turned around and smiled at me. She would of come right out of the place if it hadn't been that the crowd carried her away from me. But she smiled back to show that she knowed that I was right, and that it wasn't no place for a lady to be in."

"Smiled at you? Runt, you're ravin'. You been off your feed for some time, but this is jest plain nutty. Why, Runt, that smile was for me. She was tellin' me with it to let you down easy."

"Mack, they's times when you talk sure simple. You ain't drunk, are you?"

"Are you insultin' me agin?" snapped

Mack. "Are you makin' remarks on the relations between me and Nancy?"

"When we get out of the jail," snorted the Runt, "I'll polish off you and your relations, and —"

"Shut up!" said the marshal, but without undue warmth. In fact, he began to feel a pleasant sense of relief, and a certain fraternal kindliness for both Mack and the Runt. If he had been made a fool of by the girl, he apparently had plenty of company.

Inside the outer room of the jail he made the pair stand against the wall while he unlocked the door to the inner chamber of stone and called out the prisoner. The latter came rubbing his eyes.

"Hate to wake you up," remarked the marshal, "but two have got the call over one. You bunk out here. These two gents get your place."

But Jerry had spied the two, and now he burst into ringing laughter. It lasted so long that he had to lean against the wall to steady himself.

"So," he said, when at last he could speak, "she's sent both of you up?"

The two big men glowered in silence upon him.

"How the devil," cried Levine, "do you know that the girl is behind this?"

"Because I read her mind," answered Jerry. "She's shaking them off; she's getting clear for a cruise of her own, and when she gets through with that cruise, marshal, you'll have your old jail packed like a tin of sardines."

"Smith," muttered the marshal, "they ain't any doubt that you got a brain. Raisin' hell comes as natural to her as buckin' comes to a mustang. Hey, you two gents, step inside that door. You got no guns, but you got your hands, and if you want to fight it out, go to it. Step lively."

"Marshal," snarled the Runt, "get a broom and a can ready. When I get through with Mack you'll need to do some cleanin' up of pieces."

"Five minutes alone with him is all I ask," answered Mack as they stepped through the door.

The marshal closed it and then turned toward Jerry with an expectant grin.

"I only wish," he said, "that I could watch that scrap."

"There won't be a fight," answered Jerry.

"Why not?"

"Because the girl isn't here to watch."

"By God," chuckled the marshal, "I think you're right. I don't hear nothin' but talk. And even that's quietin' down."

"Sure," nodded Jerry. "In the morning they'll be sitting holding each other's hands like a couple of schoolgirls. Why, man, they're pals. Why don't you sit down and chin a while? You'll need all the rest you can get before the night is done with."

"The girl?" queried the marshal.

"It's in her eyes," agreed Jerry. "Hell is popping in them."

"I'd give a hundred even," sighed the marshal, as he sat down, "if she was out of Number Ten. This town was always jest one step from hell, but that girl has taken the last step. We're right at the gates, Smith. Say, that was a fine pannin' she give you, comin' here to laugh at you."

Jerry gritted his teeth, but the next moment his eyes danced.

"It's nothing," he said, "to what I'm going to do to her when I get out."

"Speakin' of that," said the marshal, "if you're to stay in this room to-night I got to get your word not to try to escape."

"No parole," grinned Jerry.

"Then it's the irons for you, partner."

"Get 'em out. I'll take—"

Into his sentence ripped a sharp explosion, the short bark of a revolver.

"Grogan's!" cried the marshal, and bolted for the door.

He barely paused to lock it after him, and then raced for Grogan's down the street.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

ENTER SCOVIL.

THE rush of the men from the table where Nancy sat manufacturing prophecies to the roulette, the interference of Grogan, his betrayal of Dago Lew, and the cornering of the latter, were

all episodes crowded into the briefest space. By the time Nancy had reached the semicircle which hemmed in Dago, she saw the gambler with his back to the wall, his chest heaving rapidly, his mouth twitching, the gun jerking ominously in his hand.

For the first time in her life Nancy found herself face to face with naked masculinity, all the droning monotony of custom and commonplace torn away, and the beast underneath staring into her eyes. The acid was about to strike the clear liquid and fill it with the precipitate of stormy action. And she rejoiced in it. Her heart raced. A berserker joy dimmed her eyes, and she wanted to tilt her head back and shout shrilly with delight in the battle. It was all her work. She had gathered those elements of strength in Grogan's, and poised them with consummate ease, and then dashed them together.

Then, tearing into her consciousness, lighting her mind like the lightning which rips the sky apart, a gun exploded. It was not an intentional or an aimed shot. One of the younger men, carried away by the tenseness of the moment, had allowed his forefinger to contract, and the lead ripped a long splinter from the floor and lodged in the wall.

It was the signal. A second later a dozen guns would belch, and Dago Lew, crushed and torn by the storm of lead, would lie writhing and screaming on the floor, and empty his gun at his murderers with the last of his strength of mind and body. Yet that vital second lay between the signal and the battle, and in that breathing space, even while Dago crouched, Nancy sprang through the crowd, whirled, and leaped back in front of the gambler, her arms thrown wide as if to welcome the deadly volley. A groan of horror burst from the men; she stood there before them, flushed with excitement, fearless, light-footed as the wind, eager as childhood.

Behind her she heard Dago Lew cursing softly with astonishment. At least, he had not cheated her, and for the sake of that square bit of play she would save him. The conscious power to do it welled up in her. She picked up face after face in the crowd with her dancing eyes.

"Partners," she said, "twenty to one is not man to man. If Dago has been crooked, a good many others have been crooked, too. Give him a running chance for his life. Will you?"

No one took it upon himself to answer as spokesman; but there was a general murmur of wonder.

"They *will* give you a fighting chance, Dago," she said, without turning her head toward him. "Keep behind me. We're going straight for the front door."

As she advanced along the wall, the men before her gave way. The eagerness for the kill was still on them, but they could not meet her eye. They passed the danger line with a deadly silence in the room; they glided among the gaming tables; they reached the door.

"Lady," Dago was saying in a swift, trembling murmur as they proceeded, "if you ever need me, send for me. Bars won't keep me from comin'; walls won't keep me out; before I go to hell I'll pay you back!"

They were at the door when the marshal leaped through it, his face ashen gray, his weapon in his hand.

"What's up?" he gasped.

"Inside," said Nan instantly.

The marshal plunged through the entrance, and Dago Lew slid out and down the street as swiftly and silently as a racing cloud-shadow. In ten minutes the desert would swallow him.

"What's up?" barked Bud Levine. "Grogan, what was that gun-play?"

Big Grogan stood leaning weakly against the bar. His own face was as colorless as that of the marshal.

"I dunno," he muttered. "I dunno nothin'. Ask the girl."

There had been a general movement of restoring guns to holsters as soon as the familiar, lean face of the fighting marshal appeared at the door. Levine did not miss that movement. He turned and glared at Nancy.

"You!" he exclaimed. "What have you been up to now?"

"I've been acting as your deputy," answered the girl carelessly.

"Ma'am," said Levine angrily, "I mean it. What's happened here?"

"You're on a back-trail, Bud," said Shorty. "Keep off the lady, Bud. Hadn't been for her, Dago Lew would be hungerin' for a place to push daisies, and you'd be here smellin' smoke and lookin' for a murder. Look here!"

He tore up, with his wedge, a board which had yielded suspiciously to his tread.

"Boys, gather around and slant an eye at this—a brake!"

The marshal hastily went to the spot. There was a growling chorus from the men.

"What about this, Grogan?" called Bud Levine.

The proprietor measured the distance to the door; and then he remembered Levine's speed with a gun and changed his mind. Legs cannot travel as fast as bullets.

"Crooked work, Bud," he answered. "I always had a hunch that Dago was a crook, but I never could get no dope on him."

"Damned funny business, Grogan. You must of come in for most of the gain on this brake."

Inspiration came to Grogan, and he heaved a great breath of relief.

"You're wrong, Bud," he said. "I only got a percentage, and I had to take Dago's word for what it was. I never could afford to put two men on the roulette. He handled the wheel and the coin all the time."

It was not the most water-tight explanation in the world, but the crowd had been close to one tragedy already that day, and they had exposed one thief. It had taken the edge from their appetite. A good many shrewd glances traveled toward Grogan, but in a matter of seconds they were drifting back to their old places. Except for Bud Levine, who approached the proprietor and, choosing a moment when no one else was near, murmured: "Once more, Grogan. You've got by again, but only by the skin of your teeth. Another time, and you'll eat lead as sure as hell."

"Now, how the devil," said Grogan, blustering, "can I keep my dealers from bein' crooks?"

"Shut up," answered the marshal in disgust. "I know you, Grogan, but I ain't huntin' up trouble until it comes my way. If they had cleaned up on Dago to-night, they'd of gone ahead and finished up with you. Smoke that in your next cigarette, Grogan, and walk soft. You can't be lucky *all* your life. But say"—and he drew the big proprietor aside—"how can I get that girl out of Number Ten?"

"Tell me how," groaned Grogan, "and I'll do the work for you—crooked or straight. Who's this new gent?"

For in the entrance to Grogan's stood a perspiring man of middle age. Dust lay thick on his riding clothes, and a face pink with soft, fine living glowed with sweat. He was loosening his shirt at the throat and fanning himself with his hat, though it was a cool night. It was John Scovil, and exercise and worry had supplied the place of hot sunshine with him.

The neighing of his lonely horse, trying in vain to call back the wanderers, had wakened him not so long after Nancy and her two guides left the camp, and he sat up among his blankets with an echo of his last snore still ringing in his ears. And he found himself alone.

At first his sleep-befogged brain refused to register the truth, but finally he realized that he was alone with two pack-mules and a riding horse in the midst of an unknown desert. Still bewildered, he saddled the horse and let it take its head. In this manner he roamed blindly through the hills, followed by a thousand wild fears and spurred by horrible conjectures, until at length the horse brought him to Number Ten and to the open door of Grogan's Place.

The light had attracted him to dismount, and now the tinkle of glasses invited him in with no uncertain voice, but when he reached the door he looked about him on the crowd for a moment.

The house of amusement was running in full blast again, and he caught the gleam of dice, the sheen of gold, the flash of cards in the deal; but last his eye rested upon a pleasant spot of white. It was a girl, dressed—most amazing!—in the coolest and crispest of summer whites, with a soft, foolish little hat of the same color perched on her head. Around her the crowd drifted as around a center. Her back was toward him, but he saw the beauty of her face as if in a mirror through the expressions of

the men who fronted her. They watched her as if fascinated and could not turn their eyes away.

She was shaking dice with four others, and even now she made her throw. She had lost, but she tossed up her head and laughed as she paid the debt. A wonderful laugh. It roused something like a forgotten spring in the blood of John Scovil, and yet there was a touch of familiarity in it. He drew closer, forgetting his thirst, forgetting his weariness and all the worries which beset him.

He came with a hungry look in his eyes, like the traveler who rides with an empty canteen through a wilderness, and in the evening comes upon the sweet music of running water.

"How much?" one of the partners of the girl was saying as he rattled the dice.

"Anything you want," she answered, "from a house and lot to a six-gun. You're on, partner!"

She turned; it was Nancy!

CHAPTER XXXIV.

EXIT SCOVIL.

AT first the mind of Scovil ceased to work. It stopped functioning just as the mind of big Grogan halted when Jerry Aiken struck the "button" of his jaw. Then, consciousness rushed back upon Scovil. It was real, perfectly real. The lights were not the lights of fairyland, the voices around him were not the sounds of a dream. The cursing from yonder corner as a man quit a poker game—broke—were too true to life.

It was Nancy; yes, there was no doubt of that; but what had become of the shell that formerly concealed her? Her old self compared with this was like the sky of December compared with that of June. Beautiful? Yes, she had always been that, but now she was intoxicating. She literally made his senses drunk. And there were a thousand little differences. The smile which never left them now made the whole curve of her lips new. And the eyes were all new, because they had new things to say. In a word, he had seen a blank slate when he last looked upon her. Now he found the slate filled with the words of a new and enchanting poem.

Suddenly he wanted to wave his arms, reach above his head, shout his happiness. For the miracle had been worked. Nancy Scovil was awake! No more days and weeks and months and years of a weight which dragged him down; but here was one to charm the wisest man he knew—a beauty greater than any he had ever known—a grace bewitching.

Now that he was himself again, he had a vague feeling that she had turned and faced him for a moment, and then moved away. She stood shaking the dice, her back to him once more, when he stepped forward and touched her shoulder.

She brushed his hand away and made her cast, and won. But those who lost to her were as good-humored about it as she had been. They seemed more happy to lose to her than to win from another. They laughed and jested as though the broad gold pieces and rustling greenbacks were so many idle, senseless baubles—toys of exchange. One of the men slapped his pockets and threw up his hands in token that he was broke, but Nancy leaned over swiftly, and before he could dodge away had poured a stream of heavy gold into his trouser pocket.

Scovil touched her again.

"Nancy!" he called.

She turned and cast a fleeting glance over her shoulder. There was not the slightest recognition in her eyes; they jarred against the stare of Scovil with a shock that made him gape. He was hardly sure that it was really his daughter.

"I say!" he continued with some irritation, and placed his hand again on her shoulder.

"Bill," said the girl, without turning, "this fellow is bothering me. He must be drunk. Take him away, will you, partner?"

Her "partner" was a stocky, middle-aged man, his face grizzled with a stubble of four days' growth. He walked with a lurching waddle that noted a lifetime spent in the saddle. Above the waist he was a reduced copy of Hercules. Below the waist

he was a boy of twelve, his little, thin legs bowing out under the weight they had to carry. Now his arm shot out and struck away the hand of John Scovil from the shoulder of Nan. He pushed in between and sent the taller man back a staggering pace.

"What's your line, stranger?" he asked aggressively. "Are you drunk or jest nacherally a nut? Or don't you know how to talk to a lady?"

"And who the devil commissioned you to quiz me?" asked Scovil hotly.

"That ain't the point," returned the other, hitching his belt around. "I asked you a question. Are you going to answer it?"

"I'll see you damned first. Nancy, come here!"

She did not stir, and when Scovil made a step forward he was caught much as a yearling is handled by the practised, and sent crashing into the wall. It partly knocked the wind out of him; it partly enraged him like a bull when it sees the red cloak of the matador. He was about to rush on the other, when he observed that the hand of the man was closed over the butt of his gun.

"You fool!" thundered Scovil. "Don't you know the girl is my daughter?"

When he smashed against the wall he brought all eyes upon him; and now Marshal Bud Levine stepped between him and danger. Oddly enough, the marshal had no eyes for either Scovil or Bill. His gaze held with stern intentness upon the girl.

"Ma'am," he said angrily, "what's the meaning of all this? D' you set out to keep me busy all evenin'?"

At last she turned.

"What's wrong now?" she asked. "Why, marshal, you aren't angry with me, are you?"

The coldness of Bud Levine melted as ice melts on the first warm day in spring. He had to lay strong hold upon himself to keep from answering her smile.

"All I know," he managed to growl, "is that you got two men fightin' agin. What's up?"

"I'll tell you," she said.

She faced her father squarely, and to his unnerving astonishment not a flicker of recognition was in her eyes. Cold horror swept over him. Had she lost her mind? Was that the meaning of the brightness in her eyes?

"That man," she was saying, "laid hands on me, and I asked my friend Bill to protect me."

"Huh!" snarled Bud Levine, and he whirled on his heel and looked through and through Scovil. "Is that the kind of a houn' dog you are? Ain't you old enough to act like a man? Listen to me, stranger, Number Ten has got ways of teachin' gents manners. It's got ways of its own, and what it teaches ain't forgot soon!"

A stern hum of assent breathed from the men around; a thundercloud of frowns surrounded Scovil.

"Damn it!" cried the latter. "Haven't I a right to speak to my own daughter?"

"Eh?" grunted the bewildered marshal, turning back to Nancy. "Is that so?"

But she chuckled softly, musically.

"Why, marshal," she answered smoothly, "I never saw the fellow before."

"You never did?" echoed Bud Levine, facing Scovil again. "Look here, you damned, fat-faced blockhead, d' you think you can run a bluff like that on me?"

"Good Heavens!" cried Scovil, and he raised his arms in desperation. "Are you mad, Nan? Is your mind gone? Don't you remember me? Or are you trying to work a practical joke? Marshal—if that's what you are—ask me questions—prove me—I'll show you that I'm her father!"

The marshal and the men around were impressed in spite of themselves by the downright energy of Scovil's statements. Many a hat was pushed back and many a shaggy head was scratched in bewilderment.

But Nancy Scovil leaned against the table, laughing. She seemed to enjoy the scene.

"I leave it to you, Bill," she said with an appealing gesture. "Do I look like that—that—"

She paused; a roar of laughter supplied the missing word. It was the clinching word in the argument; the marshal saw his way clearly.

"Here, you," he said to Scovil, "you come with me. You don't get the girl, frien', but you get a night's lodgin' free."

"But," began Scovil, "God above, man, do you mean to say you're goin' to arrest me?"

"You shut your face," snarled Levine, "and thank God you don't get what's comin' to you. No, I won't arrest you if you want to be turned over to—them."

He waved his arm toward the angry crowd of men, who were pressing closer and closer. John Scovil turned pale.

"Marshal," broke in the pleasant voice of the new Nan Scovil, "don't you notice that wild look in his eyes? Ask him what he's been doing."

"Hey, you," snapped the marshal. "Don't you hear a lady speak to you? What have you been doing?"

"Riding to beat the devil half the night, trying to get back my runaway girl!" snorted Scovil. "And as for you, my fine marshal, I'll have you—"

"You see," cut in Nancy. "I knew it was that way. The poor old gentleman has been riding in the hot sun all day and it's scattered his wits. These fat old fellows can't stand the heat, you know."

"Poor old gentleman? Fat? Sun?" stuttered Scovil. "Nan, I'll make you sweat for this prank! Marshal, I want to say—"

"Save it for the judge. Turn around and head for that door. Sun or no sun, you need watchin'. S'pose, gents, that he'd come on that poor girl when we wasn't by to protect her?"

A snarl from the crowd answered.

"But, marshal," pleaded Nancy, pressing to his side, "can't you put him in the hotel instead of the jail? He *looks* like a gentleman; and I'm sure I bear no grudge against him. He appears a little simple, too. I don't suppose he's ever had very good sense. If you'll lock him up in the hotel I'll pay for the room."

"Hell and furies!" roared Scovil.

"Shut your face," snapped the marshal. "Ain't you got even enough manners or sense to thank the lady for what she's done for you? Now get the hell out of here before I kick you out!"

The eyes of the marshal carried their threat even through the mist of Scovil's rage, and he knew enough to turn on his heel and stamp toward the door.

CHAPTER XXXV.

ADVICE GRATIS.

THE mention of the hotel to the marshal, and the fact that her father was being taken there for confinement, recalled to Nancy that she was tired—no aching weariness, in spite of the long, hard ride and all the action of the night, but a pleasant sense of fatigue. She took advantage of the diversion of attention which the exit of John Scovil and Bud Levine made, to slip out by a side entrance and hurry toward the hotel unnoticed. There, in her room, she lighted the lamp beside her bed and threw herself into a chair to dream over the day and the night before she went to sleep.

From the open window an air of coolness stirred and rustled the shade and played gently about her face, and up from the street she caught a score of light sounds, voices, and the clatter of hoofs as some one entered or left Number Ten. Then, with startling clearness, she heard the voices of Levine and her father just beneath her. She could not understand it at first, but presently she made out that the sound traveled up through the stovepipe that rose to her room through the ceiling of the room below. When she stood beside it she could hear them below with perfect plainness.

"You'll be feelin' better in the mornin', my frien'," the marshal was saying. "Now you jest rest up here and try to get hold on yourself."

"This infernal outrage—" began her father.

"They ain't nobody goin' to hurt you, stranger," said Bud Levine, "if you don't hurt yourself. The girl has begged off for you."

It was too much for Nancy. She burst into a short peal of laughter, checked swiftly when she remembered that she might be heard.

Even then it was too late. For Scovil

bellowed furiously beneath her: "By God, sir, the vixen is laughing at me now."

"Maybe she is."

"I tell you, she's right above me, laughing her head off because I'm here."

There was a brief pause. Then the marshal's voice: "I guess she was right. It's a case of too much heat. Well, partner, you lie down there and take it easy. I'll come around in a few minutes and see how you're makin' out."

"But—" began Scovil.

The slamming of a door put a quick period to his speech, and then Nancy Scovil heard a deep-pitched rumble. It was composed of many words, linked together with fluent speed, and Nancy retired to her chair again and put her hands over her ears.

Another idea, however, brought her back to the stove. She found that it was comparatively simple to remove the joint of pipe which connected the stove with the main stem. With this gone she could speak directly down the shaft to the room below. She called guardedly:

"Mr. Scovil!"

The cursing ceased abruptly.

"Mr. Scovil!" she called again.

She heard footsteps draw closer; there was a rattling of the stove beneath.

"Mr. Scovil!" for the third time.

"Well?" boomed her father's voice up the chimney.

"Do you recognize my voice?"

"Nancy, you shall regret this, by Heaven!"

"I think not."

"What in the name of all that's wonderful is in you?"

"I was thinking what an excellent joke it would be considered back in New York. Think how the papers will play it up: 'Eminent financier locked up for claiming relationship with young lady. Sunstroke suspected.' How will that sound, dad, dear?"

A groan answered her.

Then: "At least, thank God they'll never know!"

"I've pen and ink here, and a two-cent stamp will do the mischief."

"Nancy, you would not?"

"I don't know. It's a temptation."

"Nancy, my dear child, it would be more than a joke; almost a scandal. You won't do it, Nan?"

"I'll think it over."

"How long is this infernal jest to continue?"

"Jest? Do you think Number Ten takes it for a jest?"

She chuckled softly.

"Nancy—confound it, girl—you seem to have influence with these barbarians. Tell them to stop this nonsense."

"It's gone too far. They wouldn't turn loose such a dangerous character even on my request."

Subdued curses rumbled from her father's throat.

"There's only one way out for you, dad."

"What's that?"

"When Levine comes back, pretend that you've just recovered; act like a man waking up from a delirium."

"Do you mean to say I'm to pretend that you're not my daughter?"

She paused to laugh again.

"I don't see any other way out for you."

"I'll never do it!"

"Then you'll go to jail and have to talk with the judge later on. Sorry, dad."

"What's in your mind, Nancy? What do you intend to do with this practical jest?"

"Get clear of every one I know. That's all."

"Eh?"

"Oh, I'm tired of all the old stuff. I wouldn't go back to New York now for a million dollars!"

"Where *will* you go?"

"I haven't the slightest idea in the world."

"But who'll go with you?"

"There are plenty of fine fellows in Number Ten who'll do anything I ask of them."

She heard him gasp.

"Nan, you are stark, staring mad."

"No. You're all wrong. For the first time in my life I'm perfectly sane and clear-headed."

"Do you mean to say you'd go away with one of these wild men?"

"Why not?"

"Why not? Girl, you'd be barred from all respectable society ever after!"

"Not at all. I'm perfectly safe in the hands of any of these men. They may be rough on the surface, but they're gentlemen underneath."

"That may be true, but how will New York understand?"

"Hang New York! I'm through with it."

There was another pause. Then she heard him mutter to himself: "It isn't possible. This is a dream. and I'll wake up pretty soon."

He said aloud: "Did you leave camp alone?"

"No—with Red and Pete."

"I thought so. Damn the thieves! What's become of them?"

"They're in jail."

"Eh?"

"They grew troublesome; kept bothering me. So I had them put away for safe keeping. They'll be turned loose after a day or so."

Another gasp from below.

Then: "Nancy, I'll have Jerry Aiken take your trail."

"You'll have to get him out of jail first."

"What?"

"It's true. Ask Levine, if you doubt me. In a word, dad, I want to get rid of every one I know. I want to cut away into a new line."

"Nancy, I've got to save you from yourself."

"You can't. You'll be doing your part if you save yourself."

"What do you mean?"

"If you can induce Levine to turn you loose, the best thing for you to do is to get a horse and ride away from Number Ten as fast as he'll carry you."

"Why? I'm a citizen; I have rights."

"You're an undesirable citizen here. The boys don't like you, dad, and they've ways of showing their dislikes out here. Sorry, but it can't be helped."

"I'll come back, then. Nancy, you'll regret this prank."

"You'll never find me, dad, till I'm ready to be found. You can lay to that."

"Girl—"

"Hush! What's that?"

Outside her room, from the street below, a mellow barytone voice rose in song.

Nancy called: "Good night, dad; I've a caller."

While Scovil shouted beneath, she replaced the joint in the pipe. A shower of soot whirred down the chimney and the last she heard from her father was a spluttering series of curses, interrupted and finally quite subdued by snorts, coughs and sneezes. He must have been too close to the lower end of the pipe, and received a quantity of the choking soot in eyes and nose and throat.

In the mean time the song rose:

> May thy sleep be as deep
> As the depths of my love for thee;
> May thy dream ever seem
> Sweet remembrance of constancy.

For the first time in the history of Number Ten a serenade was heard in its dusty street!

CHAPTER XXXVI.

LEFTY HARRIS.

NO sooner did Scovil exit from Grogan's, with the redoubtable marshal behind him, than the crowd turned to Nancy again—and behold! she was gone. They looked about them like children deprived of a rare and amusing toy, and in another moment a hunt would have begun, combing every inch of Number Ten, had not an event occurred which thrilled even the war-worn nerves of Number Ten.

The marshal and his prisoner were not well out of sight past the shadowy doorway of Grogan's, when another man stepped into view. In the door he did not pause an instant, as though he disliked the illumination there, but he glided with a swift side-step into a gloomier place along the wall.

He was a remarkable fellow in a way. He was well above the average in height, and he had the broad shoulders and thick chest tapering down to a slender, sinewy waist which characterizes most versatile

athletes. There was both strength and alertness in the man, but more than this was his impressiveness.

He stepped into Grogan's and slid into an obscure shadow, but at once, like the star on the stage, he dwarfed all the others in the place.

For he was one of those few men who are lords of their presence, and thereby rulers over a kingdom. He could have stepped with equal assurance and poise upon a Broadway stage. Dignitaries in the social and political world would have respected him; for he had the air of importance—an importance of which he was not vain, but simply conscious.

He was not a particularly beautiful form to behold. His neck, for instance, was thick with cords which stood out when he turned his head, and the head itself was too long and angular to be good-looking. A pale yellow mustache, faded and bleached by a life of exposure to wind and bitter sun, drooped on either side of his mouth, halfway to the chin. Above this mustache rose a thin, hooked nose that gave him a touch of fierce aggressiveness. But this characteristic of his face was at once denied by the eyes. They were a pale, misty blue, and behind the mist, when the man grew excited, little lights flickered and glowed and went out in an amazing fashion.

There were other noteworthy features about him. For instance, his six-gun hung high on his right hip, drawn well around to the front—the position for a left-handed man. And that left hand was brown as a berry—a sufficient proof that no glove was ever worn upon it.

While he stood there surveying the crowd a murmur began among those nearest him and spread in a varying whisper indicative of fear, surprise, wonder, anger: "Lefty Harris! Lefty Harris is in town! What in hell's up now?"

The name was explanation enough for the sensation and the whispers, for Lefty Harris had a reputation which which extended across the mountain desert from mountains of the east to mountains of the west and far north and far south. There are varieties of rough men in that region, men with crimes on their shoulders and with notches in their guns, but far and wide there are few, indeed, who are real killers.

Usually the man-slayer begins his career of crime in some drunken fury, runs amuck, and in twenty-four hours he is sowed with a seed of lead from the mouths of forty-fives, and twenty-four hours later he is part of a legend which grows and changes, until within a year the terror of a single day is reputed to have spent a long life in crime and excess.

However, at long intervals men appear who have both a peculiar talent and a peculiar taste for the destruction of life. Gifted by nature with a cool eye and a steady hand, they cultivate their gifts until they use a gun with the accuracy of a surveyor's instrument and the speed of a snapping whiplash. And when they have achieved this position, they are comparatively safe from the law, for they can wait until their victim, taunted or stung into action, has made the first movement toward fighting before they draw and shoot him down in "self-defense."

Sometimes they stretch out a long life in this manner. Now and again they serve short prison terms, but they return always to the mountain desert and to a career too fascinating to be surrendered for any other pursuit. In the end they are hunted down by numbers, or some Federal or State officer takes the desperate chance and brings down his man. But always, always they die with their boots on.

This is the sketch of the true killer; and Lefty Harris was a killer. He was somewhere between thirty and forty, and for ten years his name and fame had grown along the ranges. Twice he had been jailed, and twice his sentence had been shortened for "good behavior," though that good behavior was generally thought to have taken the form of a bribe to the warden. And now he roamed at large. The law had no claim upon him; but all men's hands were against him, and his hand was against the world. Odds which Lefty Harris accepted and enjoyed. It made the game worth while.

Yet, Lefty Harris was no snake. Among the terrible legends of blood and death

which were gathering around him there was a scattering of other stories of help rendered in the midst of the desert to the lost wanderer, protection for the defenseless, charity to the starving. Indeed, it was said that Lefty knew only two motions: one was the throwing of gold pieces; the other was the throwing of his gun. Around him clung an atmosphere of the heroic. He was dignified by the very danger which he courted all his days.

That whisper buzzed and went out as Lefty walked to the bar and called for his drink. And it was noted that standing at the bar he kept his shoulders braced against the corner wall.

In this position it was impossible to attack him from the rear. The bartender was under observation from the corner of his eye, and his face was turned directly toward the rest of the crowd.

When his drink arrived they did not fail to notice, also, that he used his right hand for everything; that redoubtable left remained free for emergencies and hovered always near the holster. With his right hand he poured his drink—a small one. With his right hand he raised the glass, surveyed the crowd as if to make sure that no one was in the attitude of making a suspicious motion, and then tossed off his drink with a single short gesture.

There was reason for that remarkable haste in drinking. Other men, leisurely downing a glass of red-eye, had been shot through the back or belly; and Lefty Harris was known as one who took no chances when he believed danger was near.

The drink disposed of, he walked on—keeping always close to the wall—and secured a corner chair from which he could keep the entire room under his observation. How could he tell? There might be a dozen personal enemies in Grogan's place, friends or even relatives of men who had fallen by his hand.

A stern, quiet smile of understanding passed from eye to eye in the crowd. And one man gritted his teeth, glared, and then turned on his heel and huriedly left Grogan's. He dared not stay there and face the murderous temptation.

But the rest of the crowd stayed quiet, pretending to occupy themselves with the games. In reality they were waiting for the return of Marshal Bud Levine. They had seen Bud in action; they knew him and his worth; but they wanted to see how he would act in the face of one so much greater than he himself could ever be—one who could plant three bullets in him before Bud could get his six-gun clear of the holster.

They had not long to remain in suspense. Bud Levine came swinging through the door, met the volley of curious glances, and halted in the midst of a stride, as a dog checks itself in the middle of a spring. One glance swept the room, and then his eyes rested steadily upon Lefty Harris. The latter sat perfectly at ease, rolling a cigarette with his right hand alone. Indeed, Lefty always acted as if his left hand and arm were paralyzed. That limb remained sacred to one use only. He received the concentrated attention of the marshal with detached calm, meanwhile lighting his cigarette.

Bud Levine hesitated a moment, and then crossed the room, making on a line straight as an arrow for the gunman. When he came before the latter he halted and, with every eye fixed upon him, stretched out his hand. The other accepted the sign of mutual good feeling.

"Lefty," said the marshal, "I know you, and you know me. Eh?"

"I ain't forgettin' the fordin' of that river, Bud," replied the killer quietly. "Glad to see you."

"I ain't glad to see you, Lefty," said the marshal, his tone as quiet as that of the other. "Not by a hell of a lot I ain't. Jest now we're havin' our share of hell raised in Number Ten by a girl without you edgin' in for your own margin. But I'll tell you straight, Lefty. I ain't lookin' for trouble. I let trouble come and find me."

Lefty studied the face of the other with a glimmer of interest.

"That sounds fair enough to me," he nodded.

"All right," said Bud. "We'll let it ride that way. I'm with you, Harris, till you bust loose. S'-long."

Lefty Harris started violently.

"What the hell is loose now?" he asked.

Very clearly, coming down the street, they heard the music of the serenade:

"May thy sleep be as deep
As the depths of my love for thee—"

"It's the girl again," groaned the marshal. "She's behind everything."

Already an exodus was taking place in Grogan's, and the curious poured out into the street to listen and watch.

(To be concluded NEXT WEEK.)

The Triple D Bunch

by Howard R. Marsh

STONE FACE PETE maintains that if the foresight of the Triple D outfit, meaning the wild crew of which I am foreman, was half as good as their hindsight, then we'd already be reserving our seats in the brimstone pit. Sometimes I'm inclined to agree with him. Take Dick Trenton's case, for instance. Looking back, it's a cinch to see that we was all loco to try to keep him from marrying.

Dick was the marrying kind. It didn't hurt no one to look at him, particularly the ladies. He was, to my notion, too thin and high-strung for an Apollinires, but the ladies never seemed to notice that when they got in the range of Dick's blue eyes.

Man, but those blinkers of his were blue! Here in San Bernardino County the sky is full of bluing, just soaked in it. But Dick's eyes made even the sky ashamed of itself, and every time Dick looked up the clouds came. This made Dick a valuable man to have around, because the Triple D rancho is too dry, as far as rain is concerned.

Of course there's wetness at times, particularly just after the grape season, but that don't do the cattle no good, nor the alfalfa either. Fact is, both are pretty sure to be neglected when Stone Face Pete's home brew begins to pop out the corks. But that hasn't anything to do with Dick Trenton, nor his marrying disposition.

Dick came to us rather unexpected. We was lopping around the 'dobe bunk-house one evening puffing out dividends for Mr. Bull Durham and Ananiasing about cattle, people, and girls when a testimonial to general debility honked up on third speed, kicked off the magneto of his little burro, climbed down and crumpled up before our astounded gaze.

We was fractionally sober at the time and knew we wasn't seeing things. Being naturally kind-hearted myself I assumed the first aid attitude and asked in the mother-tongue:

"Son, ain't you up to much?"

"Yes," he mumbles. "Up too much." Whereupon he folds his skinny hands across his equator, flickers out a bitter-sweet smile and emits the death-rattle.

Well, there being nothing to do, which always pleases the Triple D boys, we sit and listen to this young beanpole burble and cough. Lungs? Say, that kid didn't have nothing but a porous plaster under his

collar-bone. He was too far gone to be interesting.

Stone Face Pete, being a kind man, particularly to animals, unpacks the burro and leads him away. "Poor little pie-face," he says, patting his sweating shanks.

That stirs the kid, thinking maybe he was getting some free sympathy. "Go to hell," he burbles.

This show of spunk sort of pleased us, so I consoles the kid tactfully.

"Pete ain't talking to you," I says. "He's just making friends with your burro so's he can claim him when you passes out." Then thinking it was time to be tender I asks, "Kid, where do you want to be buried? Any choice?" All the time I was cursing to myself because we'd probably have to tote his corpse over the mountains.

"Buried?" he whispers hoarsely. "I'll pick out the spot some time when I'm out on the desert."

"If you ain't picked it already you're too late," I consoles him. "But we'll find you a nice place and plant you too deep for the hyenas to dig you up."

"Thanks," he coughs. "And be sure to put me far enough away so that none of that alcohol I smell will be wasted on me."

By that I figures he was wanting a drink, so I gave him Stone Face Pete's share, he being absent. Well, say! In ten minutes that kid was asking the pleasure of licking the outfit for not being more polite to him.

Just the same, it was a bad night for the kid. None of us could sleep so loud as usual, because of that burbling cough. If ever a man knocked regularly at the pearly gates and then to get turned away, that kid surely did. Not once, but almost continuous.

Toward morning I forgot to notice his cough. When I did notice it, it was gone. I got up, seeing's it was time to root out the outfit anyway. We all took up the search. We found him in the corral, lying face down beside the cattle trough.

The Triple D boys ain't exactly what you'd call reverent, but when they gathered around that sack of skin and bones there was gloom written all over their faces. Since Barbed Wire Bill cashed in because of an argument with the boss's stallion they hadn't seen no human being in corpse form.

Hot Water Steve wanted some one to repeat the burial service, he having read about it in books. It was a nice thought, of course. In the end we turned away, leaving the kid lying there, hoping we could figure out something right after breakfast. We was powerful hungry after all we'd gone through with the kid.

After breakfast we shot at the corks in Pete's home brew bottles to see who'd have to conduct the spade-and-pick rites over the wandering kid. Sandy McAllister, being somewhat young and emotional, had the misfortune to crack one of the bottles, so the burying task was elected on him. We watched him go to the corral with mingled feelings, particularly Stone Face Pete, who didn't have no home brew bottles to spare. Sandy came back on the run. His face was whiter than it ever was; even that time he washed it for Hot Water Steve's one only and futile marriage ceremony.

"He's gone," whizzes Sandy.

"Gone?" we stammers. "You mean he's *gone?*"

"Yep. Dragged away," Sandy shouts.

There'd been a mountain lion roaming around the corral now and again and we figured that of course he'd picked up the kid. Mad? Say, it didn't seem at all proper for an animal to have the pickings of a man, even if the man was nothing but skin and bones. So we started to the corral on the run, unlimbering our artillery on the go.

"This way!" roars Hot Water Steve, pointing to where the dust had been dragged. We started around the corner of the corral.

"You flea-bitten, cannibalivorous brute!" emits Stone Face Pete. "We'll fill your demmed hide so full of lead you'll think you're a pencil!"

Just then Pete pulled up short, so short that the rest of us, being right on his heels, stampeded and went down in a heap. When we got ourselves untangled we left the apologies to Pete, who had made certain threats which still hung in the air.

There was the object of Pete's cursing, breathing fast and looking that hard way

the Kieths do when something riles them. Yes, it was Mary Kieth, the boss's daughter, trying to carry that lucky kid into the house.

Now Mary ain't much bigger'n a minute, but just then she loomed up bigger'n a cloudburst in the mountains. "So?" she says, her voice sounding more like cracked ice than usual. "So?" she says.

"No," replied Pete.

"No what?" she guesses.

"Yes, no what," Pete agrees, being even more foolish than ordinary.

"Well?" she asks.

We knew what that meant. Every one of us who'd been in love with her, and that meant every puncher of the outfit, knew what her "well" meant. It meant action, immediate, consequential and decisive action.

Pete and me, he being the nearest and me being foreman, was forced to take the responsibility. We lifted the kid into the house, Mary running ahead to fix up a temporary hospital for him. When we got out from under the range of her six-shooter eyes I called the outfit together.

"Boys," I says, "there'll be a lot of explaining to do, because that kid didn't die the way we'd figgered he had. Now I, for one, naturally dislike explaining. It's the first cousin to apologizing, which I can't digest. So I'm for trailing to the green-hills-and-far-away. There's some loose steers over in Lone Oak Cañon that might need to be branded mighty bad, I expect."

The boys came near to cheering my few explanatory words, and we vamosed.

We came back two weeks later, trying to look as though we'd been overworked all the time we was away. In front of the ranch-house we pulled up short. There was the kid, lolling in a chair. My first idea was that he had on my own best clothes, which was a true impression; the second idea that came to me was that he looked happier'n he'd any right to look after being so close to shaking hands with St. Peter. The reason for the joyous glow which oozed out of him was near at hand—Mary Kieth. They both was so busy gazing at each other that they scarcely noticed us. This ought to have pleased us, but some way it didn't.

"We're back," I shouts.

Then Mary overlooked us coldly. "Hard luck," she says.

"For us, you mean?" I flares.

"No. For us," she purrs.

"Maybe it is," I bursts out, angry. "We'll try to make it so."

"Want to get fired?" she shoots. I didn't, so I shut up.

It took a lot of explaining to persuade Mr. Kieth that it took eight men two weeks to brand thirteen steers, but when I told him of a new water-hole we'd found he agreed to let us stay on the job.

Then came the surprise party. Just after our forlorn supper in the 'dobe bunk-house, the kid came to me and pulled me out in the mesquite.

"What's your game?" I asks.

He thought I said "name," so he volunteers, "Richard Trenton."

"Nice name for a bachelor," I assures him, looking at him meaningly. "But the only married man I knew with that name was shot two hours after the ceremony."

"That's it," he says.

"That's what?" I puzzles.

"That's what I want to talk to you about," he explains. "Mr. Joyce," he says, and I knew he was talking to me because there was no one else around, though I ain't been called anything but Buck for five years. "Mr. Joyce, I can't marry her."

"If you means Mary Kieth," I agrees, "you turned an ace first thing."

"Well, what 'll I do?" he asks.

"You won't have to do much," I assures him. "Just propose, that's all. She'll do the rest. Then you can pack up your burro and vamose."

"Fine," he agrees. "But suppose she accepts me? It ain't right for a man in my condition to even think of marrying," he sorrows.

"You won't think of it long this time," I insists. "The only man I ever knew who had so much conceit as you was killed trying to stop a cattle stampede with a willow switch. Don't worry. She won't accept you. She's got the refusing habit. If she had an acre of land for every time

she's said 'no' to a man she'd open a reclamation project. Some of them handsome, too—*handsome*," I says. "Just go ahead and propose. I'll make the boys promise not to laugh at you the way they did at me and Sandy."

"All right," he says, kind of doubtful, "I'll propose."

He did. I was pretending to fix a cattle jump the next morning when I saw the climax. Talk about two hearts as one, say, those two were clinging to each other like a two-headed calf. They both looked awful happy except the kid, and he looked scared.

After supper that night he leads me to our mesquite secret lodge-room and then whirls on me.

"You're a liar!" he emphasizes, slowlike, rather hoping I'd plug him, I guess.

I nearly did. Automatically my hand jumped to my holster for my forty-five. My hand is quicker'n my mind sometimes, but this time my thoughts caught up before I pulled the trigger.

"You're right," I agrees. "The drinks are on me. Though why she accepted you and turned me—say," I says, "what's so demmed attractive about a maverick like you?"

"You have me," he confesses. "I've been as cold as I could, but she"—he pauses to breathe a reverent sigh—"she seems to like me anyway."

"There's no way to account for women and sheep," I mourns.

"No," he says. "And now what 'll I do? I'll confess, Mr. Joyce"—I looked around to see who he was talking to and he amends it—"I'll confess, Buck, that I'm crazy in love with Miss Kieth. Couldn't help it, you know."

"Uh-huh!" I agrees, knowingly, from experience.

"I'd rather die than leave her," he resumes. "But I must. I haven't a penny in the world. But that isn't the worst. I haven't the healthful right to marry."

"If you tries to marry Mary Kieth you'll find it demmed unhealthful," I agrees. "There's still the second part of my advice of last night left untouched," I urges. "Your burro is hobbled back of the corral. Your saddle is under Pete's bunk. Good-by," I says feelingly.

"You're right," he mourns. "Good-by."

Being a tenderfoot he lets his burro stumble all over the place when he leaves, so I wasn't surprised when I heard Mary Kieth's voice in my ear.

"What is it?" she breathes. "Who's leaving—Dick?" she hunches.

"Going?" I muses to kill time. "Going?"

But she knew. Ten minutes later I heard her and Gyp, the little roan mare, galloping hell-bent after that pie-faced burro and his kid master.

She brought him back all right, and she didn't take her eyes off him again for weeks. I don't think she slept nights, for fear he'd get away. She made him promise, too, not to try to escape. He told me.

For six months things went like that. Dick began to ride the range, and after a little initiation the boys liked him. He joined us in our fencing and branding and herd riding. Before long he looked like a thoroughbred and felt fine.

One night after round-up Pete came into the bunk-house, running over with bad news. Characteristic, he spills it joyfully.

"Whoops!" he yells. "Isn't it too glorious?"

"Yep," I promises. "A glorious sunset for a life like yours, if you don't shut up."

"Willing," he says. "Glad to be introduced to it. But wait until after the marriage next Tuesday night."

I didn't have much to say. Being a thoughtful man, I rarely do. But right then I turned on the gas in my brain-tank.

Two hours later we was riding quietly, me and Pete and Hot Water Steve and Sandy, with Dick Trenton as our luggage. He was riding in front of me, not exactly willing you might say, though he couldn't do much with his hands and feet tied and a piece of cow-horn wedged between his teeth.

We took him forty miles, most of it up in the mountains. Then we dropped him, none too gentle. While I was untying him I gave him a little advice about there being much better health in the mountains than around the Triple D rancho. His jaws

was too stiff from the cow-horn for him to answer, so we rode away, leaving him a little water, some crackers and a volley of threats.

Say! You'd thought Mary Kieth was going to die when she missed him in the morning. She rode for miles trying to find him. Every day thereafter she searched the mesquite and sage for him. Then she began to peter out; finally had to go to bed. By that time we was all worried. Especially when Mr. Kieth sent Pete in the flivver for a doctor from Barstow.

The night the medico came I was up in the mountains looking for Dick. That was the real remedy for Mary's illness, I knew. But demmed if I could find the kid. He'd left the place we put him. I stumbled over fifty-seven varieties of precipices before I gave up looking for him and started back to the rancho.

The doctor was still there, trying to help Mary and incidentally resting up from the trip across the desert and washing out the alkali dust with some of Pete's home brew. Toward evening Mary asked for me. I went into her room feeling kind of bad.

"Buck," she says, clinching her rivet-eyes right through my head, "Buck, tell me about the last time you saw Dick Trenton."

"Sure," I says, hoping to lighten her sorrow. "He comes to me and says, 'Buck, she's got me hooked. I ain't the marrying kind, but she's made me promise against my will. I'm going away.' Then he ran out into the desert night like a scared jack-rabbit."

"You're a liar!" shouts a voice right at my side, and in vaults Dick Trenton through the window. "You're a liar," he emphasizes. "You kidnaped me!"

Fortunately I had left my automatic outside, as I always do when I enters a lady's room. Anyway, I was considerable taken aback and might have missed my aim.

"Oh!" coos Mary. "Oh, Dick!" Strangler Lewis never bettered the grip those two gave each other. Not that I blame the kid. Mary looked swell enough in her riding outfit, but say, in her soft pink-and-white bedroom costume she looked good enough to eat.

After an hour, more or less, Dick turned to the doctor, who was absently swallowing some pills he had prescribed for Mary. "Are you a doctor?" Dick guesses.

The medico agrees. Then Dick orders an examination and overhauling of himself. "Lungs," he explains.

"Perfect," says the medico after a half-hour of listening through his chest telephone and taking Dick's horoscope and previous ancestors. "You're in fine shape," he says.

"Ah!" says Dick. "Now, Mr. Buck, you haven't any objections to fighting a man who's well, have you?"

With that he waded in. I intended at first not to be brutal with him, right in front of Mary's eyes. I was fifty pounds heavier than he was and twice as strong, so I decided to lay him out gently.

But, say! He didn't have no such thoughts about me. No, sir; he didn't. And I was all out of practise fighting wild-cats. In ten seconds he was taking all I could give him and begging for more.

To this day I don't know how it happened, unless I ran into his fist. Anyway, first thing I knew I was gazing at the ceiling and watching the stars go round. The medico was leaning over me, feeling my pulse.

"Bring on Hot Water and Sandy and Pete," roars the kid. "One at a time or all together."

"Don't, Dick, dear," begs Mary. "They'll apologize, won't they, Buck?"

"Sure," I mumbles from puffed lips, wishing I had thought of apologizing myself.

I didn't care to move for a while, so I lay on the floor listening to sweet talk which made the tears come to my eyes. Before they got half-way through the evening's game of post-office I knew those two kids were made for each other.

"Buck," says Dick at last, stirring me gently with his foot, "Buck, what do you know of silver quartz?"

Having prospected three years for my health after I shot Cold-Eyed Dan in a fracas at Tombstone, I allowed I knew quite a lot.

"How's this?" asks Dick.

I raised myself up on my good arm and studied the crumbly stone that he put in my hand.

"Where'd you buy it?" I asks.

"It was intended for your head," he confesses. "I started to gather a pile of rocks to salute you with if you came back up there in the mountains. This caught my eye. There's a whole outcropping of it."

Me and the medico studied it with wonder. It was the real stuff, running rich in silver.

"Boy," says the medico at last. "You've struck it rich."

But blamed if the kid heard. He and Mary was occupied with more important things. They was so wrapped up in each other that they didn't notice when I tiptoed out to get a description so I could file a claim for the kid and one for me right next.

"But he's got Mary," I reflects dolefully. "Demme, why'd I meddle?" Just then I stumbled over Stone Face Pete, who was lying under the window, listening. "Pete," I asks, "do I look like Cupid?"

"Demmed little," he agrees. "All you are is foreman of the Triple D, which is the short way of saying that you're the chief Demmed Dabbling Dunce."

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WHEN WE GO BACK

WHEN we go back to the old home place
We loved in the long ago;
Things never seem quite the same to us
As we sit in the firelight's glow:
For we miss the sound of some loved one's voice,
The sight of some loved one's face;
Things never seem quite the same to us
When we go to the old home place.

And we learn the lesson that's sad and true,
That nothing on earth may last;
For the loves of to-day and the joys of to-day
Are soon with the things of the past.
The scenes and the folks of the old home place
All change with the changing years;
Though we smile when we greet the folks back home,
Yet we smile through a mist of tears.

There is always a wish in the yearning heart,
A longing we cannot escape;
We long for the ones who have gone away,
Away from the old home place;
We miss their smiles and their love so true
And so, when we go back there,
Things never seem quite the same to us
Because of the vacant chair.

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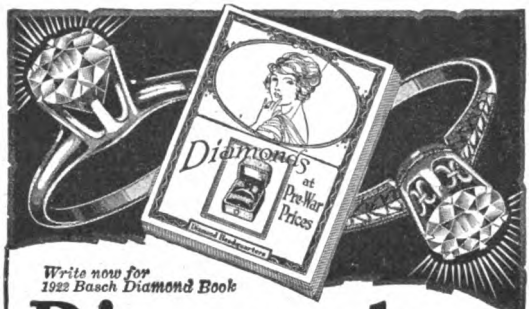

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Every diamond sent on free examination. We take the risk and pay all charges. We also guarantee to refund in cash full price less 10%, if you wish to return your diamond. We allow full price in exchange for another diamond at any time. Every diamond fully guaranteed as to weight, quality and value.

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See the money-saving reductions made in this new Basch Book before you buy a diamond. Rare bargains also in watches, jewelry, silverware, etc. *Tells how to judge a diamond.* A postcard or letter brings it *free—write now.*

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Gray hair positively, quickly restored to original color, no matter what color it was. KOLOR-BAK guaranteed to do this or it **costs you nothing!** KOLOR-BAK is a pleasing, pure, harmless, grand preparation. Contains no injurious ingredients. Colorless, stainless. Not a dye or stain, but a wonderful scientific preparation. Acts directly on the pigments of the hair. Also banishes dandruff and itching scalp in two applications. **Write for free book and positive proof.**

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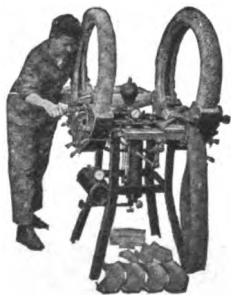

With little capital, you can establish a business in your home town and make $10 to $30 per day with Anderson Steam Vulcanizers. Better work, with less cost and bigger profits.

There are Anderson schools in 34 states, one is near you. Better schooling plus finest equipment makes Anderson tireologists successful.

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Takes 5 to 10 days in school and costs $35. If at any time you buy an Anderson Vulcanizer, we refund your $35 and pay you $5 per day for each of the 10 school days, because we sell the work you do.

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The

FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY
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SAVE YOUR BODY Conserve Your Health and Efficiency First

"I Would Not Part With It For $10,000"

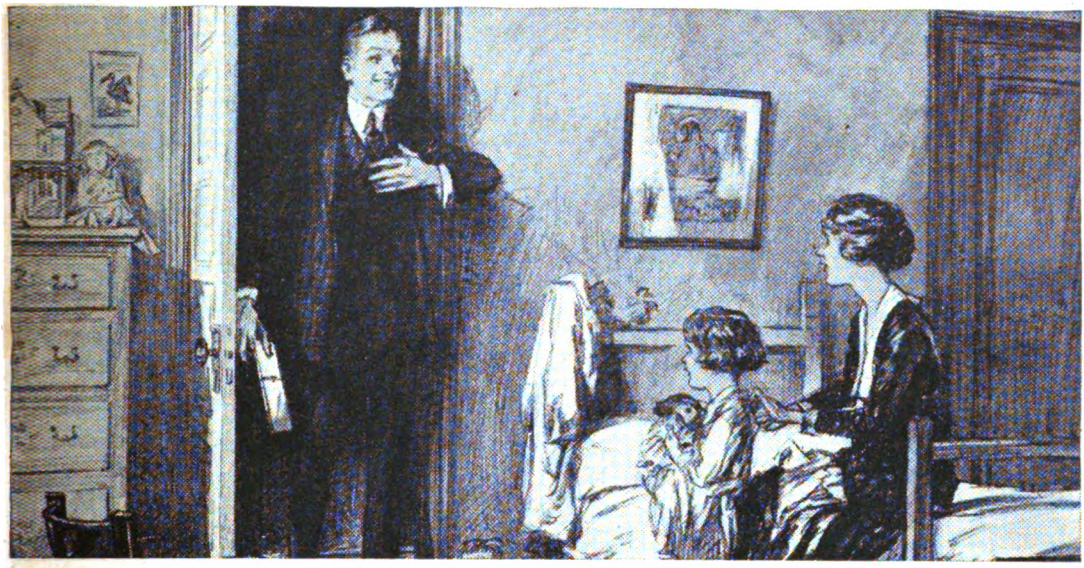
So writes an enthusiastic, grateful customer. "Worth more than a farm" says another. In like manner testify over 100,000 people who have worn it.

The Natural Body Brace

Overcomes **WEAKNESS** and **ORGANIC AILMENTS** of **WOMEN** and **MEN.** Develops erect, graceful figure. Brings restful relief, comfort, ability to do things, health and strength.

Wear It 30 Days Free at Our Expense Does away with the strain and pain of standing and walking; replaces and supports misplaced internal organs; reduces enlarged abdomen; straightens and strengthens the back; corrects stooping shoulders; develops lungs chest and bust; relieves backache, curvatures, nervousness, ruptures, constipation, after effects of Flu. Comfortable and easy to wear. **KEEP YOURSELF FIT.** Write today for illustrated booklet, measurement blank, etc., and read our very liberal proposition.

For Boys and Girls



"They took me into the firm today!"

"I'm to be manager of the Eastern Division and my salary has been raised $300 a month.

"Think of it, Mary—three hundred more a month! And me! A member of the firm!

"Remember how we used to talk about it—dream about it? It seemed almost too much to even hope for.

"Remember the night I filled out that coupon and sent it to Scranton? We made a wish that night, Mary, and it has come true.

"One of the vice-presidents told me today that the first time he really knew I was around the place was when the International Correspondence Schools wrote him a letter, telling him I enrolled and had received a mark of 93 for my first lesson.

"I didn't know it, then, but they were sizing me up. The reason I was promoted so rapidly after that was because my studies were always fitting me for the job ahead.

"I haven't missed the spare time I spent in studying at home. The lessons were all so easy to understand—so practical—so helpful in my every-day life.

"Where would I be today if I hadn't sent in that coupon? Back in the same old job at the same old salary, I guess—always afraid of being dropped whenever business slacked up.

"The folks at the I. C. S. are right, Mary. The trained man always wins!"

* * * * * *

This is not an unusual case. It is just a typical example of the recognition that is given I. C. S. students every day.

Employers need trained men—men who are preparing themselves for positions of greater responsibility. For such men there is no salary limit.

Your employer is constantly appraising you and every other man in the organization. Not only for the work that you do today but as to how you will stack up in a bigger job.

No matter where you live, the I. C. S. will come to *you*. No matter what your handicaps or how small your means, we have a plan to meet your circumstances. No matter how limited your previous education, the simply-written, wonderfully-illustrated I. C. S. textbooks make it easy to learn. No matter what career you may choose, some one of the 300 I. C. S. Courses will surely suit your needs.

All that we ask is this:

Without cost, without obligating yourself in any way, put it up to us to prove how we can help you secure the position you want in the work you like best. Just mark and mail this coupon. Today is best.

TEAR OUT HERE

INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOLS
BOX 2219-B SCRANTON, PA.

Without cost or obligation please explain how I can qualify for the position, or in the subject *before* which I have marked an X in the list below:

☐ ELECTRICAL ENGINEER	☐ BUSINESS MANAGEM'T
☐ Electric Lighting & Railways	☐ SALESMANSHIP
☐ Electric Wiring	☐ ADVERTISING
☐ Telegraph Engineer	☐ Show Card & Sign Ptg.
☐ Telephone Work	☐ Railroad Positions
☐ MECHANICAL ENGINEER	☐ ILLUSTRATING
☐ Mechanical Draftsman	☐ Cartooning
☐ Machine Shop Practice	☐ Private Secretary
☐ Toolmaker	☐ Business Correspondent
☐ Gas Engine Operating	☐ BOOKKEEPER
☐ CIVIL ENGINEER	☐ Stenographer & Typist
☐ Surveying and Mapping	☐ Certified Public Accountant
☐ MINE FOREMAN or ENG'R	☐ TRAFFIC MANAGER
☐ STATIONARY ENGINEER	☐ Railway Accountant
☐ Marine Engineer	☐ Commercial Law
☐ ARCHITECT	☐ GOOD ENGLISH
☐ Contractor and Builder	☐ Common School Subjects
☐ Architectural Draftsman	☐ CIVIL SERVICE
☐ Concrete Builder	☐ Railway Mail Clerk
☐ Structural Engineer	☐ AUTOMOBILES
☐ PLUMBING & HEATING	☐ Mathematics
☐ Sheet Metal Worker	☐ Navigation
☐ Textile Overseer or Supt.	☐ AGRICULTURE
☐ CHEMIST	☐ Poultry Raising ☐ Spanish
☐ Pharmacy	☐ BANKING ☐ Teacher

Name.....

7-1-21

Street and No.....

City..... State.....

Occupation.....

AGENTS $1.50 A Throw

THIS IS
A GOLD MINE AT

Only 20 Boxes a Day Means $18 Daily Profit

"LUCKY 11" Assortment In Display Case

Full size of box 6x13¾ inches. Each article full drug store size. Retail value **$3.35**; you sell for **$1.50** and more than double your money. Think of it! The array of fine toilet goods (that always appeals to milady's heart) will dazzle her eye, and when you state the low price of only **$1.50** for these 11 articles, the money is yours, even if she has to borrow or beg it.

Act Now! Sells like hot cakes—men and women coining 10 to 20 dollars a day—a baby could sell "Lucky 11." 30 other big sellers. Don't delay a minute. Each day's delay means big money loss to you. **Write for full details. Hurry! hurry! before it's too late. Act NOW.**

E.M. Davis Products Co., Dept. 1456, Chicago

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A YEAR TO PAY

$48.50

30 DAYS FREE TRIAL

ROYAL CLUSTER

7 Perfectly Matched Diamonds Set in Platinum, Resembles 1½K Solitaire—$48.50

Perfect cut, blue-white diamonds of superior quality, high grade **jewelry** and **watches** on **longest terms ever offered** —A FULL YEAR TO PAY. **No money in advance**—if not satisfied, return at our expense.

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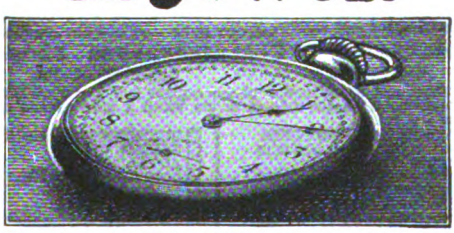
35-37-39 Maiden Lane - New York

The Burlington 21 Jewels



Sent on Approval

THIS wonderful high grade 21-jewel watch — the acme of watch production—universally recognized by owners and experts as the peer of all watches—is now being sent out on approval. Send for literature giving full explanation of this wonderful offer. Take advantage of this opportunity to secure a rare bargain.

Free Book The 21-Jewel Burlington is sold to you at a very low price and on the very special terms (after free examination) of only $5.00 a month — no interest.

Send for the most complete watch book ever produced. 100 designs and engravings beautifully illustrated in colors. Write letter or post card for it today — it is free.

Burlington Watch Company, Dept. 1456
19th Street and Marshall Blvd., Chicago, Illinois

SEND NO MONEY

NOW $1.85 Pants

Guaranteed $7.00 Value or Money Back

Made to Your Order

New wholesale tailoring house makes this sensational introductory offer—**good for 30 days only.** Perfect fitting excellent wearing pants of fine quality weave Worsted, guaranteed $7.00 pre-war value or MONEY BACK. Any style or size, no extra charges. Parcel Post or Express **PREPAID.** Write today for 60 cloth samples **Free.** $1.85 One pair to a customer.

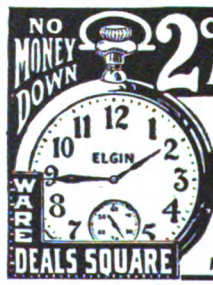
Agents Wanted EARN **Big Money**

Send orders for your relatives, friends and neighbors. Nice easy spare time work that pays you $20 to $40 a week. Send us your name today. Handsome cloth sample outfit and full information in first mail. Free. Write today.

STRAND TAILORING COMPANY
Baltimore, Md. Dept 461

NO MONEY DOWN

2 CREDIT ALL $2 A MONTH



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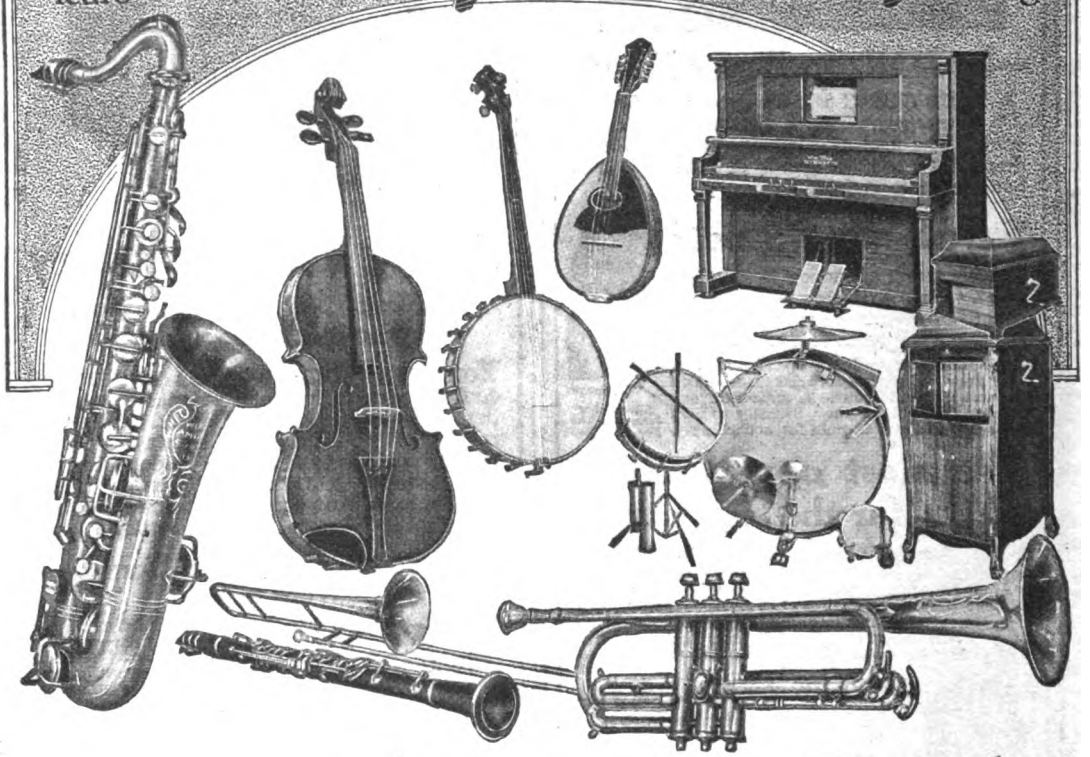
of Musical Instrument Making



Your Choice, On Trial

THE Wurlitzer plan gives you *any instrument* with a complete musical outfit for a week's Free Trial in your own home. No obligation to buy. Return the instrument at our expense at the end of the week, if you decide not to keep it. Trial won't cost you a penny.

Monthly Payments

Payments are arranged in small monthly sums A few cents a day will pay for your instrument and complete outfit. The Wurlitzer plan gives you all at direct cost. You get the outfit and instrument practically for the cost of the instrument alone.

Artistic quality of Wurlitzer instruments is known all over the world. Wurlitzer instruments have been used by artists and in the finest orchestras and bands for years. The house of Wurlitzer has made the finest musical instruments for more than 200 years.

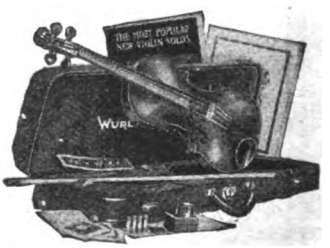
Complete Outfits

The new plan includes with the instrument everything that you need—velvet and plush lined carrying case with lock and key, all accessories and extra parts, self instructor, book of musical selections, etc.

A Wurlitzer Outfit

This shows the Wurlitzer Violin Outfit. Case is professional style, beautifully finished. Complete outfits like this are now furnished with all Wurlitzer instruments.

Every musical instrument known, including Pianos and Victrolas, is embraced in the Wurlitzer plan.



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Send me your new catalog with illustrations in color and full description of the Wurlitzer Complete Outfits and details of the free trial and easy payment offer.

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(State musical instrument in which you are especially interested)

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The Old Nest

RUPERT HUGHES' Heart-gripping story of Home

DIRECTED BY **REGINALD BARKER**

The mother whose children no longer seemed to want her

SUDDENLY they have all grown up and left her—the babies she used to tuck in bed at night. The old house is empty and silent. All have forgotten her. Her birthdays pass unnoticed.

Each child has embarked on a drama of his own. Loves, ambitions, temptations carry them away. The story of their lives sweeps you along.

Your life—your home—your mother. Never before has the screen touched with such beauty and such dramatic force a subject which finds an echo in the lives of every one of us. "The Old Nest" is a masterpiece of a new type—a presentation of life as it really is with its moments of great joy and flashes of exquisite pain. One of the most heart-gripping dramatic stories ever narrated.

A GOLDWYN PICTURE

To be followed by Rupert Hughes' "Dangerous Curve Ahead

Watch your theatre announcements

NATION-WIDE SHOWING—BEGINNING Sept. 11th

With acknowledgments to K. C. B.

Good Investments—that's where this lad lived

YOU NEVER can tell.
FROM THE cover on the book.
HOW THE story.
IS GOING to turn out.
THE OTHER night f'rinstance.
I WATCHED the customers.
AT A news and cigar stand.
AND A clerical gentleman.
BOUGHT A copy.
OF "RACY Yarns".
AND A gay thing bought.
THE "ANTHROPOLOGICAL Review".
AND A six-foot husk.
THE "LADIES Boon Companion"
SO WHEN a limousine.
STOPPED TO demobilize.
A DIGNIFIED Wall Streeter.
IN A cutaway coat.
I THOUGHT to myself
AS HE steered for the cigars.
"HERE'S WHERE I get.
A REGULAR thrill.

THIS MAN won't stop.
AT ANYTHING under.
A DOLLAR Havana".
BUT NO, Watson.
YOU'RE ALL wrong.
HE SLAPPED down two dimes.
AND SAID in a loud voice.
"GIVE ME a package.
OF THOSE cigarettes.
THAT SATISFY."

WALL Streeter or not, you're looking for twenty cents' *worth* for twenty cents, aren't you? Here's where you get it *plus*. Best of Turkish blended with the best of Burley and other choice Domestic tobaccos—and blended *right!* No wonder the wise ones pick the "satisfy-blend".

They Satisfy **Chesterfield**

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