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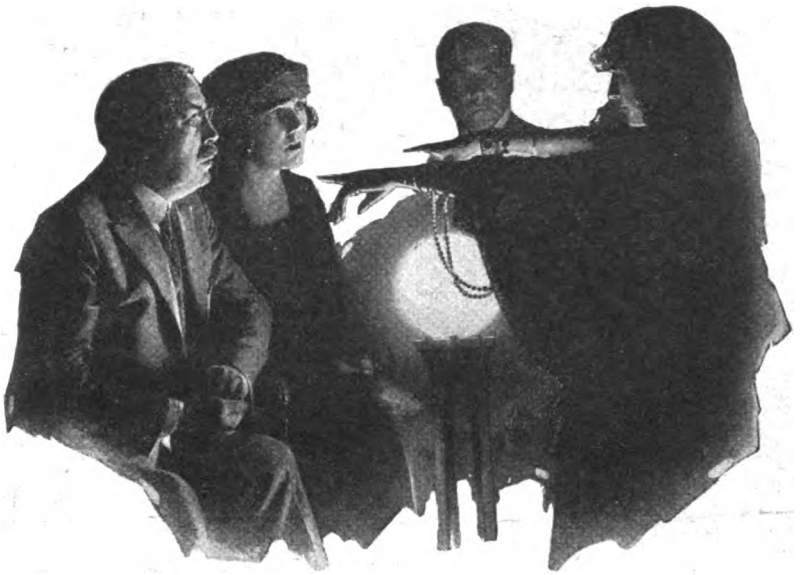

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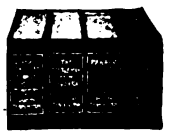

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ARGOSY-ALLSTORY
WEEKLY

VOL. CXXXVII SATURDAY, OCTOBER 8, 1921 NUMBER 4

The Efficiency Expert

Part I

by Edgar Rice Burroughs

Author of the *Tarzan* Tales, "Under the Moons of Mars," "The Mucker," "Pellucidar," etc.

CHAPTER I.

JIMMY TORRANCE, JR.

THE gymnasium was packed as Jimmy Torrance stepped into the ring for the final event of the evening that was to decide the boxing championship of the university. Drawing to a close were the nearly four years of his college career—profitable years, Jimmy considered them, and certainly successful up to this point. In the beginning of his senior year he had captained the varsity eleven, and in the coming spring he would again sally forth upon the diamond as the star initial sacker of collegedom.

His football triumphs were in the past, his continued baseball successes a foregone conclusion—if he won to-night his cup of happiness, and an unassailably dominant position among his fellows, would be assured, leaving nothing more, in so far as Jimmy reasoned, to be desired from four years attendance at one of America's oldest and most famous universities.

The youth who would dispute the right to championship honors with Jimmy was a dark horse to the extent that he was a freshman, and, therefore, practically unknown. He had worked hard, however, and given a good account of himself in his preparations for the battle, and there were rumors, as there always are about every campus, of marvelous exploits prior to his college days. It was even darkly hinted that he was a professional pugilist. As a matter of fact, he was the best exponent of the manly art of self-defense that Jimmy Torrance had ever faced, and in addition thereto he outweighed the senior and outreached him.

The boxing contest, as the faculty members of the athletic committee preferred to call it, was, from the tap of the gong, as pretty a two-fisted scrap as ever any aggre-

gation of low-browed fight-fans witnessed. The details of this gory encounter, while interesting, have no particular bearing upon the development of this tale. What interests us is the outcome, which occurred in the middle of a very bloody fourth round, in which Jimmy Torrance scored a clean knock-out.

It was a battered but happy Jimmy who sat in his room the following Monday afternoon, striving to concentrate his mind upon a college text-book which should, by all the laws of fiction, have been "well thumbed," but in reality possessed unruffled freshness which belied its real age.

"I wish," mused Jimmy, "that I could have got to the bird who invented mathematics before he inflicted all this unnecessary anguish upon an already unhappy world. In about three rounds I could have saved thousands from the sorrow which I feel every time I open this blooming book."

He was still deeply engrossed in the futile attempt of accomplishing in an hour that for which the college curriculum set aside several months when there came sounds of approaching footsteps rapidly ascending the stairway. His door was unceremoniously thrown open, and there appeared one of those strange apparitions which is the envy and despair of the small-town youth—a naturally good-looking young fellow, the sartorial arts of whose tailor had elevated his waist-line to his arm-pits, dragged down his shoulders, and caved in his front until he had the appearance of being badly dished from chin to knees. His trousers appeared to have been made for a man with legs six inches longer than his, while his hat was evidently several sizes too large, since it would have entirely extinguished his face had it not been supported by his ears.

"Hello, Kid!" cried Jimmy. "What's new?"

"Whiskers wants you," replied the other. "Faculty meeting. They just got through with me."

"Hell!" muttered Jimmy feelingly. "I don't know what Whiskers wants with me, but he never wants to see anybody about anything pleasant."

"I am here," agreed the other, "to announce to the universe that you are right, Jimmy. He didn't have anything pleasant to say to me. In fact, he insinuated that dear old alma mater might be able to wiggle along without me if I didn't abjure my criminal life. Made some nasty comparison between my academic achievements and fox-trotting. I wonder, Jimmy, how they get that way?"

"That's why they are profs," explained Jimmy. "There are two kinds of people in the world—human beings and profs. When does he want me?"

"Now."

Jimmy arose and put on his hat and coat. "Good-by, Kid," he said. "Pray for me, and leave me one cigarette to smoke when I get back," and, grinning, he left the room.

James Torrance, Jr., was not greatly abashed as he faced the dour tribunal of the faculty. The younger members, among whom were several he knew to be mighty good fellows at heart, sat at the lower end of the long table, and with owlish gravity attempted to emulate the appearance and manners of their seniors. At the head of the table sat Whiskers, as the dignified and venerable president of the university was popularly named. It was generally believed and solemnly sworn to throughout the large corps of undergraduates that within the knowledge of any living man Whiskers had never been known to smile, and to-day he was running true to form.

"Mr. Torrance," he said, sighing, "it has been my painful duty on more than one occasion to call your attention to the uniformly low average of your academic standing. At the earnest solicitation of the faculty members of the athletic committee, I have been influenced, against my better judgment, to temporize with an utterly insufferable condition.

"You are rapidly approaching the close of your senior year, and in the light of the records which I have before me I am constrained to believe that it will be utterly impossible for you to graduate, unless from now to the end of the semester you devote yourself exclusively to your academic work. If you cannot assure me that you will do this, I believe it would be to the best interests of the university for you to resign now, rather than to fail of graduation. And in

this decision I am fully seconded by the faculty members of the athletic committee, who realize the harmful effect upon university athletics in the future were so prominent an athlete as you to fail at graduation."

If they had sentenced Jimmy to be shot at sunrise the blow could scarcely have been more stunning than that which followed the realization that he was not to be permitted to round out his fourth successful season at first base. But if Jimmy was momentarily stunned he gave no outward indication of the fact, and in the brief interval of silence following the president's ultimatum his alert mind functioned with the rapidity which it had often shown upon the gridiron, the diamond, and the squared circle.

Just for a moment the thought of being deprived of the pleasure and excitement of the coming baseball season filled his mind to the exclusion of every other consideration, but presently a less selfish impulse projected upon the screen of recollection the figure of the father he idolized. The boy realized the disappointment that this man would feel should his four years of college end thus disastrously and without the coveted diploma.

And then it was that he raised his eyes to those of the president.

"I hope, sir," he said, "that you will give me one more chance—that you will let me go on as I have in the past as far as baseball is concerned, with the understanding that if at the end of each month between now and commencement I do not show satisfactory improvement I shall not be permitted to play on the team. But please don't make that restriction binding yet. If I lay off the track work I believe I can make up enough so that baseball will not interfere with my graduation."

And so Whiskers, who was much more human that the student body gave him credit for being, and was, in the bargain, a good judge of boys, gave Jimmy another chance on his own terms, and the university's heavyweight champion returned to his room filled with determination to make good at the eleventh hour.

Possibly one of the greatest obstacles which lay in Jimmy's path toward academic honors was the fact that he possessed those qualities of character which attracted others to him, with the result that there was seldom an hour during the day that he had his room to himself. On his return from the faculty meeting he found a half-dozen of his classmates there, awaiting his return.

"Well?" they inquired as he entered.

"It's worse than that," said Jimmy, as he unfolded the harrowing details of what had transpired at his meeting with the faculty. "And now," he said, "if you birds love me, keep out of here from now until commencement. There isn't a guy on earth can concentrate on anything with a roomful of you mental ciphers sitting around and yapping about girls and other non-essential creations."

"Non-essential!" gasped one of his visitors, letting his eyes wander over the walls of Jimmy's study, whereon were nailed, pinned or hung countless framed and unframed pictures of non-essential creations.

"All right, Jimmy," said another. "We are with you, horse, foot and artillery. When you want us, give us the high-sign and we will come. Otherwise we will leave you to your beloved books. It is too bad, though, as the bar-boy was just explaining how the great drought might be circumvented by means of carrots, potato peelings, dish-water, and a raisin."

"Go on," said Jimmy; "I am not interested," and the boys left him to his "beloved" books.

Jimmy Torrance worked hard, and by dint of long hours and hard-working tutors he finished his college course and won his diploma. Nor did he have to forego the crowning honors of his last baseball season, although, like Ulysses S. Grant, he would have graduated at the head of his class had the list been turned upside down.

CHAPTER II.

JIMMY WILL ACCEPT A POSITION.

FOLLOWING his graduation he went to New York to visit with one of his classmates for a short time before returning home. He was a very self-satisfied

Jimmy, nor who can wonder, since almost from his matriculation there had been constantly dinned into his ears the plaudits of his fellow students. Jimmy Torrance had been the one big, outstanding figure of each succeeding class from his freshman to his senior year, and as junior and senior he had been the acknowledged leader of the student body and as popular a man as the university had ever known.

To his fellows, as well as to himself, he he had been a great success—*the* success of the university—and he and they saw in the future only continued success in whatever vocation he decided to honor with his presence. It was in a mental attitude that had become almost habitual with him, and which was superinduced by these influences, that Jimmy approached the new life that was opening before him. For a while he would play, but in the fall it was his firm intention to settle down to some serious occupation, and it was in this attitude that he opened a letter from his father—the first that he had received since his graduation.

The letter was written on the letterhead of the Beatrice Corn Mills, Incorporated, Beatrice, Nebraska, and in the upper left-hand corner, in small type, appeared "James Torrance, Sr., President and General Manager," and this is what he read:

DEAR JIM:

You have graduated—I didn't think you would—with honors in football, baseball, prize-fighting, and five thousand dollars in debt. How you got your diploma is beyond me—in my day you would have got the sack. Well, son, I am not surprised nor disappointed—it is what I expected. I know you are clean, though, and that some day you will awaken to the sterner side of life and an appreciation of your responsibilities.

To be an entirely orthodox father I should raise merry hell about your debts and utter inutility, at the same time disinheriting you, but instead I am going to urge you to come home and run in debt here where the cost of living is not so high as in the East—meanwhile praying that your awakening may come while I am on earth to rejoice.

Your affectionate

FATHER.

Am enclosing check to cover your debts and present needs.

For a long time the boy sat looking at the letter before him. He reread it once, twice, three times, and with each reading the film of unconscious egotism that had blinded him to his own shortcomings gradually became less opaque, until finally he saw himself as his father must see him. He had come to college for the purpose of fitting himself to succeed in some particular way in the stern battle of life which must follow his graduation; for, though his father had ample means to support him in indolence, Jimmy had never even momentarily considered such an eventuality.

In weighing his assets now he discovered that he had probably as excellent a conception of gridiron strategy and tactics as any man in America; that as a boxer he occupied a position in the forefront of amateur ranks; and he was quite positive that outside of the major leagues there was not a better first baseman.

But in the last few minutes there had dawned upon him the realization that none of these accomplishments was greatly in demand in the business world. Jimmy spent a very blue and unhappy hour, and then slowly his natural optimism reasserted itself, and with it came the realization of his youth and strength and inherent ability which, without egotism, he might claim.

"And then, too," he mused, "I have my diploma. I am a college graduate, and that must mean something. If dad had only reproached me or threatened some condign punishment I don't believe I should feel half as badly as I do. But every line of that letter breathes disappointment in me; and yet, God bless him, he tells me to come home and spend his money there. Not on your life! If he won't disinherit me, I am going to disinherit myself. I am going to make him proud of me. He's the best dad a fellow ever had, and I am going to show him that I appreciate him."

And so he sat down and wrote his father this reply:

DEAR DAD:

I have your letter and check. You may not believe it, but the former is worth more to me than the latter. Not, however, that I spurn the check, which it was just like you to send without a lot of grumbling and reproaches, even if I do deserve them.

Your letter has shown me what a rotten mess I have made of myself. I'm not going

to hand you a lot of mush, dad, but I want to try to do something that will give you reason to at least have hopes of rejoicing before I come home again. If I fail I'll come home anyway, and then neither one of us will have any doubt but what you will have to support me for the rest of my life. However, I don't intend to fail, and one of these days I will bob up all serene as president of a bank or a glue factory. In the mean time I'll keep you posted as to my whereabouts, but don't send me another cent until I ask for it; and when I do you will know that I have failed.

Tell mother that I will write her in a day or two, probably from Chicago, as I have always had an idea that that was one burg where I could make good.

With lots of love to you all,

Your affectionate

SON.

It was a hot July day that James Torrance, Jr., alighted from the Twentieth Century Limited at the La Salle Street Station, and, entering a cab, directed that he be driven to a small hotel; "for," he soliloquized, "I might as well start economizing at once, as it might be several days before I land a job such as I want," in voicing which sentiments he spoke with the tongues of the prophets.

Jimmy had many friends in Chicago with whom, upon the occasion of numerous previous visits to the Western metropolis, he had spent many hilarious and expensive hours, but now he had come upon the serious business of life, and there moved within him a strong determination to win financial success without recourse to the influence of rich and powerful acquaintances.

Since the first crushing blow that his father's letter had dealt his egotism, Jimmy's self-esteem had been gradually returning, though along new and more practical lines. His self-assurance was formed in a similar mold to those of all his other salient characteristics, and these conformed to his physical proportions, for physically, mentally and morally Jimmy Torrance was big; not that he was noticeably taller than other men or his features more than ordinarily attractive, but there was something so well balanced and harmonious in all the proportions of his frame and features as to almost invariably compel a second glance from even a casual observer, especially if the casual observer happened to be in the non-essential creation class.

And so Jimmy, having had plenty of opportunity to commune with himself during the journey from New York, was confident that there were many opportunities awaiting him in Chicago. He remembered distinctly of having read somewhere that the growing need of big business concerns was competent executive material—that there were fewer big men than there were big jobs—and that if such was the case all that remained to be done was to connect himself with the particular big job that suited him.

In the lobby of the hotel he bought several of the daily papers, and after reaching his room he started perusing the "Help Wanted" columns. Immediately he was impressed and elated by the discovery that there were plenty of jobs, and that a satisfactory percentage of them appeared to be big jobs. There were so many, however, that appealed to him as excellent possibilities that he saw it would be impossible to apply for each and every one; and then it occurred to him that he might occupy a more strategic position in the negotiations preceding his acceptance of a position if his future employer came to him first, rather than should he be the one to apply for the position.

And so he decided the wisest plan would be to insert an ad in the "Situations Wanted" column, and then from the replies select those which most appealed to him; in other words, he would choose from the cream of those who desired the services of such a man as himself rather than risk the chance of obtaining a less profitable position through undue haste in seizing upon the first opening advertised.

Having reached this decision, and following his habitual custom, he permitted no grass to grow beneath his feet. Writing out an ad, he reviewed it carefully, compared it with others that he saw upon the printed page, made a few changes, rewrote it, and then descended to the lobby, where he called a cab and was driven to the office of one of the great metropolitan morning newspapers.

Jimmy felt very important as he passed through the massive doorway into the great general offices of the newspaper. Of course, he didn't exactly expect that he would be ushered into the presence of the president or business manager, or that even the advertising manager would necessarily have to pass upon his copy, but there was within him a certain sensation that at that instant something was transpiring that in later years would be a matter of great moment, and he was really very sorry for the publishers of the newspaper that they did not know who it was who was inserting an ad in their Situations Wanted column.

He could not help but watch the face of the young man who received his ad and counted the words, as he was sure that the clerk's facial expression would betray his excitement. It was a great moment for Jimmy Torrance. He realized that it was probably the greatest moment of his life—that here Jimmy Torrance ceased to be, and James Torrance, Jr., Esq., began his career. But though he carefully watched the face of the clerk, he was finally forced to admit that the young man possessed wonderful control over his facial expression.

"That bird has a regular poker-face," mused Jimmy; "never batted an eye," and paying for his ad he pocketed the change and walked out.

"Let's see," he figured; "it will be in tomorrow morning's edition. The tired business man will read it either at breakfast or after he reaches his office. I understand that there are three million people here in Chicago. Out of that three million it is safe to assume that one million will read my advertisement, and of that one million there must be at least one thousand who have responsible positions which are, at present, inadequately filled.

"Of course, the truth of the matter is that there are probably tens of thousands of such positions, but to be conservative I will assume that there are only one thousand, and reducing it still further to almost an absurdity, I will figure that only ten per cent of those reply to my advertisement. In other words, at the lowest possible estimate I should have one hundred replies on the first day. I knew it was foolish to run it for three days, but the fellow insisted that that was the proper way to do, as I got a lower rate.

"By taking it for three days, however, it doesn't seem right to make so many busy men waste their time answering the ad when I shall doubtless find a satisfactory position the first day."

CHAPTER III.

THE LIZARD.

THAT night Jimmy attended a show, and treated himself to a lonely dinner afterward. He should have liked very much to have looked up some of his friends. A telephone call would have brought invitations to dinner and a pleasant evening with convivial companions, but he had mapped his course and he was determined to stick to it to the end.

"There will be plenty of time," he thought, "for amusement after I have gotten a good grasp of my new duties." Jimmy elected to walk from the theater to his hotel, and as he was turning the corner from Randolph into La Salle a young man jostled him. An instant later the stranger was upon his knees, his wrist doubled suddenly backward and very close to the breaking-point.

"Wot t' hell yuh doin'?" he screamed.

"Pardon me," replied Jimmy; "you got your hand in the wrong pocket. I suppose you meant to put it in your own, but you didn't."

"Aw, g'wan; lemme go," pleaded the stranger. "I didn't get nuthin'—you ain't got the goods on me."

Now, such a tableau as Jimmy and his new acquaintance formed cannot be staged at the corner of Randolph and La Salle beneath an arc light, even at midnight, without attracting attention. And so it was that before Jimmy realized it a dozen curious pedestrians were approaching them from different directions, and a burly blue-coated figure was shouldering his way forward.

Jimmy had permitted his captive to rise, but he still held tightly to his wrist as the officer confronted them. He took one look

at Jimmy's companion, and then grabbed him roughly by the arm. "So, it's you again, is it?" he growled.

"I ain't done nuthin'," muttered the man.

The officer looked inquiringly at Jimmy.

"What's all the excitement about?" asked the latter. "My friend and I have done nothing."

"Your fri'nd and you?" replied the policeman. "He ain't no fri'nd o' yours, or yez wouldn't be sayin' so."

"Well, I'll admit," replied Jimmy, "that possibly I haven't known him long enough to presume to claim any close friendship, but there's no telling what time may develop."

"You don't want him pinched?" asked the policeman.

"Of course not," replied Jimmy. "Why should he be pinched?"

The officer turned roughly upon the stranger, shook him viciously a few times, and then gave him a mighty shove which all but sent him sprawling into the gutter.

"G'wan wid yez," he yelled after him, "and if I see ye on this beat again I'll run yez in. An' you"—he turned upon Jimmy—"ye'd betther be on your way and not be afther makin' up with ivery dip ye meet."

"Thanks," said Jimmy. "Have a cigar."

After the officer had helped himself and condescended to relax his stern features into the semblance of a smile the young man bid him good night and resumed his way toward the hotel.

"Pretty early to go to bed," he thought as he reached for his watch to note the time, running his fingers into an empty pocket. Gingerly he felt in another pocket, where he knew his watch couldn't possibly be, nor was. Carefully Jimmy examined each pocket of his coat and trousers, a slow and broad grin illumining his face.

"What do you know about that?" he mused. "And I thought I was a wise guy."

A few minutes after Jimmy reached his room the office called him on the telephone to tell him that a man had called to see him.

"Send him up," said Jimmy, wondering who it might be, since he was sure that no one knew of his presence in the city. He tried to connect the call in some way with his advertisement, but inasmuch as that had been inserted blind he felt that there could be no possible connection between that and his caller.

A few minutes later there was a knock on his door, and in response to his summons to enter the door opened, and there stood before him the young man of his recent encounter upon the street. The latter entered softly, closing the door behind him. His feet made no sound upon the carpet, and no sound came from the door as he closed it, nor any slightest click from the latch. His utter silence and the stealth of his movements were so pronounced as to attract immediate attention. He did not speak until he had reached the center of the room and halted on the opposite side of the table at which Jimmy was standing; and then a very slow smile moved his lips, though the expression of his eyes remained unchanged.

"Miss anything?" he asked.

"Yes," said Jimmy.

"Here it is," said the visitor, laying the other's watch upon the table.

"Why this spasm of virtue?" asked Jimmy.

"Oh, I don't know," replied the other. "I guess it's because you're a white guy. O'Donnell has been trying to get something on me for the last year. He's got it in for me—I wouldn't cough every time the big stiff seen me."

"Sit down," said Jimmy.

"Naw," said the other; "I gotta be goin'."

"Come," insisted the host; "sit down for a few minutes at least. I was just wishing that I had some one to talk to."

The other sank noiselessly into a chair. "All right, bo," he said.

Jimmy proffered him his cigar-case.

"No, thanks," declined the visitor. "I'd rather have a coffin-nail," which Jimmy forthwith furnished.

"I should think," said Jimmy, "that your particular line of endeavor would prove rather hazardous in a place where you are known by the police."

The other smiled and, as before, with his lips alone.

"Naw," he said; "this is the safest place to work. If ten per cent of the bulls know me I got that much on them, and then some, because any boob can spot any one o' de harness bunch, and I know nearly every fly on the department. They're the guys yuh gotta know, and usually I know something besides their names, too," and again his lips smiled.

"How much of your time do you have to put in at your occupation to make a living?" asked Jimmy.

"Sometimes I put in six or eight hours a day," replied the visitor. "De rush hours on de surface line are usually good for two or t'ree hours a day, but I been layin' off dat stuff lately and goin' in fer de t'ater crowd. Dere's more money and shorter hours."

"You confine yourself," asked Jimmy, "to—er—ah—pocket-picking solely?"

Again the lip smile. "I'll tell youse sumpin', bo, dat dey don't none o' dem big stiffs on de department know. De dip game is a stall. I learned it when I was a kid, an' dese yaps t'ink dat's all I know, and I keep dem t'inkin' it by pullin' stuff under der noses often enough to give 'em de hunch dat I'm still at de same ol' business." He leaned confidentially across the table. "If you ever want a box cracked, look up the Lizard."

"Meaning?" asked Jimmy.

"Me, bo; I'm the Lizard."

"Box cracked?" repeated Jimmy. "An ice-box or a hot box?"

His visitor grinned. "Safe," he explained.

"Oh," said Jimmy, "if I ever want any one to break into a safe, come to you, huh?"

"You get me," replied the other.

"All right," said Jimmy, laughing. "I'll call on you. That the only name you got, Mr. Lizard?"

"That's all—just the Lizard. Now I gotta be beatin' it."

"Goin' to crack a box?" asked Jimmy.

The other smiled his lip smile and turned toward the door.

"Wait a second," said Jimmy. "What would you have gotten on this watch of mine?"

"It would have stood me about twenty bucks."

Jimmy reached into his pocket and drew forth a roll of bills. "Here," he said, handing the other two tens.

"Naw," said the Lizard, shoving the proffered money away. "I'm no cheap skate."

"Come on—take it," said Jimmy. "I may want a box cracked some day."

"All right," said the Lizard, "if you put it that way, bo."

"I should think," said Jimmy, "that a man of your ability could earn a living by less precarious methods."

"You would think so," replied the Lizard. "I've tried two or three times to go straight. Wore out my shoes looking for a job. Never landed anything that paid me more than ten bucks per, and worked nine or ten hours a day, and half the time I couldn't get that."

"I suppose the police hounded you all the time, too," suggested Jimmy.

"Naw," said the Lizard; "dat's all bunk. De fellows that couldn't even float down a sewer straight pull dat. Once in a while dey get it in for some guy, but dey're glad enough to leave us alone if we leave dem alone. I worked four hours to-day, maybe six before I get through, and I'll stand a chance of makin' all the way from fifty dollars to five thousand. Suppose I was drivin' a milk-wagon, gettin' up at t'ree o'clock in the mornin' and workin' like hell—how much would I get out of dat? Expectin' every minute some one was goin' tuh fire me. Nuthin' doin'—dey can't nobody fire me now. I'm my own boss."

"Well," said Jimmy, "your logic sounds all right, but it all depends upon the viewpoint. But I'll tell you: you've offered me your services; I'll offer you mine. Whenever you want a job, look me up. I'm going to be general manager of a big concern here, and you'll find me in the next issue of the telephone directory." He handed the Lizard his card.

"T'anks," said the latter. "If you don't want a box cracked any sooner than I want a job, the chances are we will never meet

again. So-long," and he was gone as noiselessly as he had come.

Jimmy breakfasted at nine the next morning, and as he waited for his bacon and eggs he searched the Situations Wanted columns of the morning paper until his eye finally alighted upon that for which he sought—the ad that was to infuse into the business life of the great city a new and potent force. Before his breakfast was served Jimmy had read the few lines over a dozen times, and with each succeeding reading he was more and more pleased with the result of his advertising ability as it appeared in print:

> WANTED—By College Graduate—Position as General Manager of Large Business where ability, energy and experience will be appreciated. Address 263-S, Tribune Office.

He had decided to wait until after lunch before calling at the newspaper office for replies to his advertisement, but during breakfast it occurred to him there probably would be several alert prospective employers who would despatch their replies by special messengers, and realizing that promptness was one of the cardinal virtues in the business world, Jimmy reasoned that it would make a favorable impression were he to present himself as soon as possible after the receipt of replies.

By a simple system of reasoning he deduced that ten o'clock would be none too early to expect some returns from his ad, and therefore at ten promptly he presented himself at the Want Ad Department in the *Tribune* office.

Comparing the number of the receipt which Jimmy handed him with the numbers upon a file of little pigeonholes, the clerk presently turned back toward the counter with a handful of letters.

"Whew!" thought Jimmy. "I never would have guessed that I would receive a bunch like that so early in the morning." But then, as he saw the clerk running through them one by one, he realized that they were not all for him, and as the young man ran through them Jimmy's spirits dropped a notch with each letter that was passed over without being thrown out to him, until when the last letter had passed beneath the scrutiny of the clerk, and the advertiser realized that he had received no replies, he was quite sure that there was some error.

"Nothing," said the clerk, shaking his head negatively.

"Are you sure you looked in the right compartment?" asked Jimmy.

"Sure," replied the clerk. "There is nothing for you."

Jimmy pocketed his slip and walked from the office. "This town is slower than I thought it was," he mused. "I guess they do need some live wires here to manage their business."

At noon he returned, only to be again disappointed, and then at two o'clock, and when he came in at four the same clerk looked up wearily and shook his head.

"Nothing for you," he said. "I distributed all the stuff myself since you were in last."

As Jimmy stood there almost dazed by surprise that during an entire day his ad had appeared in Chicago's largest newspaper, and he had not received one reply, a man approached the counter, passed a slip similar to Jimmy's to the clerk, and received fully a hundred letters in return. Jimmy was positive now that something was wrong.

"Are you sure," he asked the clerk, "that my replies haven't been sidetracked somewhere? I have seen people taking letters away from here all day, and that bird there just walked off with a fistful."

The clerk grinned. "What you advertising for?" he asked.

"A position," replied Jimmy.

"That's the answer," explained the clerk. "That fellow there was advertising for help."

CHAPTER IV.

JIMMY HUNTS A JOB.

ONCE again Jimmy walked out onto Madison Street, and, turning to his right, dropped into a continuous vaudeville show in an attempt to coax his spirits back to somewhere near their normal high-water mark. Upon the next day he

again haunted the newspaper office without reward, and again upon the third day with similar results. To say that Jimmy was dumfounded would be but a futile description of his mental state. It was simply beyond him to conceive that in one of the largest cities in the world, the center of a thriving district of fifty million souls, there was no business man with sufficient acumen to realize how badly he needed James Torrance, Jr., to conduct his business for him successfully.

With the close of the fourth day, and no reply, Jimmy was thoroughly exasperated. The kindly clerk, who by this time had taken a personal interest in this steadiest of customers, suggested that Jimmy try applying for positions advertised in the Help Wanted column, and this he decided to do.

There were only two concerns advertising for general managers in the issue which Jimmy scanned; one ad called for an experienced executive to assume the general management of an old established sash, door and blind factory; the other insisted upon a man with mail-order experience to take charge of the mail-order department of a large department store.

Neither of these were precisely what Jimmy had hoped for, his preference really being for the general management of an automobile manufactory or possibly something in the airplane line. Sash, door and blind sounded extremely prosaic and uninteresting to Mr. Torrance. The mail-order proposition, while possibly more interesting, struck him as being too trifling and unimportant.

"However," he thought, "it will do no harm to have a talk with these people, and possibly I might even consider giving one of them a trial."

And so, calling a taxi, he drove out onto the west side where, in a dingy and squalid neighborhood, the taxi stopped in front of a grimy unpainted three-story brick building, from which a great deal of noise and dust were issuing. Jimmy found the office on the second floor, after ascending a narrow, dark, and dirty stairway. Jimmy's experience of manufacturing plants was extremely limited, but he needed no experience as he entered the room to see that he was in a busy office of a busy plant. Everything about the office was plain and rather dingy, but there were a great many clerks and typists and considerable bustling about.

After stating his business to a young lady who sat behind a switchboard, upon the front of which was the word "Information," and waiting while she communicated with an inner office over the telephone, he was directed in the direction of a glass partition at the opposite end of the room—a partition in which there were doors at intervals, and upon each door a name.

He had been told that Mr. Brown would see him, and rapping upon the door bearing that name he was bid to enter, and a moment later found himself in the presence of a middle-aged man whose every gesture and movement was charged with suppressed nerve energy.

As Jimmy entered the man was reading a letter. He finished it quickly, slapped it into a tray, and wheeled in his chair toward his caller.

"Well?" he snapped, as Jimmy approached him.

"I came in reply to your advertisement for a general manager," announced Jimmy confidently.

The man sized him up quickly from head to foot. His eyes narrowed and his brows contracted.

"What experience you had? Who you been with, and how many years?" He snapped the questions at Jimmy with the rapidity of machine-gun fire.

"I have the necessary ability," replied Jimmy, "to manage your business."

"How many years have you had in the sash, door and blind business?" snapped Mr. Brown.

"I have never had any experience in the sash, door and blind business," replied Jimmy. "I didn't come here to make sash, doors and blinds. I came here to manage your business."

Mr. Brown half rose from his chair. His eyes opened a little wider than normal. "What the—" he started; and then, "Well, of all the—" Once again he found it impossible to go on. "You came here

to manage a sash, door and blind factory, and don't know anything about the business! Well, of all—"

"I assumed," said Jimmy, "that what you wanted in a general manager was executive ability, and that's what I have."

"What you have," replied Mr. Brown, "is a hell of a crust. Now, run along, young fellow. I am a very busy man—and don't forget to close the door after you as you go out."

Jimmy did not forget to close the door. As he walked the length of the interminable room between rows of desks, before which were seated young men and young women, all of whom Jimmy thought were staring at him, he could feel the deep crimson burning upward from his collar to the roots of his hair.

Never before in his life had Jimmy's self-esteem received such a tremendous jolt. He was still blushing when he reached his cab, and as he drove back toward the Loop he could feel successive hot waves suffuse his countenance at each recollection of the humiliating scene through which he had just passed.

It was not until the next day that Jimmy had sufficiently reestablished his self-confidence to permit him to seek out the party who wished a mail-order manager, and while in this instance he met with very pleasant and gentlemanly treatment, his application was no less definitely turned down.

For a month Jimmy trailed one job after another. At the end of the first week he decided that the street-cars and sole leather were less expensive than taxicabs, as his funds were running perilously low; and he also lowered his aspirations successively from general managerships through departmental heads, assistants thereto, office managers, assistant office managers, and various other vocations, all with the same result; discovering meanwhile that experience, while possibly not essential as some of the ads stated, was usually the rock upon which his hopes were dashed.

He also learned something else which surprised him greatly: that rather than being an aid to his securing employment, his college education was a drawback, several men telling him bluntly that they had no vacancies for rah-rah boys.

At the end of the second week Jimmy had moved from his hotel to a still less expensive one, and a week later to a cheap boarding-house on the north side. At first he had written his father and his mother regularly, but now he found it difficult to write them at all. Toward the middle of the fourth week Jimmy had reached a point where he applied for a position as office-boy.

"I'll be damned if I'm going to quit," he said to himself, "if I have to turn street-sweeper. There must be some job here in the city that I am capable of filling, and I'm pretty sure that I can at least get a job as office-boy."

And so he presented himself to the office manager of a life-insurance company that had advertised such a vacancy. A very kindly gentleman interviewed him.

"What experience have you had?" he asked.

Jimmy looked at him aghast.

"Do I have to have experience to be an office-boy?" he asked.

"Well, of course," replied the gentleman, "it is not essential, but it is preferable. I already have applications from a dozen or more fellows, half of whom have had experience, and one in particular, whom I have about decided to employ, held a similar position with another life-insurance company."

Jimmy rose. "Good day," he said, and walked out.

That day he ate no lunch, but he had discovered a place where an abundance might be had for twenty-five cents if one knew how to order and ordered judiciously. And so to this place he repaired for his dinner. Perched upon a high stool, he filled at least a corner of the aching void within.

Sitting in his room that night he took account of his assets and his liabilities. His room rent was paid until Saturday night, and this was Thursday, and in his pocket were one dollar and sixty cents. Opening his trunk, he drew forth a sheet of paper and an envelope, and, clearing the top of the rickety little table which stood at the

head of his bed, he sat down on the edge of the soiled counterpane and wrote a letter.

DEAR DAD:

I guess I'm through. I have tried and failed. It is hard to admit it, but I guess I'll have to. If you will send me the price I'll come home. With love,

JIM.

Slowly he folded the letter and inserted it in the envelope, his face mirroring an utter dejection such as Jimmy Torrance had never before experienced in his life.

"Failure," he muttered, "unutterable failure."

Taking his hat, he walked down the creaking stairway, with its threadbare carpet, and out onto the street to post his letter.

CHAPTER V.

JIMMY LANDS ONE.

MISS ELIZABETH COMPTON sat in the dimly lighted library upon a deep-cushioned, tapestried sofa. She was not alone, yet although there were many comfortable chairs in the large room, and the sofa was an exceptionally long one, she and her companion occupied but little more space than would have comfortably accommodated a single individual.

"Stop it, Harold," she admonished. "I utterly loathe being mauled."

"But I can't help it, dear. It seems so absolutely wonderful! I can't believe it—that you are really mine."

"But I'm not—yet!" exclaimed the girl. "There are a lot of formalities and bridesmaids and ministers and things that have got to be taken into consideration before I am yours. And anyway there is no necessity for mussing me up so. You might as well know now as later that I utterly loathe this cave-man stuff. And really, Harold, there is nothing about your appearance that suggests a cave-man, which is probably one reason that I like you."

"Like me?" exclaimed the young man. "I thought you loved me."

"I have to like you in order to love you, don't I?" she parried. "And one certainly has to like the man she is going to marry."

"Well," grumbled Mr. Bince, "you might be more enthusiastic about it."

"I prefer," explained the girl, "to be loved decorously. I do not care to be pawed or clawed or crumpled. After we have been married for fifteen or twenty years and are really well acquainted—"

"Possibly you will permit me to kiss you," Bince finished for her.

"Don't be silly, Harold," she retorted. "You have kissed me so much now that my hair is all down, and my face must be a sight. Lips are what you are supposed to kiss with—you don't have to kiss with your hands."

"Possibly I was a little bit rough. I am sorry," apologized the young man. "But when a fellow has just been told by the sweetest girl in the world that she will marry him, it's enough to make him a little bit crazy."

"Not at all," rejoined Miss Compton. "We should never forget the stratum of society to which we belong, and what we owe to the maintenance of the position we hold. My father has always impressed upon me the fact that gentlemen or gentlewomen are always gentle-folk under any and all circumstances and conditions. I distinctly recall his remark about one of his friends, whom he greatly admired, to this effect: that he always got drunk like a gentleman. Therefore we should do everything as gentle-folk should do things, and when we make love we should make love like gentle-folk, and not like hod-carriers or cave-men."

"Yes," said the young man; "I'll try to remember."

It was a little after nine o'clock when Harold Bince arose to leave.

"I'll drive you home," volunteered the girl. "Just wait, and I'll have Barry bring the roadster around."

"I thought we should always do the things that gentle-folk should do," said Bince, grinning, after being seated safely in the car. They had turned out of the driveway into Lincoln Parkway.

"What do you mean?" asked Elizabeth.

"Is it perfectly proper for young ladies

to drive around the streets of a big city alone after dark?"

"But I'm not alone," she said.

"You will be after you leave me at home."

"Oh, well, I'm different."

"And I'm glad that you are!" exclaimed Bince fervently. "I wouldn't love you if you were like the ordinary run."

Bince lived at one of the down-town clubs, and after depositing him there and parting with a decorous handclasp the girl turned her machine and headed north for home. At Erie Street came a sudden loud hissing of escaping air.

"Darn!" exclaimed Miss Elizabeth Compton as she drew in beside the curb and stopped. Although she knew perfectly well that one of the tires was punctured, she got out and walked around in front as though in search of the cause of the disturbance, and sure enough, there it was, flat as a pancake, the left front tire.

There was an extra wheel on the rear of the roadster, but it was heavy and cumbersome, and the girl knew from experience what a dirty job changing a wheel is. She had just about decided to drive home on the rim, when a young man crossed the walk from Erie Street and joined her in her doleful appraisement of the punctured casing.

"Can I help you any?" he asked.

She looked up at him. "Thank you," she replied, "but I think I'll drive home on it as it is. They can change it there."

"It looks like a new casing," he said. "It would be too bad to ruin it. If you have a spare I will be very glad to change it for you," and without waiting for her acquiescence he stripped off his coat, rolled up his shirt-sleeves, and dove under the seat for the jack.

Elizabeth Compton was about to protest, but there was something about the way in which the stranger went at the job that indicated that he would probably finish it if he wished to, in spite of any arguments she could advance to the contrary. As he worked she talked with him, discovering not only that he was a rather nice person to look at, but that he was equally nice to talk to.

She could not help but notice that his clothes were rather badly wrinkled and that his shoes were dusty and well worn; for when he kneeled in the street to operate the jack the sole of one shoe was revealed beneath the light of an adjacent arc, and she saw that it was badly worn. Evidently he was a poor young man.

She had observed these things almost unconsciously, and yet they made their impression upon her, so that when he had finished she recalled them, and was emboldened thereby to offer him a bill in payment for his services. He refused, as she had almost expected him to do, for while his clothes and his shoes suggested that he might accept a gratuity, his voice and his manner belied them.

During the operation of changing the wheel the young man had a good opportunity to appraise the face and figure of the girl, both of which he found entirely to his liking, and when finally she started off, after thanking him, he stood upon the curb watching the car until it disappeared from view.

Slowly he drew from his pocket an envelope which had been addressed and stamped for mailing, and very carefully tore it into small bits which he dropped into the gutter. He could not have told had any one asked him what prompted him to the act. A girl had come into his life for an instant, and had gone out again, doubtless forever, and yet in that instant Jimmy Torrance had taken a new grasp upon his self-esteem.

It might have been the girl, and again it might not have been. He could not tell. Possibly it was the simple little act of refusing the tip she had proffered him. It might have been any one of a dozen little different things, or an accumulation of them all, that had brought back a sudden flood of the old self-confidence and optimism.

"To-morrow," said Jimmy as he climbed into his bed, "I am going to land a job."

And he did. In the department store to the general managership of whose mail-order department he had aspired Jimmy secured a position in the hosiery department at ten dollars a week. The department buyer who had interviewed him asked him

what experience he had had with ladies' hosiery.

"About four or five years," replied Jimmy.

"For whom did you work?"

"I was in business for myself," replied the applicant, "both in the West and in the East. I got my first experience in a small town in Nebraska, but I carried on a larger business in the East later."

So they gave Jimmy a trial in a new section of the hosiery department, wherein he was the only male clerk. The buyer had discovered that there was a sufficient proportion of male customers, many of whom displayed evident embarrassment in purchasing hosiery from young ladies, to warrant putting a man clerk in one of the sections for this class of trade.

The fact of the matter was, however, that the astute buyer was never able to determine the wisdom of his plan, since Jimmy's entire time was usually occupied in waiting upon impressionable young ladies. However, inasmuch as it redounded to the profit of the department, the buyer found no fault.

Possibly if Jimmy had been almost any other type of man from what he was, his presence would not have been so flamboyantly noticeable in a hosiery department. His stature, his features, and his bronzed skin, that had lost nothing of its bronze in his month's search for work through the hot summer streets of a big city, were as utterly out of place as would have been the salient characteristics of a chorus-girl in a blacksmith-shop.

For the first week Jimmy was frightfully embarrassed, and to his natural bronze was added an almost continuous flush of mortification from the moment that he entered the department in the morning until he left it at night.

"It is a job, however," he thought, "and ten dollars is better than nothing. I can hang onto it until something better turns up."

With his income now temporarily fixed at the amount of his wages, he was forced to find a less expensive boarding-place, although at the time he had rented his room he had been quite positive that there could not be a cheaper or more undesirable habitat for man. Transportation and other considerations took him to a place on Indiana Avenue near Eighteenth Street, from whence he found he could walk to and from work, thereby saving ten cents a day. "And believe me," he cogitated, "I need the ten."

Jimmy saw little of his fellow roomers. A strange, drab lot he thought them from the occasional glimpses he had had in passings upon the dark stairway and in the gloomy halls. They appeared to be quiet, inoffensive sort of folk, occupied entirely with their own affairs. He had made no friends in the place, not even an acquaintance, nor did he care to. What leisure time he had he devoted to what he now had come to consider as his life work—the answering of blind ads in the Help Wanted columns of one morning and one evening paper—the two mediums which seemed to carry the bulk of such advertising.

For a while he had sought a better position by applying during the noon hour to such places as gave an address close enough to the department store in which he worked to permit him to make the attempt during the forty-five-minute period he was allowed for his lunch.

But he soon discovered that nine-tenths of the positions were filled before he arrived, and that in the few cases where they were not he not only failed of employment, but was usually so delayed that he was late in returning to work after noon.

By replying to blind ads evenings he could take his replies to the two newspaper offices during his lunch hour, thereby losing no great amount of time. Although he never received a reply, he still persisted as he found the attempt held something of a fascination for him, similar probably to that which holds the lottery devotee or the searcher after buried treasure—there was always the chance that he would turn up something big.

And so another month dragged by slowly. His work in the department store disgusted him. It seemed such a silly, futile occupation for a full-grown man, and he was always fearful that the sister or sweetheart or mother of some of his Chicago friends

would find him there behind the counter in the hosiery section.

The store was a large one, including many departments, and Jimmy tried to persuade the hosiery buyer to arrange for his transfer to another department where his work would be more in keeping with his sex and appearance.

He rather fancied the automobile accessories line, but the buyer was perfectly satisfied with Jimmy's sales record, and would do nothing to assist in the change. The university heavyweight champion had reached a point where he loathed but one thing more than he did silk hosiery, and that one thing was himself.

CHAPTER VI.

HAROLD PLAYS THE RAVEN.

MASON COMPTON, president and general manager, sat in his private office in the works of the International Machine Company, chewing upon an unlighted cigar and occasionally running his fingers through his iron-gray hair as he compared and recompared two statements which lay upon the desk before him.

"Damn strange," he muttered as he touched a button beneath the edge of his desk. A boy entered the room. "Ask Mr. Bince if he will be good enough to step in here a moment, please," said Compton; and a moment later, when Harold Bince entered, the older man leaned back in his chair and motioned the other to be seated.

"I can't understand these statements, Harold," said Compton. "Here is one for August of last year and this is this August's statement of costs. We never had a better month in the history of this organization than last month, and yet our profits are not commensurate with the volume of business that we did. That's the reason I sent for these cost statements and have compared them, and I find that our costs have increased out of all proportions to what is warranted. How do you account for it?"

"Principally the increased cost of labor," replied Bince. "The same holds true of everybody else. Every manufacturer in the country is in the same plight we are."

"I know," agreed Compton, "that that is true to some measure. Both labor and raw materials have advanced, but we have advanced our prices correspondingly. In some instances it seems to me that our advance in prices, particularly on our specialties, should have given us even a handsomer profit over the increased cost of production than we formerly received.

"In the last six months since I appointed you assistant manager I am afraid that I have sort of let things get out of my grasp. I have a lot of confidence in you, Harold, and now that you and Elizabeth are engaged I feel even more inclined to let you shoulder the responsibilities that I have carried alone from the inception of this organization. But I've got to be mighty sure that you are going to do at least as well as I did. You have shown a great deal of ability, but you are young and haven't had the advantage of the years of experience that made it possible for me to finally develop a business second to none in this line in the West.

"I never had a son, and after Elizabeth's mother died I have lived in the hope somehow that she would marry the sort of chap who would really take the place of such a son as every man dreams of—some one who will take his place and carry on his work when he is ready to lay aside his tools. I liked your father, Harold. He was one of the best friends that I ever had, and I can tell you now what I couldn't have told you a month ago: that when I employed you and put you in this position it was with the hope that eventually you would fill the place in my business and in my home of the son I never had."

"Do you think Elizabeth guessed what was in your mind?" asked Bince.

"I don't know," replied the older man. "I have tried never to say anything to influence her. Years ago when she was younger we used to talk about it half jokingly, and shortly after you told me of your engagement she remarked to me one day that she was happy, for she knew you were going to be the sort of son I had wanted.

"I haven't anybody on earth but her, Harold, and when I die she gets the business. I have arranged it in my will so that

you two will share and share alike in the profits after I go, but that will be some time. I am far from being an old man, and I am a mighty healthy one. However, I should like to be relieved of the active management. There are lots of things that I have always wanted to do that I couldn't do because I couldn't spare the time from my business.

"And so I want you to get thoroughly into the harness as soon as possible, that I may turn over the entire management to you. But I can't do it, Harold, while the profits are diminishing."

As the older man's gaze fell again to the statements before him the eyes of the younger man narrowed just a trifle as they rested upon Mason Compton, and then as the elder man looked up Bince's expression changed.

"I'll do my best, sir," he said, smiling. "Of course I realize, as you must, that I have tried to learn a great deal in a short time. I think I have reached a point now where I pretty thoroughly grasp the possibilities and requirements of my work, and I am sure that from now on you will note a decided change for the better on the right side of the ledger."

"I am sure of it, my boy," said Compton heartily. "Don't think that I have been finding fault with anything you have done. I just wanted to call your attention to these figures. They mean something, and it's up to you to find out just what they do mean."

And then there came a light tap on the door, which opened immediately before any summons to enter had been given, and Elizabeth Compton entered, followed by another young woman.

"Hello, there!" exclaimed Compton. "What gets us out so early? And Harriet, too! There is only one thing that would bring you girls in here so early."

"And what's that?" asked Elizabeth.

"You are going shopping, and Elizabeth wants some money."

They all laughed.

"You're a regular Sherlock Holmes!" exclaimed Harriet Holden.

"How much?" asked Compton of his daughter, still smiling.

"How much have you?" asked Elizabeth. "I am utterly broke."

Compton turned to Bince. "Get her what she needs, Harold," he said.

The young man started to the door.

"Come with me, Elizabeth," he said; "we will go out to the cashier's cage and get you fixed up."

They entered Bince's office, which adjoined Compton's.

"Wait here a minute, Elizabeth," said Bince. "How much do you want? I'll get it for you and bring it back. I want to see you a moment alone before you go."

She told him how much she wanted, and he was back shortly with the currency.

"Elizabeth," he said, "I don't know whether you have noticed it or not, because your father isn't a man to carry his troubles home, but I believe that he is failing rapidly, largely from overwork. He worries about conditions here which really do not exist. I have been trying to take the load off his shoulders so that he could ease up a bit, but he has got into a rut from which he cannot be guided.

"He will simply have to be lifted completely out of it, or he will stay here and die in the harness. Everything is running splendidly, and now that I have a good grasp of the business I can handle it. Don't you suppose you could persuade him to take a trip? I know that he wants to travel. He has told me so several times, and if he could get away from here this fall and stay away for a year, if possible, it would make a new man of him. I am really very much worried about him, and while I hate to worry you I feel that you are the only person who can influence him and that something ought to be done and done at once."

"Why, Harold," exclaimed the girl, "there is nothing the matter with father! He was never better in his life nor more cheerful."

"That's the side of him that he lets you see," replied the man. "His gaiety is all forced. If you could see him after you leave you would realize that he is on the verge of a nervous breakdown. Your father is not an old man in years, but he has placed a constant surtax on his nervous

system for the last twenty-five years without a let-up, and it doesn't make any difference how good a machine may be it is going to wear out some day, and the better the machine the more complete will be the wreck when the final break occurs."

As he spoke he watched the girl's face, the changing expression of it, which marked her growing mental perturbation.

"You really believe it is as bad as that, Harold?" she asked.

"It may be worse than I think," he said. "It is surely fully as bad."

The girl rose slowly from the chair. "I will try and persuade him to see Dr. Earle."

The man took a step toward her. "I don't believe a doctor is what he needs," he said quickly. "His condition is one that even a nerve specialist might not diagnose correctly. It is only some one in a position like mine, who has an opportunity to observe him almost hourly, day by day, who would realize his condition. I doubt if he has any organic trouble whatever. What he needs is a long rest, entirely free from any thought whatever of business. At least, Elizabeth, it will do him no harm, and it may prolong his life for years. I wouldn't go messing around with any of these medical chaps."

"Well," she said at last, with a sigh, "I will talk to him and see if I can't persuade him to take a trip. He has always wanted to visit Japan and China."

"Just the thing!" exclaimed Bince; "just the thing for him. The long sea voyage will do him a world of good. And now," he said, stepping to her side and putting an arm around her.

She pushed him gently away.

"No," she said; "I do not feel like kissing now," and turning she entered her father's office, followed by Bince.

CHAPTER VII.

JOBLESS AGAIN.

FROM her father's works Elizabeth and Harriet drove to the shopping district, where they strolled through a couple of shops and then stopped at one of the larger stores.

Jimmy Torrance was arranging his stock, fully nine-tenths of which he could have sworn he had just shown an elderly spinster who had taken at least half an hour of his time and then left without making a purchase. His back was toward his counter when his attention was attracted by a feminine voice asking if he was busy. As he turned about he recognized her instantly—the girl for whom he had changed a wheel a month before and who unconsciously had infused new ambition into his blood and saved him, temporarily at least, from becoming a quitter.

He noticed as he waited on her that she seemed to be appraising him very carefully, and at times there was a slightly puzzled expression on her face, but evidently she did not recognize him, and finally when she had concluded her purchases he was disappointed that she paid for them in cash. He had rather hoped that she would have them charged and sent, that he might learn her name and address. And then she left, with Jimmy none the wiser concerning her other than that her first name was Elizabeth and that she was even better-looking than he recalled her to have been.

"And the girl with her!" exclaimed Jimmy mentally. "She was no slouch either. They are the two best-looking girls I have seen in this town, notwithstanding the fact that whether one likes Chicago or not he's got to admit that there are more pretty girls here than in any other city in the country.

"I'm glad she didn't recognize me. Of course, I don't know her, and the chances are that I never shall, but I should hate to have any one recognize me here, or hereafter, as that young man at the stocking-counter. Gad! but it's beastly that a regular life-sized man should be selling stockings to women for a living, or rather for a fraction of a living."

While Jimmy had always been hugely disgusted with his position, the sight of the girl seemed to have suddenly crystallized all those weeks of self-contempt into a sudden almost mad desire to escape what he considered his degrading and effeminating surroundings. One must bear with Jimmy and judge him leniently, for after

all, notwithstanding his college diploma and his physique, he was still but a boy, and so while it is difficult for a mature and sober judgment to countenance his next step, if one can look back a few years to his own youth he can at least find extenuating circumstances surrounding Jimmy's seeming foolishness.

For with a bang that caused startled clerks in all directions to look up from their work he shattered the decorous monotone of the great store by slamming his sales-book viciously upon the counter, and without a word of explanation to his fellow clerks marched out of the section toward the buyer's desk.

"Well, Mr. Torrance," asked that gentleman, "what can I do for you?"

"I am going to quit," announced Jimmy.

"Quit!" exclaimed the buyer. "Why, what's wrong? Isn't everything perfectly satisfactory? You have never complained to me."

"I can't explain," replied Jimmy. "I am going to quit. I am not satisfied. I am going to—er—ah—accept another position."

The buyer raised his eyebrows. "Ah!" he said. "With ——" and he named their closest competitor.

"No," said Jimmy. "I am going to get a regular he-job."

The other smiled. "If an increase in salary," he suggested, "would influence you, I had intended to tell you that I would take care of you beginning next week. I thought of making it fifteen dollars," and with that unanswerable argument for Jimmy's continued service the buyer sat back and folded his hands.

"Nothing stirring," said Jimmy. "I wouldn't sell another sock if you paid me ten thousand dollars a year. I am through."

"Oh, very well," said the buyer aggrievedly, "but if you leave me this way you will be unable to refer to the house."

But nothing, not even a team of oxen, could have held Jimmy in that section another minute, and so he got his pay and left with nothing more in view than a slow death by starvation.

"There," exclaimed Elizabeth Compton, as she sank back on the cushions of her car.

"There what?" asked Harriet.

"I have placed him."

"Whom?"

"That nice-looking young person who waited on us in the hosiery section."

"Oh!" said Harriet. "He was nice-looking, wasn't he? But he looked out of place there, and I think he felt out of place. Did you notice how he flushed when he asked you what size?" and the girls laughed heartily at the recollection. "But where have you ever met him before?" Harriet asked.

"I have never *met* him," corrected Elizabeth, accenting the "met." "He changed a wheel on the roadster several weeks ago one evening after I had taken Harold down to the club. And he was very nice about it. I should say that he is a gentleman, although his clothes were pretty badly worn."

"Yes," said Harriet, "his suit was shabby, but his linen was clean and his coat well brushed."

"My!" exclaimed Elizabeth. "He must have made an impression on some one."

"Well," said Harriet, "it isn't often you see such a nice-looking chap in the hosiery section."

"No," said Elizabeth, "and probably if he were as nice as he looks he wouldn't be there."

Whereupon the subject was changed, and she promptly forgot Mr. Jimmy Torrance. But Jimmy was not destined soon to forget her, for as the jobless days passed and he realized more and more what an ass he had made of himself, and why, he had occasion to think about her a great deal, although never in any sense reproaching her. He realized that the fault was his own, and that he had done a foolish thing in giving up his position because of a girl he did not know and probably never would.

There came a Saturday when Jimmy, jobless and fundless, dreaded his return to the Indiana Avenue rooming-house, where he knew the landlady would be eagerly awaiting him, for he was a week in arrears in his room rent already, and had been warned he could expect no further credit.

"There is a nice young man wanting your room," the landlady had told him, "and I shall have to be having it Saturday night unless you can pay up."

Jimmy stood on the corner of Clark and Van Buren looking at his watch. "I hate to do it," he thought, "but the Lizard said he could get twenty for it, and twenty would give me another two weeks." And so his watch went, and two weeks later his cigarette-case and ring followed. Jimmy had never gone in much for jewelry—a fact which he now greatly lamented.

Some of the clothes he still had were good, though badly in want of pressing, and when, after still further days of fruitless searching for work the proceeds from the articles he had pawned were exhausted, it occurred to him he might raise something on all but what he actually needed to cover his nakedness.

In his search for work he was still wearing his best-looking suit; the others he would dispose of; and with this plan in his mind on his return to his room that night he went to the tiny closet to make a bundle of the things which he would dispose of on the morrow, only to discover that in his absence some one had been there before him, and that there was nothing left for him to sell.

It would be two days before his room rent was again due, but in the mean time Jimmy had no money wherewith to feed the inner man. It was an almost utterly discouraged Jimmy who crawled into his bed to spend a sleepless night of worry and vain regret, the principal object of his regret being that he was not the son of a blacksmith who had taught him how to shoe horses and who at the same time had been too poor to send him to college.

Long since there had been driven into his mind the conviction that for any practical purpose in life a higher education was as useless as the proverbial fifth wheel to the coach.

"And even," mused Jimmy, "if I had graduated at the head of my class, I would be no better off than I am now."

(To be continued NEXT WEEK.)

IT is related that there was once a merchant who bought a great quantity of salmon at a bargain. It was perfectly good salmon, but he could not dispose of it for the reason that it was white in color. Now, there are two kinds of salmon; pink, which is the better known, and white, which is not well known at all. It happens that white salmon is every bit as good as pink salmon; but customers in general did not know that, and in consequence the white salmon did not look good to them and they would not buy.

The merchant was stumped for a while—

he had a large investment in the white salmon, and he had to turn over his money and get it out as quickly as possible in order to prevent loss. But none of his regular advertising seemed to help any. People did not know about white salmon, and they were not going to take a chance.

Finally, at his wits' end, the merchant consulted with an advertising man—a young man of ideas—a man who used his head for something besides a hatrack. The next day the advertising man called on the merchant with a design for a new label for the cans, and copy for a window and newspaper card. This copy was duly acted upon—and in a miraculously short time the shipment of white salmon was all gone, at a good profit. The copy read, in part:

GENUINE WHITE SALMON

Guaranteed Not To Turn Pink!

This has nothing much to do with the yarn about Jenkinson's blue hats, except for the fact that the clever young advertising man mentioned hereinbefore — as the legal documents say—was Cole Wadsworth, and that said Cole Wadsworth greatly desired to add Jenkinson's account to his rapidly growing list.

Old Mr. Jenkinson, the leading hatter of Springport, a thriving young metropolis of about one hundred thousand souls, some policemen, and several revenue agents, gazed morosely at the blue hats in his window. They were nice looking blue hats, of a deep, vivid blue, such as you will find in a popular brand of bluing that is used in washing clothes. The workmanship on the hats was exquisite, and the styles were of the latest. The only thing the matter with the hats was that nobody would buy any of them—and no amount of persuasion, argument, and window display would seem to help.

"I hope the slick salesman who slipped me those lemons is condemned to wander through all eternity in the Arctic regions with nothing on but one of these blue abominations," muttered Jenkinson to himself sadly, as he glared at the blue hats in the window and thought of the numerous blue hats in stock in his storerooms.

It had been a big order. The salesman had assured him that blue hats were going to be all the rage this season—that there would be an unprecedented demand for them. In a moment of aberration Jenkinson had believed him. He had stocked up heavily. It turned out that nobody wanted blue hats in Springport. In all the throng that went by in the busy street, Jenkinson could not discover one dome decorated with a blue kelly—as he put it. Only one blue hat had he sold since he had stocked up on them.

"And probably that poor simp was kicked in the head by a mule when he was a boy and never quite got over it," he remarked wryly.

This was the unpropitious moment that Cole Wadsworth chose to appear on the scene. It was not a good time to solicit an advertising account. It was not even a good time to talk to Jenkinson. In fact, it was not a good time to do anything in Jenkinson's store except buy a blue hat. Jenkinson looked up glumly as the young man entered, full of pep and wreathed in his best professional smile. He nodded at the young man's greeting and regarded him coldly.

"Well, Mr. Jenkinson," smiled the advertising man breezily, "I guess by now you've about decided to give me your advertising account, eh?"

The old man looked at him with disgust —yes, disgust. To talk to him now about spending money on—

"I have not, Wadsworth," he rasped. "I wish you wouldn't bother me about that now. I told you I have no intention of doing any advertising."

"I know you did, Mr. Jenkinson—but better men than you and I have been known to change their minds. And I thought—"

"With what?" put in the hatter nastily.

"Never mind," smiled the young man. "You'll find out that I have something above the ears yet. How's business?"

"Rotten, thank you," returned the leading hatter of Springport.

"Advertising 'll fix that—"

"Advertising, my eye!" put in the hatter testily. "No amount of advertising in the

world will make a man buy a blue hat if he doesn't want to wear a blue hat. Advertising may be of value in suggesting to people that they do that which they have already in mind to do; but when it comes to forcing them to do something that is contrary to their ideas, why, you're just out of luck if you try it, that's all."

"M-m-m; so that's it!" commented Wadsworth dryly. "The blue hats—"

"Yes, the blue hats—damn all salesmen, anyway—and you, too!"

"Got many of them?" asked Wadsworth, nothing daunted.

"Too many—more than enough to feel comfortable about. It was a fool thing to do," he said, suddenly getting confidential. "A fool break; first time I ever pulled such a bonehead play, too. Generally, I'm a mile ahead of the rest of the hatters in this town when it comes to picking winners. I thought I had picked one this time, from what the salesman told me; but I see now that all I picked was a headache and a whopping big bill for merchandise I can't sell. I bet you could make the rounds of every hat-store in town and not be able to buy a blue hat—except here."

He lapsed into a moody silence. It was not so much the money as it was the blow to his pride. He was proud of his ability as a business man, and past performances had proven that he had good reason to be. But now—

"Want to sell them all?" asked the young man.

The other looked at him acidly.

"No—I'd like to keep them here—the color scheme suits my esthetic tastes, y' know. I like these hats too well ever to want to get rid—"

"Oh, all right, all right," interrupted the young man, moving to the door. "I thought you wanted me to help you get rid of them, that's all."

The old man's face lighted up. "Here, wait a minute, you hot-headed young scamp. Can't you take a joke? Do you think you can do it?"

"Sure I can," declared the advertising man confidently, as if the matter could be considered accomplished. Truth to tell, he had not the slightest idea how it was to be done; but that was of no consequence. He thought he could probably find a way.

"Will you give me your account if I do it?"

"My boy, you can write your own ticket if you do it. How do you propose to turn the trick?"

The other shook his head wisely, sagely. "Can't tell you just yet—but I'll be in tomorrow."

II.

EARLY the next morning Wadsworth sauntered into the old man's store.

"Morning," he said genially.

"Morning," replied the old man. "What do you want?"

"You have a mailing list of your customers, haven't you?" queried the advertising man.

"Yes," replied the hatter shortly.

"Let me have it," smiled the young man. "I'm going to sell your darn ultramarine top-pieces—and don't ever let me catch you buying such fool things again, d'ya hear?"

"How're you going to do it?" inquired the old man eagerly; but Wadsworth shook his head.

"Never mind, I'll tell you later. In the meantime—let's see, this is Thursday, isn't it?—get ready for a big rush on your blue hats Saturday. And remember your promise, if I pull it off." No amount of persuasion could induce him to tell his plan, and with the list of customers' names in his pocket he departed.

Saturday morning, almost immediately after he opened, his first customer rushed into the place.

"I want a blue hat," he announced. He got it. Before he had departed another customer came in.

"I want a blue hat," he said. He also got it.

So it went all day—the biggest day he had ever had in his store; and every customer wanted a blue hat and would be satisfied with nothing else.

"By golly, it must be some sort of a disease," commented Jenkinson to himself, discreetly. "To tell the truth, I wouldn't want to be found dead in one of those awful looking things myself."

Nevertheless, he went busily onward, selling blue hats till it hurt—as we used to say during the war. He gazed with a secret and awful amazement at the steady procession of men who wanted blue hats and nothing else. From all walks in life they came—doctors, lawyers, pillars of the church, single men, staid married men, business men. It certainly seemed like the triumph of blue hats over matter.

By five o'clock there wasn't a blue hat in the place, and still they came, demanding blue hats. For a while it even occurred to Jenkinson that perhaps he had better order more of them; but he cast this out of his mind quickly. Once was enough.

At six o'clock, as he was closing the store, Wadsworth hurried in.

"I want a blue hat," he said.

"No can do," grinned Jenkinson. "You young devil, tell me what kind of magic you used. It's certainly remarkable!"

"Get your hat—not a blue one; I want to show you something," directed Wadsworth. Jenkinson put on his hat and locked the doors of the store. As they made their way along the street Wadsworth turned to him with a smile.

"Well, going to live up to your promise?"

"You bet," said the old man. "Draw up an advertising schedule; any man that can do what you did with these blue hats can sell anything. I guess I won't lose any money on you. But you haven't told me yet about how you—"

"Sh-h-h!" grinned Wadsworth. "I'm going to show you in a couple of minutes. Just come with me and learn that there are more things under heaven than are dreamed of in your philosophy of business."

By this time they were at the corner of Main and State Streets, the principal business corner of the city.

"Look!" said Wadsworth, with a wave of his hand; but he did not have to say anything. The old hatter was gazing at the crowd in wonder. It was a mixed crowd—old and young, rich man, working man, all sorts and conditions of servitude, yet the same look was on the face of each one; an expression that showed he was pleased with the world in general and himself in particular. An expression of beatitude, a genial smile, and a keen glance in all directions. Up and down in front of that corner they were walking.

Every one of them had one of Jenkinson's blue hats on his head!

"How in the Lord's name did you do that?" gasped Jenkinson.

Wadsworth drew him into a doorway and took a letter out of his pocket. It was written in a woman's hand, on blue, scented paper.

"I got a couple of girls, whom I swore to secrecy, and had this letter written by hand to every one on your mailing list," said Wadsworth, handing Jenkinson the letter.

A broad smile appeared on the face of the old merchant as he read the letter:

DEAR MR. BLANK:

A mutual friend has spoken of you so often that I feel I would like to know you. I know you will think me indiscreet in taking this means to form our acquaintance, but I am a stranger here and lonely—and I am sure you will not think too harshly of me for being so bold. It is only because I admire you so much, from what has been told me—I know you will understand.

If you care to make my acquaintance I will pass the corner of Main and State Streets at a few moments after six o'clock; I am of average height, slender, blonde, with blue eyes. Please wear a blue hat, so that I may be sure I am making no mistake—you see, I think I will recognize you, but I want to be certain.

YOUR LITTLE FRIEND-TO-BE.

The Seventh Man

Part II

by Max Brand

Author of "Trailin'," "The Guide to Happiness," "Tiger," etc.

A Sequel to "The Untamed" and "The Night Horseman."

PRECEDING CHAPTERS BRIEFLY RETOLD

VIC GREGG has been doing assessment work on a number of claims in the mountains in order to get money to marry Betty Neal, the school-teacher at the town of Alder. After a hard winter's work, with his task nearly completed, he decides to take a week off to see Betty and talk with his friends. Arrived at the town he finds that Betty has agreed, not knowing he was coming, to go to a dance that night with Blondy Hansen. A quarrel ensues, one word leading to another until both are unreasonably angered, and Vic goes to the saloon and starts to drink. Hansen comes in, and not seeing Vic, speaks of the fact that he is going to take Betty to the dance. Vic, in a rage, calls him several names, and Hansen is forced to draw his gun, but Vic being quicker, shoots first and Hansen falls.

Vic takes to the hills, but is wounded by the sheriff, Pete Glass, who is leading the posse in pursuit. He manages to reach the woods, however, but would have been captured but for a stranger, mounted on a black stallion and accompanied by a giant wolf-dog named Bart. The stranger leads the posse astray by a trick. Recovering from a faint Vic finds himself in a cabin attended by a beautiful woman, apparently the wife of the stranger, and a little girl of five or six. He is talking to the latter, trying to find out where he is and who the mysterious people are when he hears the stranger approaching.

CHAPTER VIII.

DISCIPLINE.

A LIGHT step crossed the outer room, with something peculiar in its lightness, as if the heel were not touching the floor, with the effect of the padded fall of the feet of some great cat; there was both softness and the sense of weight. First the wolf-dog pricked his ears and turned toward the door, the pudgy fist closed convulsively over Vic's thumb, and then his rescuer stood in the entrance.

"Hello, partner," called Vic. "I got company, you see. The door blew open and I asked your little girl in."

"I told you not to come here," said the other. Vic felt the child tremble, but there was no burst of excuses. "She didn't want to come," he urged. "I kep' askin' her."

The emotionless eye of "Daddy Dan" held upon Joan. "I told you not to come," he said. Joan swallowed in mute agony, and the wolf-dog slipped to the side of the master and licked his hand as though in dumb intercession. The blood ran coldly in the veins of Gregg, as if he saw a fist raised to strike the little girl.

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

" You go out."

She went swiftly, at that, sidled past her father with her eyes lifted, fascinated, and so out the door where she paused an instant to flash back a wistful appeal. Nothing but silence, and then her feet pattering off into the outer rom.

" Maybe you better go keep her company, Bart," said the father, and at this sign of relenting Vic felt his tensed muscles relaxing; the wolf whined softly and glided through the door.

" You feeling better?"

" Like a hoss off green feed. I been lyin' here drinkin' up the sunshine."

The other stood beside the open window, and there he canted his head, his glance far off and intent.

" D'you hear?" he asked, turning sharply.

There was a fierce eagerness in his face.

" Hear what?"

" It's spring," he murmured, without answering more directly than this, and Vic felt that the other had changed again, grown understandable. Nevertheless, the shock of that sudden alteration at the window kept him watching his host with breathless interest. Whatever it was that the strange fellow heard, a light had gleamed in his eyes for a moment. As he sauntered back toward the bed just a trace of it lingered about him, a hint of sternness.

" Spring?" answered Gregg. " Yep, I smelled spring a few days back, and I started out to find some action. You can see for yourself that I found it, partner." He stirred uneasily, but it was necessary that the story should be told lest it reach the ears of this man from another source. It was one thing to shelter a fugitive from justice whose crime was unknown, perhaps trifling, but it might be quite another story if this gentle, singular man learned that his guest was a new-made murderer. Better that he should learn the tale now and form his prejudices in favor of Gregg. " I'll tell you the whole story," he began.

But the other shrugged his shoulders.

" You leave the story be," he said, and there was something in the quiet firmness of his manner which made it impossible for Vic to continue. " You're here, and you're hurt, and you need a pile of rest. That's about enough story for me."

Vic put himself swiftly in the place of the other. Suppose that he and Betty Neal should have a cabin off in the mountains like this, how would they receive a wounded fugitive from justice? As unquestioningly as this? In a surge of gratitude he looked mistily toward his host.

" Stranger," he said, " you're white. Damned white. That's all. My name's Vic Gregg, and I come from—"

" Thanks," cut in the other. " I'm glad to know your name, but in case anybody might be askin' me I wouldn't care to know where you come from." He smiled. " I'm Dan Barry."

It had to be a left-handed shake on the part of Vic, a thing of which he often thought in the days that followed; but now he sent his memory hunting.

" Seems like I've heard your name before," he murmured. " I dunno where. Were you ever around Alder, Barry?"

" No." His manner suggested that the topic might as well be closed. He reached over and dropped his hand lightly on the forehead of Vic. A tingling current flowed from it into the brain of the wounded man.

" Your blood's still a bit hot," he added. " Lie quiet and don't even think. You're safe here. They ain't a thing goin' to get at you. Not a thing. You'll stay till you get ready to leave. S'-long. I'll see that you get something to eat."

He went out with that unusual, padding step which Vic had noticed before and closed the door softly behind him. In spite of that barrier Gregg could hear the noises from the next room quite clearly, as some one brought in wood and dropped it on a stone hearth, rattling. He fell into a pleasant doze, just stretching his body now and then to enjoy the coolness of the sheets, the delicious sense of being cared for, and the returning strength in his muscles. Through that haze he heard voices, presently, which called him back to wakefulness.

" That ought to be good for him. Take it in, Kate."

" I shall. Dan, what has Joan done?"

"She went in there. I told her to leave him alone."

"But she says he asked her to come in—said he would take the blame."

"I told her not to go."

"Poor baby! She's outside, now, weeping her eyes out on Bart's shoulder, and he's trying to comfort her."

It was purer English than Vic was accustomed to hear, even from his schoolmistress; but more than the words, the voice surprised him—the low, controlled voice of a woman of gentle blood. He turned his head and looked out the window, baffled. Far above, shooting out of sight, went the slope of a mountain, a cliff shining in the slant sun of the afternoon here, a tumbled slide of rocks and débris there, and over the shoulder of this mountain he saw white-headed monsters stepping back in range beyond range.

Why should a girl of refinement choose the isolation of such a place as this for her home? It was not the only strange thing about this household, however, and he would dismiss conjectures until he was once more on his feet.

She was saying: "Won't you speak to her now?"

A little pause. Then: "No, not until evenin'."

"Please, Dan."

"She's got to learn."

A little exclamation of unhappiness and then the door moved open; Vic found himself looking up to the face with the golden hair which he remembered out of his nightmare. She nodded to him cheerily.

"I'm so happy that you're better," she said. "Dan says that the fever is nearly gone."

She then rested a large tray she carried on the foot of the bed, and Vic discovered, to his great content, that it was not hard to meet her eyes. Usually girls embarrassed him, but he recognized so much of Joan in the features of the mother that he felt well acquainted at once.

Motherhood, surely, sat as lightly on her shoulders as fatherhood did on Dan Barry, yet he felt a great pity as he looked at her, this flowerlike beauty lost in the rocks and snow with only one man near her. She was like music played without an audience except senseless things.

"Yep, I'm a lot better," he answered; "but it sure makes me terrible sorry, ma'am, that I got your little girl in trouble. Mostly, it was my fault."

She waved away all need of apology.

"Don't think an instant about that, Mr. Gregg. Joan needs a great deal of disciplining." She laughed a little. "She has so much of her father in her, you see. Now, are you strong enough to lift yourself higher in the pillows?"

They managed it between them, for he was weaker than he thought, and when he was padded into position with cushions, she laid the tray across his knees. His head swam at sight of it. Forty-eight hours of fasting had sharpened his appetite, and the loaded tray whetted a razor edge, for a great bowl of broth steamed forth an exquisite fragrance on one side, and beside it she lifted a napkin to let him peek at a slice of venison steak.

Then there was butter, yellow as the gold for which he had been digging all winter, and real cream for his coffee—a whole pitcher of it—and snowy bread. Best of all, she did not stay to embarrass him with her watching while he ate, since above all things in the world a hungry man hates observation when the board is spread.

Afterward, consuming sleep rippled over him from his feet to his eyes, to his brain. He partially roused when the tray was removed, and the pillows slipped from under his back; but with a vague understanding that expert hands were setting the bed in order, his senses fled once more.

Hours and hours later he opened his eyes in utter darkness with a thin, sweet voice still ringing in his ears. He could not place himself until he turned his head and saw a meager, broken, rectangular line of light which was the door, and immediately afterward the voice cried: "Oh, Daddy Dan! And what did the wolf do then?"

"I'm comin' to that, Joan; but don't you talk about wolves so loud or old Black Bart 'll think you're talkin' about him. See him lookin' at you now?"

"But please go on. I won't say one little word."

The man's voice began again, softly, so that not a word was audible to Gregg; he heard the crackle of burning logs upon the hearth; saw the rectangle of light flicker; caught a faint scent of woodsmoke; and then he slept once more.

CHAPTER IX.

THE LONG ARM OF THE LAW.

FROM the first the wound healed rapidly, for Vic's blood was perfectly pure, the mountain air a tonic which strengthened him, and his food and care of the best. The high-powered rifle-bullet whipped cleanly through his shoulder, breaking no bone and tearing no ligament, and the flesh closed swiftly. Even Vic's mind carried no burden to oppress him in care for the future or regret for the past, for if he occasionally remembered the limp body of Hansen on the floor of Captain Lorrimer's saloon, he could shrug the picture into oblivion.

It had been fair fight, man to man, with all the odds in favor of Blondy, who had been allowed to pull his gun first. If Vic thought about the future at all, it was with a blind confidence that some time, and in some unrevealed way, he would get back to Alder and marry Betty Neal. In the meantime, as the days of the spring went mildly by, he was up and about, and very soon there was only a little stiffness in his right arm to remind him of Pete Glass and the dusty roan.

He spent most of his time close to the cabin, for though he had forgotten the world, there was no decisive proof that the world would forget him half so easily; that was not the way of the sheriff. He had been known to spend years in the hunt for a single misdoer, and Vic had no care to wander out where he might be seen.

Besides, it was very pleasant about the cabin. The house itself was built solidly, roomily, out of logs hewn on the timbered slopes above and dragged down to this little plateau. Three mountains, to the north, south, and west, rolled back and up, cutting away the sunlight in the early afternoon; but at this point the quick slopes put out shoulders and made, among them, a comfortable bit of rolling ground, deep soiled and fertile.

Here, so Kate Barry assured him, the wild flowers came even earlier than they did in the valley so far below them, and to be sure when Vic first walked from the house he found the meadow aflame with color except for the space covered by the truck-garden and the corral. In that enclosure he found Grey Molly fenced away from the black with several other horses of commoner blood, for the stallion, he learned, recognized no fraternity of horseflesh, but killed what he could reach. Grey Molly was quite recovered from her long run, and she greeted him in her familiar way, with ears flattened viciously.

He might have stayed on here quite happily for any space of time, but more and more Vic felt that he was an intruder; he sensed it, rather than received a hint of word or eye. In the first place the three were complete in themselves, a triangle of happiness without need of another member for variety or interest.

It was plain at a glance that the girl was whole-heartedly happy, and whatever incongruity lay between her and these rough mountains he began to understand that her love for Barry and the child made ample amends. As for the other two, he always thought of them in the same instant, for if the child had her eyes and her hair from her mother, she had her nature from the man.

They were together constantly—on walks up the mountain, when she rode Black Bart up the steep places; on dips into the valley, when he carried her before him on the stallion. She had the same soft voice, the same quick, furtive ways, the same soundless laughter, at times; and when Barry sat in the evening, as he often did for hours, staring at empty air, she would climb on his knee, place his unresisting arm around her, and lie looking up into his face, sharing his silences.

Sometimes Vic wondered if the young mother were not troubled, made a little jealous by this perfect companionship; but he never found a trace of it. It was she, finally, who made him determine to leave

as soon as his shoulder muscles moved with perfect freedom, for as the days slipped past he felt that she grew more and more uneasy, and her eyes had a way of going from him to her husband as though she believed their guest a constant danger to Barry. Indeed, to some small extent he *was* a danger, for the law might deal hardly with a man who took a fugitive out of the very grip of its hand.

By a rather ironical chance, on the very morning when he decided that he must start his journey the next day but one, Vic learned that he must not linger even so long as that. Pete Glass and the law had not forgotten him, indeed, nearly so well as he had forgotten the law and Pete Glass, for as he sat in his room filling a pipe after breakfast, the voice of Barry called him out, and he found his host among the rocks which rimmed the southern end of the plateau, in front of the house.

To the north the ground fell away smoothly, rolled down to the side of the mountain, and then dipped easily to the valley—the only direction from which the cabin was accessible, though here the grade was possible for a buckboard. To the south the plateau ended in a drop that angled sharply down, almost a cliff in places, and from this point of vantage the eye carried nameless miles down the river.

"Are them friends of yours?" asked Dan Barry, as he stood among these rocks. "Take a long look." And he handed a strong pair of field-glasses to Gregg.

The latter peered over the dizzy edge. Down there, in the very act of fording the river to get to their side of it, he marked five horsemen — no, six, for he almost missed the leader of the troop, a dusty figure which melted into the background. All the terror of the first flight rushed back on Vic Gregg. He stood palsied, not in fear of that posse, but at the very thought of pursuit.

"There's only one way," he stammered at length. "I'll—Dan, give me a hand to get a saddle on Grey Molly and I'll laugh at 'em yet. Damn 'em!"

"What you goin' to do?" It was the same unhurried voice which had spoken to Vic on the day of the rescue, and it irritated him in the same manner now. Kate had come running from the house with her apron fluttering.

"I'm going down that slope to the north," said Vic, "and I'll get by 'em hell-bent-for-election. Once I show my heels to that lot they're done!"

He talked as much to restore his courage as from confidence, for if the posse sighted him going down that slope on the grey it would take a super-horseman and a super-horse to escape before they closed the gap. Barry considered the situation with a new gleam in his eye.

"Wait a minute," he said, as Vic started toward the corral. "That way you got planned is a good way—to die. You listen to me."

But here Kate broke in on them. "Dan, what are you going to do?"

"I'm going to take the grey and go down the slope. I'm going to lead 'em off Vic's trail," said Barry quietly; but it seemed to Vic that he avoided his wife's eye.

The voice of Betty Neal, Vic knew, would have risen shrill at a time like this. Kate spoke even more low than usual, but there was a thing in her voice that struck a tremor through Gregg. "If it's death for him, what is it for you?"

"Nothing at all. If they see me and head for me before the way's clear, I'll let 'em come up and see they have the wrong man. If I get the chance, I'll lead 'em away. And Vic, you'll hit between those two mountains—see 'em?—and cut across country. No hoss could carry you there, except Satan, and you couldn't ride him. You'll have to go on foot; but they'll never look for you on that side. When you get to the easy goin', down in the valley, buy a hoss and hit for the railroad."

Kate turned on Vic, trembling.

"Are you going to let him do it?" she asked. "Are you going to let him do it again?"

He had seen a certain promise of escape held before him the moment before, but pride made him throw that certainty away.

"Not in a million years," he answered. "I—"

"You'll do what I say, and you'll start now. I got a better idea than that. If you

head just over the side of that north mountain you'll find a path that a hoss can follow. It won't take you clear away from them down below; but there ain't a chance in ten that they'll come that way. Take my old brown hoss with the white face. He'll carry you safe."

Vic hesitated. The fierce eyes of Kate were on him, and with all his soul he wanted to play the man; but liberty was sweet —sweeter than ever to Vic She seemed to give him up as he stood there with his heart in his throat; she turned back to Barry.

"Dan!" she pleaded.

She had not touched him, but he made a vague gesture as though brushing away a restraining hand. She cried: "If you come close to them—if they start shooting—you might want to fight back—"

"They shot before," he answered, "and I didn't fire once."

"But the second time, Dan? There may be danger."

To be sure, there would be danger in it; but as Barry himself had said, if the way was closed to him he could surrender to them, and they could not harm him. Vic tried in vain to understand this overmastering terror in the girl, for she seemed more afraid of what Dan might do to the posse than what the posse might do to Dan.

"This ain't a day for fightin'," said Dan, and he waved toward the mountains. It was one of those misty spring days when the sun raises a vapor from the earth and the clouds blow low around the upper peaks; every ravine was poured full of blue shadow, and even high up the slopes, where patches of snow had melted, grass glimmered, a tender green among the white. "This ain't a day for fighting," he repeated.

A shrill, quavering neigh, like the whinny of a galloping horse, rang from beyond the house, and Vic saw the black stallion racing up and down his corral. Back and forth he wove, then raced straight for the bars, flashed above them, and stood free beyond, with the sunshine trembling on him. He seemed to pause, wondering what to do with his new freedom, then he came at a loose gallop for the master. Not Satan alone, for now Black Bart slid across the plateau like a shadow, weaving among the boulders, and came straight toward Barry. Vic himself felt a change—a sort of uneasy happiness; he breathed it with the air. The very sunlight was electric. He saw Kate run close to Barry.

"If you go this time you'll never come back, Dan!"

The black stallion swung up beside them, and as he halted his hoofs knocked a rattling spray of pebbles ahead. On the other side of the woman and the man the wolf-dog ran uneasily here and there, trying to watch the face of the master which Kate obscured.

"I ain't goin' far. I just want to get a hoss runnin' under me enough to cut a wind."

"Even Satan and Bart feel what I feel. They came without being called. They never do that unless there's danger ahead. What can I do to convince you? Dan, you'll drive me mad!"

He made no answer, and if the girl wished him to stay, now seemed the time for persuasion; but she gave up the argument suddenly. She turned away, and Vic saw in her face the same desperate, helpless look as that of a boy who cannot swim beyond his depth in the river. There was no sign of tears; they might come afterward.

What had come over them? This desperation in Kate, this touch of anxiety in the very horse and the wolf-dog? Vic forgot his own danger while he stared, and it seemed to him that the spark of change had come from Barry. There was something in his eyes which Vic found hard to meet.

"The moment you came I knew you brought bad luck with you!" cried Kate. "He brought you in bleeding. He saved you, and came in with blood on his hands, and I guessed at the end. Oh, I wish you—"

"Kate!" broke in Barry.

She dropped upon one of the stones and buried her face in her hands, and Dan paid no more attention to her.

"Hurry up," he said. "They're across the river."

And Vic gave up the struggle, for the tears of Kate made him think of Betty Neal, and he followed Dan toward the cor-

ral. Around them the stallion ran like a hunting dog eager to be off.

CHAPTER X.

ONE TRAIL ENDS.

"I'LL keep Grey Molly for you, Vic," said Barry, when they sat their horses outside the corral. "I'll keep her like she was Satan."

Gregg looked her over sadly. There had been no pitch in her when Barry swung into the saddle, and that was a thing without precedent in Molly's history; moreover, she stood perfectly still now, with none of her usual cat-like side-steps and throwing of the head. Altogether he felt that her new rider had the mare in hand more perfectly than ever he had done, and he was troubled even as he would have been at the sight of Betty Neal in the arms of another man; it was desertion, fickleness.

"Dan," he said hoarsely, "I know what you've done for me, and I know what you're doin' now." He took the slender hand of the other in his own big paw. "If the time comes when I can pay you back, so help me God—"

"Oaths don't do no good," cut in Barry without a trace of emotion. He added frankly: "It ain't altogether for your sake. Those gents down there have played tag once with me, and now I'd like to play tag with them. Molly's fresh to-day."

He was already loking over his shoulder while he spoke, as if his mind were even then at work upon the posse.

"S'-long."

"S'-long, partner. Good luck."

So they parted, and Vic, jogging slowly up the steep path, saw Grey Molly wheeled and sent at a sweeping gallop over the meadow. His heart leaped jealously—and the next moment went out in a flood of gratitude, admiration, as Barry swung off the shoulder of the mountain, waved his hat toward Kate, and dipped at once out of sight.

The shelving ground along which Barry rode sometimes was a broad surface like a spacious, graded road; again it shelved away and opened a view of all the valley. When he reached the first of these places the rider looked back and down and saw the posse skirting rapidly on his side of the river, behind him and close to the cliff.

They rode at an easy lope, and he could see that their heads were bent to watch the ground before them narrowly. Even at this casual gait they would reach the point at which he and the grey must swing onto the floor of the valley with or before him unless he urged Molly to top speed. He must get there at a sufficient distance from them to escape close rifle fire, and certainly beyond pointblank revolver range; accordingly he raised a little, throwing his weight more into the stirrups and over the withers of the mare. This brought greater poundage on her forehead and made her apt to stumble or actually miss her step; but it increased her running power.

The gathering of the reins, the touch of his hand on her neck, the soft warning of his voice, sent Grey Molly out at full speed. Now she floundered as her foot struck a loose stone, now she veered sharply and wide to escape a boulder, now she cleared a gulley with a long leap, and riding high as he was, bent forward out of balance to escape observation from below, it was only a miracle of horsemanship that kept him in the saddle; yet he jockeyed her along with as perfect ease and precision as if she were straining against time on a smooth race-track. He poised himself with such certainty in the stirrups that Grey Molly seemed to be carrying no weight, but only a clinging intelligence that sent her on to stronger efforts.

At this speed he was sure to reach the valley safely in front unless the posse caught sight of him on the way and gave chase, and Barry counted on that instinct in hunting men which makes them keep their eyes low—the same sense which leads a searcher to look first under the bed and last of all at the wall and ceiling. Once more, as he neared his goal, he looked back and down, and there came the six horsemen, their quirts swinging, their hat-brims blown straight up as they raced at full speed. They had seen the grey and they rode for blood.

The outstretched neck of Grey Molly,

her flattened ears, the rapid clangor of her hoofs on the rocks, seemed to indicate that she already was doing her uttermost, and if Vic Gregg had been in the saddle he would have let her go on without urging in spite of the danger that galloped toward them along the valley floor. Even now their pace endangered the neck of the rider at every stride, but after that glimpse of the pursuit a change came in Barry.

He crouched a little lower over the pommel, his hand was on the reins just behind her head, his voice was near her, speaking softly, quickly, and she responded as a stout-hearted thoroughbred answers a challenge from the rear in the homestretch.

The path wound in leisurely curves, now, but there was a straight cut down a slide of gravel, a dangerous slope even in firm ground, a terrible angle with those loose pebbles underfoot, and the certainty of death, it seemed, to take the slide at a gallop. Yet this was a time for chance taking, or else that race of Molly's would go for nothing. Swiftly the posse closed, and already the dusty man on the roan rode with his revolver balanced for the snap shot. The next instant his gun swung down, he actually reined up in astonishment; for the fugitive had flung himself far back against the cantle and sent Grey Molly at the slide. It was not a mater of running as the mare shot over the brink.

It was only a question of keeping her feet, and Molly sat back on her haunches, braced her forelegs, and went down like an avalanche. Over the rush and roar of the pebbles, over the yell of wonder from the pursuers, she heard the voice of her rider, a clear and steady voice, and the tautened reins telegraphed to her bewildered mind the wish of the man.

She struck the level with stunning force, toppled, nearly fell, and then straightened along her course in a staggering gallop. Started from its nice balance by the rush of stones they loosened, a ten-ton rock came toppling after, leaped up from the valley floor like a live thing, and then thundered away toward the river.

Grey Molly, finding her legs once more, began to stretch into full speed. She had drawn away from these same horses on that race out of Murphy's Pass; she had done that under the crushing impost of Gregg's weight, and with this lighter rider who clung like a part of her, who gave perfectly to the rhythm of her gallop, she fairly walked away from the posse. Once, twice and again, the gun spoke from the hand of Pete Glass; but it was the taking of a long last chance rather than a sign of closing on his chase. In ten minutes Grey Molly dipped out of sight among the hills.

There were patches of firm sand and grassy spots where the hoof prints showed clearly; but again came stretches of slaty rock which showed not a mark, or beds of gravel where old and new trails inextricably tangled. Barry took faultless advantage of all these natural aids, and as soon as he was once fairly out of view he struck a winding course which doubled back and forth among the hills like an enormous lariat flung heedlessly on the ground.

Sometimes he rode straight ahead; sometimes he shot off at right angles from his main course; sometimes he even doubled back; and every time he altered his course it was in a patch of country where the trail faded almost out of view. Consequently the posse had to stop a dozen times in the first five miles to cut for trail, spreading in a loose line and riding in circles from the point where the sign went out.

From several points of vantage Barry looked back and watched them, smiling to himself. In ordinary country his tactics would not have troubled so expert a trailer as Pete Glass, who read a sign as another might read a printed page; but this region was enough to baffle the eye of an eagle and the nose of a bloodhound.

After the first hour Barry could have cut away cross country with little fear of discovery from the sheriff, but he seemed in no hurry to escape. Sometimes he dismounted and looked to his cinches and talked to the horse. Grey Molly listened with pricking ears and often canted her head to one side as though she strove to understand the game.

A game it was, as he had said to Vic when they parted, with the rather essential difference that in this pastime one was tagged with a forty-five caliber chunk of

lead and was quite apt to remain " it " for the remainder of eternity. Yet as that game went on Barry dropped further and further back toward the posse, much as the fastest runner in the schoolyard loiters just out of reach of his pursuers, racing by fits and starts. The danger fascinated him, like the cliff which tempts the climber to leap into space. He began to grow flushed; a peculiar yellow gleam altered his brown eyes; and now he insisted on coming back into view of the others time and again.

Once he whistled high and shrill as a hawk's scream from the top of a bluff while the posse labored through a ravine below. He saw the guns flash out, and waited; he heard the sing of the bullets around him, and the spatter of lead on a solid rock-face just beneath him; he listened till the deep echoes spoke from the gulch, and then waved his hat and disappeared, climbing back into the saddle.

This was almost defeating the purpose of his play, for if he came that close again they would probably make out that he was by no means the figure of Vic Gregg. Accordingly, since he had now drawn them well away from Vic's line of escape, and since the evening lay not far off, he turned his back reluctantly on the posse and struck straight across the hills.

He kept on for the better part of an hour before he doubled and swung back in a wide circle toward his cabin; he had laid out a course which the wise sheriff could follow until dark and be none the wiser; and if Pete Glass were the finest trailer who ever studied sign he would never be able to read the tokens of the return ride. Accordingly, with all this well in mind, he brought Grey Molly to a full halt and gazed around, utterly stunned by surprise, when, half-way up the valley, a rifle spoke small but sharp from one side, and a bullet clipped the rocks not the length of the horse away. Another shot rang before he understood. When he cut straight away across the country he had indeed left a baffling trail, a trail so dim, in fact, that Pete Glass had wisely given it up and taken the long chance by cutting back to the point from which the hunt began. So their paths crossed.

Barry spoke sharply to the mare and loosed the reins, but she started into a full gallop too late. There came a brief hum, a thudding blow, and Grey Molly pitched forward, head over heels. The sound of the third shot reached them as she lay sprawling.

CHAPTER XI.

A NEW TRAIL BEGINS.

IF he had been an ordinary rider, sitting heavily far back in the saddle, at the end of a long ride, Barry would either have been flung clear and smashed horribly against the rocks, or, more likely, he would have been entangled in the stirrups and crushed to death instantly by the weight of his horse; but he rode always lightly poised and when the mare pitched forward his feet were already clear of the stirrups. He landed, catlike, on hands and feet, unhurt.

It had been a long shot, a lucky hit even for a marksman of the sheriff's caliber, and now the six horsemen streamed over a distant hilltop and swept into the valley to take their quarry dead, or half dead, from his fall. However, that approaching danger was nothing in the eye of Barry. He ran to the fallen mare and caught her head in his arms. She ceased her struggles to rise as soon as he touched her and whinnied softly. The left foreleg lay twisted horribly beneath her, broken. Grey Molly had run her last race, and as Barry kneeled, holding the brave head close to him, he groaned, and looked away from her eyes. It was only an instant of weakness, and when he turned to her again he was drawing his gun from its holster.

Her chin was on his shoulder; the quiver of pain in her nostrils ended as he spoke; and while the fingers of his left hand trailed caressingly across her forehead, his right carried the muzzle to her temple.

" Brave Molly, good girl," he whispered, " they'll pay for you a death for a death and a man for a hoss—" The yellow which had glinted in his eyes during the run was a fire now. " It ain't far; only a step to go; and then you'll be where they ain't any saddles, nor any spurs to gall you,

Molly; but just pastures that's green all year, and nothin' to do but loaf in the sun and smell the wind. Here's good luck to you, girl."

His gun spoke sharp and short, and he laid the limp head reverently on the ground.

It had all happened in very few seconds, and the posse was riding through the river, still a long shot off, when Barry drew his rifle from its case on the saddle. Moreover, the failing light which had made the sheriff's hit so much a matter of luck, was now still dimmer, yet Barry snapped his gun to the shoulder and fired the instant the butt lay in the groove. For another moment nothing changed in the appearance of the riders, then a man leaned out of his saddle and fell full length in the water.

Around him his companions floundered, lifted and placed him on the bank, and then threw themselves from their horses to take shelter behind the first rocks they could find; they had no wish to take chances with a man who could snap-shoot like this in such a light, at such a distance. By the time they were in position their quarry had slipped out of sight and they had only the blackening boulders for targets.

"God A'mighty!" cried Ronicky Joe, "are you goin' to let that murderin' hound-dog get clear off, Pete? Boys, who's with me for a run at him?"

For it was Harry Fisher who had fallen and lay now on the wet bank with his arms flung wide and a red spot rimmed with purple in the center of his forehead; and Fisher was Ronicky Joe's partner.

"You lay where you are," commanded the sheriff, and indeed there had been no rousing response to Ronicky Joe's appeal.

"You yaller quitters," groaned Joe. "Give me a square chance and I'll tackle Vic Gregg alone day or night, on hoss or on foot. Are we five goin' to lay down to him?"

"If that was Vic Gregg," answered the sheriff, slipping over the insult with perfect calm, "I wouldn't of told you to scatter for cover; but that ain't Vic."

"Pete, what in hell are you drivin' at?"

"I say it ain't Vic," said the sheriff. "Vic is a good man with a hoss and a good man with a gun; but he couldn't never ride like the gent over there in the rocks, and he couldn't shoot like him."

He pointed, in confirmation, at the body of Harry Fisher.

"You can rush that hill if you want, but speakin' personal, I ain't ready to die."

A thoughtful silence held the others until Silver Waldron broke it with his deep bass. "You ain't far off, Pete. I done some thinkin' along them lines when I seen him standin' up there over the arroyo wavin' his hat at the bullets. Vic didn't never have the guts for that."

All the lower valley was gray—dark in comparison with the bright peaks above it, before the sheriff rose from his place and led the posse toward the body of Grey Molly. There they found as much confirmation of Pete's theory as they needed, for Vic's silver-mounted saddle was known to all of them, and this was a plain affair which they found on the dead horse. Waldron pushed back his hat to scratch his head.

"Look at them eyes, boys," he suggested. "Molly has been beatin' us all day, and she looks like she's fightin' us still."

The sheriff was not a man of very many words, and surely of little sentiment; perhaps it was the heat of the long chase which now made him take off his hat so that the air could reach his sweaty forehead.

"Gents," he said, "she lived game and she died game. But they ain't no use of wastin' that saddle. Take it off."

And that was Grey Molly's epitaph.

They decided to head straight back for the nearest town with the body of Harry Fisher, and, fagged by the desperate riding of that day, they let their horses go with loose rein, at a walk. Darkness gathered; the last light faded from even the highest peaks; the last tinge of color dropped out of the sky as they climbed from the valley. Now and then one of the horses cleared its nostrils with a snort, but on the whole they went in perfect silence with the short grass silencing the hoofbeats, and never a word passed from man to man.

Beyond doubt, if it had not been for that same silence, if it had not been for the slowness with which they drifted through the dark, what follows could never have

happened. They had crossed a hill, and descended into a very narrow ravine which came to so sharp a point that the horses had to be strung out in single file. The ravine twisted to the right, and then the last men of the procession heard the sheriff call: "Halt, there! Up with your hands, or I'll drill you!" When they swung from side to side, craning their heads to look, they made out a shadowy horseman facing Pete head on. Then the sheriff's voice again: "Gregg, I'm considerable glad to meet up with you."

If that meeting had taken place in any other spot probably Gregg would have taken his chance on escaping through the night, but in this narrow pass he could swing to neither side, and before he could turn the brown horse entirely around the sheriff might pump him full of lead. They gathered in a solemn quiet around him; the irons were already upon his wrists.

"All right, boys," he said, "you've got me, but you'll have to give in that you had all the luck."

A moment after that sharp command in the familiar, dreaded voice of Pete Glass, Vic had been glad that the long flight was over. Eventually this was bound to come. He would go back and face the law, and three men lived to swear that Blondy had gone after his gun first.

"Maybe luck," said the sheriff. "How d'you come back this way?"

"Made a plumb circle," chuckled Gregg. "Rode like a fool not carin' where I hit out for, and the end of it was that it was dark before I'd had sense to watch where the sun went down."

"Kind of cheerful, ain't you?" cut in Ronicky Joe, and his voice was as dry as the crisping leaves in an autumn wind.

"They ain't any call for me to wear crape yet," answered Gregg. "Worst fool thing I ever done was to cut and run for it. The old captain will tell you gents that Blondy went for his gun first—had it clean out of the leather before I touched mine."

He paused, and the silence of those dark figures sank in upon him.

"I got to warn you," said Pete Glass, "that what you say now can be sed ag'in' you later on before the jury."

"My God boys!" burst out Vic. "D'you think I'm a plain, low-down, murderin' snake? Harry, ain't you got a word for me? Are you like the rest of 'em?"

No voice answered.

"Harry," said Ronicky, "why don't you speak to him?"

It was a brutal thing to do, but Ronicky was never a gentle sort in his best moments; he scratched a match and held it so that under the spluttering light Gregg found himself staring into the dead face of Harry Fisher. And he could not turn his eyes away until the match burned down to Ronicky's finger-tip and then dropped in a streak of red to the ground.

Then the sheriff spoke, cold and hard.

"Partner," he said, "in the old days, maybe your line of talk would do some good, but not now. You picked that fight with Blondy. You knew you was faster on the draw, and Hansen didn't have a chance. He was the worst shot in Alder and everybody in Alder knew it. You picked that fight and you killed your man, and—you're goin' to hang for it."

Another hush; no murmur of assent or dissent.

"But they's one way out for you, Gregg, and I'm layin' it clear. We wanted you bad, and we got you; but they's another man we want a lot worse. A pile! Gregg, take me where I can find the gent what done for Harry Fisher and you'll never stand up in front of a jury. You got my word on that."

CHAPTER XII.

THE CRISIS.

THOSE mountains above the Barry cabin were, as he told Vic Gregg, inaccessible to men on horseback except by one path, yet there was a single class of travelers who roamed at will through far more difficult ground than this. Speaking in general, where a man can go a burro can go, and where a burro can go he usually manages to carry his pack.

He crawls up a ragged down-pitch of rocks that comes dangerously close to the perpendicular; he walks securely along a

crumbling ledge with half his body over a thousand yards of emptiness. Therefore the prospectors with their burros have combed the worst mountains of the West and it was hardly a surprise to Kate Barry when she saw two men come down the steepest slope above the cabin with two little pack-animals scrambling and sliding before them.

It was still some time before nightfall, but the sun had dropped out of sight fully an hour ago, and now the western mountains were blackening against a sky whose thin, clear blue grew yellow toward evening.

Against that dark mass of the mountain-side she could not make out the two travelers clearly, so she shaded her eyes and peered up, high up. The slope was so sheer that if one of the four figures lost footing it would come crashing to her very feet. When they saw her and shouted down the sound fell as clearly as if they had called from the cabin, yet they had a good half-hour's labor between that greeting and the moment they came out on the level before Kate.

From the instant they called she had remained in motionless, deep thought, and when they came now into full view, she cried out joyously, "Buck, oh, Buck!" and ran toward them. Even the burros stopped, and the men stood statuelike; it is rarely enough that one finds a human being in those mountains, almost an act of Providence that leads to a house, and a miracle when the trail crosses the path of a friend. The prospectors came out of their daze with a shout and rushed to meet her. Each of them had her by a hand, wringing it; they talked all together in a storm of words.

"Kate, I'm dreamin'! Dear old Buck! Have you forgotten me? Lee Haines! I should say not. Don't pay any attention to him. Five years. And I've been hungerin' to see you all that. Where have you been? Everywhere! But this is the best thing I've seen. Come in. Wait till we get these packs off the poor little devils. Oh, I'm so glad to see you; so glad! Hurry up, Lee. Your fingers asleep? How long have you been out? Five months. Then you're hungry. We've just ate. But a piece of pie? Pie? I've been dreamin' of pie!"

A fire already burned in the big living-room of the cabin, for at this season, at such an altitude, the shadows were always cold, and around the fire they gathered, each of the men with half of a huge pie before him.

They were such as one might expect that mountain region to produce — big, gaunt, hard-muscled. They had gone unshaven for so long that their faces were clothed not with an unsightly stubble, but with strong, short beard that gave them a certain grim dignity and made their eyes seem sunken. They were opposite types, which is usually the case when two men strike out together.

Buck Daniels was black-haired, with an ugly, shrewd face and a suggestion of rather dangerous possibilities of swift action; but Lee Haines was a great bulk of a man, with tawny beard, handsome, in a leonine fashion, more poised than Daniels, fitted to crush. The sharp glance of Buck flitted here and there; in ten seconds he knew everything in the room; the steady blue eye of Lee Haines went leisurely from place to place and lingered; but both of them stared at Kate as if they could not have enough of her.

They talked without pause while they ate. A stranger in the room would have sealed their lips in utter taciturnity, but here they sat with a friend, five months of loneliness and labor behind them, and they gossiped like girls.

Into the jangle of talk cut a thin, small voice from outside, a burst of laughter. Then, "Bart, you *silly* dog!" And Joan stood at the open door with her hand buried in the mane of the wolf-dog. The fork of Buck Daniels stopped half-way to his lips and Lee Haines straightened until the chair groaned.

They spoke together, hushed voices, "Kate!"

"Come here, Joan!" Her face glistened with pride, and Joan came forward with wide eyes, tugging Black Bart along in a reluctant progress.

"It ain't possible!" whispered Buck Daniels. "Honey, come here and shake hands with your Uncle Buck." The gesture called forth deep-throated warning

from Bart, and he caught back his hand with a start.

"It's always that way," said Kate, half amused, half vexed. "Bart won't let a soul touch her when Dan isn't home. Good old Bart, go away, you foolish dog! Don't you see these are friends?"

He cringed a little under the shadow of the hand which waved him off, but his only answer was a silent baring of the teeth.

"You see how it is? I'm almost afraid to touch her myself when Dan's away; she and Bart bully me all day long."

In the mean time the glance of Joan had cloyed itself with a sufficient examination of the strangers, and now she turned back toward the door and the meadow beyond.

"Bart!" she called softly. The sharp ears of the dog quivered; he came to attention with a start. "Look! Get it for me!"

One loud scraping of his claws on the floor as he started, and Black Bart went like a bolt through the door with Joan scrambling after him, screaming with excitement; from the outside they heard the cry of a frightened squirrel, and then its angry chattering from a place of safety up a tree.

"Shall I call her back again?" asked Kate.

"Not if Bart comes with her," answered Lee Haines. "I've seen enough of him to last me a while."

"Well, we'll have her to ourselves when Dan comes; of course Bart leaves her to tag around after Dan."

"When is he comin' back?" asked Buck with polite interest.

"Any time. I don't know. But he's always here before it's completely dark."

The glance of Buck Daniels flicked over to Lee Haines, exchanged meanings with him, and came back to Kate.

"Terribly sorry," he said, "but I s'pose we'll have to be on our way before it's plumb dark."

"Go so soon as that? Why, I won't let you."

"I—" began Haines, fumbling for words.

"We got to get down in the valley before it's dark," filled in Buck.

Suddenly she laughed, frankly, happily.

"I know what you mean, but Dan is changed; he isn't the same man he used to be."

"Yes?" queried Buck without conviction.

"You'll have to see him to believe; Buck, he doesn't even whistle any more."

"What?"

"Only goes about singing now."

The two men exchanged glances of such astonishment that Kate could not help but notice and flush a little.

"Well," murmured Buck, "Bart doesn't seem to have changed much from the old days."

She laughed slowly, letting her mind run back through such happiness as they could not understand, and when she looked up she seemed to debate whether or not it would be worth while to let them in on the delightful secret. The moment she dwelt on the burning logs they gazed at her and then to each other with utter amazement, as if they sat in the same room with the dead come to life. No care of motherhood had marked her face, but on the white, even forehead was a sign of peace; and drifting over her hands and on the white apron across her lap the firelight pooled dim gold, the wealth of contentment.

"If you'd been here to-day you would have seen how changed he is. We had a man with us whom Dan had taken while he was running from a posse, wounded, and kept him here until he was well, and—"

"That's Dan," murmured Lee Haines. "He's gold all through when a man's in trouble."

"Shut up, Lee," cut in Buck. He sat far forward in his chair, drinking up her story. "Go on."

"This morning we saw the same posse skirting through the valley and knew that they were on the old trail. Dan sent Gregg over the hills and rode Vic's horse down so that the posse would mistake him, and he could lead them out of the way. I was afraid, terribly. I was afraid that if the posse got close and began shooting Dan would—"

She stopped; her eyes begged them to understand.

"Go on," said Lee Haines, shuddering slightly. "I know what you mean."

"But I watched him ride down the slope," she cried joyously, "and I saw the posse close on him—almost on top of him when he reached the valley. I saw the flash of their guns. I saw them shoot. I wasn't afraid that Dan would be hurt, for he seems to wear a charm against bullets—I wasn't much afraid of that, but I dreaded to see him turn and go back through that posse like a storm. But"—she caught both hands to her breast and her bright face tilted up—"even when the bullets must have been whistling around him he didn't look back. He rode straight on and on, and out of view, and I knew"—her voice broke with emotion—"oh, Buck, I knew that he had won, and I had won; that he was safe forever; that there was no danger of him ever slipping back into that terrible other self; I knew that I'd never again have to dream of that whistling in the wind; I knew that he was ours—Joan's and mine—"

"By God," broke out Buck, "I'm happier than if you'd found a gold mine, Kate! It don't seem no ways possible—but if you seen that with your own eyes, it's true."

"I've been almost afraid to be happy all these years," she said, "but now I want to sing and cry at the same time. My heart is so full that it's overflowing, Buck."

She brushed the tears away and smiled at them.

"Tell me all about yourselves. Everything. You first, Lee. You've been longer away."

He did not answer for a moment, but sat with his head fallen, watching her thoughtfully. Women had been the special curse in Lee Haines's life; they had driven him to the crime that sent him West into outlawry long years before; through women, as he himself forebode, he would come at last to some sordid, petty end; but here sat the only one he had loved without question, without regret, purely and deeply, and as he watched her, more beautiful than she had been in her girlhood, it seemed, as he heard the fitful laughter of Joan outside, the old sorrow came storming up in him, and the sense of loss.

"What have I been doing?" he murmured at length. He shrugged away his last thoughts. "I drifted about for a while after the pardon came down from the governor. People knew me, you see, and what they knew about me didn't please them. Even to-day Jim Silent and Jim Silent's crew isn't forgotten. Then—don't look at me like that, Kate; no, I played straight all the time—then I ran into Buck, and he and I had tried each other out; we had at least one thing in common"—here he looked at Buck and they both flushed—"and we made a partnership of it. We've been together five years now."

"I knew you could break away, Lee. I used to tell you that."

"You helped me more than you knew," he said quietly.

She smiled and then turned to escape him. "And now you, Buck?"

"Since then we've made a bit of coin punching cows and we've blown it in again prospecting. Blown it in! Kate, we've shot enough powder to lift that mountain yonder, but all we've got is color. You could gild the sky with what we've seen, but we haven't washed enough dust to wear a hole in a tissue-paper pocket. I'll tell you the whole story. Lee packs a jinx with him. But—Haines, did you ever see a lion as big as that?"

The dimness of evening had grown rapidly through the room while they talked, and now the light from the door was far less than the glow of the fire. The yellow flicker picked out a dozen pelts stretching as rugs on the floor or hanging along the wall; that to which Buck pointed was an enormous skin of a mountain lion stretched sidewise, for if it had been hung straight up a considerable portion of the tail must have dragged on the floor. Buck went to examine it. Presently he exclaimed in surprise, and he passed his fingers over it as though searching for something.

"Where was it shot, Kate? I don't find nothin' but this cut that looks like his knife slipped when he was skinnin'."

"It was a knife that killed it."

"What!"

"Don't ask me about it; I see the picture of it in my dreams still. The lion had

dragged the trap into a cave and Bart followed it. Dan went in pushing his rifle before him, but when he tried to fire it jammed."

"Yes?" they cried together.

"Don't ask me the rest!"

They would hardly have let her off so easily if it had not been for the entrance of Joan, who had come back on account of the darkness. Black Bart went promptly to a corner of the hearth and lay down with his head on his paws, and the little girl sat beside him watching the fire, her head leaning wearily on his shoulder. Kate went to the door.

"It's almost night," she said. "Why isn't he here?" She started. "Buck, they couldn't have overtaken Dan?"

Buck Daniels grinned reassuringly.

"Not unless his hoss is a pile of bones; if it has any heart in it, Dan 'll run away from anything on four legs. No call for worryin', Kate. He's simply led 'em a long ways off and waited for evenin' before he doubled back. He'll come back right enough. If they didn't catch him that first run they'll never get the wind of him."

It quieted her for a time, but as the minutes slipped away, as the darkness grew more and more heavy until a curtain of black fell across the open door, they could see that she was struggling to control her trouble, they could see her straining to catch some distant sound. Lee Haines began to talk valiantly, to beguile the waiting time, and Buck Daniels did his share with stories of their prospecting, but eventually more and more often silences came on the group. They began to watch the fire and they winced when a log crackled, or when the sap in a green piece hissed. By degrees they pushed farther and farther back so that the light would not strike so fully upon them, for in some way it became difficult to meet each other's eyes.

Only Joan was perfectly at ease. She played for a time with the ears of Black Bart, or pried open his mouth and made him show the great white fangs, or scratched odd designs on the hearth with pieces of charcoal; but finally she lost interest in all these things and let her head lie on the rough pelt of the wolf-dog, sound asleep. The firelight made her hair a patch of gold.

Black Bart slept soundly, too; that is, as soundly as one of his nature could sleep, for every now and then one of his ears twitched, or he stirred a paw, or an eyelid quivered up. Yet they all started when he jumped from his sleep into full wakefulness; the motion made Joan sit up, rubbing her eyes, and Black Bart reached the center of the room noiselessly. He stood facing the door, motionless.

"It's Dan," cried Kate. "Bart hears him! Good old Bart!"

The dog pointed up his nose, the hair about his neck bristled into a ruff, and out of his quaking body came a sound that seemed to moan and whimper from the distance at first, but drew nearer, louder, packed the room with terror, the long-drawn howl of a wolf.

CHAPTER XIII.

EQUAL PAYMENT.

THEY knew what it meant; even Joan had heard the cry of the lone wolf hunting in the lean time of winter, and of all things sad, all things lonely, all things demoniacal, the howl of a wolf stands alone. Lee Haines reached for his gun, little Joan stood up silent on the hearth, but Kate and Buck Daniels sat listening with a sort of hungry terror as the cry sobbed away to quiet. Then out of the mountains and the night came an answer so thin, so eery, one might have said it was the voice of the mountains and white stars grown audible; it stole on the ear as the pulse of a heart comes to the consciousness.

Truly it was an answer to the cry of the wolf-dog, for in the slender compass it carried the same wail, the same unearthly quality with this great difference, that a thrilling happiness went through it, as if some one walked through the mountains and rejoiced in the unknown terrors. A sob formed in the throat of Kate, and the wolf turned its head and looked at her, and the yellow of things that see in the night swam in its eyes. Lee Haines struck the arm of Buck Daniels.

" Buck, let's get clear of this. Let's start. He's coming."

At the whisper Buck turned a livid face; one could see him gather his strength.

" I stick," he said with difficulty, as though his lips were numb. " She'll need me now."

Lee Haines stood in a moment's indecision, but then settled back in his chair and gripped his hands together. They both sat watching the door as if the darkness were a magnet of inescapable horror. Only Joan, of all in that room, showed no fear after the first moment. Her face was blanched, indeed, but she tilted it up now, smiling; she stole toward the door, but Kate caught the child and gathered her close with strangling force. Joan made no attempt to escape.

" S-sh!" she cautioned, and raised a plump little forefinger. " Munner, don't you hear? Don't you like it?"

As if the sound had turned a corner, it broke all at once clearly over them in a rain of music; a man's whistling. It went out; it flooded about them again like beautiful, cold light. Once again it stopped, and now they sensed, rather than heard, a light, rapid, padding step that approached the cabin. Dan Barry stood in the door, and in that shadowy place his eyes seemed luminous. He no longer whistled, but a spirit went from him which carried the same sense of the untamed, the wild happiness which died out with his smile as he looked around the room.

The brim of his hat curved up, his neckerchief seemed to flutter a little. The wolf-dog reached the threshold in the same instant and stood looking steadily up into the face of the master.

" Daddy Dan!" cried Joan.

She had slipped from the nerveless arms of Kate and now ran toward her father, but here she faltered, there she stopped with her arms slowly falling back to her sides. He did not seem to see her, but looked past her, far beyond every one in the room as he walked to the wall and took down a bridle that hung on a peg. Kate laid her hands on the arms of the chair, but after the first effort to rise, her strength failed.

" Dan!" she said. It was only a whisper, a heart-stopping sound. " Dan!" Her voice rang, then her arms gathered to her, blindly, Joan, who had shrunk back. " What's happened?"

" Molly died."

" Died?"

" They broke her leg."

" The posse!"

" With a long shot."

" What are you going to do?"

" Get Satan. Go for a ride."

" Where?"

He looked about him, troubled, and then frowned.

" I dunno. Out yonder."

He waved his arm. Black Bart followed the turn of the master's body, and switching around in front, continued to stare up into Dan's face.

" You're going back after the posse?"

" No, I'm done with them."

" What do you mean?"

" They paid for Grey Molly."

" You shot one of their—horses?"

" A man."

" God help us!" Then life came to her; she sprang up and ran between him and the door. " You sha'n't go. If you love me!" She was only inches from Black Bart, and the big animal showed his teeth in silent hate.

" Kate, I'm goin'. Don't stand in the door."

Joan, slipping around Bart, stood clinging to the skirts of her mother and watched the face of Dan, fascinated, silent.

" Tell me where you're going. Tell me when you're coming back. Dan, for pity's sake, tell me!"

Loud as a trumpet a horse neighed from the corral. Dan had stood with an uncertain face, but now he smiled.

" D'you hear? I got to go!"

" I heard Satan whinny. But what does that mean? How does that make you go, Dan?"

" Somewhere," he murmured; " something's happening. I felt it on the wind when I was comin' up the pass."

" If you—oh, Dan, you're breaking my heart!"

" Stand out of the door."

"Wait till the morning."

"Don't you see I can't wait?"

"One hour, ten minutes. Buck—Lee Haines—"

She could not finish, but Buck Daniels stepped closer, trying to make a smile grow on his ashen face.

"Another minute, Dan, and I'll tell a man you've forgotten me."

Barry pivoted suddenly as though uneasy at finding something behind him, and Daniels winced.

"Hello, Buck. Didn't see you was here. Lee Haines? Lee, this is fine."

He passed from one to the other and his handshake was only the elusive passage of his fingers through their palms. Haines shrugged his shoulders to get rid of a weight that clung to him; a touch of color came back to his face.

"Look here, Dan. If you're afraid that gang may trail you here and start raising the devil—how many are there?"

"Five."

"I'm as good with a gun as I ever was in the old days. So is Buck. Partner, let's make the showdown together. Stick here with Kate and Joan and Buck and I will help you hold the fort. Don't look at me like that. I mean it. Do you think I've forgotten what you did for me that night in Elkhead? Not in a thousand years. Dan, I'd rather make my last play here than any other place in the world. Let 'em come! We'll salt them down and plant them where they won't grow."

As he talked the pallor quite left him, and the fighting fire blazed in his eyes, he stood lionlike, his feet spread apart as if to meet a shock, his tawny head thrown back, and there was about him a hair-trigger sensitiveness, in spite of his bulk, a nervousness of hand and coldness of glance which characterizes the gun-fighter. Buck Daniels stepped closer, without a word, but one felt that he also had walked into the alliance.

As Barry watched them the yellow which swirled in his eyes flickered away for a moment.

"Why, gents," he murmured, "they ain't any call for trouble. The posse? What's that got to do with me? Our accounts are all squared up."

The two stared dumbly.

"They killed Grey Molly; I killed one of them."

"A horse—for a man?" repeated Lee Haines, breathing hard.

"A life for a life," said Dan simply. "They got no call for complainin'."

Glances of wonder, glances of meaning, flashed back and forth from Haines to Buck.

"Well, then," said the latter, and he took in Kate with a caution from the corner of his eye, "if that's the case, let's sit down and chin for a minute."

Dan stood with his head bowed a little, frowning; two forced, pulled him, and Kate leaned against the wall off in the shadow with her eyes closed, waiting, waiting, waiting through the crisis.

"I'd like to stay and chin with you, Buck—but I got to be off. Out there—in the night—something may happen before mornin'." Black Bart licked the hand of the master and whined. "Easy, boy. We're startin'."

"But the night's just beginnin'," said Buck Daniels genially. "You got a world of time before you, and with Satan to fall back on you don't have to count your minutes. Pull up a chair beside me, Dan, and—"

The latter shook his head, decided. "Buck, I can't do it. Just to sit here"—he looked about him—"makes me feel sort of choked. Them walls are as close—as a coffin."

He was already turning; Kate straightened in the shadow, desperate.

"As a matter of fact, Dan," said Lee Haines suddenly, "we need your help, badly."

"Help?"

The heart of Kate stood in her eyes as she looked at Lee Haines.

"Sit down a minute, Dan, and I'll tell you about it."

Barry slipped into a chair which he had pulled to one side—so that the back of it was toward the wall, and every one in the room was before him.

(To be continued NEXT WEEK.)

The Back Seat Drivers

by John Garretsee

ALL Kentonville is still wagging its head and tongue wonderingly over the mysterious and never satisfactorily explained disappearance of five of its busiest and most sober-minded citizens. They left simultaneously, which would indicate conspiracy on the face of it. Likewise their returns coincided. Nevertheless, each gave a sketchy and unconvincing explanation of his absence and stoutly denied having been accompanied by the rest.

What added the more to the mystery was that these gentlemen were noted for the punctiliousness with which they kept business and professional engagements and for their close application to duty. Yet each bolted, leaving important appointments unfulfilled.

Another thing which to the minds of the gossips gave a sinister twist to the affair was the fact that all five renegades were summer widowers, whose wives, according to customs, considered alien heat and mosquitoes less burdensome than the local variety.

At the time of the fivefold disappearance Kendall Seward, the town's leading lawyer, was working night and day in preparation for an important damage suit that was to come to trial in two weeks. On closing his office late one Friday night he informed his clerk that he would leave town early the next morning to take his wife's car to her where she was spending the summer with her mother in Millburg, some two hundred miles away. He would stay there over Sunday and return by train Monday forenoon, keeping in touch with his office by telephone *en route*. That was the last heard of him during the following two weeks. Unexpected developments of a confidential nature was his sole explanation on returning.

Dr. Porter, leading physician of the community, never took more than two days' vacation at a time. This summer he was held down more closely than ever by an epidemic of scarlet fever. He informed his patients on that memorable Friday that he would be out of town Saturday and Sunday to see an old patient, but would make calls as usual on Monday. Old patient had a relapse, declared the doctor blandly when he showed up again two weeks later.

Sam Farrell was assistant superintendent of the Kentonville Foundries. His chief was away, and a strike was threatening. He ostensibly was to absent himself from his office only Saturday morning, as the works closed at noon on that day. He had said something offhand about a little outside investigating of conditions. The investigation occupied a mysterious two weeks, and it was no thanks to him that the strike died a natural death during his absence.

As for Tom Carson, buyer for the can-

ning factory, this was his busiest season. He supposedly went out scouting for small fruit among the farmers on that Saturday morning. The scouting lasted a fortnight, but failed to land much of anything.

The last on the list of reprobates was Dr. Frank Nemus, the local dentist. He had just returned from his own vacation and sent his assistant off for his. His engagement book was full of appointments, but he managed to shift his Saturday dates over into the following week, on a plea of not feeling well. He came back looking rather poorly, to be sure, and explained that he had been under observation by a physician out of town, but guessed he was coming on all right now.

But between the times of these joint and mysterious disappearances and reappearances there was wild excitement in Kentonville and the five other communities in which temporarily resided the wives of the missing men. Indignation prevailed at first, but when a week passed and no word came from the errant ones, alarm got the upper hand. The State constabulary, when appealed to, held cynically to the theory of a clandestine fishing excursion with contraband trimmings which tend to lessen that feeling of sober responsibility.

But during the second week, when the newspapers began pounding these officers of the law for their lack of activity, they started a half-hearted search. It was unavailing. Then when the wanderers suddenly reappeared with their specious excuses, the still cynical police said, "I told you so!"

Hence the tongues and heads of village gossip began wagging and they are wagging yet.

II.

It all began with Kendall Seward, the lawyer of the group mentioned above. Seward was an automobilist of the back-seat driver type. The car belonged to Mrs. Seward, a birthday gift from her husband. He had never bothered actually to learn to drive it himself, partly because Mrs. Seward was such an ardent devotee of the art that she hated to give up the wheel long enough and partly because he was too busy.

But he knew the system of driving from A to Z. He was one of these theoretical mechanics who never smear their fingers with machine oil. He could open the hood of a car and tell you exactly what made the wheels go round and why each part was what it was. He delighted in studying Mrs. Seward's instruction book. As a lawyer he was thoroughly posted on the rules of the road.

From the time his wife took her first lesson from the garage man he sat in the back seat—she wouldn't let him sit beside her because it made her nervous—and issued instruction and advice with each turn of the wheel.

She would occasionally, however, advise him to do the driving himself if he knew so much about it. He always maintained that he could do it easily, but when on rare occasions he offered to try she hastily refused on the ground that she held the car and their necks in too high esteem.

Mrs. Seward had been suffering from nervous breakdown all spring, and when hot weather approached, Dr. Porter ordered her away for a rest and change of scene. She decided, therefore, to spend the summer with her mother in Millburg, county seat of the adjoining county.

"I'll drive over in my car, doctor," she decided, as one who is stating a fact rather than consulting a physician. "It 'll do me good to take a long run."

Mrs. Seward was a tiny, dark woman, with a firmly cut chin that told no lie when it said she usually had her own way. But the doctor vetoed the car drive.

"You're not going to drive the confounded thing at all for four weeks, and then not unless I think you are equal to it," he ordered. "You go over to your mother's on a train. When the time comes for you to have your car let Ken drive it over for you."

"But, doctor, Ken doesn't drive. He hasn't even got a license."

"Nonsense!" Seward burst out. "I can drive a car any time I want to. I'll get a license fast enough when I need it."

"Tell you what I'll do, dear," Seward declared a day or two before his wife was to start. "I'll drive across the long way, over

the mountains, and take three or four of the other men with me for company. It will be a deuced lonesome drive by myself. We can get in a day of fishing at Morgan Lodge.

" Besides it will be a chance to do some business. You know Joel Brewster, counsel for the other side of that Farthingdale damage case, has the next camp. He's so satisfied he's going to win he's spending the month in his camp while I'm sweating blood down here. He hates me so I haven't been able to get a conference with him. But if I could happen on him casually up there I think I could convince him that he might better settle the case out of court."

" Look here, Kendall Seward," snapped his wife irritably. " You are not going to take my car over those rough mountain roads. Moreover, I'm not going to have you banging around with a rough gang of men in it."

As I have said, Mrs. Seward was a nervous case, and it seemed best to humor her.

A few days before the time set for driving the car across-country Seward suddenly decided that perhaps it would be well to go through the form of practising a little before taking his examination for a license.

He climbed into the driver's seat with the utmost confidence, then thinking firmly of the pages of the instruction book, he set the gear-shift lever in reverse, started the engine and let in the clutch. The car leaped madly back and jolted the door-post out of its foundations before he managed, by good luck, to stop it. This rather nonplused the learner, but did not shatter his confidence. Very carefully and methodically this time he shifted things about and crept back into the original position in the garage and thought it over.

Perhaps it would be wise after all to conform to the letter of the law and have a man from the garage give him a lesson or two. But Seward did not propose to give himself away in his home town. He got a garage man to drive him over to Marion, ten miles away, where the examinations were held, on the plea that he had a strained wrist and did not feel like driving himself. Then he sent the home town man back by train and engaged a stranger for the easy lesson.

Thereupon Kendall Seward discovered many things about the large hiatus between theory and practise in driving a car. Also he learned some things about his own mental make-up. He was a man skilled in the use of his brain, but he had never synchronized that organ with his hands. In fact, he simply couldn't make his hands behave as they should.

All this his trainer enjoyed hugely in secret, but being a discreet man and oily of tongue withal, he kept his ridicule to himself and kept insisting that his pupil was merely suffering from a little preliminary nervousness. In fact, Mr. Seward seemed to know so much about a car that the tutor actually believed it. So skilfully did he cover up the inepitude of Seward after he discovered his faults, by keeping one hand on the wheel and with the other guiding the pupil's feet and hand to the right pedals and levers, that by the end of the hour the pupil's confidence was somewhat restored.

As this was the last day in which he could take an examination for a license before the time set for driving the car to Mrs. Seward, his practical knowledge was put to immediate test. One taking such an examination has to demonstrate to the examiner on the running-board that he can drive a car straight away, turn, back up, and cramp around. The moment Seward was deserted by his kindly tutor and found a critical examiner gazing at him coldly his confidence fled again.

He met his Waterloo when he was told to cramp and turn around. Following directions he turned his car to the left and headed gently toward the curb. At the moment when he should have stopped and backed around his unruly foot hit the accelerator instead of the brake. The car leaped the curb, shot through a hedge and was not stopped until it was standing in the center of an innocent citizen's flower-bed.

Seward received a lecture and after much patient instruction backed out to the street again. But this time he had too much headway, and although he threw out his clutch his foot missed the brake and the car only stopped when it crashed into a picket fence on the opposite sidewalk. That settled it.

"Nothing doing for you," announced the unfeeling examiner. "Go away and practise a couple of weeks, then maybe you can do something."

Back in Kentonville by grace of another hired driver, the chastened man sat down and thought it over. He was due to start for Millburg in three days. He could not attempt to drive without a license, and there was no chance of getting one before then. Moreover, he had to admit to himself now that he couldn't have driven if he had a license.

But it would never do to let Mrs. Seward know this after all his boasting. He thought of deferring the trip until he actually learned to drive. But in view of Mrs. Seward's nervous condition it would not do to disappoint her. He could hire a man to take the car over, pleading that his wrist was too lame to drive. But Mrs. Seward was a very acute little woman, and he was perfectly sure that she would taunt him ever afterward for being afraid to drive.

Then his mind reverted to the party he had suggested, and he had an inspiration. He would take the gang along and get one of them to drive for him, using his wrist again as an excuse for not driving himself. Of course he would have to make it an object to them by including the day's fishing at Morgan Lodge.

So it came about that the group of eminent citizens whose mysterious disappearance was cited at the beginning of this story met secretly just before dawn on that fatal Saturday morning in the Seward garage.

As they were getting into the car the host sprang the vital part of his plot.

"I'm going to let one of you fellows drive, if you don't mind," he said casually as they were getting into the car. "I strained my wrist the other day cranking this old boat when the starter wouldn't work. It hurts it to handle the wheel."

"Let me see that wrist," demanded Dr. Porter professionally.

Seward had taken the precaution to put an ostentatious bandage about it.

"Nothing doing," he resisted. "We've got no time for any doctoring; besides I don't need it. Why don't you drive, doc?"

"Me? I should say not. When I go on a pleasure trip I don't work my passage."

"Guess it's up to me," remarked Dr. Nemus, the dentist, climbing into the driver's seat. Nemus was a car fan and never was happier than when driving a powerful machine. The other four did a lot of facetious back-seat driving all the way, pouring good advice at the driver's back.

So Seward's plot worked to perfection. They got away before any of the villagers were up to catch them at it, and by broad daylight had left the main highway twenty miles out of town and struck into the mountain wood road headed for Morgan Lodge, a hundred miles distant.

They made fifty miles that forenoon and stopped for luncheon at the last habitation before they should reach Morgan Lodge. From there on the road was little more than a rough trail steadily climbing the sides of the hills along the verge of the steep, high bank of a tumbling stream. Morgan Lodge had been established in this wilderness by a Toronto hunt club which used it only in the fall. They kept it stocked with provisions, however, and in the hands of a caretaker, who was instructed to allow parties to use it for a reasonable consideration at all other times during the year. The only other habitation for fifty miles around it was the lodge of Joel Brewster, the rival lawyer whom Seward wished to see in hope of compromising their case.

Luncheon over, they started out in high spirits for the rest of the drive and were still on the winding, rough trail at the top of the stream bank, some twenty miles from Morgan Lodge, when Nemus suddenly turned pale, stopped the car, and leaned limply back with his hand to his side.

"Gosh, doc," he exclaimed. "A pain in my side just struck me like a pistol shot. Makes me feel faint."

The party piled out of the car in some consternation and helped the dentist out where the doctor could examine him.

"Looks to me like appendicitis," the physician pronounced after a brief examination. "We better turn right around and get this man back to town double quick."

Then the four men looked at the road and back at each other helplessly. The

narrow trail with the stream on one side and the mountain rising on the other did not afford for miles a place where a car could be turned around.

"Can't do it here," Seward replied. "Best we can do is to run on up about ten miles farther until we strike some flat land where we can maneuver. You take the wheel, doc."

"I will not," emphatically declared Dr. Porter. "I've got my hands full looking after this patient."

"Then one of you fellows will have to try it," hastily announced Seward. "My wrist gives out on me at the slightest strain."

Both the other men were flivver drivers. They looked at the threatening bank at the very edge of the wheel track, and unanimously declined the offer. This car had an entirely strange gear shift system they had never tried.

"Come, doc," Seward wheedled. "We'll look out for Nemus and you can keep your eye on him. You're the only man that's safe to trust the car to."

At that Doc Porter confessed.

"Look here, you fellows. I've been kidding all the way up about driving and giving Nemus a lot of advice from the back seat, but as a matter of fact, I never drove a car in my life. I've always had a chauffeur and I've been too busy to learn. So don't pester me any more about driving."

The four well men stood and gazed at each other speechlessly. The sick man lying by the roadside groaned. Here they were with a perfectly good car and not a man who could drive it and no chance of help anywhere in that wilderness. They leaned against the machine and thought about it for a while.

"Wouldn't your wrist stand it as far as Brewster's camp?" demanded the doctor of Seward. "Let me look at that wrist now. Perhaps I can bind it up so it will go for a while."

Thereat Seward saw that it was up to him to be as good a sport as the doctor. He threw up his hands and laughed a little ruefully.

"I'll have to confess that I've been putting it over on you worse than the doctor has. Fact is, I can't drive the confounded car myself and didn't want to admit it to anybody for fear it would get back to my wife, who'd never let me hear the last of it after all the back-seat driving I've been doing. I know all about how a car works, but when I tried to put it into practise I found it was another matter. I certainly owe you fellows an apology and feel mighty cheap, but I'm not going to bluff about it any more."

The remarks that Seward had to listen to following this declaration can't be repeated here. Even the sick man forgot his pain for a moment to express certain well-worded sentiments.

But in the mean time the sun was setting behind the mountains. There was nothing to eat in the car. There was not a chance in the world that any one would come their way to help them out. As a last resort some one could walk the twenty miles to Brewster's lodge and get help. It would take at least five hours for any one to get there on foot. Brewster might be away. If he was there he might refuse to do anything when he found out that his ancient enemy, Seward, was involved. But what could he do at the best? If he drove back in his car they would be faced with a situation of two cars standing hood to hood in a road where they could not pass and could not turn around. If the rescuer walked back it would be long past midnight before he could get there and the condition of the sick man might be very serious by then.

"There is just one thing to do," Seward decided. "One of you fellows who drive flivvers will have to take the wheel and let me sit by you and tell you what to do. We can creep along on low gear and stand a chance of making it."

In their desperation this was finally agreed upon. Farrell and Carson matched pennies to see who would make the try and Farrell was elected.

Probably none of those five men will ever forget that twenty-mile ride. They crept up the trail an inch at a time. Again and again Farrell, in going around a bend, stopped the car just in time to keep from slipping over the cliff. The unfamiliar

steering-wheel and gear shifts were constantly deceiving him. Half-way there he revolted absolutely and compelled Carson to try it the rest of the distance. But at length, a little before dark, they rolled into the camp.

"I'd never go back down that trail with one of you fellows driving if I had to stay here for the rest of my life," Dr. Porter declared, and the rest agreed with him fervently.

"I'd never drive it again for a million dollars," Farrell vowed.

Carson seconded the resolution.

But once in the lodge and a comfortable supper eaten, they felt a little more optimistic. Nemus's pain was less acute and the doctor hoped it would prove to be only a temporary attack.

In the morning, while the patient was no worse, it was evident that he would be in no condition to drive a car for some days, so Seward prepared to approach tactfully his enemy Brewster and appeal, if possible, to his sympathy. After some consideration he decided that the best strategy would be to have Dr. Porter act as emissary and say nothing about Seward's presence until the lawyer's aid had been enlisted.

After a half-hour's absence the doctor returned with a crestfallen countenance.

"Nobody home but a caretaker," he reported. "The car's there, but the man can't drive it. Brewster went off yesterday on a fishing trip and he's coming back just in time to get to town for an important case he has on."

So the day passed with no change in the situation. They divided the time between worrying about important business they should all be attending to on the morrow and hoping that Nemus's condition would improve enough so that he would be able to drive.

The next morning Nemus was slightly better and the doctor said that his condition was not at all critical, but that under the best of circumstances it would be weeks rather than days before the man would be able to risk the strain of driving an automobile.

Thereupon the two flivver owners earnestly set to work to master Seward's car. Under Seward's directions they did strange things with it along the narrow road past the camp. They practised by turns, agreeing that the one who succeeded first in sticking to the narrow road for a mile, turning around in a little open space and coming back without a mishap, should have the honor of driving the party back to town. And they made very satisfactory progress. By mid-afternoon Seward pronounced Farrell to be showing a decided lead over Carson, and there was a bright prospect that on the following morning the foundry man would be qualified for the rescue job.

But a little praise went to Farrell's head. He grew reckless. To demonstrate his skill he continued on down the road past a low bank at a curve. At that point he made a slip of some sort, the car swerved from the road and slid gently down the bank, turning over on its side with its nose in the muddy bottom of the stream. The unlucky driver was thrown out, but landed on a soft spot unhurt.

Investigation showed that the car was uninjured, but it was lodged where it would take a derrick to get it back on the road.

The party spent the next day sitting about, three of them making disparaging remarks about Seward and Farrell and circumstances generally. But mean time Seward's passion for theoretical mechanics was at work. He was busy devising a scheme whereby, with heavy tree limbs used as levers, four able-bodied men might gradually work a two-ton car out of a mudhole and up a twelve-foot bank. The next morning he announced the details of his plan to a rather skeptical audience, but there being nothing else to do they adopted it. It took a day of experimenting and chopping of tree limbs of various lengths in diameters before the combined brains of the party devised a system which actually began to make the heavy car yield ground inch by inch. It was a crude inefficient system, and they made exceedingly slow progress. Several times they got the car part-way up the bank when something slipped and back it went again. All the time they were keeping an eye out down the road hoping that by some miracle a man would appear with a roomy automobile he

was willing to play good Samaritan with, but no one came.

Meantime, inch by inch, averaging something like a foot a day of net gain, they worked the car back up the bank. It was several days before they learned the trick of propping the car with limbs every time they gained a little ground so that it could not slip back. Finally the day before Seward was due in Millburg to try the Farthingdale case for which he had not been able to complete his preparation, they got the car back on the road. A little testing showed that none of its vital parts was injured. But the nerves of the two possible drivers were completely shattered by the experience. They positively refused to risk their lives in any attempt to drive down the mountain road. Nemus by now was recovered sufficiently to be about and give useless advice, but the doctor still refused to imperil his life by letting him drive.

And then Brewster returned. He drove by just as the party was scraping the mud off the restored car. He paused to make a friendly inquiry as to the accident, then caught sight of his enemy Seward and froze up at once. Seward brought all his diplomacy into play.

"How do you do, Mr. Brewster?" he said in his pleasantest manner. "This is an unexpected opportunity in running across you. I have one or two things in connection with that Farthingdale case that I think would be to our mutual advantage to discuss. Suppose I run over to see you tonight?"

"I don't wish to discuss the case out of court with you at all, Mr. Seward," the other replied stiffly. "We'll meet in court to-morrow and we'll decide it there. I've already told you it is useless to try to discuss a settlement. We're going to win the case, and that's all there is to it."

Seward sat apart that evening and brooded. He had to admit that it was pretty likely that Brewster would come off victor. It was certain that the case would go to him by default if Seward failed to show up in court to-morrow. He sat and thought long after the others had retired. Then before going to bed himself he took a short walk down the mountain road.

The next morning before the others were up Seward arose, dressed hastily, and went over to Brewster's camp. He found Brewster in an old suit tinkering frantically with the bowels of the car. He stood and watched him for a few moments, smiling faintly.

"Having some trouble, Mr. Brewster?" he said finally. Brewster noticed his presence for the first time, came up right with a jerk, grunted non-committally and went back to his tinkering. Seward stood and watched him for an hour, and the longer he watched the more pleasantly he smiled. Finally the tinkerer threw down his wrench and swore; then he looked at his watch.

"Our case is on in just three hours, I believe, Mr. Brewster," Seward commented. "You'd better be getting started. It's a two-hour drive under the best of circumstances from here."

"Then why don't you start?" snapped Brewster.

"Well, you see," said Seward pleasantly as though it didn't matter in the least, "the only member of our party who can drive a car is ill, so I don't see any chance of my being there. I came over to suggest therefore that we might, after all, settle that case out of court. If you'll let me talk with you for a few minutes I can show you that it will be to your advantage as well as mine. If neither of us get there we'll both lose pretty badly, as you know."

Brewster glared and without a word went back to his tinkering. But after another vain half-hour of it he whirled on his adversary in despair.

"What's your proposition?" he growled.

Seward, in a few moments, explained certain legal matters.

"Now," he wound up, "if you will agree to a settlement as I suggest and put it in writing I'll let you drive our party down to Millburg and we'll get there in time to put it through. If you don't, we'll both lose and that's all there is to it."

III.

Two hours later Seward's party, driven by Brewster, rolled up to a garage in Millburg.

"Take this car around to 19 Hedge Street and deliver it to Mrs. Kendall Seward," Seward directed the garage man. "Tell her I was detained up in the woods in an important legal conference and couldn't get to the telephone to explain. Say that I drove her car over, but have got to rush to court and will be around at noon."

"When you've done that," Brewster interposed, "send a man up to my camp on the mountain road and tow my car back to town. There's something wrong with it that I couldn't fix."

"I can save him some trouble when he comes to fix that car," exclaimed Seward sweetly. "He'll find a bit of wiring that feeds the spark into the cylinder has been slightly detached. It 'll only need tightening of the screw to make it all right again. I found it necessary, Mr. Brewster, to take a walk over to your place last night after you had gone to bed and adjust your car a little for you as long as argument didn't seem to have any effect on you. You see, I put my theoretical knowledge of a car with your practical knowledge and then we moved something!"

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TO A WAR PROFITEER

YOU are a good spender, they tell me; head waiters revere you, they say,
And lackeys in livery hail you—your nod they all rush to obey!
Your yacht in the harbor awaits you; your mansion stands high on the hill,
Your gardener's roses are famous; your food proves your foreign chef's skill!

At the touch of your skilful mechanics, your motors glide smoothly along,
And indolent there on their cushions, you pass 'mid the envying throng;
Your favorites litter with jewels, and you are no piker at play;
You win, or you lose with distinction—you are a good sport, they all say!

Ah, yes, a good spender they call you—and doubtless you are a good sport;
But, oh, I am thinking of spenders and sports of a different sort!
They are lying in France 'neath the lilies—and in hospitals here in despair;
Or on crutches they offer you pencils—yes, that is a veteran there!

But, oh, they were wonderful spenders—their coin was their strength and their youth;
They opened the wine of their life-blood, and recklessly poured it, in truth!
They drew on the bank of their manhood; upon war's gaming table they tossed
Their hopes, their desires, their ambitions—aye, flung them there proudly, and lost!

But you won! Your investments were heavy, and you risked, but your profit is made!
For war is forever a gamble! You won, but they lost and they paid—
Aye, they paid for your viands and jewels—your bounties are blood-bought, you know!
Ah, yes, though you do not confess it, the thought of it goes where you go!

You can but remember the spenders who lie 'neath the lilies out there—
The veteran venders of pencils, the sports in the hospitals here!
But ever you try to keep busy—around you no war talk's allowed,
And you must have music and laughter, and lights, and a rollicking crowd!

But your face—when the lights are all lowered! Your look—when the violins moan!
And ever you see the white crosses when your satellites leave you alone!

Roselle Mercier Montgomery

Broken Chains

by *Jack Bechdolt*

Author of "The House of Fraud," "The One Way Street," etc.

A COMPLETE NOVELETTE

PROLOGUE

A YOUNG woman stood alone at the rail, near the bows, as the steamship Skagit passed through the intricacies of a narrow, wooded inlet and raised the first glimpse of the cannery town of Katama. She was straight and slender, clad in a thick, modish coat of golden-hued camel's hair. Everything about her stamped her as from "Outside"; as no part or parcel of the new, raw, but half-explored land she was in.

From the time the Skagit left Seattle this young woman's thoughts had raced ahead of the questing bows. Her frequent physical presence on watch at the ship's nose told where her interest lay.

There were half a dozen tourists making the round trip through the picturesque, inside passage to Alaska, but their keenness did not match that of the girl in the golden coat. They were exclamatory, enthusiastic, fitful; she was quiet, intense and constant.

Aided by the tide, the steamship plunged into a passage unusually narrow and full of sharp bends. The smooth current raced alongside. The shores, seemingly close enough to touch, were covered with thick forest that extended to the water's edge and sent out an aromatic breath. The sun was bright, but it lacked warmth at this time of year; a rather watery, pallid sun.

Round an abrupt bend the Skagit came to the head of the inlet, and the cannery town and her whistle woke echoes in the still, black forest.

The girl at the bows could see a huddle of new, wooden houses against the gash where the timber had been cut; two long wooden docks; three unusually large, box-like buildings with stacks—the cannery; a beach littered with dories and Indian canoes. All this seemed dwarfed to the dimensions of carved wooden toys by the great shoulder of hill that rose behind and again, behind that hill, the naked, scarred rock of a mountain that climbed straight to heaven.

Something cold lay over all this land, a spirit unsympathetic, rudely challenging. It wore an aspect of complete indifference to man and his works.

The girl in the bows of the Skagit felt this and shivered. Then, although the tourists were exclaiming rapturously over a carved Indian canoe that approached, and clicking their silly little cameras at the mountains, her eyes went toward the dock ahead and remained there.

Her hand clutched the rail. She leaned forward, peering as if she could hope to distinguish faces from a mile away. All of that mile she continued to look, and when the Skagit rubbed gently along the string-piece, hers was the most eager face of all, searching the upturned ones of the crowd that had come to welcome the semimonthly visitors from "Outside."

The steamship got out of Katama Inlet with the turn of the tide that brought her. Altogether she did not stay much over an hour.

When she was again on her way Purser McFadden had time to devote to two passengers who had dropped into his cabin, two acquaintances of some years' standing. One was George Fish, leading merchant of Katama, going outside to buy dry-goods, a stout, comfortable, bald-headed man of forty-five. The other, Ed Wrangel, was a real "sourdough"; a weather-beaten old-timer, past sixty, whiskered generously. He was looked up to as an authority on pioneer days.

"Fat, who was that young woman you brought up this time?" Fish wanted to know. "Girl in a yellow coat—stood alone at the bow like she was looking for some friends on the dock. She didn't seem to find the parties—"

"A right nice looking girl," Wrangel judged.

Fat McFadden grinned. "That's our bride! Cats, didn't you know about her? That's Miss Cora Henry, of Van Buren, New York State. Going to marry one of your leading young business men. Kind of funny he didn't meet her, ain't it?"

"Who's she going to marry?"

McFadden ignored the question. "Yeah—it's queer about that. Spoiled a lot of fun. Y'see, a bunch of the passengers had it all framed up to shower 'em with rice. Everybody had a bagful. It was going to be some demonstration—only it wasn't because there wasn't any bridegroom waiting. I was so busy I never got a chance to find out what happened, but they tell me she went up-town to the hotel by herself. Some romance, that girl! Seems she got engaged to this fellow Towers back in their own home town more'n four years ago. Waited for him. Finally he makes good and sends for her. Of course the story got out and spread all over the boat. And women love gossip like that. The girl was a regular heroine—"

Fish repeated his question, "Who's she going to marry?"

"I told you! Fellow named Towers, Wallace Towers. You ought to know him; he's manager of the cannery, so I was told. It's damn funny—" The garrulous purser stopped. In the glances between Wrangel and Fish he scented excitement and further gossip. "Say!" he demanded. "What's this?"

"Wallace Towers? Fat, are you dead sure it was him?"

"'Course I'm sure. What the—"

"I'm damned," said Fish.

Wrangel shook his head seriously. "That's—pretty—tough!"

"What do you mean, tough? Look here, Ed—George—"

"Listen!" George Fish bent forward, brandishing his cigar impressively. "This Wallace Towers never said a thing about any girl—and how the hell could we guess! And now—"

"George, he ain't dead?"

"Dead? No. A lot better for her if he was. He's beat it—missing—but not forgotten. This Wallace Towers, he was manager of the cannery for about six weeks. Now they're looking for him to explain a matter of a few thousand dollars he's short in his accounts, that's all. He ducked out of town ten days ago, and here this little girl's come all the way out from New York State expecting to marry him!"

"Beat it, with the money?"

"Oh, I guess he blew most the money. Lost it playing Red Dog, so I hear. Ran with Oxford—you remember John Oxford?—and some of that bunch. And I had it pretty straight there was a woman mixed in it. Fat, he's a no-good kid, this Wallace Towers. A flivver—*hyas cultus*. And now this girl! Ain't that hell?"

Purser McFadden blew out his cheeks and shook his head slowly.

"Can you beat that? Think of it, that poor girl—coming all this way—why, I bet

every minute she was awake she's been standing up there in the bows trying to speed up the Skágit so's it would get her to him quicker. Know what I say? They ought to lynch this guy Towers when they get him. By gum, they ought. String him up—"

"Well, I don't know but they ought," Fish concurred. "Seems if a rope was about the only way to show some pups—"

Wrangel began to shake his head.

Fish demanded, "What do you mean, shaking your head? You used to use rope back in '99, and you know it. And here's a dirty dog wrecks a girl's life—"

"Are you sure her life is wrecked, George? It don't strike me—"

Both men interrupted with excited clamor.

"I mean," Wrangel explained mildly when they would let him, "it isn't half as bad as if the girl had married him and then got into this box. Strikes me, maybe she's saved—"

"If you'd seen the girl like I have for ten long days you couldn't talk so blame judicial," McFadden grumbled. "I tell you she's a fine woman. A regular lady, y'know how I mean. A little bit cold maybe—they say she taught school quite some time, though she isn't the regular schoolma'am type by a long shot—but a fine girl just the same. Got that kind of *steady* look about her. You look at her and you say, 'There's a girl would keep her word, no matter what she promised.' You feel she's the kind of girl would go through hell and high water for anybody she cared about—"

"Towers!" Fish made the name an oath. "I'd like to get my hands on that lad! Funny thing is, he's a steady looking man. They tell me back in the States he was a regular fellow, good business man, honest, industrious, all that sort of thing. He showed up here full of pep. Made good right from the jump. Was with a fish-oil outfit up at Juneau a couple years. Then got in with the Pacific canners and made a record. The Katama people heard of him and sent for him to take the cannery. Seems like he went all to pieces first time he got a job with a man's responsibilities. Began to drink a lot and gambled worse. Then of course John Oxford ain't no partner for a decent young fellow to run with. But this girl affair! That caps it all! Wonder now what the devil does get into a young fellow to turn him that way!"

"It's this country," McFadden cried earnestly. "It breaks 'em. Lonely as all hell—and cold and miserable. You take these young fellows used to city ways and it breaks them up. A regular curse on it, that's what!"

Fish nodded profoundly. "Fat, I believe you. I've seen it happen—lots of times. The country, yes, there's a curse on it!"

"No." Wrangel shook his head. "There ain't any curse on the country, boys. She's a good country—for a man. If there's any curse it's brought in from Outside by the *chechakos*. I've seen this country work on men, watched it for the last twenty years. Seen men that looked rotten clean through turn into regular God-fearing citizens. Seen weak men and vicious men doing brave, fine things. And seen strong men break up, too! The way I see it, boys, this country tests a man; assays him down to the last trace of all the good and bad that's in him.

"Take back in the States, a man may be no good, yellow all his life and never get the chance to show it, because of his folks, or the business he falls into and all the conventions that's around him. Another one, he makes one mistake and society writes him down as a bad actor and the tag sticks with him all his life. But here! They all start at scratch here. No conventions. No tags. They write their own tickets. Sometimes they make mistakes. Then they got the chance to write 'em over again, and nobody gives a damn what they was! But they got to have guts to go through with it for themselves! They got to stand the gaff. This man's country shows 'em up; assays 'em fine. 'Tain't long before you know just what they're made of."

"It's showed up this Towers all right," Fish agreed. "Showed how plumb yellow he is. Gambling and running around, nobody 'd kick hard about that. Even losing some of the company's money—well, it's

happened before and men have lived it down. But leaving the woman he promised to marry to come up here a stranger and discover the truth—hell!"

"Maybe he'll come back," Wrangel predicted. "If he's been the steady, decent kind—"

Purser McFadden interrupted angrily. "Him! Who care a whoop about him? It's the girl! What's going to become of her? What's she going to do? Alone! A stranger! That's what I want to know—"

Wrangel agreed softly. "Yes, that's tough. But, if she's the right kind of girl—"

CHAPTER I.

THE TRAIL.

WHERE a swift, yellow river met salt water the shore line bent back in a bow and a spur of flatland projected from the steep hillside. On the flatland, sheltered by tall firs, stood a one-room cabin of logs.

The sea was hidden by thick, driving rain and low-hanging clouds covered the hill behind. The forest dripped with moisture; soil was ankle-deep in mud, and the cabin smoke flattened out as it left the log chimney, weighed down by the heavy air.

Cora Henry, recently of Van Buren, New York, sat by the one window and stared out at a dismal prospect, barely revealed by the gray light and clinging mist.

She wore a thick, serviceable coat-sweater, half open over a man's flannel shirt; a short, serviceable tweed skirt and low, comfortable shoes to rest her feet from the heavy trail boots. Her small, well-shaped head was held with a peculiar, graceful erectness. The pallor of her skin seemed even whiter against the mass of close-gathered black hair.

Her hands were idle in her lap. Her whole pose spoke of forced resignation, but not of despair. For all the lax lines there was something eager and purposeful about her; something very vital that ignored the continued stare of the man who shared the cabin and seemed to concentrate upon the gray distance.

Her companion sat by the half-hearted fire. He had removed muddy boots and was drying his feet, clad in thick, gray socks. He was a powerful, thick-set man of middle age, mutilated by hard winters. One ear was but a tattered remnant, souvenir of some killing frost of the past. His face was crisscrossed with deep lines, tanned a leathery brown. Though evidently he had not shaved for a week or longer, his hair had been sleeked down with water, parted with painful regularity and plastered in barber's ringlets. His general appearance, naturally careless, showed several signs of a labored attempt at smartening. He looked constantly at Cora Henry, and his small eyes grew bright and his full lips moist.

Finally he spoke. "Watching don't lower that river no quicker. Might's well make up your mind to wait."

"You're sure it can't be forded? Not anywhere? If we followed inland for a few miles—"

"God! Don't you think I know that river? I say it can't be forded. No use even my going to look at it to-day. But I went—just to please you. And got soaked for my pains!"

"Thank you, Mr. Scarr."

"Huh!"

"Only fifteen miles to Flambeau. It seems such a little way—"

"Good's a hundred if you can't make it. Guess the bridegroom will just naturally have to wait a little longer!" Scarr chuckled.

Cora Henry turned from the window to study Scarr with a sharp, steady glance. This was not the first moment in the past five days when she had asked herself who the man was—what he was. How far dared she trust him? Dared she trust him at all? Was she not indeed an absolute fool to have put herself completely in his power?

It was not the first moment she had asked these questions, and yet most of that five days of companionship with the man she had hired to show her the way to Flambeau had passed in the same haze of unreality that had marked all her acts from that moment she learned Wallace Towers was not waiting to marry her at Katama.

The news with all its ugly detail she heard from Broome, the manager sent to succeed Towers at the cannery. The new manager was a blunt person, and he had not spared his opinion of Wallace Towers. He gave her the complete Katama version of Towers's dissipation, embezzlement, and flight, holding back nothing. Perhaps it was meant kindly—as a warning to her. When it was told Broome asked her what she would do.

Cora answered, dry-eyed: "I'll find Mr. Towers. I want to hear his story."

"You can't!"

"We'll not discuss that. I'm going to find him."

"Why, that's crazy—stark crazy. Suppose you did find him—you don't mean to say, after all this, you'd marry him?"

"I promised to marry him."

"An embezzler—liable to arrest wherever he showes his face. An outlaw—"

"That's my affair."

She said it so firmly, she stuck to her point so consistently, that Broome was shaken. Finally he confided to her, using a conspiratorial whisper: "Now, look here—of course you're a mad little idiot. And somebody ought to restrain you, but—I'll say this. I do like to see a woman that 'll stick by her word. They're damn scarce. Well! Officially I haven't any idea where Wallace Towers is. Part of my business here is to get him, if I can, and put him in jail. But I've heard rumors. Well, put it this way: if you're interested in seeing some of the country before you go back to the States, suppose you see if you can find some reliable party to show you the trail over to Flambeau. That's a boom town that busted—nobody lives there now—about thirty miles down the coast from here. It might be an *interesting* trip."

Then Broome had shaken hands with her very earnestly. "Good-by," he said. "Sorry I had to be the one to tell you all these unpleasant things. It's a tough world. And, say, Miss Henry, if you do make that—that little trip—for God's sake forget I told you!"

She heard his advice and followed it. She hunted up Scarr, who had a cabin near Flambeau, and was in Katama for supplies—and asked him to guide her. At first Scarr refused. He said plainly he was not going to bother with any woman. Women were a nuisance on the trail. No, he would not! She had persuaded him. How? It must have been sheer force of will that beat him down. That and the offer of a generous payment for his time. Some way it was done, and they started.

All these details Cora carried out with keen intelligence and excellent judgment, forgetting nothing, but all the time what part of her had emotions and was conscious of living—all of her that was the Cora Henry of yesterday—was in a daze, drugged by surprise and grief and horror.

The first two days on the trail Scarr said nothing. Not a dozen words passed his lips from morning to night. She knew she was unwelcome; that he resented her companionship and the necessity of considering her and smoothing things for her unaccustomed feet. She guessed that his sullen dislike amounted almost to hate.

They had come to Scarr's cabin, on the river bank, and halted abruptly. The river was high and still rising because of rain and snow melting in the mountains. Scarr said they couldn't go on until it dropped. This was the third day of waiting.

"Guess the bridegroom will just naturally have to wait a little longer." The words and Scarr's chuckle startled her into that searching look.

For the first time she fully realized Scarr and realized their situation. For the first time she was afraid of Scarr.

She said with studied insolence: "I don't know what you're talking about, Mr. Scarr."

"You know, all right!"

She stared until Scarr's eyes turned aside.

"Hell, you know! Don't try to bluff me. Maybe you think I'm a fool? Maybe you think I don't even know who you are—and all about you—you and your friend Wallace Towers?"

She saw that Scarr was getting angry—deliberately working up his anger. That might provoke unpleasantness.

She changed her attitude.

"Why, of course, in a small town like

Katama, I suppose everybody knew about me after I'd been there an hour or so. I—I didn't realize that at first—"

"Lot of things you don't seem to realize—"

"I suppose I am a tenderfoot—what is it you call them?—*checkako*."

"Hunh!"

"But don't you see now, I am pretty anxious to get to Flambeau? I—I think I'll find him there—Mr. Towers. You—you won't mind my being so impatient, will you, knowing how things are?"

Cora smiled a little anxiously. It would be best to keep on the good side of Scarr, supposing he had a good side. Why in the world had she thought of this so late? She began to realize how indifferent that first shock left her—how blind.

"You won't mind, I'm sure?"

"Look here, what's your sweat to find Towers? Don't tell me you still aim to marry him!"

"That's entirely my own business, Mr. Scarr."

"After the way he treated you? After him leaving you stranded on a dock—and ducking out with company money—and probably some good-looking Siwash wench with him. Hell, I wouldn't treat a dog that way!"

"We won't discuss that."

"Why not? Ain't this country full of decent men, fit for a girl like you? Sure it is! Why, there's—there's a lot of regular he-men in this country—men who would treat a girl right! There's—well, there's men like me!"

Scarr left the fire and crossed the room. His sock-clad feet made no sound. He moved lightly, with a certain animal grace, for all his bulk. There was something animal also in his steady glance.

For the first time she noticed that his eyes were light, almost colorless, and the pupils dilated curiously, giving them a glow of their own. They were somewhat like a cat's eye, seen in the dark.

Cora Henry stirred uneasily. She made her lips smile, but she was afraid of Scarr.

"Now look 't me," Scarr argued, standing close beside her. "Ain't much to look at, you say? Maybe so. Never been much of a hand with the women either. But when I like a girl—"

"Oh, Mr. Scarr, there's something I meant to ask you—"

"Listen! I may be a clawed-up old bobcat, but I know how to treat a nice girl like a lady. If I like a woman—"

"There's a man I want you to tell me about. You must know him—and I want to know all about him. His name is Oxford."

"Hunh?"

"What do you know about John Oxford? What does he look like, act like, all about him. Please!"

He scowled and grumbled:

"What do you want with John Oxford anyhow?"

"I have business with him. Some day I hope to find him." She said it with a grim significance.

Scarr forgot his purpose and stared amazedly.

"You! Got business with John Oxford? Say—"

"Tell me what you know about him."

"Well! You got funny tastes. First, Wallace Towers, then John Oxford."

"Who is John Oxford?"

"Everybody knows who John Oxford is! And he ain't no kind for you to mess up with either."

"Yes. Perhaps that's why I'm looking for him."

Scarr stared heavily. "Lay off Oxford," he advised. "Happens I never laid eyes on him, but I've heard all about him. So's everybody in this neck of woods. He's a card slicker, if you got to know—a damn sharp one, too."

"Yes. I've heard that."

"Used to deal faro at the Nugget in Katama, before they had the reform wave and made the town nice and moral. Been hanging around since, playing some and cleaning up suckers. If he ever done an honest day's work I never heard of it."

"But just who is he? And what's he like? If I ever meet him I may need to know."

"You're a funny one, all right! Look here, girl, you don't want to meet up with him!" Cora merely looked her inquiry,

and Scarr continued, evidently curious. "All I can tell you's what I've heard. They say back in the States his old man's a minister. I guess so! He's a regular minister's son—a heller!

"Nobody ever proved he was crooked, but he's too handy at a deal to please most of the boys. Never done any good that I know of. Never known to do a day's honest work. What's he like? Like any tinhorn. Oh, kind of soft-looking, skinny and soft-spoken—but don't let that fool you! By all accounts he's strong as a tiger. Nobody ever saw him swing a pick or heft a shovel, but they say them thin wrists of his are like steel. Why, he can take a pack of cards in his bare hands and tear it in two! Fact. Tear it clean in two. Done it lots of times."

"He can tear a pack of cards in two! He must be strong!"

"Yep. Regular stunt of his. And they say he's greased lightning with a gun. But nobody ever saw him fight. Regular tinhorn—too yellow to fight, I guess."

"He would be! Too yellow to fight, of course—"

"Well, don't bet all your pile on that. Can't always tell."

"A card sharper—a crooked gambler!" She nodded her head with vicious emphasis.

"Hello! What you getting sore about? Don't look's if you was going to love John Oxford to death when you meet up."

"I hate John Oxford—despise and detest him!" Cora rose as she said it, all her muscles tense. Her face was colorless and her dark eyes burned with scorn. "Some day I'll find him and we'll have a—a settlement. The cheat!"

Scarr gasped. "Say—look here! What's all this whooptedoo? He ain't done you any dirt?"

"Has he not? I'll tell you what he's done, Scarr. I promised to marry a decent man, an honest, straight, clean man. That is the kind of man Wallace Towers was when he met this Oxford. Foolish, of course, or Oxford could never have dealt with him; but he was lonely. He wanted company. I know! And Oxford deliberately ruined him, made him dishonest, made him an embezzler. All for a few more dirty dollars! That's why I want to meet Mr. John Oxford. He ruined the man I love."

CHAPTER II.

A WOMAN'S HEART.

CORA HENRY spoke again, while Scarr eyed her in dull surprise. "I've a score to settle with John Oxford. And I'll make him pay. He'll pay—with interest." Her voice was hard.

Eying her, it occurred to Scarr that she was not quite the simple girl she first appeared. She had a will of her own—and she could hate.

Scarr's admiration increased tremendously.

"Who's been feeding you this stuff?" he demanded. "How do you know Oxford got your friend Towers into this fix?"

"How do I know? Because I know Wallace Towers. I've known him since we were children. He was straight, I tell you. There was never a cleaner, decenter, more ambitious man! Do you think he would steal? Oh, I heard! I heard about his friend Oxford—heard it all from Broome, the cannery manager. Of course Wallace trusted him! He'd trust any man. But Oxford sha'n't fool me!"

"Looks like I'd taken a hand in framing up a regular vendetta!"

"I'll make him pay! He won't find me so easy to fool. And thanks for your information. Some day I'll find him."

"Yes, I guess you will. If you make up your mind to it I guess you will."

Cora Henry began to walk, pacing off the length of the cabin. There was always a slender, springy erectness in her youthful figure, and the man's shirt and the short, rough skirt she wore accentuated it. Her animation brought a faint color to her cheeks. Her anger made the dark eyes sparkle.

And in the midst of this emotion, the first she had known since the tragedy at Katama, she caught herself wondering in amaze, "Am I Cora Henry—Miss Cora Henry, of Van Buren, New York?" Where was the girl of yesterday—the girl who ex-

isted four humdrum years in a small town, tamely waiting the return of the man she had promised to marry? Where was the girl who had centered her interest dutifully on teaching a village school—on the trifling importance of the Baptist Church supper and the K. of P. dance? And where the girl who had stepped so suddenly into romance—a romance of rose-tinted hopes and a bride's dreams—summoned abruptly into a new land, into a new life, about to marry?

What a change—a complete change! Surely it was not reality. The blow came without warning, from a clear sky, and her response—that had been instinctive. Robbed by surprise of the capacity to feel, the old leisurely ability to adjust herself, she had acted without hesitation. Within an hour she had been the girl of yesterday and the woman of to-day, a woman who knew only love and hate: the loyalty she had promised to Towers, and hatred for the man who had made him an outlaw. And of the two emotions she found she hated better than she loved. Honesty compelled the admission. Her greatest interest lay in hope of revenge on a man who had broken her romance—brought tragedy into her life—the man she had never seen—John Oxford.

Was she indeed Cora Henry—this woman, alone in a cabin, in a wilderness, her only companion a man whose glance she knew suddenly as something unclean—a man actually dangerous?

"Look here," Scarr began without warning, "what d'you want to waste your time on this Towers for? Him! By your own say-so, he's the kind that's led into trouble by some other fellow. Led! What kind of a man is it anybody can take by the hand and lead into something? What you deserve—a fine-looking woman like you—is a man that's big enough to do a little leading on his own account. Now, ain't that so?"

Cora ignored the question. She ignored Scarr.

Her attitude provoked his anger, always ready to boil over.

"I'm talking to you!" he insisted loudly, "Now, you listen to what I'm saying."

She continued to walk, outwardly composed. But her pulses were fluttering, and she had to fight to keep that self-control.

"I say why don't you pick a man to love? Now, me, I ain't so handsome, but nobody's going to lead me into trouble. Not exactly! When I feel like going astray, I go—and I lead myself. I'm an honest-to-God sourdough, too; no round-trip-tour imitation. Came to Valdez in 1900. Yes, and I've seen tough times and tough men. And done my own bit in raising hell, too. Ask any old-timer about Tom Scarr. But now, why, here I got my little cabin and this claim. Fish when I feel like it, and hunt and trap sometimes.

"There's a bar back up the crick, where I can pan out wages when I need the dust. I ain't so bad, and when I like a girl I know how to treat her right. You hear? I treat 'em right!"

She spoke, as if suddenly reminded of it. "Oh, Scarr, time to get something to eat, isn't it? You must be hungry."

She turned her attention to the contents of a shelf at the back of the cabin. "How about bacon and beans?" she suggested over her shoulder.

Scarr stared.

He said, "Well, I'm damned!" Said it slowly and with a certain admiration. He continued to stare at her uncertainly for several minutes. He took a step toward her, thought better of it, shrugged, and laughed shortly. "I am damned."

He searched the room and found a pack of playing-cards. Seated at the table, he lighted a pipe and began dealing out solitaire—an involved, tedious, winter-long diversion. From time to time he glanced at Cora and reiterated his conviction of damnation.

An odor of cooking filled the cabin. Scarr continued to shuffle and deal, considering each play with ponderous sagacity. Frequently he considered so long that he forgot his game and his pipe went out.

Cora surprised him in one of these abstractions.

"Get up," she said calmly. "I want to set the dishes."

Scarr pushed the cards to one corner of the table and rose without question. She

passed in front of him, brushing against him.

Suddenly his heavy hands were on her shoulders. He spun her about, made her face him. He thrust his own face closer and the pale eyes glowed.

"Well?" she asked briskly, biting her lips to keep them firm.

"Well! I was talking to you. I guess you ain't deaf. Made up your mind yet?"

"Made up my mind about what?"

"About me."

"Yes, I've made up my mind," with sudden anger. "I've made up my mind I don't care for your hands on me! Take them away."

With her own hands she caught at his and freed her shoulders. Scarr shifted the grip with a terrifying quickness and held her by the fingers.

"You know what I'm talking about!" he said hotly. "You come up here looking for a man. Well, I'm offering you a man—a regular man. You decide to chum up with me, and I guess I could be pretty good to you. When I like a girl—"

"You let me go!"

Scarr grinned. "Sure—when I feel like it."

"You will feel like it, and now! And you'll take me on to Flambeau, too, without any more delay."

"Will I? Suppose I decide to keep you here with me for a while, eh? Suppose I decide you and me was just made for each other, hunh? Say, you're a pretty kid when you get mad!"

He paused to grin his admiration for her scarlet anger.

Her sharp finger-nails cut into his palm and surprised him into loosening her right hand. She struck him across the eyes with all her strength.

Scarr's head snapped back. He shouted. His arm went about her waist and dragged her close against him.

"Don't get too damned rough!" he said huskily. "I can get rough, too, if I got a mind. Like this!"

His grip tightened so suddenly the breath left her body. She was held savagely, flattened against his coat. It seemed she would never breathe again.

As roughly he released her, but still kept his grip on her hands.

"I've made up my mind about you." He was breathless and the speech came haltingly. "Made up my mind. Three days. Been thinking you over. Well, I didn't want you. Didn't ask you to come here. Told you to keep away. I did, by God! But you would come. All right. Now you're going to stay—here with me. Stay till I say you can go. Guess you'll learn to like that—in time."

"You don't dare!"

"Who says I don't?"

"I'll kill you—kill myself."

"I'll look out for that."

"You brute!"

"That's my name. Get me sore, and you'll see."

"Beast!"

"Worse 'n that, if you ain't careful. But treat me decent, and, hell—"

"I—I'll—"

"You'll love me after a while. All the girls do."

She struggled, writhing, twisting, seeking to free her hands. Scarr watched, grinning.

Capricious in his strength, he drew her close again. He swept her against him and his hand tilted back her head. "We'll begin—like—this—"

His unshaved beard scratched her cheek. His lips pressed against hers. Even then he saw her eyes, staring beyond him, widen with discovery.

"Hello! Hope I don't intrude!"

The door was open. A man had entered.

Scarr dropped her so abruptly she reeled against the table as he swung to face the intruder.

CHAPTER III.

THREE'S A CROWD.

SCARR faced the newcomer with savage glance. "Who the hell are you?"

"That's a nice welcome!"

He grinned pleasantly at the battered owner of the cabin.

Cora caught a sharp side-glance sent in

her direction. Her face flamed and she turned her back, groping weakly for a chair.

"I didn't ask you in," Scarr growled.

"No. But this is Alaska, eh? And I'm tired and wet—yes, and hungry. She's a tough trail to-day."

In spite of Scarr, he seemed to assume that all was as it should be. He swung a blanket roll from his shoulder, stripped off a soaked mackinaw coat and hung it by the fire, tossed a cloth cap beside it, straightened his clothing with a pat or two and a brush of his hand, and smiled pleasantly.

He was a taller man than Scarr, taller by a head, and slighter in build. His face was clean shaven and tanned; the features not bad, especially the gray eyes; hair brown, with patches of premature white, and kept from curling by close cutting. He had a noticeable composure, a grasp of situation, what an actor would call stage presence.

"I assume my welcome in a sourdough's shack," he explained as his hand fumbled in shirt-pocket and brought forth a cloth tobacco-sack and brown cigarette papers. "I'm sure the—lady—won't mind setting another place?"

"Hunh—oh, sure, let's eat." Scarr grunted, more composed now. "Welcome to eats and a fire, sure! Get him a plate"—this last to Cora.

She hastily rose to obey, avoiding the stranger's glance. She was both furious and humiliated; mad to throw herself on the newcomer's mercy, demand his protection—and afraid. One mistake had put her in the present peril; she dared not make another. Delaying in her pretense of getting a plate, she studied the man intently.

"Sit down—drag up a chair," Scarr was saying. "Don't think I caught your name?"

"No, probably not. Make it Smith."

"Hunh! Lots of Smiths."

"Yes—you're right. There are lots of us." He said this pleasantly, but with a significance that Scarr seemed to understand.

"From Katama?" Scarr asked hastily.

"Nope. South of here, down Flambeau way. Got an oil location down there."

"River's pretty high. How'd you cross?"

"High, yes. Not impossible to ford it," said Smith.

Cora heard, and her anger flamed anew. Scarr had lied, then—lied about the river for three days He had delayed, deliberately, planning to keep her! Indignation shook her. Scarr was even worse than she thought—more terrible.

Full realization of her danger left her shaken. Scarr had moved slowly, but with definite purpose to trap her. He was a man of terrible obstinacy and deadly rages. Physically he could outmatch a dozen like this wayfarer Smith. Dared she trust an appeal to Smith? Could he save her? Who could save her?

She brought a plate for the guest and the food. Both men ate hungrily. There was little said.

"Traveling?" Smith asked.

"Staying," Scarr grunted. "My claim."

"And you?"

The question was addressed to Cora. Impulsively she wanted to blurt out the truth. She hesitated.

Scarr scowled. Then he spoke for her. "She stays where I do."

"Ah, I see." Smith avoided her eyes. "Hoped you might be going my way. Like company," he added politely.

Cora had the feeling he was watching her intently, yet never caught his eye. Just as intently she watched him while she made a poor pretense of eating; watched his every move and noted carefully his peculiarities. Everything depended on this chance stranger—everything—and she had to know what manner of man he was.

His hands were clean—a favorable sign—lean, long-fingered hands. He ate heartily, but with a noticeably better manner than Scarr. Several times he passed her dishes which she refused. He poured her coffee for her.

Surface signs, these. They might mean much or nothing at all, eloquent of manners, not morals.

How could she tell—how in the world could she gage the man?

Scarr's head was bent low over his dish. He was cleaning up the last of his beans,

chasing them, corraling them, a bit of bread in one hand, the other harrying stragglers with a knife. He played the game with the intentness of a crack billiard shot.

Her heart fluttering, she hazarded a long look, full at the stranger.

Their eyes met.

His face was grave, impassive.

But the eyes carried a message She strove to read it.

Almost imperceptibly one eyebrow lifted, asked a question.

Her lips trembled into speech—

And she saw that Scarr had looked up and was glowering at her.

Scarr thrust his dish at her, saying gruffly: "Take it. I'm finished. Clean 'em all up."

Cora hesitated, then rose to obey. She carried the dirty graniteware dishes to the bench, where they were washed, and Scarr followed her. Under pretense of drinking from the dipper he spoke to her.

"Got my eye on you. One yelp, and all hell's going to break loose! You hear me! One more look like that, and the coroner won't never know which was you and which was Smith. I'm telling you!"

Smith sat with his back to them. He picked up the playing-cards and was idly shuffling.

Scarr emphasized his words with a savage look. Then he walked back to the table and watched Smith, his sullenness gradually fading into interest in the fall of the cards.

Mechanically Cora thrust dirty dishes into a pan of hot water. Scarr's threat left her not frightened, but furious. Yet it emphasized the need of caution. The man was dangerous. Suppose he killed Smith before there was time to warn him, before he could make a move in self-defense?

Scarr had seated himself at the table. The two men were playing cards. She heard the chink of money; saw that both had a stack of coins. She abandoned dishes and found a chair.

Warned by Scarr's sidelong glance, she kept away from the table, sitting in the shadow. Darkness was complete, and Scarr had lighted a lantern and set it on the table.

They were dealing poker hands.

Their talk was brief and concerned only the game. At times Smith derided his bad luck. The pile of coins in front of Scarr, at first a neat series of stacks, grew overhigh, toppled, and spread into a bright mass. He won steadily, and, winning, began to grow genial, then boisterous.

"Hell, you ain't got the luck of a Siwash!" Scarr derided. "Staying on two pair!"

"Rotten, eh? Always that way with me, but I can't seem to let 'em alone."

"I'll open for five."

"Five? I'll tilt her ten."

"And up ten more. Boy, I'll show you action!"

"And twenty! Call me? Three kings."

"Three aces!" Scarr's bellow made the lantern flame jump. "God, you sure love punishment! Never mind, kid, give your luck another whirl, hunh?"

Their play was interminable. Cora Henry, sitting in a hard, home-made chair, afraid to move lest she wake Scarr's suspicions, knew that every muscle and bone in her ached with weariness. She did not care, nor even think of that. She watched and hoped, trusting vainly for some interruption, some chance to speak to the stranger, to warn him. Sometimes she tried to pray.

Abruptly Scarr's luck left him. One big jackpot took half his winnings. More followed that. Fickle Chance wavered again in his favor, then turned her back. He grew sullen, then silent. Five minutes of dumb play between them, then Scarr banged his fist on the table.

"Cleaned me—every damn cent! Picked my bones. Every nickel and— Wait! I got some dust."

One more hand, and Scarr leaped to his feet, kicking over his chair.

"I'm done!" he said.

Smith leaned back and stretched.

"Take a walk round the table—change your luck," he suggested.

"To hell with that. I'm through."

"Well—maybe later. We got all night."

"Hunh!" Scarr blinked and peered.

"Too late for me to hit the trail now. I'll have to bunk with you."

Scarr growled in his throat. His eyes closed into slits of suspicion. He bristled, but his voice was argumentative. "Now, look here, old-timer, sorry, but there ain't room—get it?"

"Room! Why—"

"And there ain't blankets."

"Got my own. Sleep on the floor."

"You're pretty damn thick! Look here, there's a woman here—my woman."

"Well?"

"Well! Hell, it's a case of three's a crowd, if you got to know. We don't want you. That's plain enough, ain't it?"

"Brutally plain, I should say. Smith had risen. His expression was blank. He added suddenly: "But suppose she don't mind."

"She does!"

"Suppose we ask her."

"Suppose we don't. I'm boss here. I say she don't want you, and by—"

"Do you want me?"

Smith had suddenly turned toward Cora.

She found herself on her feet, facing both men. She was numb and suddenly icy cold. She feared what Scarr might do—do suddenly before Smith was warned. Her lips opened and her tongue tried to form words. Her eyes were big and black with excitement.

"Go on, answer him!" Scarr rumbled.

She stepped toward Smith unsteadily. Her hands extended in entreaty. "Take me—take me out of—this. Oh, for the love of God, help me!"

Smith showed no surprise—only nodded slightly. He still kept his grave silence.

"Well," said Scarr suddenly, "you heard her."

"I did."

"What do you think you can do about it? What are you going to do, huh?"

Smith kept silent.

Scarr laughed loudly. "Four-flushing—and I called your bluff! I thought so! Now, you! Take your roll and get outside that door. I'll give you a minute!"

Scarr came round the table truculently. He walked on his toes, his head thrust forward, his big fists clenched.

The stranger watched him, and his lips smiled slightly.

"Wait!" he said quickly as Scar reached him. "How's this?"

He pushed the heap of coins he had won into the center of the table—added the small chamois sack of gold dust. Then from under his vest he produced a money-belt that yielded more gold.

He heaped it all while Scarr stared. He spoke again.

"Look here—that's a pretty good-looking girl of yours. I like her. So do you. I'll stake all that against her. One *hyas tyee* jackpot. Are you game?"

"What do you mean?"

"Exactly what I say. I'll stake all I've got against the girl. Deal one jackpot. If you win, you've got the girl and cleaned me. I go out in the cold to camp. If I win, you go. The girl stays with me. Well?"

Scarr stared, breathing heavily. He eyed the money, and he eyed Cora.

"Hell," he broke out, "I got the girl—and it's my shack. If I've a mind I can throw you out any time."

"Probably you can. But also, by your own account, you're a sport, and a sour-dough. I can see you've raised the devil in your time. I guess you'll play square. Besides, that's a heap plenty gold in that stack. With that and the girl—"

Still Scarr hesitated, glowering suspicion.

Smith smiled and shrugged lightly. "If I had your hog luck," he said slowly, "I don't think it 'd take me long to decide. I'd take a chance."

Cora caught his cue. She managed a smile of scorn. "And you told me what a daredevil you were, Scarr!"

By just the flicker of an eyelash she caught Smith's applause.

Scarr reddened. "Sit down," he roared. "Sit down and deal 'em out. I'll play you. I'm game. The girl against the pot. Deal 'em. Mush!"

CHAPTER IV.

ACES FULL.

SMITH shuffled the cards slowly. His lean hands seemed almost clumsy.

Scarr, leaning across the table, never shifted his glance from those hands.

Cora waited and dared not breathe.

A half-dozen shuffles and Smith passed the pack to be cut. Scarr cut deep, and his big hands shook a little. He cut, then hesitated, then shuffled the pack again.

"Wouldn't trust my own mother in this jackpot," he rumbled.

"Neither 'd I." Smith received back the deck and shuffled yet again, his face blandly vacant.

"Hell, we can't shuffle all night!"

"Just what I say. Shall I deal?"

"Yes—no. No, by thunder!"

"You don't trust me? I don't trust you, if you care to know. Wait, let the girl deal. That O. K.?"

"That's it! Let her deal."

Smith passed Cora the cards. Her hands were dead as gloves. A moment she held them stupidly.

"Shoot 'em," Scarr cried irritably.

"Yes, five apiece. You know?"

Slowly Cora passed the cards. Each took his hand and looked. Their faces were wooden. Beads of sweat stood on Scarr's forehead.

"Draw any, Scarr?" Smith asked, his voice level.

"Nope. I play these. You?"

"Ye-e-e-s. Three, please."

He received the cards from Cora without a glance at her. He studied the improved hand thoughtfully.

"Well!" Scarr was snarling. "It's a showdown—"

"Just one minute—"

"What!"

"It's understood? Whichever one loses gets out of here—at once. And the girl—stays."

"That's understood. All understood, my boy!" Suddenly Scarr grinned widely. He slammed his hand on the table and shouted, "Beat it! Beat that, if you think you know how to hold poker hands."

He spread out three aces and a pair of kings.

His voice roared. "Aces full! You see it, do you? Aces full! Well—well! Got enough now, got enough?"

"Not yet, I haven't. Not—just—yet."

Smith showed his hand, laying down his cards one by one. He held four Jacks.

Cora Henry did not know one hand from another.

She leaned forward fearfully, staring at the telltale cards, trying to read her fate. Then she stared at the two men, and by Scarr's face she knew!

Scarr's mouth was open, but he said nothing. The red that had flamed over those battered features drained away slowly. He rose, making a futile gesture with his open hand.

"Satisfied, are you?" Smith asked.

"I—yes, I'm—satis-fied. I—"

He moved clumsily around the table as he spoke. He was brushing Smith. Then he whirled on him, and Cora heard her own scream, piercingly shrill.

"Smith! Look out!"

Scarr's hand sprang into view, leveling a pistol.

Just as fast the stranger closed with him.

There was no report.

The men were locked and struggling. The pistol struck the floor and skidded into a corner, propelled by Smith's kick.

Almost before she comprehended this, Scarr bellowed in pain, an inarticulate howl. She saw that Smith had him helpless, one arm twisted half behind him.

His hand held Scarr's like a vise, and the cords stood sharp along his white wrist. Slowly Scarr's arm bent upward, twisting until bone and sinew cracked.

Smith glanced back. "Open that door," he directed quietly, and Cora heard above Scarr's yells.

She snatched the door wide. Smith moved his prisoner toward it and out into the night. A sudden, convulsive scuffle between them; Scarr's roar ending in a shriek of pain, the thud of a fall—and then Smith was back, closing the door thoughtfully.

"I think I broke his arm," he said. "I hope so."

Cora knew that the room was dancing before her eyes, that the whole world reeled. The roar of a cataract boomed at her ears. She tried to reach a chair, or table, something to cling to.

Smith's arm was about her shoulders. He got her to a chair and brought her water. Some of it he splashed in her face. Then he made her drink.

"Take it easy a minute," he was saying. "Perfectly quiet. You'll come out of it."

There was a blank, the blank of complete exhaustion, inanition. Then she found herself slowly. She was at the table, her hands clenched tightly on the reassuring hard edge of its rough board top.

Smith was sitting in his old place, riffling the cards. The lightning play of his fingers fascinated her. His hands moved among the paper slips endowed with a strange, graceful life of their own.

He recognized her with a smile and a slight nod.

"Better? That's good. Rest a little while longer. Don't worry. Pretty soon you turn in. Sleep will help. But don't hurry. I'll look after everything. Want another drink?"

She shook her head weakly. Her eyes turned toward the door.

"That's all right. He won't bother. I'll sit up to see that he don't," he said reassuringly.

"He—might—have shot—you."

"Nope. I had him covered. Gun in my side pocket. See? But I don't like shooting. Not with you here. Seen too many innocent bystanders hurt! But it turned out all right. Everything's safe as a church now."

Talking comfortably, smiling a little, his hands were eternally busy among the cards, shuffling, cutting, shuffling again.

Suddenly irritable, her nerves raw, she cried, "Don't. Please, please don't do that!"

"Eh! Oh, the cards?"

"I—I hate—them. The sight of them! You—Scarr—I can't stand thinking of what—what—"

"You mean the chance you took? What might have happened?"

She nodded.

"Lady, there wasn't any chance."

Cora only stared and he continued, "No, no chance at all. That—well, that's what they sometimes call a cold deck. I mean that I—fixed it up. I fixed it to—eliminate—chance—"

"Scarr couldn't win!"

"That's it. Couldn't win. Scarr was up against a sure thing—that time. I saw to that."

"A—a crooked—deal? Is that it?"

"Exactly. Dirty work, but, under the circumstances—well, don't you think it justified?"

"Crooked cards." She stared somberly at the bits of pasteboard.

"You don't like them? Right. Neither do I. Cards! They've been my curse, both kinds, honest and—otherwise. Lot of men laugh at that. Laugh all you want, they are a curse—to some men. They've cost me—well, never mind that. Damn all cards!"

His swift fingers swept the heap together in one pack. His hands closed over them. A rasp of paper and the deck was torn in twain. With a savage gesture he tossed the fragments high. They showered down about them.

"And that's that," he said more lightly.

But Cora had risen now. She faced him, trembling and white. Her black eyes held him fascinated.

"You!" she stammered, pointing shakily. "I know you. You're Oxford—John Oxford!"

"Why, yes! That's so, too. You've got it somehow. That's my name, John Oxford."

CHAPTER V.

JOHN OXFORD.

CORA backed slowly from the table, a step at a time, her horrified gaze on Oxford.

She reached the wall of the cabin and her hands found reassurance in its support. Like something wild that is cornered by the hunter she faced him, her breast heaving, her face dead white, but defiance in her black eyes.

As she retreated John Oxford rose to his feet. His casual smile vanished. He watched her with a puzzled frown and stepped toward her.

Her shudder of repugnance held him fascinated.

She gasped. "Oh, I let you touch me!" Her hand completed a gesture of horror.

"My dear woman, are you mad?"

"Yes, perhaps. I must have been mad—not to know you. Not to know a thing so—unclean!"

His frown deepened. Red came into his face, a blush of resentment. "Stop that. Hold on—do you know what you're saying—"

"Do I know! I know you! A man who fattens on the misery of others. A profiteer in decent men's weakness. A crooked gambler. A common card cheat. Cheat!"

"That's a lie."

Oxford's voice had a cold steadiness.

"A lie," he repeated. "A gambler? Yes, I played. Made my living by it several years. It's rotten, I admit. But when you call me a cheat—"

"I do call you a cheat!"

"You're a woman," he said with a shrug. "But when you say that I tell you you lie."

"And you can say that—after to-night! After to-night, and what you told me. Convicted by your own act, a common card cheat, you stand there and deny it—to me!"

"To-night! Does it make no difference that I cheated to save you? Is it possible you can say that now? Why, even a trace of gratitude—"

"Gratitude!" Cora laughed a hoarse, rasping note. "The gratitude of the woman won in a card game. Passed from one master to another. Really, do you expect gratitude when you saved me—for—yourself!"

His involuntary gesture of denial, the clenching of his fists and the flare of anger in his face passed away. He said slowly, "I'm sorry you must believe that—of me."

"I do believe that. You don't deny it! You can't. Oh, yes, I hoped—for a few silly minutes I hoped that you—but then I did not know you were John Oxford!"

"Evidently I stand convicted." He spread his hands, palms out, a token of surrender.

"I would rather it had been—Scarr—than you!"

Cora saw his start and knew she had hurt deeply and was glad. Then she made a discovery. Her foot struck something hard. She stooped quickly and picked up a pistol, Scarr's weapon; kicked into the corner during the struggle. She snatched it and turned it against her own heart.

She faced him with a biter smile.

"You can have me, Oxford—dead!"

John Oxford stepped back as if to ward off a blow.

He recovered his poise quickly. His hand went to his coat pocket and he drew the pistol that was there and tossed it at her feet.

"You're quite welcome to both of them." He was quiet, but nothing could hide the bitterness he felt. "Any time you feel like using them I'll be here by the door, on watch. You see, Scarr might come back. When you make up your mind I'm sure you won't object to having to shoot me in the back."

CHAPTER VI.

WALLACE TOWERS.

THROUGHOUT the long night Oxford sat beside the door, his back to her. He scarcely moved.

His very pose spoke of a resentment that ruled him to the exclusion of every other thought.

Cora watched him from beside the hearth. When the room grew cold she threw a blanket about her shoulders and again settled in her chair.

Much as she hated the man, great as her reasons for hating seemed to be, she recognized she had roused in him an emotion deeper than her own. His absolute indifference to her; his manner of eliminating her from all further consideration made her furious and, somehow, a little afraid. She was not afraid of the man, but of what she had done to him. She reassured herself many times that every word of her anger had been well justified.

She promised herself not to close her eyes, but she did eventually. When she opened them again it was to struggle against the conviction that she was dreaming.

Wallace Towers stood in the doorway, calling her name.

Towers was young, as tall as Oxford,

rather handsome with his blond hair, smooth-shaved face and evenly tanned skin. If his lips were a trifle full, giving him the suggestion of a sulk, that was scarcely noticeable. From mackinaw to boot-soles he had a fresh, smart look.

He was tremendously excited, almost incoherent.

He hesitated, eying her and he looked both guilty and apologetic and placating.

"Cora! I can't believe it yet. Not even seeing you with my own eyes. Cora, this is—wonderful! It's me, really me. Wake up—aren't you going to kiss me?"

Cora rose unsteadily, dropping the blanket from her. She moved painfully, her legs numb from cramps. All her body ached.

Even then, in this moment of realization that she had found the man she was promised to her first words were of Oxford. "Wallace, where—where is he?"

"Oxford? Gone. Not far. Be back soon. But these first few moments—I suppose he thought we'd like to be alone." He laughed, and extended his arms again. "Well? You are going to kiss me now!"

She warded him off. "No, not yet." She was very sober. "There are—some things—to settle."

Towers flushed. "Yes! I know. It was beastly, my not meeting you. Letting you come alone—to find out—all they were saying about me. I—Cora, when I left I hadn't any hope. I—thought then—it was—forever. I—I had to go. That or a prison. But there was just one chance, one little chance of—of getting it back. I followed that chance, and hoped and prayed I would win it before—before you came. I—honestly, I didn't expect you for two weeks more. I had no idea—"

"Wallace! Then you—you are all right? It's not true what they say, that you—took—that money. It's all fixed?"

"It's all fixed. All right. Cora, I'm going back to Katama. There won't be any prosecution. There won't be—anything unpleasant—now. And we—we're going to be married. Aren't we going to be married?"

Again his arms extended and again she hesitated. "But—but—"

"Cora, believe in me!"

She was in his arms, her face buried against his coat. "I do believe! I must believe. Oh, I do trust you. I—I've got to trust you—to believe in you—now!"

"And it's all right? All right—"

"But you didn't take that money? You didn't—"

"Yes, I took it. If you insist on knowing, I did!"

"Oh, Wallace!" She drew away from him quickly.

"There's no use pretending I didn't take it," Towers went on, suddenly irritable. "I did. Too many people know it now. But that's nothing. Men do that every day. It was—well, just business. Saw a good chance to make something for myself—"

"Ah, I know! You let Oxford tempt you. Let him trick you into losing it. I know, I heard!"

Towers looked at her curiously.

"Where'd you hear that?"

"At Katama. Everybody knows—and—I think—they understand and forgive you. They know!"

"Oh, they do!"

"Of course. The man's notorious. A gambler, a sharper, a common card cheat. Dear, they put the blame where it belongs."

Wallace Towers flushed and eyed her curiously. He thought it over slowly and relief dawned on his face. Still he shook his head. "We-e-ell, if they say that—"

"And it's true. Isn't it? Wallace, it is true?"

Her insistence disturbed him. "Oh, what's the difference? Aren't you satisfied to believe in me—"

"I've got to know. There is a difference. If I'm to marry you—"

"You mean, if I was guilty you—wouldn't?"

"Dear, I want a man who's clean—and honest. No other!"

Towers considered again. "Your own heart tells you I'm clean—and honest. You know it wasn't me, that it was—the man they say—"

"Ah! I felt it! I knew it! I knew it was he. Wallace, I'm so glad—and proud—"

Towers held her close. He sighed a great

relief, then added slowly, "But don't ask any more. It was—oh, Cora, just business! Technical, involved. And Oxford—"

"Don't. Don't mention him. I can't stand even his name. I hate Oxford, hate and despise him. The cheat—"

"Hold on. Wait! Now get this straight, Cora. You must get this straight. No matter what the facts are about John Oxford you—we—we've got to treat him decently, you hear? Got to treat him white. Never mind what you may thinnk. Hide it. Save it for another time. Cora—John Oxford, right now, holds me in his hand. He can smash me—like that. Just close his fist, so! And you and I—we'll have to treat him right until—well, until we part from him at Katama."

"I don't understand you." Cora drew back. Towers followed eagerly. He argued with sudden earnestness that was almost vehemence. "Never mind. Never mind understanding. You'll promise me. You've got to promise me. You will be—decently polite!"

"I'll promise nothing. That cheat! That blackleg!"

"You've got to, I tell you; got to!" Towers's voice became suddenly shrill. He lowered it cautiously and it trembled as he hurried on, "If you don't want to see me in a penitentiary, if you don't want to see me disgraced—yourself disgraced—"

"Wallace! What do you mean—"

"Nothing. Don't look at me that way. I tell you it's nothing. I'm not guilty. But the technicality, if Oxford chooses to desert me—"

"You aren't explaining, dear—"

"Explaining! What's the use of explaining. It's an involved business matter, I tell you. But if you love me, if you mean any of the things you promised me, you'll hold your tongue against Oxford. You'll treat him decently. You'll be nice to him. Smile at him and thank him for everything. Think anything you like. Say anything about him you like, but for God's sake don't say it now!"

"You want me to lie—"

"Lie? Yes, lie. Lie yourself black in the face. Why not? Can't you tell a lie to save me? You said you loved me—"

"Once I said that—"

Towers's gesture stopped her. "He's coming back," he whispered. "Remember!"

CHAPTER VII.

THE SHOWDOWN.

OXFORD appeared in the doorway on the heels of Towers's whisper. He said good morning with a pleasant, mannerly smile. His eyes sought Cora's as he said it and there was a little, quizzical sparkle in them.

He had the manner of a perfect gentleman, ready to forget and forgive.

That manner made Cora furious.

It implied that something had happened; that Oxford felt himself justified in her eyes—triumphant over her.

She bit her lips and refused to answer his salutation, but Towers, watching her fearfully, hastened to fill the breach.

"Come in, John! Everything's O. K. You're welcome as the little birds around this place—or anywhere else we happen to hang our hats. Poor Cora! Her mind's all topsyturvy yet with the excitement and confusion. Guess I surprised her all right—when you come to think of it, why not? Guess we all surprised her. Can you beat it? You two meeting like that, you never knowing who she was, saving her like the hero in a movie show and me popping in on your heels this morning! Do you wonder her head whirls? Remember, she's from little old Van Buren, New York State. She's not used to the way we make things happen in Alaska. But she'll get over that. She's already discovering just how much this family owes to you—"

Oxford smiled again, that deprecating smile that made Cora so furious.

"Forget it," he said. "Let's have breakfast."

Towers echoed, "Sure, we will! Cora, dear, can you fix up something—"

Oxford interrupted quickly. "No, let me. I can scare up pretty good coffee, anyway."

"Yes," Towers agreed, "we'll all take a hand."

On the plea of freshening her toilet Cora got out of the cabin. She had to have a moment to think, to adjust herself. She lingered by the stream that was in stone's throw of the log structure, but it needed more than ice-cold water over her head, neck and shoulders to clear the confusion of her thoughts.

Shock had followed shock too fast for coherence. Out of the welter she recognized but two ideas, the portraits of two men, Oxford, whom she hated, and Towers, whom she—what?

That was it! What was her feeling toward this Wallace Towers? Only physically was he the Wallace Towers she pledged herself to four years ago. Something had happened to him. Something had changed. A phrase came out of the muddle of last night's memories and attached itself to him—Scarr's phrase, "the kind that's *led* into trouble."

Was it possible that even Scarr might speak truth?

Towers's voice summoned her to breakfast and she had no firmer grasp of herself or the situation. Oxford was standing awaiting her at the table, though Towers had already begun eating. He held her chair and Cora shuddered away from his touch on her sleeve.

She made a poor pretense of the food. Resolutely she avoided Oxford's glances, ignored his attempts at talk and refused his efforts to serve her.

She began to tremble excessively. The situation was hateful. She would not tolerate it.

Oxford had interrupted on the verge of her own rebellion. He silenced Towers's babble with a look and spoke gravely to Cora.

"Miss Henry, you have something to say to me this morning, I think?"

She stared, exclaiming, "I have? I think not—"

Wallace Towers here broke in.

"Why, Cora, of course! After all—after last night—and what we discussed. Cora—"

"Why not let her say it?" Oxford suggested gently.

"Yes, say it, Cora," Towers prompted.

Cora shook her head. "I have nothing to say—to you."

"Cora! My God, you—" Towers half rose. His whole body was shaking in his vehemence.

"Wallace," Oxford asked, ominously calm, "you promised to explain everything, I think?"

"I did, John. Sure, I did. She—Cora thanks you. From the bottom of her heart she appreciates what you have done; what you are doing. She does, John. She sees now how foolish and mistaken she was. She is sorry, bitterly sorry for her mistake and her—rudeness. She has told me all this—and she'll tell you. She'll apologize to you and ask that you forgive—"

Cora was on her feet, drawn up straight and white. Only her eyes lived and there was such a scorn in them, such outraged honesty that they silenced even Towers.

"That's a lie," she announced distinctly. "Wallace Towers lies. I do not apologize. Nor do I retract one word. I! Apologize to you! I will not lie. It's true, every word I said. I believe it all."

Towers tried to silence her, tried to shout her down. He gave that up and threw himself into his chair, sinking his head between his hands.

Oxford heard her out with cool attention. Then he said sternly, "Very well. Listen to me. Evidently Wallace's *explanations* don't explain. For I give you credit for one thing, Miss Henry, a keen intelligence. I'll explain this time and—"

"John, let me tell it," Towers begged, looking up suddenly and stretching out his hands.

"Be still. You'll answer when I speak to you." Oxford was savage for all his quiet voice. "Now, Miss Henry, Wallace Towers embezzled money from the Katama cannery, money trusted to him. It was spent not with me, as you seem to imagine, but in a foolish stock speculation. Of course he hoped to win and restore the fund, all embezzlers do. He lost. Then in a panic Wallace came to me at Flambeau. Contrary to your opinion I was not busy fleecing honest miners or debauching innocent young men. I was developing a paying oil proposition, with honest money. I told you

I was a gambler. *Was,* mark you. In this country men and women learn a deep respect for the past tense when it touches on a man's life—and his honor.

"Wallace came to me, begging. He told me he had written you to join him. That you were about to be married. And because, in earlier days, I *have* played cards with Wallace—yes, sometimes won his money, and having taught him that vice to some extent felt a remorse and a responsibility—I listened. And what decided me to help him, Miss Henry, was the thought of a woman, coming here alone, facing a tragedy. For her sake I decided.

"I started at once from Flambeau; leaving my own business. He followed a few hours after. The plan was that I should come to Katama ahead of Wallace and by settling for him make his return to greet you possible. Insure him against a very ugly arrest."

Oxford turned on Towers. "Is this true?" he rasped. "Is every word and detail the truth?"

"Yes, yes, yes! Every word of it. It is true, John." Towers fairly gibbered in his anxiety. Even as she understood his earlier lie he turned on Cora and flared out, "And I told you. Don't deny it. I told you. Didn't I tell you?"

Cora looked at him, saying nothing. Her look stopped his mouth. So significant was it then even Oxford smiled a brief acknowledgment.

"I think Miss Henry understands *both of us,*" he said. "There's only this to add. Wallace, I've changed my mind about you. Wait! Listen to me—you are not worth saving. I knew that, rather I feared it. But because of a woman I thought—the idea appealed to me. I imagined—oh, a woman's anguish. Perhaps her gratitude to me and a lifelong friendship among the three of us. Every man has a price. I—it seemed that a friendship more than repaid me. However, I—" He hesitated, his eyes on Cora. Then he continued with a distinct significance, "I find I was mistaken in the woman. And that's all. Good morning to you both."

He rose and turned to the door.

Towers flung himself at him, catching his arm and clinging to it, though Oxford tried to shake himself free. "No," he choked, "no, no! John, you wouldn't do that. You—you promised me. You said—you promised—oh, God, you won't let them send me up for it! Didn't we agree? Didn't you promise—"

"You heard what I said."

Oxford snatched the clinging hands from his coat and his shove, gentle though it seemed, sent Towers reeling.

"You!" Towers shaking hand indicated Cora. "You did this. I told you. Told you what to do! Told you why! That's how you help me. That's how you stand by the man you—you said you loved. The man you promised to marry! Good God! You marry me. Well, that didn't happen anyway. And I'm glad—damned glad. You for a wife? Damn you! Damn you!"

Even Oxford protested. He was more than shocked at this outburst.

Cora took the blow without flinching. There was neither surprise nor resentment in her face. Strangely enough what expression there was suggested a calm acceptance of fact; acceptance of the expected fact.

Then, as Oxford was turning from the door, she spoke, and by her look she had reached a daring decision.

"Just a moment, John Oxford."

"Yes?"

"You mentioned a—a price. The price of a woman's friendship. That was enough until you saw the woman, enough to save Wallace. I'll bid for him. No, he's not worth much! But I—loved him—once. I—wouldn't see him suffer—prison—even now. You refused friendship, I offer you—the woman."

"What's that?"

"I offer you the woman—myself. Give him the money. Let him pay his embezzlement. I'll pay you—if you think me worth it. Yours to keep—or throw away. It doesn't matter. Well?"

Oxford drew a deep breath.

His eyes brightened.

Then both looked at Towers, who avoided their looks.

"Well, Towers?" Oxford asked briskly.

Towers groaned. His face flamed and paled. Then he burst out sulkily, "I don't

give a damn what you do—either of you. Go to hell for all of me!"

CHAPTER VIII.

FREEDOM.

WALLACE TOWERS was gone. He went without a backward look, his eyes avoiding their eyes, his pocket weighed down with Oxford's money, the price of his default.

From the door of the cabin Oxford watched him go and his face was a cryptogram.

Cora did not watch.

She had heard Wallace's acceptance of her own terms and seen him take the money. Just once, when he acquiesced in her bargain, she had been betrayed into a look of astonishment and horror more eloquent than a book.

Then all light had gone from her eyes. Their glance was blank. They seemed to say that something within her had died; that she had ceased to struggle; that there was nothing left to struggle for.

When Oxford turned from the door and approached her she showed neither fear nor repugnance. She accepted him quietly and his hand on her arm brought no shiver now.

"You didn't expect this?" he said gently.

"No, I didn't expect this."

"Meant it for a bluff, eh? Meant it to wake him up—make him realize?"

"Yes, I thought he would—realize."

"And the bluff was called."

"Yes—called."

"You can lose—gamely?"

"I'm not crying, am I?"

"You made a bargain—"

"I'll keep it."

"You trade yourself to me—for that?"

"I trade myself."

"You don't value yourself very highly?"

"No. Perhaps not—very highly. But it's done. You may do as you please about—about me."

"You mean, I suppose, keep you or discard you at my own pleasure. Marry you or—"

"Yes. What pleases you."

"Good!" He breathed deeply again. Abruptly he added, "Put on your trail-boots. Get ready to go."

She obeyed him without hesitation. In a few moments she stood before him.

Oxford took her arm and led her from the door. His face was hard and the cold white of white marble. Still holding her arm, he pointed. "The trail to Katama lies that way. Good-by."

She stood, uncomprehending.

"Follow the trail," he said again. "You have been over it. Follow it back. Better not delay—"

She turned suddenly to stare at him, almost dumb with amazement; still doubting she had heard truly. "You—me—you don't want me?"

Oxford smiled faintly and slowly shook his head. He held himself very straight and with a pride in his triumph that was terrible. Softly, but with deadly distinctness he answered, "I do not want you. If you were the last woman alive, if I were the last man—if I was mad for loneliness and the love of a woman, I would not take you—on any terms. Good-by."

She faced him a moment more. A furious wave of color swept her face and neck and drained away as quickly. She turned and took one hesitating step, and another.

Then again she faced him. "Please, there is one thing. What I have said of you, to you—what I have thought. I wish—I wish to express my bitter regret, my—"

"No," said Oxford. "I don't care for that. Not even your apologies. Good-by—and a pleasant journey."

Oxford turned his back upon her, ready to reenter the cabin. Mechanically she turned to take the back trail, and in all the world there was nothing so small, so utterly alone and naked as her soul was then.

That was one span of time, long or short she could never tell. It ended in a flash as she comprehended Scarr.

Scarr stood in the edge of the clearing. He stooped forward and the sun glinted from the pistol-barrel he had trained on Oxford.

Scarr's pose, eloquent of his purpose; all the photographic details of the scene,

even the rage twisted features of the assassin flashed sharp, then vanished with her anguished cry, "John! John Oxford. John—"

The pistol report was negligible in volume.

For a second Oxford, wheeling at her cry, saw nothing wrong in all the scene except that the girl had sprang after him. Then she crumpled fantastically and sprawled on the ground, accepting the bullet meant for him.

Oxford knelt beside her, his trembling hand ripping loose the clothing from her shoulders, seeking shakily for the source of the blood that flowed.

He found it, in the soft flesh of the upper arm, and had time to feel the overwhelming rush of relief and joy before her hand caught his and clung fast.

Her fingers twined over his and she murmured, "John—the biggest man—I ever knew. A real man—" Then even her lips went white in a faint, but her hand still held his.

EPILOGUE

"If she's the right kind of girl," Wrangel, the sourdough, repeated to George Fish and Fat McFadden, purser of the Skagit. "It all depends on that. If she's a real woman, who can break away from the chains of little conventions that tie men and women of the States, why, she can make a pay streak out of the toughest luck gravel God ever put on earth. It all depends on that."

(The end.)

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LUCKLESS LUKE

NOW, Luckless Luke came into town
With two guns swinging low,
And folks wuz kinda shy of him
Where'er he chanced to go,
For Luckless Luke is some bad man,
As all us fellows know.

And when he happened to step in
The Roaring Rip Hotel,
Folk said that in a minute he
Would start to raisin' hell,
And fire and brimstone would abound
For quite a lengthy spell.

But nothin' happened, though folks said
'Twould come to pass as soon
As Luckless Luke went over to
The Yellow Dog Saloon,
And bullets would be humming
A most ferocious tune.

But Luckless Luke, the terrible,
Of man-killin' renown,
Just sauntered round them dusty streets
With head a hanging down,
And then we knowed the reason why—
His wife she wuz in town.

Joe Lee Davis.

Let the Wedding Wait

Part III

by J. L. Schoolcraft

Author of "The Case of Madeleine Patris," "The Blood Pearl," etc.

CHAPTER X.

THE PINCH HITTER.

JIM BANGS kept his roadster tuned to concert pitch. Once he was clear of the clump of cars at St. Paul's chantry, the only limit to his speed was the city ordinance and the posts of the Elevated structure. Jim was curious to know just why Sally was going to the Club, and he glanced at the figure sitting low in the seat beside him to see if she would encourage a discreet question.

All he could see over the upturned collar of the coat was a smooth, white temple and the curve of dark hair in which still hung a fragment of blossoms from her bridal bouquet. They flashed past a traffic policeman who put up his hand in warning, and Jim lifted his foot from the pedal a fraction of an inch.

"I suppose we can't get down there too soon," said Jim, "if it is a matter of such importance."

He put a note of inquiry into his voice, thinking he migh elicit a bit of information, but Sally remained silent. Her mind was busy, not with what was ahead of her, but what was behind—the unparalleled scene of an interrupted wedding in St. Paul's chantry. She pictured with painful vividness the agitated whispering of the women hot upon the trail of a scandal, the benevolent astonishment of the rector, the alarm and embarrassment of her own family—and Henry Fleet. Henry was the epitome of propriety; Mrs. Grundy's breath was nauseous to him.

She winced painfully at the thought of him, then resolutely determined to think only of what was ahead of her. She tried to imagine what had come upon Mabel Duveen which would prompt her to call upon one so little likely to be of any help to her.

After all, provided she could forget what she had left behind her, there was a thrill in speeding this way to some unknown situation which might be full of danger to herself. She wished that it could be a perilous adventure, for every one has possibilities of brave action which in the ordinary course of life are dormant, and there is a profound and natural thrill which comes from acting to the full limit of one's powers.

Sally Remington's life had been so smoothly ordered that the thought of adventure was like wine in her veins. And, she thought, if she could go through some dangerous situation with credit to herself, she could at the end of it go to Henry Fleet, command his respect, and convince him that her flight had not been a thing of mere caprice. She sat up in the seat

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for September 24.

and a tinge of color came back to her cheeks.

"Can't you go faster?" she urged Jim. "It seems to me that we are simply crawling!"

"Right you are!" Jim agreed.

This was an invitation which he had never yet declined, and the traffic policeman stood only at the important cross-streets. Jim "stepped on her tail," and the little car put out her nose and flashed through the traffic, while the needle of the speedometer jumped half-way across the dial. But Jim's "jinx" was after him that day, for he heard the stuffy *put-put* of a motorcycle engine on one quarter.

As he slowed up, a traffic policeman hove alongside, riding with that air of unappeasable fury which is a part of a good motorcycle's equipment. The policeman put out his hand, and Jim slowed down with an exclamation of disgust. The officer motioned him to the curb; there was nothing for it but to stop, and Jim did so.

"Jim!" objected Sally. "We simply can't stop now—I must get on to the Club!"

"Doggone it!" said Jim. "Who would have thought that one of those insects was hanging around at this time of day?"

Their pursuer dismounted leisurely and, propping his machine against the curb, took off his gloves, pushed his goggles over the vizor of his cap, and took a small book from the inner pocket of his tunic.

"Name?" he requested. "I have your number."

"Now, look here, officer," spoke up Jim, "I simply must get along. I am traveling on a matter of life and death importance."

"That's what they all say," was the reply, delivered with an air of Olympian disinterestedness. "Name?"

"Bangs—James Bangs—and I don't think that I was going very fast. Perhaps this car will do better than I thought, or perhaps the speedometer isn't quite correct. It seemed to me that I was doing about fifteen."

"Nearer fifty. You'll have to go to the station with me."

"As I told you," cried Jim, "it is a matter of vital importance. It is worth a great deal to me not to be stopped just now."

"Nothing doing," said the officer. "You'll have to go, that's all."

"But can't he give you his name," said Sally, "and report at the station afterward? There is no chance for his deceiving you, for you have his number."

"I'll say I have his number," was the grim reply. "Nothing but the fire department and ambulances can get along this street at fifty miles an hour. Come along."

Jim's remonstrance was lost in the whir of the motorcycle engine.

"The jinx is on me for life," he said to Sally. "This is what I get for being too wise. We shall be held up for Lord only knows how long."

Sally Remington was already out of the car.

"I shall have to go in a taxi," she decided, "and I haven't any money."

"Here is part of the rector's tip," offered Jim. "I suppose the police judge will get the rest of it. Trust me to ball up everything. Take care of yourself, Sally. I will be along as soon as I can. Where shall I find you when I get down there?"

Sally was already on her way to the corner, where there was a taxi-stand. She climbed into one and sped on her way to the Club.

In the twilight its unlighted marquise looked strangely unfamiliar to her. She paid the driver, and walked along the street to the fourth door from the big entrance, then paused at the bottom of the steps, for her heart failed her a bit as she looked up at the dingy brown front. One of the windows above stood open, and a green shade with a bit of string on it flapped miserably in and out. A late fall of snow had been tramped smooth on the walk, but on the steps it lay untouched.

She was going among people to whom the words "theft," "prison," and even worse were as common as tea and bridge were to her. But this was not the time to falter, and she walked quickly up the steps, conscious of the curious looks of one or two passers-by.

She pulled at the old knob of the bell-pull, and the door swung open before her. She saw Joe standing within the dim hall. She had seen his face but once before, and then it had seemed friendly—now he looked at her with an inscrutable expression in which she caught a note of distrust.

"I came to see Miss Duveen," she announced. "I think she expects me."

Joe turned without a word, and she followed him down the long halls with her hand out to guide her in the gloom. She felt about her the chill hush of a deserted, old place; she saw Joe only when he passed through the patches of light that streamed into the corridor from the open doors.

"Do you know what is the trouble?" she asked Joe, as he paused before a door. "She did not have time to tell me."

"Whatever it is," equivocated Joe, "she reckons that you are the only one to help her out of it."

He tapped at the door with his finger-nail and said: "Miss Duveen, here's the pinch hitter!"

He did not wait for the door to open, but melted away in the darkness. Sally Remington stood wondering at Joe's cryptic announcement; she heard a light step within the room, and the door swung open. She saw the white face of Mabel Duveen in the dimness, and felt her hand taken in two small, cold ones.

Then she heard the girl say: "I knew you would come!"

The sudden friendship, so rare among women, which had sprung up between these two, so far apart in the world, was warm in Sally's breast. She put her arm about Mabel Duveen and said: "What a cold, desolate place this is! Can't you come away with me? We could go to my home—or somewhere where it would at least be warm."

"No," said Mabel; "I can't leave—yet. I must tell you everything—just as it happened."

"At least we can have a light. It would not seem so cold and dangerous here if we could have a light."

"The current is turned off," explained Mabel Duveen, drawing a chair beside her own—the backs of both being to the couch. She sat down and drew Sally to a seat beside her.

"Do you remember the man who came in here the night you were in the wardrobe?"

"Yes. The night you saved me so cleverly."

"I was not so clever as I thought I was," went on Mabel. "He turned out to be the clever one. I have not been living here since that night, and I was planning to go away and leave all this for good. I came here to get a few things I wanted to take with me. Joe was in here talking to me, when Josiah Whittaker came in. That isn't his name at all—I don't know who he is, but he's a crook of some kind.

"He knew that you were in that wardrobe all the time. I thought I was getting away with it in fine shape, but I guess it's true that pride goes before a fall. I might have known that a real reformer would not have the sense to push this far into the place. He not only knew that you had been in this room that night, but he followed you and found out where you lived and what your name was. He said that unless you or Mr. Fleet paid him thirty thousand dollars he would tell the whole story to the newspapers."

Sally Remington was tempted to laugh—such a thing was so far from anything within her experience that it seemed almost funny.

"How absurd!" she smiled. "Why, that is blackmail!"

But on top of that first feeling came a cold dash of fear. She knew that it would be a painful story to her family and to Henry Fleet's family. She knew, too, that it was a story to which the best newspapers would not grudge a half-column, while the cheaper ones would spread it over the inner sheet.

"That would be horrible!" she shuddered. "What did you do?"

"He wanted me to be the go-between. I was to get you here, so that he could talk to you. The only thing that would keep him from telling the story was thirty thousand dollars from you—or I must go to South America with him."

When this had sunk into Sally Remington's mind, a rush of fury sprang up within her that she had not known was possible to her.

"What a beast!" she cried. "What an utter beast!"

"While we were talking," went on Mabel, "Whittaker wanted a drink. Joe got him some Scotch and seltzer and tipped him over with it."

"Tipped him over?"

"Yes. Knock-out drops. He took the drink, and within twenty minutes he collapsed. I didn't know what Joe had done, and I lost my head and telephoned you. Then after I had telephoned you Joe came in and told me what he had done. He meant to be a good pal, but I'm afraid he gave him too much—that he is either dead or dying—"

Sally Remington felt her companion's shudder, but curiously enough there was no horror in her own mind; she felt that Josiah Whittaker had reaped his own sowing. "Good for Joe!" she exclaimed. "I almost hope that Josiah Whittaker did get too much, although I suppose that is not a very Christian wish."

"Joe planned to have me go away, and perhaps I should have gone, but I simply couldn't go and leave this behind me. If he should die and be found in my room, it would be put on me. If he did not die, he would follow me to get even. In any case I could never be happy, wondering how it turned out and feeling all the time that sooner or later I should suffer the consequences. I want to start clean, and how can I if I go away with this behind me?"

"I cannot tell you how happy I am that I came," smiled Sally reassuringly. "It was hard for me to get away, but if it hadn't been for me you would never have been in this trouble. If it hadn't been for me, you could have gone away as you want to."

"No," sobbed Mabel. "If it had not been for you, I should never have thought of breaking away. You have done more for me than I ever did for you. And there is one thing more that I must tell you. Josiah Whittaker is still here."

"Still here?"

"Lying on that couch under the window. Joe laid him out there."

Sally rose from her chair and stared intently at the long, black shadow under the window. She could make out the edge of the couch, but nothing more until a light, striking suddenly down from a taller building, showed her the powerful, thick-chested figure with its startling white face and folded hands.

She went to the side of the couch almost without fear, for Josiah Whittaker did not look dangerous as he lay there, with the lines of the face sagging and the crossed hands nerveless and open.

She stooped, but could hear no sound of his breathing. She touched his face—it was cold clay—then put her hand upon his heart; but she caught no movement there, and the chill of his body struck through to her hand.

After all, she thought as she turned back to Mabel, the underworld was not a place of unrelieved horror. She had pictured all its people as being shifty-eyed and physically repulsive. But here was a girl on one side of the game which she was now playing who had beauty and a touch of piquancy which would have been the envy of any of her own friends; and on the other side was a man who looked for all the world like a vestryman in an up-town church.

She dropped back into her chair beside Mabel, girding her mind to meet the emergency, but keenly sorry for her own inexperience.

"You see," said Mabel, "why I sent for you."

"Yes, and I am sorry to be so stupid about things—like this. Whatever I can do I will do—you may count on my loyalty at least. What *is* there to do?"

"I don't know!" sighed the other girl; and Sally could tell by the break in her voice that she was near the end of her strength. She had thought of one thing, but it seemed so obvious that she was sure that Mabel had already considered it and dismissed it.

"You must have thought of the first thing that came into my head," she suggested, "and that is to go to the police."

"Never!" cried Mabel in a sudden pan-

ic. "Never! They would be only too glad to put a good finish to this place by sending up somebody who belonged here. He may be standing in with them, too. Any one who hangs out here is fair game for the police."

"But surely," urged Sally, "if you went to them and told them everything just as it happened, they could not do anything to you. They cannot convict an innocent person."

"Don't you think it!" the other girl retorted bitterly. "More than one man is in stir for something he didn't do. Besides, that would mean getting Joe into it. What he did he thought he was doing for the best. I couldn't get him into it."

"That's true," Sally agreed. "I hadn't thought of Joe. We must protect him. Why not go away with me, then? No one would ever thing of looking for you in my house—or we can travel."

"No," Mabel dismissed the suggestion—"that would drag you into it in a way that I will not stand for. Besides it would mean that I would live like a hermit—I might as well be doing time and getting the thing over."

"Well, then"—a plan of campaign unrolled itself in Sally's mind suddenly and clearly—"the thing for us to do is to get him away from here and put him in some place where we can watch him and he can't watch us.

"I started down here with Jim Bangs in his car. He will be here in a few minutes, and Jim will know of some good place where we can put him until he wakes up—at least it will be a better place for him to die in than this. I can trust Jim—he was arrested for speeding, he was in such a hurry to get me down here. How does that plan sound to you?"

"It is the best thing we can do," answered Mabel after a moment's reflection. "We must get him out of here. He may forget everything when he wakes up, and if he doesn't wake up—there is a chance that no one will connect him with this place."

"Fine!" Sally sprang up. "Now there must be some way of getting him out of here without being seen. On what do these windows open?"

"On a court. There is a drop there about the height of a man. But there's a window in the bath that opens on an alley. A machine could come in there, and no one would suspect anything because they are often parked there."

Sally Remington opened the door to the bath and saw a dim patch of light which marked the window. She unlocked it and put her strength to it. After a moment it yielded, and she could see that it was wide enough to admit the passage of a man.

She came back to Mabel and said triumphantly: "That will be our plan then—the window is wide enough. Jim can back the car in there, and when it is a bit later and the streets are quiet we can put Josiah Whittaker in the car and take him riding. The thing to do now is to make sure that Jim comes here. Perhaps I had better tell Joe to watch out for him."

The fact of having some sort of plan of action brought the heart back to Mabel Duveen, together with the cordial of friendship. She straightened up in her chair and said: "You are right, but let me talk to Joe."

She pressed the button, and in the quietness of the place they could hear the buzzer sounding in the empty hall. But Joe did not come.

Mabel Duveen went out into the corridor and called "Joe!" softly; but she saw no sign of him.

"I can't find Joe just now," she said. "I'll have to try again. He must be around somewhere, because he promised to stay around and help. Joe is a good pal—he wouldn't go back on me."

At that moment Slippery Joe was helping as best he knew.

CHAPTER XI.

JOE HELPS AGAIN.

SLIPPERY JOE'S mind was a queer jumble of sense and stupidity, insight and obtuseness. In his own world there was no one sharper than he—he could make two aces grow where one grew before, and when he talked the dice listened. But Joe was not a cosmopolite, not a man of wide

experience, for his life had been spent in the lower ranks of his craft, and he had the same conservatism that marks any member of a well-defined class. His instinct worked with a man like Josiah Whittaker—with Sally Remington it was altogether at fault.

While she was unlike any crook he had ever seen, he felt that she was "one of us," probably the sort that dealt in big "come on" games such as the sale of stock for hypothetical oil-wells, or perhaps she was a smuggler of rare gems; and both of these games Joe felt to be quite dishonest and unwarrantable.

He kept a sharp lookout after Sally Remington had gone into Mabel Duveen's room, for he was sure that a girl of that sort would not work alone, nor was he surprised when he saw a smart roadster roll into the street about half an hour after Sally's arrival. He watched from behind the glass front door, and Jim Bangs's silk hat and fur-collared coat realized his suspicions to the full.

Jim walked up and down for several minutes in front of the houses, apparently undecided as to which door he should tackle first.

Joe saw him go to the tool-box of his car, and then a round spot of white light danced on the house front. Jim knew only vaguely where Sally was—she had told him once that her adventure had taken place in one of the old houses connected with the Club. He passed along the street until his light fell upon the print of Sally's shoe in the new-fallen snow on the steps. He accepted this as a sign that Sally had come that way, mounted the steps, and pulled at the bell. There was no answering peal, for the reason that Joe had muffled the bell with his coat. Slippery Joe waited for a decent interval to elapse and then opened the door, walked into the vestibule, and closed the door behind him.

Jim Bangs flashed the spotlight upon Joe's face, and the latter grinned amiably. "What can I do for you, boss?"

"I am looking for a young lady," said Jim. "I was to meet her here. She came about a half-hour ago, I should say. Is she here?"

"I don't know, chief," grunted Joe. "What name?"

Jim thought for a moment before he answered—perhaps it would not be the best thing in the world to publish Sally's name all over the place. Quite casually he put the light on Joe's face—a queer physiognomy, good-natured in a way, but the eyes, though blue and clear, were set as close together as eyes could be, and Jim had the usual superstition that this indicated a crook.

"She was a rather tall girl," described Jim, "in a black coat—a man's coat, fur-lined. No hat. She came in a taxi."

"I haven't seen anybody like that." Joe, in his turn, had taken a fairly complete inventory of Jim Bangs and decided that his front was excellent. "Fact is, the place is shut up tight. I am the only one here, and I am only caretaking until the place is sold. Nobody here at all, as far as I know."

"That's curious." Jim frowned. "She must have come here—I am quite certain that she did. Perhaps she went to some other part of the building."

"No chance." Joe shook his head. "The other doors are all locked. This is the only place where anybody could get in or out, as far as that goes. What would she be doing here anyway? The place is all shot to hell—nothing here for anybody. That is, if you don't mind me asking."

"I have an idea that she came here to see a girl—a Miss Duveen. I am not sure, but I think so."

This put a new angle on the affair for Joe—it would do him no good to deny knowledge of Mabel Duveen as long as this man knew she had lived there.

"Oh, Miss Duveen!" he said. "Well, she's gone away. She hasn't been here for an hour or more. She said she was getting a train, and I guess she's gone for good. She had her traveling bag with her. She's beat it like the rest of the sensible birds."

Jim flashed the light into Joe's face again and found it bland. Perhaps Sally had found that there was no one at the Club and had gone back home, but he could not be absolutely sure that she had come to see Miss Duveen. Even so, she was the one through whom he must get track of Sally.

"I wish you would make sure," he said. "It is very important that I find this girl. Would you mind making sure that Miss Duveen is gone?"

"Sure." Joe opened the door. "You can see for yourself."

He walked into the hall, and Jim followed his heels with the spotlight. In a warren like the Club it was an easy matter for Joe to turn to the right where he should have turned to the left and to take Jim up a flight of stairs while Mabel's room was on the floor below.

Jim followed him, puzzled to the last degree and a bit alarmed, for the Club in its present chilly, deserted condition was no place for Sally Remington.

Joe picked out a door at random, stopped in front of it, tapped, and called softly: "Miss Duveen!" Naturally there was no answer. He opened the door and said: "You can see for yourself. This used to be Miss Duveen's room."

Jim's light danced about the room and revealed one high-heeled shoe, a comb, a glove, and a pile of half-burned magazines lying on the hearth. From these slender bits of evidence he must conclude that this had been Mabel Duveen's room and that she had gone. He looked at Joe and found his face childlike and bland. He drew back into the corridor and looked as far up and down it as his light would carry. It was obviously impossible for him to search a place so full of secret places as this.

"That girl," he said, "who came here has powerful friends. If anything happens to her somebody will sweat for it!"

"Sure," said Joe, "but it ain't my fault if she starts for here and doesn't get here. I don't know anything about it. Miss Duveen may come back, but she said she was catching a train."

Jim still had a portion of the rector's fee, although the police judge had taken a fair share of it. He took it from his pocket.

"It is worth this to me," he said, "to know just what became of Miss Duveen. Are you sure you are telling me everything you know?"

Joe's code of honor was not a conventional one, but it was nevertheless strong. The display of money tempted him, for he saw some lean months ahead. But where Mabel Duveen was concerned he was incorruptible, and he said to Jim: "That's O. K., chief. I wouldn't take the coin from you just to tell you something I didn't know."

Jim felt a bit easier after this evidence of Joe's honesty. He motioned to Joe to lead him back to the entrance. When they reached it Joe said: "Miss Duveen might come back. Do you want to wait?"

"No, thanks," said Jim. "But I tell you what I wish you would do. Here is my card with my telephone number on it, and in case you hear anything about either of them will you please telephone me?"

"Sure I will," agreed Joe. "Glad to do it for you!"

"Thanks a lot," said Jim. "Good night."

"Good night." Joe watched him go down the steps. "Certainly put the skids under that fresh guy."

As Jim got into his roadster he felt baffled and a bit uneasy. He was sure that Sally should have come there, but there was the possibility that she had come and gone; and in that case the thing for him to do was to get back to his own apartment, where she could find him.

He could not very well run over a hive like the Club, shouting Sally's name; and the man with whom he had just talked, while not a very prepossessing person, seemed honest.

He started his car and headed up-town for his own apartment. If he had known who awaited him there it is probable he would have sought the comparative safety of his own club.

CHAPTER XII.

THE TRUTH IS STRANGER THAN FICTION.

OF all the painful emotions, injured pride has the keenest tooth. The rector's version of Sally's flight had not been such as to offer any comfort to Henry Fleet. He knew nothing of the message from the Club; he only knew that Sally had fled without explanation in the company of Jim Bangs. If she had gone

alone he might have felt only alarm; as it was, wherever she had gone she had chosen to take Jim with her.

The sympathetic glances which bombarded him were wormwood to his pride, but Henry Fleet was not a man to make a cheap show of his emotions. He shook hands with the rector and slipped out into the street with his mind made up to a course of action. Fleet's was the sort of nature which prefers actual misfortune to uncertainty; whatever this riddle might be, Jim Bangs had the key to it, and he started out to find Jim Bangs.

He had been at Jim's apartment so often that the latter's servant, an oldish man with the baby cheek and misty blue eye of the man who has lived comfortably indoors all his life, let him in without question. Although trained to hide surprise, joy, anger, and grief—emotions which are deleted from the servant's nature when in the presence of his betters—the man started a bit at sight of Fleet in frock coat and gardenia.

"Where is—Bangs?" asked Fleet as he stepped inside the door.

"I don't know, sir," said the valet in his gentle wheeze. "The master has not been back since he dressed for the wedding. Wishing you much happiness, sir."

Fleet looked at the old man keenly, but in spite of the mild blue gaze returned to him, something turbulent in his mind whispered to him to doubt his word.

"You are sure? It is extremely important that I know."

"Quite sure, sir. I may have dozed off a bit, but Mr. Bangs left his key here, and I should have waked when he rang."

"And you don't know where he is?"

"No, sir."

Fleet strode past him without leaving his hat and coat in the servant's expectant hands. The first door in the short hall was that of Jim's bedroom. It was closed, and Fleet knew by every law of decency he should not open it, but solving this mystery was the most important thing in his life. He felt the curious eyes of the servant on him, and he hesitated. But had Jim played fair with him?

He threw the door open. The room was empty. Furthermore, the door to the wardrobe and the door to the bath were also open. He passed on to the next room—a small dining-room done in dark oak with a pendulous moose-head over the buffet. That room, too, was empty, and he went on to the living-room—a chamber high enough and large enough to be the studio of a successful artist.

The single great square window looked like a patch of nocturnal sky; it was blue in the twilight, with a sprinkling of starry lights from the city. The valet followed Fleet noiselessly into the room, turned on the lights, and lighted the lamp on the smoking-tray. There was but one other occupant in that room—a tawny chow dog that waked from his nap on the long couch, showed his blue tongue in a yawn, jumped down and sniffed at Fleet's legs.

"You will find the cigarettes in the usual place, sir," said the valet. "I am sorry that Mr. Bangs has the only key to the cupboard, sir, or I might offer you something."

"You don't know when Bangs will be back?"

"I do not, sir."

"But surely"—Fleet faltered a bit in spite of himself—"you expect him tonight."

"You know Mr. Bangs's habits as well as I do, sir," said the valet with a deprecating smile. "He didn't say anything about being away for the night, sir, but that does not mean that he will be here. I never do anything about breakfast until I hear him ring. He did say that he would not be here for dinner."

Fleet nodded, and the man went out. To the jealous man trifles are proof, and that room itself argued against Jim. Most of the photographs on the mahogany desk were of girls—pretty ones. The largest Jim recognized as being the likeness of the reigning beauty of the Winter Frolic. It was subscribed in a round, babyish hand: "To priceless old Jim—from his pal, Dolly." There were others of this type, and many of the letters neatly stacked on the desk bore addresses in unquestionably feminine handwriting.

Among the pictures he saw one of Sally—an exact duplicate of one which he had

received in a Canadian lumber-camp three months before. Fleet put his hands to his head and groaned. What was there about Bangs that drew women as a fire draws a crowd?

In his present state of mind Fleet was ready to believe all that the poets have said about the inconstancy of women. He reached out to take Sally's picture from among these profaning surroundings, when he heard Jim's step in the hall. Jim came in, and the two locked glances as a pair of stags might lock horns. Jim's gaze faltered first—of all the people in the world, Henry Fleet was the last he would have chosen to see at that moment.

Jim felt guilty—guilty for having taken Sally to the Club, guilty for having taken her from the wedding—and now he felt very much ashamed at having lost track of her. However, there was nothing to do but to be friendly, and he advanced into the room with his hand outstretched.

"Hello, Henry!" he greeted. "I am sorry as blazes for all that has happened. I wouldn't have had it turn out this way for the world. How the devil can you tell what a girl will be up to next? Sally fairly knocked me over when she said—"

Fleet ignored the hand which Jim offered him, and his voice was tense with passion. "Where is Sally?"

"The fact is, I don't exactly know." Jim sat on the edge of the table and tried to look more comfortable than he felt. "I lost track of Sally. I don't know where she is just now."

The answer came like a pistol shot.

"You lie!"

The passion in Fleet's voice brought Jim up short. Although he had thought of Henry Fleet, he had not fully visualized his side of the affair—he had been occupied too much with Sally's part in it. It struck him as being just a bit silly that Fleet should take it so hard.

"Now, look here, Henry," he retorted, "there is nothing for you to get so wound up about. This thing will come out all right in the end, provided you play the game. The only thing to do is to sit tight until Sally turns up again."

"Where is Sally?"

"Great Scott, man, I tell you that I don't know where she is! I wish I did. If you will only be reasonable I will tell you everything that I know about it—just how it happened from beginning to end."

"Jim," replied Henry Fleet, "I am calm, and you never saw the time when I was not open to reason."

"You look it," commented Jim.

"You will admit"—Fleet was stung into fury by the apparent flippancy of Jim's remark—"that I'm being more reasonable with you than most men would be!"

"Reasonable with me!"

For the first time it came to Jim's ingenuous mind that Fleet suspected him of eloping with Sally. He could have laughed outright, but Fleet's face warned him against that. He plunged into a narration of just what had happened without answering Fleet's challenge.

"You know I took Sally to the Club the night before you came home," he explained, "and I've kicked myself a hundred times since for doing it. She was caught in that raid, and a girl helped her out. That part of it you know. I thought that we had heard the last of the Club. I was with you and the rector when that little pink bridesmaid came tearing in and said that Sally wanted to see me. You saw her come and saw me go out."

"Yes."

"I went with her to the room where the bridesmaids were. Sally was not there—she was in the next room, where they keep the Sunday-school banners. I tell you, Henry, it went through me like a knife to see her there, white as a sheet, with tears in her eyes.

"She said: 'Jim, I am afraid I cannot go on with this wedding. There is something I am bound in honor to do.' I said: 'Sally, you can't spoil everything now by quitting. Whatever you have to do, let it go until after the wedding, or let me do it for you.'

"But she said it could not be done that way, and she took off her veil and laid aside her bouquet, and put on a man's coat that was lying there. She started to go, and I racked my brains trying to think of a reason for her acting this way. All of a sudden it

flashed across my mind that it might be something about the Club, and I asked her if it was.

"She said: 'Yes, Jim; I must go to the Club.' She asked me to get her a cab, and I said I didn't think that I could. She started anyway and walked through that room full of bridesmaids. Believe me, that took courage.

"I followed her, and when I saw that she was determined to go I made up my mind to go with her. So I grabbed Rob Schuyler's hat and coat and put Sally in my car. You believe all that, don't you?"

"Go on."

"Well, we were pinched for speeding. She jumped out and went on in a taxi. I had to go to the police station, but after I had paid the fine I went on down to the Club; but I could find absolutely no trace of her there. I came on here. That's all I know about it, and that's the truth. Believe it or not, it's the truth!"

Even as Jim recited his narrative he could not help thinking how fictitious it might sound to unsympathetic ears. One look at Fleet's face told him that Fleet was far from being convinced.

"Good God!" the latter said. "What a lying little hound you have become! What sensible girl is going to break off her marriage to go to a place like the Club? You have not said a word about *why* she was going. I don't suppose you could think of a good falsehood for that part of the yarn."

"She didn't tell me why she was going," Jim replied with an assumption of calmness, though Fleet's accusation had brought the blood to his cheek. "She only told me that she had to go, and that it was a matter of life and death. She was bound in honor to go."

"Wasn't she bound in honor to marry me?" cried Fleet. "And in a pinch what girl is going to leave her wedding? She is more bound in honor to go on with that than anything else in the world."

"That's what I told her," said Jim, "or if I didn't I meant to. But marriage isn't a matter of life and death, and the stunt she was on was a matter of life and death."

"And if Sally were going on some fool expedition, why didn't she send for me? Why is it that she turns to you instead of me?"

"Take a look at yourself and you will see!" retorted Jim with asperity. "She knew that you would raise the devil about it, and she didn't have time to do any explaining. You aren't the easiest person in the world to tell things to. She did send for me, that's all, and what I'm telling you is the truth, so help me God!"

"And so help me God, I don't believe it!" cried Fleet. "There is something queer about this whole business. I come back from Canada, and I find that Sally has been playing around with you to the exclusion of every one else, and that you have taken her to a place where she would not dream of going with me! Then on top of that, just as she is about to be married, she sends for you, and you go away with her, and now you say you have lost her. You with your chorus-girls! What have you done with Sally?"

Fleet strode across to the desk and tore the picture of Sally from its place of honor between the queen of the Winter Frolic and the heroine of "Budding Time."

"You damned fool!" groaned Jim. "I *have* told you the truth!"

"You have not! It's a yarn from beginning to end. Where is Sally? If you don't come clean and tell me the truth, I swear I'll make you tell it!"

"I have told you that I don't know where Sally is," insisted Jim in the quiet voice of one who argues with a lunatic.

"Jim," Fleet almost begged, "tell me the truth! Whatever it is, I can take it like a man. If Sally is through with me, if she does not want to marry me, all right. I can stand it. But I can't stand this uncertainty."

"But I have told you the truth!" pleaded Jim. "And on top of that I will tell you why she sent for me. She did not think that I was going with her. She wanted me to tell you that she still loved you. She said: 'Tell Henry that I have not changed, and that if he still wants to go on with this I will marry him when I have finished what I have to do.' That ought to prove her loyalty to you. You don't deserve it."

Fleet's face softened, and Jim thought of what a fool he had been not to give him this message at the first. The telephone rang, and cut off for the moment any conversation between them.

Jim took up the instrument and answered the call, listened for a moment, and then said: "Thank you very much. Please call again in five minutes."

Fleet watched him closely, and he saw that when Jim heard the voice at the other end of the line he turned his back to him and that when he set down the instrument he stood for a moment with his face averted.

As Jim turned to him Fleet gripped his arm and said:

"Who was that?"

"Only some one calling from downstairs," Jim answered casually. "I told them to ring again in five minutes."

"It was a girl's voice!"

"Well, what of it?"

"That was Sally calling you!"

This time Jim had been lying; it was Sally's voice. When he had heard her speaking he had to do a bit of quick thinking. It had simply flashed through his mind that Fleet would be only an embarrassment to Sally in whatever she had to do. He also felt a little pride in helping her himself—he had got her into the mess, and it was up to him to get her out. For these reasons he had told her to call again in five minutes in the hope that he could get Fleet out of the room by that time. And now that Fleet had suspected the truth, Jim was bound to put him off the track.

"No"—he shook Fleet's hand loose—"that was not Sally."

"What a cad you are!" cried Fleet. "I might have believed your other yarn, but I am certain that Sally was talking to you then! I shall answer the phone when it rings in five minutes—I am going to get to the bottom of this!"

He seized the telephone instrument and dragged it across the table to him.

"Henry," asked Jim earnestly, "do you love Sally?"

"Better than my life!"

That was the one immovable thing in Fleet's tottering world.

"Do you trust her?'

"How can I tell?" cried Fleet in real agony. "God knows I want to trust her!"

"Do you trust me?"

"That is asking too much! How can I trust you when I detect you in this falsehood? If you are lying about one thing, how do I know you aren't lying about everything?"

"I swear," said Jim, "that I have told you the truth and the whole truth—"

"And a little more than the truth!" cut in Fleet. "Jim, if I do not hear Sally's voice when this bell rings I will believe everything you have told me. If I do hear her voice I believe nothing. God knows I *want* to believe you!"

"If you love Sally," swore Jim, "you will put on your hat and coat and go home and wait until she sends for you. That is the best way you can show your affection for her. When she can she will come back to you. God knows you don't deserve it."

"Then it was Sally that called!"

"If it was," replied Jim, exasperated, "she called me, didn't she? What have you to do with it? The best thing you can do for her and yourself is to get out!"

"No! I will not go—not until I hear who is calling you. I keep this phone if I have to fight for it."

For a moment Jim calculated the chances of physical combat. They were fairly well matched, but at second thought Jim realized he would gain nothing in the end from it, even though his hands instinctively became fists as he saw Fleet standing by the table with the telephone clutched to his breast.

"All right." Jim sank into a chair wearily. "You have the God-given right to make an ass of yourself. I am not the one to stop you."

CHAPTER XIII.

NOBLESSE OBLIGE.

SINCE Sally had left the church Henry Fleet's mind had become a battleground of conflicting emotions, with the victory first on one side and then on the other. At one moment he was all

rage and hurt pride, which at the present time he was venting on Jim; at the next moment his instinct for fair play convinced him that he was judging too harshly. As the minutes ticked by toward the time when the telephone should ring again the latter emotion became increasingly strong in his mind.

He looked at Jim again—the expression on the latter's face was not that of a plotter; it registered only a genuine disgust at the pigheadedness of the man opposite him.

"Jim," groaned Fleet, "you know I don't want to be a cad in this affair! I want to play square with you and with Sally, but it does not seem to me that either of you is playing fair with me. I am simply at sea; I don't know what to think or what to do. Why can't you tell me what has happened?"

"I *have* told you as much as I can," reiterated Jim; "but you saw fit to disbelieve everything I said—so what's the use?"

"Will you promise," asked Fleet, "to tell me what Sally says if I give you the telephone?"

"I leave it to you!" retorted Jim. "Can I tell you if she does not want me to? And what's more, if she gives me instructions about what she wants me to do, and I go ahead and tell you, how do I know but that you will pull some bonehead play and spoil the whole thing. How can I promise to tell anything when I don't know what she wants me to do or what she is going to say to me?"

The telephone rang, and Fleet looked at Jim in painful indecision.

"You will tell me if you can?" he pleaded.

"I promise nothing!" said Jim flatly.

The bell sounded again, and Fleet put the telephone down on the table and pushed it across to Jim.

"After all," he spoke quietly, "it's your apartment, Jim, and the call is for you. I have no right to be a mucker about it."

Without waiting to thank him, Jim seized the instrument and answered the call. "Yes—this is Jim Bangs."

Sally's cool voice came over the wire. "Jim, I have been waiting for you. You must come on to the Club at once, and bring your car."

"I did come, but I couldn't find you anywhere. They told me you had gone away."

"Never mind," Sally replied. "It is not too late now, although we must work quickly. Come as fast as you can without being arrested for speeding. I need you!"

"Righto!" called Jim. "Where shall I find you?"

"Fourth door from the big entrance. Hurry!"

Jim set down the instrument and called for his hat and coat.

"I know this is hard on you, Henry," he said softly, "and believe me, I am sorry—as sorry as I can be. You are a sport to take it as well as you do. I can't tell you anything, and as far as I can see the only thing for you to do is to sit tight and take it easy. Wait for things to turn out all right. I'm sure that they will."

"Sit tight!" raged Henry Fleet. "Stand on the side lines and watch you play ball! Is that all I have to do?"

"I know," sympathized Jim, "it's rotten luck, and I wish I could tell you what is going on, but I don't know myself exactly."

"You need not bother." Fleet picked up his own hat and coat. "I reckon this is about the end for me."

"Where are you going?"

"Home from here, and from there to Canada just about as fast as I can get there. This is getting too thick for me."

Jim could have throttled him on the spot as he saw another spell of argument ahead of him.

"Believe me, Henry, you will regret doing anything rash—you will never find another girl like Sally. She said that she had not changed—have you forgot that? That means that she loves you, and she is certainly a girl worth going through a bit of hell for. I will make you a proposition—you wait here three hours, and at the end of that time I will tell you everything that I know; if you don't hear from me by that time it will be because I am dead. Three hours is not much, considering that you have already waited three months for

the girl. I give you my word of honor that I will communicate with you in three hours. Is that a bargain?"

Fleet looked so drawn and haggard that Jim's heart went out to him. He did not resist when Jim took his hat and coat from him and drew his most comfortable chair up to the table.

"Poor old Henry! It certainly is rough on you, but take it all together, you have acted like a sport in this thing, and I am proud of you. If I had been in your place I should have been in an asylum for the criminally insane by now. I'll tell Sally as soon as I see her that you are here, and if she can I am sure she will talk to you. Here are the cigarettes and the pipe tobacco, and here is the key to the cellaret. I hope you realize the favor I am doing you. The valet will bring you some ice, and you can sit here and be as comfortable as a man can be in these days. Three hours from now the whole thing will be cleared up. Good-by!"

Jim pushed his passive friend into a chair, put the tobacco by him, threw the key on the table, and rushed down to his car. He rode to the Club with one eye on the speedometer, drew up at the fourth door from the big entrance, slipped his electric torch into his pocket, and went up the steps three at a time. The door swung open to him, for Mabel Duveen had told Joe to watch for a roadster and admit the driver of it. Jim flashed his torch on Joe's face and saw an expression there of suspicion, sullenness, and resentment.

Joe had not had a good day, so far, for three of his best-laid plans had gone smash. He had tried his best to get Mabel Duveen out of trouble by laying out Josiah Whittaker, only to find that just as things shaped nicely and the reformer collapsed she refused to take advantage of the opportunity. On top of that he had done her the good turn of getting rid of Jim, only to find that he was the one person in the world she most wanted to see.

Joe had said nothing when she told him that—he retired to think about it, too much ashamed to tell her that he had already sent Jim away. It would have been too much of a blow to his pride to confess that he had done so, and he guessed from a few words which he overheard that Sally would telephone to the visitor and get him there again.

Then he had laid another plan for getting the two girls out of the room and getting rid of Josiah Whittaker himself, for he was convinced that once the body of the reformer was out of sight Mabel would leave the city.

He had got the two girls out of the room by finding the electric-light switch, the opening of which had thrown the place into darkness. He closed it again, went to a sitting-room on the second floor, turned on a pair of lights there, and then persuaded Mabel Duveen and Sally to shift their quarters to a room in which there was light if no heat.

But just as he accomplished this much, and was "spraining his bean" trying to find some way in which he could dispose of Josiah Whittaker, Jim Bangs drove up in his roadster and added a new complication. So that when Joe threw open the door for Jim the expression on his face was not as friendly as it had been before.

"She's here now," explained Joe briefly. "I had the wrong dope last time. Sorry." He led Jim up one flight of stairs and stopped before a door under which showed a faint crack of light.

"And say, guy," Joe spoke in a hoarse whisper as he thrust his face close to Jim's, "you won't say a word about being here before, will you? It won't do you any good, and it might get me in wrong. I figured you was some kind of a con man, and I ain't sure but what I was right. If anybody tries to start anything with this girl—take it from me his health isn't going to last. What's more, if anybody puts me in Dutch with her, I'm not going to be too good-natured about it either. See?"

"Oh, certainly," agreed Jim. "I see. As long as you feel about it as you do, I won't say a word about having been here before."

Jim did not like the way Joe spoke to him—it gave his civilized spine a thrill to think of Sally among such people as these. Therefore when he tapped at the door his mind was made up to get Sally out of the

place as quickly as he could. The door swung open and he saw a disordered sitting-room, with tables and divans standing in a crazy ring, Sally standing before him, and behind her a neat-looking little girl whom he had never seen before.

"Jim!" Sally held out both her hands to him. She drew him into the room and shut the door behind him.

"This is Miss Duveen, Jim, and I was just telling her that we could count on you through thick and thin. She did me a good turn, Jim—the best that any girl could do for another."

Jim put out his hand to Mabel, and looked at her warily. His practised eye told him that she was good-looking enough, and the grip she gave him was firm and honest. Jim could see that there was none of the siren about her, in spite of undeniable charm. And, furthermore, there was a drawn smile about her mouth and hint of tremendous weariness in the droop of the small figure that went to his heart at once.

"I want to do what I can," offered Jim. "What is it that I am to do—blow a safe?"

"No. Sit down here, and I'll tell you all about it. Why did you ask me to wait five minutes when I called the first time?"

"I had a guest—a gentleman named Fleet."

A flush crossed Sally's face, and after it came a shadow.

"And how," she asked, "is he—taking it?"

"As well as could be expected," answered Jim. "You could not think that he would be exactly pleased. But he has promised to hold on for three hours, and if I don't telephone or talk to him personally by the end of that time he's made up his mind to go back to Canada. I can't say that I blame him. What is this all about anyway?"

"Three hours!" breathed Sally. "It's wonderful of him to wait at all! But we must work quickly. There is much to do, and you, poor old Jim, have all the hard part, but all the excitement too. Did you bring your car?"

"Yes."

"Good! Sit down here and I will tell you just what we have planned for you to do."

CHAPTER XIV.

JIM GETS HIS CUE.

THE change which Jim Bangs saw in Sally was another element in his mystification. He had known her as a rather quiet, conventional girl with a strong sense of propriety which, while it detracted nothing from her spirit, kept her from the outbursts of erratic energy characteristic of many young women of fashion. Now her face was flushed, and the gray eyes were almost black with excitement; a strand of dark hair lay loosely across the white forehead. In addition there was a long streak of dust across the hem of her wedding gown and her slippers were gray with dirt.

She almost pushed Jim into a chair, and spoke with a thrill of energy in her low voice which Jim had never heard before.

"Now, Jim," she said, "you must not be shocked at what I am going to tell you, because it will not do any good. There is something disagreeable that simply must be done, and I am counting on you to help. In the first place I want you to think of some secure place where one could put a person who is under the influence of a narcotic—chloral, for instance. That person must wake up in some place other than that in which he took the drug—and if he does not wake up he must not be found in the place where he took the drug. See?"

"Sally," gasped Jim, "what are you talking about?"

"It is a pretty big order," interrupted Mabel. "A man could not be blamed for wanting to side-step it. If Mr. Bangs does not wish to be concerned in it—"

"Oh, I want to help," Jim offered quickly, "but I can't think of any place just now except the park—"

"Well, you keep on thinking about it," went on Sally, "and I'll tell you what it is all about."

She sketched in the first part of the story very briefly, for Jim knew most of it—her

adventure at the Club and the interrupted wedding. But when she came to the end of her tale she paused, for her narrative seemed incredible.

She looked at Jim, and wondered if a man who had skimmed so pleasantly on the surface of things would be equal to the emergency—would be the man who would soil his hands with something so close to crime. But there seemed to be no other way out, and the sight of Mabel Duveen, growing more and more weary as the strain began to tell, made her think that the one thing to do was to get the affair settled quickly.

"I know I'm asking you a thing hard to accomplish, but if there is any danger or unpleasantness I'm more than willing to go with you and share it with you. You see, Mr. Whittaker came here this afternoon, just as Mabel was going away, and told her that he knew that I was here that night. He knew my name and yours and Henry Fleet's.

"He said that unless between us we gave him thirty thousand dollars he would tell the whole story to the press. You know what a big thing the sensational papers would make of it. Miss Duveen was to be the go-between. She did not want to do it, of course, and tried to persuade him not to, but the only condition on which he would give up was that she should go to South America with him."

"The skunk!" cut in Jim.

"While they were talking he said he wanted something to drink, and Miss Duveen called Joe to get it. Joe saw that something was wrong, and when he gave the liquor to Mr. Whittaker he put some chloral in it. Mr. Whittaker drank it and collapsed. We are afraid—that is, it is very possible—that Joe gave him too much, and he may be dying. That's why we must get him away from here."

"Why, that's murder!" came from Jim.

"That is what they would call it if they found him in her room or in this place," Sally continued, "and that is why we must get him away. You see, we can't go to the police and tell them about it, because that would mean getting Joe into it, and what he did he did for the best.

"And if he does come to, which is possible, it would be better for him to wake up somewhere else. He may even forget what has happened and where he was when he took the drink. Even if he does remember, we can meet him on better terms somewhere else. You will help us, won't you, Jim?"

"I will do what I can, Sally," replied Jim.

"Now, the thing for you to do," went on Sally quickly, "is to back your car into the alley. There's a window in the room where he is lying which opens on that alley. You can put him through the window, put him in your car, take him somewhere, and leave him. Isn't that a fine plan?"

She finished as gleefully as if she had just asked him to deliver a Christmas basket to some poor family. Jim's mind was far from agreeing that it was so fine a plan as she seemed to think. He felt that he was more or less responsible for the whole situation, since it was he who had brought Sally to the Club in the first place. But the more he saw of this chilly, deserted place, the more he was convinced that the best thing for Sally was to get away from it as quickly as possible.

Besides, he did not like the idea of leaving dead or dying men by the lagoon in the park, for he was sure that the wild fowl would cackle or that some late passer-by would feel that a smart roadster drawn up by the shrubbery at this late hour could mean nothing good. Some one might even get his license number. Then there was that shifty-eyed crook he had met twice outside.

"You will help, won't you, Jim?" Sally leaned toward him. "You and I have always been friends, and I felt sure that I could count on you from the beginning. If there is any danger I will share it with you—I will go to the park or anywhere you think is best. You will help, won't you?"

"Of course I will." Jim put his hand on hers. "You know that. It was my fault for bringing you here in the first place. But I am just wondering if perhaps there is not some other way out."

Mabel Duveen read his hesitation. She arose and said:

"Perhaps I had best leave you two together. Mr. Bangs might want to ask you something about me to make sure that you're not in the hands of worse people than Mr. Whittaker."

"No!" cried Sally almost fiercely. "If Jim will not take you as my friend, we will go on with it alone. Jim, I've heard you say that two women could not be friends, but this girl and I are pals, that's all! If you don't want to help us, leave the car, and we will go ahead by ourselves. I'll take off the license number."

"Sally," protested Jim, "you make me feel like an awful piker! I was simply wondering if there wasn't some other way out."

"There isn't any other way!" Sally stamped her foot. "Don't you suppose we have thought of every possible thing we can do again and again? We are simply losing time standing here talking about it. What we are going to do must be done at once!"

"If you wish," offered Mabel wearily, "I'll tell you just who I am and what I've done—all the wrong things and the few good things. Whatever bad I may have done, I give you my word that I have been guilty of nothing which deserves what I'll get if he is found here. I have—"

Sally put her hand over the other girl's lips.

"Not a word of that!" she silenced her. "What you have done and what you are are two entirely different things! I'm interested only in what you are! Jim, for the last time, will you do what I ask you, or will you not?"

Jim saw that there was no use in arguing with the girl in her present frame of mind. He did not know whether she was displaying a fund of courage that he had never suspected in her or whether she was simply rushing in where angels feared to tread; in any case he must comply with her in appearance at least.

"Of course I will," he agreed. "You tell me the lay of things and I will go ahead."

"Dear old Jim!" cried Sally. "I knew I could count on you! The room in which Mr. Whittaker is lying is just below here. You cannot miss the alley—it is the only one near here. You get your car into the alley and then go into the room downstairs. You'll find a door there which leads into the bath, and in the bath you will see the window that opens into the alley. I will go with you and show you the way."

"No," Jim interposed quickly, "you stay here with Miss Duveen. I can do whatever there is to be done alone; I have my electric torch. I must say, Sally, that you talk about this as though it were amateur theatricals instead of something akin to homicide. Give me the layout again."

Sally gave him minute directions for finding Mabel Duveen's room, and Jim went out into the hall. He had not taken two steps before he was conscious of a figure pressed against the wall. He turned his light upon it and saw Joe standing there, with the same expression of distrust.

"Well," Joe demanded, "you didn't spill the beans, did you?"

"No. I didn't say a word about being here before."

"It's a hell of a good thing you didn't," whispered Joe. "I would not lose my stand-in for a whole lot, take it from me."

Jim left him and passed on down the stairs. He stopped for a moment on the lowest step and felt that Joe was watching him from the top. The more Jim saw of this place the more certain he was that Sally did not quite know what she was getting into.

Jim had played around enough on the gilded fringe of the underworld to know that a place like this might harbor almost any kind of crook, in spite of its red plush and good music.

That lynx-eyed Joe looked as though he might be the sort to double-cross the whole lot. As far as the girl was concerned, Jim's instinct told him that she was honest—but then Beauty is often found in company with the Beast. But could he trust his instinct? Was she really honest? It seemed strange, he thought, that a girl of the underworld should have no friends—that she would have to call on Sally—

He had reached the bottom stair.

(To be concluded NEXT WEEK.)

Some Variety!

by Samuel G. Camp

I SEE by the papers where the energetic and genial manager of the present heavyweight champion box-fighter claims to have his troubles. Well, no doubt he has 'em. As a general proposition, the average boxing impresario has no more troubles than Ireland, and the exceptional ones have more. Such is my opinion, if you must know. And, believe me, I speak with authority, for I was once widely advertised as " Mr. Budlong Peters, manager of Pinkus McCabe, the Cyanide Kid, coming middleweight champion of the world," and consequently you can take this as coming from one who knows.

For example, there was the time the Cyanide Kid and me took a little whirl at the vaudevilles. The way we came to do that—well, for some time things had been about as usual with me and the Kid. That means that off and on we were in a fairly affluent condition; but as a general thing, taking one day with another, we and real money were complete strangers. Somehow, what with one thing and another, we never could seem to accumulate a real bank-roll and get things on a regular runnin' basis.

Then one night the Kid smacked down an aspiring middleweighter of the name of Kayo McGuire, né Shopinski, and me and the Kid escaped from the clubhouse with nothing less than fifteen hundred legal smackers. Now, fifteen hundred berries is quite a bit of money, at that; but P. McCabe and me, being no pikers in our manner of living, and our next fight being a mere matter of conjecture, as the feller says, considered that sum of money as merely a means to an end.

In other words, we immediately started looking for some kind of an investment, the returns from which would be sure and also sudden, and, as a result of which financial coup, we could live for some time in the manner to which we were accustomed.

Now maybe you'd think that finding an investment of that sort might be a matter requiring some little time, seeing there's every day a couple of million or so small-time speculators straining their eyesight for some such similar gilt-edged opportunity, but without success. However, such was not the case — though, of course, maybe the particular kind of opportunity that showed up wasn't the sort that would have appealed to a certain type of investor. No, not exactly.

Anyway, only a couple of days after that affair with Mr. Shopinski, and by means of which we once more graduate into the moneyed class, as the Kid and me were idling along what was formerly Broadway, New York, we ran up against a mutual friend of ours, Gilbert Willetts by name. It struck me right away that for a bird with no visible means of support, for I already knew that friend Gilbert had nothing

of that sort, he was looking mighty prosperous and the like. He was all dressed up like a screen-hero, and seemed to give forth an impression of great wealth, like the treasury building or something. He had me guessing.

We passed the time of day and pulled some other small-talk, and then I came right out with it and asked Gilbert how come.

"I'll tell you," he says. "But listen, Bud, don't let this go no further. I got a chance to do a favor for one of the owners at the track, a feller of the name of Jim Langley, and I done it. And, believe me, since then I been in soft. Most every day this guy Langley puts me wise to some good thing or other, and I'll say I'm playin' them tips across the boards! He ain't put me onto a dead one once—not once. Talk about takin' money from a kid!"

Just at that period of time the fall race-meeting at Belmont was in process of eruption.

"Did I understand you to say," I asks friend Gilbert, "that this man Langley is an owner—that he's racin' some animals of his own?"

"I'll say he is," responds Gilbert emphatic. "And what's more, I'll tell the world them animals are no cheap skates, either. He's a big man, this guy Langley, and his racin' stable is second to none."

"You don't say," I says. "Then he certainly ought to be in a position to know."

"That's what he is," says Gil.

"Listen," I says, employing my most ingratiating manner. "As between lifelong friends, do you happen to know of any good thing that's on, say, the program for to-day?"

Friend Gilbert glances suspicious and furtive at the passing proletariat, like a Bolshevist plotting to blow up the Polo Grounds or something.

"Honey Bee in the fifth!" he hisses. "Langley put me wise to it, and it's a pipe. You can't lose. Shoot the wad!"

We did. We shot the wad on Honey Bee. And—stung? You guessed it. There was six entries in the race. Honey Bee ran fifth. One horse was scratched before the race.

Yes, such were the facts, and, not to gum up the game by going into a lot of post-mortem stuff, I'll admit candidly and right now that, what with one thing and another, it took the heart out of me. What is it the poet says about the stings and arrows of outrageous fortune, or something?

Well, it makes no difference. Anyway, the Kid and me were sure out of luck, and consequently, when this fellow F. Warren Wales springs his little proposition on us, he finds us in one of them receptive moods, so to speak. Otherwise—if things hadn't been just the way they certainly were—you can make a bet that we'd have done very little business with this guy Wales, for believe me, we considered any such cheap barnstormin' trip such as he outlined as far beneath us. However, when the feller said that beggars can't be pickers and choosers he said a pageful.

On the evening of the day friend Gilbert put the bee on us, the Kid and me dined modestly, or even worse, at a beanery mostly infested by a certain type of theatrical folks—"trippers" in what Noah Webster would call the phraseology of the theatrical profession.

Having concluded the so-called meal, as the Kid and me were leaving the place, a fellow hails us. He was a lengthy, slatty bird, with large, pale, mournful blue eyes, ingrowing cheeks, and a thin, hooked beak like an eagle. I knew him by the name of F. Warren Wales, for he was a sort of fight-fan, in a small way, and I had run across him once or twice in the practise of my profession. His business was managing small theatrical enterprises—"Tom shows," refined burlesque troupes, repertoire companies adapted to the agricultural districts, and the like.

He was attacking the program of alleged eatables single-handed. That is to say, he was alone.

"Set down and let's converse for a minute, won't you?" he says. "I'm lonesome. How's the fight game going?"

Having recently had some experience with the eats provided in that place, F. Warren Wales has mine and the Kid's sym-

pathy, and so we sit down to cheer him up as best we can during the ordeal. Though, believe me, neither me or P. McCabe were in any very rosy state of mind ourselves.

"The fight game?" I says. "Never worse."

"Why, how's that?" he asks, puzzled. "Didn't I see by the papers where you copped fifteen hundred bucks by dustin' off Kayo McGuire or somebody?"

"You did," I says.

"Well?" says he.

"Just now," I explains, "they're supposed to be runnin' at Belmont. We bet on one that couldn't."

"That's tough," he comments. "But no doubt you'll grab off another purse in a short time."

"No doubt we won't," I correct him. "It's a tough job getting fights for the Kid. He's got all the rest of the scrappers buffaloed. I could make more money with a third-rater."

"Oh, well," he laughs, "I guess that what with the money that's been goin' round lately in the fightin' business, you probably won't starve to death."

"Come again," I says. "It looks like it. We've started already," I says, with a glance at the immediate surroundings.

"How d'you mean?" he asks.

"Broke," I informs him.

"H-m," he murmurs, and, forgettin' for a moment the Lucullian eats in front of him, relapses into a dark-brown study.

"Listen," he says then, snapping out of it. "I'm going to make you people a proposition. You can take it or leave it."

"Naturally," I says.

"Here's the idea," he goes on, laying down his knife and fork without regret. "According to Hoyle, there ain't supposed to be anything new under the sun; but, just lately, I've got wise to an opportunity in the show business which is exactly that—brand new. The existence of this great, new opportunity in the theatrical profession is, I may say, entirely due and owin' to the marvelous rise and stupendous growth of the ever and justly popular movies."

At that, in the true oratorical manner, F. Warren Wales takes a sip of water from a glass on which there is a collection of finger-prints which rivals the one at headquarters.

"Let me elucidate," he says.

"As you will," I says.

"All over this great country of ours," he points out, "movie theaters have sprung up like weeds in an amateur garden. Every small town, places running, say, from one to five thousand souls, or inhabitants, has its local movie house, sometimes two or three of 'em. These places, as a rule, feature screen productions exclusively. But—"

F. Warren Wales pauses to gain impressiveness, and then goes on:

"But science has lately discovered that the managers of these provincial movie palaces, ever anxious to retain the good will of their customers by providing some sort of variety in the entertainment, are suckers, so to speak, for the transient or perambulating vaudeville troupe. Get me? By putting on a vaudeville bill now and then, in connection with the restless photography, they aim to keep the local patronage from going stale on the screen stuff and keep 'em comin'. Understand me?"

"That's good business," I says. "But what's the point? You seem to have a wide and garrulous knowledge of current conditions in the show business; but where do I and the Kid come in?"

"Right here," says he. "One week from to-day I leave this humble village on an amusement enterprise of the sort described; in other words, as manager of the Wales Variety Players. We're already booked solid for six weeks, and that's only a starter. I'm looking for one more act. The already famous Cyanide Kid, here, in an exhibition of sparring, bag-punching, and the like, would do very nicely. Are you on?"

"The only impediment in your speech," I observes, "seems to be in the matter of dollars and cents."

F. Warren Wales clears his throat in a startled and noisy manner, and turns his pale-blue orbs ceilingward.

"Fifty bucks a week," he proclaims after a fearful struggle, "transportation and hotel expenses."

"Are you tryin' to kid me?" I comes back, insulted.

"This ain't no Ben Hur tour," was F. Warren Wales's reply. "As I said, you don't have to take it."

"That's where you're wrong," I correct him. "How about a little advance, say fifty?"

F. Warren Wales pulls some more deep stuff. "We'll compromise on ten," he says then.

So we did.

A week later the Wales Variety Players hopped off. The other members of F. Warren Wales's coruscating constellation of world-eminent entertainers, to borrow a phrase from F. Warren's advance literature, were McIntyre and McCarty, whose act consisted mostly of flamin' red wigs, chin-shrubbery to match, twin slapsticks, and a line of polite, rapid-fire repartee that 'd cause the well-known Petrified Man to weep tears of sorrow; White and Waller, acrobats extraordinary, who weren't so bad, at that, Waller doubling as a sparring partner for the Cyanide Kid; Ben Coleman, monologist, who had eighteen alleged jokes, eighteen of which were knockouts about mother-in-laws—needless to say, Ben went big; Professor Mazzini, wizard; Adolph Berg and his world-famous galaxy of educated canines; and last but by no means least—all rights reserved—Marie La Fleur, who sang, danced, and looked, and at all three of which pastimes, I must admit Miss La Fleur was good.

However, though Miss La Fleur was certainly some Farrar, and sure shook a mean but shapely foot, it was as a looker that she was particularly there, I'd say, for in my opinion Marie had nothing to fear, in that respect, from Cleopatra to the latest movie cutie, inclusive. She possessed a beautiful golden coiffure which was strictly home-brewed, the usual number of eyes which were large, fascinating and blue, and she had other exclusive and distracting features.

And the first time I lamped the La Fleur, I remarked wisely to myself, after gazing for some time in a permanent and pensive manner, that I was in for trouble—and I was.

For, at first sight, P. McCabe, otherwise the Cyanide Kid, fell for the beautiful Miss La Fleur, and I rise to remark that if the Kid had fell off the Woolworth Building and lit on the Eighteenth Amendment he couldn't have fallen harder.

Absolutely the same thing happened to Adolph Berg, proprietor of Berg's world-famous galaxy of educated canines, who, including the world-famous pups, I have already mentioned as among those present.

That completed the celebrated triangle and set the stage for the entrance of the great Shakespearian actor whose appearance I'd been anticipating — James K. Trouble himself, the only player who was never known to miss a cue.

I wasn't disappointed, for James K. immediately grabs the spot-light.

Miss La Fleur accepted the attentions of Adolph and the Kid in a strictly neutral and complacent manner, and for a short time there was no real open hostilities between Mr. McCabe and Mr. Berg. Then Adolph, who was a bird of a slightly Teutonic cast of countenance and descent, and who also had a mussy disposition and a dome composed entirely of some hard, solid substance resembling bone — Adolph acquires the habit of planting himself in the wings while the Kid's act is on, and from time to time, and in various highly irritatin' ways, handing the Kid what is sometimes called the raspberry.

"Listen, Mr. Man," I finally took occasion to warn Adolph. "Take my advice and lay off. Do it now. If you don't you're liable to do it in a hospital."

Adolph favors me with a stupid grin, shrugs his shoulders, and goes on about his business.

However, when the Kid came back at Adolph it was in a manner which I had not foreseen. There was fourteen canine animals in Adolph's aggregation of educated pups, varying in size all the way from a toy lap-dog to a big greyhound. One night when Adolph's act was just nicely getting under way, with the fourteen four-legged actors sitting pretty on as many moth-eaten plush-covered stools intended for that purpose, in some mysterious manner nothing other than a particularly bony and disrepu-

table-lookin' cat lands suddenly right in the midst of 'em.

Now, that unfortunate feline was the official house-cat of the theater we were then playing. Furthermore, Adolph's fourteen canine meal-tickets had previously shown a strong and active dislike for the creature. Consequently—but you're at liberty to fill in the details of the ensuing riot yourself.

Whether or not Amos tumbled to the fact that the Kid was responsible for the above, it made no difference in his program. At each and every performance of the Wales Variety Players, Adolph continues to stick round in the wings, razzing the Kid to the best of his dull-witted ability.

"Adolph," I warned him once more, "take it from me, you're playin' with fire. Keep on and one of these fine days you'll wake up looking like 'Frisco after the fire, and feelin' a lot worse."

Adolph hands me a double-blank look and no reply in his most intelligent manner.

While the Kid was now beginning to mutter threats of committing several different and attractive forms of personal violence on the body of one Adolph Berg, for a time he did nothing but this. We were then playing an all-week stand in a burg numbering some five thousand denizens. On the third night of that engagement, the exact time being when Adolph and his collection of Pomeranians, *et cetera,* were in the act of entertaining the audience, a large, delicious-looking piece of raw meat, hurled by a hired accomplice of the Kid's occupying a seat fairly well up toward the front of the house, lands on the stage within full view of the educated canines.

Now maybe if Adolph had fed them dogs once in a while on something besides small blocks of Portland cement, or some similar material, called dog-biscuits—maybe then the results would have been different. Moreover, the results would have doubtless been different if there hadn't been a string attached to that uncooked sirloin, and when the educated canines leaped for it as one dog, so to say, it hadn't flopped back over the footlights and into the audience.

Anyway, without a moment's pause, all fourteen of them highly intelligent animals immediately took up the trail and followed the escapin' quarry over the lights and into the midst of the customers. And, believe me, the mix-up which then came off—but once more giving you the privilege of writing your own ticket, I'll merely pause to remark that, on that occasion, Adolph's act was surely crabbed for fair.

At our next performance, Adolph was notably missing from the wings during the Kid's act.

"Which means," I says, "that he's wise—and no doubt planning to get back at you."

"On with the dance," says Mr. McCabe.

Just before that, F. Warren Wales had notified the Kid that if anything faintly resembling the disreputable event of the previous evening occurred again, he would, much as he regretted it, be compelled to sever our connection with the show.

"Which," I says, "would no doubt be money in our pockets, seeing we've now been on the road some three weeks, and so far all the real money I've seen is eighteen and thirty one-hundredths dollars."

Which was nothing but the truth, F. Warren Wales having compromised on various small sums, on one pretext or another, every time I braced him for the fifty per which we were supposed to be getting. Supposed was right.

Meantime the beautiful Miss La Fleur had continued to exhibit the strictest sort of neutrality as regards Adolph and the Kid.

Now, to cut back for a moment, we'd been on tour only a few days when F. Warren Wales somehow connected with the idea that it would add to the gaiety of nations if the Kid was to occasionally take on some local scrapper, as a part of the regular performance, of course. And, to cut a short story shorter, right there is where Adolph got back at the Kid. Stating the matter baldly, Adolph hired a "ringer," and what that professional pugilist in disguise did to Mr. McCabe—well, it only lasted the stipulated three rounds, but while it was on I'll say it was the battle of the Kid's life,

and, at the conclusion of the hostilities, believe me, the Kid looked it.

That put the next move up to the Kid. He made it—regardless of everything from F. Warren Wales to the consequences, inclusive.

For some weeks—during which time F. W. Wales continues to pay us off in compromises, so to say—I saw the thing brewing, but the Kid didn't let me in on the details. If he had, you can lay a bet that it would have stopped right there. For, though past thirty, I still have a little common sense left, and know enough, for example, not to amuse myself, say, with pinwheels in a powder magazine.

Adolph had an assistant tutor for the educated canines whose name was Oliver White. Ollie's young life had been mostly passed with various fly-by-night tent-shows. He was, therefore, a desperate character. Furthermore, for reasons both personal and financial, not to go into the details, Ollie sure had it in for Adolph. He was only waiting for a chance to get square with Mr. Berg, when he would immediately blow the show, as it were.

They got together, the Kid and Oliver.

As I've said, I saw it coming for some time. Finally it came.

The occasion was our farewell performance in a certain so-called city in northern Connecticut. The first part of Adolph's act having gone off with much éclat, *et cetera,* there now remained of Mr. Berg's part of the performance only the final number, a grand march of the *tout ensemble* of fourteen canine performers featuring the flags of all nations — an effect of which Adolph was justly proud. First would come the big greyhound, walking upright on his educated hind legs, of course, and bearing the Star Spangled Banner, and so on down to the national colors of Newark, New Jersey, or some place, each dog walking upright with his fore-feet resting on the shoulders of the educated canine in front, the flags being set in sockets in the canine cravats.

Usually it went big. That night it didn't.

For when the head of the procession emerged from the wings, where it was the customary duty of Oliver White to put the bunting on the four-footed paraders, and so forth, while Adolph stalled the audience with a bit of professional patter, it was at once observed that the first standard-bearer, the greyhound, was proudly sporting nothing other than the gonfalon of the Fatherland — Germany — and so was the next canine color-bearer, and the next, all of 'em, in fact—and this, mind you, was the night of November eleventh, nineteen nineteen, the first anniversary of Armistice Day, and fully one-half of that audience was composed of men that had seen service, many of 'em in uniform!

That riot was of such proportions that next morning it received columns in the metropolitan dailies. That's all I care to say. Adolph escaped—among the first.

Me and the Kid slowed down to a fast walk about ten blocks from the scene of the disaster. As I was treating the Kid to a large, generous slice of my alleged mind, we rounded a corner and suddenly met up with Miss Marie La Fleur and Mr. F. Warren Wales.

Marie, at the last minute, had reported sick that night, and F. Warren Wales had left the theater, shortly after the start of the performance, to see, so he said, what was the trouble.

"Allow me," I says to her, "to congratulate you on your rapid recovery."

She laughed. So did F. Warren Wales.

"That was only a little frame-up," says he. "We wanted to surprise the company. Congratulate us. We're married."

The expression on the face of P. McCabe was worth travelin' miles to see.

"I congratulate you," I says. "Surprise, eh? Seems to me surprises seem to be the order of the day."

"How do you mean?" inquires F. Warren Wales.

"You'll find out when you get to the theater," I says.

And, with that, the Kid and me passed on.

"Where do we go from here?" asks P. McCabe after a little.

"New York," I says, "and, believe me, it's a long walk."

It was.

Regular People

Part V

by Edgar Franklin

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

CHAPTER XVII.

CONFERENCE.

THE great hush persisted. Joan's mother sighed heavily; her father shrank and drew his breath with a faint little hissing sound. Frank grunted and stared; Henry turned distinctly pale. Joan's own eyes filled with tears once more. If a great physician had entered and informed them that there was no hope at all for William, the effect would have been something like that.

"They—came to make a touch and—you love 'em!" Henry breathed.

"I wish you wouldn't put it that way; I'm sure you don't feel that way about it," William said sharply. "That word 'touch,' to my mind, conveys something underhand, Hank. There was nothing of the kind in this crowd. They were just some poor chaps who had met misfortune and, thank the Lord! they'd heard about me and they came straight to me! It made me mighty happy!" William concluded heartily, as he sat down.

"You—gave them money?" Joan's weak little voice asked.

"Wasn't it lucky I happened to have cash?" William beamed at her. "Chap out there in Jersey to-day—didn't know him, and didn't care so much for his looks—did a little business and he gave me a check for three thousand, dear. I cashed it at the local bank."

"But you haven't been giving away three thousand dollars in that parlor?"

"Eh? Oh, no. Not quite. Wasn't necessary, Joan. I still have three or four hundred left, I think."

Joan's father leaned forward uncertainly.

"Will—William!" he contrived. "Do you—of course, it's your business, but Joan's my daughter, and in a way it's my business, too—do you think it's just wise to give away money to anybody that asks for it, without knowing a thing about 'em or whether they really need it or—"

"Wise!" William broke in, almost indignantly. "I think it's beautiful! I think it's magnificent! If you could have seen their faces, in there, when they understood that their immediate troubles were over—why, of course it's wise! Dad, you'll have to break away from a lot of old ideas, too. That's the blight of what they call 'organized charity,' isn't it—making a man prove he's in want before you give him any aid? That's what makes it humiliating and keeps so many needy ones

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for September 10.

in our own beloved middle class from asking help, isn't it? To be sure it is—and we'll do away with all that! We'll make people understand that their mere statement that they need money or medical treatment or legal advice or a home is *enough!*"

"Gone!" Henry faltered, to himself, "Clean gone!"

"What was that, Hank?"

"I—what? I didn't speak!"

"Listen, then, old man," William advised merrily, as he pulled his chair closer and brought out paper and his fountain-pen. "I've got no end of things to tell you all to-night—little plans and some big ones that I've thought out. I want you all to hear and then make suggestions. About this hospital, for one thing. I've got my eye on a building up this way that we can buy for eight hundred thousand dollars cash! It 'll do, too! It's laid out like this—"

William talked and drew, and drew and talked. William sketched in floor plans and, after much thought and memory-probing, set down dimensions, as they were or as he remembered them. From the sub-cellar of his proposed hospital to the roof did William work, describing the roof alone in some two thousand words.

He talked further. He passed to the subject of the giant fresh-air farm that might well be started, so that children of the middle class, whose parents rarely took them away for more than two weeks in the summer, could leave town in June and return when school opened, in the interval enjoying specially prepared and safe-guarded swimming-holes, and tennis-courts and baseball diamonds and two hundred ponies William would send to the farm, and a fleet of big automobiles, each with its especially selected chauffeur. And there was to be a mighty fireproofed motion-picture theater on the farm, and a big corps of governesses for the girls and college-trained overseers for the boys, with another corps of instructors in a summer school for the backward children. About all of this William talked without pause.

At ten he was still talking, while father dozed with his chin on his chest; and Helene, in her room, banged things about by way of indicating her disgust; and Frank and Henry gazed numbly and Joan gazed haggardly. At eleven, with William still talking, father and mother had both gone to bed, all was quiet in Helene's room, and Frank, head shaking, excused himself. Joan, too, rose.

"It's time for bed, dear," she sighed.

"Not for me, Joan!" William smiled. "Hank and I have a lot more to talk over."

Henry nodded grimly.

"I guess it's coming to me, Joan; you go to bed," he said.

So Joan went to bed, in a frame of mind more distressed, more utterly bewildered, than she had ever known before. She would wait, awake, for William, of course, and then try again to talk him back to reason. There *must* be a way of reaching that once sound, normal brain! There had to be! Joan shuddered her way into bed and waited. But the steady mumble in the dining-room kept on and on and on; and some time after the clock had struck midnight, Joan went to sleep.

Henry alone loitered over the breakfast table when she appeared. Her mother smiled rather sadly at her from the kitchen doorway.

"Get a good rest, dear?" she said.

"You shouldn't let me oversleep like that," said Joan. "I'm lazy and worthless enough as it is. I wanted to see Will, too."

"He must have gone off about six again," her mother said. "I wonder why he does that?"

"I don't know, mother."

"I left him some breakfast last night; he ate that, anyway. What time did you two stop talking, Henry?"

"I stopped when Bill came through that door after the party," Henry said bitterly. "Bill stopped around quarter past one this morning."

"Was he—the same?" Joan inquired.

"He hadn't changed a bit. He spent about a hundred million dollars before he ran down. The poor half-wit—oh, say, don't look like that, Joan! We'll get him yet! *I'll* get him! I started him and—gee! who'd a thought a guy like him would

go off like that, Joan? Clean, plumb *off!*" muttered Henry, and ceased drawing pictures on the table-cloth with his knife and shot a scared glance at Joan. "He—excuse me, of course—he looked like a boob to me! How could I know you'd married a—a fanatic in disguise, kid? You never hinted there was anything queer about him!"

"There never was until *you*—"

"I know; at that it might be worse!" Henry interrupted. "Might have taken some other form, I mean. Suppose somebody's shot him full of the idea of killing off all the big men or the little men or the blond women in the population? Where'd that have landed him, if he had all this crazy pep to get out of his system?"

Joan scorned a reply. Henry squared his shoulders.

"Well, don't give up the ship, anyway!" he advised. "I'll get him out of it, if it takes the rest of my life!"

Toward ten the telephone tinkled.

Joan hurried to it.

"Oh! Uncle Peter Vanluyn! Yes?" said she. "Well—no, it didn't work. No, it wasn't successful at all. Yes, he's a very unusual young man, I know—persuasive, yes. I should say he was! If he hadn't—well, I *know* that something must be done at once!" Joan cried, and agitation cracked her voice.

After that, for some three minutes, there was more talk over the wire, while Henry stood in the background, biting his nails and glancing keenly at Joan. Eventually, she nodded.

"I will, of course!" she said. "Yes, at once. By eleven, I think."

"Well?" Henry asked sharply, as she rang off.

"He wants me to come to the office immediately, to talk the thing over and see what is to be done," Joan responded, with a queer, distracted little smile. "I know he'll blame me."

"He will not, because I told him yesterday it was my fault," Henry snapped. "What's more, I'm going down there with you, and if he tries to hand you anything rough, I'll mess up his scenery!"

"But I don't want you to—"

"I'm going — with you or right after you," Henry said, briefly and conclusively, as he reached into the bedroom for his collar and began buttoning it into place.

His picture of the Peter Vanluyn office had not been greatly overdrawn. Joan, not at all given to awe, did pause for a moment and catch her breath as they entered Uncle Peter's sanctum. Large and beautiful and infinitely dignified and artistic were weak little words when applied to that office! One of the mature woman stenographers—tight black gown and precise, stiff white collar and cuffs — closed the door after them and Joan looked rather timidly down its length, to the distant spot by the giant flat-topped desk at the far end, where three elderly gentlemen stood. Henry's push set her into motion again, and now, courtly and wonderful as ever, Peter himself was taking her hand. Henry he favored with a stare, a perplexed smile, and eventually a nod!

"I have called a conference, you see, my dear," he said. "The situation seemed to warrant that. Mr. Clanborne—you know him, of course, from the old days in Will's office." Joan nodded breathlessly to the attorney whose fee for a call outside chanced to be five hundred dollars, win, lose or draw! "And this is Dr. Millway," Uncle Peter pursued. "Heard of him, of course. Been Will's personal physician for years, my dear. Let's be seated."

He indicated a chair, and Joan fluttered into it and looked at them. Clanborne wore his usual rather cynical little smile. Dr. Millway, quite as eminent in his own profession, looked like a person who might be rather jolly most of the time, but he wore a heavy and puzzled frown just now.

"Now, as to the—" Peter Vanluyn began slowly, and chanced to note Henry's presence again. "Oh, yes! Mr. Thayer, wasn't it? Clanborne, Millway — Mr. Thayer. You—er—came, too?"

"Yes, I just ran in with Joan to make a full report about that little business last night," Henry said briefly and genially. "You see, it was this way—"

"You failed completely?"

"Why, yes, but—"

"That's full enough, Mr. Thayer," said

William's Uncle Peter. "I'm not yet quite sure just how you convinced me of the wisdom of that slightly—er—however, that's done with. Where was I? Ah, yes, as to this astounding affair of William giving away his fortune. I've told Clanborne and Millway most of the details. He—hasn't altered at all?"

"Not a bit!" Henry said. "You see, Bill—"

"Mrs. Vanluyn?" smiled her husband's uncle.

"I'm afraid he hasn't. The—the idea seemed stronger than ever last night," Joan replied, with a little tightness in her throat.

"Well, what in the world *is* it?" Mr. Vanluyn demanded. "What does it mean? What *can* it mean?"

"*I'm* the one that started all this!" Henry proclaimed. "There isn't any mystery about it! I—"

"Mr. Thayer," said the lord of the office, "of course you're welcome—any relative of Joan's is welcome. But this little conference concerns her more directly and—er—we'd like to hear from her exclusively. You understand?"

"I can take a hint without being kicked down-stairs!" Henry remarked shortly.

"Thank you. Because, while I'll testify myself that you're a persuasive talker, Mr. Thayer, it is really absurd to assume that anything you or any other person may have said could possibly have influenced William to this extent. What is your own idea, Joan?"

"About the actual cause of it? I don't know," Joan answered wretchedly. "He was quite himself, and then, after Henry had said so much about the—the middle-class and all that, he—he wasn't! That's really all!"

"But the obsession that he must convert everything into money and give away the money still persists?"

"Oh, it's growing stronger!" Joan said faintly.

"Astounding! Positively astounding!" muttered William's uncle. "Clanborne?"

"Don't look at me in that confident way; I can't help you—yet," the attorney said tartly. "I don't know why you brought me here, Peter. I'm a lawyer, not an alienist. Most extraordinary thing I ever encountered, particularly with a perfectly balanced boy like Will. It's remotely possible, of course, that he has some sort of tremendous financial deal afoot, and that he's using this freakish pose to cover his operations. Been done before, something like that. But I don't believe it. Will never went in for that sort of spectacular thing; he's always been ultra-conservative and disinclined to take even small chances. *You're* convinced that he is really in earnest about all this, Mrs. Vanluyn!"

"I wish that I was not!" Joan faltered.

"It's disease, then—that's what it is: disease!" Clanborne concluded. "It's a job for you, Millway!"

The very eminent physician shook his head gravely.

"It does begin to seem so," he remarked.

"But disease—that would mean mental disease, of course!" William's uncle said sharply. "There's never been anything like that in the Vanluyn family!"

"There's no recorded case of another Vanluyn digging down and giving away all he possessed, either, Peter," Clanborne smiled dryly. "That proves nothing."

"And not to wound your feelings, Peter, there *have* been one or two Vanluyns who were a bit odd," the physician added. "I'm probably the only man in the world who has done it, but I did read through that *de luxe* history of the Vanluyns you gave me three or four years ago. Did you?"

"Eh? No—not all of it," the head of the clan confessed.

"I thought as much. Well, there was a Wat Vanluyn, back in the neighborhood of eighteen ten, who started quite a to-do with the notion that he'd raise a sort of concentrated Colonial super-army and run over and lick all Europe. They shipped him to Paris for treatment, and the record doesn't state just what did become of him. Unimportant branch of the family—but he was a Vanluyn just the same."

"Humph!" said William's uncle.

"And a century or so behind him there was a Hendryk Vanluyn, who must have been a downright peculiar chap. As I recall it, he developed a fixed notion that he was one of the planets, and he did his darn-

edest to get up with the rest of the crowd and revolve in his own orbit. He was killed by a fall from a stone tower—um! There's a picture of him in your book, too, Peter, and if the old wood cut's at all accurate, William resembles him remarkably! Gad! That's curious! That never occurred to me until this very minute!"

William's uncle was not quite so ruddy.

"Jack, are you trying to tell me the boy's a throwback to some maniac ancestor?" he demanded harshly. "Is that a fact?"

"If I were able to tell you that it is or is not fact, medicine'd be a mighty interesting and exact science," the doctor stated. "I don't know. I offer the suggestion for what it's worth. It's possible, at any rate. These things happen."

"And then—what?"

"Well, the obvious thing, of course, would be to get Will where we could watch him very closely for a month or two," sighed the physician. "It could be managed without any publicity."

"You mean, put him in an asylum?" Joan gasped.

"Oh—my child!" Dr. Millway protested soothingly. "Not quite that, of course. There are places—"

"But Will isn't crazy!" William's wife cried, and the tears flowed suddenly. "He's not, I tell you! Don't you suppose *I'd* know it if he were? It—it isn't anything like that!"

"No?" Clanborne smiled quietly. "Then just what *is* it?"

"I—I don't know!"

"Well, he's not insane," Peter Vanluyn snapped. "At least, we'll assume that he's not until we're forced to assume otherwise. Joan, my dear, this is surely a time for the plainest speaking. Tell me, just how far are *you* personally responsible for this obsession of William's? You insisted on his living at your home?"

"Yes!" choked Joan.

"That violent change is at the root of it, I'd be willing to swear! You have great influence with Will, my child. Have you dwelt at length on the virtues of the middle class and their afflictions?"

"No, I haven't."

"Have you tried to turn him away from the idea of helping them, then?"

"Yes!"

"And—"

"He has tried each time to show me that I was wrong!"

Peter Vanluyn glanced at Dr. Millway. The doctor nodded.

"Looks more and more like the real thing," he observed soberly. "When a pretty little bride can't make an impression on a man, something's all wrong."

"Joan, I wonder if you realize what a very serious, very dreadful thing Will is doing?" the chief of the clan pursued, with a heavy sigh. "Carried through, it means ruin for himself and ruin for you. If you have children, it means poverty for them, and deliberately cheating them out of all the splendid opportunities to which, as William's children, they are entitled."

"I've thought of all that," said Joan huskily.

"And it goes much further. It means much more to many more people! You don't quite see that? Let me cite one little instance; your knowledge of Will's affairs will confirm me. That solid block of small apartments which he owns, not very far from your home. They're cheap; they're occupied by two hundred and fourteen little families, all poor people, my dear, office workers who did not benefit greatly by the late boom in wages and are not benefiting at all now. You know the policy of the whole estate: no such rents have been raised, save in one or two cases where they did not cover actual expenses. We will say that Will has sold that block. What happens? The rents will be raised to the very limit, and a large number of those people—I've been about that block, because it interested me—will be unable to meet the raise and their homes will be broken up. Misery! That's one minor case. Now consider—"

"Please don't tell me! I know!" Joan cried. "I've thought of all that, too. What do you want me to *do?*"

"You feel that it's incumbent upon yourself to do something?" Clanborne asked, rather harshly.

"Yes!"

"So do I! I believe, Mrs. Vanluyn, that that trick of putting Will into a tenement house is enough to have upset his mind! I believe the one responsible for it should bear the blame and—"

"Yes, yes! I believe that, too!" Joan broke in passionately. "Only tell me what to do! I'll do it! I don't care what it is! Short of murder, I'll do it, if it will only stop Will!"

"Don't excite yourself, my dear, and don't take Clanborne too seriously," advised William's uncle, but in his tone there was not one suggestion that he really disagreed with the attorney. "Ah—what would you advise doing, Millway?"

"You're opposed to putting Will under scientific observation, I believe?"

"Decidedly!"

The doctor shrugged his shoulders.

"Divert his mind, then. That's the only thing I—or anybody else—can suggest. Fill his brain with some new interest, some new idea, so positive that it will push out the original obsession. It's worth trying. Mrs. Vanluyn is the one to do that, I'm sure. She's closest to Will now."

And then they looked at Joan, did these three elderly gentlemen—not kindly as they should have looked at a sweet and gentle bride, not angrily as one might have expected, but coldly, thoughtfully, appraisingly, as if each was debating whether the sight of her in flames at the stake or the vision of her driving a car over the edge of a cliff was likely to prove the greater diversion to William.

Joan sat erect.

"Very well. What shall I do?"

"My dear lady, that's something nobody can tell you, I fear!" the doctor replied rather testily. "That's a thing you'll have to determine for yourself. You are with Will. Little occasions are bound to appear. You're very intelligent; *you* are the one to seize upon the occasion that can be turned into a big, diverting interest. Only, unless you're prepared to discover something of the kind in the very near future, I'd suggest observation!"

"You mean that if I don't do something to shatter this obsession, you'll put him in an asylum?" Joan asked, with difficulty.

"You phrase the thing rather bluntly," Peter Vanluyn sighed.

"But correctly?"

"My dear, for Will's own sake, for the sake of yourself and the rest of his family—"

"I understand," Joan said, as she rose. "I—I shall do something startling!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

WHAT?

"I DON'T know that we've done the wisest thing," murmured William's uncle, as the door closed.

"If we always did the wisest thing, Peter, we'd have three golden haloes and be too darned good for this world," the attorney submitted.

"What else was there to do?" Dr. Millway demanded. "The boy—if he isn't actually a lunatic—needs a shock. She'll give it to him, if I'm a judge of young women!"

"Yes, but what kind of a shock?" asked Peter. "That little girl was the one indirectly responsible for Will's getting into the papers recently, you know. Not pleasantly, that is. Being featured in the public prints is decidedly against the policy of the family. It's just possible that fact may not occur to Joan when she—no, I'm not at all sure we've done the wisest thing."

He would perhaps have been in still greater doubt could he have stood beside Henry Thayer and Joan, down in the street, just then.

"Jo, for the love of Mike, will you can the weeps?" Henry was asking, quite vehemently. "Look at the people staring at you, Joan! Anyway, that stuff doesn't get you anything."

"But they're right; I *am* the one to blame!" Joan cried passionately. "It is all my fault, Henry, and I'll do something—oh, I will do something—"

"Certainly you'll do something," Henry agreed soothingly. "Something big and just right, kid—something that 'll knock Bill cold. We know that. Only we don't want to jump at it and pull something crazy; we've had too much of that now,

between you and me! We want to study this all out and—"

"We've no time to study it out!" the bride informed him, with an hysterical catch in her voice. "If I don't drag his mind off the middle class, they'll put Will in an insane asylum! And if they do that, Henry, I'll die! They—they're cold, awful old men, aren't they? They looked at me as if—"

"Hey—sssh!" pleaded Henry. "Don't fly off like that! I thought you were a—a sort of superior woman, Jo!"

"Yes, I thought that, too!" Joan laughed bitterly. "I'm not, Henry! I'm an utter fool! If it hadn't been for that idiotic idea of superiority lurking in me somewhere, I'd never have insisted on Will coming home with me and none of it would have happened. I—what shall I do, Henry? *What?*"

"For a while, I guess I wouldn't try to do anything," Henry advised, rather sanely. "You're not fit."

"That's quite true!" conceded Joan, and gripped herself.

"Anyway, *you* couldn't think out a thing like this and do it right," Henry mused. "You haven't got the imagination, Jo, and you're too excited. I'm not. Those cold, awful old men didn't affect me so much—and doping this thing out is my job, anyway. Give me ten minutes to think!"

"But no brilliant—"

"Listen, Joan!" Henry interrupted. "I don't want to knock you when you're like this, but *you* did start this mess and *you* can't finish it? Eh? All right, then! If I can think up something good don't turn it down without looking it over at least. You haven't got anything really bright to suggest yourself?"

"Not one thing!" Joan confessed, with a helpless, hopeless little shudder and a scared look at Henry Thayer. "I—I don't know what's wrong, Henry, but my—my brain's numb!"

"Well, mine's not, kid!" Henry said reassuringly. "Lemme think!"

Hands in his coat pockets, Henry walked on beside her, while young Mrs. Vanluyn bit her lips and stared ahead. They meant it—Will's uncle, Will's sister meant it! Unless William was turned from his mad course in the shortest order, something definitely awful would happen to William! They would find ways of taking him from her; and, since doubtless they had never quite approved her, once gone she might lose Will forever. Where much wealth, much power and much determination are combined toward an end, these things sometimes happen! And all of that because, in one tremendously disturbed moment, she had forced William to leave his own atmosphere and—where were they?

They seemed to have reached the subway. Henry, deep in thought and whistling very softly, led the way below; his brows knit as they waited for the train; he was silent and Joan did not disturb his meditations. Was it thinkable that, having all her life regarded Henry as a rather unfortunate and irresponsible and undependable boy, a little to be pitied if anything, she was mentally leaning heavily on Henry at this moment?

Joan sought to shake herself together, with scantiest success. She might or might not admit that, but it was near to being the fact. She herself seemed to have lost the power of voluntary thought; there was only that hideous picture of Will being taken away from her. She glanced at Henry as they sat in the roaring car; his lips were pursed now and his brows contracted.

Henry, in point of fact, was thinking more furiously at that moment than ever before since conscious thought began within his cranium—not so much of Joan or of William or of William's family, but of the ghastly crime involved in handing back to a public from whom at some period it had been wrenched, the sum of fifteen million dollars. That was the thing to be prevented, no matter how much temporary suffering the process might impose on the principal actors, even upon himself!

Privately, the thought that he, Henry, was responsible for that catastrophe was one of the few that had ever really taken his breath away, but it surely had been taking his breath away for several days now. His lips parted, just as they did every time the full realization surged over him. He wondered if William actually had gone

crazy? He wondered what would have happened if his initial idle thought had involved something more unique than aiding the middle class? Because it had been no more than an idle thought, as Henry reflected rather dazedly; even now he could not quite have told how it all began.

William had looked like a simple, overmoneyed soul who could be teased with pleasing results; he had assumed, too rashly, that William was a blue-blooded snob who would be thoroughly roused at the proposition of his own democratization and thus furnish a little innocent entertainment and—well, this wasn't getting the answer, was it? Henry's lips pursed again.

He spoke, suddenly, when they were on the street again and within three blocks of home:

"Jo!"

"Yes—yes. What?" gasped Mrs. Vanluyn, who had been deep in thoughts of her own.

"Are you willing to go the limit to save Bill?"

"Yes!"

"I don't mean any cheap little small-time limit, Jo; I mean the real stuff: *the limit*, short of getting into jail! I—well, for instance, if you found you were weakening, could you think hard enough about Bill and the fact that you were saving him from strait-jackets and keepers, to go straight through with what you started?"

"If—yes!"

"How much money have you got—cash?" Henry asked brightly.

"Oh, some absurd sum—three or four hundred dollars. Will insists on my carrying that. Why?"

"That's not so much, but it will have to do, I suppose," Henry sighed. "Got it with you?"

"Yes."

"Let's have it!"

"But—"

"Joan, I've got this thing doped out, and it 'll take that much cash and likely more, if you don't—thanks!" said Henry, as he pushed the roll down in his pocket. "Not that it's for me, you understand. Do you want to lean on me, Jo, while I tell you the answer?"

"Henry, if you really have an idea that may help—" Joan pleaded.

"This won't *help!*" her cousin said impatiently. "This 'll lift Bill off his feet, shoot him a mile into the air, turn him over ten thousand times coming down—and when he hits the earth again, he'll be himself. Joan, you're going to elope with George Stevens this afternoon!"

"*What?*"

"Not so bad, eh?" smiled Henry. "Get it? If finding that his wife's gone with her old lover doesn't shock Bill back to his senses, the quicker they lock him up the better. And I'll say—"

"Don't dare say one thing more!" Joan flamed. "Henry Thayer, you're—you're beastly! I—I'm ashamed to think that you could believe, even to save Will's money, that—"

"Deary, don't get this wrong," purred Henry. "It's not that kind of an elopement. This elopement could be pulled in any Sunday-school and they'd just clap their hands with glee—see?"

"No, I don't, and—"

"*You've* got some scheme ready that 'll do the work—eh?" Henry said shortly.

"I—no, I haven't!" said Joan, and her voice grew faint.

"Hear this, then. Turn it down if you want to. George was still strong for you when the last returns came in? I mean, you didn't have words with him, that first night Bill came?"

"George? No, he offered to help me if I ever needed it, and—"

"Lord! You've clinched it! You've said it all!" Henry cried enthusiastically. "That was all that worried me, about George. Now, listen! Leave George to me; I'll attend to him. He'll be on hand at—what time? Four o'clock, I guess. You pack all the bags you own and have 'em ready. George 'll land there in a taxi, at the house. You beat it with old George. Take a train for Philadelphia. Then what?"

"Henry, I think if any one's going to an asylum, *you*—"

"I'll start the excitement, home here. I'll find where Bill is and telephone him that you've skipped—maybe I'll wait till

he gets home; I don't know. You and George get to Philadelphia. Go to a hotel and register—his name, of course, Mr. and Mrs. The best hotel in town and—"

"Henry, I won't do that!" Joan cried hotly. "George will not and—"

"Then leave a couple of clues around the place—a bag or something—anything so it 'll look as if you were scared off and went further. Maybe a forwarding address is the best thing. Get on to Baltimore, anyway. Do the same stunt there, Joan, no matter what time of night you hit the town. Leave some clues and beat it for Washington! If you're still able to travel and Bill hasn't caught up with the procession, get on to Richmond, same way! The whole idea is to keep Bill chasing you till he finds you and rescues you from the monster that grabbed you off. Well?"

"No!" Joan said flatly.

"Why?"

"Because—because—oh, it's impossible! Suppose that Will were—were just as disgusted as he would be and refused to follow and—"

"Say, does that bird love you?" Henry demanded.

"I hope so!" Joan answered tremulously.

"Then if he doesn't chase you and bring you back, you might a darned sight better stick with George and start a delicatessen-stone down South somewhere! Do you love Bill?"

"Oh, Henry!"

"Then why not give him a jolt that 'll knock his poor old brain right side up again? The doctor ordered it!"

"But this isn't—no, this isn't possible!" Joan said thickly, as they came to their own block.

"Isn't, eh?" mused Henry, and shrugged his shoulders. "Well—I suppose we'll have to let old Bill slide then. I wonder if they still treat 'em rough in those asylums? Probably not the rich ones. Maybe they'll hang on to Bill for the rest of his natural life! Too bad!"

He took to humming unconcernedly. Joan glanced at him, frowningly, then in sudden plain terror, then in a pathetic, hopeful way, and again in terror. She had heard of the confused head described as "spinning"; well, if ever a head actually did spin under stress, it was her own just then.

They came to the steps, and Henry started upward. Joan detained him with a quick, clutching little hand.

"Just a minute—before we go up!" she said hoarsely. "Mother—"

"I thought of that," smiled Henry. "Aunt's gone over to Aunt Jennie's this afternoon—away over in New Jersey. She never gets back from there before five."

"But Henry, it—it's all so horrible and still—*would it help?*"

"Well, if it didn't cure Bill, I'd say you might as well give up trying!"

"And would George understand — that —I mean—"

"Oh, yes, I'll see that George understands all that very clearly, so far as that goes. Why? Thinking of trying it after all?"

Young Mrs. Vanluyn was white; her eyes were wild; her lips trembled violently.

"Henry, I'd do anything—*anything!*—to—to make everything all right for Will again!" she managed to whisper.

Henry smiled, brightly and rather relievedly, and patted her sleader arm.

"You'd better run up-stairs and begin the packing; we haven't any too much time," he said. "I'm going down-town again."

CHAPTER XIX.

HENRY'S FINE WORK WITH GEORGE.

IN a way, George Stevens came near to being a dual personality. That is to say there was an exclusively woolen business George Stevens and another George who ate and read and felt and slept much as do other people. Between the week-day hours of nine and five, the plain George never by any chance intruded upon the woolen George; the woolen George, however, was not nearly so meticulous about overstepping the border, for frequently he went home with the plain George and dominated the young man all night, even to the extent of filling him with

dreams about woolens—and it had happened much more frequently this last month than hitherto, because the plain George had something he wished to forget. It was curious, without being very unusual.

The woolen George was the one who glanced up vaguely from his desk this very early afternoon as Henry entered. The woolen George was all-absorbed in the papers before him, too. Somebody had lied about worsteds; they were not worsteds at all, and more, they were about twelve hundred yards shy! The point of the game was to discover who had lied and why the shortage; and George was approximately in the middle of the seventh inning and going strong when he was forced to pause with:

"Oh—hello, Henry!"

"Hello, George," Henry said quietly, and drew a chair very close to the side of the desk, although George was important enough to have an office all to himself. "Got a few minutes?"

"Um — ah — no," the woolen George muttered. "About a job, Hank? I see you're not working again. Er—say, could you run around and see me to-night about it?"

"I could, if you say so after you've heard what brought me here," Henry smiled mysteriously. "But to-night might be too late!"

"Eh?"

"George!" Henry shot at him. "You're still stuck on Joan?"

"What?" gasped the plain George, pitching headlong through the woolen George and taking the chair.

"You are, then. Fine!" breathed Henry, and hitched his chair so close that he all but pushed George out of his place. "Listen, George! What if there was still hope?"

"Hope!" George laughed, croakingly, and flushed a brickish red. "Joan's married."

"True, but she isn't dead, boy!" Henry smiled. "Other women have made mistakes and still lived to be happy with their second—or third or fourth—husbands."

"Is Joan unhappy?" George demanded savagely.

Henry's eyes narrowed strangely and significantly.

"Now, there's where you bring up a very nice point!" he said. "I don't know. I don't believe she knows altogether. On the other hand, it's dead certain she's not happy. George, do you want to help her?"

"I'd die to help Joan!" stated the plain George, and while it was fervent, it was not so fervent as the similar statement he had made to Joan herself.

"Advantage of this, then, is that you don't have to die, I suppose," the caller said thoughtfully. "George, I wonder whether I've made a mistake in coming to you? You're a friend of mine and — of course, I don't have to tell you that I'd a darned sight rather have seen Joan marry —well, I don't know at that." Henry frowned and hesitated visibly, and then reached a new decision. "George, I guess I *did* make a mistake! I—yes, never mind any of it, old man!"

To this George rose with the promptness and the precision of a fine piece of mechanism. He caught Henry's arm, just as its owner was getting to his feet. His flush deepened.

"Wait, Hank!" he cried forcefully. "If I can help Joan, you've got to tell me how."

"But—"

"How, Henry?" George demanded.

So Henry relaxed again, with a smile that indicated slight shame at his own weakness. George, with a sharp glance at the closed door, bent his head nearer to listen, and Henry talked.

He talked luridly and impressively, because he was Henry. At the same time, he did not talk too luridly, and he did not wander too far from the cold facts or too deeply into the spectacular; certain recent experiences had bred in Henry a little timidity about that sort of thing. Toward the end, although he had not heard nearly all the facts, it was George's impression that Joan found herself unhappy because of her husband's neglect; further—although very certainly Henry had said nothing of the kind—George sensed that Joan was just about disgusted with her bargain in William, and, while she might be too proud to admit anything of the sort, that she felt a

secret yearning to pass her future years with a more ordinary, more devoted husband. Beyond this, George had learned just what was expected of him in the way of immediate action, and he had stared amazedly at Henry during the hearing!

Henry sat back at last.

"You'll be up there, with a taxi and your bag packed, at four, George?"

"I—hum," mused George. "No, I don't think I will."

"*What?*" cried Henry Thayer. "After all—"

"I—I'll tell you," George muttered. "First place, that's an expensive job that I could hardly af—"

"Wait! I forgot about that!" Henry broke in, and slapped a rumpled roll of currency on the desk. "Here! Close to four hundred. Oh, that's all right, George! I always have a little change around me, you know; I'd kick in more than this to help Joan! Take it—there!"

There was something about tangible money which inevitably made its appeal to George; he stared at this collection in his palm and flushed again.

"Next place, it's the wrong thing to do!" he stated, less energetically. "Her husband—"

"My Lord!" Henry snapped. "Do you imagine that when it's all over and her husband understands, he won't feel you're his best friend on earth?"

"He might!" George mumbled. "It does seem queer, though — helping somebody else to win her back after he's neglected her that way!"

"What's queer about it?" Henry demanded, exasperatedly. "Could there be anything finer and nobler and more self-sacrificing than to help a girl get what she thinks she wants, even if it is her husband?"

"Ssssh! Ssssh!" George pleaded. "What do you mean by that 'thinks'?"

Henry studied him intently for one second; then he leaned close again.

"George, you are kind of a thick bird after all, aren't you?" he said. "You can't read between the lines even when they're pried apart with a crow-bar, can you? Listen! You'll do as you like about all this, of course; but, George, if I was in your shoes and this chance came my way, I'd grab it off so quick it would blister my hands! I'd put such a punch into it, I'd send it over with such a slam, I'd make myself so solid as a gentleman and a man and a manager and a regular sport, that before the show was over—if *I* had a chance to get a girl like Joan all to myself for a few hours! — she'd know *who* was *who!* And when the big smash came, eventually, she wouldn't be in any doubt about who she was in love with!"

"The big smash!" George echoed. "You mean between Joan and her husband?"

"No, I'm talking about a railroad wreck!" Henry sneered. "You haven't nerve enough for this—is that it?"

George Stevens scowled and stared at the desk, and bit his lips and stared at the money in his hand. His breathing quickened. George, just then, was making what he considered the most momentous decision of his whole life.

"I can—get leave of absence for a week," he muttered. "I've never taken many chances, and I've never got much—business or any other way. Maybe playing safe's what cost me Joan and—Henry!"

"Yes, old man?" Henry said smoothly.

"I'll be up there at four o'clock!" George choked.

"And go through with it?"

"Yes, and go through with it to the end!" George repeated solemnly, as he wrung his friend's hand in sudden, deep emotion.

CHAPTER XX.

DEPARTURE.

HALF past three had arrived. The fact itself was established by the striking of the clock; how that hour, which was within thirty minutes of the time of her crucifixion, could have arrived so soon passed Joan's understanding. All alone there in the flat, she had been packing without system or reason, folding things and cramming them in, anywhere—stopping—starting hysterically again and cramming in more things—stopping.

One hundred times, at the very lowest estimate, she had stopped permanently; on each of these occasions she had removed several little things and put them back in the drawers—and stopped once more, and eventually resumed packing. It seems to be axiomatic in many connections that the higher they go the harder they fall; this capable brain of Joan's, in college and elsewhere, had attained some dizzy heights. Now—well, every last cell this afternoon seemed to have collapsed or turned itself inside out or started a private battle with some other cell! It was hideous and uncanny; but she could not think in a straight line.

Time after time young Mrs. Vanluyn paused and established to her perfect satisfaction that, of all escapades Henry could have conceived for William's diversion, this was the maddest and the most impossible. Time after time she decided positively that it should not be. Time after time, then, she sat down—usually with a shoe or a bit of lingerie crumpled in her hands—to devise another, more conventional little scheme which should attain the same result with the same, painfully necessary speed. And before her seemed to loom those three old men who would take William from her and thrust him into an asylum, and William's infuriated sister, who had promised all sorts of nameless horrors unless William's reason was restored by to-morrow morning, and who, unhappily, was rather in a position to carry out her threats; and finally, with shuddering sigh, wild stare at nothingness and trembling step, Joan tucked the bit of lingerie or the shoe into one of the open grips!

And now it was half past three and still Henry had not returned! Why? Joan brightened suddenly. Perhaps George had failed to consent? Oh, that would be wonderful! Yes, he must have failed, for otherwise Henry would have appeared long before this and spread himself a little and taken charge. He had not done that! Joan stood erect, dropping the little taffeta gown to the floor, glowing! Joan, then, gave a queer, whining little cry and stooped for the gown, because the door had just slammed and Henry was calling:

"Jo! Hey! Oh, there you are. My word, haven't you finished packing yet?"

"Almost," Joan quavered. "George—George—"

"Oh, George is all right; he'll be on the job at four, of course," Henry said, with a wealth of good cheer. "Why? Think something had happened? I just stopped off to buy myself some lunch, Joan; there wasn't any hurry. Written the note yet?"

"What note?"

"What? The one for Bill, of course."

"I'm not going to leave a note for Will!" Joan gasped. "I couldn't—"

"Well, how in the world is he to know that you've eloped with George—and why?" Henry demanded warmly. "Where does the first awful shock for him come in? D'ye suppose I can go to him and tell him?"

"Henry, I couldn't—"

"You don't have to think it up; I'll tell you what to write," Henry snapped. "Only for Heaven's sake let's get this packing finished. George 'll be here in fifteen minutes! Here! What about this lid? Chuck it in here? Right! Comb, bush, and these other tools? All right. You look after 'em and hand me that job lot of white slippers!"

Five minutes Henry worked. The packing was finished, three large grips. Henry took his cousin's arm and led her to the tiny desk in the corner.

"Now get busy on this thing, because it's important, Jo. Everything hinges on getting him wild at the start. Ready? Fine! Something like this: 'You have too long neglected me for your middle class. Now I can bear it no longer and I have gone with the man I love and—' How are you starting that?"

Joan held up the sheet, which showed two words and three tear-drops.

"'My darling!'" cried Henry, quite wildly, and threw up his hands. "Is that the way to begin a note to a man you're leaving forever? Don't you understand this thing at all, Joan? You're leaving Bill because he's forgotten you — see? Well, you hate him! What? Well, maybe you don't hate him, but you're sore at him—piqued—mad as sin—and you don't call

him 'my darling' when you feel like that! Make it 'Will!'"

Joan numbly selected another sheet and obeyed. Henry frowned over the single word.

"I can do better than that first line," he muttered. "This is about right: take this down as it stands, Joan: 'There comes a time in many women's lives when they know, better than any spoken word can tell, that a husband's love has grown cold. That time has come in mine.' Got that?"

"Henry, that's the most idiotically theatrical—" Joan choked.

"Put it down!" Henry rasped fiercely. "This is no class in literature! This is a good-by note for a guy that needs a wallop in the midriff, Joan, and I know what 'll hit him! Have you got it? All right! Now! '—Come in mine. For the sake of the great love I once bore you, Will, I do not judge you now.' That's good; I like that!" said Henry. "Got it? Next: 'I know but too well that I am only in the way; I leave you to the middle class you love so much better, and go to live my own life with—' Stop there! Now, scratch out the 'with'—see? No, don't scratch it all out, you—I mean, leave it so he'll know what the word is! That's the stuff. Now stick a period after 'life' and sign your name!" concluded Henry, straightening up with a satisfied smile. "I'll tell the world that's going to jar Willie!"

Joan swallowed.

"I—I think that if you'll let me write another—"

"No time to change it now; this is the goods, anyway," Henry said briskly, as he picked up the remarkable document. "Now, we'll stick this on the mirror here, where he can't miss it, eh? No, it's better on the parlor mantel. The sooner the family finds out, the bigger excitement there'll be by the time Bill gets home—and I'm counting some on that, too; he needs all the jolting we can hand him. Now—let's see. Oh, yes, here are the two Philadelphia tickets, kid, and the Pullman checks—four of those."

"*Four!*"

"Yes, my child," Henry said, blandly and complacently. "Two of them you use in the regular way. The other two we drop on the floor here by accident—thusly! Not so bad? These are what start Bill toward Philadelphia."

A small, rattling laugh sounded in Joan's throat. She passed one slim hand over her hot and aching forehead.

"Henry," she said thinly, "if Will *shouldn't* follow me—"

Henry was at the window. He turned back, vibrating new excitement.

"Here's George!" he announced.

And now, while Joan stood petrified, he was running to open the door—now he was talking to some one in the hall, and now—now George Stevens stood before her at Henry's side.

If one were hypercritical, one might have felt that George did not then look quite the daring devil on the point of eloping with another man's wife. George's color was pasty; his eyes seemed to have sunk and developed a queer, nervous trick of shifting, where once they had been almost cowlike in their steadiness. The hand he gave Joan was cold; George's smile was an indescribable little twitch.

"Hello—Joan!" George said, with difficulty.

"How do you—do, George?" Mrs. Vanluyn forced out.

"We're — ah — eloping this afternoon, eh? Hah!" George observed further, and perhaps not even Henry suspected that the last sound was meant for a gay, careless laugh.

"We—yes—yes," Joan agreed, from a distance.

"Er—ah—pleasure!" George submitted, and started violently as a motor in the street honked its horn.

"Yes, it's—decent of you to be willing—to help me like this," Joan observed with a ghastly little smile.

George Stevens nodded thrice, the last two times apparently because his head had passed momentarily beyond control.

"Joan, if—if it would help you, I'd be willing to—"

"Die? Yes, I know. Thank you so much!" Joan said. "I wouldn't quite ask—er—that!"

"Well, don't get excited — anyhow!"

George cautioned, and failed to catch the tremor that ran through him. "You're that now. Of course, it's all a trifle unusual—ah—unusual—ah—"

"Yes, it *is* a little unusual, isn't it?" Joan inquired, with the same dreadful little smile.

"But all the same, if it helps you—"

"Going to stand and gibber about it all afternoon, eh?" Henry asked sharply. "The train leaves around quarter of five, and you have to pack the cab and get down to the Penn station before that, and—say! For the love of Mike, *look human!* That goes for both of you! You're eloping! You're happy! Don't you get that, either of you? Where are those bags? Is yours on the cab, George?"

"Eh? Yes, of course."

"Then give me a hand with these of Joan's!" Henry snapped. "No, take the small one, you boob! You haven't got strength enough left to handle the big ones. Come on!"

He started Mr. Stevens by prodding him in the back with the biggest grip. They vanished. Joan looked around and laughed—more than hysterically this time, crazily! She was leaving home with George! She was leaving her dearly beloved husband! She—

"Hey! I left that stiff down in the gas-wagon, Joan!" Henry snarled, as he bounced in again. "Go with him! Is this your hat? Are you going to carry that coat, kid? All right! I won't go down with you and make a function of it! Good-by, Jo. Keep a stiff upper lip and go through it at a gallop; and believe me, when I tell you that, you're doing the wisest little thing you ever did in all your life!"

Thus Henry closed the door upon his cousin; and having closed it, stepped to the front window and gazed downward. There was the cab; there was George—the poor fish—standing beside it and snapping the fingers of one hand while he gnawed the nails on the other. And—ah! There was Joan! She looked neither to right nor to left; she even ignored George's proffered hand; she stepped in and George followed unsteadily—and the door slammed and the cab moved away and Henry Thayer sat down in the silent parlor!

"Well, I got 'em into it and I got 'em out of it!" he said to the elderly piano. "And that's all of that nut stuff that gets into my young life! I'm through!"

The telephone rang. Henry, with a start, answered it; and heard father's voice:

"Henry? Oh, you home? Henry, I forgot to tell mother about my laundry. She isn't there, I know. You tell Joan when the man comes to leave out that blue-striped shirt, Henry, will you? Don't send it; it's torn around the collar-band and I'm not going to spend another seventeen cents on it. I forgot to tell mother."

Henry thought quickly. Ostensibly, he had just reached the house and just found Joan's note. Now, if he were not to be called upon later to explain differences in time and so on—yes, it was better to start the fun now; it would have that much more time to seethe before being served to William on his return.

"Uncle Phil!" Henry cried breathlessly. "Joan's not here!"

"No? She go over to Jersey with mother?" asked Joan's father.

"No. She was here around noon, Uncle Phil. There—yes, I better tell you, I guess. There was a note in the parlor, addressed to Bill. I read it and—"

"That's like you, Henry! You—"

"Wait, uncle! Maybe it's just as well I did. Joan's left Bill! She's taken all those big bags and gone off somewhere! And I wouldn't be a darned bit surprised, uncle, if she'd got sick of Bill and left with George and—hey! What? Why, you can't do any good by coming home now! You—say! Wait!"

Presently Henry hung up the receiver and loitered back to the dining-room, hands in his pockets, the corners of his mouth drawn down rather disgustedly.

"Hell! I didn't think he'd fly off like that!" he told the dining-room table. "What's the idea of rushing home after she's gone? He ought to have more sense than—oh, cuts no figure, anyway. It 'll take him better than fifteen minutes to get here, even if he hops an express without any waiting; they'll darned near be aboard

the train by that time. Poor old unk! Probably he is all fussed up, at that," mused Henry, as he sat down again. "I suppose, if I'd thought—"

He ended in a gently whistled tune. This he dragged out to its end and repeated; he found a cigarette in Frank's pack behind the clock and lighted it. Another little space he considered the dismal pulley-lines out back, grinning meditatively; they were about at the station now. Unless both of 'em dropped dead with terror or nerves, they were just about walking to the train, with a porter ahead and — Henry turned inquiringly as a knock sounded on the door, and then sauntered over and opened it with a patient smile. If there was one thing he hated in this house it was the way female neighbors popped in to visit.

But Henry started back as the latch clicked, because the door was pushed open, and George Stevens, a still paler George with a very shiny forehead, stood before him.

"What the—" Henry began.

"Blowout!"

"Where?"

"Right at the corner, Henry," George panted. "Last tube the man had, and he's gone to find another one. Henry, I made some sort of excuse and came back to tell you. I can't do this!"

"You *are* doing it!" Henry snarled.

"No, I'm not. I've quit! I've quit because it's not the right thing, Hank! It's too darned easily misunderstood by her husband!"

"Say, do I have to draw you a diagram of this thing and show you just where *I* come in, in explaining to her husband that you've done more for him—"

"That's what I've been thinking about!" George said feverishly. "All this explaining stuff 'll be done down south of here somewhere, and you won't be there! Is he going to take *my* word for it that this is a perfectly proper and moral elopement, after we've been registering at every hotel along the line?"

"If he doesn't—"

"No, he's a damned sight more likely to pull a gun and blow my head off!" puffed George Stevens. "I'd do that, if I were in his shoes!"

He clutched a chairback now with quite pathetic vigor, as if defying all the Henries in the world to pull him free and send him again upon the mad adventure. Henry ground his teeth and forced a smile.

"What if he does, old man?" he queried. "You've always been anxious to die for Joan."

"Yes, but decently!" George protested, without a glimmer of a smile. "I don't call it dying decently to have a woman's husband—"

"Well, nothing like that 'll happen here," Henry said soothingly. "Bill doesn't own a gun, and—here, I tell you what! If he gets too blasted wrothy and excited, I'll insist on coming with him. Then, when the time comes, I'll confess and—say! Get off! Will you get off!"

"Do you swear to that, Hank?"

"I do!"

"Even so—" George hesitated.

"Listen, George! If you want to wreck Joan's life, get cold feet now! If you've got the steam of one small cockroach in you, breeze out there like a man, hustle that driver with his tire and get out of the city! Bill may come back any minute!"

"You didn't tell me that!" George gasped. "You said he usually turned up around seven o'clock and—"

"So he does, but—George, if I were you, if I had as little nerve as you've got, if I'd promised to do a little favor for a girl like Joan, and then found I didn't even have spunk enough to start it, much less finish it, I'd get a safety-razor blade, bleed out the whole ten drops in me, die and call it a job! You darned dirty little spineless coward!"

"I—don't like that word!"

"Don't thank me for it; you've earned it honestly," Henry said bitterly.

His lips curled. His eyes poured blistering contempt upon George Stevens; and George, facing him as squarely as might be, caught his breath, and the pasty color gave way suddenly to the brickish red.

"Feel that way, do you?" he snapped. "Good-by!"

"Going to run off and hide somewhere?" Henry asked sweetly.

"No, I'm going through with this damned fool business!" George cried. "And when it's over I'm coming back to knock your—"

"That's all right, old man! That part of it's all right," Henry assured him. "Only, if you're going, go now!"

Again the door closed on George. Once more Henry hurried to the front window, leaning out this time and peering down the block. There was the cab at the corner, surely enough, with the driver apparently hammering on the last lug after his tire change. And presently, if scorn could keep him going, George would hustle up to it and jump in and—they'd be off!

Yep! They'd be off this time! Henry chuckled and leaned farther out, grinning down upon the warm street. It was just as well that George came back, if he had that nervous attack in him! Much better get it over here than to collapse in the station or jump from the train or something like that. Only where the dickens was he now? Had he fallen down-stairs? Had he—Henry returned to the parlor, conscious of another knocking. He opened the parlor door and George Stevens came hurrying to him. The brickish red, incidentally, had vanished and the pasty tinge predominated again.

"One thing more, Henry!" he said, not so forcefully.

"What—"

"Let me in a minute; I can't tell you this in the hall. Hank, old man, we've been good friends."

"You didn't come back to tell me that?"

"Not entirely; but you got me into this and—accidents will happen. All this is pretty risky for me, Hank. If anything *should* slip, you're friend enough to look after a couple of things for me when I'm gone?"

"Yes, George, I—I guess so," Henry breathed.

"I've got a little money in the savings bank, about nineteen hundred dollars. And I've got some Liberty Bonds in the safe at the office. I want you to see that my mother gets them and—say, this 'll break her all up, Henry. You'll see that she knows the real truth about it—afterward?"

Henry tugged at his collar, which seemed to be trying to strangle him.

"Wouldn't you like a pen and paper, so that you can make out a regular will?" he asked, with a wicked smile. "There's plenty of time."

"No, I'll take one of these old envelopes and jot down the different things," said George, drawing a collection of them from his pocket and facing Henry owlishly for an instant. "Two or three minutes won't matter now. About my photographic apparatus; I've got a raft of that. I paid a hundred and a quarter for that French camera, Hank. You better sell that one and give the money to mother. Then there's—"

"Shut up!" Henry hissed, suddenly, astonishingly, and slapped a hand over George's loose and tremulous lips. "Listen!"

Three seconds they stood as statues. Out back a door slammed. A strained voice called:

"Henry! You home still?"

"That's Uncle Phil!" Henry rasped. "No, no, no! You can't get out that way without 'em hearing you, ass! Get in there, you big boob—yes, in their bedroom! And stay there till I give you the word to start and then run like the devil! I guess you've wrecked it all now, anyway. Yes, uncle?"

The strange thing was that Joan's father had not hurried to him. The stranger thing was that, as Henry entered the dining-room, no wildly excited man leaped at him and implored him to tell all he knew. Father, with the queerest stunned expression, was sitting by the table, leaning on it heavily.

Frank Thayer still stood by the door, very white and with lips compressed.

"She's gone?" father asked. "You're—sure about that, Henry?"

"Why—yes. I came home and—"

"Some mistake—some mistake. Joan wouldn't do a—thing like that," father muttered; and it struck Henry that Joan's disappearance, for some reason, had dwindled astoundingly in importance, and there was that in father's eye just now which

turned Henry's heart to ice. "Henry, I—I've lost my job!"

"*What?*" gasped Henry, and shot a scared glance at Frank.

"Yes, it's so," he laughed bitterly. "I got into it, too. I'm fired with him. That doesn't matter. We'll manage one way or another. What about Joan, Henry? Where has she gone? How do you know—"

"Think of it, after all these years!" father intoned. "Because I said my daughter was in trouble and I had to go out early for once—that's what started it. That's what Sam Hankey's been waiting for, something like that. Said if I couldn't finish the day I needn't come back, and Frank got mad and—" He broke off with a gulp and looked from one of them to the other. "Young ones," father smiled, dazedly, "I'll be sixty years old next month, and *I've got no job!*"

Out at the rear of the cab the man was hammering and hammering at his tire. Joan, motionless, staring through the streaked and dirty front window, thought on and on. George was missing; it did not matter. George would return; just now George was evil fate incarnate, and there was no more escaping him and all he implied than there was escaping ultimate dissolution! Joan was hardly thinking of George; her whole turbulent mind centered upon William.

What would he do? How would he act, when finally he returned to the flat, brimming over with new insanities about the money he meant to give away? Had the thing grown to be such an obsession that William might actually abandon her and go on with his chosen work? Joan shuddered; it was not impossible. Or would he react just as Henry expected? And if he did take up the chase—what then?

William was very, very slow to wrath, but he did own a temper which, when roused, was an awful thing to witness and a worse thing to feel! Twice Joan had seen that temper in action; she shuddered again. Further, she shook an unlovely little drop of perspiration from the end of her dainty nose; for if anything will rouse a man to actual murder, is it not the abduction of his own wife? And if William actually were roused to murder—

Joan's teeth chattered. It *wasn't* impossible! It was the one sound, glowing probability in the whole wretched affair! William would overtake them, perhaps, at Washington. And perhaps on the very steps of the Willard, one of the most public spots in America, a sensational murder—just then Joan looked across the street.

And having looked, she shrieked faintly and thrust herself farther back in the cab; because, slowing down at the opposite curb, was William's own big car, with Bowers at the wheel and William in the back! And—yes, and William had seen her and the car had stopped, and now William had bounded out and was crossing the hot little stretch.

"Why—Joan!" said William, blankly.

Joan's lips moved. That was all.

"Ah—going somewhere, dear?" William inquired further. "I say, what's the row, anyway, sweetheart?" He gazed on the piled luggage with increasing curiosity; specifically he gazed at that elderly suitcase of George Stevens. It was a bulky affair, still forlornly yellow as if defying old age despite the inches of pasteboard which showed in a frayed line at two spots along the edge. "'G. S.'" muttered William. "Who's 'G. S.,' Joan? That's a maid's bag—what?"

And then William stared at his wife and swerved suddenly into the cab.

"I say, dear!" he cried. "What in the world—" Here William turned on the staring chauffeur, with an authority which brought the person to an alert attention. "Back up your car to that house down there—start up and I'll show you which one. Move, damn it! Don't you see the lady's fainted?"

CHAPTER XXI.

THE MOST REGULAR PERSON.

THE dining-room seemed to have frozen! If Frank was white, Henry had grown whiter, this last minute; after all, irresponsible as he might be, Henry owned a conscience, and just now,

like a thousand-ton weight, the knowledge was crushing him down that he, and he alone, was responsible for the greatest possible catastrophe in the whole world!

"Don't mourn about that damned job, dad!" Frank said. "It's probably the best thing that could have happened, anyway. You're due for a good rest, and it's up to us to see that you get it without any worrying. Only this thing about Joan, Henry! What was the note you found?"

Henry swallowed.

"Oh, that—I suppose she just got mad and—oh, hell! I don't know!"

"You *don't know!*" Frank cried savagely. "D'ye mean to say that you called up and started all this," whereat he pointed at father, "about something you *don't know* about?"

"I tell you, Frank—" Henry essayed weakly, and his eyes filled with tears.

"Listen here, you!" Frank shouted. "What's the idea of dodging like that? Is this some crazy stunt *you*—"

"Boys, for Heaven's sake don't fight—not now!" Joan's father put in. "I'm too darned shaken up to stand it!"

They gazed helplessly at father. Father sought to smile.

"Don't seem possible, does it?" he muttered. "I've been with that firm since eighteen eighty-seven—went there the fall before the big blizzard. It seems about two years ago, looking back now. Why, I was the only fellow in the office force that turned up for two days during the blizzard—me and Charles Hankey, the old man, Sam's uncle. Yep. We ran the business alone for two days; there wasn't much business to run, at that. Couldn't move a truck fifty feet to save your—"

"Say, father!" Frank broke in harshly. "I don't want to be unkind, but that blizzard melted thirty-odd years ago, and Joan's disappeared *now!*"

Father nodded dully.

"*Has* she? Is she really gone, or is it just some fool notion of Henry's?" he asked. "If I'd stopped two minutes to think, I wouldn't have flown off like that, y' know. I was kind of excited when he called up; Sam 'd been—"

"Uncle, that's just what it was—no more and no less!" Henry exploded. "I did it all. I planted a fake elopement with George Stevens, to see if it wouldn't bring Bill back to his senses. Oh, it wasn't all my idea. Bill's family doctor suggested it—suggested something like it—and I carried it out and—don't soak me, Frank!" Henry cried suddenly. "It's coming to me, but don't do it! Leave me so I can grab off the first job to-morrow and—and help *him!*"

"You're devilish anxious to help him now, eh?" Frank said passionately. "Soak you! I'd like to take your fool head and—"

He outlined no more of the pleasing program. Some one, in the rudest way, was kicking at the door of the dining-room; and Henry, turning from white to a pale green, slipped by Frank and pulled back the latch; and among those present was William Vanluyn, who carried a very pale Joan, sagging, eyes closed, in his arms. William himself was none too colorful as he puffed:

"Found her down-stairs — taxicab! Fainted. What the devil's it all about? Well, never mind what it's about. Get her a doctor, quick! Call Dr. John Millway and say that I want him here! You do that, Henry!"

He laid Joan tenderly on the aged sofa which still stood bravely in the corner of the dining-room. He dropped on his knees beside her, and father, tottering hurriedly to them, perched on the edge of the couch, caught one of Joan's hands and chafed it quite frantically.

"Isn't there any ammonia in the house?" William demanded fiercely. "Well, get some water then! Get some cold water! Get—"

"Will! Oh, Will!" came very faintly from the sofa.

"Eh?" cried William, and peered down at his bride, whose eyes were open. "She's coming around! Thank God! She's coming around!"

"Daddy, I—I'm all right," the faint voice said. "Don't look so frightened, dad. It—isn't anything. I just—"

She said no more, for William, with a swoop, had gathered her into his huge arms, and now, apparently, was seeking to

squeeze out what little vitality remained in Joan. This, in some cases, is the very best treatment for a fainting person. It was in Joan's case, for it brought a great sob from her and sent an arm about William's neck.

"Will, I didn't mean to do it! I didn't do it! I didn't mean to do it!" Joan wailed.

"Why, you poor lamb!" William said rather chokingly. "Whatever is it? Is it something I've done? Joan, darling! Look at me, dear! Tell me!"

Joan, however, merely burrowed farther into William's shoulder and sobbed harder and harder. Henry Thayer, standing apart, smiled awfully and squared his shoulders; there was something about Henry just then highly suggestive of the thoroughbred who has determined to walk straight up the gallows step without one sign of flinching.

"She can't talk just yet, Bill," he said steadily. "Lemme do it for her; it's my job. Listen, Bill. You've gone crazy on this stuff about giving away all the coin!"

"Eh?" cried William.

"Clean nutty, Bill!" Henry sighed. "Well, it had Joan scared stiff—as a matter of fact, it had me scared stiff, because I started it. Had your Uncle Peter scared stiff and hotter than red pepper. I went to see him about it. Well, we—we decided something had to be done to save you from yourself. I—framed up all that last night, about the guys calling for money. I thought it 'd make you sick of the middle class, Bill. I—"

"Yes, I knew that," William said astonishingly.

"You *knew* it?" Henry cried.

"I assumed something of the sort, of course. That kind of thing doesn't happen like that without help," William grinned. "Go on, though."

"So you were wise enough to—well, what do you know about that?" Henry muttered. "Well, it fell down, anyway, Bill, and this morning me and Joan and your uncle and old Doc Millway and that iceburg guy—what was his name?—Clanborne, got together and doped it out that you needed radical treatment to get your mind off the freak."

"I say!" William cried.

"And so I—you can blame it all on me, Bill, and do what you like to me! I fixed it up for her to elope with George Stevens and—"

"The devil you did!" said William. "That's the 'G. S.,' then!"

"And the big idea was for you to do a hotfoot after 'em and catch 'em and forgive Joan and all that, and by that time we figured your brain might be pointed straight again, Bill, and— What's the matter? Don't you believe me?"

"It seems too—too—"

"It was, Bill, but I thought it would work," Henry sighed. "Frank, go in there and get George. I cached him in the front bedroom. He may as well back me up; he wrecked it."

He waited, while Frank went and William muttered and Joan wept, and her father, head in his hands, stared at the floor. He opened his eyes, then, for Frank returned alone.

"What's the matter with you, Henry?" he snapped. "*Can't* you tell the truth about anything? There's nobody in there."

"Why, I left George—"

"Bah! Whose money's this?" Frank demanded, tossing it to the table. "Is it Jo's? Well, it has no business lying in there on her bureau, where the first sneak-thief can get it! There must be three or four hundred dollars in that roll!"

Young Mrs. Vanluyn's head was back a little now, so that she could face her husband. The worst of these self-contained people is that, the emotional barriers once down, they almost always overflow; Joan, emphatically, was doing that. Tears had reduced her beautiful features to one wet and unlovely smudge; her eyes were streaming; she breathed in the great, difficult gasps of a terrified child!

"Will, dear, I never meant—oh, I *never* meant—" she strangled.

"Well, here—oh, I say! Here!" William cried, and gathered her close again, smoothing her hair. "You mustn't let go like that, little girl. It's not what you've done. It's what I've done! It's all my fault, ass, I am! Really! Joan, you mustn't cry like that! If I'd ever foreseen—I

say, you understand what I'm saying, eh? Well, I have no idea of giving away any money or starting any movement for the jolly old middle class or any other class, or anything like that—never did have, really. It was a—a—a joke, you know. Something like one of Henry's jokes. Potter Stanwix, the fool, insisted on this one. I'll make my own jokes hereafter!"

"J-j-joke?" Joan choked.

"Yes—wonderful name to give it, eh? Can't think of a better one just now," William hurried on. "But that's what it was; scheme to get you and me out of here, you know. That's all it was. I confess it now. Old Potter's idea—heaven-born he called it at the time, I believe. Pah!"

"I—don't understand!"—from Joan.

"Not so easy to follow, old Potter's reasoning isn't, once he gets away from law," William explained. "You see, the notion was that since you were all so anxious to make me one of the middle class, here in the flat, I mean, it might be that we'd have had to stay here forever—and that 'd really never do for any of us.

"So Potter suggested that I overdo it to the wildest extreme, give the impression that I'd gone quite off and was bent on impoverishing myself for the middle class, and then possibly you'd feel that some one had blundered in getting me here at all and the sooner we skipped out and saved a little of the loose change the better. Um, yes. He's a splendid corporation lawyer, Potter is, I fancy; not so much as a plotter possibly. He tipped off old Sallie, I believe; that was another tactical error; I wanted to keep the excitement exclusively in this branch of the family. You're calmer?"

"Will, are you telling me—"

"That I haven't gone mad and that we're quite as rich as ever?" William grinned. "I believe so. Might have been better to go a bit lighter on it; surrender when you first showed signs of weakening, Joan—something like that. Old Potter thought it ought to be pushed to the limit; three days of it at least; but—gad! if I'd foreseen a rumpus like this I'd have called it off sooner, I fancy. I figured that you might be pleading a little by this time, but—oh, I say! *Eloping!*"

"But, Will, you've been away all these days, selling things?" said Joan.

William's grin broadened.

"Been away, yes. Had to get out early for the sake of the effect and because I couldn't hear your questions and look at you and lie any more than seemed absolutely necessary. You've got such a beastly honest way of looking into a chap's soul, Joan. But not selling things. I've been—er—otherwise occupied— Is the old world at peace again?"

"It is if you forgive me, Will."

"Can't do that; nothing to forgive, you know. Blame's all mine, only—my word! I never thought it would hit you so hard you'd feel forced to elope to bring me to my senses!" William muttered, shaking his head and looking about. And then, after the first good stare at father, William started.

"I say, dad!" he cried. "You're not ill?"

"I—hey?" father muttered, and his head came up suddenly and he even forced a smile as he stood erect and shuffled over to his own chair. "No, I'm not sick, Will. Had a little fuss this afternoon; it don't matter."

"No! It's only a matter of life and death to him!" Henry exploded passionately. "Bill, that damned Hankey fired Uncle Phil! You've got the coin and the pull and power. I wish you'd go down and tell Hankey to take him back—or you'll wreck him if it costs a million! Do that, Bill, and I'll be your slave for life. On the level! If it hadn't been for me—"

Joan's fainting spell was all over. Joan sat bolt upright.

"Dad!" she cried. "What did Hankey do?"

"Oh, don't get excited over it, Jo," her father said dully. "Bound to happen sooner or later and—"

"Oh, but I say! Here now!" cried William amazedly. "What was that? Hankey discharged you? Why—'pon my soul!" shouted William, and passed to the most hilarious laughter. "That's the funniest thing I've heard in a year! That—coming now—ha! ha! ha! ha!"

Literally he rocked, while Joan stared

blankly at him and father considered him with a decidedly grim smile.

"I suppose it is funny, Will, if you can look at it just right," he murmured.

"Yes, but you're not looking at it right, you know, because you're beastly short on information," said William. "Hankey couldn't do it, of course. That's your firm, dad! Lock, stock and barrel, that Hankey business belongs to you!"

Joan's feet came to the floor and her cheek grew pallid. Henry winced and opened his mouth—and promptly closed it again; first and last, he had done too much toward disturbing William's delicate mental balance, which really seemed no good at all under stress of any kind. Father and Frank merely frowned at William.

"Astonished, are you? Yes, to be sure! But it's quite the truth, nevertheless," William went on. "I bought out that Hankey & Brown business for you yesterday, dad. Stanwix has all the papers, and Hankey got his money this morning; doesn't know yet that he sold it to you, of course, but—"

"Will, you don't know what you're talking about!" father stated thickly. "Do you know what that business is worth?"

"I know what I paid for it; it wasn't so much, really," William said more soberly. "Now, hold on before you say it, dad! If ever a man deserved anything, you deserve that outfit, if you want it; you've worked hard enough for it. And I've been putting you all over the bars a bit, and I do try to be polite; mean to say, that is, it's only decent to hand you a little souvenir of the occasion.

"It's all in your name now, dad; if you feel like it, you can go down and kick Sam Hankey off the premises; and, by the way, if you don't take it over, I don't quite know what 'll become of the old works. And just one thing more, dad, before you tell me what you think of me. I've tried to be and mean to be just a plain, decent sort of husband for Joan, and a member of the family, and what Henry 'd call a regular guy. Well, if you want to hurt a regular guy's feelings without any justification, and hurt 'em bad—and I mean just that—refuse to take over your own firm now that it belongs to you."

Father was a strange sight. However much he might have been shifting about a minute ago, he was limp now and low in his chair. An absolutely astounding smile flashed across his features; it was as if some one had opened the gates of heaven and permitted him one peep inside. And immediately the smile flattened out—for things like this simply cannot be and never are! Helplessly, then, father gazed at Joan and only at Joan.

"Jo," he mumbled, "d' you suppose it—it would be all right—"

"Yes, I think it would be very much all right for you to accept, dad!" Joan replied, with remarkable promptness. "It's what Will wants to do, and we haven't been letting him do so many things he wanted to do since he married me. And think—oh, dad, *think!*—after all these years and all the meanness you've endured, think of walking into that office and telling Hankey—"

"Where he gets off!" Henry concluded, rather wildly. "Bill, if I've ever tried to put anything over on you, I beg your pardon from the bottom of my jackass heart! If you ever feel like kicking anybody, send for me, and if I'm in Africa I'll take the first boat back and let you kick me till you drop! Because, Bill, you're the cleanest, whitest thing that ever walked!"

Father nodded slowly; a queer little cackle sounded in his throat. To-morrow morning, unquestionably, he would enter the Hankey & Brown office the happiest and most glorified single citizen in the whole United States; but for the moment he was no more than so much thunderstruck pulp.

"Well, then, Will, I—Will, I—" he essayed futilely.

There was something about that face which William could not watch another second. It may have been the tired lines or it may have been the one eloquent teardrop which, having gone half-way down the side of father's nose, stuck there; or it may have been the whole expression. But William rose suddenly and, turning his back, lifted Joan to her feet.

"You bet, dad!" he agreed. "That's settled and out of the way, eh? How is it, Joan?"

"I'm quite all right."

She gazed adoringly upward at her husband. Her husband enfolded her once more in his arms and gazed adoringly down upon her.

"About the jolly old house," he whispered. "Better not spring that just now, I fancy. Too much sensation at once, eh?"

"What house, Will?" Joan breathed.

"Up there in Starboro; bought 'em a whale of a little place, dear. Title 'll be in mother's name and—oh, no, we'll leave that over till to-morrow or next day. Just now—um."

He looked thoughtfully upon father and Frank and Henry. There was something more on William's mind.

"I'll run down and get Joan's bags," Frank suggested in the queer little hush.

"Well—about that! Just a moment, old chap," said William. "Shall we—er—fetch 'em up here again, Joan?"

"We shall do exactly as you like, now and always!" the strong-minded Joan replied.

"Oh, that 'd be absurd, of course. But I thought—turning beastly hot again, dear. The old house is cool as a cucumber, and there's no end of room, you know."

"Let's go live there!" Joan suggested.

"Just for a day or two, at present," William went on. "Just till I get things cleaned up at the office, dear. Thought it mightn't be so bad to run off on the old Minna for a month—finish up the summer that way. Sort of second honeymoon, dear, without having to think we were coming back to—I mean to say she's not a half bad old tub," William amended hastily.

"Just you and I, Billy boy!" Joan whispered very softly.

"Well, the crew, of course," said William. "They're not a bit obtrusive, though."

Slowly, slowly, father was returning to life.

"You're not going to run off before dinner?" he asked.

"I thought—yes, I thought Joan and I'd have a little blowout to-night."

"Oh, you better wait till Nellie gets home. She'll be here in another ten or fifteen minutes," Frank suggested.

"Yes, I—er—I know," William said hurriedly. "But—you're ready, Joan?"

"I'm ready!" responded the bride.

When Bowers had carried the three grips—George's was strangely missing from the taxi—and stowed them away in the open-windowed limousine across the street, and when the taxi man had been paid and had rolled away, and Joan herself tucked into the big back seat, William paused and looked back at the old apartment house—and Joan looked at William.

Because it was all right at last, and that big, luxurious, deep-cushioned car seemed to be claiming her; and a long, deep, happy sigh came from Joan. After all, she was distinctly human, and that car typified the beautiful future.

William waved a hand at the third-floor window.

"Frank and dad and Henry—watching us go," he explained. "What's Henry shaking the sheet of paper at me for—pale-blue paper? Oh, he's tearing it up now. I wonder what that can be?"

"That's the note I left for you," said Joan. "Is he tearing it in little pieces, Will?"

"Bits about the size of a pea. Throwing it out now; fancy he thinks it looks like a snow-storm. Curious! Imaginative chap, Henry, isn't he? I say, Joan!"

"Yes?"

"Crazy idea, that of old Potter's, wasn't it? Me giving all the money away and all that. And still *it worked!* That is to say, we're not living there any longer, eh?"

Joan's small hand was stretched out to him. William, with a beatific beam, stepped in and closed the door, leaned forth a moment for a last wave toward the window, and then sank back with a great sigh of content. So ten full seconds passed until Bowers at the wheel turned questioningly. William started.

"Oh, yes!" he said. "About where we're going, of course. I'd quite forgotten that!" And he captured Joan's hand and squeezed it hard as he concluded: "Home, Bowers—*home!*"

(The end.)

THE VOICE OF LIFE

A MAIDEN stood at the edge of things,
Looking with curious eyes
Off into the mist-veiled borders where
The Country of Womanhood lies.

She lifted her finger and touched the veil,
Impatient to fling it wide;
Said she: "There are beautiful, wonderful things
For me on the other side!"

A woman stood in the midst of things—
A woman weary and pale;
And "Wait awhile!" she cried to the child
On the other side of the veil.

"Out here in the Country of Womanhood
Are wonderful things, 'tis true,
And the voice of life, like a silver bell,
Is calling, calling to you.

"But wait in the Land of Dreams, for here
The clouds oft hide the sun,
The road is rough and the way is long,
With always a task undone.

"Success and failure, laughter and tears,
With many a heartache, too,
All wait in the Country of Womanhood,
Dear little girl, for you!"

"But," said the girl, "if hearts must ache,
Sometimes they are also blest;
And perhaps the toilsome way may lead
To the Haven of Perfect Rest.

"And so, for the voice of life is strong,
I'm coming alone to see
Whether the jewel-starred crown of love
Is waiting there for me!"

She paused uncertain, perhaps afraid,
But the warning lips were dumb;
For the woman slowly lifted the veil,
And said to the maiden: "Come!"

Ella Middleton Tybout.

The Power of Madame Krishna

by Elizabeth Irons Folsom

SOMETHING tall and white streaked across the road. It was just visible through the thickness of the October night and it was close—so close that the horse, tired though he was, turned a right angle in the buggy-shafts. There was the rip of breaking wood, and Hawley sprang out of the lurched vehicle with the reins in his hand.

He landed in the long grass and weeds which had overgrown the unused road by which he was trying to make a short cut to the highway. It was very dark and some pale lightning was flashing. He felt the broken shaft and then scrambled across the drain ditch to tie the horse to a tree there. He knew there was no house close behind him; he did not know what there might be ahead, but he set out at once to follow the slight depressions which were wheel tracks.

As he started he heard the sound of voices. There were jumbled words mingled with rough laughter; a few paces farther and he could see the glow of embers—remains of a campfire. He hesitated. He knew that through that part of the country bands of horse-traders, gypsy-blooded, pitched their tents sometimes and were not too heartily welcomed by the farmers of the neighborhood. Hawley had passed through such camps on other business trips and had viewed their people as picturesque lovers of free life and independent, not too honest, purveyors of romantic color. To drive through a camp of that kind in daylight was not quite the same as to come upon it afoot after night. But he reckoned quickly that he had little money with him and nothing of value and that the day of the gipsy desperado was past.

They saw him as soon as he did them. He knew it because the voices stopped. In the silence that dropped over him, just the creak of a far-off katydid struck through.

"Hullo, there," he called.

"Hullo, there," came the answer after an instant's pause.

Then he began to see a figure getting up from the ground and the twinkles of fire shot into broad flames.

He walked into the circle of light.

"How far to the highroad, men?"

He repeated the question before any one answered. Then one of the men said gruffly:

"What do you want of it?"

"I want to walk upon it," answered Hawley good naturedly. "And I want to go back and get my horse if it is not too far. I had a breakdown back there."

They watched him without speaking. There were half a dozen of them sprawled on the ground: lean, long-armed, long-

legged men with sinewy, bony backs sketched under their flannel shirts, with brown, bony wrists and hands. They were looking at the leather case in which he carried his legal papers and which he had taken from the buggy before he left it.

"Come on," he persisted. "How far?"

Just then something tall and white streaked the shadows back of the fire. Hawley turned sharply as the tail of one eye caught the gleam.

"What's that? That's what frightened my horse. What is it?"

The men looked, and one of them laughed loudly.

"Dagny," he called. "You've scared the young man."

Then Hawley saw that the white figure was a girl. She came slowly forward, and the glow of the fire ran up across her breast, her folded arms, and lay over her face and head.

He stared. He had not cared a great deal about looking at girls. He had been too busy: the law had been a hard dictator, and since he had been prosecuting attorney of the biggest county in the State, he had considered the feminine only as bad witnesses, tiresome adjuncts to court routine; influencing juries if pretty; wearying juries if not.

So he had not known how really beautiful it was possible for a girl to be until he saw that one. She was tall, slight; she stood with her chin raised and surveyed him, too, as frankly as he was surveying her. Above the dead white of her dress, the flesh of throat and face was palpitant with color. Her hair, thick and dark, grew into a peak in the middle of her forehead—he did not recall having seen hair grow like that—he saw it, too, in broad braids back of each ear, lying against her gown below her waist.

Then one of the men spoke.

"He thinks as you're a ghost."

Laughter ran around the fire, followed by silence. Hawley came closer and spoke to the girl.

"I am trying to find out how far it is to the highroad."

"They know. Maas, tell him how far it is."

"Two mile straight away," said the man spoken to.

"Much obliged," responded Hawley and turned back toward the lane.

"Better have your fortune told 'fore you get away," suggested one of the men.

Hawley looked back. He wondered at once if the girl standing there was the fortune-teller. He had never had time for any of that foolishness, but now he hesitated.

"Have your fortune told," repeated the man ingratiatingly. "Take him to the tent, Dagny."

"You are the fortune-teller?" asked Hawley, stepping forward.

"No," she said, and smiled. "No. But if you like, I'll take you to Mme. Krishna."

He followed her, feeling singularly out of topics of conversation. He was a fluent talker, too; given a crowded court-room and antagonistic, clever men to hear and he could talk with the best of them. He cleared his throat to be ready for an idea if it should arrive before he reached the tent which loomed close ahead.

She lifted the flap and held it for him to pass in. He felt as if he might be on the stage.

The tent was lighted by one kerosene lamp. The girl lit two others, and the interior of the place came into view.

Hawley looked, to the immediate exclusion of other things, at the woman in the big chair. At first he had thought it a pile of old stuff huddled beside and upon the table close to the light, but it moved and sat up.

"Mme. Krishna," announced the girl.

The canvas that peaked above her head flapped in the rising wind of the coming storm. There was a dingy red curtain hanging behind her; the chair in which she sat was draped with another; there were red pillows on each chair-arm, and she sank a fat elbow deep in one as she leaned forward to look at him.

As she moved, Hawley saw the girl whip away a glass from the table and catch up something from the floor that clinked in her hands. She did it fiercely. He heard the tink of glass against glass again as she set something away out of sight.

The woman leaned her big hands on the

table; she turned her big face toward him; it was all folds of yellowed skin creasing about her mouth; numerous sagging chins were sunken into the red of her dress; her lips were colorless and dry; there were dark lines running like grooves from each corner of her mouth. Her eyelids had the only color in her face; they were red and heavy, and back of them her eyes looked out dull and filmed.

"The gentleman wants his fortune told, Mme. Krishna," said the girl.

The woman reached into the folds enveloping her and brought out a pack of cards. She waved her arm to indicate that Hawley should sit opposite. Then she shuddered expansively, caught the edge of the table in both hands, released it, placed the palm of one hand on her forehead, stared blankly into the highest spot of the tent, shuddered again, spread out the cards on the table and cut them vaguely.

Hawley had moved forward opposite her. The girl stood at one side and he could just see the white of her dress in the gloom. The lamp flames moved in the drafts from the rising wind outside; as he waited for the woman to speak he heard the fall of the first rain-drop, like taps of a hammer, sharp and quick.

"You are going on a journey," she began in a slow, deep voice. "The journey will be a successful one, and on it you will meet a dark woman who will have an influence upon your life."

Hawley made an impatient exclamation. He did not know why he had expected any more than the usual rigmarole, just because the girl was different.

"You will get a letter," went on the woman, jumbling the cards. "To-morrow you will have an important letter. It will be about a light woman—"

He got up, intolerant of it all.

"That's enough," he said, and laid a coin on the table.

Mme. Krishna put a hand over it, made an effort to straighten and focus a gaze upon him, but her head moved uncertainly and went down on her arms, which she had spread out over the cards. Immediately she began to breathe heavily with guttural sleep.

The girl was at his side.

"You—did not like—her." She said it breathlessly.

"Humbug," answered Hawley shortly. He was angry at her and at himself for being mixed up in such a situation.

"It is not all humbug. She is very wonderful sometimes after she gets started. You were impatient with her. She knew it and then—she—she was not quite well—"

"No, she was not. She was—" He had intended to say "drunk," but he could not quite speak the word to the girl trying to offer apology.

Just then there was a blue flare of lightning through the tent and an instantaneous crash and crackle of close thunder that grew, spread, boomed and died away. The canvas above their heads bent and shivered in the rush of the rain.

"You will have to wait a bit until the storm is over," she said.

She offered him a chair. He did not take it, but stood erect near the entrance. The girl sat down on the edge of the chair and clasped her hands in her lap.

Again the lightning flamed; again the roll and rush of the thunder dominated; the rain streamed like a river down the slight protection.

The girl spoke first.

"Mme. Krishna is not all a humbug. She has a strange power."

Hawley looked down at her and smiled and she shook her head.

"Don't laugh. How should we know such a power—we who haven't it? She tells things that cannot be explained. I know. I have heard her."

"The thing that needs explanation is: what *you* are doing in a place like this." He said it bluntly.

She raised her head and he went on:

"Of course it is none of my business, but you do not seem like part of a cheap fraud."

"You came in intending to think it that," she said indignantly.

"No. I came in because I was puzzled. I was willing enough to be told the future. I don't know anything about the occult—do you call it that?—and I don't believe in it, but I don't *know*. I was curious to

see if a fortune-teller would touch a certain thing; if she would read my thoughts at all; if she would get what I am anxious about."

He checked himself; it was unusual for him to talk in so young a way—pretty soon he might be telling her about the case that was engrossing him. Odd, the influence that made him talk in this way: the storm, the creaking, shadowy canvas shelter, the girl. But why not talk! She was watching him with interested eyes—often it was good to voice perplexities—he spoke impulsively.

"I am prosecuting attorney, and I am trying hard to convict a man of murder."

"Did he do it?"

"I think he did. It is Owen Masters, charged with killing his wife. You may have seen it in the papers."

She shook her head.

"It happened more than a year ago, but he is rich, and although I have tried hard to get him to trial, I am just succeeding. I believe he killed her. Some one did. They try to show it as suicide. I don't believe it and I want to convict Masters."

He stopped suddenly. Something impelled him to turn his head; the woman was looking at him; her eyes back in their sockets of fat were like flames—the look in them touched like a knife-edge.

It was for only a moment. She dropped her lids, sank into her red folds again, stretched wearily and put her head against the chair-back. But Hawley had a feeling that she was listening; he noticed that the wrist of one hand was taut. But he forgot it because Dagny was speaking.

"Let Mme. Krishna try it for you in the cards. Not to-night, maybe. Can't you come when she is—better?"

He shook his head and smiled down again at her.

"You don't really believe in it, do you?" he asked.

"I believe in her," she answered quickly.

"Because?"

"Because I do."

"That is a girl's reason. She is good to you, I suppose?"

"Yes, so good. So generous."

He raised the tent flap and looked out. It was still raining, but the first gush of the storm was spent; it had settled into a sodden pour; the lightning was flashing flatly against the horizon; the thunder which came then was an echo.

"The rain will soon be over and I will get to town. Do you—will you—do they stay here long?"

"No. Mme. Krishna has some urgent call to town—I don't know what. We are going in to-morrow."

"Oh, yes." He would have liked to ask where. "You—stay with them all the time?"

"No."

He wondered if he dared ask more. She rose as he looked and put back one braid which had fallen over her shoulder and had lain in her lap; he had been watching it stealthily as he had the line of her bent head and throat.

He looked across at Mme. Krishna.

"If she is so good and generous as you say—why is she like this?"

She answered him instantly: did it with a quick shadowing of her youth.

"Oh, I wish I knew," she cried, almost under her breath.

Just then the woman by the table hunched herself slowly into uprightness and began to shuffle the cards that still lay before her. Hawley and the girl watched her. He made a movement to go, and Dagny touched him, so slightly that he hardly was sure she had done so.

Mme. Krishna turned her face toward them.

"The cards have more to say to you, sir."

Hawley understood that she had heard what he had been saying and was thus provided with information to give back to him. But he was less angry and more tolerant than he had been.

"I heard what you said about your murder trial," she went on, thereby surprising him greatly. "And the cards say to me that you will not convict your man."

She gathered them up and spread them again.

"You will nolle the indictment."

Hawley stared. How in the world could a woman of that type know what the nolle

of an indictment meant! She had said, "You will not convict," and then, "You will nolle the indictment." How did she know that they went together? How did she know the word? Did she know that a prosecuting attorney could dismiss a case if he felt that he could not convict and that the word for that act was "nolle"? Apparently she knew, for he saw her glance at him again; her fingers were shaking; her head quivered.

She found nothing more in the cards, although she fumbled them uncertainly back and forth. She was still handling them when Hawley went back to the entrance and said to the girl there:

"Good-by. I—I wish I might see you again."

"It's most unlikely," she answered quickly. "Good-by."

She turned back and the flap of the tent dropped over the only light; the campfire had been drowned out; there was no sound from the dark tents among which he felt his way to the road. The edge of the storm-cloud was rolling away and some starlight helped him to his soaked horse and buggy. He started for his long walk to town, and as he went there lay a girl's face in the puddles which presently glittered under more and more stars—a girl's face where there was throbbing, abundant youth, and something else that was puzzling—living familiarly in that gipsy camp—such a girl! As her face was reflected in puddles along the muddy road he thought of her and he thought, too, of Mme. Krishna and what she had said about the nolle of the Masters indictment.

II.

THE next morning he went into the trial of Owen Masters and he carried with him the disagreeable premonition of defeat made glaringly foolish by recollection of its source. Dagny had said that Mme. Krishna had an odd power; certainly she had the power of making Hawley uncomfortable and of making him wonder.

He thought of it during the trial. It was dominant when he did not convict his man.

But he told himself fiercely that at least he did not nolle the indictment, for when the jury had failed to agree, he notified the judge that he would be ready to try the case again at the next term of court.

He was disappointed. It seemed so clear to him that Masters had guilty knowledge of how his wife came to her death. Hawlew sat down and soberly reviewed it all, after the first twinge of failure had passed.

Masters was known to be a man with plenty of money and love affairs; his wife had been found dead; he was away; he claimed it a plain case of suicide.

To Hawley details told a different story. Mrs. Masters had been found in her bed with coverlid and pillows piled over her head; in the crook of her bended arm there was a bowl and in it a sponge which had held chloroform. Hawley looked at the bowl, which, with the other exhibits in the case, had been brought to his office. It was Royal Doulton china, and Mr. Masters had testified that it had been one of some odd pieces long in his family. It was kept in the dining-room. Mrs. Masters had been ill for some days; would she go down-stairs and get a bowl of Royal Doulton out of the best cupboard and take it up-stairs for the chloroform which was to kill her? Would she not rather take some dish close at hand in her room?

Hawley had wondered privately why Masters should choose a piece of family china and unlock a cupboard to get it. It seemed that sentiment must attach to it—retribution—a mind befuddled or uncertain—he wondered. Masters's lawyers had scouted the idea that he would select that dish, and Hawley believed that on the Royal Doulton the jurors had split; they could not reconcile it either; they could not see the point of that particular dish. He thought about it and looked at the bowl before him; a wreath of pink roses encircled it inside and out—why that particular bowl for the deed? She might have piled the pillows and coverlid herself, but why go down-stairs for the Royal Doulton? No! Some one had brought it up! Masters? He wanted her out of the way; there was another woman, as there had been another wife deposed for the one just dead.

Hawley set himself doggedly to hunt for something new that should strengthen his

second trial; some new motive; some new bit of history of the man.

And always and every day there intruded itself—much in the way and not at all to be desired—the memory of the girl in the gipsy camp—ever persistent—ever prodding. He found himself thinking about her; he wrote the word "Dagny" on his blotter pad and looked at it.

But it would all pass off—this memory of her; it was stubborn because he had never trailed about after girls; her face had no rival as it built itself before him in the smoke of his cigar, in the coals of his fireplace, in all his quiet hours. He had not known a face spring out like that before him. He did not like it. And yet he did. Queer. But it would pass off. He was not the silly kind.

It had not passed off when he read that the city attorney was waging war on all fortune-tellers and had prepared a list for the purpose of getting rid of them. Instantly there was Dagny's face and—more—her voice. That had come, too! Pretty state of things when a busy lawyer mooned around about a girl he had seen but once. But it would pass.

It had not passed either when he went to his office of the city attorney and looked casually at the prepared list. There it was—Mme. Krishna and the street and number.

Then he did not pretend any longer that it would pass of its own accord. He got on a street-car. That was the simplest way to dislodge all this foolishness. Just go and see her again and so find out that there was nothing to it; that she was no more interesting than any other girl; that it had been the mystery that attracted him. There would be no lure of mystery in the neighborhood where Mme. Krishna was living—no romance there.

There was a printed sign in the window and he waited in a front parlor thick with the smell of old plush, pungent with dust. Then he was admitted to a rear room, where red curtains hung back of a big chair, and a woman sunk her elbows into red cushions to look at him.

She chose to ignore that she had ever seen him before, and he let it go that way. She spread the cards and told him a long rambling fortune of the usual thing. He bore it patiently. He asked no questions. Why should he? He had not come there because he was a lawyer; he had come there because he was a man. And the man that he was could not ask in that tawdry place about Dagny. There must be some other way than to ask for her there. He would wait and find that way.

But when he went back into the front room she turned from the window and looked at him over brown furs that rose high about her face.

"I was sure I saw you come in," she said frankly. "Do you remember me?"

"I remember you very well, Miss Dagny," he said formally, his heart ticking furiously. "You are living here?"

"No, I am at school. But I come for an occasional day. I was just going when you came in and I—I waited."

"I'll walk with you if you don't mind," he said.

They went together down the front steps and along a strangely squalid, reeking, radiant, glittering street. And as they walked and talked he was riotiously acclaiming himself and his judgment; he had been right—she was like no other girl! Where was it to lead, his legal mind suggested—through and over what?

When they parted it was with the understanding that they should meet again. He tore back, late by three hours, for the afternoon session of court.

He saw her again and then other times; he sent her the usual gifts; he hurtled through and across obstacles; he even went back to the house with the sign in the window, even admitted that she was part of that; part of anything—she might be the daughter of Mme. Krishna for all he knew or thought to wonder, in those first days. There was no sane moment in which to reckon conditions nor results.

III.

THE second trial of the Masters case was two days off when Hawley looked up from his desk at the sharp closing of his office door.

The woman who had come in put up her veil and came across the room. He looked at her. It was Mme. Krishna—but a clean Mme. Krishna, in an orderly dark dress and veil. Minus the appurtenances of fortune-telling, she looked younger and different.

She spoke first.

"I came here because I could not keep away and let you go on with this thing."

"What thing? Won't you sit down, Mme. Krishna?" he said, placing a chair for her.

She caught her fingers together in her lap and looked at him, shivering a little.

"What thing?" he asked againn.

"This going on with the Masters case."

"Oh, yes," said he, feeling suddenly antagonistic. "You told me I would nolle the indictment. I have not nolled it, Mme. Krishna. I shall not."

"You would not hang him if you knew he was innocent. No matter—no matter what else he may have done, you would not do that?"

Hawley put down the papers he had in his hand and gave her a moment to control herself—she seemed to need it. Then he turned and said slowly:

"Mme. Krishna, why do you care so much?"

She met his straight look.

"I knew him—long ago."

"Before he married this woman?"

"Yes."

Hawley thought swiftly: here was indeed a new angle. He waited for her to say more and then remarked:

"Well, I don't see what difference that can make in my action on the case."

"But he is innocent. It—it was suicide."

"That is what the guilty person expected it to look like. That is why it was arranged as it was. No one can go back into that room, Mme. Krishna, and tell what happened, but some one tried to make it appear as suicide."

She had risen while he was talking. Her broad back and trailing veil were all that he could see. He thought she was going and he turned back to his desk. Then she spoke, and her voice was strange,

"You are clever, Mr. Hawley, but you can't convict him."

He did not answer. He had reached the limit of patience.

"You can't convict," she repeated. "And I will show you why."

"You will show me nothing, Mme. Krishna."

"You will go on with the case?".

"Assuredly."

"Will you—come to my rooms and let me show you?"

"No."

"Not if I can tell what will convince you?"

"Tell me now."

"I can't tell you now."

Hawley got up abruptly.

"Look here, Mme. Krishna. If you know anything about this case, it is my duty to make you tell it. There are ways; you cannot evade them."

"I am not trying to evade them. I am here to tell if I must. I am here in the city for that purpose. I was on my way here when I first saw you; I was coming to you then."

"Coming to me?"

"To the prosecuting attorney, whoever he might be. I heard you tell Dagny you were that. No, I would have been far from this part of the country, Mr. Hawley, if I had not been pulled—dragged—by something I could not resist. I had to come to the man who was trying to send him to his death. That is why I was so near the city. It was not just a coincidence, Mr. Hawley, that I was there; I was coming to you."

"You did not come."

"No. I chanced it—chanced that you would not convict. You did not. But I was afraid to chance it again!"

She had spoken rapidly; her voice was shorn of its mumble, its professional whine, as her appearance was shorn of the charlatan.

"Very well, Mme. Krishna," Hawley said sharply. "Go on with what you have to say."

"I can't—now. Come this evening and I will tell you." Then she flung out one hand; her face had a new color—a bleached

yellow that was different. "No—not to-night—a little longer. To-morrow morning. Come then."

"At what hour?"

"At ten. No—a little longer. At twelve." She came close and put her hand on his desk. "Mr. Hawley—do you—like Dagny?"

He felt his color rise and he bit his lips to keep back the words, but they would come: "To much, Mme. Krishna."

"So then." She smiled. He had never seen her smile before and he looked at her curiously. What was all this, anyhow? "So then," she repeated with satisfaction.

"I am going to tell her so," said Hawley suddenly in the silence that had fallen between them.

"Yes, tell her. And you need never be ashamed of Dagny, Mr. Hawley, just because I have taken care of her."

"I have wondered many times—" he hesitated.

"Yes, you would. I had known her parents long and I went there when—I was not always like this. But I had to do something to get food—it was that bad—I tried fortune-telling, for I had always been clever in playing at it. I—I—went to pieces, Mr. Hawley. It's funny how far and how fast a woman can go when she doesn't care. Farther and faster than a man. I was bad off then—crazy almost and went into their home and asked for a decent place to lay my head—and she—little Dagny—put up her arms to me. You don't know—you're a man—you don't know all it is to have a baby put up its arms to you, and the little thing—it was she who kept me from meeting justice long ago, Mr. Hawley."

"How do you mean?"

"It doesn't matter. It has nothing to do with Dagny. Her parents both died within the year; there were no near relatives, and I took her. I have sent her to school. I could not have her with me, but I could spend money for her. But what do you suppose she did—she followed me one day after I had been to see her; followed me into the country. It was the first time I had told fortunes that way—but I was slipping fast then—drink—"

"She followed you?"

"Yes, and she was a big girl then. And I have allowed myself to have her for a few weeks every year. Oh, I know I should not have let her be with me, but I kept her out of sight, and it didn't hurt her—she was not strong and the out-of-doors put color into the child—but she has the education, Mr. Hawley. She has the family. Dagny is none of me. What I do does not touch her."

She stopped and flung out an arm.

"And she loves me! It doesn't sound true, I know—but she does."

She dropped her extended arm heavily and it struck the desk with a sharp blow. She rubbed it dully with the other hand and he waited.

"Will you come to-morrow morning? I have the power if I choose to tell you who is guilty and you will not punish the wrong person, and I will tell you, too, how Dagny's future must be unhampered. Will you come?"

"Yes, I will come."

IV.

He thought about the strange Mme. Krishna much of the night. He did not believe she had anything convincing to tell, but he would give her the chance to show her "power," as she called it, both about the case and about Dagny's future.

He was surprised when Dagny opened the door for him next morning. He caught her hands eagerly.

"What are you troubled about?" he asked at once, for she was breathing fast and clutched his hand as if from the need of it.

"About Mme. Krishna. She went into her room early this morning and said I should not let any one in until you came and that you were to go in alone."

"Yes. I will go right away." He felt vaguely hurried and anxious.

He opened the door of the back parlor and looked but once at the couch there. Then he turned to Dagny, who had followed him, took her by the shoulders, put her gently outside and turned the key.

He lifted the coverlid and pillows piled

over her head. Just in the crook of her bended arm there was a bowl in which was a sponge that had held chloroform.

He picked up the bowl—it was Royal Doulton; pink roses encircled it inside and out—its replica was in his office.

He knew instantly: any one knowing so well how Mrs. Masters had died, must see her repeated here; must know that the same hands had arranged both.

He covered her face and stood beside her; foremost in his mind was the effect of this upon his prosecution of Masters; could he still try to convict? Could he let a man go free upon such evidence?

Dagny was rattling the knob and calling to him. He went out, closed the door and stood in front of it.

"Maas is here," she said, catching his arm, her eyes wide with distress. "He is afraid of something. What is the matter?"

It was the tall gipsy who had lounged at the fire that night. Hawley signaled to him across Dagny's head; the man understood and signaled back.

"I thought so," he said meaningly. "Now, d'ye unnerstan' all about it? That's wat sh' said I was t' ask ye—d'ye unnerstan' it all?"

"I am not sure," said Hawley, watching him.

"Sh' wanted that ye should an' ef ye didn't, I was t' tell ye." He showed a letter under his coat. Hawley shook his head.

"You see, I must be very sure, Maas."

"I was afeered sh'd do it afore sh' did; wat with t' drug an' t' other; sh' said t' cards kep' at 'er an' t' house drew 'er—drew 'er, sh' said. Ofter wen I mist 'er I uset t' go an' fin' 'er a-wanderin' about where sh'd lived with 'im—sh' was 'is wife, long ago, afore t' other woman took 'im. An' that night sh' come out with t' dish and laughed and laughed; said as how sh'd used her own things an' got justice. I didn't know wat sh' meant, but I knowed sh' was about crazy. An' wen sh' told me, I didn't care about 'im—he d'served it, for I knowed t' mighty good o' her—pore thing. I was afeered all t' time it 'd come t' this." He drew his sleeve across his lips.

"Come to what—oh, come to what!" cried Dagny, clutching Hawley's sleeve.

He drew her close and told her.

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IDLE HOURS

THE dawn of day has softly crept
Beyond the hills, where it has slept;
The smiling sun—oh, joyous sight—
Beams like a north star of the night.

The stately trees their arms entwine
To form an arch; a perfect shrine
'Neath which there flows a babbling brook,
Who would not seek such sheltered nook?

Here may I dream, content and lone,
Of joyous moments quickly flown;
With rapture dwell upon a thought,
And, dreaming, hold the world as naught.

Here in my idle hours I lie
And gaze into the peaceful sky,
Till wings of night, whose shadows play
About the sun, would end the day.

Cecile L. Flashburg.

Snowdrift

Part VI

by

James B. Hendryx

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

CHAPTER XXI.

UNEVENLY MATCHED.

"SO! My beauty!" grinned the captain. "Fer once in his life Claw didn't lie. An' ye didn't wait fer us to go an' git ye—jest come right to us nice as ye please—an' saved me a keg o' rum." He rose with an evil leer. "An' now git up an' make yerself to home—an' long as ye do as I say, an' don't git yer back up, you an' me'll git along fine."

Frantic with terror the girl essayed to rise, but her snowshoes impeded her movements, so with trembling fingers she loosened the thongs and, leaping to her feet, backed into a corner, and stared in wide-eyed horror first at the captain, then at Claw, the sight of whom caused her to shrink still further against the wall.

The man sneered.

"Know me, eh? Rec'lect the time, over to the mission, I tried to persuade you to make the trip to Dawson with me, do you? Well, I made up my mind I'd git you. Tried to buy you offen the squaw, an' she like to tore me to pieces. I'd of kidnaped you then, if it hadn't be'n fer the Mounted. But I've got you now—got you an' sold you to him." He grinned, pointing to the captain. "An' yer lucky, at that. Let me make you acquainted with Cap Jinkins. 'Tain't every breed girl gits to be mistress of a ship like the Belva Lou."

Her eyes blazing with anger, Snowdrift pointed a trembling finger at Claw.

"Stand away from that door! Let me go!"

"Oh, jest like that," mocked the man. "If he says let you go, it's all right with me, pervided he comes acrost with the balance of the dust."

The captain laughed, and turning to the Dog Rib, he ordered: "Slip out to the sled an' git a bottle o' rum, an' we'll all have a little drink."

For the first time Snowdrift noticed the presence of the Indian.

"Yondo!" she screamed. "This is your work! You devil!" and beside herself with rage and terror, she snatched a knife from the table and leaped upon him like a panther.

"Git back there!" cried Claw, leveling his revolver.

Quick as a flash, the captain knocked up the gun, pinioned the girl's arms from behind, and stood glaring over her shoulder at Claw.

"Put up that gun, damn ye! An' look out who yer pullin' it on!"

"By God, that's my Injun! I ain't

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for September 3.

through with him yet, an' there ain't no damn jade kin carve him up under my nose!"

"An' this here's my woman, too. An' there ain't no damn hooch runner kin pull a gun on her neither!"

"Ain't no harm done," conciliated Claw. "An' I guess they ain't no call to fight over 'em. How about that drink?"

"Git it!" ordered the captain, and as the cowering Dog Rib slunk from the room, he snatched the knife from the pinioned hand of the girl and hurled it under the bunk.

"An' now, you hell-cat!" he rasped, pushing her from him, "you set to an' git supper! An' don't go tryin' no more monkey business, er I'll break ye in two! They seems to be grub enough here without usin' none of my own," he added, eying the supplies ranged along the opposite wall. "Who owns this shack anyhow?"

"Carter Brent owns it," cried the girl, drawing herself erect and glaring into the man's eyes. It was as if the very mention of his name nerved her to defiance. "And when he returns, he will kill you both—kill you! Do you hear?"

"It's a lie!" roared Claw, then paused abruptly. "I wonder — maybe it is his shack. He came straight from the Yukon, an' that accounts fer the burnin' in."

"Know him?" asked the captain.

"Know him!" growled Claw. "Yes, I know him—an' so do you! That's Ace-in-the-Hole's real name."

"The hell it is!" cried the captain, and laughed uproariously.

"So that's the way the wind blows! An' the breed's be'n livin' here with him! Things is sure comin' my way! That's most too good to be true—an' you misrepresentin' her to be a virgin, fresh from a school—ho, ho, ho!"

"What d'you mean?" snarled Claw. "How was I to know—"

"Whether ye know'd, er whether ye didn't, it didn't make no difference—I win either way."

"What d'you mean?" Claw repeated.

"You know what I mean," sneered the captain truculently. "Second-hand goods —half price—see?"

"You mean I don't git my other five hundred?" yelled Claw jerking the revolver from his holster and leveling it at the other's head. "Is that what ye mean?"

Surprised at the suddenness of the action, the captain was caught off guard, and he stood blinking foolishly into the mouth of the gun.

"Well," he faltered, moistening his lips with his tongue, "mebbe we might kind o' talk it over."

"The only talking over you'll git out of me is to come acrost with the five hundred," sneered Claw.

"Ye know damn well I ain't got no five hundred with me. Wait till we git to the Belva Lou."

"I'll wait all right; but not till we git to the Belva Lou. Me an' the girl will wait on shore, in sight of the Belva Lou, while you go out an' git the money an' fetch it back—an' you'll come back *alone* with it. An' what's more—you ain't ahead nothin' on the rum, neither. 'Cause I'm goin' to slip down to the Injun camp in about five minutes, an' the rum goes along. I'll be back by daylight, an' instead of the rum, I'll have all the fur—an' everything else them Dog Ribs has got. An' I'll git square with that damn squaw fer jerkin' that handful of whiskers out of me, too."

"That's all right, Johnnie," the captain assured him, still with his eyes on the black muzzle of the gun. "Take the rum along —only, we'd ort to split half an' half on that fur."

"Half an' half, hell! You got what you come after, ain't you? An' if I kin pick up an honest dollar on the side, that ain't no reason I should split it with you, is it? I'll jest leave you two to git acquainted while I slip down to the camp."

"Go ahead," grinned the captain, "an' don't hurry back. We'll wait."

"Yer damn right you'll wait!" retorted Claw. "I'll have the dogs." In the doorway he paused. "An' by the way, cap. Don't open that door till I git out of range —see?"

The moment the door closed behind Claw the captain placed his back against it and turned to the girl.

"Git to work, now, an' git supper! We're goin' to hit the back-trail inside an

hour. We kin pack what grub we'll need, an' we'll git most a hull night's start, 'cause he'll be busy with them Injuns till mornin'."

Snowdrift confronted him with blazing eyes. At the words her blood seemed to freeze within her, leaving her cold and numb with horror. She had heard of the coastal traffic in winter wives, but always it had seemed to her a thing vague and unreal. But now the full hideousness of the thing stood revealed to her.

She herself, at that very moment was trapped, bought and sold — absolutely in the power of the two bearded beasts, who in the very loathsomeness of their filthy minds, discussed her as they would discuss a piece of merchandise, bargained and haggled over the price of her living body. A single ray of hope had dawned in her breast as the men began to quarrel. If they would only come to blows, in their rage, she might be able to seize a weapon, or better still to dash from the room. Once in the scrub, she could easily elude them.

But the hope died when Claw covered the captain with his gun. And with the hope died also the numbing terror. A strange, unnatural calm took possession of her. There was still one way out—and she would seek that way. As the two men stood facing each other, she had caught a glimpse of the blade of the knife that lay where the captain had thrown it, beneath the edge of the bunk. Stealthily her moccasined foot had reached out and slid it toward her, and as the door opened upon Claw's departure, she stooped swiftly and recovered it.

She would plunge the blade into her own heart—no, better, she would attack the captain now that they were alone, and either kill him, or by the very fury of her onslaught, would force him to kill her. So, with the knife concealed by her folded arms, her eyes blazed defiance.

"I'll never cook your supper! You dog! You unspeakable devil! I'll kill you first —or you'll kill me!"

"Kill ye, eh?" sneered the man. "Well, I might, at that, if I didn't have five hundred dollars tied up in ye. Guess they ain't much danger of me killin' ye till I get my money back, one way er another—an' I guess they ain't no one knows that no better'n what you do. An' as fer killin' *me*," he laughed. "You look spunky 'nough to—but I'm hard to kill—it's be'n tried."

"I've warned you!" cried the girl.

"Git to work! Damn ye!" snarled the captain. "Yer losin' time! You cook that supper, er by Heaven I'll make ye wisht I had killed ye! I'll tame ye! I'll show ye who's boss! Mebbe you won't be so pretty when I git through with ye—but ye'll be tame!"

The innermost thought of her brain found voice in words. "Oh, if he were here!"

"Hollerin' fer yer man, eh!" taunted the captain. "Ye ain't hisn now, yer mine —an' he won't come 'cause he's dead—"

"Dead!" The word shrieked from the lips of the tortured girl. "No, no, no!"

"Yes, yes, yes," mocked the man. "He's dead an' froze hard as a capstan bar, somewheres up on the sea ice, an' his Injun, too. Got dead drunk up on the Belva Lou, an' started fer shore in the big storm—an' he never got there. So ye might 's well make the best of it with me. An' I'll treat ye right if ye act right with me."

The girl scarcely heard the words. Brent was dead. Her whole world—the world that was just beginning to unfold its beauties and its possibilities to her — to hold promise of the wondrous happiness of which she had read and dreamed, but had never expected to realize—her whole world had suddenly come crashing about her. Brent was dead, and—like a flame of fire the thought flashed across her brain—the man responsible for his death stood before her, and was even now threatening her with a fate a thousand times worse than death.

With a wild scream, animal-like, terrifying in its fury, the girl sprang upon him like a tiger. He saw the flash of the knife blade in the air, and warding off the blow with his arm, felt the bite and the hot rip of it as it tore into his shoulder. With a yell of pain and rage he struck out blindly, and his fist sent the girl crashing against the table.

The force of the impact jarred the chimney from the little oil bracket-lamp, and

the light suddenly dimmed to a red flaring half-glow. Like a flash the girl recovered herself, and again she flew at the man whose hand gripped the butt of his revolver.. Again he struck out to ward the blow, and by the merest accident the barrel of the heavy gun struck the wrist of the hand that held the knife, hurling it from her grasp, while at the same time his foot tripped her and she crashed heavily to the floor.

Before she could get up, the man was upon her, cursing, panting hot fury. Kicking, striking out, clawing like a wildcat, the girl managed to tear herself from his grasp, but as she regained her feet, a huge hand fastened in the neck of her shirt. There was a moment of terrific strain as she pulled to free herself, holding to the stanchion of the bunk for support, then with a loud ripping sound the garment and the heavy woolen undershirt beneath gave way, and the girl stood there panting with the table interposed between herself and the man who rose slowly to his feet.

At sight of her in the wavering light of the flickering wick flame, his look shifted. He moistened his thick lips, and as he slowly advanced to the table, his foot struck an object that felt soft and yielding to the touch, yet when he sought to brush it aside, it was heavy. He glanced down, and the next second stooped swiftly and picked up Brent's sack of dust, which the girl had carried inside her shirt.

For an instant greed supplanted the other look in his eyes, and he laughed. Long and loud he laughed, while the girl, pumping the air into her lungs, gained strength with every second.

"So here's where he left his dust, is it? It's too good to be true! I pay five hundred fer the girl instead of a thousan', an' all the dust that Claw'll be up scratchin' the gravel around Bloody Falls fer next summer. I guess that's poor—five hundred clean cash profit, an' the girl besides!"

The sight of Brent's gold in the man's foul clutch was too much for Snowdrift, and the next instant a billet of stovewood crashed against the wall within an inch of his head. With a low growl, he dropped the sack and started around the table.

In vain the girl cast wildly about for some weapon, as, keeping the table between them, she milled round and round the room. In vain she tried each time she passed it to wrench open the door. But always the man was too quick for her, and when finally, he pushed the table against it, she once more found herself cornered, this time without a weapon, and half dead from fatigue.

Slowly, deliberately, the man advanced upon her. When he reached out and touched her bare arm with a thick-fingered hand, she shrieked aloud, and redoubled the fury of her attack, clawing and striking at his face. But her onslaught was futile. He easily warded her off. Closer and closer he pressed.

CHAPTER XXII.

"YOU ARE WHITE!"

JOE PETE wanted to camp, but Brent would have none of it. The storm thickened. The wind increased in fury, buffeting them about, and causing the dogs to whine and cringe in the harness until it became necessary to fasten a leash to the leader to prevent their bolting. Hopelessly lost though they were, Brent insisted upon pushing on.

"The land lies this way," he kept saying, "and we'll strike it somewhere along the coast."

Then he would appeal to the Indian, who would venture no opinion whatever, frankly admitting he was lost, and always counseling the making of a camp. Finally, when darkness fell they did camp, merely digging into the snow, and tossing blankets and robes and a little food into the kit, crawled in and drew the tarpaulin over them.

Brent slept little that first night. Over and over again he tried to reason out the course, and between times he lay hugging lightly his bottle of hooch.

"I wouldn't lose you for a million," he muttered, as each tortured nerve of his body cried out for stimulant, and the little brain devils added their urge, and with sophistry and cunning excuse sought to un-

dermine his resolve. "Just one drink." "You need it." "Taper off gradually." "It's a medicine."

But to the insidious suggestions of the brain devils he turned a deaf ear, and with clenched teeth gripped his bottle.

"I'll never want you—never need you any more than I do this night," he whispered into the dark. "Right now I'd give half my life for one big swig—but my life isn't mine to give now. It's hers—*hers*, do you hear? It's her fight that I'm fighting, now—and, by God, she's going to win!"

In the morning, despite the protest of Joe Pete, Brent pushed on. The storm had increased in fury, and it was with difficulty they kept their feet. Toward noon both knew that they had gained land of some kind, for the terrain became rolling, and in places even hilly.

"We ain't goin' right fer de montaine," shouted the Indian, with his lips close to Brent's ear. "Dey ain' no leetle hill dere till we com' to de ridge."

"I don't care," yelled Brent, "we're heading south, and that's the main thing. We can hit for the river when the storm stops."

The third day was a repetition of the second, except that the hills became higher and more numerous; but entirely unlike the ridge formation of the Copper Mountains. That night the storm wore itself out, and the morning of the fourth day dawned bright and clear, with a wind blowing strongly.

"Well, where are we?" asked Brent as he and Joe Pete ascended a nearby hillock to take observation of their surroundings.

For a long time the Indian studied the horizon, nor did he speak until every degree of the arc had been subjected to minute scrutiny.

"I'm t'ink we com' too mooch far wes'," he observed. "I'm t'ink we better strik eas', 'bout wan day, to-mor'."

"To-morrow!" cried Brent. "Why not to-day—now?"

The Indian pointed to the dogs. "Too mooch tired out. Too mooch no good. We got to res' to-day. Mebbe-so, travel to-mor'!"

A glance at the dogs convinced Brent, anxious as he was to push on, that it would be useless to try it, for the dogs were in a pitiable condition from the three-day fight with the storm. He wanted to make up a pack and push on alone, but the Indian dissuaded him.

"S'pose com' nudder beeg snow? W'at you do den, eh? You git los'. You trail git cover up. I kin no fin'. Dat better you wait." And wait they did, though Brent fretted and chafed the whole day through.

The following morning they started toward the southeast, shaping their course by a far-distant patch of timber that showed as a dark spot on the distant snow. The ground was broken and hard to travel, and their progress was consequently slow. At noon they cut a dog loose, and later another, the released animals limping along behind as best they could.

At noon of their seventh day of travel, the eighth after the storm, Brent, who was in the lead, halted suddenly and pointed to a small lake that lay a mile or more to the southward.

"I know that lake!" he cried. "It's the one where Snowdrift killed a caribou! The river is six or seven miles east of here, and we'll strike it just below our cabin."

"You sure 'bout dat?" asked the Indian. "De dogs, w'at you call, all in. I ain't lak' we mak mor' travel we kin help."

"Yes—sure," insisted Brent. "I couldn't be mistaken. There is the point where we ate lunch — that broken spruce leaning against those two others."

"Dat good lan'mark," the Indian agreed. "I ain't t'ink you wrong now."

Joyously, Brent led off to the eastward. The pace was wofully slow, for of the seven dogs, only three remained, and the men were forced to work at pulling the sled.

"We ought to make the cabin a little after dark," he figured. "And then—I'll grab a bite to eat and hit out for Snowdrift. Wonder if she's looking for me yet? Wonder if she's been thinking about me? It's—let's see—this is the nineteenth day—nineteen days since I've seen her—and it seems like nineteen years! I hate to tell her I didn't make a strike. And worst of all I hate to tell her about—what happened on

the Belva Lou. But I'll come clean. I will tell her—and I'll show her the bottle—and thank God I didn't pull the cork! And I never will pull it, now. I learned something out there in the snow—learned what a man can do."

He grinned as he thought of Claw and the captain of the Belva Lou, searching the Copper Mountains for his camp, so they could kill him and steal his dust. Then the grin hardened into a straight-lipped frown as he planned the vengeance that was to be his when they came after the girl.

"They won't be in any hurry about starting up river," he argued. "They'll hunt for me for a week. Then, when they do come—I'll kill 'em as I would kill so many mad dogs. I hate to shoot a man from ambush—but there's two of 'em, and I don't dare take a chance. If they should get me—" He shuddered at the thought, and pressed on.

As he swung onto the river, a sharp cry escaped him, and he stooped in the darkness to stare at a trail in the snow.

The cry brought Joe Pete to his side.

"Those tracks!" rasped Brent. "When were they made? And who made 'em?"

The Indian bent close and examined the trail.

"Two—t'ree mans, an' a team," he muttered. "An' wan man dat Godam Johnnie Claw!"

"How do you know?" cried Brent. "How old are they?" And leaping to the sled, he cut the pack thongs with one sweep of his knife and grabbed up his rifle.

"I know dem track—seen um on Mackenzie. B'en gon' 'bout two t'ree hour!"

"Bring on the outfit!" Brent called over his shoulder, and the Indian stared in surprise as he watched the man strike out on the trail in great leaping strides.

The distance to the cabin was a scant mile, and Brent covered it without slackening his pace. At the foot of the bank he noted with relief that the trail swung upward to his own hut. If they had stopped, there was yet time. His first glance had detected no light in the window, but as he looked again, he saw that a peculiar dull radiance filtered through the oiled parchment that served as glass.

Cautiously he maneuvered up the bank, and made his way to the cabin, mentally debating with himself whether to burst in upon the occupants and chance a surprise, or to lie in wait till they came out. He stood in the shelter of the meat *cache* weighing his chances, when suddenly from beyond the log walls came a woman's scream—loud—shrill—terrible it sounded, cutting the black silence of the night.

What woman? There could be only one. With a low cry that sounded in his own ears like the snarl of a beast, Brent dropped the rifle and sprang against the door. It flew inward, and for a second he could see nothing in the murky interior of the room. There was a sound from the bunk, and through the smoke haze he made out the face of the captain of the Belva Lou.

As the man sprang erect, their bodies met with an impact that carried them to the floor. Brent found himself on top, and the next instant his fingers were twisting, biting into a hairy throat with a grip that crushed and tore. In his blind fury he was only half-conscious that heavy fists were battering at his face. Beneath him the body of the man lashed and struggled. His tongue lolled from his open mouth, and from beneath the curled lips came hoarse wheezing gasps, and great gulping, strangling gurgles.

A wave of exultation seized Brent as he realized that the thing that writhed and twisted in his grasp was the naked throat of a man. Vaguely he became conscious that above him hovered a white shape, and that the shape was calling his name, in strange quavering tones.

He tightened his grip. There was a wild spasmodic heaving of the form beneath him—and the form became suddenly still. But Brent did not release his grasp. Instead he twisted and ground his fingers deeper and deeper into the flesh that yielded now, and did not writhe.

With his eyes held close, he glared like a beast into the face of the man beneath him—a horrible face with its wide-sprung jaws exposing the slobbered tongue, the yellow, snag-like teeth, and the skin fast purpling between the upper beard and the mottled thatch of hair.

A hand fell upon his shoulder, and glancing up he saw Snowdrift, and realized that she was urging him to rise. As in a dream he caught the gleam of white shoulders, and saw that one bare arm clasped a fragment of torn shirt to her breast. He staggered to his feet, gave one glance into the girl's eyes, and with a wild, glad cry caught her to him and pressed her tight against his pounding heart.

A moment later she struggled from his embrace. She flushed deeply as his eyes raised from her shoulders to meet her own. He was speaking, and at the words her heart leaped wildly.

"It's a lie!" he cried. "You are not a breed! I knew it! I knew it! My darling—you are white—as white as I am! Old Wananebish is not your mother! Do you hear, girl? *You are white!*"

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE PASSING OF WANANEBISH.

STEPPING across to a duffle bag, Brent produced some garments which he tossed to the girl, who, in the weakness of sudden reaction, had thrown herself sobbing upon the bunk.

"There, there, darling," he soothed as, with his back toward her, his eyes roved about the room seeking to picture, in the wild disorder, the terrific struggle that had taken place. "Put on those things, and then you can tell me all about it. You're all right now, dear. I will never leave you again."

"But, oh, if you had not come!" sobbed the girl.

"But I did come, sweetheart—and everything is all right. Forget the whole horrid business. Come, we will go straight to Wananebish. Not another hour, nor a minute will we wait. And we will make her tell the truth. I have never believed you were her daughter—and now I know!"

"But," faltered the girl, as she slipped into the warm garments, "if I am not her daughter, who am I? Oh, it is horrible—not to know who you are! If this is true—she must tell—she has got to tell me! I have the right to know! And, my mother and my father—where are they? Who are they?"

"We will know soon, darling," Brent assured her, drawing her to him and looking down into her uplifted eyes. "But first let me tell you this—I don't care who you are. You are mine, now, dearest—the one woman for me in all the world. And no matter who or what your parents were, you are mine, mine, mine!"

His lips met hers, her arms stole about his neck, and she whispered:

"Oh, everything seems all strange, and unreal, and upside down, and horrible, and in all the world, darling, you are the one being who is good and sane and strong. Oh, I love you so—don't ever leave me again—"

"Never again." Brent smiled down into the dark eyes raised so pleadingly to his. "And now, do you feel able to strike out for the camp?"

"I feel able to go to the end of the earth with you," she answered quickly, and he noticed that her voice had assumed its natural buoyancy, and that her movements were lithe and sure as she stooped to lace her snowshoes, and he marveled at the perfect resiliency of nerves that could so quickly regain their poise after the terrible ordeal to which they had been subjected.

"Where is Claw?" he asked abruptly, as he stooped and recovered his gold sack from the floor where the captain had dropped it.

"Come, we must hurry!" cried the girl, who in the excitement had forgotten the latter's very existence. "He started for the camp to trade hooch to the Indians—and—oh, hurry!" she cried, as she plunged out into the night. "He hates Wananebish, and he threatened to get even with her! If he should kill her, now—before—before she could tell us—"

She was already descending the bank to the river when Brent, picking up his rifle, hastened after her, and although he exerted himself to the utmost, the flying figure gradually drew away from him. When it had all but disappeared in the darkness, he called, and the girl waited, whereupon Brent, despite her protest, took the lead, and with his rifle ready for instant use, hurried on up the river.

A half mile from the encampment, Brent struck into the scattered timber. "He may watch the back trail," he flung over his shoulder, "and we don't want to walk into a trap."

Rapidly they made their way through the scrub, and upon the edge of the clearing they paused. In the wide space before one of the cabins, brush fires were blazing. And by the light of the leaping flames the Indians could be seen crowding and fighting to get to the door of the hut. Brent drew Snowdrift into the shelter of a bush, from which point of vantage they watched Claw, who stood in the doorway, glass in one hand, gun in the other, dispensing hooch. Standing by his side, Yondo received the skins from the crowding Indians, and tossed them into the cabin. The process was beautifully simple—a drink for a skin. As Yondo took a skin, Claw passed out a drink to its erstwhile owner.

"Damn him!" muttered Brent, raising his rifle. But Snowdrift pushed it aside.

"It is too dark," she whispered. "You can't see the sights, and you might hit one of the Indians."

Breaking off sharply, she pointed toward her own cabin. The door had been thrown open, and, rifle in hand, old Wananebish stepped out onto the snow. She raised the weapon, and with loud cries the Indians surged back from about the hooch runner. Before the rifle could speak, Claw fired, and dropping her gun, old Wananebish staggered a few steps forward and pitched headlong into the snow.

With a yell of rage, Brent broke cover and dashed straight across the clearing. As the cry reached him, Claw looked up, fired one hasty shot at the approaching figure, and leaping straight through the throng of Indians, disappeared in the scrub beyond the cabin, with Yondo close at his heels.

Brent was aware that Snowdrift was at his side. "Go to her," panted the girl. "I will try to handle the Indians."

For an instant he hesitated, then, realizing that the girl could deal with her own band better without his presence, he hastened to the squaw, who had raised herself to an elbow and was vainly trying to rise. Picking her up bodily, Brent carried her into the cabin and placed her upon the bunk.

"Where—is—she?" the woman gasped, as he endeavored to stanch the flow of blood from a wound low down upon the sunken chest.

"She's all right," Brent assured her. "Claw has gone, and she is trying to quiet the Indians."

"No use." She whispered the words with difficulty. "Take her away—while—there—is—time. They—are—crazy—for—hooch — and — they — will — sell— her —to—him."

She sank back, gasping, and Brent held a cup of water to her lips as he motioned her to be quiet.

"I am going to take her," he answered. "But, tell me—who is Snowdrift?"

The beady eyes fixed his with a long, searching stare. She was about to speak when the door opened and Snowdrift herself burst into the room and sank down beside the bunk.

With a laboring effort the old woman laid a claw-like hand upon the girl's arm.

"Forgive me," she whispered, and summoning all her fast-ebbing strength, she went on: "It is all a lie. You are not my child. You are white. I loved you, and I was afraid you would go to your people."

A paroxysm of coughing seized her, and a gush of red blood welled from her lips.

"Look — in — the — moss — bag," she croaked, the words gurgling through her blood-flooded throat. She fell heavily back upon the blanket, and the red torrent gushed afresh from between the stilled lips.

With a dry sob, Snowdrift turned to Brent.

"We must go!" she faltered hurriedly. "I can do nothing with the Indians. I tried to reach the hooch to destroy it, but they crowded me away. He has lied to them—won them completely over by the promise of more hooch. He told them he has plenty of hooch *cached* in the scrub. Already they have sent runners to bring him back, and when he comes"—the girl paused and shuddered—"they will do anything he tells them to—for hooch; and you know what that will be—come, we must go while we have time!"

"Can't we stay and fight him?" cried Brent. "Surely some of the Indians will be with us."

"No—only a few of the squaws—and they would be no good. No, we must go before they bring him back! My sled is beside the door. Hurry and load it with supplies while I harness the dogs."

As she talked, the girl's hands searched beneath the blankets upon which lay the body of the squaw, and with a low cry, she drew forth the moss bag, which she handed to Brent.

"Take it," she cried, "and do not trust it to the sled. We have no time to look into it now—but that little bag contains the secret of my life."

"And I will guard it with my own!" cried Brent, as he took the bag from her hand. "Hurry, now, and harness the dogs. I'll throw in some grub and blankets and we will finish the outfit at my cabin, where we'll pick up Joe Pete."

While Brent worked at the lashings of the sled pack, Snowdrift slipped silently into the cabin, and crossing to the bunk, bent low over the still form of the squaw.

"Good-by, Wananebish," she sobbed, as she pressed her lips to the wrinkled forehead. "I don't know what you have done—nor why you did it—but I forgive you."

She turned to see Brent examining the two heavy crotches that were fixed, one on either side of the doorway on the inside.

"That is our lock," explained the girl. "See, there is the bar that goes across the door, like the bar at the post at Fort Norman. Wananebish made it. And every night when we were inside she placed the bar in the crotches, and no one could have got in without smashing the door to pieces. Ever since I returned from the mission, Wananebish has feared some one, and now I know it was Claw."

"If we could only drop the bar from the outside," muttered Brent, "maybe we could gain a lot of time. I know Claw, and when he finds that he has all the Indians with him, and that we are only two, he is not going to give you up without a struggle. By George!" he exclaimed suddenly. "I believe I can do it!"

He motioned the girl outside, and slipped the bar into the crotch at the hinge side of the door, then driving a knife upon the inside, he rested the bar upon it, and stepping outside, banged the door shut. The knife held, and opening the door, he loosened the blade a little and tried again. This time the banging of the door jarred the knife loose. It fell to the floor, and the heavy bar dropped into place. Brent smiled with satisfaction as he threw his weight against the door.

"That will keep them busy for a while," he said. "They'll think we're in there, and they know we're armed, so they won't be any too anxious to mix things up at close quarters."

Swiftly the dogs flew up the well-packed trail toward Brent's cabin. The night was dark, and the Indians were fighting over the rum cask that Claw had abandoned. As they hurried down the river, the two cast more than one glance over their shoulders toward the cabin where the Indians milled about in the firelight.

At the first bend of the stream they paused and looked back. Shots were being fired in scattering volleys, and suddenly Snowdrift grasped Brent's arm.

"Look!" she cried. "At our cabin!"

At first Brent could see nothing but the distant glow of the brush fires, then from the direction of the hut they had just left a tongue of flame shot upward through the darkness. There were more shots, and the flames widened and leaped higher.

"They're piling brush against the cabin," cried Brent. "They think they'll burn us out. Come on, we haven't a minute to lose, for when Claw learns that we are not there, he'll be on our trail."

At his own shack, Brent tore the lashings from the sled, and began to rearrange the pack, adding supplies from his stores. Joe Pete stared in astonishment.

"Come on, here!" cried Brent. "Get to work! We're off for Dawson! And we've got to take grub enough to last till we hit Fort Norman."

"All day long you have been on the trail," cried the girl. "You are tired. Can't we stand them off here until you are rested?"

Brent shook his head.

"You saw what happened at the other cabin," he answered. "And here it would be even worse. With the window and the door on the same side, they could burn us out in no time."

"But they will trail us—and we must travel heavy." She pointed to the loaded sled.

"We will take our chances in the open," rejoined Brent grimly. "And if luck favors us we will get a long lead. The Indians may become too drunk to follow, or they may stop to loot my cabin, and even if they should overtake us, we can give a good account of ourselves. We have three rifles, and the Indians can't shoot, and Claw will not risk his own hide. Strike out straight for Fort Norman, Joe Pete. We will take turns breaking trail."

At daylight they camped upon the apex of a high ridge that commanded a six or seven mile sweep to the rear, and all three noted with relief that the stiff wind had filled their course with the shifting snow. All through the night they had avoided the timbered swamps and the patches of scrub, both for the purposes of allowing the wind full sweep at their trail, and also to force their pursuers to expose themselves to the open. It was decided that until danger of pursuit was past they would travel only at night, thus eliminating in so far as possible the danger of a surprise attack.

Because the men had been on the trail almost constantly for twenty-four hours, Snowdrift insisted upon standing the first watch, and as Brent unrolled his blankets, he removed the moss-bag from his shoulders and handed it to the girl. Both he and Joe Pete were asleep the instant they hit the coverings, and for a long time Snowdrift sat with the bag hugged close, and her eyes fixed upon the long sweep of back-trail.

At length she thrust her hand into the bag and withdrew the packet, secure in its waterproof wrapping. Over and over she turned it in her hand as she speculated, woman like, upon its contents. Time and again she essayed to untie the thong that bound it, but each time her fingers were stilled before the knot was undone.

"Oh, I am afraid — afraid," she murmured. "Suppose he—my father—was a man like—like those two—suppose he was Claw himself!" She shuddered at the thought. "No, no!" she whispered. "Wananebish said that he was good. My mother, then. Who was she? Is some terrible stigma attached to her name? Better never to know who I am than to know *that!*"

For a moment she held the packet above the little flames of the fire as though she would drop it in; but even as she did so she knew she would not destroy it, for she decided that even to know the worst would be better than the gnawing of lifelong uncertainty.

"He, too, has the right to know," she murmured. "We will open it together." With a sigh she replaced the packet in the bag, and returned to her scrutiny of the back-trail.

Despite the agreement to divide equally the time of watching, the girl resolved to let the men sleep until midday before calling Brent, who was to take the second watch.

At noon Brent awoke of his own accord, and the girl was startled by the sound of his voice in her ear: "Anything doing?"

"No," she answered. "Not even a wolf or a caribou has crossed the open."

"Have you explored that?" He indicated the moss-bag with a nod, and the girl was quick to note the carefully suppressed eagerness of the words.

"No. I—waited. I wanted you—and—oh, I was afraid!"

"Nonsense, darling!" laughed the man. "I am not afraid! Give me the bag. Again I swear to you, I do not care who you are. You are mine—and nothing else matters!"

Snowdrift slipped her hand into the bag, withdrew the packet, and handed it to Brent. He placed his arm about her shoulders, drew her close against his side, and with her eyes following his every movement, his fingers fumbled at the knot.

Carefully he unwrapped the waterproof covering and disclosed a small leather note-book, and a thick packet wound round with parchment deerskin. On the fly-leaf of the note-book, in a round, clear hand was writ-

ten the name, *Murdo MacFarlane,* and below, Lashing Water.

"Murdo MacFarlane!" cried Brent. "Why, that's the name in the book that told of Hearne's lost mines—the book that brought me over here!"

"And the name on the knife—see, I have it here!" exclaimed the girl. "But, go on! Who was Murdo MacFarlane, and what has he to do with me?"

Eagerly Brent read aloud the closely written pages, that told of the life of Murdo MacFarlane, of his boyhood in Scotland, of his journey to Canada, his service with the Hudson's Bay Company, his courtship of Margot Molaire, and their marriage to the accompaniment of the booming of the bells of Saint Anne's, of the birth of their baby — the little Margot; of his restless longing for gold, that his wife and child need not live out their lives in the outlands; of the visit of Wananebish and her little band of Dog Ribs; of his venture into the barrens, accompanied by his wife and little baby; of the cabin beside the nameless lake and the year of fruitless search for gold in the barrens.

"Oh, that is it! That is it! The memory!" cried the girl.

"What do you mean? What memory?"

"Always I have had it—the memory. Time and time again it comes back to me—but I can never seem to grasp it. A cabin, a beautiful woman who leaned over me, and talked to me, and a big man who took me up in his arms, a lake beside the cabin, and —that is all. Dim and elusive, always, I have tried for hours at a time to bring it sharply into mind; but it was no use—the memory would fade, and in its place would be the teepee, or my little room at the mission. But go on! What became of Murdo MacFarlane, and Margot — of my father and my mother. And why have I always lived with Wananebish?"

Brent read the closing lines with many a pause, and with many a catch in his voice—the lines which told of the death of Margot, and of his determination to take the baby and leave her with Wananebish until he should return to her; of his leaving with the squaw all his money — five hundred pounds in good bank-notes, with instructions to use it for her keep and education in case he did not return. And so he came to the concluding paragraph, which ran:

> "In the morning I shall carry my wee Margot to the Indian woman. It is the only thing I can do. And then I shall strike north for gold. But first I must return to this cabin and bury my dead. God! Why did she have to die? She should be buried beside her mother in the little graveyard at Saint Anne's. But it cannot be. Upon a high point that juts out into the lake, I will dig her grave—upon a point where we used often to go and watch the sunset, she and I and the little one. And there she will lie, while far below her the booming and the thunder of the wind-lashed waters of the lake will rise about her like the sound of bells—her requiem—like the tolling of the bells of Saint Anne's."

"Oh, where is he now — my father?" sobbed the girl, as he concluded.

Brent's arm tightened about her shoulders.

"He is dead," he whispered. "Somewhere in this white land your father met his death—a man's death—the kind of death he would have welcomed—for he was a man! The whole north is his grave. And out of it his spirit kept calling—calling. And the call was heard—by a drunkard in a little cabin on the Yukon. I am that drunkard, and into my keeping the spirit of Murdo MacFarlane has entrusted the life of his baby—his wee Margot."

Brent paused, and his voice suddenly cut hard as steel. "And may God Almighty strike me dead if I ever violate that trust!"

Slender brown fingers were upon his lips.

"Don't talk like that, dear, it scares me. See, I am not afraid. And you are *not* a drunkard."

"I got drunk on the Belva Lou."

"Didn't I say we couldn't expect to win all the battles?"

"And I carry my bottle with me." He displayed the flask of rum.

"And the cork has not been pulled," flashed back the girl. "And you have had it ever since you left the whaler."

"Yes, darling," answered the man softly. "And I always shall keep it, and I will never pull the cork. I can give you that promise now. I can promise you—on the word of a Brent, that—"

"Not yet, sweetheart — please!" interrupted the girl. "Let us hold back the promise till we need it. That promise is our heavy artillery. This is only the beginning of the war. And no good general would show the enemy all he has got right in the beginning."

"You wonder woman!" laughed Brent, smothering the upraised eyes with kisses. "See, we have not opened the packet."

Carefully he unwound the parchment wrapping, and disclosed a closely packed pile of bank-notes. So long had they remained undisturbed that their edges had stuck together so that it was with difficulty he succeeded in counting them.

"One hundred," he announced at length. "One hundred five-pound notes of the Bank of England."

"Why, Wananebish never used any of the money!" cried the girl.

Brent shook his head. "Not a penny has been touched. I doubt that she ever even opened the packet."

"Poor old Wananebish," murmured the girl. "And she needed it so. But she saved it all for me."

When darkness gathered they again hit the trail. A last look from the ridge disclosed no sign of pursuit, and that night they made twenty-five miles. For three more nights they traveled, and then upon the shore of Great Bear Lake they gave up the night journeys and continued their trip by daylight.

Upon the evening of the eighteenth day they pulled into Fort Norman, where they outfitted for the long trail to the Yukon. Before she left, Snowdrift paid the debt of a thousand skins that McTavish had extended to the Indians, and the following morning the outfit pulled out and headed for the mountains which were just visible far to the westward.

CHAPTER XXIV.

CLAW HITS FOR DAWSON.

WHEN Claw returned to the flame-lighted clearing a scant half-hour after he had fled from the avenging figure of Brent, it was to find his keg of rum more than half consumed and most of the Indians howling drunk. Close about him they crowded, pressing skins upon him and demanding more liquor.

The man was quick to see that despite the appearance of Brent and the girl, he held the upper hand. The Indians would remain his as long as the rum held out.

"Ask 'em where the white man went—him an' the girl," he ordered Yondo.

The Indian pointed to the cabin of Wananebish, and a devilish gleam leaped into Claw's eyes.

"Tell 'em I'll give a hull keg of rum, er a hundred dollars, cash money, to the man that kills him!" he shouted. "An' another keg to the one that brings me the girl!"

The drunken savages heard the offer with a whoop, and yelling like fiends, they rushed the cabin. The barred door held against their attack, and with sinister singleness of purpose they dashed back to the fires, and securing blazing fagots, began to pile brush against the wall of the building.

With an evil grin on his face, Claw took up his position behind a stump that gave unobstructed view of the door through which the two must rush from the burning cabin, and waited, revolver in hand.

Louder roared the fire, and higher and higher shot the flames; but the door remained closed. Claw waited, knowing that it would take some time for the logs to burn through. But when at length the whole cabin was a mass of flames, and the roof caved in, his rage burst forth in a tirade of abuse.

"They lied!" he shrilled. "They wasn't in there. Ace-in-the-Hole wouldn't never stayed in there an' burned up! The Injuns lied! An' he's layin' to git me. Mebbe he's got a bead on me right now!" and in a sudden excess of terror, the man started to burrow into the snow.

Yondo stooped, and in the bright light of the flames examined the trail to the river. Then he pointed down the stream in the direction of Brent's cabin, and Claw, too, examined the trail.

"They've pulled out!" he cried. "Pulled out for his shack! Tell 'em to come on! We'll burn 'em out up there! I ain't a goin' to let her git away from me now—

an' to hell with Cap Jinkins! I'll take her to Dawson, an' make real money offen her! An' I'll git Ace-in-the-Hole, too. I found that girl first! She's mine—an' by Heaven I'll have her!"

He started for the river. At the top of the bank he paused.

"What's ailin' 'em?" he roared. "Why don't they come? Standin' there goggin' like fools!"

"They say," explained Yondo, in jargon, "that they want to see the rum first."

"Tell 'em I left it up to his shack!" roared the man. "Tell 'em anything, jest so they come. Git my dogs an' come on. We'll lead out, an' they'll follow if they think they's hooch in it."

Yondo headed the dogs down trail, and Claw threw himself upon the sled and watched the drunken Indians string out behind, yelling, whooping, staggering, and falling in their eagerness to secure more hooch.

When they came in sight of the cabin, Claw saw that it was dark.

"You slip up and see what you kin find out," he ordered Yondo. "An' I'll stay here with the dogs an' handle the Injuns when they come along."

Five minutes later the Indian returned and reported that there was no one in the cabin, and that the door was open. With a curse, Claw headed the dogs up the bank, and pushed through the open door. Match in hand, he stumbled and fell sprawling over the body of the captain of the Belva Lou, uttering a shriek of terror as his bare hand came in contact with the hairy face. Scrambling to his feet, he fumbled for another match, and with trembling fingers, managed to light the little bracket lamp.

"Choked him to death barehanded!" he cried in horror. "An' he'd of done me that way, too! But where be they? Look, they been here!"

The man pointed to the disordered supplies that had been thrown about in the haste of departure. "They've pulled out!" he cried. "Git out there an' find their trail!"

Yondo returned, and pointed to the westward, holding up three fingers, and making the sign of a heavily loaded sled.

"That 'll be him, an' her, an' the Injun," said Claw, "an' they're hittin' fer Fort Norman."

Reaching down, he picked up a sack of flour, and carrying it out to the sled, ordered Yondo to help with the other supplies. Suddenly he sprang erect and gazed toward the west.

"I wonder if he would?" he cried aloud. "I'll bet he'll take her clean to Dawson!" He laughed, harshly. "An' if he does, she's mine—mine, an' no trouble nor risk takin' her there! Wunst back among the saloons, Ace-in-the-Hole will start in on the hooch—an' then I'll git her."

From far up the river came the whoop-whoroo of the drunken Indians.

"Quick!" cried Claw. "Git that pack throw'd together. When they git here an' find out they ain't no more hooch, they'll butcher me an' you!" And almost before the Indian had secured the lashings, Claw started the dogs, and leaving the Indian to handle the gee-pole, struck out on the trail of Brent.

It was no part of his plan to overtake the trio. Indeed, it was the last thing in the world he wanted to do. At midnight they camped with a good ten miles between themselves and the drunken Dog Ribs. In the morning they pushed on, keeping a sharp lookout ahead.

Soon Brent's trail began to drift full of snow, and by noon it was obliterated all together. Thereupon Claw ordered the Indian to shape his own course for Fort Norman, and because of Yondo's thorough knowledge of the country, arrived in sight of the post on the evening of the sixteenth day.

When he learned from an Indian woodchopper that no other outfit had arrived, Claw pulled a mile up the river and waited.

Two days later, from the summit of a near-by hill, he saw the outfit pull in, and with glittering eyes he watched it depart, knowing that Brent would hit for the Yukon by way of the Bonnet Plume Pass.

Claw paid off Yondo and struck straight westward alone, crossing the divide by means of a steep and narrow pass known only to a few. Thus shortening the trail by

some four or five days, he showed up in Cuter Malone's Klondike Palace at the height of an evening's hilarity.

Cuter Malone greeted him from behind the bar.

"Hello, Claw! Thought you was over with the whalers!"

"Was," answered Claw. "Jest got back." He drained the glass Malone had set before him, and with a sidewise quirk of the head sauntered into a little back room.

A few minutes later Cuter followed, carefully closing and locking the door after him.

"What's on yer mind?" he asked, as he seated himself beside the little table.

"They's a plenty on it. But mostly it's a girl."

"What's the matter? One git away from you?"

"She ain't yet, but she damn near it. She'll be here now in a few days, an' she's the purtiest piece that ever hit the Yukon."

"Must be right peart, then, 'cause that's coverin' quite a bit of territory."

"Yes, an' you could cover twice as much an' still not find nothin' that would touch her for looks."

"Where is she?"

"She's comin'. Ace-in-the-Hole's bringin' her in."

"Ace-in-the-Hole! Yer crazy as hell! First place, Ace-in-the-Hole ain't here no more. Folks says old R. E. Morse got him an' he drownded hisself in the river. Camillo Bill an' that bunch he used to trot with has combed Dawson with a fine-tooth comb fer him, an' they can't find him nowheres."

"Drowned — hell!" exclaimed Claw. "Ain't I be'n to his shack on the Coppermine? Didn't he come up to the Belva Lou an' git drunk, an' then git lost, an' then find his way back to his shack an' choke the life out of Cap Jinkins? Yes, sir, barehanded! I looked at cap's throat where he lay dead on the floor an' it was damn near squoze in two! An' he'd of squoze mine, if he could have caught me!"

"What about the gal? What's he got to do with her? He wouldn't stand fer no such doin's, an' you'd ort to know it. Didn't he knock you down fer whalin' one with a dog-whip?"

"Yes, an' I'll even up the score," growled Claw savagely. "An' me an' you'll shove a heft of dust in the safe fer profits. It's like this. She's his girl, an' he's bringin' her here."

"His girl! Say, Claw, what you handin' me? Time was when Ace-in-the-Hole could had his pick of any of 'em. But that time's gone. They wouldn't no *klooch* look at him twice now. He's that fer gone with the hooch. He's a bum."

"You know a hell of a lot about it! Didn't you jest git through tellin' me he was drownded? An' now he's a bum! Both of which they ain't neither one right —by a damn sight. He's be'n out there where they ain't no hooch, an' he's as good a man as he ever was—as long as he can't git the hooch. But here in Dawson he kin git it—see? An' me an' you has got to see that he does git it. An' we'll git the girl. I've figured it all out, comin' over. Was goin' to fetch her myself, but it would of be'n a hell of a job, an' then there's the Mounted. But this way we git her delivered, C. O. D., right to our door, you might say.

"Startin' about day after to-morrow, we'll put lookouts on the Klondike River, an' the Indian River. They're comin' in over the Bonnet Plume. When they git here the lookout will tell us where they go. Then we rig up some kind of excuse to git him away, an' then when we've got him paralyzed drunk, we'll send a message to the girl that he needs her, an' we'll bring her here—an'—well, the middle room above the little dance hall up-stairs will hold her —it's helt 'em before."

Malone grinned.

"Guess I didn't know what I was up to when I bullt that room, eh? They kin yell their head off an' you can't hear 'em outside the door. All right, Claw, you tend to the gittin' her here, an' I'll pass the word around amongst the live ones that's got the dust. We ain't had no new ones in this winter, and the boys 'll 'preciate it."

(To be concluded NEXT WEEK.)

Tape Measure for Measure

by Helen Ross Lantz

ACCORDING to the standards of steelyards and tape measure Hazel Hopkins has no business crowding into fiction. No self-respecting magazine ever printed a story about a girl who was—it may as well come out first as last—fat. Take a look at the heroines of your own favorite writers, whether they be Joseph Conrad, Henry James, Rudyard Kipling, Galsworthy, Harold Bell Wright, Robert W. Chambers or Rupert Hughes, and you won't find a single charmer taking a size above thirty-six.

Among the bolder effusions of O. Henry appears an occasional female of pleasing plumpness. But even he never dared handicap a heroine with more than one layer of superfluous embonpoint; and then he did not stress this aspect of the lady, but skipped lightly to her eyes or hair or unfailing good nature. Ordinarily I am for the beaten path and hesitate to "rush in where," *et cetera.* But I ask, what is one to do? If Hazel, who sold suits at the Bon Ton, had not been frankly fat, the trouble would never have happened.

Then whoever heard of a salesgirl named Hazel? They are all called Nellie or Sadie or Mattie, and they live in hall bedrooms and are fashionably slender from living on toast and coffee made over the gas-jet right under the hard-hearted landlady's nose. Hazel, I admit, is shockingly unorthodox. But her lot was cast in Seattle, not New York, and, owing to the minimum wage law, post-war conditions and her own ambition, was handed a weekly pay-check of twenty-two dollars and fifty cents.

She lived at home with her father and mother and brother Al in a modern bungalow out on the Phinney line. The front room was furnished swell, with an overstuffed davenport and floor lamp, which only lacked three instalments of being their very own, and there was besides a phonograph and seventy-five records, all paid for.

Father and Al had made good money at the shipyards during the war, and now that it was over, they had beaten their riveters into pipe-threaders and their whaddayoucallums into monkey-wrenches and had taken up the peaceful pursuit of plumbing in a—I was going to say—modest way. But plumbing isn't done that way nowadays. Hazel gave her mother five dollars a week for her board.

When Hazel first went to work at the Bon Ton they gave her a place in the bakery department, where she was a living testimony to the excellence of her wares. Indeed, her fresh blond coloring and ample architecture neatly set off by the crisp white cap and apron had a wholesome beauty not unlike the large, golden loaves of bread known to the trade as the Bon Ton Special.

But that was two years before our story begins.

If Hazel was a trifle too plump she was also a rattling good salesgirl and chock-full of ambition. So we now find her promoted to Cloaks and Suits, where she has speedily acquired an educated taste in dress, a poise not entirely due to increased avoirdupois, and an ambition. But I must not get ahead of my story.

The trouble really started with Mr. Ealy, head of the department, remarking to Hazel one rainy day between seasons that the new spring styles were the niftiest ever.

"So slim of line and elegant," commented Mr. Ealy, quoting from the Buyer's Guide. "'Truly, the slender silhouette was never more strikingly emphasized than in the new tailors with their short, narrow skirts and their close-fitting coats.'" Then he added in his own words, "Honest to goodness, Miss Hazel, I've never seen anything so swell. But it takes a girl with a slim figger to get by with 'em. Now, Miss Keenan—"

Hazel slammed an eighty-five-dollar coat on the rack marked "one hundred and fifty dollars and up" before replying.

"Well, I don't know as you need to rub it in," she snapped. She had always been used to gibes at her chubbiness and wouldn't have minded a joke even now. But to have Mr. Ealy in that unpremeditated way—oh, well, if he preferred that skinny Lucy, why, all right. She could hardly keep back the tears.

"Oh, come now," coaxed Mr. Ealy with that tender, earnest look in his black-fringed blue eyes usually reserved for the occasional moneyed customers who sought him out. "Oh, come now, I can't have you sore at me. I'm going East to-morrow for the spring goods. Won't see each other for a long time. I never meant to knock your figger, little girl. Anyhow, if I was looking for a wife, I'm not sure but what I'd pick a fat girl. They're good natured as a rule."

He smiled tantalizingly while Hazel blushed rose-pink, displayed her best dimple and said, "Aw, go 'long!"

Mr. Ealy went, but came back directly, remarking in that killing, offhand way of his, "Wish I could put off starting East till after to-morrow night, Miss Hazel. I'd like to take you to the Bon Ton dance. But I suppose you already got a—"

"Yes," Hazel cut in, "but I could—"

"No chance," declared the buyer emphatically. "Made my reservations and everything. Ought to have started last week."

"Oh, well," Hazel sighed. "There'll be plenty more. One every month, y'know. You'll be back for the next one, won't you?" She looked at him with the frank, eager gaze of a child.

Mr. Ealy seemed worried. "The worst of it is you never can tell just how long these trips are going to take. I hate awfully to make a date and then leave you high and dry. It wouldn't be right."

"Oh, I don't mind!" cried Hazel from her impulsive heart. Then out of her store of woman's wisdom she added, "If you shouldn't get back by the 24th, there will be somebody I can go with."

"Oh," said Mr. Ealy, his gentlemanly scruples suddenly overcome. "Oh, in that case—" Thus gracefully he became a dated man and gracefully he implied that until the 24th, time would move on crutches.

Hazel promptly bethought her of a certain orchid satin evening dress which a friend of hers over in Gowns had shown her the other day—a peach of a Bon Ton exclusive model, trimmed with ostrich and silver galloon. Mrs. H. C. L. Beatham, whose name one saw with sickening regularity in the society columns, had had it out on approval for the Governor's ball, and it would never be quite the same again. But an employee could have it for a lyric. It would need fresh malines for the bodice. Otherwise it was all right, just her size and everything.

The rest of the morning Hazel waited on customers mechanically, bringing out green gabardine to those who specified brown broadcloth and selling one customer a coat two sizes too small. When she went out to lunch she failed even to see the young man in Crockery, who always waited for her smile and who had even gone along an occasions and insisted on paying for her order.

If one could only be sure Mr. Ealy meant all he said! He was such a jollier! It

would certainly be fine to be the wife of a man like Mr. Ealy. He had a good salary and knew how to spend it. Twice that winter he had taken Hazel to a regular show, and once to dinner at Blanc's. Only last month he had taken her to the dance given by the Bon Ton Employees' Improvement Club, and now he had asked her again! From the top of his black pompadour to the tips of his mahogany-colored shoes he was next to the last, if not the final word in refined and nifty dressing. He knew all about flowers and taxicabs and was not afraid of the head waiter.

Now Mr. Thackeray—or was it Solomon?—once said that any woman, unless she has a positive hump, can marry any man she sets her heart on, a theory which I accept with certain reservations. The trouble is, nine times out of ten, there are at least two women with their hearts set on the same man. And, as polygamy is no longer the thing, somebody is sure to be disappointed. Take Mr. Ealy. He was admired and pursued by nearly all the girls in the Bon Ton Cloaks and Suits.

There were, however, a few middle-aged and married salesladies who did not share the general enthusiasm. They said Clarence Lionel Ealy was a smart Aleck, a flirt and a sissy. But why record the minority report? To all but the crabbed he was a genial fellow not above passing a friendly word with anybody. More than once Hazel had noticed him, over in Millinery, laughing and talking with the buyer, Miss Corey, who was at least thirty-five and so stout as to require Bon Ton Special boning in her. For the present, though, let us consider only the leading contenders for the heart and pay-check of Mr. Ealy—Hazel Hopkins and Lucy Keenan.

There was no telling which of the two girls Mr. Ealy preferred. He bestowed his attentions alternately and with a nice impartiality on both the hefty Hazel and the lissom Lucy. It may be that Miss Keenan had a shade the advantage, as she herself admitted, twisting about so as to obtain a better view of the back of her new beaded tricotine in the mirror of the Bon Ton lady employees' rest-room.

"If I only had your hair 'n' complexion and maybe teeth, Hazel, I'd be a knockout with my figger and all, believe me. But then I sometimes think a figger is what counts after all. Ever notice how Mr. Ealy always singles me out to try on the hundred 'n' fifty ups when he wants to show some rich fatty how she'll look in 'em—not?"

Hazel had noticed all right. But she merely shifted her gum to the other cheek, as behooves a Christian young lady receiving a sisterly slam, and went on sewing a rip in the sleeve of her one-piece brown jersey frock. Sleeves that are too full of arm certainly keep one busy.

In another corner of the room sat the massive Miss Corey, gazing into the mirror of her smart vanity-case as she pinned a bunch of coquettish brown curls just above her left ear.

"You girls make me tired," Miss Corey announced in the calm, restrained tones of one whose mouth is full of hairpins. "All you think a man notices is a figger. Now, to my way of thinking—" She paused, taking the last of the hairpins to draw her Marcel into a chickenish dip on her forehead, and carefully scrutinizing the effect in the glass. "To my way of thinking, it's pleasant, refined manners that makes a woman attractive. And, believe me, a good-looking hat helps, too." She smiled complacently.

"Any spring goods in yet?" asked Lucy quickly.

"Nothing to speak of yet," returned the voluminous lady, rising and smoothing her velveteen down over her hips. "But wait till you see what we get from New York. Off-the-face models are all the go."

Lucy made a disdainful mouth at the retreating back of the Millinery buyer. "She's a nice old thing," she remarked condescendingly. "Too bad, with all her good ideas, she never won a home. Guess she likes Mr. Ealy pretty well at that. Swell chance she has. She must be a forty-eight if she's an inch!"

Hazel had put away her needle and thread and was industriously plying a nail-file. "Tell me, honest to goodness, Lucy," she inquired with affected carelessness as she concentrated on the troublesome third

finger of her right hand, "did he ever get mushy when you've been out with him—or anything?"

Lucy stopped powdering her upturned nose and looked her friend squarely in the eye. "Not a darned bit," she replied promptly. "How about yourself, old sly-boots?"

"I should say not. He's too much of a gentleman. Of course, he has said things sort of—er,—well, you know what I mean." Hazel blushed and smiled foolishly.

"Well, I never take a man seriously until he says something about naming the happy day." With this the sylphlike Miss Keenan went out, slamming the door.

Hazel sighed and moved over to the mirror. Gosh, she was a sight with that thick waist of hers, those washerwoman's arms, big hips and fat ankles! And that short, brown jersey dress, clinging like a bathing-suit, made her look worse than ever. The face in the mirror gave back an ugly scowl. She turned away and flung herself into a chair by the battered reading-table.

Snatching a copy of the *Evening Star* from the litter of magazines and papers, she scanned its pages with a lack-luster eye. Darn everything, why couldn't she be slim? With unerring instinct she turned to "Cynthia's Advice to the Lovelorn." But before she had a chance to glean any bits of wisdom, her eye was caught by a neat, single-column advertisement headed in black letters:

NOBODY LOVES A FAT GIRL

Why Remain Unsightly? Eat and Grow Thin!

Reduce by my Easy Painless Method

Scientific, Sure, Safe, Simple

I Absolutely Guarantee to Take Off 30 lbs.

in Three Weeks. Only $20.00

DR. LULU BANTA

Room 121, Globe Bldg.

To tear out this portentous announcement with the aid of a trusty hairpin and to tuck it into her patent-leather handbag was but the work of the minute.

"All I need now's the twenty," murmured Hazel delightedly, her face aglow with hope.

The next noon after a lunch consisting of pork and beans, hot biscuits, banana-whipped cream, pie and coffee, Hazel hurried over to Pike Street in search of 121 Globe Building. As she had foreseen, getting the twenty dollars had not been difficult. She had discreetly told brother Al she must have it to make a payment on her kolinsky coat. No need to give away her secret just yet and be laughed at, and maybe not get the money!

"I forgot all about the thing, or I wouldn't have had my permanent wave this month," she had explained to Al. "I wish I had never got the old thing anyway. I look like a stuffed prophet in it."

"More like a snake-charmer," Al had returned seriously, meaning the wave. "But here, take the twenty. I was gonna get me a coupla silk shirts. I need 'em bad. So don't you forget to pay me back."

Up a pair of dingy stairs and down an ill-lighted hall Hazel found the magic number, 121, displayed on a ground-glass door with the words, "Beauty Institute—Please Enter."

It was a challenge which Hazel Hopkins accepted without batting an eye, and heard her arrival proclaimed by a bell attached to the door. It was a tiny, unpretentious office, severely clean and neat. In the middle of the floor stood impressive looking scales, and the walls were hung with a fascinating array of framed photographs, showing patients "before and after."

There was no time to look at them. Out of a door at the rear popped a trim little woman with snapping black eyes. She wore a kind of nurse's uniform and moved as if springs were concealed in the principal parts of her anatomy.

"I am Dr. Banta," she announced incisively. "It's plain you want to reduce. Don't worry. It can be done," she continued without giving Hazel a chance to get in a word. "Look at me. I used to weigh one hundred and sixty. Was as wide as I am tall and felt miserable. Now I'm down to one hundred and twenty-five. Feel that arm—hard as nails. Proper feeding did

that and exercise. I guarantee results provided you follow my directions. Are you ready to talk business?" Having shot her ammunition she waited, fixing Hazel with a piercing eye.

The girl shifted her weight uneasily from one high French heel to the other. "I don't want to be athletic," she faltered.

"Sure, I know you don't," snapped the doctor. "You're like all the rest—after the easiest way. Well, you're young. It ought not to take much exercise to reduce your figure. But you'll have to diet."

"Dye it?" gasped Hazel.

"Yes, instead of eating things which go to make adipose or fatty tissue, you will have to confine yourself to certain foods which I shall prescribe. You can eat all you want of them. No danger of starving. It's just a matter of using a little self-control. Are you ready to talk business, or would you prefer to go on getting stouter?" She spoke in a tone that implied it was nothing to her whether Hazel did or didn't. A crackerjack seller of cloaks and suits was lost to the world in Dr. Banta.

Hazel had a swift vision of the willowy form of Lucy Keenan, clad in ivory satin with a court train and veil caught with orange-blossoms, walking up the church aisle clinging to the arm of Mr. Ealy, with herself looking on from the side lines. Then she opened her patent-leather bag and extracted a twenty-dollar bill, which she laid upon the flat-top desk.

"All right, go ahead. I'm game," she sighed with the air of one abandoning herself to fate.

"You'll have to cut out starch, sugar, and fat," announced the doctor, her fingers closing over the twenty. She seated herself at the desk and motioned Hazel to a chair opposite.

"Starch 'll be easy," replied Hazel, brightening. "We don't eat it at our house, not even corn-starch pudding or blank mange."

The doctor had a sudden fit of coughing, but emerged from behind her handkerchief to explain, "I mean you'll have to stop eating potatoes, macaroni, white bread, turnips and a lot of other things that contain starch. Instead, eat coarse brown bread, and plenty of eggs, lean meat, green vegetables and fresh fruits. Stay off of mayonnaise, whipped cream, pastry, milk, cheese, hot breads, and sweets. Better, too, if you'll leave coffee and tea alone and drink, instead, buttermilk or hot water and lemon-juice. But I'll give you a week's diet schedule. Then you can come in and get another for next week. Besides dieting, you'll have to roll on the floor every day from half to three-quarters of an hour. Do you work down-town?"

"Y-es," replied Hazel doubtfully. "I don't see how I'll have time to roll. I work at the Bon Ton."

"I thought so by your clothes. Well, you can find time if you really want to get thin. Be a good idea for you to get yourself a middy and bloomers and come over here and roll in my little gymnasium for half an hour every noon. It's quite complete—shower and all. I can sell you the middy and bloomers for eight fifty." The doctor spoke crisply, indifferently, as if what Hazel did about it was nothing in her young life, and rose to terminate the interview.

Hazel went home that night carrying a bag of grapefruit and a durable-looking loaf of bran bread. Her mother received her with equanimity.

"Might help some," she conceded. "But seems like folks that's meant to be fat 'll be fat, no matter what. You take after your father's side. All the Hopkinses is heavy feeders and fleshy. You remind me of your Aunt S'phrony. She got to weigh over two hundred and was always having spells of shetting down on her vittles. I can see her now going around suckin' a lemon and puckerin' up her face."

Grimly Hazel followed her mother into the kitchen and set about preparing a hygienic dinner for herself in accordance with Dr. Banta's menu entitled, "Dinner No. 1." But she and her mother kept getting in each other's way, and by the time the family gathered about the table Hazel had developed a man-size grouch which the tantalizing odors of baked potatoes, creamed onions, Salisbury steak, hot rolls, and fresh-baked loganberry pie did nothing to alleviate.

It certainly is no fun when you are hungry enough to eat a house and lot to sit at the table with people gorging themselves with real food and have to be content with a stingy portion of meat surrounded by a lot of herbage and forage. It was like being the vacant chair at a banquet, or Lazarus licking up the crumbs from the rich man's crumb tray, or the uninvited guest peering through the window at the Christmas-tree, if you get me.

And it did not help any to have to listen to the ill-timed humor of father and Al. Of course, father had to pull that old one about the toothpicks and the glass of water. Al guessed maybe mother would be able to break even boarding Hazel if she kept on with the diet for a while.

II.

For the first few days keeping to the starchless, sugarless, fatless, kickless diet caused Hazel the tortures of the damned. She snapped at the other girls, and as lunch-time drew near found it extremely hard to put up with the vagaries of customers who were "just looking" and wanted to try on everything in stock. Fortunately, Mr. Ealy was gone; so she did not need to exert herself trying to keep up an appearance of good nature. Lucy Keenan, with whom she often lunched, caught on in no time to what Hazel was up to and soon she had to stand a lot of joshing from everybody in Cloaks and Suits.

"Daily Menu No. 3" had just begun its deadly work on her system when, on arriving at the store in the morning, Hazel found her greetings returned with icy stares. She was beginning to feel pretty sore at everybody when Lucy Keenan pounced on her, exclaiming in mock surprise, "Why, if it ain't our little Hazel! Honest, we didn't know you. You've got so thin and emaciated. Ain't it the truth, girls?"

As the rest of Cloaks and Suits crowded about, commenting on the way she was rattling around in her clothes, Hazel tried to laugh with them, but it was no use. She only grinned uncertainly and said, "Aw, you think you're pretty funny, don't you?"

Thereafter Cloaks and Suits counted that day lost which failed to yield its little joke on poor Hazel. They even tipped off other departments, and representatives from Carpets, Notions, Corsets, and what not made it a point to wander in and look about, inquiring in loud tones for "that slender Miss Hopkins." Then she would have to come out and exhibit her amplitudinous figure before the surprised and amused stares of the customers.

According to Hazel's calendar it was "Menu No. 7" when her tormentors in Cloaks and Suits reached the climax of their cruelty by presenting her with a two-pound box of chocolates. Talk about temptations! Only the knowledge that she had lost four pounds of flesh kept her from yielding to the urging of the crowd and the lure of the succulent brown beauties as she sniffed their rich, spicy odor and watched them disappear amid the appreciative lip-smacking of the girls. As she went to throw away the empty box she allowed herself to nibble a broken bit of chocolate that had stuck to the bottom.

"Gee, but that's good," she muttered. "I'll bet some day I'll have all I want of 'em."

But even a joke must run its course. As the oldest saleswoman in Cloaks and Suits remarked to Lucy Keenan, "After all, I kind of admire Hazel's spunk in denying herself, and I honestly do believe she's falling off some."

"She," responded Lucy. "She's reducing like everything. Look at her shoes. She's got 'em laced nearly together at the top now, and she showed me where she had to take in her clothes a good two inches."

Self-denial was right, Hazel would have agreed as day after day she held herself to the uninspiring régime of Dr. Banta and forced her body to roll on the hard old floor of the doctor's gymnasium during the noon hour while her window-shopping soul roamed through Petticoat Lane and her palpitating appetite feasted in fancy on the rich viands of the soda-fountain lunch.

One day when "Menu No. 14" had become past tense and the tape measure and weighing machine agreed that Hazel had

more than justified the methods of Dr. Banta, she allowed the young man in Crockery to take her to lunch in the Bon Ton tea-room.

As he asked the waitress for a piece of Bon Ton special apple-pie with whipped cream to top off with, Hazel scowled at him darkly.

"Oh, for goodness sake have a heart!" she cried petulantly. "It's bad enough to have to sit here nibbling an old bran bun and drinking buttermilk and watch you eat all those baked beans and French fried potatoes 'n' everything. I don't believe I can stand the sight of that pie."

"Better have a piece," he returned with a grin. Then seeing the tears in her eyes as she resolutely shook her head, he added soberly, "Look here, Miss Hazel, what's the big idea? I've been seeing you browsing around at the lunch-counter that way, and I know you told me you was training down. But I'm blessed if I like you near as well slim as fat. Now to me a nice fat girl—"

"What's nice about a fat girl?" she cut in bitterly.

"Well, they look sort of healthy and jolly," he answered earnestly, "and they have dimples. By the way, I haven't noticed yours lately. Guess it's because you've had a grouch on. I don't suppose I'd ever have noticed you in the first place if you hadn't been fat. Your general plan and specifications reminded me of my mother. She lives back in Ioway, and I sure get pretty homesick sometimes."

He looked so like a great big kid at that moment that Hazel leaned over impulsively and patted his hand. "Sorry I was cross," she pleaded. "Gee, mothers are all right, aren't they? You'll have to come out some time and sample the apple-pie my mother makes." This Crockery young man was a nice fellow, she reflected, and would do fine for their best man.

During the next few days plans for the wedding began to take on definite shape in Hazel's mind and helped to keep her faithful to the rules of reducing. The reason for this was a post-card which arrived from Chicago, bearing a picture of the lady hippo at Lincoln Park. On the back—of the card, not the hippo—was the significant if cryptic message:

> Seems like I've been away a long time.
> C. L. E.

The initials meaning, of course, none other than the future husband of Mrs. Clarence Lionel Ealy.

Not even Lucy Keenan had been favored with a post-card from the popular buyer of Bon Ton Cloaks and Suits, and after the manner of the sisterhood, she began saying catty things to Hazel. Some girls simply couldn't have resisted coming back with facts concerning a date for the 24th. But wise Hazel spilled no beans. She did not even confide the secret of the revamped orchid satin.

On the third Sunday of her fast Hazel went for a walk with the young man in Crockery. As they neared the prettiest residence section of Queen Anne Hill, the young man was giving an explicit account of himself and his prospects, while she, busy with her own thoughts, was now and then throwing him a conversational bone in the shape of "Whaddayou know about that?" or "Sure, I think so, too," when she saw a house which she immediately selected as a home for the future Mrs. Ealy. As they walked on she planned the furnishings, from curtains to coal-buckets. There was a garage. Of course they would have a car with some class to it. Such stuff are dreams made of!

One morning when Mr. Ealy had been gone four weeks and three days and it was whispered in Cloaks and Suits that he ought to be back any time now, and Hazel had just completed a sale to a fussy fat woman, who took a coat, size 48, because the sight of Hazel parading up and down in size 38 —yes, she was down to that!—was more than she could resist, and it was eleven forty-five and nearly time to knock off for lunch, Hazel heard a familiar voice with a note of joy in it say, "Well, look who's here!"

She turned quickly, unleashing her dimples and blushed at the same time—how they do it is a mystery to me. "Oh, Mr. Ealy!" she cried.

"Gee, it's good to get back." He was

grinning almost foolishly and pumping her hand up and down at a great rate.

"D'you notice that I've changed any?" she asked breathlessly.

"Why, I don't know—" he began. "Oh, yes; why, sure. You got thinner." He cast a professional eye over her figure. "Why, you're down to a perfect 38. Most any of the new models will look swell on you. You must 'a' been pining away while I was gone, or else eating at the employees' cafeteria."

His infectious smile was answered by Hazel's giggle.

"You got back in time," she remarked with a knowing little smile. Thank Heaven, she had got the orchid satin fixed over and taken in at the waist.

Mr. Ealy seized her elbow quickly. "Come along, I want to show you something." He led her down the incline to the wash-goods section, where they came upon Miss Corey. The amplitudinous buyer of Bon Ton millinery, all dressed up in a new Hudson seal coat with a hat to match, was critically examining a gingham house-dress on a dummy. She looked up, smiling all over her big fat face.

"Miss Hopkins," said the head of Cloaks and Suits, "let me make you acquainted with Mrs. Ealy. We were married in New York last Saturday."

Hazel never remembered what she said to the happy pair. Evidently the news had got around, for right away the entire sales force of Cloaks and Suits closed in about them. In the midst of congratulation, explanations and general excitement, she suddenly became conscious of a well-defined pang. Although it lacked five minutes of noon, she went away from there.

III.

Across the table in a secluded corner of Blanc's, where all the corners are secluded, Hazel smiled and dimpled at the young man in Crockery. Up to now she had devoted herself with great singleness of purpose to the important matter of eating. Bearing mute testimony to her success lay an array of empty dishes. Here a platter, that had been heaped with little pig sausages and cream gravy, stood as white as a rain-washed bone; there a crummy plate told a tale of butterhorns that had gone the way of all flesh; and scattered about were little dishes that had held corn soufflé, creamed asparagus and other trifles.

"Go as far as you like," the young man in Crockery had said delightedly. "Yesterday was pay-day and it sure is a pleasure to see you eat."

When the waiter brought a bowl of lobster-salad with a double portion of mayonnaise, Hazel's eyes took on a softer expression than they had worn in many a day. "I oughtn't to let you spend your money on me like this," she whispered sweetly as she reached for the sugar to augment the richness of her cream-topped chocolate.

The young man in Crockery caught her hand on the sugar-bowl and held it. "Aw, I'd rather spend money on you than anything. We can save later on. How about some good old French pastry for dessert?"

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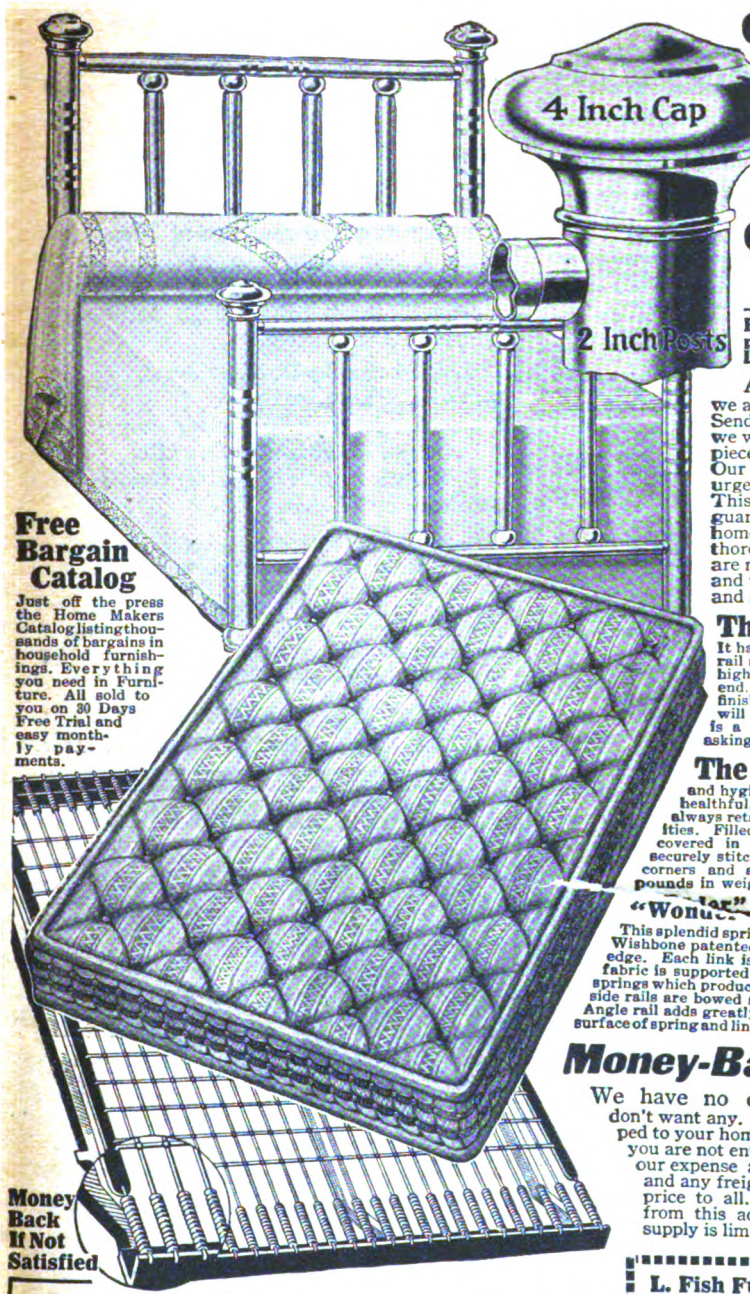
WHEN?

IF fortune, with a smiling face,
Strews roses on your way,
When shall we stoop to pick them up?
To-day, my friend, to-day!

But should we frown, with face of care,
And talk of coming sorrow,
When shall we grieve, if grieve we must?
To-morrow, friend, to-morrow!



Only $1.00 DOWN

Complete Brass Bed Outfit

—a handsome 2-inch Post Satin Finished Brass Bed—45 lb. Imperial Roll Edge Mattress and a Link Fabric Spring.

An astounding offer which we are making for only a limited time. Send only $1.00 with the coupon and we will ship you this complete three-piece brass bed outfit immediately. Our supply is limited, therefore we urge you to send in the coupon today. This complete outfit is absolutely guaranteed. Order it shipped to your home today. Examine the outfit thoroughly. If at the end of 30 days you are not entirely satisfied, return it to us and we will at once refund your dollar and any freight charges you have paid.

The Bed is one of the handsomest designs we have ever seen. It has 2 inch posts, 4 inch caps, 1 inch top rail and ⅝ inch fillers. Bed stands 55 inches high at head end and 36 inches high at foot end. Beautifully ribbon banded and satin finished. Guaranteed acid-proof lacquer, will not tarnish or wear off. The bed alone is a wonderful value at the price we are asking for entire outfit. Full size: 4 ft. 6 in.

The Mattress is wonderfully comfortable, sanitary and hygienic. It is a mattress that will insure healthful, restful and refreshing sleep and will always retain its shape and comfort giving qualities. Filled with natural white cotton linters—covered in a superior grade of floral art ticking, securely stitched and deeply tufted. Has round corners and an **Imperial Roll Edge.** Full 45 pounds in weight.

"Wonder" Link Fabric Bed Spring

This splendid spring is constructed of heavy [illegible] Wishbone patented steel link fabric, with a ⅝-inch strap edge. Each link is securely locked and interjoined. The fabric is supported at each end by 29 oil-tempered helical springs which produces a very resilient effect. The angle iron side rails are bowed so as to give spring a 4-inch elevation. Angle rail adds greatly to its strength and durability. Entire surface of spring and link fabric top, is enameled in French gray.

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Mail them to us today. Have this complete brass bed outfit shipped to you on 30 days' free trial. Pay the balance in the easy monthly payments if you are satisfied. We will send our big bargain catalog listing thousands of amazing household bargains. Any of them will be sold to you for only a small first payment and the balance in easy monthly payments. Read the coupon and mail it TODAY!

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L. Fish Furniture Co., Dept. 1457 Chicago

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☐ **No. A180—$1.00 down, $3.50 per month. Complete price, $37.85**

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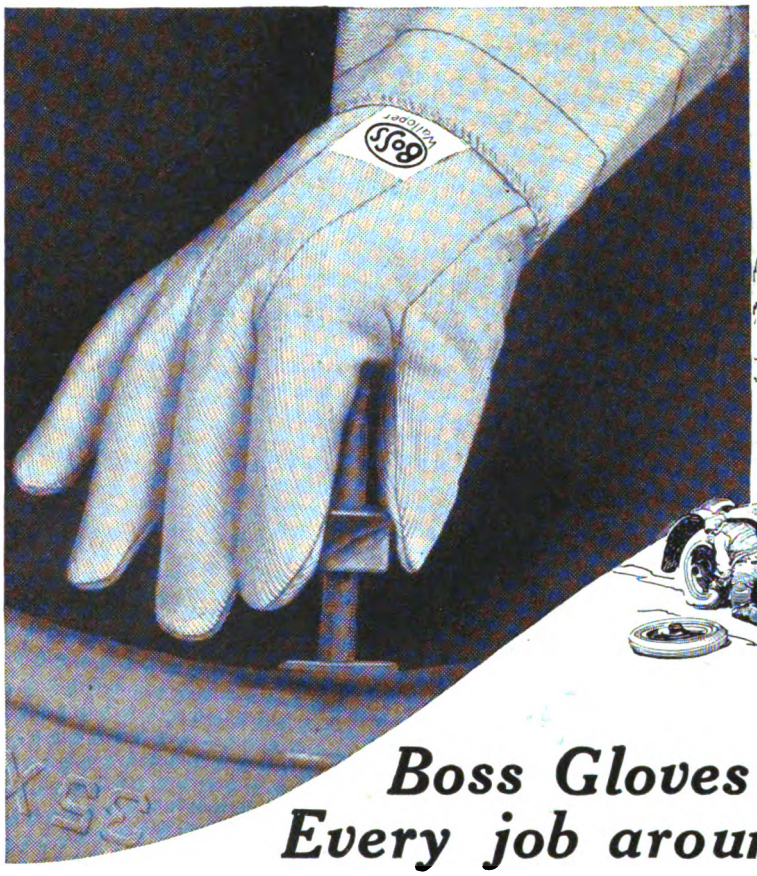

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FOR the inevitable puncture—pull on a pair of gauntlet style Boss Work Gloves and keep hands and shirt-cuffs clean.

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Boss Gloves are made tough for rugged work and long wear. Yet they are so flexible that you can wear them for all delicate jobs.

Made of the finest quality white canton flannel in men's, women's, boys' and girls' sizes. Ribbed, band and gauntlet wrists. At any accessory dealer's.

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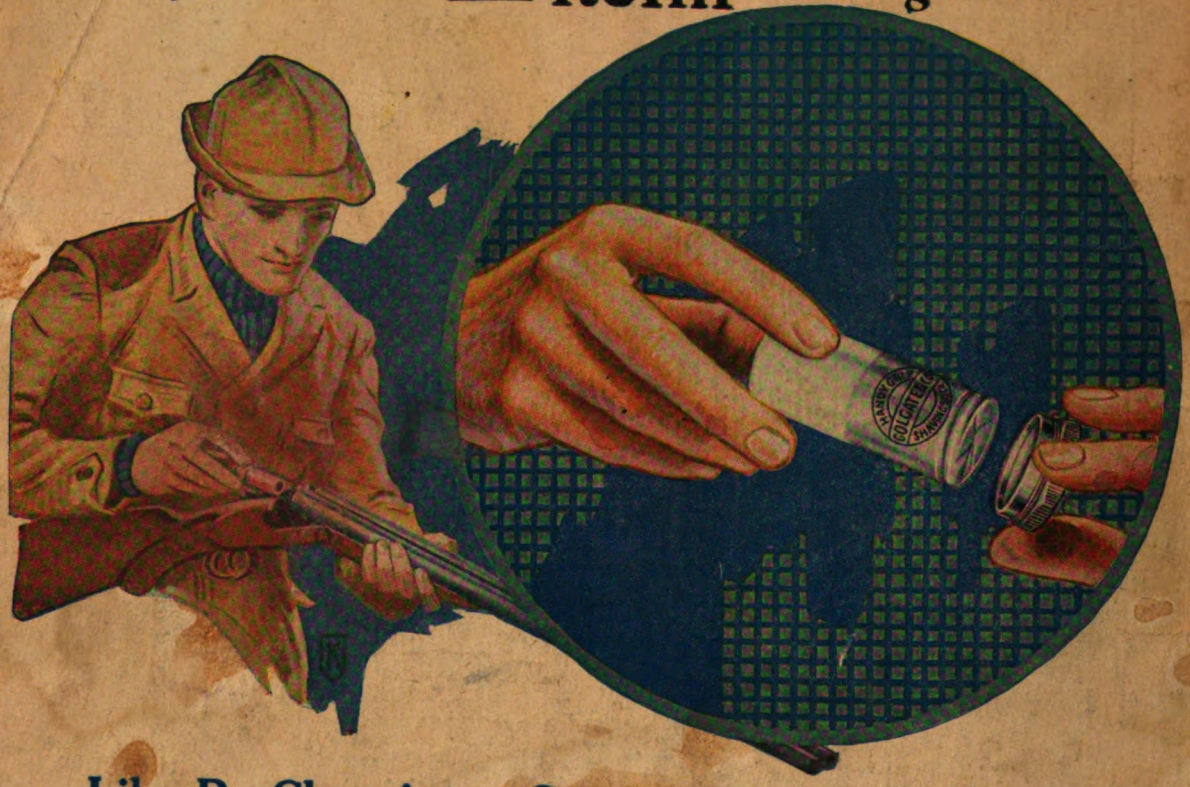
BOSS WORK GLOVES

COLGATE'S

"HANDY GRIP"
REG. U.S. PAT. OFF.

The Refill Shaving Stick



Like Re-Charging a Gun

PUTTING a Colgate "Refill" Shaving Stick into the "Handy Grip" is as simple as slipping a cartridge into a gun.

The metal "Handy Grip" and Container last for years. When you need "Refills" buy them for the price of the soap alone. The soap itself is threaded to screw into the "Handy Grip," and the small stub removed from the socket can be moistened and stuck upon the end of the "Refill." *There is no waste.*

We took the rub out of shaving *originally* in 1903.

Colgate's Shaving Stick not only produces the most soothing lather for the average man but it is a little more economical in use than powder, and much more economical than cream. As we make all three, we can give you this impartial advice.

The metal "Handy Grip," containing a trial size stick of Colgate's Shaving Soap, will be sent for 10c. When the trial stick is used up you can buy the Colgate "Refills," threaded to fit this Grip. Thus you save 10c on each "Refill" you buy. There are 350 shaves in a Colgate Shaving Stick—double the number you can get from a tube of cream at the same price.

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