ARGOSY ALL-STORY WEEKLY

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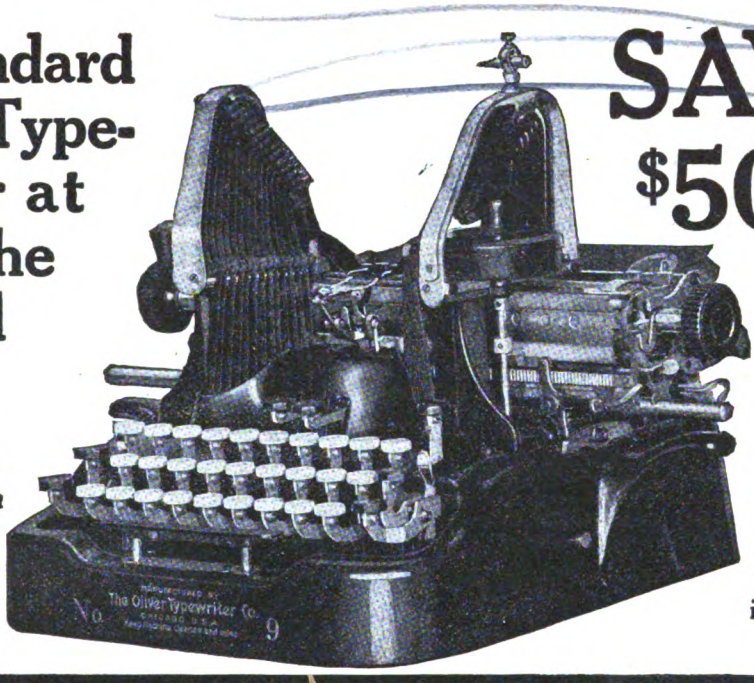

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ARGOSY-ALLSTORY WEEKLY

VOL. CXXXVIII CONTENTS FOR NOVEMBER 19, 1921 NUMBER 4

FIVE CONTINUED STORIES

NOVELETTE

SEVEN SHORT STORIES

THEY called him Frenchy because he could savvy "Dago," but he was really a Virginian. He was afflicted with

"GIPSY HEELS"

and that's what his biographer, George Noble, has called the story that starts Next Week. Both Frenchy and George Noble are tall-water sailormen, of a breed that is dying now that "tin tea-kettles" sail the seven seas. If you like adventure, and the sea, and sailors, and the multi-colored ports of the world, don't miss the first instalment next week.

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How this test beautifies the teeth?

Millions of people have accepted this offer—have made this ten-day test. They have found a way to whiter, cleaner, safer teeth.

We urge you to do likewise. Watch how your teeth improve. Learn what this new method means to you and yours.

Remove the film

Teeth are tarnished by a film. By that viscous film you feel. It clings to teeth, gets between the teeth and stays. Old ways of brushing do not end it.

Film absorbs stains, making the teeth look dingy. It mars the beauty of millions. But it also is the cause of most tooth troubles.

Film is the basis of tartar. It holds food substance which ferments and forms acid. It holds the acid in contact with the teeth to cause decay.

It forms a breeding place for germs. They, with tartar, are the chief cause of pyorrhea. Very few people who brush teeth daily escape these film-caused troubles.

How to fight it

Dental science, after long research, has found ways to fight that film. Authorities have amply proved those methods. Leading dentists everywhere now advise their daily use.

They are embodied in a dentifrice called Pepsodent. And other most important factors are included with them.

New protections

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It stimulates the salivary flow — Nature's great tooth-protecting agent. It multiplies the starch digestant in the saliva, to digest starch deposits that cling. It multiplies the alkalinity of the saliva, to neutralize the acids which cause tooth decay.

Twice a day, Pepsodent is bringing millions these much-desired effects.

The test is free

Simply mail the coupon for a 10-Day Tube. Note how clean the teeth feel after using. Mark the absence of the viscous film. See how teeth whiten as the film-coats disappear. Watch the other good effects.

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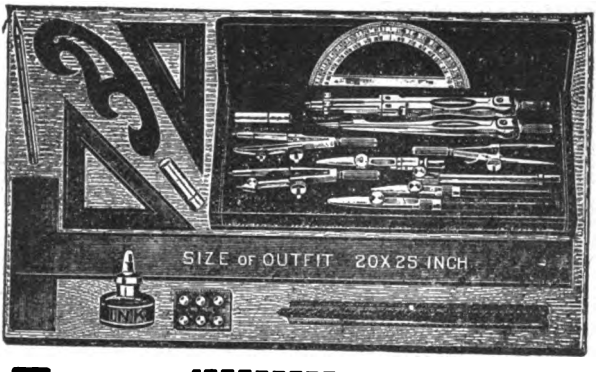

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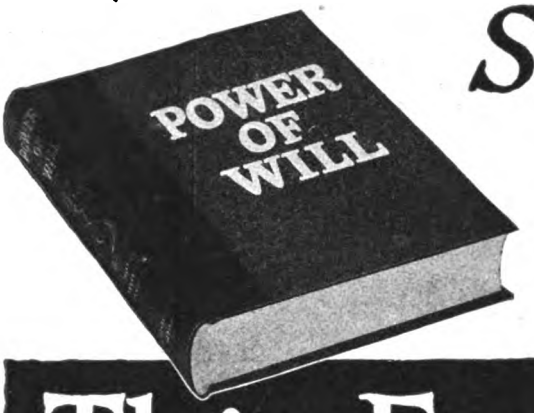

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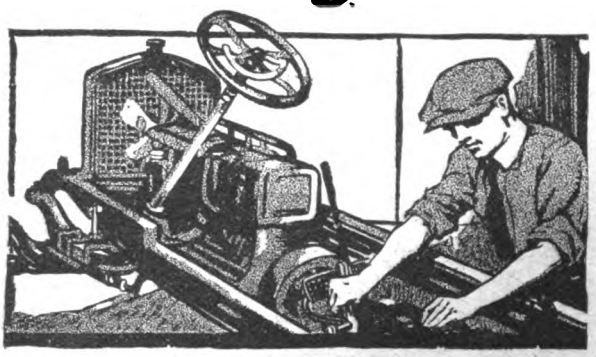

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ARGOSY-ALLSTORY
WEEKLY

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Stay Home

Part I

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CHAPTER I.

TROUBLE IN THE FAMILY.

"YOU going to mope up here alone all evening?" Millicent thrust the auburn glory of her coiffure around the edge of the door.

Although she was merely the lean daughter of his plump landlady, and this thing of having her stick her head into his room whenever the door happened to be ajar was an every-day occurrence, James Berry jumped at the sound of her voice and even dropped the cigarette he was smoking.

"I—eh? What?" he said jerkily. "I'm not moping."

"We thought maybe you'd like to come down-stairs and take a hand of five hundred, Mr. Berry?"

"I would, but—I can't, you see. Not to-night. I'm going out presently."

"Oh, you just don't want to!" Millicent pouted, for even at thirty-three and with freckles that had defied every lotion on the market, she could never quite rid herself of the idea that she was rather piquant and possessed of a certain power over the young male.

Now, ordinarily James would have responded in a light, gay vein, softening the blow of his refusal with a merry quip or two, because he was a kindly soul and had suffered through many a long evening of cards in the parlor of that high-class boarding-house rather than risk hurting any one's feelings. But to-night there was not even a hint of his chaffing smile; indeed, for one startling instant, he seemed actually about to bare his teeth savagely in Millicent's direction and to bark at her. He controlled that impulse, however, and said briefly:

"I'd like to, of course, but I can't to-night. I have an—an appointment."

Quite seductively Millicent tilted her head to one side.

"Well, until it's time for you to leave for your appointment you might—"

"It's time now; I'm supposed to be there at eight!" James snapped.

At last the strangeness of him had reached Millicent. She ceased her pouting and her wheedling and grew suddenly concerned.

"Oh, you're nervous, aren't you?" she cried.

"Huh? Yes—possibly," James grunted.

"Trouble, Mr. Berry?" Millicent asked ever so sympathetically.

One scowling instant James had dropped back into the depths of perturbing thought; now he swirled back to the surface, staring at the lady.

"What d'ye mean — trouble? Who the—" he rasped, and then caught himself. "I—beg your pardon, of course. I didn't mean to shout like that. I—no, I'm not in any trouble, thanks."

"You are, though," Millicent insisted. "I can see that, and—oh, dear, I wish I could help?"

"Yes, I wish to Heaven you could, but you can't!" James exploded. And thereafter he looked Millicent in the eye steadily, almost weirdly. "Is there—ah—anything else that I can do for you this evening?" he inquired sweetly.

The lady, rebuffed, dropped her lids and backed the single pace that took her into the corridor once more.

"No," she said very gently. "Excuse my—my intrusion, Mr. Berry. I didn't know."

A final second or two she hesitated, plainly in the hope that James would recall her and bare his obviously surging soul for comfort. James merely mustered a smile and, breathing heavily, waited for her to go; and the door closed, and he threw up his hands and resumed his promenade up and down the big, comfortable room,

Well, at least he was alone again. He had wounded the poor soul, very likely. Later on he'd have to do something or other to atone. Perhaps. Flowers—candy —some sort of junk. He couldn't say what just now. Indeed, in his present mental turmoil, he did not care one small, particularly condemned hoot. James stopped and glowered viciously at the closed door, then laughed harshly and lit another cigarette.

Nervous! Well, he was nervous, fast enough! Any man has plenty of license to be nervous when his partner, his lifelong friend, has gone raving crazy and accused him of— Yes, that was what Howard had done! He'd gone stark, staring mad. There could be no other answer. Howard, of all people, seriously as he took himself, jealous as he was by nature and all that— James fetched up before the mirror and stared at his reflection.

What in the name of all the gods was there about him to smash Howard's trust? How had he changed? To himself at least he looked just the same, and he certainly didn't look like *that* sort of creature. James gazed steadily. No, he didn't look like that sort of creature at all; he was merely the same rather slight young man of twenty-six, perfectly dressed, rather handsome in his mild way, frank and clear of eye, intelligent of nose and forehead. He was, in fine, exactly the same person that he had been before Howard Dawson blew up this afternoon!

What, then, save insanity, had caused Howard Dawson to blow up?

Nothing in the business affairs of Dawson & Berry, surely. Their dandy little factory here in Wallington, their little New York office—both were functioning perfectly as usual. Not a question or an argument of any sort had come up in many weeks.

And yet, just before five, Howard had stormed into the office, had called his old friend virtually every fighting name in the language, had promised to drag him through the divorce court as corespondent, had hinted frenziedly at other punishments and reprisals which would later on fall to James's astounded lot, and which seemed to run from mere shooting to burning at the stake—and then had fiercely stormed out again!

Since then? Why, a small lifetime seemed to have passed since then. James had called up Howard's home and asked rather feverishly to hold speech with Dorothy, Howard's dainty bride of just a year; and from a maid who gurgled grief he had learned that Dorothy Dawson had returned to the home of her parents, on

Pindar Street. And telephoning there, another maid had informed him that little Mrs. Dawson's parents were out of town until to-morrow, and that Mrs. Dawson herself flatly refused to converse with any one. Just before six o'clock, old Judge Starr, their attorney, had called up James at the office; and in his usual brief way had ordered him to report at the Starr residence at eight sharp, there to participate in a conference of "all parties interested" and see if "something couldn't be done to keep it all out of court."

And that was really all James knew about the trouble between the erstwhile affectionate pair, his own very best friends. Where in Heaven's name he could have been dragged in passed him altogether, but— James started again, because the clock was striking eight.

His eye turned rather wild. Whatever it was, he would have to go and face it now; and James dearly loved peace and violently detested dissension. He found his hat, groaned, gazed at the ceiling for a moment before switching off the lights, and tried to tell himself that everything was quite all right; that overwork had kinked Howard's mentality a little, and that before now the good old judge had calmed him down. Yes, that was it—overwork! He'd been fussing too much about that contemplated South American branch of Dawson & Berry, or something. James switched off the lights with another groan.

Soothing and placating the judge might be, but could James have drifted instantly into the judge's shabby sitting-room just then he would have found little that was reassuring in the external Howard Dawson, even after he had spent ten minutes in the judge's presence.

Howard sat in the big old horsehair armchair, his hands clasped in a white-knuckled fashion that denoted deep emotion repressed with difficulty. His eyes were two ferocious slits. He scowled blackly. And Howard was a large, rather heavy-featured young man, and when he scowled like that it seemed to mean something definitely unpleasant. The judge, on the other hand, was short and plump and elderly and benevolent, a person who had seen much and learned the priceless value of calm in all things. He blinked a little as Howard unclasped his hands suddenly and demanded:

"Say! Aren't they coming—either of them?"

"They'll be here in due time, Howard," the judge assured him placidly. "They both said they would—your wife and Jim Berry, both. You go on and tell me the rest about this South American branch establishment of yours. Down in the republic of Orinama, hey? City of San Palo?"

"What? Yes, of course."

"Pretty live town, ain't it?"

"Livest thing commercially on the whole darned continent!" Howard rapped out. "Going to have Rio and Buenos Aires backed off the map for business in another twenty years, they say—and I believe it."

"You'll—you'll put up your own building down there, I take it?" the judge rumbled on encouragingly.

"We've got track of a place we can rent for a while—heard of it through a big customer of ours down there—Gardez is his name—big man down that way, I believe. What we ought to have is a good-sized warehouse, too, of course. Cost too much, though. It 'd mean thirty-five or forty thousand dollars before—"

He stopped short. His savage glare should have blistered Judge Starr; but it was not the judge's fault that his entire countenance had vanished in the cavern of a gigantic yawn. The judge was always like that after dinner. His genial old face slowly returned to the normal; the judge blinked. He had lost the precise thread of the discourse, but he went on nobly with the task of keeping Howard's mind off his immediate troubles.

"Well, I dunno," remarked the judge. "I'm an old fogy, Howard, but it seems plumb foolish to me for you to run away off to South America to start up another branch of your business. Seems to me it might be better to stay home and—"

"Hah! Does it really?" Howard hurled at him. "You've got the 'stay home' idea, too, have you? Berry has it! It's as easy for Berry to consider expanding as it would be for you to grow a pair of

wings and fly out of that window. Stay home! Well, I'm not like that, thank Heaven! I'm for spreading out, and all this—"

He was on his feet, his hands thrown out. The judge gasped.

"Well—well, Howard—"

"Oh, it doesn't matter! Let's drop the subject. It doesn't matter!" the senior partner laughed terribly. "There'll never be any expansion, any South American branch of Dawson & Berry now! There'll be no Dawson & Berry this time to-morrow! I'll split the firm in the morning, judge! I'm done with that hound! I'd no more sit in the same office with him another hour than I'd live in the same house with my wife another hour!"

"But—but you may be wrong, Howard, and—"

"I'm not!" young Mr. Dawson shouted. "I know what I know, and I'll see it through. I'm started now, and the devil himself couldn't stop me! I'll divorce *her,* and then I'll rip the very flesh from *his* bones! They may hang me, but—"

"They're a sight more likely to come in here and arrest you for disorderly conduct. Stop that yelling!" the judge snorted testily. "You act like— Well, Mary?"

"Please, sir, it's Mrs. Dawson," his rather pale housekeeper faltered.

"'Tis, hey?" grunted the judge. "Show her in! And as for you, young man, you start yelling at *her,* and I'll bust a chair over your head! I've known Dotty Ankers since she was in her baby carriage, and I know mighty well she's just as good and sweet as she ever was, and— Good evening, Dorothy!"

He beamed upon the extremely pretty, fair, slender girl who had entered. He seemed about to say more, but the little tableau before him held him dumb.

Little Mrs. Dawson, pausing just inside the door, permitted her glorious blue eyes to sweep her husband, up and down and up again, with such a wealth of proud, icy contempt that he might well have reeled backward. He did not reel. His narrowed eyes narrowing further, Howard gritted his teeth and held himself only by the most tremendous effort; his hands worked, his nostrils dilated with fury; but he said nothing. Then, with the most infinitesimal sniff, Mrs. Dawson turned her back on him.

"Mr. Berry not here, judge?"

"He ought to be here any minute," the judge answered. "You—that is, Howard—well, it's probably better to let all rest till Jim shows up, I guess. Lord! Seems as if he might have managed to get here on time when— There's some one ringing!"

A low howl rattled in Howard Dawson's throat. The judge stared warningly at him.

James Berry entered.

He seemed even smaller than usual as his rather scared gaze rested on them. He nodded to Dorothy, who smiled with cold sweetness. He looked almost heartbrokenly at Howard; and the judge was clearing his throat energetically.

"Sooner we get down to brass tacks here, the sooner we'll have this fool mess settled!" he stated, plumping down behind his writing-table. "Now—lemme see! We're gathered together, so to speak, for the purpose of finding out—"

"Wait a minute!" young Mr. Dawson cried. "I'll state the case in fewer words than you can. I accuse—"

"You dry up!" snapped the judge. "*I'll* do the talking here for the present, and whatever the rest of you have to say you can say later on. Now just—just all be seated, will you? That's better. Now, the whole trouble here seems to be—you'll have to excuse plain speaking; I've known you all since you were kids—the trouble seems to be that Howard here suspects you, Dorothy, of carrying on a pretty violent flirtation with Jim Berry this last week or so."

Mrs. Dawson's really exquisite lips curled; she inspected her husband once again, and found him even more distasteful. James leaned forward.

"Judge, before you begin, let me say just one thing," he said miserably. "I don't know what he's talking about, and I know Dot doesn't either. He—"

"Here! Here! You can't get away with that stuff!" young Mr. Dawson broke in sneeringly. "Your team work's bad! *She* chose to brazen it out, Berry! She looked

me in the eye and informed me that it was no concern of mine and told me to think what I liked! Hah!"

"But—" James began limply.

Little Mrs. Dawson, having faced her husband, chin up, laughed bitterly and enigmatically, and, turning then to James, dimpled sweetly.

"I refused to explain," she said. "I shall refuse to explain to my dying day. I refuse to let you offer one word of explanation, Jim!"

"Well, it don't seem a wise stand to take, somehow," the judge grunted impatiently, "but let's get on with this thing and see if we can't straighten it out. James, the specific thing that's worrying Howard and causing him to entertain a lot of unwarranted presumptions is that he's been informed that you and Dotty have been meeting secretly in out-of-the-way spots, this last ten days or so; and the folks that saw you and told Howard about it said that you both looked pretty animated and interested in one another. They usually do say something like that. Now, lemme see; Monday, Howard alleges, you met by the ball park and took a long walk in the country, returning late. Wednesday, according to these notes I made of his talk this afternoon, Dotty picked you up in her car, Jim, and you went off in the country again. Last Saturday morning, he says, you met kinder sudden, down near the Second National Building, and sneaked off quick—somewhere or other. And yesterday—Monday, that is—you met again and—"

He paused to gaze at James over his glasses. A most remarkable change had taken place in the junior partner's expression. The worried lines were vanishing, the clouded eyes clearing.

"Is *that* what ails him?" he cried. "Why—"

"Jim!" Mrs. Dawson cried sharply and flushed a little. "You promised me that—that if he were to be told, *I* should tell him!"

Howard snarled aloud. James stared a little.

"Eh? Yes, that's true; I did!"

"He will *never* know!" Dorothy stated evenly and faced the old gentleman with a whimsical smile. "Go on, Judge Starr, if you think there's any use in going on."

The judge ceased frowning, ceased scratching his head with the penholder, and grunted.

"H-m—there's evidently more here than I know about myself," he muttered. "However, summing up the case, it appears that this afternoon Howard asked Dotty for an explanation of the matter, and—"

"Oh, no, he didn't! He didn't *ask* anything!" Mrs. Dawson interrupted crisply. "He came raging into the house like a madman; he bellowed some sort of gossip that some women down-town had been telling him; he—he *swore!*"

"Well, there was trouble, anyway," the judge sighed patiently, "and afterward you went to your mama's, Dotty, and Howard came down here, expecting to get a divorce before night. So, having known all of you all your lives, and your mamas and papas before you, I got you together to see if we couldn't set things right without any fool court business. And I still think we can. Now, lemme see. Dotty, it looks to me as if you'd ought to just speak up frank and tell your side of the story and what it's all about. Hey?"

"I have nothing to say!" Dorothy remarked frigidly.

"Oh, but look here, Dot!" James put in. "If you just—"

"I have absolutely nothing to say. And I have your promise to say nothing—whatever a man's promise may be worth."

"Well, a promise is a promise with this man, Dot," James sighed grimly.

There was an uncomfortable little pause of fifteen seconds. Dorothy yawned.

"May I go home now?" she asked languidly. "Mother's chauffeur's waiting for me, and it's rather damp out to-night."

Her chin elevated more than ever, she considered her husband as one might have considered a very small, very loathsome worm—yet it must be said for Howard that he was a good deal calmer now. He cleared his throat and brought his voice down to a normal pitch.

"You realize that this—this means the breaking up of our home?" he asked.

"Ah? It wasn't much of a home, with as little trust as that in it, was it?" Dorothy murmured.

"It always was an ideal home until this —this happened," Howard said with some difficulty. "Dorothy, if you wish to confess frankly and freely—"

"If I wish to do *what?*"

"Well, explain, then," young Mr. Dawson amended grudgingly. "I'm prepared to forgive a good deal."

"Sweet of you, really," Dorothy murmured contemptuously. "I have nothing to say."

James, who had been summoning his forces this last minute, stepped forward.

"Dorothy, that stand's all wrong," he said earnestly. "I can believe that you're sore at him and all that, because Howard's a loose talker when he gets mad. But just to say nothing in this case is worse than absurd and—"

"Jimmy, if you had heard the things Mr. Dawson dared to say to me this afternoon you would know that there's nothing 'absurd' about it!" Dorothy snapped. "I have *nothing* to say!"

Lips curling, she studied her husband again. Howard turned rigid.

"This is the end, judge," he said.

"It looks to me more like the beginning—of a rotten mess!" the judge sighed.

"I have grounds for a divorce in this State?"

"Not on the evidence, Howard. Get a court to grant you some sort of separation, I suppose, if you're all going to leave things as they are."

"Make it a separation, then. I leave the details to you," young Mr. Dawson said, and picked up his hat. "Berry! Our business connection is ended, of course. I'll buy out your interest in the firm, or you may buy out mine, if you can and wish to do that. Think it over and have your attorney communicate with me in the morning. I decline to deal with you personally, of course. Good night."

He was going! It may not have astonished the two gentlemen, but it certainly seemed to astonish Howard's bride. Her eyes dilated as she viewed his broad, receding back; visibly, her cold and cynical amusement evaporated. In simple truth, there was one little item which Dorothy had altogether overlooked: she remained just as madly in love as ever with her large, brutal husband! That sort of thing frequently pops in to complicate a situation. Dorothy, bosom heaving suddenly, stared after Howard.

And he really *was* going! He had marched to the door; his hand was on the knob.

And suddenly a flood of angry tears burst from little Mrs. Dawson and her voice came shrilly:

"Howard! You come back!"

"What?" young Mr. Dawson barked.

"Yes, come back! I—I'm going to confess!" sobbed the bride.

CHAPTER II.

THE GHASTLY TRUTH.

HOWARD'S hand slid from the knob. He turned back, scowling, and hesitated. Little Mrs. Dawson was convulsed with grief of the most genuine sort; there could be no question at all of this. Her shoulders shook, her lovely face was in her hands, her choking gasps filled the room! And now she was fumbling around for a handkerchief; now, having found it, her great eyes flashed at Howard Dawson, hurling at him outraged love and accusation and a variety of other things. Howard shuddered. When she looked at him like that he was as jelly—for it chanced that Howard was just as enamored as ever of his bride.

James Berry was grinning frankly. Howard glared at him and clenched his fists. There, in that dapper little rat, one saw the hardened Don Juan brought to the *n*th power! Not enough was it that he had sought to disrupt a happy home, not enough that his luckless, doubtless almost innocent victim was sobbing out her heart before his eyes; James Berry, the human hyena, must needs grin at his sickening work! A dreadful sound rumbled in Howard's chest; James merely grinned more broadly and the sound gathered volume—and just there the good judge bustled between them with:

"I wouldn't bother to get het up again just now if I was you, Howard. It looks to me as if we were going to get at the truth in another couple of minutes. Now just let's all control ourselves and do it in proper, peaceful shape. You better sit down again, everybody. That door closed? All right. You—you want to talk now, Dotty?"

Mrs. Dawson shook her head.

"Let—Jimmy tell—about it!" she contrived.

She nodded at James and retired behind her handkerchief again. The judge hurried back to his table and dipped his pen, for in cases of this character it is well to have a few lucid notes for future reference. James Berry turned his mild gaze rather quizzically upon his partner; one might almost have fancied that the gaze contained a hint of evil satisfaction.

"You want to know what is behind all this?" he said.

"I'm waiting to hear!" Howard snapped.

"Well, it was nothing—nothing under the blue sky!—but that confounded South American warehouse!"

"What?"

"Yes, Dorothy was planning the big surprise for you, you bonehead!" the junior partner said informally. "She was buying it for the firm!"

"She was—what was she doing?" Howard gasped.

"She was trying to please you, because she knew your heart was set on the beastly thing—and you've broken her own heart because she tried! She took the forty thousand dollars she inherited from her Aunt Jennie last year and turned the securities into cold cash; that's what we've been conferring about in secret, as it happens. You weren't to know a word about it until the day before you sailed for San Palo, next week. Then she was going to spring it—and you could go down and open up with all the style and all the flourishes you liked. Her own little fortune, invested in gilt-edged securities," James said distinctly. "And she's risking it on your South American hunch. Get it?"

For the moment, apparently, Howard did not get it at all. He sat with heavy jaw sagging and the most complete confusion in his eye. The judge frowned.

"Well—say! See here! I don't want to give unasked advice, but blamed if I think that's wise. That money was all invested in the finest kind of paper!"

"Of course it was wise!" little Mrs. Dawson flashed at him. "Don't you suppose Howard knows best about the business? I—I don't understand myself why it's necessary to have a warehouse down there at first, but if Howard says it is, it is! He's always right about the business; and they couldn't afford it now—the firm, I mean—and capital's hard to get, and that money was only drawing seven or eight per cent and—it *was* wise!"

"Um—ah—yes, doubtless," the judge said mildly. "Only I wish you young folks had sort of talked it over with me before you did it."

"Yes, and if we had, the chances are you'd have told Howard, directly or indirectly," Dorothy said impatiently. "That's why we even had an outside lawyer attend to the details—Jack Foster, you know. That's what took us down to the Second National Building on Saturday."

"All the same, forty thousand dollars ain't growing on every bush these days," the judge insisted doggedly. "For a foreign stunt like that, anyway."

He ended with a shrug. James sighed and smiled.

"Well, maybe Howard's the only one of us who sees the necessity for starting up in South America, but likely enough he's right. Personally, I'd prefer to stay home with the business—then again, we do export a lot of stuff down there and we'll probably export more when we're on the ground. Anyhow, Dorothy's twenty-one and boss of her own affairs and—hey!" he snapped at his partner directly. "Aren't you *ever* coming around enough to tell Dot how much of an ass you think you are?"

"This is—is *all*—absolutely all you two have been running around together for?" Howard Dawson said thickly.

"No, you poor nut, we were planning to elope as well!" James snapped. "As soon as Dot had bankrupted herself to please you, we meant to leave for Honolulu and—"

Howard had turned from him. Howard was looking at his bride—and his bride, incidentally, was looking at Howard; and after perhaps two seconds Howard's lately somersaulting brain settled into place with a heavy thud and its owner left his chair hurriedly and, rushing across the sitting-room, dropped on his knees beside almost the prettiest young woman in Wallington's twenty thousand population.

"Dolly—dolly, dear!" he gasped brokenly. "I—oh, my Lord! I know you can't forgive me, but will you—will you try to forgive me? I'm an—infernal idiot, Dot—I'm the biggest jackass that ever lived and I ought to have my tongue cut out for the things I said to you this afternoon. But I love you so, Dot, that just the hint that you—you might ever care for somebody else—"

"S-sh!" said little Mrs. Dawson very unsteadily, and slipped an arm about his neck.

Her husband clutched her feverishly to him. As concerned Howard, the judge and James Berry had passed out of existence and he and his bride were essentially in the middle of a desert.

"Dolly, darling, you did all that for me and I—I bawled at you and accused you of everything under the sun! I don't deserve you, Dot! I never did deserve you! I ought to be taken and—and—"

"Drawn and quartered!" James supplied happily, for he dearly loved to see the end of a row. "Let it go at that, old man. I guess she forgives you."

It was entirely evident that she did. Witnesses notwithstanding, Howard had insisted upon kissing his bride at just this point and his bride was offering no resistance at all. They murmured softly for some seconds, during which the judge still scratched dubiously at his head with the penholder; and then, with a wrench, Howard rose to his feet and turned toward his partner and old friend, James Berry. The tiniest space of time, Howard hesitated visibly. His mentality was not of the sort that whisks, humming-bird fashion, in lightning flashes from thought to thought. Definite impressions reached it slowly; but once imbedded they sank deep—and however false subsequent events might prove the impressions, scars had a great habit of remaining. Not ten minutes ago Howard had been planning to sprinkle James's whole future with an assortment of painful disasters!

But the hesitation vanished and Howard's hand went out.

"Jim, old man, I beg your pardon," he said.

"Forget about it!" James laughed and wrung the hand. "I guess a good part of the blame was ours, sneaking around like that."

"No, it was my fault for going up in the air just because a couple of old hens made me listen to 'em," Howard said with almost conscious nobility. "But Dot's so much to me that—well, it's all over now, anyway."

"And the firm still goes on existing, does it?"

"You bet it does, Jimmy!" Howard laughed and unbent altogether. "For a while there, I—gosh! I was mad!"

"Yes, we all assumed you weren't putting it on," James said dryly as he dropped the hand and looked around. "Well? Is the meeting adjourned?"

"I take it the session's over," the judge chuckled, "and ending pretty satisfactory for you, Jim, seeing that Howard here hasn't brained you. That's what it is to be one of these gay bachelors, though, I s'pose—always heading into some sort of mess!"

He chuckled again. James glanced sharply at him and at the others and then smiled suddenly and with wonderful brilliance!

"I say, I suppose you folks can keep a secret as well as most people? All right, then. I'll give the alibi another little touch that may astonish you a bit: I'm to be married myself pretty soon!"

"Jimmy!" Dorothy squealed delightedly. "*Who?*"

"Well, we have to keep it dark for the present. Her guardian has a sort of grip on her matrimonial plans till she's of age—and that's too long to wait. That is, he can put the grand kibosh on the matrimonial stuff if he can make any valid objection to the chap she picks. It—it's Betty Carson!"

"Betty!" cried Dorothy, and shook him by the right hand, while Howard shook him by the left and the judge patted his shoulder.

"So that's why I asked if the meeting was over," James suggested. "I had some idea of running around there for a few minutes if we finished early enough."

Mrs. Dawson was looking at him in a steady, significant fashion he could not at all fathom. Now, abruptly, she turned to her husband with:

"Howard, dear, you run out and tell the chauffeur that I'm walking home—to *our* home—with you! Will you?"

Howard hurried off. Mrs. Dawson, with what impressed James as remarkable speed, smiled at the judge.

"I wonder if I might have a glass of water before we go?"

"You can have all the water we got in the house and maybe a little chunk of ice thrown in, child," the judge responded, and waddled away through the door at the left.

And now, in downright melodramatic fashion, Mrs. Dawson had darted to James's side and was whispering:

"It worked, thank fortune! Jimmy, what did you do with those fool notes?"

"What—what notes?"

"The three or four I wrote you, making those appointments, of course," Mrs. Dawson said impatiently. "You destroyed them?"

"No, I didn't, Dot. They're in a pigeonhole, I believe, in my desk down at the office."

"Well, tear them up the very first thing in the morning, *please!* Get there before Howard and tear them up!"

"I'll do that, of course," James smiled. "But I wouldn't worry about them, Dot. There is nothing in them that couldn't quite properly pass between two people who have known each other since they were born."

"I know there's not, but there isn't any telling how Howard would construe them, if he happened on them in his present state of mind," Mrs. Dawson said with a nervous little shudder. "I was feeling terribly happy and exuberant when I wrote those things, you know. I think I began one of them, 'Jimmy, boy,' or something of the kind, and another—oh, please be sure to tear them up."

Her scared eyes shot toward the door for an instant.

"*He* might think they mean—anything, you know!" She shivered. "I never even suspected that Howard *could* think and feel and say things like that."

"As a matter of fact, Dorothy, neither did I!" James muttered gravely. "I—"

"S-sh!" breathed the bride, and turned to the approaching judge with what was doubtless an excellent simulation of the eagerness felt by a lady about to perish for want of water.

Howard was returning, too. One could almost read his thoughts as he paused in the doorway. When Howard had left the room the whole width of the apartment had separated James and Dorothy; now, for no plain reason, they were standing not a foot apart—and Howard forced unworthy suspicion from his brain, advanced, and they shook hands with the judge and thanked him for his kindly offices, and there was a great peace upon that little company, so lately torn by grizly emotions.

At the gate both Dorothy and Howard shook hands with James again; then, since their way lay north along Prescott Avenue and James's lay south, they parted.

Dorothy's little hand was slipped through her husband's arm. She snuggled close to him and Howard purred over her for that first block. All reconciled, they were on their way back to the little home which had been wrecked at four that afternoon.

"Isn't it lovely about Betty and Jim?" Dorothy murmured.

"Um—yes. Mighty nice girl!"

"Isn't Jim a nice fellow, too?" Dorothy laughed.

"*You* think so, eh?"

"Well? Don't you?"

Howard said nothing at all. Mrs. Dawson glanced up at him.

"Howard, honestly, you're not really jealous of Jim?"

"Jealous of that rat!" young Mr. Dawson snapped. "I should say not!"

Gently the hand slipped from his arm.

"Then please don't be absurd—and *please* don't growl at me like that!"

"Don't fret about me! There's nothing absurd about me!"

This initial conversation of their new life was not beginning happily at all. Little Mrs. Dawson stared very soberly down the dark street ahead as they walked. Of course he was still annoyed; Howard went into rages slowly and came out of them slowly and probably some vague prejudice against Jim would cling to him for a day or two. But it did seem as if, with the facts in hand, he might have had a word of commendation for the bride who had contributed her all to the firm! The little hand slipped under his arm again.

"Dear, we's partners now — business partners, I mean."

"Yes," Howard said unenthusiastically.

"Aren't you glad?"

"I'm not crazy about the idea. I don't like the way you handled it, Dot. You should have come directly to me."

"But it was meant to be a great big surprise for you!" said Dorothy, and her lips trembled.

"It was!" the senior partner responded grimly; but a complacent little note crept into his voice as he murmured, "Er—Jim did approve the idea after all, eh? I had a notion that, away down at the bottom, he was pretty strong for that San Palo warehouse himself!"

"Oh, but he didn't!" Mrs. Dawson said unguardedly. "He advised against it!"

"*Really?*"

"Why, yes, he said he thought it was better to keep the business at home in the United States and so on, and that we didn't know what we'd be running into in South America and all that silliness and—"

"Well, just now, are you trying to defend him or trying to excuse him—or just what?" Howard asked with hot curiosity.

The hand came down from his arm with a sharp snatch. Also, Dorothy stiffened in a fashion that would have warned a gentleman less preoccupied than her husband. These many moons, perhaps, she had comported herself as if Howard were some sort of deity—but it just happened that her own spirit had not quite expired!

"I'm not trying to do either; I'm trying to be friends with you, and you choose to make yourself ridiculous!" she retorted with unexpected fire. "I'm not even asking you to thank me for doing my best to please you by furnishing capital you couldn't possibly raise anywhere else!"

"*What?*"

"It's the truth, isn't it?"

Young Mr. Dawson was keeping himself in hand with the utmost difficulty.

"Dorothy," he said sonorously, "when I want your money, I'll come to you and ask for it. When you wish to invest in the firm, you'll come to *me* and learn whether the firm needs any further capital! This business isn't infallible; we stand the same chance of going on the rocks as every other firm in the world. Everything else apart, I haven't the slightest idea of running the risk at some future date of having your parents and your uncles and aunts and cousins accusing me of swindling you out of your inheritance!" And he crashed stunningly to the point with, "I am very sorry, but the firm is forced to decline the capital you offer!"

"Oh, is it? Well, it isn't at all!" Mrs. Dawson said serenely. "It happens that Jimmy's the treasurer of the company, you know, and he sold me forty thousand dollars' worth of treasury stock at par, and it's down in my personal safe deposit box at the Second National Bank this very minute. So you may run along and get your warehouse whenever you're ready, Howard," she concluded in a drawl that might well have been considered grounds for murder. "The money is there!"

After that she hummed a pleasant little tune. Four distinct times Howard Dawson sought to speak, sought to frame words which would deal fittingly with this astonishing situation. On each occasion he met only direst failure. Flexible though the English language may be, it is adequate only to a certain point.

They covered the remaining two blocks in complete, terrible silence. Humming still, Mrs. Dawson led the way into the cozy little home, bade the waiting maid retire when she chose and shaded a bored yawn as she picked up a magazine. Mr. Dawson stood for one full minute and bit his lips; even now he was not quite con-

vinced of the impossibility of saying the things he felt; but after that minute, apparently, the conviction came to him.

Howard frowned mightily, found the evening paper, selected his favorite volume of Dickens, took six cigars from the box on the stand and without comment retired to the ground floor spare room, stalking majestically out of sight and closing the door with a lack of any slamming effect which was in itself eloquent. Although he had never tried it before during their married life, this, as Howard's mother had long ago confided to Dorothy, was a pet trick of Howard's when tremendously offended. Presumably, the august presence would not reappear until morning. For some seconds little Mrs. Dawson regarded the closed door with glittering eyes and quickened breath.

Eventually, though, she relaxed—and having begun to relax continued to wilt until she was no more than a miserable little huddle of girl in the big chair, chin down, eyes large and moist and gloomy.

After all, perhaps it was her fault—some of it. Perhaps she should have gone to Howard first, because he really was a very wise and wonderful business man; Jimmy was terribly energetic and efficient and all that, but without Howard the firm couldn't have lasted three months; this was part of Dorothy's religion.

And those gossipy women had driven him crazy! They were enough to drive any one crazy, if one chose to listen and to believe. And Howard's was no light, frivolous little nature to hear the honor of his home assailed and pass it off with a shrug; Howard was a very strong and terrible person, elemental, almost a caveman, if one liked; the sort of man who, in the prehistoric days, doubtless strewed the whole landscape with mangled corpses before quite feeling that a slur of this kind had been avenged according to the code! No, it really wasn't Howard's fault and she shouldn't have prodded him on the way home.

Only—who in the world could ever have thought that it was in Howard to say such things as he had said this afternoon? And to think such things! Whatever he said he was jealous of Jimmy Berry. Hereafter Jimmy, as it were, would be under the miscroscope for an indefinite period; and any little thing that Jimmy did which suggested the slightest intimacy with Mrs. Dawson—b-r-r-r! Dorothy shivered and then turned actually cold! Those ridiculous notes she had written to James—schoolgirly gush, which expressed the childlike happiness she had felt in aiding her husband, and which the said husband, if he ever found them, might possibly enough take to indicate a deeper friendship than he had ever suspected.

She may have been right about these notes; more probably, in her nervous state, she magnified the possibilities; but the fact remains that the notes preyed heavily upon little Mrs. Dawson's mind. It would be just the evil luck for Howard, searching for something in James's desk to-morrow morning, to find them and—

Presently she rose and, tiptoeing to the spare room door, listened. There was a sound of heavy breathing within which indicated that Howard, doubtless exhausted by his emotions, slumbered.

CHAPTER III.

THEY RARELY COME SINGLY.

WALKING briskly from the judge's old-fashioned home, James Berry found himself in a distinctly confused mental state. Predominantly he was happy to a degree; but underneath there ran a current of the most profound and nagging dissatisfaction.

The happiness hailed in part from the fact that all was well again between his two old friends, but in far greater degree from the other fact that each quick step brought him that much nearer the home and person of Betty Carson. In James's estimation, this young woman was beyond any question the most beautiful female so far born to the human race and the tenderest and as well the most wonderful of soul and the most brilliant of mind.

So far as the beauty part of it went James may not have exaggerated so greatly: the firm of Dawson & Berry seemed to have rare luck and taste in the matter of wives and sweethearts—and emphatical-

ly Betty was a tender flower. Again it is entirely probable that she owned a first-class soul; but as to the brilliance of her mind and the marvel of her general character there might have been opinions. Betty seemed in many ways a survival of that clinging vine type which began to disappear during the reign of the late Queen Victoria. Her health was far too fine to permit of the overtiring and the promiscuous fainting which made such great appeal in the dear old days; but when it came to the matter of weeping easily and of leaning with shy, awed adoration upon the masterful male, Betty ranked with the best product of 1875!

She was not conscious of these facts, as such; neither was James conscious of them; but they remained facts, nevertheless, with all their possible bearing upon the present and the misty future. James knew only that she was earth's greatest prize, incredibly—if secretly for the present—reserved for himself. He sighed lightly as he walked; there were but three more blocks!

The dissatisfaction was another matter altogether and wholly concerned himself. By nature James was far, far too mild. He knew it perfectly—knew it better every day. The failing did not seem to be fear, physical or moral; rather was it an exaggerated loathing of everything that savored of strife and dissension.

Why was he eternally like that? Why had he not been cast in the brutal mold—able to thresh about and roar down opposition and cow the other fellow completely? Why in this specific case, sound in the knowledge of Dot's perfect innocence and his own, had he not hurled outraged thunder at Howard Dawson until Howard took a turn at cringing? Well, he was not that sort for the simple reason that he was not! With conscience crystal-clear he had gone to the judge's as nervous as the traditional cat! And instead of demanding of Howard how he dared—oh, what of it? James shook off the mood and turned to sweeter thoughts of Betty, not even one block distant now.

Dear little Betty! Dear little orphan Betty, who lived with her Aunt Martha in that big house on the far corner! James laughed aloud, for pure joy. She herself was captured! Her guardian, Uncle Henry Mason, was not won by any means; in fact, the job of winning had not even been started, and it promised to be a considerable one. Uncle Henry occupied a rather painfully strong position in this little romance. Betty's father, long since gone before, seemed to have lacked faith in the motives of the race and in the good judgment which might have been expected in time to mature in Betty herself; but he had retained the fullest faith in his brother Henry. To the best of James's understanding, Uncle Henry seemed to have everything but the power of life and death over Betty until she was twenty-one and over her very comfortable patrimony in certain unpleasant contingencies, for a long period after that! To marry Betty one had also to conduct the successful wooing of Uncle Henry.

Not that the same thing hasn't happened before thousands of times; not that their careful little plans were not perfected to fit this case, either! James chuckled. Aunt Martha, a being as plastic and tender as Betty herself, was in the secret and had helped with the plotting. Like most of us, Uncle Henry had his vulnerable spots. Well, according to these plans, James Berry was to be thrust gradually upon Uncle Henry's notice, on each occasion deftly tickling one of the spots—until eventually Uncle Henry would form the conclusion which should have been obvious at first; to wit, that James Berry probably came as near as possible to being the ideal young man.

It promised to be a long and difficult job, with Uncle Henry's sour nature making all kinds of slips painfully possible. But—ah, the reward! James sighed pleasantly. To-morrow, he believed, they were to start the ball rolling by having him for dinner, with Uncle Henry also expected. The day after that—James paused in the beloved pathway. The door of Aunt Martha's home had opened for an instant and closed again without a sound; through the dusk a slim, adored figure sped toward him.

And James held out his arms, thrilling in advance; and some ten seconds later James realized that he had wasted a perfectly good

thrill, because the gentle maiden had not thrown herself into the arms. She stood, indeed, five feet away; she also sobbed softly!

"Why—my Lord!" gasped James in not exactly knightlike speech. "Betty, darling! You're crying!"

A shuddery gulp was his answer.

"What is it, dear?" James inquired feverishly and sought again to enfold her in his arms—and felt her draw away! "Betty! Don't you—don't you want me to touch you?"

Another shuddery gulp came through the soft night.

"Something's happened!" James stated. "Betty, you come in the house and—"

"No!" the young woman said quickly. "You can't go in there!"

"Why not?"

"Uncle Henry's there!"

"To-night? I thought he wasn't coming over till to-morrow night. Well—what of that? We're going to be great friends, I hope."

"He hates you!" Betty remarked.

"Eh? Why?"

"I hate you, too!" Betty added.

"You? You—*why?*"

"For just the same reason," Miss Carson explained, and her voice choked with new tears. "Oh—oh, Jimmy, how could you do it? How *could* you?"

"Do what?" James asked faintly.

"Make yourself a town scandal? That's what he says you are—a town scandal! He doesn't even suspect that we—we wanted to be married; and he says that—that men like you ought to be tarred and feathered and ridden out of town on a rail! He says everybody's talking about it and you ought to be made an example!"

Beads stood out on James's forehead, although summer was just beginning and this was a rather cool evening.

"I—don't get it!" he said hoarsely.

"Running around everywhere, all the time, with Dot Dawson!" Betty forced out.

"*That!*" James cried. "D'ye mean to say that that's being discussed publicly? I thought it was Howard's imagination more than anything else, but—oh, Betty, *you* don't believe that lie?"

There was a tense little pause.

"*Is* it a lie?" Betty asked faintly.

"The dirtiest, nastiest confounded lie the vile old hens of this town ever invented!" the junior partner declared savagely. "I don't know who they are, but I'll find out and if they can't pay damages I'll put 'em in jail till—"

His voice gave out, which was partly because the slim form was in his arms at last, trembling.

"Oh, Jimmy! Please! Not so loud! You—you're so terrible when you're angry!" Miss Carson pleaded, and placed a hand over his lips.

"Angry! Who the—who wouldn't be angry?" James demanded, the words slightly muffled. "I swear, I'll—"

"Jimmy! Jimmy!" Betty begged piteously, and clung to him. "Please don't do anything foolish! Please, dear—while you're so furious! They'll hear you!"

"But—"

"Oh, it was terrible!" Betty explained further, with some difficulty, and wept freely now on his shoulder. "Uncle Henry phoned that he was coming over and aunt and I just planned to work your name into the conversation, you know, and—and say how nice you were; and then when you did come in yourself—" Grief consumed her for a moment. "And almost the first thing he said was about what the younger generation of men was coming to and how you ought to be whipped at the post and—Jimmy, it *wasn't* true?"

"Not a word of it!"

"You never went anywhere with her—alone?"

"Why—no, I can't say that," James replied. "We did go off a couple of times, but it was to talk over something she was planning for Howard."

"Oh! You did then?" Miss Carson murmured, and drew away a little.

"It was just—about business."

He could feel moist eyes flashing reproach at him through the gloom.

"Business!" Betty echoed faintly.

"Betty, you're not going to believe there's a word of truth in that rot?"

"I know what you tell me," Miss Carson answered rather enigmatically.

There was another tense little pause. Twice James reached for his beloved, twice his beloved twitched herself away from his lately cherished touch. She was swallowing audibly; as nearly as he could see she was picking at her handkerchief and looking at the ground.

"Do you know what brought uncle over to-night?" she asked.

"Of course not."

"Will Potter wants me to marry him!"

James Berry reeled.

"Has he proposed to you?"

"No. He—he went to uncle first. Uncle approves of him!"

"But you—you—you don't, Betty!" James forced out.

"Will doesn't—do *such* things!" Miss Carson submitted just audibly. "He isn't that kind. And if I thought that *you* had, I'd marry him just to hurt you!" she pursued, and her voice rose hysterically. "I would! I'd marry him and then—then kill myself!" Miss Carson concluded pleasingly.

Momentarily James was beyond words.

"Uncle may—just *make* me marry Will!" Betty added, and a less disturbed mind than James's might have suspected that she was administering punishment. "He always has made me obey him in everything. I'm—weak. I know that. When I could—trust you and lean on you—you're so strong—"

"Betty, come here to me!" James commanded, his voice returning hoarsely.

Betty stepped aside deftly.

"And if I ever *should* marry any one uncle didn't approve—any one really unfit and—and disreputable—he needn't ever give me a penny of my money!" concluded Miss Carson, almost with satisfaction.

"Betty! If it's money you're thinking of—" James began in amazed bitterness.

"It—oh, it isn't! Jimmy, it isn't!" Betty cried suddenly, and voice and resolution seemed to break together and she moved swiftly nearer to James; and very possibly the wondrous flower of complete reconciliation was about to burst into bloom when the door of the house opened and Aunt Martha called:

"Betty! Are you out there?"

"P-st!" said Miss Carson, and stepped between James and the light and answered: "Yes, aunt."

"What in the world are you doing?"

"Just walking," called Betty. "It's so stuffy inside."

"Well, you better come in, deary," Aunt Martha pursued, lowering her voice. "Uncle Henry likes to see you when he's here, you know. He's asked twice what became of you."

The door closed softly. Miss Carson's heart resumed its earlier pounding.

"I'll have to go in," she said swiftly. "No, you mustn't come. It would ruin everything forever. And—oh, you had to do that just when we had it all planned out so beautifully!"

"But I didn't do it! I—wait a second, Betty! I'll call you up later."

"Don't! Uncle Henry's staying all night. I can't get to the phone without his hearing."

"Then I'll come the very first thing in the morning and—"

"No, not before noon at the earliest," Miss Carson advised as she moved away. "But come then and—and convince me!"

"You bet I'll convince you!" James panted.

"Because," added Betty, and her voice turned curiously sharp and ominous, "if you don't come and convince me—"

The door opened again, suddenly this time, to reveal a broad, gray-haired individual in the informal shirt-sleeves of the family circle. His head moved as his eyes, mercifully very near-sighted, tried to penetrate the gloom.

"Ee-lizabeth!" called Betty's uncle.

"I'm coming right in, uncle," Miss Betty responded sweetly and quickened her steps.

And now the door had closed and—James Berry was just rising from his crouching position behind a bush. He breathed very heavily. Why the dickens had he dived in there and crouched like that? Well, mainly, as it appeared, because it had seemed the politic thing to do at the moment. The situation was all awhirl in his brain as yet, but it appeared that a personal encounter with Uncle Henry on this particular evening meant disaster of the most complete kind!

Yet, to have ducked out of sight that way! Would Howard, for example, have ducked? He would not! What would he have done then? Obviously, Howard would have pounded into the house after Betty and asserted his right as an innocent, free-born American citizen—with whatever consequences. Then why did not James Berry, equally free-born, equally innocent, do the same thing?

James ground his teeth and started directly for the door. James, almost immediately, slowed down again. In his mad desire to raise himself at least to the average of belligerent brutality, was he about to blast whatever hope remained to his little romance? On the evidence in hand—yes. Cold wisdom refused him any other answer. Then just for the sake of demonstrating that he really dared face Uncle Henry Mason he meant to—James ceased grinding his teeth and faced about. He walked to the gate and through it to the street without any undue clatter of steps.

Some little space he devoted solely to detesting himself; two blocks and he had cooled—had even cooled unpleasantly. As regarded Betty, matters could not well have been left in a more unsatisfactory state. She doubted him now, with what justification might be; so much her words had proved quite clearly. So deeply did she feel that she had suggested several horrible possibilities to James, should he fail to clear himself completely with her and with her esteemed Uncle Henry. James shivered; he had not thought it possible that Betty could even think things like that.

But she was right. Instinctively, James flew to her defense. No high-spirited, self-respecting girl like Betty, filled with the lies that were evidently being told about James, could have felt any other way. Only he did wish that the garden interview had ended a little more happily. "Because, if you don't come and convince me—" Her voice had been very odd as she said it; there were vague threats in that unfinished sentence that froze James Berry.

However, he was not yet licked by any means. At half past one to-morrow, by which time Uncle Henry would have returned to his farm, ten miles out of town, James would report for the first session of explanation and defense. And he would have to talk well and convincingly. James groaned as he turned into the best boarding-house in Wallington.

He passed Millicent, who hurried from the parlor, without a word. Millicent sighed noisily and gazed after him as he ascended; it was with an effort that James refrained from slamming the door.

And now—so far as one may consider a boarding-house home—he was at home. What did he mean to do with the rest of the evening? It impressed James gloomily that, the way things seemed to be running to-day, the safest thing would be to crawl into bed and trust that the house might not burn down before morning. He scowled at the snowy spread and turned away. He was far too much upset for sleep as yet.

Why not go down and join their beastly card game then? James growled aloud. He would sit opposite plump Mrs. Farnley for about five minutes and then, with a howl of pure emotion, hurl the cards at her face! There was no use trying to be cheery and sociable this evening; he did not feel cheery and sociable.

He switched on his reading-lamp and laid several magazines beside it. This move seemed equally futile; the makers of these particular copies had put nothing at all in them worth reading. James tossed the third one aside and gazed at the rug for a long time.

Then he brightened up suddenly. There was work aplenty at the office, and it was work he loved. Crazy old Howard meant to sail for San Palo a week from to-morrow and there were simply reams of data still to be completed that must go with him. Now there was a good idea. And it was soothingly quiet in the factory office at night, and if he didn't turn sleepy within an hour or two he could go on working peacefully until morning. James jerked up from his chair and switched off the light again.

He covered the three blocks to Sayer Street, the two down to the tracks, and having crossed the latter, stood beside the big, dark factory itself. He thrilled a little; he did that every time he approached the works of Dawson & Berry; this large pile of bricks

and all that it signified were much for two young men to have attained in a bare three years' time. Just now, for no very plain reason, it appealed to him as a haven of refuge from an unkind outer world.

He looked around for Gannet, the burly watchman, who was supposed to pass most of the night outdoors, here and in the square central yard. Gannet was not visible. James found his key and moved through the gloom, past the yard gate and to the office door. Peace came upon him. Here at least was one spot where nothing unpleasant could happen to round out a bad day. He fitted the key and, having closed the door behind him, fumbled his way up the black stairs, for the fiftieth time making a mental memorandum to have a lighting switch installed in that lower vestibule.

And on the third step James halted.

Up at the head of the stairs was the glass panel of the general office door. His eyes had just risen to it and, at the very second of their rising, a light had been switched off at some point beyond. The feverish effect whirled back to James's brain! Gannet did not enter the offices until his twelve-o'clock round; those were orders, and Gannet obeyed orders. Employees were forbidden to enter the office after hours without permission from a member of the firm —and in addition none of them possessed a key. And, still more, that light had been burning in the cashier's room, where stood the frail old safe they had taken over with the building itself.

James then had erred in assuming that his troubles were over for the day. A light in there at this hour meant just one thing—burglars!

CHAPTER IV.

CAUGHT!

MANY seconds James Barry listened. Not a sound reached him from above. He remained upon the third step for a time and pondered the situation with entire calm.

It was humanly possible, of course, that Gannet had come into the offices from the rear for some reason or other—although why should Gannet have turned off the light just ten seconds after the lower door had closed audibly? James pricked up his ears again. Very faintly, from the general office, came a familiar *click-click-click-click!* That eliminated Gannet. That was the watchman's recording clock, and four clicks signified that Gannet had just pressed the button at station number four, which was the shipping office out by the railroad spur, on the other end of the building and two hundred feet away.

Then could it be Howard? Hardly. He had seen Howard start for home, and there could be no earthly doubt but that Howard, at this moment, was more or less sweetly engaged in patching up certain domestic difficulties.

No; the answer to that vanishing light was shaping itself quite swiftly now in James's mind. There was the unusual sum of eighteen hundred dollars in cash up in the old safe to-night. There was also to be considered one Thomas Cowan, who had been assistant cashier until four o'clock this afternoon, at which point he had been discharged with quite a flurry all around. Thomas, a husky young man, was a stranger in town; Howard had hired him, and he had lasted just one inefficient week. Now he was back to clean up the office and move on to some other burg!

That was it. James Berry took one step downward, on his way to summon Gannet and an officer, if necessary. Just one, and then James paused. Why summon anybody? Something in James which had been sorely outraged arose and suddenly commanded him to go up there and do the capturing single-handed! In the blackness he smiled weirdly. It was really the best idea that had come to him in months. That was the sort of moral exercise he needed more than anything else in the world. And for once in a way the prospect of physical combat was like wine; much activity had rendered and kept James's muscles in really wonderful shape, and had young Mr. Cowan been eight feet tall instead of six the anticipation would have been that much more pleasing.

So, quite absorbed in this little effort to vindicate, at least partly, himself to him-

self, James turned back and began the ascent once more; and his step was as soundless, his senses as keen as those of any red savage of the olden days.

He made the top of the flight without a single creak. There was a spring lock on the general office door; his fingers on the key were lighter and daintier than a single hair from the head of an unusually small fairy—and he was inside the general office and still without a creak to his discredit. James smiled again and listened.

Some one had moved over there! And "over there," to his slight astonishment, was not the cashier's office either; it happened to be the corner room to the rear, in business hours occupied by the partners themselves. James changed his course and tiptoed on through the gloom.

Well—he was in there now and the party of the second part had not greeted him with a jovial hail. And, all the same, the party of the second part was somewhere in this room! A sixth sense, just acquired, informed James of the fact as positively as could have been done by a printed bulletin; he was not alone in this room!

Yet, how in blazes was Cowan living without breathing? How could a hulk like that pass minutes without moving a single muscle? Because the pause surely had lengthened into minutes now. James was near to suffocation; another thirty seconds of this breath-holding trick and he'd explode! And ten thousand betraying little twitches were trying to come into being all over him—and *still* Cowan had not moved again!

It was—why, it was no less than ridiculous! James had counted, long before this, on such a pitched battle in the darkness as would have been heavenly balm to his lacerated self-respect, even if it did cost the firm one or two hundred dollars for new office furniture. And instead of engaging in battle he and Cowan, with not a dozen feet between them, were standing like a pair of stone images and—aha! Cowan had breathed at last!

Just one little strangling gasp it was that had escaped him, but that one had been all-sufficient for James Berry. Cowan was *right over there* by James's own desk; and James's muscles tightened gloriously and, arms outstretched and ready, he shot through the gloom with the spring of a maddened panther.

A whoop of pure joy escaped him. No range-finder ever could have directed him more accurately; he had crashed headlong into Cowan, startling him so that he screamed in a high, thin voice, denoting terror! The littlest flicker of time then and his powerful arms were about Cowan and James was squeezing, squeezing, with the happy idea of beginning the argument with the fracture of half a dozen of Cowan's ribs.

But—an astonished little gulp issued from James. In another tiny fraction of one second two distinct thoughts shaped themselves in his brain: if this form crushed hard in his arms was Cowan, Cowan had failed terribly since their last meeting, five hours ago, and Cowan was offering no resistance whatever. He had turned limp, in fact, and—

Over by the door the aged switch rasped loudly.

Light flooded the office. James Berry's wild eyes winced before it and he bent his head instinctively. Yet, the eyes did not close completely; sufficient vision remained to James that he perceived the lovely features of Dorothy, white, eyes closed, upon his bent and clutching arm! Dorothy! Yes, it was Dorothy, fast enough. From the doorway came a horrid laugh.

"*That* time I got you!" Howard Dawson stated distinctly.

Moments such as these mock at any immediate, intelligent analysis. James rather prided himself, and that with some justice, on his presence of mind in exciting emergencies and the habit his brain had of functioning nicely while the owners of other brains galloped about in wide circles, emitting incoherent cries. It was not functioning now, though. As an organ of thought, it had merely rolled over on its back and pointed all four legs at the skies.

This was Dorothy in his arms! And it could not be, because it was Cowan. And on the other hand, it seemed the sheerest absurdity to insist that it was Cowan, because it was, in fact, Dorothy. Neverthe-

less, Cowan had been in here robbing the safe a few minutes ago, and James had stolen in to capture him and—about there the first suggestion of a lucid ray penetrated the hot, swirling fog: just why was James assuming so confidently that Cowan had been here? He did not know; without releasing the slim little figure in his passionate embrace, James looked dumbly about, eventually staring at his partner.

If one wished to be soothed and cheered, Howard was really nothing to look at just then. Drawn face, flashing eyes, visible teeth and all, that expression of Howard's carried a powerful suggestion of the Demon himself, just rising from the home region in a particularly ugly mood. There was, too, something of the maddened giant ape about him; part of Howard had dropped back a million years or so, and the fact was betrayed in the queer way his shoulders sagged forward and his arms hung, open, clawing hands at the ends of them.

James's brain tried hard to gather speed as it absorbed this picture. James sought to smile and finally did so, inanely, insanely.

"H-h-hello!" James said brightly. "You—you here?"

"Damn you! Drop her!" was Howard's elemental command.

James's arms loosened instantly. Instantly, too, they tightened again. As it happened, Mrs. Dawson, what with fright and the recent violent onslaught, was still unconscious; she slid sickeningly downward, and James hauled her up again with a sudden shudder. Was it possible that he had—had killed her? Every ounce of strength in him had gone into that initial squeeze; he had planned with it to wrench the Cowan anatomy as nearly as possible in two and—little beads of pure relief appeared on James's forehead. At least, he was no murderer, for Dorothy was stirring. Her lids twitched; her eyes opened, widely, wildly. Briefly, she struggled, pushing against James; she recognized him and relaxed.

"Why—why, Jimmy—" Dorothy faltered.

"It's—all right," James managed. "You'd better—er—stand up now!"

He propped her up at full arm's length. Mrs. Dawson steadied herself.

"Howard! You're—here, too!" she said dizzily. "You—came together?"

"None of that!" the senior partner barked. "I'm a trusting fool—yes! But not a complete imbecile!"

"Howard," James protested, "she—I guess she fainted. She doesn't—"

"*You* talk to me and I'll kill you before I've said what I want to say!" the husband replied. "I've been a blind idiot; I concede that. But my eyes are open now and I won't have my intelligence insulted with the story you two—two *things* have ready!"

James Berry turned to ice. His head cleared in the most abrupt and complete fashion. He understood now just how things must look to Howard Dawson. So, evidently, did Howard's bride; but where her outraged womanhood should have blazed forth she merely caught at the desk for support and choked audibly. The hot, indignant surge just coming up in James died at the sight of her; she should have radiated innocence; instead, every inch of her spelled guilt!

Howard laughed again.

"You thought I was locked up and asleep for the night, woman?" he said. "Well, I felt something like this in the very air! I heard you listen at my door. I heard you go to the desk and get my spare factory keys out of the little drawer, although I couldn't imagine then what you were doing with them. I wasn't a block behind you all the way down here!"

"Howard!" his bride's strangling voice began. "I came to—"

"Yes, and so did *he*, didn't he?" wheezed the senior partner, and his self-control was slipping visibly. "And wasn't it odd that I should have been bright enough to suspect that he'd be here, too? Wasn't it queer that I waited over in the shadow of the freight-house?" His hands clenched; two steps he took toward them; when his voice came again it was no less than horrible. "Oh, *you!*" Mr. Dawson choked. "The only two people in the whole world I trusted absolutely! And even after you knew you'd been discovered you thought the wool had been pulled over my eyes and, this very night, you had to meet *again* down here and laugh about it! Well, by the

Almighty—" roared Mr. Dawson and, quite happily, gave over the idea for the moment of slaying them in cold blood and stared at the floor, all littered with torn fragments of paper.

A single, vicious flash he directed at his bride, who had started forward as if to keep him from the fragments. Mr. Dawson swooped and gathered half a dozen and glared at them. A flush of fury rose through his pallor.

"Your writing, hey?" he snarled. "So that was the reason for this little meeting, was it?—tearing up the love letters before the fool husband could stumble on them. What's this thing? 'Jimmy, boy!'" he gasped. "Say, I—"

"Howard, listen to me!" Mrs. Dawson begged hysterically, but coherently at last. "They are not love letters. They're notes I wrote to Jimmy making the appointments last week. I didn't dare use the phone here because you're in the same room, and I didn't want you to suspect a thing. That 'Jimmy boy' is idiotic, of course, but I was so happy when I wrote—"

Something in Howard's awful smile halted her. Howard was considering another fragment.

"'And oh, how I love—' is all I read on this one!" he sneered.

"Yes, yes!" his bride agreed. "I said, 'how I love to see Howard when he's really surprised,' or something like that. Ask Jimmy. Jimmy can tell you, Howard! And you were so ridiculous and so excited this afternoon that I knew you'd misinterpret those things if you ever found them, and I stole out of the house to—"

"Yes, and *I* came down here to work!" James put in with commendable force. "You and your craziness sent me too far up in the air to think of sleeping, and I came down to get more of your beastly South American plans in shape; I meant to put in the night here! I had no more idea Dorothy was on this side of town than—why, Howard, I thought it was a burglar, of course. I—I was trying to catch him!"

His words, too, faded out before the steady glare of Mr. Dawson. That gentleman's hands were open again now; once more his awful smile had appeared.

"Don't try; I understand," he said steadily. "You know what is going to happen to you two, don't you?"

"Howard!" cried his wife. "Don't—"

"The Dawsons rarely take these things into court; thank fortune, Starr kept me out of that!" Howard pursued and twitched up his cuffs. "The Dawsons settle these matters on the spot, and this one's about to be settled so completely—"

He was moving down on them, too, and if ever murder sparkled in a man's eye it sparkled in Howard's just then—and on the stairway a heavy step sounded suddenly; a door slammed down-stairs and the steps continued, mounting two at a time.

Mr. Dawson's teeth shut with a click. A struggling moment, and he was smiling, however strangely, as he faced the door; and in the opening the large form of Mr. Gannet, watchman, loomed up suddenly. His broad, good-natured face scowling, his right hand gripped his revolver—and the scowl turned to a smile and the gun went down.

"Well, you—you'll have to excuse me, gentlemen," he puffed. "I thought for sure I had a burglar that time!"

"No, just the—er—the firm, Gannet," Howard said.

"No trouble, Mr. Dawson, that brought you down?"

"No trouble whatever," answered Howard. "We just—dropped in for a minute."

Gannet pushed back his cap, pocketed his weapon and grinned broadly.

"Well, why not, to be sure, seeing it's your factory, sir," he said. "Only if it's all the same to you, Mr. Dawson, I wish you'd let me know if you expect to be around at night—for a while, anyway. There's a gang of five hoboes come down on the through freight night before last, and they've been hanging around the tracks ever since. I was speaking to Murphy, the company detective, about 'em maybe an hour ago. They claim they've got work promised here in town, but—I dunno. You gotter keep a pretty sharp eye on them kind. Oh, by the way, Mr. Dawson, that load of inch-'n-half galvanized pipe come in around eight, and I signed for it without checkin' it up. Driver wouldn't wait; had

a sick kid home, he said, and I thought you'd rather I took a chance than wait till they got ready to deliver it again. And—what was that other thing? Something I was going to leave a memo about. Oh, yes, them four cars that was promised for Friday. Railroad called up—"

Gannet spoke further, much further. At best his working hours were lonely and when opportunity for necessary conversation appeared, it was improved; he mentioned a new box of gaskets, left spilled on the floor, and recommended the discharge of the plumber's helper; he dragged in a drill-press which had turned temperamental past any handling and flayed its performance and design with many words. In all, he consumed ten minutes, and with curious effect; when Gannet left the dreadful light had died from Howard's eye.

Not, be it understood, that he rushed forward and shook their hands and begged forgiveness for his recent overheated mood. Far from it! But, ceasing to be apelike, Mr. Dawson was stiff and straight when the lower door closed behind Gannet; and James Berry brightened with lightning speed.

"You're almost yourself, anyway!" he said quickly. "Now hear the truth and—"

"I know the truth!" Howard said harshly. "I suppose *you* know—and you, too, Dorothy, that you owe your lives to that man?"

"Maybe, but—"

"I'll talk, Berry," his partner interrupted bitterly and so far unbent as to fold his arms. "I've had the chance to think a little; it's probably as well. And I was born very sane; you may thank your lucky stars for that!"

They did not contradict him just then.

"These things happen, I suppose," Mr. Dawson went on. "Perhaps some of the fault is mine; perhaps I should have kept a sharper eye on you; but—gad, Berry! It never occurred to me that any woman could consider you attractive! I thought I knew every thought in Dorothy's head. I was wrong about that, but I refuse to wreck three lives and a splendid business for what may be curable and cured!"

"It sounds very splendid and judicial and condescending," Dorothy began hotly, "but if you'll just step down from your pedestal and try—"

"*Be silent!*" Howard thundered, so terribly that his bride actually winced and drew back. "I'll oversee the cure. You'll both do all that lies within you to help. I want your very solemn oath on that!"

"Oath?" James gasped.

"Here and now you will both swear to do your utmost, to the very limit of your power, to break off and crush out every atom of this ghastly, this damnable attachment! Do you swear that?"

His fingers were working again. A quick glance passed between Dorothy and James; whatever it was that had boiled over in Howard's mentality this was really an evening when one stretched a point to placate Howard.

"I—er—swear it!" the junior partner said mildly.

"You, then?" Mr. Dawson demanded, and pointed a shaking forefinger at his bride.

"Yes, I—I swear it, too!" Dorothy's faint voice agreed.

Howard smiled very unpleasantly.

"We'll begin by cutting you off entirely from seeing one another, I think," he went on. "Berry, on the seven fifteen to-morrow morning, you are leaving Wallington forever. You'll go to New York and take permanent charge of our office there. Thorndyke can come up here and do what you're doing and—"

"Oh, but—I say, I can't do that!" James cried, for even during these last turbulent minutes the unfortunate affair of Betty Carson had begun to ache again in his bosom.

"You *can't?*"

"No, not to-morrow morning, old chap. Later, perhaps, if you feel it to be necessary—which you won't when you've cooled down. But—"

Mr. Dawson's chest heaved slightly; his nostrils also dilated.

"Just why can't you?" he demanded with forced calm.

"Well, you see, Howard, it's like this," James said swiftly. "This fool gossip got to old man Mason's ears somehow and he's—er—well, a bit down on me at present.

Doesn't know Betty and I are planning to get married, and I've got to spend a lot of time and careful work right here in town getting into his good graces before we spring it on him. You see, don't you? I'd like awfully well to go if it 'd make you any happier, but my job is here. And if I did leave suddenly it would look as if there was something to *this* affair, which there isn't, and that you'd chased me out of town. Betty herself would take it like that!" James gave a shudder of real apprehension. "No, I can't go, but—"

"Wait, Berry!" Mr. Dawson commanded. "I can't even understand—and, thank Heaven, I can't—the sort of beast that carries on affairs with two women at the same time. It's Betty's money you're after, I suppose. But I *can* tell you this: if I don't see you leave Wallington on the seven fifteen to-morrow morning, I'll go to old Mason myself and tell him your plans about Betty and tell him the rotten truth as well. And I'll see Miss Carson and tell her precisely what you are! And if that isn't enough—"

"But you—you can't do that!" James cried angrily. "I told you about that in confidence. Why, you're bound in honor—"

"Honor!" sneered Mr. Dawson. "*You* talking of *honor!*" Then, noting James's pallor, he permitted his dreadful eye to grow penetrating again. "Well, well," he barked, "d'ye want to go home now and pack?"

(To be continued NEXT WEEK.)

Two Bits for Barry

by Will H. Greenfield

BARRY ALTEMUS was my dearest chum and companion at school and in college when I believed him a type of the artistic soul that only a few of the illuminaté could understand. In after years I came to know him as a cultured crook, full of the resources of perverted intelligence, an appalling combination of magnetism and criminality.

You couldn't help liking him, and there was a guilelessness about him which moved the ungodly to derision. In him nature and education combined to produce a paragon in an era illustrious for its *chevaliers d'industrie*. South Carolina had given him birth, and he had been sent abroad to Bordeaux to be trained as a physician. In France he studied letters and became proficient in French, German, and Spanish. He read everything on alchemy from the days of Albertus Magnus, was a photographer of no mean order, and a machinist knowing as well how to produce a collodion film as to bore a cylinder. He had dived into the mysteries of chemistry, and came out with flying colors as a laboritician.

It was Barry who came to me in 1910 with his discovery of a new metal, a deriva-

tive of alumina, which was obtained by a secret hardening process calculated to make the solvent of which the ancient alchemists dreamed look like the proverbial thirty cents. Barry defecated fluids with it, he told me. That is to say, he took out of them every metallic and every deleterious substance. At the present time he claimed he could take an electrode made of this new metal, attach a wire from an electric lamp to it, dip it in a pan of swill milk, turn on the electric juice, and extract every tubercular microbe in the lacteal fluid. He was also working at a certain tenacious obstacle that prevented the extraction of gold from sea-water, and when this was overcome he would be untellably wealthy.

Barry planned to take a dozen pumps and dynamos, a hundred electrodes and wires, say, and go out into the ocean on a steamer. As the vessel sailed the ocean, water would be pumped into tanks from the bow, the forty cents in gold which is said to be in every ton of sea-water would be extracted, and the defecated water suffered to run back into the ocean through a pipe projected over the stern of the vessel.

I laughed at Barry.

"How you can get credulous fools to finance such schemes," said I, "is more than I can imagine. Why don't you get into something honest? The confidence-game is moss-grown and unprofitable, and you know it."

"Well," he grinned, "I've just finished a two-year bit for forgery, and I'm here to tell you that the bunco stuff hasn't as yet put me in stir. That's why I'm going to back it, though I pride myself on being a rather slick penman."

"Can't you make money honestly, Barry Altemus?" I exploded. "You are a scientific searcher who is forever peering into the twilight regions beyond knowledge and familiar speculation, and there ought to be something genuine in the fruits of your labors. You cannot get anywhere forging checks or swindling fools. I've made money honestly without a tenth of your talents."

As cool as a winter evening, he suffered me to abuse him with rare stoicism. His lawless course in life caused me profound displeasure and disappointment, and I never missed an opportunity to tell him so.

"If I had money now I could make money," he said at length. "But I'm broke, as you may have surmised from the fact that my visits to your home always synchronize with meal hours. I have a real scheme, one I would give to you if I thought you would finance it. The trouble with you, Jimmy Nelson, is that you're a bit overworshipful of the penny. The prospect of the proverbial rainy day clouds your sunniest afternoons."

"Facts do not trammel the processes of your contortionate intellect," I retorted. "I'll invest in anything legitimate that looks good, but I'll not play the dupe. What's on your mind now?"

"Eggs!" he rejoined succinctly.

"The egg market has been cornered," I remarked. "And if things keep on the common people will pass up the egg, that fruit not being immensely popular according to my observations."

"Rats!" exclaimed Barry. "I'd say you were talking like a rube, only a rube would know more about hen fruit than that. Don't you know that as a general thing a city of this size consumes about six million eggs a week? When Eastertide comes along this number is almost trebled, for Easter wouldn't be Easter without eggs. Pancakes on Shrove Tuesday; hot cross buns on Good Friday, and ham and eggs on Easter morning! The laws of the Medes and Persians are no more inflexible than this gastronomic spring-time rule, and in this city alone some three million eggs will be sacrificed on Easter morning."

"Well," I remarked innocently, "you seem to know something about eggs."

"Why should I be ignorant on the subject of eggs when I can make them? I presume you will admit that a hen has a fragmentary knowledge of hen fruit."

"Pardon me; I didn't know you were devoting your energies to the manufacture of hen fruit."

"If that is intended for sarcasm, Jimmy, it leaves me unscathed. I have been dreaming and living eggs for months. A philoso-

pher who, when it came to succinct expression, had the capacity of putting a good deal in a small compass, once remarked that the reason he could do with so little sleep was that when he slept he paid attention to it.

"There is a lot of wisdom suitable for general use in this statement of the case. Concentration of effort! And I have been concentrating on eggs. Pretty soon the hen—a crude makeshift at best, Jimmy—will be of use only for purposes of fricassée or decoration. For I can make eggs that will laugh at time and never grow stale.

"'If a thing goes up,' said Confucius in one of his first moments, 'that is a sign that a thing can come down.' Just at the time, therefore, that hen's eggs at sixty cents a dozen are disappearing into the blue, the chemical eggs can descend from the same general direction. I will be a great favorite with the masses if I can devote my time to this egg-making scheme."

"You will be one of the greatest benefactors of the human race!" I cried, for I could see the immortal pen of History entering his name on her scroll of transcendental events. "At the present price of eggs you can become a multimillionaire in no time."

"I suppose it is my opportunity," sighed Barry, "but I am afraid I shall have to let it go by for a while. I am engaged at present upon the perfection of that new metal I was telling you about last week. There is only a slight impediment in the way as it is, and it will mean incalculable riches, whereas the artificial egg means mere millions."

"Mere millions!" I gasped, annoyed that I had shown no sense of flattery at his presence. "Good gracious, Barry, don't try to think in bigger figures!"

"But I must! What are millions compared with countless billions?"

"But you are passing up a great bonanza, Barry! And it would be a boon to humanity!"

"I should worry about humanity!" said Barry disdainfully. "A business man like you might—but what's the use? It may be my opportunity—"

"It becomes your duty," I cut in. "I'll be your partner and furnish the capital."

"Nothing doing, Jimmy. My time belongs to a greater project, and I shall play for billions. You can always get busy at the sign of the double 'I' superimposed upon the 'S.' I'll turn the scheme over to you, if you'll finance it and pay me enough to go on with my new metal. What say?"

"Do you mean you will sell me the formula outright?"

"Just that. Is it a go?"

"How much do you want?"

"I'll take two thousand dollars down, and thirteen when you get the thing working."

"Well," said I, "you must give me indubitable proof that you can make eggs, and the formula."

"Both within the hour, my cautious one," agreed Barry. "I can convince you that I can imitate the chemical process of the hen in the laboratory. An egg, Jimmy, is only a compound of nitrogen, oxygen, sulfur, and hydrogen. Formerly we were able to do little with the uncombined nitrogen in the atmosphere, but now that I have been able to harness it, the possibilities are incredible. Come with me, James, and learn how to dispense with the festive hen!"

So I went with Barry Altemus to his laboratory, and inside of an hour I had been taught how to make an artificial egg that was in every way—taste, quality, and appearance—the peer of the natural article. I did not pay him the two thousand dollars until I had myself manufactured and eaten with relish the chemical product of Barry's patient genius. He left town that night, and the following afternoon I received this letter:

> It was abominably careless of me, Jimmy, but I believe I neglected to tell you that the artificial product of the chemical hen costs more than thirty-seven cents apiece to produce, as you will discover if you attempt to manufacture. Some day I might be able to cut down the costs, so keep the formula until I see you again.

And that was not until one black, storm-racked night in April, 1917, just

after the United States entered the war against Germany and her allies. Barry came knocking on my kitchen door, and when I opened it to him stalked in with a gray smile and a look that was as deprecating as anything that had ever appeared on that granite face.

"Some crust, eh, Jimmy!" he greeted me. "But you must remember you challenged me to fleece you, and I only did you in for two thousand when I might just as easily have nicked you for ten or twenty. You know that, don't you, old pal?"

"Sit down," I said dazedly. "Where have you been keeping yourself?"

"In seclusion, Jimmy. I broke out of the State prison at Hanover last night, and I'll not be taken alive!"

"Barry," I said, and I wondered at the tenderness of my own voice, "I'll put you up for the night and give you anything you need, but you can't stay here."

"Don't want to, Jimmy! I broke jail to do my bit for Uncle Sam, that's all!"

Unmasked skepticism was so patent in my face and manner that he hurried on: "Of course you can't believe me, Jimmy, but I want to fight for, not against, humanity. I'm doing a four-year bit, so I can't wait till I'm free again."

"If you are in earnest, Barry, I can do something for you. You'd probably be caught if you attempted to enlist in the regular army now, but I think I can put you in our lone company of the National Guard that leaves in the morning for some training camp up-State. Will you go straight, Barry?"

"After what has happened, you are willing to accept my word?"

"I am—and I don't know why, unless it is because you are that type of criminal who is most difficult for the conventional mind to fathom—a man of high abilities, almost a genius, who chooses the paths without the law rather than those within. I know that you have been operating for the past fifteen years, and have been serving your second prison sentence; but I also know, from memorable experience of other, happier days, that you never broke a solemn promise you made to me."

Barry was briefly silent, apparently in reminiscent mood.

"Never to pull another trick!" he soliloquized aloud. "Never to know again the fun of—"

"The fun of duping your fellow men—your friends!" I cut in satirically. "There are some people whose present impotence never weakens their belief in how strong they are going to be to-morrow. Like the sniveling little boys they used to be, they will shake their fists at stronger men and cry 'Just wait!' It is time for you to make up your mind whether you want to be a soldier or a crook!"

"I must be a soldier, Jimmy—nothing else counts. If it were not for this war, I could never bring myself to quit the life I've been leading. But it's for Old Glory, God bless us, and that's enough. I know there are hundreds of other prisoners where I came from who, if given the chance, would fight like hell for Uncle Sam and march back to their cells when the game was over. That is the way I feel, Jimmy, and that's what I mean to do. If I'm not bumped off it will be two bits for Barry, old pal—the army and the jail."

I held out my hand with a quick gesture of impulsive friendliness.

"And you will never forge another check?"

"Never! And never fleece another friend!"

II.

THE next morning I took Barry Altemus to the local headquarters of the National Guard and introduced him as a distant cousin by the name of John Barry. Clean-shaven, nerveless, low-voiced and dignified, he was hailed as a welcome addition to our segment of the National Guard, and when the troop-train pulled out of Ferrisville he had been sworn in and uniformed.

A week passed, and I was beginning to plume myself as a saver of men when a letter came from Captain White, of the Ferrisville Guards, which entirely convinced me that fellows like the inventor of the chemical hen only serve their turn by adding to the general fertility of the soil

when they are dead and buried. Captain White wrote:

> I am sorry to inform you that your cousin John Barry has deserted. He was a rare good soldier until we were ordered to move further up the State for guard duty, and then he moved completely out of the picture. If your physical disabilities did not prevent, I would love to have you in his place, but I know that, like hundreds of others, you can creditably do your bit at home. Your cousin's strongest wish was to get a crack at the Huns, but I hardly think he has gone over there alone.

And neither did I. Barry Altemus had been as close to my affections as the flesh to my bones, but I had nothing save unutterable contempt for a deserter. I had commiseration and forgiveness for the crook, but only loathing and contempt for the coward.

Fully nineteen months later I persuaded Colonel Roy St. Leger, of the First Canadian Rifles, to deliver his lecture in Ferrisville. We had no auditorium large enough to contain all who wanted to hear the famous warrior, so he was obliged to speak in the open from a stand I had caused to be erected near the railroad station.

Flitting about in the crowd with sleepless vigilance, caring for the comfort and auricular deficiencies of our older citizens, I somehow contrived to get uncommonly interested in a neighbor's flattering comment upon the arrangements made when the Ferrisville band burst into the glorious strains of "The Star-Spangled Banner." As we stood uncovered the while the national anthem tingled the blood in our veins there suddenly arose a great clatter of shrill, vehement voices.

"Knock it off his head!"

"Where's he trying to push to?"

"Knock him down!"

There was a whirling eddy of human bodies not twenty yards from the speaker's stand, then a man was flung savagely to the ground and trampled upon by frenzied feet. I caught a glimpse of his face as he went down, and before I thought the words had tumbled out of my mouth: "Barry—the deserter!"

In an instant, from all around me, came harsh cries and harsher threats:

"He wouldn't take his hat off, the cur!"

"Barry—the deserter!"

"Let's lynch the skunk!"

"Barry, the deserter, wouldn't remove his hat!"

"Soak him for me!"

"Barry, is it?" I heard Colonel St. Leger cry, and in a twinkling his two hundred pounds of clean bone and sinew cut a path to the side of the prostrate man.

"Stop this, men!" he thundered. "Stop it, or by Heaven I'll—" His hand dropped to his sword-hilt.

The band ceased playing; the mob of breathless men who had stamped Barry in the mud paused, panting and defiant. The crowd stood still in statued expectation.

"This man is under my protection!" rasped the colonel, his eyes hard as steel marbles. "I know his story from his own lips, and you shall hear every word of it, too! He is a hero I am proud to have served with—a man who has just been mustered out of the English army with honorable wounds and record. Mr. Nelson, may I trouble you to assist our friend Barry to the waiting-room over there?"

Too dazed for speech, and for a space too astonished for action, I took Barry Altemus, bloody and bewildered, into the little waiting-room, made him comfortable on a bench, and looked the questions my lips refused to frame.

"The chemical hen's come back to roost, Jimmy!" he gasped. "I had to desert when they sent us up to Hanover to guard the prison, but I enlisted with the Canadians. I came back as soon as I could."

Outside a vast torrent of cheers broke from the crowd as St. Leger concluded a graphic recital of Barry's exploits, and again the strains of "The Star-Spangled Banner" throbbed through the air.

Barry lurched to his feet.

"Take my hat off, Jimmy!" he cried out. "Both arms are paralyzed, you know."

I removed his hat, my cheeks frankly wet, and he grinned at me with something of his old devilishness.

"Can't forge any more checks now, Jimmy!" he said grimly. "And maybe I can improve on the chemical hen while I'm doing the unfinished bit up at Hanover!"

Folly's Harvest

Part II

by Elizabeth York Miller

Author of "Diana the Hunted," "The Greatest Gamble," etc.

WHAT HAS ALREADY HAPPENED

NINETEEN-YEAR-OLD Mary Glenn upsets the expectations of her family and suitor, Donald Foshay, by becoming infatuated with a certain Captain Victor Little. Angered by her father's disapproval of the man, whose reputation is none too good, Mary agrees to elope with him if he cannot win her father's consent to the match. When old John Glenn ejects him from the house Mary goes to London and secretly marries him. The ceremony is barely finished when the warning of a man named May sends Captain Little from her. He promises to write, but does not, and Mary becomes convinced that she has made a dreadful mistake, especially when she comes to love Donald and is not free to marry him. Ignorant of her marriage her father and Donald plan to help her forget Little by causing to be printed a notice of his death in India, which she believes. Soon after she marries Donald. A son is born to them, and Mary feels safely happy until one day she is seen by Mr. May, who follows her home. He sends in his name and she receives him, trembling in fear that her past will rise to destroy her happiness.

CHAPTER VII.

THE LIE.

"WHAT do you want?" Mary demanded.

Mr. May's oily features were set in an amiable grin. Not for nothing had he lived by his wits as far back as memory carried him. It had taken him about ten seconds to size up this situation with an accuracy that did his power of observation credit.

The woman was afraid of him, and that could only mean one thing—there was a man in the background, possibly a husband who had not been told of her youthful adventures. And here were prosperity and pearls all ripe for the plucking.

"What do you want—why have you come here?" Mary demanded again.

"Well, it's this way, ma'am," he began slowly. "You remember the last time we met, you wanting to know something of Captain Little, and me saying I'd be glad to forward any letters for you—"

"That isn't why you've come here—followed me, I suppose," she interrupted, her voice sharp but shaking horribly. "You know very well that Captain Little is dead."

"Oh, is he?" Mr. May seemed genuinely surprised. In fact, he was surprised. "When did he die, ma'am?"

"It will be two years ago this October," she said a little more steadily.

Mr. May's eyes opened wide and he pursed his lips in a silent whistle. Was she trying to bluff him? If so, two could play at that game. Very well, he had no objection to agreeing that Captain Little was dead. It didn't matter one way or the other as far as this lovely young lady

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was concerned; she was just as much afraid of being found out.

"And so you have married again, ma'am. Very comfortably, I should judge, by the look of things. H-m—well, it does my heart good to see any one so prosperous in these 'ard times. H-m."

"You want money, I suppose," Mary said, nearly choking with indignation.

Mr. May endeavored to be facetious.

"Now, ma'am, was there ever a time when I didn't? But there it is, sometimes you're up and sometimes you're down, and at the present moment I'm considerably down. That's the word for it—down. I've a cheerful disposition; always look on the bright side. And when I saw you to-day, tripping it so light-'earted, I says to myself, now there goes Captain Little's sweet young widder, and me being such a friend of her late husband, it 'd be a natural pleasure to her to loan me a ten-spot or so. That's what I said to myself, ma'am, and I can see it in your eye that I wasn't mistaken. Just a loan, ma'am. I've a little speculation in mind—a twenty-to-one shot and a certainty—and to-morrow or next day I could pay you back."

Mary snatched up her hand-bag, which was lying on a table, and opened it with trembling fingers.

Mr. May watched her greedily.

"Of course, twenty pounds would be of more use," he suggested with a gentlemanly cough.

She poured the entire contents of her purse and note-case into his hands, taking care that her fingers did not come into contact with his. There was a little over twenty pounds all told.

"Now go, please, and don't ever come here again. I don't want to be paid back. I don't want ever to see you again. Do you understand?"

He stuffed his wealth into a pocket, regarding her meanwhile with an abstracted air.

"Yes, I think I understand," he said slowly. "Thank you kindly, ma'am, and good day to you. You've saved a desperate man from a watery grave, that's what you have. I'm sure it 'll always be a pleasure to you to remember that."

Afterward she had a confused memory of ringing for Johnson and of Uriah May being shown out, bowing and scraping in a manner which told its own story to the disgusted butler. Johnson knew that the queer visitor had come for money and obtained it. It was none of his business, of course, but still he could not help wondering, and as the day progressed he wondered more and more.

Now, there is this to be said on behalf of a blackmailer—for the first day or so after he has levied his tax one may feel reasonably safe. One may even hope that he will not come again. Perhaps he will find a heart, resurrect a dead conscience, or —most to be hoped for—inherit a fortune of his own. But none of these things happen very often.

From the start Mary had made a fatal mistake. She should have had him turned away from her door-step by the police if necessary and if he had dared to risk their being sent for.

It was just touch and go with him whether she was a good subject for blackmail or not. He did not know. He did not even know her name—as yet.

Even had she gone so far as to see him, and then straightway laughed in his face when he made his veiled demands, he would have slunk away with a sigh for just one more notch in his record of failure.

But she had been afraid, and he saw that at once.

He came jauntily out of the little house with money in his pockets, a man again—and to-morrow was Derby Day. He was really quite grateful to the former Mrs. Little.

Now, what could her new name be? Who was her husband? Queer, her saying that Captain Little had been dead for nearly two years. Of course, he might be dead now, for all Uriah May knew. Their paths hadn't crossed for a good while. But not two years ago—oh, no, decidedly not. This was going to be an interesting and undoubtedly remunerative game, much better than horse-racing had proven lately.

Mr. May crossed the street and took a good look at the house from which he had just emerged, making a mental note of its

number. It was then that he first saw the steel bars protecting the nursery windows. His eyebrows went up.

"There's a kid!" he commented. "That's funny. I wonder if she ever *was* married to Little? Or did he only just say so? H-m—that's doocid funny. I know real pearls when I see 'em. What made her take up with Little? Wonder where he is—wonder if he's really dead. Rubbishy chap—always on the brag, and always on the wrong horse. No judgment. I liked him, and then again I didn't."

From the servants' sitting-room in the front basement a severe eye was fixed upon him, although he was unconscious of it. Johnson would very much have liked to go over and boot him out of the square.

In the drawing-room Mary lay back in a chair with a bottle of smelling-salts held to her nostrils. After it was all over and the man had gone, she came perilously near to fainting. Instinct told her that he would come back again for more money. Her secret was no longer her own. She shared it with this vile little man. Perhaps he would be content with comparatively small sums which she could manage; but there would always be the dread, the uncertainty, hanging over her.

Wouldn't it be better to tell Donald at once?

A shiver ran over her. Ever since their marriage the slightest reference to Victor Little had been anathema to Donald. There were some things which even he, generous and big-hearted as he was, found it hard to forget. That dreadful night, for instance, when he had walked the terrace while she was keeping a love tryst with Victor in the Privet Maze. Also, it had hurt Donald terribly because she had clung so to the memory of her first love even after he had abandoned her, and would not marry the man she had come to love until assured that Victor Little was dead.

More than that, even the fact of having kept her secret so long made it almost impossible to confess now. She might have done so at first. Indeed, in this moment of anguish, she realized that for her own peace of mind she should have told Donald.

When the telephone bell rang she began to understand the long reign of terror that was before her. She sat rigidly, waiting until Johnson had answered it and came up to give her the message.

"The master says he will be detained at the office, madam, and not to wait tea. He'll be home about seven."

"Oh, thank you," Mary replied, suddenly as limp as a rag. "And I don't want any tea."

What was it, exactly, that she had apprehended? Would it be like this to her very grave—that every time the telephone or door-bell rang, or a shadow crossed her path, she would half die of fear?

There was that delightful dinner she had planned, and the new frock, which the dressmaker had sent home at the eleventh hour.

Donald would expect to find her more than usually cheerful to-night; and, indeed, it would be a poor return for his generous kindness were she to show a sorry face.

Besides, just for the moment, everything was all right.

She dragged herself up-stairs, put on a tea-gown, and then ascended the next flight to the nursery.

It was Jimmy's bath-time, usually the most cheerful hour of the day. The little fellow crowed and held out his arms to her.

"He knows you, madam. He's that cunning already," said Ellen.

Mary smiled wanly and sat down on a low chair, her chin propped in her hands. The nursemaid did not know what to make of it, and glanced shyly at her once or twice before venturing to hope that she was feeling quite well.

"Oh, yes, Ellen—except a little headache. The sun was very strong this afternoon, and I walked home all the way from Piccadilly."

"There, now—you didn't ought to've done it," sympathized Ellen. "Perhaps a lay-down before dinner 'll do you all the good in the world."

"Perhaps it will," Mary assented listlessly.

When she was alone in her bedroom she burst into tears. Was her whole life to be

ruined for one mad hour of girlish folly? It was too cruel to contemplate. The very love she bore her husband and her child was tainted with the bitterness of that old folly. Surely, it could not be called by a harsher name. The sin, if sin there were, had been in not telling Donald, and in the beginning she had kept silent as much for his sake as her own. Why should Donald suffer any more than was necessary just because she had been an utter and complete fool?

Languid from the fit of weeping, she inspected the new frock, and finally whipped herself into a proper mood to greet her husband.

It was a lovely little dress, cream lace over very pale pink, and the pearls gave it a superior air of distinction. The housemaid had just hooked her into it when she heard Donald's voice and step in the hall.

A lump came into her throat. Was she going to cry again?

She greeted him with exaggerated gaiety; it was almost theatrical.

During dinner Johnson got a severe shock.

"And what have you been doing with yourself this afternoon?" Donald asked as they settled themselves at the beautifully arranged little table.

"Oh, nothing, absolutely nothing," Mary replied.

"How dull! No visitors?"

"Not a living soul," she said.

Then, for one fleeting second she caught the butler's eyes and a flush of shame dyed her face.

Johnson had heard her tell her husband a deliberate lie.

CHAPTER VIII.

BETTY FINDS A RING.

WHEN three weeks had passed and Mary saw no more of Uriah May, her fears began to die down. She breathed again, as it were. Life was resuming its normal trend, and Donald, to whom her nervousness and slightly haggard face had given great worry, was glad to see that she was improving.

There had been just an idea that she might be on the verge of a nervous collapse.

"I think you're better, darling," he said one morning when she announced that she had had a really good night's sleep.

"I'm sure I am. Isn't it silly of me, Donald, to have nerves at my age?"

"It's because you're a little country girl," he replied, "and I'm a pig to keep you tied here in London when you and Jimmy would be ever so much healthier and happier at Glenn Towers."

"Not happier," she corrected gravely. "I shouldn't be happy anywhere without you, Donald."

He gave her a big hug and then surveyed her solemn little face with tender anxiety. During those past three weeks she had puzzled him very much. He could put his finger on almost the moment from which the change dated—from when they had parted after buying the pearl necklace. Mary had not been quite the same when he came home that evening. There had been a note of forced gaiety in her voice, a shrillness in her usually sweet laughter, an hysterical tendency to start and weep at nothing.

"Dear, I've been wondering if you really are happy—I mean as happy as you hoped to be," he said, hating that tragically solemn look in her eyes.

Her lips quivered. "How can you say such a thing? I'm the luckiest, happiest, and proudest woman in the world."

"Thank you, dear. All the same—you must have a change. Father Glenn will be delighted to have you and the boy for a visit, and I can always manage week-ends."

"I can't leave you," she whispered tearfully. "Don't ask me to, Donald."

"Don't think I *want* you to go."

"Oh, I know you don't. You're only thinking of me—but you see, I'm thinking of me, too. I shouldn't have a moment's peace of mind—"

She broke off short, appalled at the thought of what she had been on the point of blurting out. But Donald was quite unsuspecting.

"You flatter me, madam," he said,

making her a deep bow. "I shall soon be taking a larger size in hats."

In the end they compromised about her going to Glenn Towers. She and Jimmy and Ellen were to go on ahead and Donald was to beg a week from the office, or rather more, since it would last from one Saturday until the second Monday following.

Although she should have to do without him for two or three days, it would amount to her having a fortnight, and most of it with him.

There was just one little fly in the ointment, and that was a pretty one—to wit, the Honorable Mrs. Frederick Glenn. Betty was still keeping house for her father-in-law, and still slightly piqued because Mary had got Donald after all. But that was a small matter; the victor can afford to smile. Only the victor was not at the present moment in a smiling mood about anything, and even at the best of times Betty could irritate her, especially by being too friendly with Donald.

However, the first part of the program passed off as arranged.

Oh, it was rather good to be back in the beautiful home of one's childhood. The servants, most of whom were like old family friends, went into such ecstasies over Jimmy that Betty feared her Pekingese pets were in danger of being slighted. But she, too, thought Jimmy a wonderful child, and she was very friendly and sweet to Mary—suspiciously so, if Mary had taken the trouble to think.

"It's simply lovely having you here," she said, as though Glenn Towers and all within it were her property. "Now do hurry and change. I'm dying for a nice, cozy chat with you. Tea will be ready in about ten minutes." Then she added, a little irrelevantly: "We're having ducklings for dinner—our own—with early peas from the garden."

After all, Mary thought contritely, Betty wasn't such a bad sort, if one only took her the right way. Of course, she was a little frivolous and selfish, and sometimes she was "catty" about other women—but, then, so are all of us on occasions.

It seemed easier to forget Uriah May away off here in the country, and if only Donald could come now, at once, Mary felt that she really would be cured of her terror.

What if May called again when she was not there, and Johnson told Donald about it, and that the man had called before? What if he dared to approach Donald?

But she tried to put those sickening fears from her, hurriedly removed the stains of travel, and went down to join Betty in the living-hall. Her father had driven over to the near-by market town that morning, and was not expected back until six or seven.

"I wanted you all to myself this afternoon," said Betty in the most flattering way. "So I've given orders that we are not at home. Anyway, I expect you'd rather rest. You don't look awfully well."

"I'm well enough," Mary replied. "Just a little run down. London really does agree with me, but of course I love the country."

"I'd change places with you any day," Betty remarked with a wry smile. "Durrenmead is a dull hole, and the people! How any one can stand them passes my comprehension. Always poking their noses into one's affairs and prying about. One can't so much as be seen with a man without all the gossips clacking."

Mary smiled mischievously.

"I agree there is a fair amount of talk in this neighborhood—but what special scrape have you been getting into, Betty?"

Betty laughed, too.

"Oh, any amount. Nothing *special*. I'm always furnishing food for scandal. Speaking of food reminds me we're going to have ducklings for dinner."

"You've already told me that," Mary interrupted.

"I know. But I want to tell you something awfully queer. This particular pair were chosen for slaughter because they felt their own swimming-bath wasn't smart enough, and they would persist in breaking bonds and establishing themselves at the Lily Pond. So now we're going to eat them, and perhaps that will teach them a jolly good lesson."

"Poor little chaps," said Mary, slightly

puzzled as to what all this was leading to, if anything. Betty's chatter was apt to be inconsequential.

Suddenly Betty opened her right hand and held it out to Mary.

In the palm lay a band of bright gold—a wedding ring.

"Cook found this in one of the duckling's insides," she said. "Isn't that—queer?"

Mary knew that she was expected to examine the thing, but she would almost as soon have touched a viper; she knew that she ought to exclaim with surprise at this uniquely obtained ornament, but the words would not come.

"It's a wedding ring," Betty informed her.

"Yes—it looks like one," she managed to reply.

"Somebody must have lost it in the Lily Pond, and one of those inquisitive ducklings found it instead of the worm he was looking for."

"Yes, of course," Mary said hoarsely.

She knew that she was as pale as death, and her whole body felt as though turned to ice, but as an animal will tear at the paw which holds him to the cruel trap she still hoped desperately for escape. Perhaps careless Betty hadn't thought of looking to see if there was an inscription. She forgot that Betty, though careless, was as inquisitive as the duckling which had been the cause of the trouble.

"Do look at it. There's something written inside—awfully queer. 'Victor to Mary, June 6th—'"

The eyes of the two women met, and Betty laughed. It was a soft laugh, low and very terrible; it was the laugh of a woman who held not only a wedding ring in the soft palm of her little hand, but the heart of her successful rival.

"I've looked up the date," said Betty, her voice as hard as nails, "and it's shortly after Clarissa was married. About the time you were so frightfully in love with Captain Victor Little, and everybody thought you were going into a decline or something. You kept Donald hanging about, playing with him, until your father got news of Captain Little's death."

"Why not say straight out what you think you've discovered?" Mary said quietly.

This was infinitely worse than having Uriah May hanging over one's head. May was as a tender young kitten to this tigress who had been balked of her prey.

Again came that soft, indescribably cruel laugh.

Useless for Mary to deny that "Victor to Mary" followed by that incriminating date meant anything but exactly what it did mean. The names together with the date proved a clear case. But not necessarily did it prove that she had actually married the man.

"My dear Mary, I think you're being ungrateful," said Betty. She had changed her tone and was cooing now. "If I had wanted to be unpleasant and make trouble for you, I could have shown the ring to your father; if it had been in my mind to make serious mischief I could have shown it to Donald. Instead of which—"

"Donald knows all about it," Mary interrupted fiercely.

She was in a corner now, and must lie.

"Donald knows you were married to Captain Little?"

"He knows that I was engaged to him—that we were to have eloped. Captain Little gave me the ring to keep. I—I had changed my mind about eloping. Still, I felt bound to him—long after he had gone away. You see, Betty, Captain Little threw me over."

"And so you took Donald as sort of second best," sneered Betty.

"Oh, no, no!"

"What else was it? How complimented Donald must have felt."

Here was Betty, who had wanted him herself, roughly bruising their wonderful love, telling her that she had thrown contempt upon Donald, calling him "second best."

"And when you learned that Captain Little was dead, you threw your wedding ring into the Lily Pond and married Donald," Betty went on. "Has Donald ever seen that ring?"

"No."

"If he saw it, isn't it rather likely that

he'd think you had carried your elopement plans to their logical conclusions?"

The object of this controversy had been deposited upon the tea-table, and at this point Mary leaned forward and picked it up, slipping it into the pocket of the jersey she was wearing.

"I cannot say what Donald would think," she replied, "but I don't feel that it's necessary for me to test his love. Donald *does* love me. I'd rather die than hurt him. Oh, Betty"—her voice rose on a passionate note—"weren't you ever unwise or foolish in your life? Didn't you ever do anything that you wished with all your heart and soul you could undo? I suppose everybody has. I was mad—infatuated—completely lost to sense or reason; whatever you like to call it. I'd met so few men outside the family, and Donald had always seemed one of the family. I had to grow up before I knew that I loved him; that he was the one man in the world I ever could really love. You've no idea how wildly happy we've been, Betty."

Betty's blue eyes were very hard. She had no wish to hear about the happiness of Mary's wedded life. It infuriated her. "What are you telling me all this for? What is it leading up to?" she demanded.

"I don't know really." Mary made a gesture of hopelessness. "I only thought perhaps you'd be kind enough to keep this discovery to yourself—"

"That you were married secretly to Captain Little?"

"No, no!" Mary crimsoned. She was a dreadfully poor liar. "Only that I had meant to elope with him, and that he'd actually bought this ring."

"But you said Donald knew that," sneered Betty.

Poor Mary had indeed floundered; the most credulous child would know that she was not telling the truth, but having set her hand to this plow, she must pursue the crooked furrow.

"He doesn't actually know about the ring," she said tremulously. "And it was all so long ago, Betty. Donald can't bear any mention of Captain Little. It upsets him dreadfully, and if any one told him about this he'd only be hurt. Don't you understand?"

"I understand, at least, what you want. You want the whole thing hushed up—forgotten."

"Isn't it the only merciful thing to do?"

"Are you begging me for mercy?" Betty's voice was scornful.

"If it comes to that, I am," Mary replied.

The little blond woman laughed, rocking herself in a very ecstasy of mirth.

"Oh, how incredibly funny you are! I can't help it. You are ridiculous, Mary. Of course I haven't the least intention of telling Donald or anybody."

Mary's hands flew to her face, and she burst into hysterical sobs.

"Then why did you torture me so?" she cried. "If you only knew how I have suffered already!"

"I thought you were so happy."

"I was until—until quite recently. And that ring turning up so unexpectedly—it seems as thought fate was determined to punish me for something I—I never meant to do; something that should be dead and buried now beyond all recall."

She spoke almost as though to herself, and her lovely young face fell into an expression of pathos and melancholy that should have melted a heart of stone.

"Dear me, what a fuss you're making!" said Betty, who hated any display of emotion. "For Heaven's sake, go on being happy. Don't let anything I've said interfere with it. Be as happy as—h-m—your conscience will let you. I, for one, certainly disapprove of husbands and wives raking up their pasts for each other's discomfort. Or even the present, if it comes to that.

"I'm sure poor Frederick and I would have separated if we'd been confidential about many of our little peccadillos. And men are generally more unreasonable than women. Personally I advise you *not* to whisper a word to Donald about that ring. Heaven knows what he'd think. Now, run up-stairs and wash your face, my dear. You look a perfect sight."

Mary gladly availed herself of this excuse to get away.

In the solitude of her room she tried to reason away the new terror. Perhaps Betty had not really meant to frighten her. She could not quite make Betty out. Now she was as desperately anxious for Donald to remain in London as she had been to have him come to Glenn Towers.

She knew that she would not have one easy moment while he was here.

A dull headache assailed her, the veins in her neck and forehead throbbed strangely, and it occurred to her in a flash that what she had been fearing was actually going to happen. She was going to be ill.

CHAPTER IX.

BETRAYAL.

THE doctor called it a mild attack of brain fever. Mary was delirious and babbled strangely of Victor Little and a man whose brown bowler hat offended her. Once she said to the man in the brown bowler, who apparently stood leering at her from the foot of the bed: "If only you'll go away and promise never to come back again, I'll give you my pearl necklace."

Donald heard some of these ravings, and whenever the poor girl mentioned Little's name he winced as though a sharp blow had been dealt him.

Her cries to the supposedly dead lover were all on the same note: "Oh, why didn't you write me, Victor? Why did you go off and leave me with never a word? The silence was so cruel—so terribly cruel! What had I ever done to you, Victor, to be treated like that?"

Donald would set his teeth and go quickly out of the room. Never once did she mention his name.

It was an anxious time, and when, in September, Mary emerged from convalescence, she found that the illness had taken serious toll of her youth. She was beautiful, but too spiritual-looking for this world. She had little strength and less will to do anything.

Everybody was kindness itself. Her father and the host of brothers and sisters vied with each other to coax her back to her old self. Donald, of course, was her slave.

Yet one person at Glenn Towers marked a change in Donald. Betty, too, had heard some of the things poor Mary had raved in her delirium; and it was Betty who understood why Donald's eyes had lost their merry twinkle and could not regain it even after Mary had been pronounced well on the road to health again.

Donald knew that in the background of Mary's life there still lurked the sinister shadow of the man she had loved before she discovered that she loved him. He knew that she was unhappy because of Victor Little, even though she believed the man to be dead.

But even in delirium Mary had kept the vital part of her secret. Something standing guard in her unconscious brain had warned her not to talk about her first marriage.

During this period of anxiety it had been quite natural for Donald and Betty to see a great deal of each other. Betty was greatly harassed by the procession of nurses and relatives which came to Glenn Towers. True, it was the housekeeper who had to do with the actual arrangements, but Betty liked to think that the whole responsibility rested on her own shoulders.

Whenever possible she coaxed Donald to let her take him for a drive in her little car, and he went only to please her because she complained of being completely worn out with worry.

Betty was also very motherly with little Jimmy, and made a point of fussing over him whenever Donald was at hand.

Being but a mere man, these maneuvers took him in. Besides, he shared an unpleasant secret with Betty. She, too, had heard some of those ravings about Victor Little.

He was hurt to his very soul, poor Donald, and Betty's sympathy was very sweet.

While Mary was still convalescent and had to go to bed early, Donald would come down after saying good night to her and stroll for an hour or so with Betty on the terrace.

The nights were golden with moonlight and just cool enough to be enjoyable.

Betty was what is described as a man's woman. She was quite another person in the company of men—an agreeable, soft little person, almost too young in the lore of life to have experienced wifehood and widowhood. With the exception of old John Glenn, who saw through her and tolerated her for the sake of his dead son, all the men of the family rallied to Betty's standard. There had been more than one domestic scene because of some sister-in-law's jealousy.

And Betty played them this way and that, as suited her purpose.

But a tragic thing was happening. Whereas in her early widowhood Betty had fixed covetous eyes upon Donald mainly because he would one day be the richest shareholder in Glenn & Foshay, Limited, now she was falling head over heels in love with him.

During the critical period of Mary's illness she had wondered—she could not help herself—even speculated a little. If Mary were to die—

But Mary did not die.

One night on the terrace Betty gravely discussed with Donald the secret they shared.

It was none of his doings. He would have died rather than have spoken of it of his own free will, but Betty compelled him insidiously. He always remembered that night with a shrinking feeling. The tender spot was touched, even firmly pressed.

Mary was almost quite well now. She had been rather cross when they sent her to bed; also—which no one knew—terribly apprehensive about something in the air which he could not define. It was just a feeling that Betty was at heart a traitor.

Donald came down to the terrace in almost a light-hearted mood. Betty did not know that what occasioned it was Mary clinging to him with her old-time fervor and demanding to be assured of his everlasting love.

"She's a troublesome child," he said as Betty invited him to hold a match to the cigarette she always smoked with him after dinner. "Said she wouldn't go to bed—pretended to be afraid of the dark." He chuckled. It had been a long time since that boyish laugh had escaped him.

Betty's hand shook, and the cigarette was lighted badly. She puffed hard at it. That note in Donald's voice filled her with sick dismay. Had she hoped to part the young husband and wife? Did she realize that it would not be an easy task even for one so skilled as she in the arts of seduction.

"I've often wondered, Donald, if you have ever had the key to Mary's inner life," she began musingly. "You say she is a troublesome child—you think of her as a child—but I would describe her as a deeply troubled woman."

The man caught in his breath with a sharp, rasping sound.

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"I think you know what I mean. That man, Little, was more to Mary than—than just an ordinary sweetheart."

Donald's nails dug into the palms of his clenched hands.

"Mary was in love with Captain Little," he said gravely. "They were secretly engaged. He didn't treat her very well, for which I am grateful to him."

"Are you?" Betty asked. Then, before he could resent what might seem to be a suggestion of impertinence she added quickly, "Oh, if only poor dear Frederick had been as understanding and patient with my little sins as you are with Mary's, then we would never have quarreled at all."

"If your sins were no bigger than Mary's then Frederick must have been rather unreasonable," Donald replied.

She looked at him slyly, with a sidewise glance, and saw that his lips were quivering for all he spoke so evenly, and then wave upon wave there surged up in her breast a violent, almost annihilating hatred of Mary. She tried to feel that it was righteous indignation such as the Almighty Himself must hold toward a young wife who in some way was certainly deceiving the best husband in the world.

"Well, of course you knew that Mary was on the point of eloping with Captain Little," she said guilelessly.

"Good Lord, what *can* you mean?"

Betty clapped a hand to her mouth with

a charming gesture that was, nevertheless, wholly theatrical.

"I'm so sorry, Donald! I shouldn't have mentioned that—I mean, Mary said you knew all about it. Oh, what a stupid little fool I am! My tongue will be the death of me one of these days—but, honestly, Donald, as I live and breathe, Mary told me that you knew she and Little had arranged to elope on a certain day. Donald, don't look like that! I can't bear it. Do you imagine for one moment that I'm lying, or that I've wilfully betrayed a confidence?"

He said nothing, gave her no cue as to his innermost felings, and so in a fury of heart-sickness she was compelled to convince him.

She did lightly, in her own way.

"I'm afraid you don't believe me, but since I've said so much—far too much, really—I must say more. Otherwise, I don't know what you'll think of me, Donald. I mean, it sounds as though I were trying wilfully to slander Mary."

"I don't know. I don't know!" His voice had a dull hopeless sound.

Betty crept close to him and laid a little hand on the arm nearest her.

"Donald, dear, I don't want to make you suffer—"

"You have already; you may as well go on. Otherwise—"

"Yes, yes! After all, it's nothing, really. The whole thing's over and done with, isn't it? The man is dead, and Mary is your wife."

"I think you started out to tell me something," he said coldly.

She laughed with a nervous air. "Only because you seemed to doubt me when I said—what I'd been told you already knew—that they had once planned to elope. Why, he'd even bought the wedding-ring and had it inscribed with their names and the date."

Donald was tempted to tell Betty that she lied, but he forbore.

"Is that a fact?" he said, trying to be pleasantly sarcastic.

And at that Betty's hatred of Mary seized her as a gale shakes slender trees. She was in the clutch of it.

"A fact? Very well—if you want 'facts' and drive me to it! Would you like to see that wedding-ring, which we assume was never used? Still, Mary treasures it, I can tell you where to find it—if you doubt me. It's in the pocket of a yellow silk jersey she was wearing the very day she was taken ill. The jersey hangs in the big Dutch wardrobe in her bedroom—she's probably forgotten that she left the ring there, and I suppose one of the maids put the jersey away when they undressed her that afternoon."

Mary had forgotten.

Afterward she wondered how she could have been such a fool—and, above all, how for one little moment she could have trusted Betty.

Donald had said good night and left her in bed, but now vitality was returning with greater strength than showed on the surface. She had rebelled at being put to bed so early, and having napped generously through the day she was uncomfortably wakeful.

That queer, uneasy feeling would not let her rest. Betty was up to something. Donald was Mary's man, and so delicately strung were the cords which bound them together that Mary responsively caught every alien suggestion.

Scarcely had Donald left her when she got up again, flinging aside the bed-covers aggressively, and creeping back into her clothes with a stealthy, childish air of doing something which was forbidden.

She was not ill any more; why should they send her to bed at half past eight? Donald and Betty—why should they insist upon her going to bed when she didn't feel a bit like it—unless—

They were on the terrace, deep in their absorbing conversation, when she came down.

She crossed the drawing-room, her little slippered feet making no sound, and she saw them there together and heard what they said; she saw Betty's traitorous hand resting on Donald's arm, while the guileless blue eyes, tear-brimmed, implored him; she heard herself betrayed.

And it seemed to her that Donald shared in her betrayal.

After all, what did anything matter now?

Fifteen minutes later Donald came softly into her bedroom and was vastly surprised to find her sitting bolt upright in a chair when he had expected her to be asleep. The room was lit in a spectral fashion by only two candles, and in her white dressing-gown with her hair all unbound, Mary looked like the unhappy ghost of the proverbial haunted chamber.

Donald halted on the threshold and she bade him enter. Her voice was cold and clear. The expression of tragedy on his face maddened her, but she had definitely decided upon her line of action.

"Please come in. I know why you are here. I couldn't sleep and I dressed and went down-stairs. You didn't hear me—you and Betty were too busy discussing me—but I heard what you were saying. Yes, it is quite true, I had planned to elope with Victor. I told you I had made him vows which I could not break. But it is not true that I've been treasuring that hateful ring—"

She went on, speaking evenly, telling him the truth in everything but that one essential fact, that she had actually gone through the ceremony of marriage with Victor Little.

And then the miracle happened, as it very often does between a husband and wife who love each other dearly.

Donald believed her.

He was all contrition and anguish as he flung himself on his knees and buried his face in her lap.

"Of course I knew!" he cried with infinite self-reproach. "Only I'm so infernally jealous. The very thought of the fellow drives me insane. If ever I meet him again—"

"My dear, you forget that he's dead."

Donald made no reply. Suppose he were to tell Mary that, as far as he knew, Victor Little was not dead?

CHAPTER X.

MR. MAY PLAYS DESTINY.

URIAH MAY led an interesting and varied life. When in funds he followed the race-meetings; Epsom, Newmarket, Doncaster were all homes to him. Yet he really possessed what might be called his own home, although he never invaded it unless there was a little money in his pockets, for otherwise he would not have been tolerated.

There was a Mrs. Uriah May, but it was not she of whom he stood in fear. She was a faded, gray woman who scarcely ever opened her mouth, and went about like a shadow doing all the disagreeable tasks of the household for no greater reward than her bed and board. Sometimes—when she could get it—she took in a bit of tailoring to help make both ends meet.

If she had chosen to recall those happy days there was a time when she had been the mistress of five well-trained servants and had ridden in her own carriage. She was a widow when May first captured her fancy—in what circumstances it does not really matter—a fairly rich young widow.

They had come down now to four rooms in a great, gloomy house in a shabby neighborhood on the outskirts of Westbourne Grove, and it was the martinet of the little family who paid the rent and called the tune.

Mr. May possessed a daughter who had been christened Amabel. Could he have looked well into the future at the time of her infancy, he would not have chosen such a meek name for her. Privately he called her "hell-cat," but never aloud.

At the period of this story Amabel May was aged about twenty-two, a clever, dark-browed girl sometimes beautiful and always shrewd, and she earned good wages in the ladies' costume department of a fashionable drapery establishment.

Amabel hated her father and adored her mother. She was one of the few people in the world that Uriah could not cheat at some time or another, and when he elected to rest at home he had to pay his board or promptly be turned out. Amabel stood no nonsense from him, and he was mortally afraid of her.

That lucky touch of his with Mary had resulted in quite a long run of good fortune. Strange to say, the twenty-to-one shot he had fixed upon a "certainty" came romping home; and it was not the only success he had that week at Epsom. At the

end of it he found himself with something like five hundred pounds in his pockets.

Being a generous man he made his wife a surreptitious present of two pounds, and took her to a moving-picture show, followed by tea at the Corner House, which was rather a romantic procedure. He lived at home for a fortnight and never grumbled once at being mulcted for his board.

Then, with the bulk of his wealth still intact, he went over to Ireland—where he wasn't so well-known—and opened a book himself. It took more than a month to clear him out, but from the first luck was dead against him.

He came home sadly reduced, and October found him back in the dingy house in St. Mallow's Square with only a couple of pounds or so to face the prospect of the future. As he remarked frequently, life was all ups and downs.

It was a Saturday afternoon, raining; he had caught a cold, and Amabel was at home.

Mr. May had appropriated a corner of the sitting-room table for his own needs, and adorned with a woolen stocking reeking of camphor pinned around his throat, was seeking with some difficulty to compose an important letter.

Mrs. May was in the kitchen—her usual retreat on the few occasions when father and daughter happened unfortunately to foregather at the same time—and Amabel was sitting near a smoldering fire nervously stitching on a crêpe de Chine blouse which she hoped to complete in time to wear to a dance to-night. Her "best boy" was calling for her at seven o'clock, and the blouse was not nearly finished yet.

Occasionally she glanced under level black brows at her father and scowled, wondering what villainy was afoot.

Mr. May's detective powers had enabled him, without much trouble, to discover that the former Mrs. Little was now a Mrs. Donald Foshay, of the well-known firm of Glenn & Foshay, Ltd., East India merchants, and that, moreover, she was a Glenn by birth.

When he thought of the beggarly twenty pounds he had got out of her, he felt cheated. Of course she did not know how really valuable his silence was, and it might be necessary to tell her. Indeed, the market price of it was going up by leaps and bounds. Only last week, by a curious coincidence, a certain rumor he had followed up, resulted in his getting into touch with a man he had wanted very much to see.

He composed his difficult letter with one eye on the clock. If this man kept his appointment, he'd be calling here in about an hour. Mr. May threw an apprehensive look at Amabel, sighed, dipped his pen in the ink, and proceeded with the task in hand.

"Never trouble trouble 'til trouble troubles you," is a good adage, and if the worst came to the worst he could take his visitor around the corner to the Angel Arms for their confab.

"Dear Madam," he wrote for the second time, forgetting that he had decided upon a curter beginning.

"Oh, bother it!" He crumpled up the second sheet, and Amabel remarked sweetly, "You must be very rich to be able to waste paper like that."

"It's an important business letter, my dear," he informed her.

"*Business!*" It is impossible to give an adequate description of the scorn in her voice.

Mr. May bent to it now, being terrified to risk wasting another sheet of paper.

MADAM:

Forgive me for intruding upon you, but things has come up making it necessary. I am by the way of obtaining a comfortable little business which would set me up for life, if only I could get the loan of a thousand pounds. Two thousand would be even better.

Happening to think of you I knew you would not refuse my request. Two thousand pounds would not be much to a lady in your posishun. As you do not wish me to come to your house, will you come to mine? It is perfectly proper. My wife is on the premises. I will expect you—

He broke off to nibble his pen and brood upon Amabel's sour young face. He must nominate a time when there could be no possible interruption from her.

—I will expect you at three o'clock on this coming Tuesday.

And am, madam,

Your obedient servant,

URIAH MAY.

This missive, sealed in a properly addressed letter, he slipped into the pocket

of his coat and went out to post, in spite of the rain and his sore throat. She might get it by the last post and it would give her something to think about over the week-end.

When he had gone Amabel rose quickly, crossed the room, and made what she could of the clues he had left behind him. They were not many, but one was important. It was the address of Mrs. Donald Foshay on the scrap of paper where he had jotted it down, and the impression on the blotting-pad told her that he had been writing to Mrs. Donald Foshay.

Now Amabel was considerably surprised. She knew Mrs. Foshay very well. Indeed, in the establishment which employed Amabel May, Mary was a frequent customer, also the particular customer of Miss May in the ladies' costumes.

Amabel had been twice to the gay little house to bring a selection of frocks to be tried on, and on one occasion she had met Jimmy.

To her harassed and slightly warped conception of life, the little house of happiness, Jimmy and beautiful Mary Foshay had given something infinitely pleasurable. She was not envious of Mary. She only rejoiced that such things really did exist in a world which she herself had found just a little hateful—such things as love, beauty, happiness, and wealth, all going hand in hand.

What had her father to do with Mrs. Foshay? One could depend upon it that it was not anything good.

When Uriah May came back from the pillar-box his daughter was sewing furiously on her blouse, scowling worse than ever. She looked up at him, and their eyes met.

In Heaven's name, what had he done to her *now?* He knew she hated him; it was no new tale; but so far he'd been paying his board regularly, and that was the only rock on which they ever split to any serious extent.

So long as he paid she generally kept her mouth shut. She kept it shut now, but certainly the look in her eyes was disconcerting.

The visitor Mr. May expected was a little late.

As time drew in Amabel stitched more furiously than ever. Would she be able to finish the blouse? To use an expression which might have been her father's—it mattered, and it didn't. She possessed other blouses.

He knew that she was going out and he longed for the moment when she would have gone. He could deal with his wife, but not with Amabel.

Still she worked, unmoved from her fury of stitching, and when the door-bell rang Mr. May answered the summons.

As he feared, it was not Amabel's young man, but the visitor for himself.

They exchanged stilted greetings in the shabby passage lit by an evil-smelling oil lamp.

"What's it all about, May? This is a beastly evening to drag a fellow out. I'm not so well, you know."

"I can see that, captain. And I'm not feeling any too well myself. It's no good asking you inside. My family, you understand—all over the place. We'll just trot across to the Angel Arms—nothing to whet your whistle here—and talk it over."

"Talk *what* over?"

"You'll be interested when you hear," said Uriah May.

As he spoke he was pulling on an ulster and hiding the offensive neck bandage under a silk muffler.

Amabel poked her head out of the door and took a good long look at her father's caller. When she had retreated the caller said, "Well, I hope she knows me the next time we meet."

"That's my daughter," explained Mr. May. "She always has to find out what's going on."

"Pretty girl."

"You wouldn't think so if you lived with her. Handsome is as handsome does," said Amabel's father.

The small bar parlor of the Angel Arms was empty, although the bar itself was full, and the two men seated themselves at a small table in the corner. Mr. May ordered drinks, a bottle of stout for himself and a double brandy for his guest.

The other man struggled out of his overcoat and was revealed as the wreck of Cap-

tain Victor Little. It is doubtful if Mary, passing him in the street, would have recognized him. Drink and dissipation had absolutely done for him, as was evident in his bloated face and palsied limbs. There was also a haunted expression about his eyes which hinted at some deeper mental worry, which might have been responsible for his drinking himself to death.

"Bless me, but you do look a fair crock!" exclaimed Uriah May with more truth than tact. "What's the matter with you?"

Little laughed discordantly. "What isn't the matter with me, you mean. Now I'm free at last, damn it, and haven't got six months to live. Well, I'll make it a merry six months. There's a little money and I'm going to have a hell of a time and blow every brass cent of it."

"That's right," said Mr. May soothingly. "Keep your pecker up. Who knows? Doctors don't, and that's a fact. You might die and you mightn't, although in the long run I suppose all of us has to go." He heaved a deep sigh. "Oh, well, let's talk about something more cherful."

"What did you want to see me for?" Little asked.

Mr. May laid a finger to his nose.

"Remember that young lady what you was going to marry—the one in your flat that day?"

Little nodded indifferently, but a gleam came into his eye. Perhaps he had not allowed himself to think of Mary Glenn since force of circumstances over which he had had no control had torn him from her side.

"I was married to her," he said.

Mr. May looked astonished and gave vent to his almost soundless whistle.

"The dickens you were, captain! Well, that was rushing it a bit, wasn't it?"

"No doubt."

Mr. May coughed softly. "I—er—happened to run into her the other day. She thinks you're dead."

"Well, I soon will be."

"She's married again; got a kid, too. She did a bit of rushing, too."

Victor Little suddenly stiffened, and the hand which held the tumbler of brandy came down on the table with a bang. He leaned forward, and ugly blue veins showed on his temples.

"Married—again!" he exclaimed thickly. "She wouldn't dare."

"Ah, that's just what she has," said Uriah May.

"Do you know who she's married to?"

"Chap name of Donald Foshay."

Victor Little's face went purple with anger.

"I know the fellow. He gave me a thrashing once. I've never forgotten. So that's the man. Well, by God!"

Mr. May shifted his position uneasily as Little's shaking hand mopped the purple face and the thick lips twitched. No doubt about it, the captain was a horrible wreck. What a lesson on the evils of drink. Mr. May rapped on the table and when the barmaid responded, he ordered another relay of refreshment, brandy for himself this time, as well as for the captain. They both of them needed pulling together for the important business in hand.

"He thrashed me—once," Little repeated as though to himself.

"What cheek!" sympathized his friend. "Well, you can get even with him now, can't you?"

Obviously poor dear Captain Little required to be led by a better brain than he himself possessed. He looked so dull, as though he did not take it in.

"Look here," May went on briskly. "Anyway, you'd like to see her, wouldn't you? The girl's fond of you still, I'm sure. Wouldn't you like to see her?"

"I—" the other hesitated.

"*Wouldn't* you? If it could be arranged safely, you know, by a mutual friend. Now what about Tuesday, half past three at my house? Amabel will be at her shop and my old woman 'll keep herself out of the way. You and—er—the former Mrs. Little could have a nice little chat over old times and what not. It seems such a pity that just because two loving hearts 'ave drifted apart, as you might say, that they can't go on being friends."

Victor Little groaned. "I loved her. Yes, I truly did love her, May."

Mr. May grunted expresively. He was so sympathetic that it hurt him.

"Half past three on Tuesday then. Shall I come and fetch you?"

"No, I—I'll be there," Little said.

CHAPTER XI.

CANCELED CHECKS—AND NAMES.

DONALD and Mary were back in the little house off Eaton Square, but things were not quite as they had been before. A shadow had stolen over their happiness. At first it seemed no bigger than little Jimmy's hand, but it grew.

Complete harmony would have seemed to be restored. It had been a shock to Donald to discover that Mary had at one time actually fixed a date to elope with Victor Little, but as he reasoned with himself, she had been frank enough about her feelings for Little. She had not treasured that ring, at all, as Betty intimated. She had cast it from her, and it had only been returned to her in the curious circumstances already narrated on the very day she was stricken with illness.

But while Donald could reason himself out of his jealousy, it was desperately hard for him to account for the sudden change which had come over Mary. There was no doubt about it that she had changed. Not that she loved him less dearly—it seemed almost as though she loved him more—but she was timorous, fearful and given increasingly to those dreadful fits of weeping.

And, though at times she clung to him piteously, at others she seemed to want him out of her way.

There was another matter troubling him which he could not discuss with Mary.

After that dramatic scene at Glenn Towers when Betty had filled him with all sorts of ideas he had spoken to her rather sternly. She was not, he said, to spread the story of that wedding-ring around the family. He forbade her to; and Betty had looked at him with soft reproach in her big blue eyes.

"As though I would, Donald!" she exclaimed.

"Well, see that you don't," he said crossly.

He did not know that Betty was in love with him, but very soon he began to find himself, quite against his will, forced into a sort of friendly intimacy with her.

She had grown tired of Durrenmead and wished to come to London for the winter. It was a reasonable enough request, but old John Glenn had no sympathy with it. He himself was going to Italy, and it was rather selfish of him to insist upon Betty occupying Glenn Towers in solitary state during his absence, but that was what he tried to do. He had made her a personal allowance of four hundred pounds a year, and he refused to increase it by a penny, so that with her extravagant habits it would have been impossible for her to take even a modest flat in London, unless help were forthcoming from another quarter.

So it was not only Mary who was being blackmailed, but Donald as well. Because she was keeping the secret of the ring Betty began to ask him for money. At first it was a moderate sum to pay an overdue dressmaker's bill. Then she came to London and established herself in a small but very expensive flat in King Charles's Court, and almost at once she got into money difficulties.

Donald found himself being rung up by her at odd moments. She appeared several times at the office without invitation and made him take her out to lunch; and before he knew how it happened at all he was stopping at King Charles's Court on his way home as much as twice a week and sometimes oftener.

He thought he understood why he had been singled out as her financial adviser, even though there were plenty of other brothers and brothers-in-law quite as well qualified for the task; but there it was, he had allowed himself to be blackmailed, and now he had gone too far to refuse her.

His salary was big, but when—to dry Betty's tears and insure the holding of her tongue—he felt obliged to hand over to her anything from ten to fifty pounds a week, the affair began to get on his nerves. Always she protested that it was the last time, that he was ever so good, and she herself overwhelmingly grateful—but the last time was not yet in sight.

Accordingly, there were two worried peo-

ple in the little house which had once been a house of happiness; two people with secrets they could not share with each other. For Donald had not told Mary anything about all those checks, nor of his frequent calls upon Frederick Glenn's widow.

It must not be supposed, however, that it could be kept an entire secret from the family. The sisters and sisters-in-law did not like Betty, and they wondered how she could afford to live so extravantly.

Thomas Glenn saw them lunching together one day in the big city chop-house, and he told his wife, who told all the other wives with the exception of Donald's.

Often the hovering figure behind the drawing-room windows waited until tea time was long past before the taxicab dashed up with Donald, and on those occasions he was in such a cross mood that to question him as to why he was so late was fatal.

There had been three quite serious quarrels in the little house.

Then something definite happened.

It was a Saturday afternoon—destined to be a very fatal Saturday in several respects—and there could be no excuse to detain Donald. He had telephoned, however, saying that he could not get home for lunch and that he might possibly go straight from the office to Beckenham for a couple of rounds of golf. Mary was not to worry if he was late.

She lunched that day with Mrs. Thomas Glenn, and all through the meal Beatrice had made veiled remarks about the source of Betty's income.

"If you ask me," Beatrice said with a meaning laugh, "I think she's passing the hat around the family. You know what men are."

Of them all, Mary had most reason to be jealous of Betty. She went home nursing the idea Beatrice had planted in her mind. Only last week Donald had grumbled at the size of the housekeeping bills, and never before had such a thing happened. He had also said he could not afford to order himself some new winter suits and an overcoat.

Mary went straight up-stairs to Donald's little den and sat down at his desk, which he kept rather untidily. Most women will agree that it is a wife's privilege to do what she did. Donald never looked anything up, and it was an easy matter to find the last batch of canceled checks which had been returned from the bank, together with his pass-book, only a few days ago.

All told, there were seventeen checks made out to the Hon. Mrs. Frederick Glenn, ranging in amounts from five to a hundred pounds.

Mary sat back aghast.

Donald—her Donald—was like all the other men in the world!

She rose up, readjusted her veil to hide the pallor of her face, and ordering a taxi had herself driven to King Charles's Court.

Donald's patience had been strained to the breaking point that morning, and when he rang up to say he could not be home for lunch and might play golf in the afternoon, he stated the innocent truth.

A business associate from out of town had claimed him for lunch, but shortly after one o'clock it came on to rain, and the downpour increased to such an extent that golf was impossible.

Twice during the morning Betty had rung up to implore him to look in on her that afternoon, "just for a minute or two." There was some technicality about her lease that she wanted explained. She felt that it was going to be too expensive for her to continue living at King Charles's Court, but the landlords were being most unpleasant on the subject of subletting. And here she was, tied to the flat for the winter unless she could sublet; and how was she to live in it if she couldn't pay her rent?

Donald assured her that there could not possibly be any difficulty. No reasonable landlord could refuse to allow her to sublet if she found a satisfactory tenant.

But this was not what Betty wanted, and he knew it. He was beginning to detest her. After all, it was a very feeble threat she held over him. Did it really matter what lies and rumors she spread?

In a way it did. For the man, Victor Little, was not dead. Roger Wilton, the initial cause of Little's coming to Glenn Towers, had seen the fellow quite recently at

the Junior Paddock Club. Clarissa's brainless husband had rather a weakness for the turf, and the Junior Paddock was one of his favorite haunts. He told Donald on one of the rare occasions when they happened to meet, that he had seen Captain Little and that the man had obviously "gone to the dogs."

It would not be at all pleasant if Betty started spreading vague rumors about Mary's past interest in this creature when he was alive and here in London. Somehow, Donald had got into the habit of thinking of him as dead, and it was a shock to learn that he wasn't. Donald's sole thought was to protect his dear young wife and regain with her that wonderful happiness which seemed to be slipping away from them in such an inexplicable fashion.

The second time Betty rang him up he said he would try to find some time during the afternoon to call upon her, unless he went to Beckenham. It was then that he decided definitely to clear his brain with golf.

But the rain put an end to that idea.

He lingered as long as he could over lunch, experiencing in a minor degree the sensations of a man going shortly to the scaffold. It was becoming humanly impossible for him to give Betty any more money. The one person he could have taken in his confidence, his father-in-law, was far away, and letters explain badly. Also, it isn't in the nature of an honorable man to tell tales on women. Could he even discuss with old John Glenn the problem of being blackmailed by Frederick's widow?

It was well after three when Donald found himself on his way to King Charles's Court.

How he hated the place! Could Betty, had she set out with the idea, have hit upon anything more flamboyantly expensive? She had even jobbed a motor-brougham for her exclusive use.

Who was paying for all this?

The answer was—a weak idiot, his own fatuous self.

And he couldn't afford it. It wasn't fair to Mary, nor to his son. One day he would be a rich man, but he wasn't one yet, and even a rich man may find an ever-increasing demand upon his purse, apart from normal expenses, a tedious and unprofitable business. The Foshays, like the Glenns, were a conservative, quiet-living family, and it went against Donald's grain to provide senseless luxuries for a woman who already had a fine old country house at her disposal with plenty of society thrown in, could she find either, or both, to her taste.

He called at King Charles's Court that afternoon with every intention of having the whole matter straight out with Betty. He might even mention what both of them knew to be the unpleasant truth—that she was trading upon his regard for his wife's good name. Perhaps that was putting it a little too strong. Mary's good name had never been in question; merely the details of a love affair in the past which seemed to have an astonishing and wholly disproportionate influence upon the present.

There was no doubt about it that Betty was expecting him.

He had scarcely been admitted to her circumscribed—if hopelessly expensive—suite when he became aware that he was expected.

Outside the rain was falling monotonously. The chill of approaching winter was prematurely in the air. In Betty's small drawing-room a wealth of flowers bloomed and scented, logs burned in the grate, throwing forth blue, green, and orange flames. She must have drenched them with incense, for the atmosphere was pungent.

Betty glided into the room wearing an arch expression and a fearsome tea-gown arrangement of jade green and peacock-blue. Long jade earrings dangled from her pretty ears and she had "bobbed" her hair! If there was anything Donald disliked more cordially than another it was a woman of mature years with short hair.

"Are you thinking of going on the stage?" he asked.

Betty preened herself at a mirror, fluffing out the short flaxen mop with her heavily ringed little hands.

"Don't you like it?" she asked. "Everybody else does. I must have personality—I must *express* myself, Donald."

Donald left unsaid what he wanted to

say. It would have sounded as if he was lacking in politeness. Also he had not come here to discuss Betty's appearance, however charming that might be.

"Sit down, my dear," she said, indicating one of the two chairs which had been drawn companionably to the fire.

"Thanks. It's scarcely worth while. I've got to rush straight off again—"

"Oh, Donald, how unkind of you!" Betty pouted and her eyes filled with tears. "I wanted so to have a cozy little talk with you. You needn't worry that any of the relatives will come dashing in. I left word with the head porter that I'm 'not at home.' Except to you. Of course he knows that I'm *always* at home to you."

Donald frowned. Confound the woman! She certainly did her best to make him feel and look a fool. And why put into words what secretly bothered him very much?—that if any of the relatives did come dashing in they would be inclined to think that he ought to be spending the afternoon with his own wife instead of with Frederick's widow. Which was exactly how he felt himself.

Nevertheless, he accepted her invitation to sit down. This might be a longer business than he had hoped for. Betty was out for blood this time. He could pretty well gage the size of the check she would angle for by her elaborate method of approaching the subject. And he determined that she was not going to get it.

"About this affair of your lease—" he began abruptly. "I'll see the landlords if you like. I'm quite sure they'll allow you to sublet. Let me have a look at the lease—or is it only an agreement?"

Betty's eyes brimmed over.

"But where am I to *live?*" she wailed, spreading her little hands in a gesture of hopelessness.

"Glenn Towers is at your disposal, isn't it?"

"That hole! Really, Donald, I can't think why you're so unkind to me. Everybody's simply beastly to me. Was it my fault that Frederick ran through every penny we had and left me a pauper? And that rich, stingy old man"—she referred to her father-in-law—"simply rolling in money and allows me only a miserable four hundred a year."

Donald shifted uncomfortably. "Well, you see, Mr. Glenn has a rather large family. He may be rich, but certainly I shouldn't call him stingy. All of the girls have the same allowance, and now that you're a widow he's treated you exactly as one of his own daughters."

"I believe you're trying to preach at me!" she gasped indignantly.

"Not exactly. Only—well, you must cut your coat according to your cloth, Betty."

"That means, I suppose, that you're not going to help me out any more when I get into difficulties." Her voice was hard now.

"But you're always in difficulties," he said lamely. "I hate to say so—no doubt you'll think I'm stingy, too—but my means simply won't run to it. Do be a sensible girl and go back to Gleen Towers. You won't have any expenses there at all."

"You want to get me away from London—"

"Not in the least. It's quite plain that you cannot live in London on your income, but there's no reason why you shouldn't visit here as much as you like. Any of the girls would be glad to put you up—"

"Would they? Would Mary?"

"I'm sure Mary would be delighted."

Betty laughed harshly. "Little you know. Why, they all hate me, every blessed one of them. They're jealous of me, Donald—all afraid I'll make eyes at their precious husbands. And Mary is the most jealous of them all."

Donald flushed and drummed impatiently on the arms of his chair. What Betty said was true, and he knew it. She was a great and growing nuisance; a wilful child who yet would not permit herself to be treated as a child. He longed to shake her.

"If you could only allow me a fixed sum, Donald," she said brazenly. "Say a thousand a year—"

"A thousand a year! Good Heavens, Betty, are you mad? Why, I haven't much more than three thousand myself. We don't even keep a car, as you know."

"I suppose that's a hit at me—"

"Not a bit. But with the best will in

the world I can't do anything more for you. It isn't fair to Mary and the boy. You've already run me unpleasantly short."

"*I* have run you short? Ha, I like that! Why did you ever give me any money, then?"

She had certainly put him into a most uncomfortable position, and mentally he squirmed.

"Don't think I've minded lending a hand. I don't begrudge it, Betty—only I simply can't go on doing it. I haven't got the money."

"You can get it." Her voice held a deadly note. "You can ask your father for it."

"That is something I haven't the slightest intention of doing." He got up, affecting a jaunty air. "As the editors say, this correspondence is now closed."

"Not quite."

She also rose and faced him breathlessly.

Donald had hoped to be spared the ugliness of open threats, but now he realized that from the very first everything had tended toward it.

"Are you a blackmailer?" he asked.

"Perhaps I am."

"I was beginning to fear so. Well, go ahead, my dear, and do your damnedest. However, I may as well warn you that there is such a thing as a law of libel."

"Ah, you're threatening *me!*" Betty exclaimed with her softly cruel laugh.

"No, I'm only warning you."

"You've been afraid of me all this time because you didn't want the family to know how far your precious Mary had carried her little affair with her first lover—"

"Be silent. How dare you speak of Mary in that way!"

"I'm beginning to think that you don't know yourself," Betty went on, paying no heed to his violent interruption. "Did it never occur to you to go to Somerset House and look up the marriage records? Oh, no, you're far too trusting—"

"My God! What are you saying?"

"You can easily prove it for yourself. It wasn't merely that Mary had planned to elope with Captain Little. She actually did elope with him. They were married on the 6th of June two years ago, at a registry office. Lucky for her that he died so opportunely; that gave her the chance to marry you and say nothing about it."

But Victor Little was not dead, and any moment Betty or even Mary herself might make that unwelcome discovery.

Donald dropped limply back into the chair from which he had risen. The room had reeled dizzily around him.

"You look dreadful!" Betty exclaimed. "Drink this quickly."

Her voice and hand shook as she urged him to take a tumbler of whisky. She had expected to shock him, but she hadn't meant to kill him, and it seemed to her that really she had dealt him a death blow.

She was an utterly selfish little woman, but she was in love with Donald and the sight of him with a face as gray as stone set in lines of dumb anguish, stirred compassion in her. She had meant to hurt Mary, whereas she had come near to killing him.

To her relief he accepted the drink she offered, and drained if off quickly in great choking gulps.

In that moment Betty became a woman with a heart; she rose above the petty cruelty of her nature.

She dropped to her knees beside him and cradled her head against the arm of his chair.

"Oh, Donald, I'm so sorry! I'm a dreadful pig! Please forgive me. I—I didn't think you'd take it like this. What does it matter, really? The man died so soon afterward, and I don't believe she could ever have lived with him as his wife. Just to—to amuse myself I looked up those dates. It was on the 6th of June that she came to visit Tom and Beatrice. I looked up my old diaries. Perhaps you'll remember being at Ciro's that same night for supper, and Frederick and I were, too. Mary hadn't been expected until the next day, and Beatrice was awfully cross about her not telegraphing, so that some one could meet her at the station. Well, she must have left Captain Little directly after they were married."

"She was married to him!" Donald exclaimed tonelessly.

"But he's dead, and she's your wife

now. It's all forgotten. And, Donald, I'm not really a pig. I give you my solemn word of honor I'll not whisper a word of it—even to Mary—and I'll go back to Glenn Towers and behave myself, and I don't want another penny out of you. I can sell a piece of jewelry to settle up things here. I've got a lot of stuff I don't even wear. Those black pearls I bought when Frederick died will fetch a large sum of money, and I can't bear the sight of them now."

Betty was certainly making a handsome apology for her cruelty. She groveled beside him, tugging at his sleeve, while her head was cradled childishly in her other arm.

Donald sat sunken in gray-faced apathy. All that she said meant nothing to him. It was mere dust and ashes. Mary was not really his wife; she was the wife of that man he had once thrashed so soundly for daring to meet her secretly against her father's orders.

And then, suddenly, there came a sharp pain in Donald's heart, a sensation as of being physically stabbed. It was not imagination, it was real. If a man's heart can bleed through mental anguish, then his certainly did. During Betty's impassioned speeches he had been thinking only of Mary—Mary, the wife of that man; not his, Donald's, wife at all, but Victor Little's; Mary, who had been fondly tricked into believing Little was dead.

He remembered with a shudder now how old John Glenn and he had actually joked over the method of "killing" the fellow. Must not be allowed to die fighting for his country. That would make him a hero. So they "killed" him with apoplexy after a too hearty meal. It had seemed "more logical."

But hard upon the thoughts of Mary came the image of little Jimmy, and that was when Donald's heart began to bleed his very life away. Their little son, his son and Mary's, would not be entitled legally to his own father's name. That dear, innocent, comic little chap, already trying to hitch himself to his wabbly feet and sitting down with a painful bump when the experiment failed—grinning cheerfully in spite of the bump and trying it all over again—Jimmy was a child without a name.

CHAPTER XII.

MARY DECIDES.

URIAH MAY had left Mary undisturbed for so long now that she was beginning to feel fairly secure where he was concerned. Her haunting jealousy of Betty put May out of her mind to some extent, and when she discovered those canceled checks—seventeen of them—her fears were partially confirmed. She was furiously angry with Betty, for in a dim way she understood why Donald had been paying her those astonishing sums. Also, instinct told her that Betty was in love with Donald, or as much so as a woman of her volatile nature could be in love.

That rainy afternoon—the same afternoon that Uriah May was plotting to bring her into touch with the man she believed was dead—Mary drove to King Charles's Court with the firm intention of telling Betty what she thought of her. It wasn't merely a question of the money. Mary was as generous as anybody, and more so than most people, but she had a valid and wifely objection to such things going on behind her back.

The head porter whom she encountered first in the expensive block of flats was a smug fellow, and she did not in the least like the way in which he informed her that Mrs. Glenn was out.

It was quite possible that Betty was out, but some time she would return, and Mary could wait all the afternoon if necessary.

The lift porter said exactly the same thing, and it almost seemed as though he might refuse to take her up. He did take her up, but after a shrug which should have gained him immediate dismissal for bad manners.

Betty's personal maid answered the door. She was a sly-looking, middle-aged woman whom Mary detested, and she did her best to block the way.

It was here that a suspicion of the truth flickered into Mary's mind. She pushed

by the woman, who fled down the corridor like a homing rabbit.

The drawing-room door was ajar, and as she reached it Mary heard Betty's voice, low and pleading.

"Donald, dear, you mustn't be unhappy; I can't bear it. I'll go back to Glenn Towers, and both of us will forget that this ever happened. Mary mustn't know. After all, you *have* been happy—haven't you? And there's the dear little baby—for his sake, Donald! Jimmy's really a darling—"

The man, sunken in the chair, groaned. Mary caught a fleeting glimpse of his ashen face, and of Betty kneeling on the floor beside him, tugging at his sleeve. It is scarcely necessary to dwell upon what conclusion Mary drew from that scene or from what she had heard.

She crept away, glad that the frightened maid was nowhere in evidence, and walked down the five long flights of stairs to avoid the shoulder-shrugging lift-porter.

And from King Charles's Court in Westminster she walked back to Eaton Square in the pouring rain without an umbrella.

There was scant room for doubt in Mary's mind but that she had lost her husband's love.

It must have begun with her illness; or did it date even farther back than that? Yet Donald had always been so tender and loving toward her. Perhaps remorse had made him so.

The shock was terrible—far too terrible for tears. She felt as though her heart had been turned to stone.

Johnson, the butler, was having an afternoon and evening off duty, and the parlor-maid answered Mary's ring, exclaiming with dismay when she saw her young mistress drenched to the skin, though apparently impervious to it.

"Oh, madam, you'll be ill again! You've been walking in all this rain."

The fact was obvious.

Mary made some remark to the effect that it did not matter, and went up-stairs to her bedroom, where she took of her wet clothes mechanically and donned a white cashmere wrapper edged with swan's-down. Her face was no less white than the gown; her ruddy brown eyes glowed with a somber light, and the heavy masses of her hair dragged back a little untidily.

She had better kill herself, make an end of it, and then Donald could marry Betty and be happy.

There was a fire in her bedroom, and she drew a divan to it and rang for the maid.

"Ask Ellen to bring Master Jimmy down to me," she said.

She wanted the baby all to herself for a little while. It might be for the last time. Ellen brought him, and Mary said she would ring when he was to be taken away. As he held out his arms with the gurgling cry which was supposed to be "Mummy," the ice in Mary's heart melted. She held him in her lap, letting him tumble about, clutching her face and neck, making love to her as only Jimmy could make love, while the tears streamed from her eyes.

She had lost Donald's love, but she still had little Jimmy's. It would be many years before another woman stole Jimmy from her, and even then it wouldn't be quite the same sort of theft. Perhaps Jimmy would love her, too, after he married. What would happen to this precious baby of hers if she were wicked enough to kill herself? Beyond a doubt he would grow up to think of Betty as his mother—Betty, the thief and traitor.

Mary's heart grew hard again, and the tears ceased to flow. She kissed him fiercely in a devouring passion of mother-love. Never—*never!*

The thing that troubled her most was that she did not know how she was going to face Donald with this terrible knowledge in her possession. She had a fastidious horror of scenes.

She had no intention of accusing him in a vulgar way. There would be no reproaches. How can any woman so lower herself as to reproach the husband who has ceased to love her? Love is a winged thing, and when it has taken flight recriminations and bitterness will not bring it back.

Yet Donald must be told that she knew he cared for her no longer. It would make

it easier for him. It must be a terrible strain on him to have to pretend that he cared.

All these weeks this thing had been going on, and she, the deceived wife, had never suspected. But Beatrice knew, and doubtless other members of the family. Beatrice had given her a very clear hint about Betty. There was humiliation as well as grief unspeakable in this loss of her husband's love. And to Betty, of all people!

Her lips pressed to Jimmy's fair curls; she wept again, homesick this time for her father and Glenn Towers. Should she snatch up her baby and Ellen and go to her father in Italy?

One thing was certain. She could not bear to continue living under the same roof with Donald. That was too refined a torture to contemplate.

Her whole life was entirely ruined. What Uriah May had begun the Honorable Mrs. Frederick Glenn had finished—between them the wreck of a woman's life.

And if Mary suffered, what of Donald? His anguish was the more bitter because it was founded upon one of the cruelest facts that had ever been dragged to the light of day. She had been forced by a chain of circumstances into believing that the husband who really adored her had, for some senseless reason, fallen in love with another woman. Mary suffered, but she was wholly deluded.

Donald's anguish could never be assuaged. Mary was not his wife, and their child had no legal right to his name. And when he came to think it over with a certain measure of calmness he did not dare to blame Mary. Of course she hadn't told him of her first marriage, but love gave him knowledge of her pure heart. She had kept silent because the revelation of the thing, which was only an incident in her own life, would have hurt him too much. She honestly believed Victor Little to be dead, but until that was proved to her satisfaction she had listened to no tale of love from the man she had come to adore.

A fierce protective knowledge was in Donald's heart. He knew instinctively that Mary had never really been any man's wife but his own, and he made a great secret vow to keep her. She was his wife in everything that counted. Yet he must see Victor Little and get the creature out of the country again, and that promised to be a loathsome business. "He laughs best who laughs last." Donald shivered. Would Little be vengeful over that thrashing?

There was also the legal aspect of the affair where it concerned the baby. Would Donald have to "adopt" his own son? The lawyers must be consulted, and perhaps Mary would need to be told that she was not legally his wife.

But he was going to keep her. His jaw set determinedly on that point. Nobody should take her away from him. Only, he needed a little time to think things over, and of course there must be legal advice, a most unpleasing prospect.

Perhaps that first marriage could be decently annulled and his own with Mary legalized, but he was not at all sure how Mary would take such a makeshift arrangement.

Until he had been to the lawyers—he meant to get the best advice possible—he determined to give her no hint that Victor Little was alive, and he devoutly hoped that none would reach her.

The rain was letting up a little as he left King Charles's Court. In the end Betty's rare exhibition of common sense had cheered him up to a small extent.

At the same time, he felt quite as disinclined to meet Mary with this terrible secret in his heart as she dreaded an encounter with him. They were at terrific cross-purposes.

The little house was very still when he let himself in with his latch-key; it seemed to brood to the quiet tick of the grandfather clock on the landing.

On the hall-table lay some letters and a telegram. He picked up the latter and examined it, starting a little, the lines of trouble deepening in his face. With the open telegram in his hand he went upstairs to his wife's bedroom and knocked gently. There was no reply, and when he pushed the door open he saw Mary, her face tear-stained, curled up on the divan with Jimmy in her arms. They were both of them fast asleep. One of the baby's

feet was bare, and the mother had enclosed it in her hand. They lay cuddled together, his two treasures—an adorable and yet a very tragic picture.

"She's been crying again," he thought. "I wonder why?"

He leaned over and touched her disordered hair very softly, and kissed her on the forehead.

She sat up with a jerk, hugging the baby to her, her eyes tortured beyond expression.

"Oh, you've come home," she gasped, with a frightened, furtive air.

"Yes, dear, and I've got some rather bad news." He spoke in a low tone so as not to wake the little fellow, who still slumbered peacefully. "Dad's had another stroke. I must go to Liverpool at once. Poor old chap! I'm afraid this is going to be serious."

James Foshay, Donald's father, had devoted himself personally for some years past to the Liverpool branch of their extensive firm. Unlike his partner, he could not bring himself to take much ease in his old age; but he was not by any means a well man. And although it might be that James Foshay was on his death-bed, both the young husband and his wife could not help but feel relieved that they were to be parted for a few days.

Donald handed the telegram to Mary, who read it through, scarcely seeing the actual words. They avoided each other's eyes—they who had loved and trusted each other as they would have trusted heaven itself.

"Yes, of course, you must go at once," she said, clearing her voice, which was rather husky. "And unless you really wish me to come with you—"

"No, I don't think you ought to," he interrupted hastily. "You're not strong enough yet, and it's a tiresome journey. I'll wire you at once how things are with the old man, and if necessary you'll come."

"Oh, yes," she replied. "Just ring the bell for Ellen, please. I'm so sorry Johnson is out, but Marshall will pack for you. What about dinner?"

"Oh, I sha'n't bother. There'll probably be a dining-car on the train."

Again she was relieved. It would have been too great a strain just now to sit through a meal with him. The respite would help her to get things into their true perspective; to find, perhaps, a small measure of calm and courage with which to face the blank prospect of the future.

CHAPTER XIII.

AMABEL'S YOUNG MAN.

AMABEL MAY finished her blouse just in the nick of time. It still needed a hook and eye, but that lack could be easily remedied by a brooch. Amabel's "best boy," as she called him, was a recent acquisition, and this was the first time he had been invited to her home. They were to have a high tea and then go on to the Palais de Danse in Hammersmith.

Mrs. May had been engaged most of the afternoon in preparing certain delicacies for tea. She was very fond of Amabel, and very grateful as well, for she knew that she owed the very roof over her head to her daughter's brain and industry. Sometimes it seemed that Amabel had kept that roof and the shabby household goods together by sheer force of will.

Uriah May had despoiled his wife, but he had met his match in Amabel. She had actually bought the furniture from him and preserved the deed of sale; and now, if he were to partake in this festive tea, it would cost him one-and-sixpence in hard cash.

There was no sense in remarking to Amabel that it was "a nice way to treat your father." Remarks of that sort left her completely unmoved. She was of age, it was all hers—what there was of it—and she considered it very kind of her to accept him as an intermittent lodger.

Amabel had gone to her bedroom to dress, and when Uriah May returned from the Angel Arms after his confab with Captain Little he found the tea-table laid, the hearth freshly swept, and the fire burning merrily. A bunch of yellow asters had appeared to grace the occasion, and Mr. May decided that he had better wash his face and replace the woolen stocking around

his neck with a collar, even if it were the death of him.

"Amabel's so particular," said Amabel's mother, giving him the hint.

"Particular be—blowed!" he exclaimed. Behind his daughter's back he could always assert his independence of her. "Who is this fellow she's going out with, anyway?"

"A very nice young gentleman indeed, I am told," said Mrs. May. "Wears evening clothes."

"H-m," sniffed Amabel's father. "Sometimes you can tell a man by his clothes, and sometimes you can't. Is that girl thinking of getting married?"

"I don't know," Mrs. May replied mournfully.

"Who's going to take care of you if she does?" he demanded. "You know what my health is—and business is the very devil just now."

"I know," sighed Mrs. May. "Still, I might get a position as housekeeper somewhere. The child ought to have her chance to be happy."

Uriah May had a sense of humor, and he laughed. "Happy!"

The door leading to Amabel's room creaked, and he disappeared haughtily into the kitchen to wash up and adorn himself with fresh linen. A clean collar was sheer waste at a family meal, but still he could not be outdone by the very nice young gentleman who wore evening clothes.

When her father came back refreshed, Amabel was sitting pensively by the fire with a novel on her lap.

Even Uriah May, much as he detested her, could not fail to observe that she had her pretty moments. The new blouse was of pink crêpe de Chine and set off her dark coloring most attractively, and she had a rose-pink cloth skirt to match, so that it made a complete costume. She wore silk stockings—at least Mrs. May supposed they were real silk—and a smart pair of buckled shoes. Over the couch lay her mackintosh and a white chiffon scarf, her gloves and bag, all ready when it was time for her to go.

Her father looked her over critically, trying to think of something to say that would jar her out of her serenity. He never could; it was always she who jarred him. He had tried it over and over again.

"Well, why don't you ask me for my tea-money in advance?" he growled. "Only I'm going to dock you tuppence for this collar."

Amabel laid aside her book and smiled. "There is nothing to prevent your having your tea in the kitchen," she said. "But as a matter of fact I meant to invite you to be a guest to-night."

Mr. May was so astonished that he stuttered: "Th-that's uncommonly generous of you. Wh-why this sudden enlargement of the heart?"

"Well, you see," said Amabel, "I can't very well ask Mr. Johnson to pay for his tea, and it doesn't seem quite fair to make my own father do it when I am giving a sort of party."

"Humph! So this pretty fellow's name is Johnson, is it? May he come to tea often if it means a free tuck-in for me. What's his business?"

"He's—oh, there's the bell. Will you answer it, father?"

Amabel again picked up her novel and gave a good imitation of being absorbed in it, while Mr. May went into the passage to open the door.

A very smart, clean-shaven young man stood on the steps sheltering under an umbrella.

Uriah May invited him to enter, and in the passage the two stared at each other. They had met before. This was the superior servant who had kept Uriah waiting on Mrs. Foshay's door-step that afternoon, and only admitted him under pressure from the lady of the house.

Although the recognition was mutual, it seemed better to avoid open reference to it. Still, Mr. May could not help grinning.

"I'm Amabel's father," he said when he had recovered himself. "Come in, 'Erbert."

"My name is Alfred," Mr. Johnson corrected solemnly.

"Oh, well, then come in, Alf, and leave your brolly here. Might spoil the Persian rugs if you was to take it inside."

The visitor was conscious of a faint sensation of disgust. He had taken an immense fancy to Amabel, and the invitation to tea at her own home marked an important step in the progress of their friendship. But it had never occurred to him that this particular Mr. May was her father.

He shed his coat and stood revealed in the correct clothes of which Amabel had bragged to her mother. Mr. May admired him immensely. Still, a butler wasn't any great catch for Amabel. All the better. It wasn't likely they could get married very soon. He wondered if Amabel knew that the fellow was a domestic servant.

"Come on. In 'ere," said Uriah, hospitably urgent. "Nothing stronger than tea to offer you, I'm afraid."

"Thanks, I never take anything stronger," Johnson replied bluntly, and went down a little in Mr. May's estimation. Just the sort of prig that Amabel would fancy!

But Uriah May possessed all the social graces and made himself master of ceremonies; a little too much so to please Amabel, who found the situation trying. Her silent mother had no more than a word to say for herself, Mr. Johnson brooded and ate sparingly, and Uriah May talked.

He tried all sorts of things, but drew a blank every time. Mr. Johnson confessed to an appalling ignorance of even the rudiments of racing. He had never placed a bet in his life. As for cards, his mother had brought him up to regard them as "the devil's pasteboards." He did not even smoke.

"Well, my mother never would let me learn to dance," said Mr. May, with a sly kick under the table at Amabel.

"I like dancing," Mr. Johnson said apologetically.

"And is there anything wrong in that?" Amabel demanded with some heat.

"Not at all—not at all," her father hastened to reassure her.

Amabel pushed back her chair.

"I think we might as well be going," she said, looking pointedly at Mr. Johnson, who rose with alacrity.

Mrs. May heaved a deep sigh and began immediately to clear the table.

Uriah saw them off with a geniality that suggested the speeding of a honeymoon couple.

He came back chuckling and rubbing his hands.

"Amabel's awfully cross with you," his wife said meekly.

"Well, if it's put off Mr. Johnson I don't mind. We don't want any goody-goodies in the family. Besides—she'd be demeaning herself. The fellow's only a servant."

Mrs. May started. "What can you mean, Uriah? He's the night clerk at a smart hotel. I know for a fact. Amabel told me."

"You mean that's what he told her," corrected Mr. May. "I happen to know all about him; and he wasn't any too pleased to be caught out, either."

"You're a strange man," said his wife, with another overflowing sigh. "You seem to know a lot about—about so many people."

Her husband took the compliment modestly. "All in the way of business, my dear. I'm a specialist."

Between the hours of three and half past nine a very commonplace routine was being enacted elsewhere. It was a routine that goes on endlessly in every corner of every country of the globe, so one calls it commonplace, but it is anything but that.

It begins when some one drops a letter into the red pillar-box. Then comes the postman, who unlocks the box and dumps everything—including one's special letter—into his strong gray bag. So, to the nearest post-office, where the first sorting is done. Then comes the big red van, so important that only to fire-engines does it give right of way—his majesty's mails—and one's letter proceeds another stage on its journey.

At half past nine that Saturday night the postman mounted the steps of the gay little house off Eaton Square, and, giving his *rat-tat,* dropped a solitary envelope into the letter-box.

It was a cheap, slightly soiled envelope, and the address, to "Mrs. Donald Foshay," was embellished with uneducated flourishes.

Mary had retired to the drawing-room

when Uriah May's letter was brought up to her.

Donald was on his way to Liverpool, and she sat alone with her thoughts. Beatrice had rung up, asking her to dinner when she heard from her husband that the elder Foshay was so seriously ill; and so also had a sister, hitherto unmentioned by name, Sally Evans, who lived in West Kensington. Mary had declined both invitations. She dined alone, if it could be called dining, and then wandered about the drawing-room trying to recover her sanity.

Who would have thought, such a little while ago, that life could suddenly have become so impossible?

She now looked back upon her brief period of happiness as cruelty unspeakable.

It had led but to this!

It would have been much better had she never known the meaning of happiness. Vastly more unendurable to have had something precious and lost it than never to have possessed it.

She had loved and she had lost, and all that stood between her and death was that splendid little fellow up there in the nursery. Somehow he must heal this wound in his mother's heart. She must just trust to his baby hands and forget everything else. And then appeared the parlor-maid with Uriah May's letter.

Mary knew from the look of the envelope that it was from him. She had been expecting another demand, but now that it had come she found herself laughing.

What on earth did it matter? If Donald knew that once, long ago, she had seemed to compromise herself with Victor Little, what did that matter? It would give Donald an excuse, if he needed one, to cast her entirely aside. She was convinced that even May did not know she had really gone through a ceremony of marriage with Little. She read his pretentious demands with a scornful smile.

Yes, she'd go to see him on Tuesday. She was in a mood to lead him on to expect anything of her, and then to lay her trump card on the table—that she did not care in the very least what he did.

But she did not know the trump card he himself possessed—that up his sleeve he had Victor Little in the flesh; not dead these two years and more in India, but alive and here in London:

(To be continued NEXT WEEK.)

"THAT'S the queerest fish I ever caught." Atwell detached from his line a gleaming mesh-bag, drawn from the depths of the lake. "I wonder who dropped that overboard."

He let fall his catch upon the seat of his old motor-boat, where it lay a little shapeless pile, while he packed his tackle neatly away in the locker. Then he examined his prize.

The bag was silver, without chasing, and the clasp had a businesslike snap that denoted good workmanship. Atwell hated mesh-bags, but somehow this one seemed in better taste than others he had noticed. That thought flitted through his mind as he poured out the contents. A small, pulpy wad of bills—twenty-eight dollars in all, a half-dollar and three nickels, a seal ring bearing the initials " G. M.," a box containing a powder-puff and some paste, which undoubtedly represented the powder, a tiny dog-collar carrying the license No. 4637, N. Y. C., and around which was tied a little bow of black silk.

That was all. The only clues to the ownership of the bag appeared to be the license number and the letters on the seal ring.

Contemplating the collection before him, the fisherman concluded that the black ribbon on the collar denoted the loss of a pet dog. That was obvious. By looking up the records it would be a simple matter to locate the owner of the purse, and Atwell decided to do so on his return to New York. He replaced the contents of the bag, put the latter in the locker and headed the boat for his modest camp.

Leonard Atwell was a wholesome person to look upon. Well over medium height, of strong build, with skin permanently tanned, keen gray-blue eyes, and hair which would be kinky if allowed to grow long enough. His air was one of quiet steadiness, mixed with a suggestion of latent activity sufficient to dispel any impression of indolence. At that, he told himself that his greatest desire was to be indolent—to be downright lazy, and that he never would do a tap of work if it were not necessary.

That may or may not be true. Atwell had been trained as a newspaper man, had knocked about in many parts of the globe, and finally had developed a market for his articles which permitted him to maintain a comfortable apartment in New York and to spend occasionally a few days at the rough camp he had acquired on the shore of an Adirondack lake. Further, he boasted a secretary, a man of sixty, who had gladly left a newspaper copy-desk to dig out statistics and attend to other bothersome details loathed by Atwell. He was noiseless and accurate, and his name was Bailey.

The usual scene of leisurely activity greeted Atwell next morning when he ran his little boat alongside the landing at the railway terminus at the head of the lake. Six or eight people from various points along the shore clustered about the baggage-room of the small frame station, and Bill Parker, official cap on one side and a formidable chew on the other, issued checks as calmly as if the safety of all four trunks did not depend upon his complete accuracy. The locomotive puffed as briskly as if a transcontinental train were behind it instead of a baggage car, day coach, and one Pullman.

Turning his boat over to a freckled youth whom he addressed as Bobby, Atwell made his way toward the platform. He was crossing the dusty roadway when a huge touring-car swung around the turn of the cliff under which the station nestled. Atwell avoided being run down by a catlike jump, but lost his balance and landed in a heap as the machine stopped with a jolt. He scrambled to his feet and turned toward the car.

" You're not hurt, are you?" anxiously inquired a burly man, sitting beside the driver. " The horn didn't work."

" It's all right," said Atwell good humoredly; " no damage done."

" Oh, I'm so *glad,*" came in silver tones from the rear seat.

Atwell looked up with a start. He hadn't noticed the other passengers before. Now he saw a pair of solemn brown eyes in which genuine concern was giving way to equally genuine relief. Above the eyes waves of soft brown hair were pressed down by a snug-fitting motor hat. A provoking nose, a generous and altogether attractive mouth, an exquisitely firm little chin peeping through the opening in the turned-up collar of a dust coat—these rewarded Atwell's hurried scrutiny.

They were satisfying, but he wanted to hear her speak again and he turned with a half bow toward her and a bored-looking young man beside her. That individual puffed his cigar steadily and said nothing, although he acknowledged Atwell's presence by a slight inclination of his head.

"That is a horribly dangerous turn," con-

tinued the musical voice. "I often wonder there aren't more accidents."

"Yes, it is bad," agreed Atwell. He tried desperately to think of something more to say. He wanted to hear her talk. But just then the engine whistle emitted two sharp blasts. He picked up his bag with one hand, doffed his hat with the other and sped for his train. "Good-by," he called. And a haunting "Good-by and good luck" floated back to him as the big motor moved off.

Sturdily the engine attacked the tortuous upgrade that led out of the valley. Atwell opened a magazine and settled himself for the long daylight journey. But he could find nothing worth reading and soon abandoned the effort. He moved close to the open window and inhaled deep breaths of the warm, spicy odor of the fir woods, gazing idly at the gorges and cliffs through which the train treaded its way. Once, on an opposite elevation where the twisty roadway ran, he saw a cloud of yellow dust. He wondered if that was his motor party and decided that probably it was.

He found himself speculating as to who these people were and where they were going. Most likely they came from one of the dozen camps along the lake. Who was the girl? Was the young man her husband? What a voice! And eyes! He heard her words over again and was surprised at the thrill the recollection gave him. He told himself it was because he never would see her again. He stumped into the smoking compartment and lighted a cigarette.

His thoughts wandered to the mesh-bag reposing in the bottom of his grip. G. M., G. M.—who was G. M.? He must look up that license number at once and restore the property to its owner. What did G. M. stand for? He found himself making all sorts of combinations—Gladys, Gertrude, Gwendolyn, Genevieve, Grace. Munson, Marsh, Mason, Murray, Martin. Stupid business. Stupid Marsh, stupid Gwendolyn. And Atwell dozed.

A dozen letters awaited him when he let himself into his apartment in Gramercy Square at eleven o'clock that evening. He glanced over them hastily, abstracting a couple of checks, noted with satisfaction that Bailey had completed the notes he required for an article on the advisability of a Danube federation, realized that he was healthily tired, and tumbled into bed.

Bailey was on the job bright and early next morning. He explained the notes he had taken of a score of telephone calls. Together they went over the Danube material. Then Bailey made ready for a trip to the public library. As he was leaving Atwell called him back.

"Wait a minute," he said, and went into the bedroom, returning with the mesh-bag. He extracted the dog-collar while Bailey looked on wonderingly.

"Go to the dog license bureau," directed Atwell, "and find out the name of the holder of license No. 4637." Bailey made a note of the number and disappeared.

On his return he found Atwell hard at his typewriter and the Danube article well on its way to completion. He laid a memorandum on the table and settled himself to straighten out the jumble of notes he had brought from the library. Atwell worked steadily on. Finally, with a triumphant tap, he pushed back his chair, stretched his arms and yawned, not from sleepiness, but from satisfaction. Then he crossed to Bailey's table and picked up the memorandum. "Edith Wilson, 507 West Eighty-Second Street," he read.

At first Atwell was minded to hand over the mesh-bag to Bailey with instructions to deliver it to the said Edith Wilson. Then it occurred to him that the name did not correspond with the initials on the seal ring, and at the same time another and far more startling idea took possession of him.

What if Edith Wilson should turn out to be the girl of the motor-car—and the silver voice? Again the queer thrill he had experienced on the train ran through him and his blood stirred with a pleasant current of excitement. No, he wouldn't send Bailey. He would go himself. The thing might easily be possible.

Only a few people owned camps or cottages around the lake. The bag had been lost from a boat without doubt. There was a chance. And again the words were borne to him, "Oh, I'm *so* glad!" Perhaps she would say that when he returned her

bag. Yes, the chances were all in favor of him now. By the minute he grew more certain that Edith Wilson was the girl in the automobile.

Atwell ate his lunch hastily and was sorry afterward that he had done so. It occurred to him that he couldn't decently call on Edith Wilson at half past one in the afternoon. So he pottered about impatiently until three o'clock, slipped the mesh-bag into his pocket and set out in a taxi, which drew up in due course before a substantial brown-stone house very much like its neighbors. Atwell paid off the cab, mounted the steps and rang the bell. While he waited he furtively adjusted his tie and ran his handkerchief lightly over his face.

The maid who answered the bell was not particularly smart-appearing, but Atwell reflected that servants were at a premium and difficult to obtain at that. He inquired if Miss Wilson was in, and was shown at once into a long, gloomy drawing-room at the right of the narrow entrance hall. "If you'll sit down I'll call her," said the girl, and was gone.

Atwell studied the room. It struck him as a relic of one-time splendor. The furniture was old and worn, but unquestionably it once had been the acme of style. There were finely carved chairs of lancewood and rosewood, ornamental, but useless for sitting purposes. A massive sofa and a cabinet in Flemish oak were of early eighteenth century design. On the whole, the place was a perfectly good antique shop, Atwell thought.

Ten minutes passed and he was beginning to feel as heavy as his surroundings. He half wished he hadn't come. At the best, the girl probably would thank him for returning her property and he would mutter a polite remark or two and leave. Yet—and yet, a single sentence spoken by that glorious voice would be worth a greater effort than he had made. There was a flutter on the stair and a sound of footsteps approaching. Atwell stood up and faced the door. Then she came in.

"I'm sorry to have kept you waiting," she said, "but—"

Atwell made a gurgling sound in his throat and stared. That thin, metallic voice brought him out of his dream with a rudeness that jarred. Forty-five at least. Hair of the ex-chestnut variety, badly faded. Lusterless blue eyes. Efforts properly to apply powder and rouge a total loss. Egyptian figure draped in a short, modern gown, beneath which razorlike shin-bones showed through sheer hosiery. Atwell gaped stupidly.

"But," continued the lady, "I was dressing." Here Miss Wilson insinuated a little, embarrassed laugh and coyly dropped her eyelids. "I suppose you came about the room, in answer to my advertisement. You see, I have been pretty hard hit by the war. I suppose everybody who lives on investments has found it the same with prices where they are. But I have always lived in this house and decided to hang on to it whatever happened. So I rent a few rooms to cultured people such as you and manage to get along. Now—"

"But I—" began Atwell, only to be overwhelmed by the torrent.

"Oh, I know what you are going to say," laughed Miss Wilson. "You are going to deny that you are a cultured person and tell me that you are just a plain, ordinary man. That's modesty on your part. Why, anybody could see—but I suppose you are anxious to inspect the room. If you—"

"I don't want a room," blurted out Atwell desperately. "I found a mesh-bag with a dog-collar in it and the license bureau gave me your name when I looked up the number. Here it is." He drew forth the bag.

"Why, that isn't my bag, and my dog isn't lost. Here, Shakespeare." And a Scotch collie came bounding in from somewhere in the rear.

"Apparently there has been some mistake," said Atwell, taking a step doorward. He pulled out his note-book. "Isn't your license No. 4637."

Miss Wilson bent over Shakespeare and examined his collar. "No," she answered, "it is 4367. Oh, that's where the trouble is. The numbers are transposed. And you have had all your trouble for nothing. You poor man."

Atwell made short work of the balance of the interview and floundered into the street.

"Wow!" he breathed as he made for the subway, bestowing upon the Wilson home one violent, backward glance.

"Bailey," he snapped as he burst into his apartment twenty minutes later, "how the devil did you come to make a mistake in looking up that dog license?"

Bailey glanced up in surprise at the unwonted manner of his employer. "Why, did I make a mistake?" he asked.

"I should say you did!" said Atwell with a shudder. "Now, hike over to the license bureau and get it right this time. The number is 4637, not 4367."

An hour later a fresh memorandum reposed upon Atwell's desk. This one read, "Doris van Vechten, 97 East Sixty-Eighth Street, N. Y. C."

Atwell handed the slip back to Bailey and the mesh-bag as well. The secretary was to deliver the bag to Miss van Vechten on his way home. It might not be Miss, it might be Mrs. Atwell didn't care. He was through. What an idiot he was to connect the girl of the motor party with the mesh-bag, anyway. There wasn't a chance in a million. The August heat must have gone to his head. Let Bailey do it. So Bailey did it.

"Well, what luck with the bag?" inquired Atwell when Bailey appeared next morning. "Did you find the lady who belongs to it?"

"I did," said Bailey. "And she's some lady, too!"

"That so? What does she look like?"

And Atwell sat squirming in his chair while he listened to a remarkably able and faithful description of eyes and hair and especially a voice. There was no doubt as to whom Bailey was describing.

"And, by the way," he concluded, "she asked me when you left the lake. Said she thought she had met you there."

"Did she?"—eagerly. "Perhaps I have seen her." Bailey was staring at his boss. He couldn't quite account for this outburst of enthusiasm. Atwell lighted a cigarette and strolled over to the window. Bailey busied himself with some papers.

The world looked pretty dingy to the man at the window. There was too much litter in the street. He had not noticed before how shabby the iron fence around the park was. Needed painting, and the pickets were broken in any number of places. The cornice of the adjoining house was crumbling.

Well, let it crumble. It probably would fall down and kill somebody soon. Let it fall. Good job. How had Gramercy Square ever looked neat to him? The telephone rang and he stepped over to answer it.

"Is that Mr. Atwell?" Those were the words. Clear and sweet they came, with a bell-like purity. Atwell gripped the desk with his disengaged hand. "Yes," he answered shakily.

"This is Miss van Vechten," ran the silver message. "I wanted to tell you how thankful I am to have my bag again. My mother's seal ring was in it and I would not have lost it for the world. And there was poor Binney's collar, too. I think, from what your secretary told me, that you were the man our car almost ran down at the lake when we were starting for New York on Monday. Do you remember me?"

"Do I—" began Atwell. "Oh, yes, indeed," he finished lamely. The blood was pounding in his ears and he tingled to his finger-tips. He needed air. He listened thirstily for more words. They came.

"If you care to drop in some time, say this afternoon, I should like to thank you in person."

"That's fine of you," said Atwell, recovering. "You bet I'll come."

"Oh, I'm *so* glad," she hung up on.

Author of "Broken Chains," "The One Way Street," etc.

CHAPTER I.

PARTNERS IN DISASTER.

THE impenetrable blackness, a stygian pall such as no midnight had ever known, was dissolving. Earth and sea began to take their places out of chaos, dimly sketched in the copper light of a dawn that was contrary to nature. Earth was a dirty, grayish white, as if shrouded in a soiled snowfall, and as the inky cloud rolled back slowly and normal sunlight returned the black trees of a thin forest that clung to precipitous slopes were etched against this.

In time, pure sunlight picked up the snow-fields of the peaks that shouldered abruptly into the Pacific and dripping downward slowly revealed what the convulsions of the world in its birth-pangs had wrought.

It was the aftermath of a day of terrors. Far off to the westward among that group of changing islands that rise and sink along Alaska's coast a new peak had risen to the accompaniment of tremors and volcanic fires, the inky blackness, swift, livid electrical discharges, and the blasts of a hurricane.

The vast cloud of choking smoke and gas that poured from this convulsion had rushed with a fearful swiftness across sea and land, preceded by the shrieking flight of thousands of sea-birds. Now it was rolling back, but it had left behind a deep powdering of pumice that lay like snow, in places drifted deeper than the worst winter falls.

Light found a man who had been lying among the rocks of a lonely shore that bordered a bay several miles in depth. It witnessed his groping return to animation and his first struggles to cast off the evil effects of the tempest that overwhelmed him.

Like everything on that coast, he was grimed deep with ashes, but when one of his earliest impulses had led him naked into the cold salt water he emerged again white and shining, a powerful figure of youth. Hastily he donned rough and serviceable clothing. Dressed, he appeared in a faded red sweater topped by a loose, heavy shirt, khaki trousers, high boots, and on his square-angled head, thrust forward aggressively, a battered tweed cap clinging jauntily.

The man was blond with a deeply tanned face. His eyes were gray and rather wide set. Nose and mouth were carved squarely, and the jaw and chin suggested a bulldog determination.

For the strange scene about him this castaway spared plenty of wondering glances that finally ended in a philosophic smile. His lips puckered into a cheerful,

habitual whistling, and with sudden purpose he began to scale the rocks bordering his narrow strip of beach.

From a high point of land that took him hours to reach he was able to look far about him.

He could see the empty ocean as far as the distant black clouds rolling back to their place of origin. Behind him was the rock wall of the shouldering peaks that were white-headed with perpetual snow and ice. To his left, the indented bay stretched back to its ending in a small glacier, and just opposite made its return curve in a slightly more gentle shore of rock and forest.

Where the land met the sea in its farthest point, almost opposite to the observer but several miles removed by the water of the bay, he saw what he sought.

A small schooner had been piled onto the reefs and lay exposed by the low tide. Even from that distance the eye could understand that it was wrecked beyond all hope, wrecked fantastically. The man who was looking for this vessel had a keen vision, keen enough to distinguish in time moving forms against the white powdering of ash, and he nodded with satisfaction. He knew who was moving there.

A survey of the land on his own side of the bay gave him less cause for congratulation. Where it met the water it broke off in steep cliffs, and for one to detour around the head of the inlet meant a painful journey along the mountain slopes and over the glacier. This journey the lone man started with very little loss of time.

It proved as difficult as he had foreseen—and more so. Darkness found him little advanced and tending a supperless fire. Another day saw him at it again, but more leisurely, for he had to forage food as well as travel.

The third day he crossed the glacier, a task that required infinite caution, for the thick powdering of ash over the snow wiped out all signs of crevasse and rotten spots. Morning of the fourth day found him at his destination. The wreck was deserted. Study of the tracks in the sand showed where four men had taken up a beach trail and vanished.

If the lone man had made that toilsome journey seeking companionship and help, his disappointment must have been deep. There remained only the schooner, split open on the rocks, bent and broken and rent apart by the fury of the wind and sea.

Yet, left with this abandoned heap of shattered wood and twisted metal, with no means of escape from the wilderness unless he chanced walking as the other four had done, he appeared well enough satisfied.

Sated with food he had looted from the wreck, he sunned himself on a rock and stared thoughtfully at the hulk, gray eyes narrowed in thought, his lips puckered into their habitual whistle.

The Dora had called at Kanak Island with the mail. Sarah Truett drove from her father's ranch on the west side to the trading town and wharf with a speed and recklessness that showed supreme faith in the powers of her rusty and battered little car.

Because Sarah was the daughter of Hillman Truett and a lifelong friend of the old sourdough postmaster, she was first to receive mail. Of letters there was but one, and she instantly knew that was from her father.

She stuffed the missive into a pocket of her mackinaw coat, tossed a bundle of newspapers into the car, and whirled it around on the dusty road for the return drive.

The day was pleasantly warm—and pleasantly cooled by a brisk sea-air. Sarah had tossed aside the man's felt hat she usually wore, and as the little car streaked up the road and over low hills the mass of her red hair worked free of bonds and bannered out behind her.

Her fair skin had tanned a smooth, light coffee color, and the rush of air brought a fine flush into her cheeks. Her black eyes snapped with life.

She was a sturdy figure of young womanhood, this native daughter of Alaska. The blue flannel shirt that served her as shirtwaist suggested by its folds and curves the resilient strength of deep chest and firm muscle. Walking, she appeared taller than the average woman, and the man's hat, the

plaid mackinaw coat, the flannel shirt, short skirt and high boots heightened a semblance of sturdiness and outdoor efficiency incongruous to the piquant beauty of her face.

The drive of five miles to the Truett ranch took the battered little car a very few minutes. Sarah abandoned it in the road and hurried to the porch of the pleasant dwelling that stood in a neat flower-garden overlooking a little harbor and the broad sweep of ocean.

She turned her attention at once to the letter, and as she read her face grew grave. Hillman Truett had written:

> It's been pretty tough sledding, and I guess I was a fool wasting my time with these financial crooks when Angus McDonald has always been willing to help me out—always been renewing his offer if ever I found I needed a lift from him. So I'm starting for New York to-night to see my old tilikum. It's been a long time since Angus and I had a look at each other. Reckon he's about ready to retire on his millions by now, but I'll bet you he's never forgotten our early days in the ruby sands proposition at Lituya Bay, nor the Dyea trail either!
>
> Seems like a mighty long trip and a mighty long way to go from home, Sally, but it's what I should have done in the first place, instead of wasting time in Seattle and Frisco. I won't be any longer than I need—six days to New York, a day or maybe two, with Angus—then six days back to the coast again. And then I'll come straight home, Sally. I figure I can make it just about in time, allowing a week for accidents.
>
> Believe me, I'll be on hand to take up that option before the thirty-first, and with Angus McDonald's backing, we'll make the Kanak ledge the richest low-grade proposition in Alaska. I guess the Treadwell will look sick beside us, hey, Sally!
>
> Meantime keep a bright eye on that Pacific Development crowd so's they don't grab the ledge before our option is up, and don't run "Liz" into any more stone walls and scratch up the bright beauty of my own Sally.
>
> With love,
>
> DAD.

Sally whistled thoughtfully when she had read the letter.

"New York! Good gracious, what a way to go, even after money! I used to think Frisco was bad enough when I went to school there. But anyhow he'll get the money. Angus McDonald won't ever go back on his promise. I'm glad—glad!"

Her mind pictured her father's long journey and the results of it. The ambition of Hillman Truett's later years was to develop Kanak ledge, a property of low-grade ore which he believed would make him rich, and so accumulate the fortune he wanted to leave to his daughter when he was called over the long trail. Most of his life Hillman Truett had spent in Alaska. The Klondike had staked him and his old partner, Angus McDonald, to enough gold to insure a comfortable existence.

Angus McDonald used his stake to found a great business and a great fortune back East, whence he had come. Truett bought the ranch on Kanak and continued to adventure in various ways until close to his own hearthstone he discovered the possibilities of a greater plenty.

Others owned Kanak ledge, and Truett held it on option. To begin its development he demanded far more money than he could realize and hence his trip to the "outside."

From thoughts of this sort Sarah turned finally to the thick packet of newspapers. Several weeks' accumulation, sent on by a Seattle newsdealer, showered about as she cut the strings of the wrapper. There were *Post-Intelligencers* from Seattle, and *Oregonians* from Portland, the San Francisco *Chronicle*, and a half-dozen magazines current a month previous.

With an instinct that belied her mannish dress, she pawed among the sheets and volumes for one bright monthly that told what women wear on Fifth Avenue and other streets of fashion.

And stooping to retrieve this prize from the porch floor, her eyes encountered a news item that seemed to leap at her:

ANGUS McDONALD DEAD

Former Alaskan Who Amassed Huge Fortune in Chain Stores Stricken Suddenly.

The telegraphic despatch following was a brief statement that the former Alaskan and millionaire had succumbed in his home near Roslyn, Long Island. The death had occurred the day following the mailing of Hillman Truett's letter.

Beaten.

Hillman Truett had lost his last chance.

Death that snatched Angus McDonald made a mockery of his hopes.

The paper crumpled in her gasp; Sarah sat very straight and still, looking somewhere beyond the horizon. Her cheeks had paled and her wide, black eyes were sober and a little frightened.

For her father and his shattered plans she felt a vast, maternal pity—the pity of a loyal only daughter for a widower father. But there was more than deepest sympathy in his grief to worry her. Hillman Truett, to hold his options on Kanak ledge, had endangered all that he owned. The ranch was mortgaged. Other securities were sold outright.

Angus McDonald had been his last hope. With that hope gone, they were faced with ruin.

If her father had been a younger man, Sarah Truett would have laughed at ruin. To laugh at disaster and to build success from failure's ashes was her heritage of sourdough blood. But Hillman Truett was now an old man—perhaps too old to begin again.

She stared blankly beyond the distant blue horizon as if her eyes would go forward to meet new days and read what they were bringing her.

And while she looked, absorbed in her father's worry, four men who had walked from Kanak plodded along the road toward the Truett ranch.

CHAPTER II.

A CHANCE TO HELP.

THE barking of the dogs drew Sarah's attention to this quartet of visitors. They were advancing now toward the porch where she sat, one of them ostensibly in the lead, the other three some paces behind.

The leader was a man worth attention anywhere. His height was unusual, fully a half foot above six feet, but in spite of this he appeared a man below medium stature, so great was the girth of his body. It was only when the eye found a comparison with his companions that one realized what a huge bulk of humanity he was.

As he approached this man removed a round, black felt hat, exposing a perfectly bald and glistening pate that was tanned a deep, rich brown like the rest of his face and hands. The only sign of hair on that startling expanse of skull was the eyebrows, black brows that dived together at the bridge of the nose, making a V above his small, shrewd eyes.

The stranger's nose curved boldly in a parrot-beak hook, and the chin beneath curved up to meet it. The mouth between was thin-lipped and tight. He wore a suit of blue serge, rather neat in effect, a gray flannel shirt, and a black string-bow tie. One knew at a glance that he was a man who followed a profession, and it was a safe guess to say that profession was the sailing of ships.

He inquired politely if he addressed Miss Truett. "I'm here to talk business if that's your gas cruiser out there in the bay—which I've been told it is."

"That's mine—ours rather—that's the Sally." Sarah followed his keen glance toward the anchored power-boat.

"Looks big enough to handle a bit of cargo," the stranger suggested.

"Depends on the cargo and who's going to handle it." Sarah Truett implied that explanations were in order, and the big man took the hint.

"Miss Truett, I'm Bradden—Cap'n Bradden, of the trader Seal. She was a gas schooner, but now she's a heap o' junk. That's why I'm here. That little fellow there's my mate, Mr. Spicer, and the other two boys was in the crew. If you don't mind I'll sit down. Tramping ain't in my line, and we done what these islanders call five miles to get out here."

Sarah nodded consent, and the big man sat, mopping his head vigorously. His companions followed his example, stretching on the grass within ear-shot.

Sarah Truett studied the four shrewdly. She had been used since early childhood to various sorts of men, and relied on her own good sense to catalogue them properly.

"Well, Captain Bradden, what about the Sally?"

"Why, just this, miss—would you consider a proposition for a charter? I need that boat—"

"We never charter the Sally. My father and I use her on our own business—and pleasure."

"But supposin' it was to help distressed seamen, Miss Truett—kind of a neighborly accommodation?"

"I don't recall you as a neighbor, captain. And I think I know every soul a hundred miles around Kanak."

Bradden smiled shrewdly. "That's fair enough!" he nodded. "Let me tell you about us. I been a trader and such like the past fifteen years up along the peninsula and among the Aleutians, Miss Truett. Ask anybody at Kodiak or Dutch Harbor if I ain't. This Seal was my boat, all I had, and now she's smashed up on the rocks in Cultus Bay, all on account of that hell-roarin', gosh-awful volcano that busted loose last month. It sure fixed us, hey, boys?"

His three companions nodded, and the little fellow, Spicer, added with a crooked grin: "Busted us flatter'n smoked salmon belly, cap."

"What money I've got, Miss Truett, is tied up in my cargo, and that cargo's over there in Cultus Bay in the Seal. When that volcano tied loose we was heading down for outside, but it got so thick we never knew where we was pretty soon. Then come the wind and raised merry hallelujah with us and flung us onto the rocks. If I could get the Sally I could save my cargo—and I'd be willing to pay you well for the charter."

"What is your cargo?"

"Well, now, it's ivory, Miss Truett—fossil ivory."

"Ivory!"

"Yes, ma'am, the finest fossil ivory ever came out of Alaska—and believe me, miss, I've seen it all. Sixty tusks, and it's worth the top market price. Not a rotten spot in it—regular billiard-ball stuff. It's worth fifty thousand if it's worth a cent."

Sarah Truett looked more thoughtful. For the first time this man's story interested her. It was not uncommon for various sorts of men to try to charter the Sally. Hillman Truett's cruiser, built for pleasure and adventure and occasional trade, was widely known, but most of the propositions that came to them offered little chance of profit. To salvage a cargo of ivory—especially choice ivory—might be an opportunity worth while.

It occurred to her now that here was the Heaven-sent chance to win back some of the money so badly needed by her father—perhaps enough to stave off disaster, to safeguard their home and their little fortune.

Outwardly she gave no indication of these thoughts.

"You were cast up when the volcano broke loose? That was two weeks ago, captain. Has it taken you two weeks to come from Cultus Bay?"

"Two weeks! We're lucky we ever got away! Our boat was smashed up—we had to walk. We walked to Yunaska, ten ungodly days of it! Then we found there wasn't no boats anywhere about this forsaken country except the Sally, so we shipped over on the Dora. I don't deny we're anxious to get at that cargo pretty smart, Miss Truett. It ain't going to help us any leaving it lay there on the beach. So—"

"You'd have to handle the cruiser yourselves. Our two boys are gone—"

"We'd aim to do that!"

"And"—Sarah drew a deep breath and wondered if her pounding heart betrayed her anxiety by outward signs—"and you would have to give my father and myself a half interest in the value of all you salvage. If you want the Sally on those terms—"

"Good Lord!" Bradden's exclamation was fervent in its expression of outraged feelings. It implied that the bargainer was the incarnation of greed—more than that, crazed by lust for gain. It expressed fully the scorn and derision of an honest sailorman.

"Those are the terms," Sarah repeated. "A half share. The Sally is not for charter; personally we don't care whether you get that cargo off the beach or not. If you can find a boat, go ahead and welcome, but it's my guess you won't get anything

this side of Juneau—maybe not this side of Seattle. You know what it will cost you then."

She said no more, sitting quietly and returning Bradden's stare without emotion. The three men on the grass stared at them both, eager spectators.

Captain Bradden—" Baldy " Bradden as Sarah came to know him—had a wicked, unwinking gaze that was hard as nails. Occasionally his thin lips gave an irascible twist as if he longed to tell the red-haired bargainer his plain opinion of her. But he said nothing, merely stared.

And Sarah Truett stared back indifferently, until it was Bradden who gave up.

" You'd ought to have been one of these beef trust maggots the papers talk about," he sighed finally. " You got your foot on my neck, miss, and your fingers in my eyes. What's a man going to do but stand for a gouging? You win."

" Then we'll sign a little agreement," Sarah answered with perfect composure, but the hand in which she wrote their contract twitched with excitement.

Baldy Bradden stretched out his hand for the completed draft of their agreement, but the red-haired genius of finance waved him aside. " I have thought of one more condition," she announced.

Bradden glared. " Well?"

" I shall go with you on the Sally."

" You! Why, you're crazy—why, miss, you can't do that. One lady with four men—why, that ain't proper—"

" Rot!" She smiled scornfully up at him.

" Don't worry about me, Captain Bradden. I've lived in Alaska most of my life, in camps and on the trail and sometimes in a lot worse places than your company. I'll take care of myself—and besides I have no intention of letting four strangers walk off with the best cruiser in western Alaska. I go."

" All right, all right, *all right!*" Baldy Bradden tossed his hands in a gesture of irritation. " Bring your aunts and cousins and dogs and cats for all I care—anything you say—"

" Quite right," Sarah murmured; " sign here, please."

Bradden signed, breathing hard through his nose as he did so. That done he fixed her with his bright, small eyes. " Now, miss, if you can pack your trunks and powder your nose in a reasonable length of time."

" I can do that," Sarah agreed.

" About how long?"

" Why, say fifteen minutes."

Bradden's lips stretched in a sudden grin of admiration. " Well, that's fair enough—but the cruiser won't be ready for, anyhow, a couple hours, I take it—"

" Ready this minute; the Sally's always kept ready." Sarah's reply was business-like, but proud. The cruiser was one of their cherished possessions.

" You go aboard, captain," she continued. " Look over everything, and when I hail send the dingey for me."

The four men went aboard the Sally. They found that Sarah had told the truth. It was a smart craft, and ready for immediate use. She was a gas-powered cruiser, just a little too utilitarian in line for a gentleman's private yacht and much too smart for a trader. The Sally was admirably adapted to the use of Hillman Truett, who had cruised and prospected thousands of miles of little known coasts and islands of Alaska, sometimes doing a little trading with the natives as well.

The four were little more than aboard and finding their way about when Sarah Truett hailed from the beach. She was ready.

By way of preparation she had called the Indian woman who looked after the ranch-house, told her where she was taking the Sally on business and left a few brief instructions. Then she went to her own room. She did not powder her nose nor pack any trunks. Instead, she snatched up an extra sweater and donned heavy shoes. Then she opened a table drawer and picked out a small automatic pistol. To this she added a box of ammunition and stowed both away in the pocket of her mackinaw coat.

Now she was ready for the journey—ready for anything.

Bradden paid her a warm compliment as she climbed aboard.

" I bet there ain't another woman in the

world can get ready to go anywheres as quick as that!"

Sarah acknowledged this with a brief nod. She went direct to the pilot-house. To Bradden she said, "Tell them to cast loose from those floats. We're wasting time here."

The Sally uttered one brief hoot of farewell to her home port. With engines humming she slipped briskly from her mooring buoys and poked her nose toward the sea.

Sunset found her sinking Kanak Island below the western horizon while the eyes of the four men and one girl were turned toward the east, whither lay Cultus Bay, the wrecked schooner Seal and a fortune in ivory.

What else awaited them there was shrouded in the veil of to-morrows, a veil more impenetrable than the darkest night shadows running to close them in.

CHAPTER III.

MYSTERY AND MUSIC.

SARAH TRUETT was quite used to setting off on expeditions to all sorts of strange places on short notice. For twenty years of her total of twenty-three she had been her father's partner, and Hillman Truett had the true prospector's restlessness.

She had not boasted idly when she told Baldy Bradden that she had been in many odd situations and in strange company. She was quite capable of taking care of herself—anywhere. To go adventuring with four strangers gave her not the slightest worry; only a pleasant sense of excitement at the thought of winning in one stroke enough to insure her father against total disaster.

Three of her four partners in adventure did not accept her so philosophically. When the men Bradden had brought with him learned that the girl would sail with them there was an anxious consultation. What its outcome was Sarah could only guess. Nothing was said to her, but she was the object of many speculative looks.

Of Bradden's three companions the mate, Spicer, was the only one who showed a disposition to talk. Spicer was a merry, careless, black-haired, dark-skinned little fellow. Some accident had robbed him of the use of one eye, but it took a great deal to deprive him of his habitual cheerfulness. He seemed to lack all the dignity of a navigating officer, though on a schooner so small as the late lamented Seal officers and men are on easy relations.

The two sailors were Gus, a long, sallow German with melancholy brown eyes and a weak chin, and Carter, a compactly built human bulldog who looked and was both stupid and surly.

On the Sally, Sarah occupied her own stateroom; Bradden berthed in Hillman Truett's little cabin, and Spicer and the two men forward. The cruiser was easily managed, and at the outset Sarah Truett showed them she knew as much about navigating her boat as any of them. She divided watches with Spicer and Bradden.

One of them was constantly at the wheel; one of the others always watching the engines, a task of some responsibility but little labor.

They were a day at sea without sight of land, and except that she lacked her father's companionship Sarah might easily have imagined the Sally on one of her usual expeditions.

Shortly after noon of the second day they picked up the coast line. Using the glasses Bradden declared he could make out the landmarks of Cultus Bay, and the circulation of this news set them all to staring.

The day had been flawless, with scarcely a hint of breeze, but now as afternoon advanced there appeared along the horizon behind them a low, thin, dim line that told of advancing fog. But before that fog came they should have reached their destination, and the Sally would lie safe and snug near the wreck of the unfortunate Seal.

A blue sky and placid sea are enough to raise anybody's spirits and add to that the silhouette of a new and wild coast and the prospect of picking up a fortune in ivory, and you have enough to understand why Sarah Truett hummed gaily to herself as she handled the cruiser from the diminutive pilot-house.

Bradden and Spicer had gone to the cabin below and presently she saw Gus go aft, evidently to join them. It was Carter's trick at the engines.

The appearance of this surly partner in the pilot-house caused her a little surprise. Carter came from the engine pit, wiping his hands on a bit of waste. He stared silently toward the nearing coast, ignoring the girl beside him. If the notion of returning to the Seal to save the ivory roused in him any of the interest the others had showed, he certainly gave no sign. He merely pressed his sullen face against the glass and looked.

Ignoring this rude companion Sarah steered and hummed and smiled with anticipation. The engines drummed rhythmically, and the wash sang a steady pæan of progress.

Carter turned abruptly and stared full in her face, a long, speculative stare. In spite of her effort to return this glance with composure Sarah felt a thrill of alarm—of wonder at the man's behavior. Speech was forced on her.

"Well?" she demanded sharply.

Carter's reply was curious. It came abruptly.

"Say, what in hell ails you; you crazy?"

"Not so's you'd notice it," Sarah snapped, her cheeks flushing, eyes snapping. "Next time you talk to me, speak more civilly."

Carter ignored this advice.

"Ain't you even got good sense?" he growled. "Who told you to come this trip?"

"My own common sense. Do you think I'd let four strangers run off with my boat?"

"Never heard of Baldy Bradden?"

"I never did."

"Humph!"

Carter was silent a long time.

Sarah's resentment grew. The man was rude and annoying. He had no business in the pilot-house with her. The object of his questioning she could not guess, but the manner of it called for a rebuke.

"Suppose you go back where you belong," she suggested crisply. "Those engines need attention."

Carter gave her no answer. He was staring again at the coast line.

"Carter, I said get out of here."

Carter muttered something under his breath.

"What's that?" Sarah demanded.

"I said, you got a hell of a lot to learn, that's all."

An instinctive warning made Sarah delay her reply. There was something odd in Carter's manner. His very persistence, rude as it was, suggested that he had some other purpose than a mere desire to annoy her. She wondered for a fleeting instant if Carter was trying to tell her something—to warn her.

"Just what do you mean?"

His reply was a snarl. "Oh, hell, find out for yourself, if—"

He had time to say no more. Spicer had crowded into the little pilot-house and Spicer's hand fastened in Carter's shirt-collar. He whirled Carter about and thrust him angrily toward the engine pit.

"You get down there where you belong," Spicer panted. "And keep a civil tongue in your head. If I ever hear you swear at a lady again I'll cut your filthy tongue out, you dog!

"Don't you stand for any annoyance from them roughnecks, Miss Truett," Spicer urged eagerly. "They're a pair of bums, like all the crooks that call themselves sailors nowadays. I'll teach him to cuss before a lady, damn his eyes—"

Sarah smiled. "He meant no harm."

"Don't you think it! He's a no-good loafer, that's what he is—ought to be on the chain gang. Wait till Bradden hears about this."

Evidently Bradden did hear of the incident, for presently Sarah saw the big, bald-headed captain and Carter together, and Bradden was talking angrily. Carter looked sullen, and what he had to say seemed to annoy the captain even more. For a moment she thought blows were to be struck. Perhaps it was the presence of a lady that spoiled the fight. Bradden and Carter both turned to look at her in the pilot-house, and Carter went below with his usual sulky face.

Bradden joined Sarah in the pilot-house.

"There she is, Miss Truett, over there on the point — that's what's left of my schooner."

They were closing in with Cultus Bay. Using the glass Sarah could easily see the wreck piled fantastically on the rocks. Behind it rose the thick ranks of fir and spruce, climbing abruptly toward the snow line. To the left of the point was the winding inlet of the bay, stretching back toward the muddy expanse of the small glacier.

The broken schooner, canted at an angle of forlorn helplessness, added to the scene the one touch needed to emphasize its wild loneliness. Under a bright sun, in fine weather, Cultus Bay looked actually sinister.

At Bradden's suggestion the cruiser passed in around the point of rocks where the wreck lay and found an easy anchorage in its lee. They made snug, and all five came ashore in the dingey. By this time it was past six o'clock, but day would linger for some hours in that northern latitude if the advancing fog did not blot it out.

The five of them showed a nervous tension due to rising excitement. The two sailors rowed, and every time their uneven strokes splashed water Bradden cursed volubly. Spicer's one eye was brilliant as it searched the shore line. Sarah maintained the greatest outward composure, but her cheeks were bright and she studied her companions closely.

Carter's rudeness had set her to thinking —and wondering. Her right hand, thrust into the coat pocket, closed about the small automatic. She would take no chances.

Landed, they scrambled over the rocks toward the wreck, a walk of some little distance, leaving the dingey pulled above high tide mark. Their brisk pace ended in a run as they approached the Seal. Bradden and Spicer led, with Sarah not far behind. The two sailors came lurching after.

In the moment of their frantic hurry the evening turned gray and dull. Rolling up from the west came the bank of fog and its cold breath cooled their heat.

The schooner was canted toward them, its decks open to their view. The rocks had gashed a great hole along the stout fir planking, impaling the Seal like a beetle on a pin. The cargo hatch gaped at them, a vacant, open eye.

Spicer was the first to scramble to the deck, and Bradden was at his heels. Their first act was to peer into the gaping hatch. In this posture they continued until something unusual about the fixity of their attitude brought a shouted inquiry from Gus and Carter. Neither man answered; they merely stared into the hold. Presently Bradden lowered himself within.

The two sailors pushed past Sarah and scrambled onto the wreck. Among the four men there broke out a sudden squall of questions and answers, shouts and curses. A curious spectator, the girl waited on the rocks below, a little uncertain.

Bradden reappeared through the hatch. His face had flushed an ugly red that spread along the bald skull. He was in a passion of fury that deprived him of speech.

"What is it?" Sarah called. "What's wrong? Captain Bradden—Mr. Spicer—what's wrong?"

Her inquiry attracted no attention. The quartet were snarling at one another. She climbed aboard and peered into the hold of the Seal.

At first the rapidly fading light showed her only blackness; then a litter of loose stuff, broken packing-cases, scattered raffle that had washed in a heap against the sides. But of ivory tusks, the treasure in mastodon bone that Bradden had promised, there was no trace.

"I tell you he must of done it!" Spicer was shouting angrily. "The dirty, yellow, low-lived crook—"

"You talk like a damn fool!" Bradden roared, exasperated by the mate's persistent repetition of the phrase. "He's dead, ain't he? Well, what the hell—"

"He may be dead, but it's gone, ain't it? Well, then!"

"Captain Bradden! Captain!" Sarah was shaking the big man's arm, clamoring for attention. But the captain ignored her and continued his wrangle with the mate.

"I tell you somebody's come along and found it—that's how it is. Somebody's robbed us of what's ours and, by God, I'll find him and make him pay back!"

"Somebody's come! Who's coming to Cultus Bay, tell me that?"

"All right; how's a dead man going to move sixty mastodon tusks, tell me that? Huh, a dead man!"

The words stopped the speech of all four. Gus and Carter looked uneasily into the thickening fog and back at the dark wood behind them. Bradden walked again to the hatch to peer down as if unable to believe his own vision. Sarah followed, determined to have an explanation.

"Well, Bradden, what does this mean? Where's your ivory?"

"How the merry, blue blazes—" Bradden choked off his impatient speech and seemed, by an effort, to control his irritation. "How do I know?" he amended sullenly. "It was here, now it ain't! Sixty tusks of it—finest fossil ivory I ever seen any place—a good fifty thousand dollars' worth. You listen to Spicer and you'll think spooks carried it off—or it grew wings and flew back home. I don't know. It's gone, ain't that plain? It's gone and I'm busted, but if I ever find the man that got it, God have mercy on his soul!"

Bradden's knotted fist raised to emphasize his threat of vengeance. The pointed brows gathered above his small eyes, glaring red with anger. A high tide of fury suffused his strange face.

He turned his back suddenly and climbed from the wreck. A few paces away he halted, brooding, and the thickening mist gradually blurred out his figure to a wraith-like shadow.

"Anyhow, I'm going to have a look," Spicer declared loudly. "Come on, boys." With Gus and Carter he quit the shattered Seal. They moved aimlessly among the rocks and vanished.

Sarah Truett leaned against the rail of the tilted wreck, stunned by the abrupt realization of failure. She had gone chasing treasure, seeking a golden fleece providentially dangled before her eyes at the moment her father needed help—and the prize had vanished.

Wherever it had gone, the ivory was not in the Seal. The voyage had been a waste of time—a pursuit of the will-o'-the-wisp. Her rainbow's end was no pot of gold—only ashes of despair on a wilderness coast where the fog was rolling thick and cold.

For perhaps half an hour the young woman continued to stare into the gray mystery, a victim of disappointment. Then the sourdough blood began to tell. She managed a laugh—rather a forlorn chuckle, but at least an expression of mirth at the turn of events.

"Dad will surely tease me about this!" she exclaimed. "I'll never hear the last of it—an ivory hunt and no ivory!"

"Spicer! Oh, Spicer, boys—hello!" Bradden was hailing.

From somewhere distant there came an answer.

"Come back, you fools! Back to the wreck—hello—hello!"

Guided by his shouts they heard the three returning. Sarah joined the captain. "We'd best be getting aboard, Miss Truett," he greeted her. "This fog's thicker than a Heinie's head—and whatever we've got to do we can decide on the boat."

Bradden spoke soberly now, without trace of his earlier fury. His manner seemed almost apologetic.

Their progress along the beach toward the dingey was awkward. The place was littered with boulders and slippery ledges and in that thick fog all sense of direction vanished.

It seemed to Sarah they had gone twice the necessary distance without finding trace of the small boat. Yet the search persisted. Foot by foot they combed the sand and rocks, and again arguments arose. They retraced their course, they circled and crisscrossed the trail—and without success. The fog that had swallowed the landscape about them seemed to have taken the boat as well. Either the dingey was lost—or it had gone to join the vanished ivory.

Irritation at the delay waxed to the exploding point, then died away. The hard fact confronted them: the boat could not be found and they were stranded in the fog.

They eyed one another without words, huddled into a dumb companionship of bewilderment and misery.

Bradden was first to recover.

"What do we want of the boat?" he

growled. "If we had it chances are we couldn't pick up the cruiser till the sky clears, and when it does we can find the dingey. Boys, what we need's a good hot fire so we can sit warm till this blows over."

Back among the rocks there was a plenty of drift. They kindled a prodigal blaze that sent its roaring tongue of flame a good twelve feet into the air and dyed the cloud in which they sat with the pink of dawn.

Five silent companions huddled about this flame. Each in his way seemed driven to an exasperation beyond speech by the loss of the ivory cargo and the added puzzle of the missing dingey. Bradden's head was sunk, chin on chest, and his gaze avoided them all. Occasionally, by the ruddy light, Sarah noted that his former anger surged back again to twist his face into an evil picture while he muttered and mowed. Spicer, after one or two feeble attempts at joking, had subsided at full length. He seemed to doze. Gus and Carter sat close, exchanging an inconstant mutter and snatching nervous glances about them. And Sarah watched the flames gravely, her mind a thousand miles from current perplexities. Disappointment and present discomfort she accepted as fact and dismissed—her liveliest concern was the future and what it would bring to the father who was all that the world held dear.

It was very still and a little uncanny, this waiting in the fog. The drone of distant surf, the fire's fluttering and the lip of water on their sheltered beach were sounds accepted and forgotten.

Sarah's ears were first to catch another sound, a sound that caused her a quick glance about to make sure none of her companions had uttered it—and then an attention that was both surprise and incredulity.

In a moment the others about the fire were listening, too. The two sailors stared with wild eyes; Bradden's jaw had dropped and Spicer sat upright, his one eye shining.

From somewhere, where no man could say in that baffling mist, there floated notes of music. A man or woman was whistling softly and a little monotonously. The air was the waltz from "The Merry Widow."

The music came very sweetly, seemed to draw a little closer, faded into distance. Once it broke in mid-bar for an interval of several minutes, resumed again and so faded from their hearing.

While it lingered, and for some minutes after it died, the listeners said not a word, nor moved.

Bradden gaped, Spicer stared vacantly, the two sailors seemed on the point of rising for flight. Sarah leaned forward, rapt with strained attention.

It was Spicer who broke the spell.

The little mate sprang to his feet as if he would dash into the fog and tear the veil from this newest mystery.

"You heard it?" he demanded of Bradden. "You heard, boys? It's him, I tell you, it's him! By Almighty Heaven, he's out there—Whistling Bob!"

CHAPTER IV.

WHISTLING BOB.

At the mate's words, Bradden looked up with a shadow of his former impatient manner. "You're cracked," he snarled, but the tone was uncertain. "You—you've gone nutty about him, I tell you!"

"*Lieber Gott im Himmel—*" Gus began to repeat a prayer in German. His blue eyes were round and staring.

Carter moved fearfully until he stood closer to the group. His face was pale beneath the stubble of beard and the smear of engine grease.

"How could it be him?" Bradden insisted again. He spoke like a man holding an argument against his own convictions. "Ain't he gone—drowned—dead? Sure, he is! Besides, if it was him—"

"Didn't I tell you; didn't I tell you so as soon as I seen that ivory gone!" Spicer crowed shrilly. "I says it was him and by—"

"Well, what of it!" roared Bradden. "If it's him we ain't got cause to worry. He's alive—dead men don't go round whistling, do they? No, you bet your sweet life they don't. We'll damn soon find out. I'll hail." He raised his voice, standing

erect in the fire glow, his face turned toward the mystery of the shrouded sea.

"Oh, Bob, hello-o-o-o! Hello-o-o-o!"

The fog gave back no answer. There was no echo from Bradden's outflung hail. It seemed blanketed, driven back upon them by the steaming air.

"Hello-o-o, Bob!" Bradden hailed again, then broke off with an angry exclamation. "What damn foolishness! If you believe in spooks hail him yourself, Spicer."

"*Nein, nein,*" Gus muttered, shaking his head. "What for should he do so? Can a dead man talk?"

"Spicer says he can whistle," Bradden chuckled savagely.

"You can't fool me just the same," Spicer insisted. "I heard that."

"Bradden," Sarah demanded peremptorily, "what are you talking about? I want to know—I've got a right to know. Who is Whistling Bob? What's all this nonsense?"

"Nonsense, that's what," Bradden growled back.

"That doesn't go with me, Bradden. I've put up my boat for your salvage scheme; we get here and there's nothing to salvage; then you begin talking about something you won't explain. Now let's have the story straight!"

The red-haired girl stood face to face with the irascible captain. Her black eyes sparkled with determination. Her manner suggested that her questions would be answered or somebody would suffer.

Bradden read the look and became once more diplomatic. "We're all getting a little touched, I guess, what with bad luck and this damned fog," he apologized. "It's nothing to lose any sleep about anyhow, Miss Truett. This Whistling Bob was—"

The interruption came in a sound they instantly recognized. It struck consternation to them all. They heard the popping cough of a gas-engine. The explosions blurred into a steady purr and there followed the hoot of a compressed air whistle—a derisive, mocking salute.

Held fascinated they listened to this and continued to listen until the gradual recession of sound told them that its cause had withdrawn. And they realized that their cruiser, the Sally, had slipped anchor and left them—marooned.

"Now you've lost my boat!"

Sarah Truett drew herself up, a picture of queenly indignation, as she accused the captain. Her accusation was not strictly just, but Bradden was at least the indirect cause of all these misfortunes. And the loss of the cruiser, for there was no doubting that the whistle they had heard was from the Sally, capped their previous worries with an ugly disaster. Without a boat, on that wild coast, hardship and hunger were certain; death not at all improbable.

Spicer had dashed into the fog toward the water, shouting incoherently, as if to call back the cruiser. The two sailors followed, and their clamor grew more distant.

Bradden sat down weakly on a log. This last surprise had shaken his nerve. He looked gray and tired and he had nothing to say.

His stupefaction irritated the girl. Sarah was sick of mystery and riddle; frightened by the persistence of their bad luck and growing angrier every minute.

"Look here, Bradden, I'm through fooling. It's time we had a showdown. You got me into this thing on false pretense; you held out something from the first. Now we're in a fine mess—stranded, helpless. I've lost a valuable boat; I'm liable to lose my life before I get through with your business. Right here's where we make a new start, and we'll make it by getting this story straight. Begin with this Whistling Bob!"

Baldy Bradden looked up with a dull eye and sighed.

"Well?" she suggested angrily. Her right hand gripped hard about the small pistol in her pocket, not that she expected to use it, but because she felt an overpowering desire to hammer Bradden with it.

"Aw, you don't even know your boat's gone," he protested feebly. "You're crazy—"

Sarah's answer was a scornful laugh. "Come on, start the yarn," she commanded. "If I'm going to suffer at least I'll know why. Speak up, Bradden."

"Hell's torment, am I running this thing or are you?"

"Oh, you ran things, all right — ran us onto the beach. A fine mess you've made of it. I trusted you to have plain, homely common sense and a fool I was to do it! From now on I'm going to know what's going on—is that plain?"

"Damn you, you've got a nerve," Bradden roared, reddening at her sarcasm.

"Nerve! What about your nerve, dragging me out here on a fool chase when you knew there were odds against you. Nerve! A burglar's a scared rabbit alongside you. Now talk—talk fast and plain."

"All right, Miss Truett, all right! I never told you about this Bob, because I figured he was dead and didn't count no more in our plans. If that's him out there in the fog, which it sure does sound like him, why he ain't dead and what's more he ain't nothing to worry us, no, not if there was a dozen like him. He's a bad actor, but I ain't worrying about the likes of him.

"This Whistling Bob is just an everyday, low-down bum—and a crook. I did him a favor and he double-crossed me. That's what a man gets for doing a favor to his kind! Well, when we get our hands on his neck we'll know how to treat him— "

"When we do! "

"Don't you worry, Miss Truett, we'll get him. I got a pretty good idea, putting two and two together, what this Bob's up to. He aims to get away with my ivory, the dirty yellow dog! He tried that once before and lost out; he'll lose out again. I'll admit he kind of got my goat at first, but now I'm sore— "

"None of which answers my question," Sarah interrupted. "Who is he?"

"Why no, it doesn't!" Bradden looked thoughtful for a moment. "Well, Miss, he's an adventurer, so far's I know. He come aboard the Seal at Dutch Harbor as one of the crew, we being short a man. We went on this ivory trip, trading for the stuff with a bunch of natives out to the westward. I didn't know nothing about the man—didn't care, in fact. But when he saw that fine lot of tusks he must of figured it was a good chance to get away with a big haul.

"One night after we'd left the island, he tried to kill me and Spicer—"

"Why? "

"Figured he'd grab the Seal and put her ashore some place near a market for the stuff, I suppose."

"And the crew? "

"Oh them! I dare say he had some scheme to get rid of them when he was through—I tell you the man's a crook all through, a low-lived, dangerous rascal that don't think no more of sticking a knife into you than he does of eating.

"But he didn't put anything across with us! We were too damn smart for his kind and we kept a sharp watch on him after that night! Then when we was driving in here in that dirty weather the volcano kicked up this Bob was lost overboard—and a good riddance it was. Of course we figured he was dead—gone— "

"And evidently you figured wrong? "

"That's it, Miss Truett; that's just it as I see it. Spicer was right— "

"Well, by the eternal, he admits it! "

Spicer, who had come up to hear this, could not restrain his crowing triumph.

Bradden nodded silent acquiescence. He seemed to lack the spirit to dispute with the mate.

"Yes, I guess if a man guesses often enough he's bound to hit it once in a while. It must be Bob—"

"Of course it is. Ever see a pest like that die when you wanted him to!" Spicer seconded.

"No, he's too crooked to stay dead," Bradden sighed. "But hell, what do we care! Here's the way I figure it out: Bob got ashore and when we left he cached the ivory somewheres—"

"Some job for one man," Spicer observed.

"Yes, some job, but one man could do it if he was built like him—and persistent like him, Spicer."

The mate nodded thoughtfully.

"So he cached the cargo somewheres near," Bradden resumed, "figuring I suppose that he'd get away from here and make some deal to recover it. Instead we show up looking for our goods and he steals our boat—"

"Why? " Sarah asked the question.

"Why! Because he's naturally crooked,

that's why. Flames of torment, he'd steal anything he could get his hands on and think it was a fine joke to leave us here to die—that's Bob! Probably he figures he can load up the ivory and get away with it—probably he does, the fool! I'll show him—"

"Then you don't think he's gone far with my boat?"

"Don't stand to reason, Miss Truett. If a man's stole a good cargo boat and there's twice her value in ivory ready for the taking, he ain't going to leave it on the beach. No, sir."

"Then we'll find him and make him give up the Sally!"

"We will. We'll do just that. You hear, Spicer, you hear me, boys? The lady's dead right—and when we get our hands on that whelp—"

"Ought to be shot," snarled Spicer.

"I'll kill him with my bare hands," Bradden grumbled.

"Tie him to a tree and let him starve," suggested Gus.

"Nonsense," declared Sarah briskly. "You all talk like children. When we get the boat back and the ivory in it, we'll take this cheap crook to the nearest United States marshal and turn him over to the law; that's plenty enough trouble for him."

The four men exchanged a long, doubtful look. None offered any comment.

"Well," Sarah added after a time, "we can't do a thing until the sky clears. Meantime I can use some sleep."

She deliberately chose a level spot in the sand, beside a rock that radiated back the warmth of the fire and curled up with perfect composure.

Her companions eyed her curiously—a red haired girl whose cheeks glowed with health, unusually graceful now in her unconscious relaxation to sleep. But even asleep her hand curled tightly about the little pistol in her pocket.

Bradden summoned them by a look and a jerk of the head. They walked softly away from the fire and held a long, muttering consultation. Their talk would have interested Sarah, had she been there to listen, for mostly it concerned her.

Sarah wakened to find the fog gone. The sky was flushing pink with dawn behind the snow covered peaks. She went at once to the sea to freshen herself and the sting of the cold water raised her spirits perceptibly.

Nowhere in the bay was there any sign of the Sally, nor did a survey of the sea outside give any clue to the cruiser's whereabouts.

When she returned to the fire the men were stirring. The four were in distinctly bad humor that was aggravated by the petty irritations of an uncomfortable night. Bradden, however, had regained much of his lost poise. He led the way to the wreck where they made the encouraging discovery that there was enough tinned food to maintain life for some time.

There they also found signs in plenty that some other person had been using the stores, and suspicions of Whistling Bob received further confirmation.

"Never mind," Bradden rumbled. "We'll find that pup. He won't stray far from the ivory. That's our job, boys; let's be at it."

It was agreed that they divide. Spicer and the two sailors went south along the sea beach, having in mind a cove a couple miles distant.

Bradden and Sarah were to concentrate their attention on Cultus Bay. There shots in rapid succession would call them together.

"I've a mind to beat the woods close about here," said Bradden when the others had left. "No man is going to carry mammoth tusks very far, not by himself. If I can find that stuff I'll know something worth while."

"The ivory's your worry," Sarah agreed. "What interests me is the Sally. I want my boat back, and any Whistling Bob who thinks he can get away with what's mine is going to change his mind mighty sudden."

"That's the talk, miss," grinned Bradden. "But look now, don't take no chances. If you find track of Bob or the cruiser, signal for help. He's a bad one, that Bob. Don't go in alone."

Sarah nodded and set out, her face grimly earnest. Bradden watched the jaunty figure

until it disappeared among the rocks. He smiled peculiarly. Then the smile changed to a look of sober speculation.

"By Godfrey," he exclaimed, "suppose she does come up with him!"

At times following the beach, at times skirting through the nearby forest, Sarah Truett would have enjoyed the day had her errand been less pressing. The morning was fine and growing warmer and the woods were lovely.

But in her thoughts always was the menacing presence of the criminal who had stolen her cruising boat—a man whom even Bradden seemed to fear. Her purpose was war, not pleasure, and as she went she vowed vengeance on the unknown.

A long morning's tramp brought her into the neighborhood of the small glacier that broke off at the head of the bay. Here there was no beach, only rocks sloping steeply into the water, and she was obliged to detour along the hillside among clumps of hemlock, fir and spruce, stunted growth that sprawled fantastically among a wilderness of boulders. Underfoot still lay a deep powdering of the volcanic ash, and the branches that twined across her way shed clouds of dust as she passed.

The day had reached afternoon and she was tired and hot. Her quest seemed fruitless—a waste of time. Only the thought of her smart cruiser in the hands of another, and that other an unscrupulous man who would wreck it or sell it with equal unconcern, spurred her. She had vowed to find that man and she would!

And even in the moment of despair she came upon him.

Her first warning was like that of the night before music. The whistling was distant and faint, an elusive echo of harmony. Listening, crouched in a thicket of spruce, she made it out and her blood began to run hot with anger.

The man was there, somewhere ahead, whistling unconcernedly, his air that same "Merry Widow" waltz.

For intervals the sound would cease, then resume again, the idle whistle of a man busy at some task and apparently without a worry in the world.

Sarah began a cautious advance.

She held her pistol ready for use as she darted from one shelter to another, wary against any surprise.

Bradden's words were forgotten. She had no thought of giving the signal arranged among them. Her one purpose was to find this thief of boats and to win back her own. Her bright eyes sparkled that purpose; her pink cheeks flaunted danger signals and her red hair bannered to the world a warning of the wrath of a determined young woman.

Thus, peering down from the rim of a steep ledge, she found him—Whistling Bob. And floating serene in a tiny bay, walled on one side by the crumbling yellow ice of the glacier, on the other by the rocky mountain side, lay the Sally, unharmed.

The cruiser had been made fast to a shelf of rock just below where Sarah crouched. The clean cut stone made a natural wharf, and it was broad enough to give room to the man who was loading aboard, with infinite labor, but a hearty good will, various curving tusks of ivory taken from a neat pile that had been cleared of a rough covering of boughs.

There also floated in the tiny harbor a serviceable raft of heavy timbers that explained at a glance how it was a lone man had looted the fossil wealth from the Seal.

Sarah's interest was less for the method than the man who had done the thing—and added to the doing the unspeakable insolence of stealing her cruiser.

She studied him intently—a blond man of powerful build and a good six feet and a half in height. Over his faded red sweater he wore a heavy drill shirt that draped about him like a coat. On his head, sticking up aggressively from that square-angled skull was a battered tweed cap. The thrust of the head from its strong column of neck, the uncompromising line of its sharply carved jaw, his hard cut features, wide gray eyes narrowed with concentrated vision, and the deeply tanned face with its rough stubble of beard, painted Whistling Bob a desperate character.

But desperate looks roused no fear in the red-haired goddess of vengeance.

She studied out a way to reach him by a short detour. Five careful minutes

brought her around the ledge and close upon him, unseen. The little pistol poked forward aggressively, and her voice was edged with grim threat when she spoke.

"Put 'em up, Whistling Bob. I've got you!"

CHAPTER V.

VENGEANCE.

WHISTLING BOB was stooping low to seize one of the ivory tusks when Sarah spoke. His back was toward her.

In one quick, catlike movement he straightened and whirled about with an agility surprising for a man of his size. But whatever his first intention, it changed miraculously when he saw who confronted him.

His gray eyes widened and the line of that grim mouth softened with astonishment. His big hands went slowly over his head while he goggled at her.

They stood a moment tense while a slow transformation brought something like a grin to the man's lips.

"A woman!" he panted. "I surrender."

He studied his captor with growing interest. She was worth it. Though her hand held an ugly little weapon and her face and bearing proclaimed a deadly purpose, Sarah Truett lost nothing of her attractive charm by the pose. Fighting madness only glorified her lively beauty.

With an evident effort the captive commanded his voice for further questioning. "Are you—one—of that—gang, or—or what?"

"I'm the person who owns that boat, if that happens to interest you—and I own half of that ivory you stole, too—I'll thank you to hand them both back."

"Then you are—one of Bradden's crowd! Where in the name of bright angels did he find you?"

"Never mind where he found me. I've found you—that's the point—and I've got you with the goods. You're going to pay for this before you're through. I'll tell you that much."

"Well, by the Lord, I like—" Whistling Bob changed his mind and left unsaid what it was he liked. His face grew sullen. "Well," he exclaimed, "you've got the drop on me—what is it you want?"

"For the present you can keep right on with what you're doing. You're saving us work—go ahead."

"You mean load that stuff?"

"I certainly do."

Whistling Bob lowered his hands slowly. Sarah circled him warily and seated herself on the cruiser's deck, where the pistol could follow his every move.

Deliberately, his manner abstracted, the captive stooped to the task. He shouldered a heavy tusk, and, bowing beneath its weight, dragged it with infinite labor to the hatch, where it went to join its fellows. During the entire operation his eyes scarcely left Sarah's face. He walked back thoughtfully, looking over his shoulder, to get another load.

Another tusk went into the Sally's hold.

"Say," he exclaimed, "you know I've been doing this all morning—it's no child's play."

"No?"

"No. I intended knocking off for a breath—"

"You've had time to take a dozen. Suppose you hustle a little now."

His stare was met by a glance that showed no sympathy. He read the message of her black eyes and groaned. "It takes a woman to get away with it—it sure does!"

Bowed beneath another load, he passed her, toiling painfully.

"It doesn't seem to me you showed much sense in handling them," Sarah criticised. "You might have made it easier."

"Perhaps you'd like the job!"

"Perhaps. If it was mine I'd have rigged a tackle from that tree-trunk that curves out up there in the rock and swung them in."

Again he stared, this time with a shade of admiration. "Humph, that's not such a bad idea—suppose I do it?"

"It's hardly worth it now, I think. Keep on as you are. There's only a few left."

Whistling Bob moved toward the pile with black looks. He bent to his work

and the sweat streamed over his face as he muscled the clumsy, curved burden to his shoulder. The big tusk slipped from its uneven balance; he strained to hold it, but it had gained momentum. It thudded to the ground.

He straightened, an angry glint in his eyes.

"Look here, I'm sick of this damn foolishness!"

"Are you?"

"Yes, I am—and what's more—"

"Well, go on—what's more?"

"I quit!"

"Oh, you do!"

Sarah climbed briskly from the cruiser and approached him. He stood glaring, his big chest laboring, hands clenched. The large, square head was thrust forward, and his face was ugly.

Sarah advanced with a nice deliberation that was graceful in its menace. She held the weapon ready for use and her glance telegraphed trouble. Her face had gone rather white now and the red lips were pressed into a firmness that marred its beauty.

She stopped only when the breast of her coat brushed his shirt, and she seemed to crouch a little, looking up at him.

"You think you can bluff me," she snarled. "You think you can, do you, you cheap bully? I know you, Whistling Bob, know all about you and your kind. You're a yellow dog—yellow clear through—and I've got your number. You stole my boat and my ivory—now you'll make good. Don't you think for a second I'm not afraid to use this gun, and when I do I'll pick out a spot where it will hurt. Now, you get busy—"

"No!" His voice was hoarse.

"Get busy—this is my last warning."

A nervous tremor shook his big body.

"No," he panted, and his jaw set more stubbornly.

The pistol raised a fraction of space, seeking a deadly mark. Sarah's finger tightened on the trigger. Inwardly shaken, she was outwardly steady as steel.

"Your last warning, Bob."

"No, and to hell with you!"

Both stiffened with surprise, listening. Somewhere in the distance a shot had been fired, then another. There came a faint, echoing cry.

The little automatic roared—*bang-bang-bang*. The bullets were deflected just enough to miss the man before her. One raveled out his shirt. Sarah remembered the signal.

Before the pistol was still the hand that held it was caught in a crushing grip and her arm forced to one side and held there. Whistling Bob had her helpless.

His bold stare swept her appraisingly, and a little gleam of appreciation showed in his eyes as he noted her breathless defiance.

"Now," he ordered with a cold purpose, "I'll take that little gun."

His fingers bit cruelly into the tender cords of her wrist. She ground her teeth stubbornly, determined to cling, but flesh could not stand that pain. The pistol dropped. Still holding her hand, he stooped quickly and recovered it.

"We'll be moving," he announced. "Get aboard—ahead of me."

"I won't!"

By way of answering, his arms enfolded her. She was swept from her feet and carried, a helpless bundle, onto the Sally. He thrust her into the pilot-house.

"Take that wheel, and keep her clear of the rocks."

"I won't."

"What, again? Yes, you will, because I'm going to start her, and you don't care to smash this boat."

There was a key to the door of the pilot-house. He turned the lock and dropped the key into his pocket. Then he went through the hatch to the engine pit with a superb disregard of her.

The hum of engines made the cruiser tremble. The Sally strained at her moorings.

Whistling Bob appeared on deck, a knife in his hand. He stooped to slash the straining ropes.

Sarah darted for the hatch that led to the engine pit. That, too, was fast—it hooked from the other side. She was fairly trapped.

The knife made short work of the moor-

ings. The cruiser leaped ahead. Instinct and habit, stronger than her anger, forced Sarah's hands over the wheel. Whatever came, she could not see her cruiser dashed against the rocks. They headed out into the little bay.

Back through the engine trap came Whistling Bob. Without a word he detached her hands from the wheel and thrust her aside. He steadied the Sally into a winding channel that led between a wall of ice and a wall of rock to the wider water of Cultus Bay.

"What are you going to do with me?" Sarah snarled the question from the corner where he had thrust her with a rudeness that left her shaken.

"Don't know." His attention was busy with the narrow water. "If I gave you what you deserve, I'd take you out to sea and drown you. You clawed my arm raw."

"I'll do more than that if you touch me again."

He laughed scornfully.

"You don't dare keep me on this boat."

"Can't say I'm anxious to! But here—hold this wheel—look at that damn ice!"

He unlocked the door and jumped for the deck. A clumsy block, broken from the glacier, was spinning slowly across their path, threatening them. Whistling Bob ran forward, a pike pole ready to thrust aside the menace.

Sarah held the cruiser on her course until the Sally was free of the ice and poking her nose into the open water. Then she stopped the engines dead.

For emergency purposes, when one man might have to handle the boat, a control had been installed beside the wheel. A simple electrical switch would stop, but not start, the power. When she pulled this switch the engines stopped.

Her plan was completed as Whistling Bob burst through the door. For her he had only a brief look of contempt while he snapped on the switch. Then he turned and disappeared into the engine pit.

There was a small stool kept in the pilot-house — a substantial, home-made piece of furniture.

Sarah slammed the hatch behind her captor and thrust the stool across it. The furniture formed a bar that was wedged between a stanchion and a corner of an angle-iron. The engines started again—the cruiser advanced—and there came a terrific battering against the blocked hatch. The girl at the wheel smiled and shrugged. She wondered just how long it would be before Whistling Bob remembered he had the outer door key in his pocket.

Several minutes passed in an uproar. The man below was furious and charging the hatch with the impetus of a battering-ram. The Sally's air-whistle was hooting, three short, quick blasts, then three more and another three.

From ashore three pistols popped an answer. They had heard her and understood!

She thrust open the small window and shouted her loudest: "Bradden—Spicer, quick! This way!"

Hoot-toot-toot echoed the whistle.

Ahead she saw a bit of sand, a bar that promised soft ground. She turned the Sally's nose for it and snatched a lashing that hung ready on the wall.

She must fight for time—delay him every second possible.

While she slipped the knots fast, lashing the wheel, the battering against the hatch ceased.

Beside the locks, the pilot-house door fastened from the inside with a hook. She made that secure.

The cruiser was going at top speed, straight for the sand. She noted with a thrill that the bar was close to shore. If only they found her in time they could wade aboard.

She kept the siren going.

Whistling Bob was on deck. He turned the key in the locked door, his face white and furious.

Against his angry jerk the brass hook held firm.

He seized the knob with both hands and braced himself for a terrific pull. The flimsy wooden fabric creaked and groaned. He pulled again, and the screws that held the latch tore from the wood. The door flew open with a violence that almost sent its assailant over the side.

An arm like a steel bar pushed Sarah

back, spinning, into the far corner. Whistling Bob jerked the clasp-knife from his pocket and bent to cut the lashing that fastened the wheel on a course toward the sand.

A whirlwind of fury landed on his broad back. Arms entwined about his neck and tried to pinion his hands.

Sharp finger-nails clawed at his face.

Choking and bellowing his rage, the big man reared back and whirled, trying to grasp her. Sarah was swung from her feet, but she clung tight.

Thus burdened, he reached the wall switch and twisted it. The engines died.

The Sally's bow was close onto the sand. Two men had burst from the cover of woods, Bradden and Spicer. They were scrambling for the beach.

With a staggering effort the pinioned man forced the girl's grip loose. They came face to face. For just a second a murderous insanity peeped from Whistling Bob's gray eyes.

Then with his knife he slashed the cord that bound the Sally's wheel. He put the helm hard up, but in the moment of its doing the cruiser struck ground and slithered gently onto the bar. The shock of her grounding sent them both staggering.

Now Spicer and Bradden were wading, and each brandished a pistol.

The big man darted outside again, snatching up the pike pole and working desperately to free the cruiser. The two men wading stopped to open fire on him. To the bullets he gave no heed, straining with all his weight and strength to shove the Sally off the bedding of sand. The boat seemed to budge and lift to the heaves that threatened to break the hardwood pole.

Sarah flew at him, clutched his arm, shook it. The wading men ceased their fire at the sight of her. Her hair streamed wild. She looked like one of the mythical Furies.

Whistling Bob caught her and raised her high. With a toss he could have dropped her over the side. He seemed about to do this.

Bradden and Spicer waited gaping to see murder done.

The odds were still in favor of the blond giant. Freed of the girl, he could have gotten the cruiser afloat in short time, sooner than the pair in the water could reach it. For him the thing was simple, but he did not do it. Instead his arms relaxed and he set her down gently.

"Damn it," he groaned, "you're a woman—that's got me beat!"

The breath was sobbing in his throat. He was shaking violently.

Abruptly he turned his back and walked a few paces from Sarah. There he waited with arms folded for the appearance of the two armed men.

They scrambled over the side shouting, and found a silent pair—the disheveled girl and the bitter man.

"Now, you pup," Bradden shouted, "we'll show you what comes of trying that rough stuff here. Stick 'em up, Bob—higher. All right now, Bob. Don't start anything or we'll fill you full of holes. You're our meat now—we caught you."

Whistling Bob gave the captain a hard look—a glance bitter with contempt.

"You lie," he snarled. "It was that damned woman got me."

CHAPTER VI.

THAT DAMNED WOMAN!

SARAH TRUETT turned to Bradden. She addressed him curtly. "Most of your ivory's aboard," she said. "The rest is back there in a little bay—a fine time I had getting it."

The captain surveyed her disorder with a grim smile.

"I should say you did!" he exclaimed. "Why'd you take a chance?"

"Because I was too busy to wait for you," she snapped, and retired to repair damages to her toilet.

Bradden lost no time looking over the cargo in the Sally's hold. He counted every tusk.

"There's eleven missing," he announced when Sarah reappeared. "We got to get them."

They waited a few minutes longer, and Gus and Carter came out of the woods at a run. When they were aboard and saw

the prisoner their eyes grew wide. They grew wider when Spicer told them who had whipped Whistling Bob.

By now Bob's hands were tied behind his back and his feet hobbled. He sat on the hatch, staring straight before him. He had not a word to say, and his face was set in a hard, speculative stare. Only when Sarah passed did the gray eyes show any gleam of interest.

A little labor, aided by a flooding tide, put the Sally free of the sand bar. They started back for the little cove where the ivory was cached, and Bradden stood beside Sarah in the pilot-house.

Bradden was inclined to be boisterous in his compliments. Bit by bit from her brief replies he gathered the story of Sarah's fight.

"By the sacred seal of Solomon," he cried. "Did you ever hear the beat of it? She does it single handed—licks him—Whistling Bob! And there's some says women don't deserve to vote! By Jonah, miss, you're a wonder!"

For some reason she could not have explained his praise was distasteful to Sarah. There were things about that struggle she preferred to forget and Bradden's windy admiration nettled her. She preferred the silent stoicism of the prisoner.

"Forget about that," she advised him. "I got him, that's enough—I told you I could take care of myself."

"Yes," Bradden grinned, "I guess you can! Say now, miss, what'd Bob have to say?"

"Say? Nothing."

"I mean about us—about the ivory he stole. Didn't he have some lie ready—some kind of defense now?"

"Not a word."

"Not a word! Huh—humph, well now! Nothing at all, hey?"

"Nothing at all. Why should he? I got him with the goods."

"Yes, that's right, you got him with the goods. And—and he didn't even have the nerve to deny it?"

"No, he didn't deny it."

"Well, he's a queer one—a queer fish. When he's in action he's a regular Kadiak bear, I'll say that. But get him licked—get the drop on him and he'll quit flat and cold—he'll lie down without a whimper. Look at him now, sitting there without a word—yellow all through."

Sarah glanced at the prisoner, but said nothing.

"But we got to look out for him," Bradden resumed eagerly. "We can't take chances on him! He's bad, bad clean through, Miss Truett. Right now I'll bet he's figuring how he can get the drop on the bunch of us and murder us while we sleep. You got to look out for his kind!"

"There are five of us to do it."

"Yes, that's right, I guess we can do it all right. Five of us—but don't take no more risks—you took too many already. And if he talks, don't you believe him. He's a slick liar, this Bob—a slick liar."

Sarah nodded absently. Her attention was given to the narrow channel through which the Sally was entering the little cove. "Tell the boys to stand by to make fast," she suggested.

Ashore again, with the Sally moored to the natural wharf, their attention went at once to the pile of ivory tusks. All of the missing were there, ready for loading.

"It's the devil's own job," Bradden mused. "And the boys are tired—plumb beat out. I guess we're all pretty tired, 'specially you. Suppose we lay over to-night—it's late anyhow? We can load in the morning and get away before noon."

Sarah nodded assent. She was tired and a little weak with the reaction of strain. She felt a shameful desire to crawl away to her little stateroom and lie on her bunk—yes, and to cry! She wanted to cry—wanted to so badly that a lump was in her throat and her eyes burned.

"Sure, we'll sleep ashore comfortable for one night," Bradden went on eagerly. "Come on boys, let's make camp."

"Hello!" cried Spicer. "What's the big idea?"

"We're all pretty tired," Bradden repeated with a significant look at the mate. "We'll load in the morning and to-night we sleep ashore, where it's comfortable and room to stretch."

The four men exchanged glances and set about the task of making camp.

Sarah started to go aboard the cruiser, noted the prisoner sitting against a tree, and changed her course to pass him. His lips were puckered and he whistled softly, with air of a man who had much to think about.

He lifted his glance to meet hers, staring curiously and with evident admiration.

An impulse stopped her beside him. "Thirsty—or—or anything I can do?"

"Huh? No, nothing— Thanks."

"I—I hope I didn't hurt you—very badly I mean?"

He grinned. "You clawed pretty freely, but that's all right. No worse than a bobcat would have done."

"Oh!" She reddened and turned away hastily. He watched her speculatively until she disappeared into the Sally's cabin. Then he shook his head and a frown of puzzlement gathered above his eyes.

In her own cabin Sarah ceased to be the fighting swashbuckler and became all woman. She had her cry; she cried until her tired nerves were satisfied. Then she curled up serenely and went sound asleep: It had been a trying day.

From this sleep she woke suddenly. At first she thought night had fallen, for the porthole beside her was black. But there was a thread of reflected light under the door that told of the sun in the heavens. Then she heard a murmur of voices and knew that somebody had planted his broad back against the little port while he stretched his legs before him on the deck of the Sally. There was a murmurous conversation going on among the four men. It was this sound that wakened her.

A phrase caught her wandering attention. Its familiar ring interested her and she reasoned drowsily that it had figured previously in her waking dreams.

"Law of flight, that's the American of it." The voice was Bradden's. "It works like this: there's a prisoner and nobody don't want to take the responsibility for shooting him. So they fix it he can escape, then he gets shot by accident—killed while he's breaking arrest, you see? It's a little trick I learned one time along the Mexican border."

"That's a cute one!" Spicer exclaimed. "By the holy Christmas, that's a good scheme, Bradden."

"Yes, I figure it is. It does away with taking any risks. You see, boys, we got to figure it this way: suppose some boat should come along, maybe some revenue cutter. 'Taint likely, but you never can tell. Well, if we're here with the Sally and Miss Truett who owns her, and there ain't nothing unusual or out of the way happened to make her suspicious, why we got a clean bill—anyhow we got somebody to speak up for us that can get a hearing. That girl and her dad are damn well known along this coast. On the other hand if we do something off color—rough stuff—if we was to deliberately shoot this Whistling Bob, now—why—you see how we'd stand with her!"

An incoherent grunting from his hearers answered this.

"Look how it is to be smart," Gus exclaimed. "By golly, I wish I had a head like that."

"Yep," sighed Spicer, "that's what I call slick—neat, but not gaudy as the saying goes."

"Well, what the hell's all this got to do with him?" Carter grumbled. "What do we do? I don't figure sense out of your talk."

"Oh lord, listen to him. I bet he's got more ivory in his head than there is in the cruiser—"

"Shut up, Spicer. Here's what we do." Bradden lowered his voice. Sarah, a listener now and interested to hear every word, pressed her ear close against the glass that separated her from Bradden's back.

"When it comes night," said the captain, "we all lie down to sleep, but one of us is ready to shoot in a hurry. Before we turn in we pretend to look after Bob's ropes and retie them so's any fool could slip 'em off. Then, when he makes a break for it, which he sure will, why we drop him—and that put's that yellow dog out of our way for good, so we don't have to go to no courts and prove where we got this ivory or anything, see? We got a good reputable witness to show he was killed trying to escape—"

"Yes, but I thought—" Carter began the objection.

"Don't try to think," Bradden bade him. "One thing at a time. Now you got that straight in your head?"

"Yes."

"All right. All you got to do is keep yourself out of the way. I'll do the shooting— I'll do it gladly."

"Good enough," exclaimed Spicer. "I'll look after his tie ropes. Where's that girl? Ain't she had enough sleeping yet?"

"Yep, time to eat. I'll wake her." Sarah heard Bradden rising. She lay back hastily on her bunk.

When the captain knocked she answered, after a suitable pause to suggest wakening. Presently she confronted him with her usual cool, confident glance. She gave no sign that she had heard, yet inwardly she was shocked and angry.

She was angry that these men should dare decide the fate of a prisoner without consulting her—an equal partner with Bradden. She was shocked by the cold-blooded brutality of them. They meant to murder Whistling Bob, nothing less.

That Bradden hated the man was apparent, just as it was plain the captain feared him. Sarah guessed shrewdly that Bradden's version of the trouble on the Seal left many things unsaid.

She never doubted for a moment that this man was unscrupulous and dangerous —after her encounter with him she had no reason to doubt it. But she had no intention of standing by to acquiesce in treacherous murder.

Her first thought was to denounce Bradden and forbid the plot. A glance at the huge captain as he came to wake her put that notion out of her head. She was one —and a woman—against four men.

Should she warn the prisoner? She determined to seek an opportunity.

Opportunities were difficult to find. They prepared a meal and ate it. When they were done Sarah volunteered to feed Whistling Bob, who still sat with his back to the tree, staring intently at nothing.

"No, no, miss, I'll do that," Spicer exclaimed. "Don't you go messing up with that thug any more—no call for it!"

The mate took the business into his own hands in a way that left her no alternative. Later, when they all sat about the fire, Sarah yawned elaborately and announced she would seek her own berth aboard the cruiser. The four watched her figure fade from the fireglow. Whistling Bob still sat by his tree, in the shadow. His hands were tied behind his back; his feet hobbled by a rope made fast about his ankles. These bonds were long enough to permit him to take short steps, but to attempt escape in them, in that rough country, would be suicidal.

Sarah paused beside him and stooped down in a pretense of having dropped something.

"Whistling Bob," she murmured.

"Yes?"

"Not so loud. Listen to what I say. I'm warning you that that gang—"

"Lost something, Miss Truett?"

Spicer had followed close behind her.

"My handkerchief, but I have it now, thanks."

"Good enough, miss. Now Bob, let's have a look at them ropes again. Got to tie you up for the night. We'd sure hate to lose your pleasant company."

The mate set about his task with a genial, bustling manner that made Sarah's blood run cold. He was paving the way to this man's death and he did it with the cheery matter-of-fact air of a mother tucking up her child for the night. What manner of murderer was this chatty, chipper little fellow?

She lingered a moment, uncertain what to do. Her impulse was to shriek her warning and defy them all—but common sense told her that to do that would only provoke a clash with Bradden and his crowd—a crisis that might turn them against her.

She had thrown her lot with these four; for the present at least she must depend on them.

She trusted them, except to disapprove of a murder in cold blood, no matter how richly the prisoner deserved that.

So instead she bade Spicer good-night and went aboard the Sally. She sat on the edge of her berth and thought hard, her brows knotted, her hands clasping and unclasping nervously.

She had no choice, but to take some action. To do otherwise was murder—nothing less. And bad as he was the man had spared her when he could have killed her. A moment he had held her life in his hands—could have sacrificed her and made good his escape. Instead he had let her beat him, "because she was a woman." Besides, humanity, common decency demanded of her that she act—

She might have believed that the talk she heard was idle—the characteristic bloody boasting of Bradden and his like, but for Spicer. The mate was carrying out his part of the program. Soon they would all lie down and wait for their prisoner to discover his loose bonds and make a break for freedom. Then—

A moment she turned sick with the thought of it. Her knees were weak, her head swam. But her training told. "It was up to her," as her father would have put it. She would do something—do something though it cost her own safety.

With the resolve came a new idea—a plan.

She pressed her face close to the little port-hole, watching the men about the fire. Her wait was a long one, sickening in its anxiety.

The flames were burning lower. At last she saw Bradden rise and stretch significantly.

The men had taken blankets ashore, and she saw them arranging them. That was her signal for action.

Her high boots she slipped off, that she might move more quietly. Each step an agony of caution she stole from her little stateroom, through the cabin to the deck of the cruiser. The Sally was trunk cabined; that is, the house rose a couple of feet above the deck, making a bulwark behind which she crouched, peering.

Bradden summoned the prisoner close to the flame and tossed him a blanket.

"Sleep where you please," he said, "but mind you don't try any tricks again. We've got a line on you now, my man, and it'll be damn dangerous for you if you make any breaks." The captain's tone was necessarily hearty—it might well be intended to reach her ears in the cruiser cabin.

Finally they were done with their eternal wrangling about the best place to lie. They composed themselves for sleep and some one of them soon began to snore, probably a counterfeit of the real thing, but reassuring enough to a man not warned.

Sarah slipped ashore where the shadow was deepest. She picked her way fearfully, crouching, at times crawling, every dry stick an obstacle that must be avoided, until she was close to the self-elected murderer, Bradden, but outside the zone of light. There she settled herself for a long vigil.

Now they were all asleep, or seemed asleep. The night was black with great, glittering stars and a keen little wind stirring. Somewhere a tree toad or cricket began a monotonous cheep-cheeping. The waiting girl shivered in spite of her warm coat.

She grasped her pistol tightly, ready for action.

And still nothing happened until it seemed that night must have worn away and dawn would soon come. A bit of mist off the water came crawling toward the dying coals of their camp fire.

Deadly tired from the hard day Sarah fought against sleep that sought to stupefy her. In spite of her will she nodded. Then her heart stopped and turned to ice within her breast. The prisoner was stirring!

His blanketed form was moving, very deliberately, but moving at a crawl farther into the shadow. Soon he would be opposite her, but twenty feet or more to the right.

And another blanket stirred—Bradden. The sight of those two muffled, swathed, shapeless bodies inching along, dropping flat for a moment or more at a time and inching on again, was eery.

Bradden, pursuing, came straight at her. She crouched, ready, in his path.

It had been Sarah's plan at this juncture to declare herself as the innocent bystander, to give an alarm in such a way as to disconcert Bradden and spoil his shooting—to keep concealed from him that she had overheard their planning.

But plans and a red-haired temperament do not always jibe.

In the instant Whistling Bob rose for free flight, casting his blanket behind him—and Bradden rose with leveled weapon, Sarah was on her feet and had fired. Her target was the pistol in Bradden's hand and the shot was a hit. The weapon went flying from his grasp and left him nursing aching fingers, dumfounded at the apparition that rose from the brush.

A crashing of branches that died out rapidly—Whistling Bob was gone. Sarah had not counted on this!

"Blistering blue blazes!" Bradden roared. "Spicer, Gus, Carter—after him. He's got away. After him!"

The close-wrapped forms about the embers, already in commotion at the sound of a shot, stumbled to their feet and urged on by the captain's fluent profanity began a blundering chase that was doomed to failure at birth. Bradden advanced on Sarah with a shout.

"What in damnation d'you mean by that shooting? You know that Bob's got away—clean away? Why ain't you in your bunk where you belong? You might of killed me!"

"You're lucky I didn't." Sarah's voice was cool.

"What's that!"

"You heard me. Now talk sense."

"Sense, you know what you did—you let him get loose—"

"I didn't tie him—that's up to you. I was up and I saw somebody making a break from the fire. I thought you were Whistling Bob—"

"Huh!"

"If you wanted him why didn't you tie him tighter? You got what was coming to you for your carelessness."

They faced one another beside the coals. Bradden frothed with rage, but the girl's nimble wit kept him outdistanced. He groped for explanations that would give him color for the abuse he longed to shout at her and bewilderment added to his exasperation.

"Well, damn it all, this is a fine mess—the prisoner gone—"

"What if he is? Listen, I've heard enough roaring for one night. He was my prisoner anyway. I took him, and if he wants to run off I don't care. We've got our ivory."

"But Bob—but—but—"

"That's how I feel. Good night."

She turned and left him with regal insolence, going serenely aboard the Sally.

Bradden gaped after her. The men returning empty-handed, clamorous with questions, were treated to some of the choice remarks she had bottled within him. Out of it all one phrase came clear to her, *"That damned woman!"*

Sarah smiled a vast satisfaction and prepared herself for sleep. She had won her point. Her interest in them was ended. Let them say what they pleased!

CHAPTER VII.

AN EXTRA ACE.

BRADDEN'S voice, profanely directing the handling of a big ivory tusk, wakened Sarah. The four were beginning the task of loading the last of the Seal's former cargo. When Sarah came on deck the captain gave her a sullen stare and the rest of them pointedly ignored her.

She went ashore to prepare a meal, preferring the camp-fire to the little galley of the cruiser. She was smiling and well-pleased with herself and the world. That her partners were resentful of what she had done for Whistling Bob did not worry her in the least.

She was glad the man was gone. His presence would have made the return trip to Kanak unpleasant for her. No telling what violence he might commit. And as for punishment, the long, hard beach trail to Yunaska, the nearest settlement, was punishment enough. Besides, by the time he reached there she could have the federal marshal looking for him.

She was glad, too, that they would soon be at sea—that they soon would sight again the island shore which was home. She had enough of adventuring and longed for peace. The ivory was recovered, the venture was successful, she would be satisfied to see the last of Bradden and his profanity and the cold-blooded Spicer and Gus and Carter.

She wondered if Whistling Bob was

breakfasting—and where? He would not dare return, unarmed, to molest them this morning, but perhaps he was near, peering even now from some hiding. Maybe he was sorry for his crimes. What fun could a man find in being an outlaw! She pictured his coming loneliness—the man-killing trail he must take—and felt a stirring of sympathy for the huge, blond man.

Bad as he was, he was human. Had he appeared just then Sarah would have offered him passage back on the Sally. She was a generous fighter and ready to forget the wrongs of past yesterdays.

She strolled back to the ivory cache. There were but a half-dozen tusks left. On the cruiser the captain, Spicer, and Gus were quarreling about the disposition of an unusually long tusk. Carter was loafing ashore.

Carter looked up with his insolent, slow-witted stare. "You think you're so damned smart," he growled in a guarded undertone.

Sarah turned away, giving no sign she had heard. Best to ignore the fellow's boorishness.

"Yah damned smart!" Carter sneered again, and laughed significantly.

Sarah went aboard the cruiser and stood beside Bradden. "Ready soon, captain?"

Bradden scowled at her, but he answered with an effort to be civil, "Soon enough."

She desired no conversation with him. They watched Gus and Spicer in silence.

"Carter," Bradden shouted, "come here and lend a hand, you lazy dog! I'll cure you of that soldiering! All right, Spicer—better look up the stuff ashore and make sure we ain't leaving anything."

The mate disappeared with a cheerful grin that included Sarah in its sunny warmth.

The last tusk went aboard and they closed the hatch. They loosed the moorings. At last they were ready. With a thrill of pride Sarah realized that she had won—that the prize was in her grasp. Now her father need not worry!

"Hey, Miss Truett, that your sweater hanging over there by the camp-fire? Better hustle for it!"

Sarah, about to enter the pilot-house, followed Bradden's gesture. "I thought it was aboard," she cried, and leaped nimbly to the rocks. She sped toward the camp-fire—reached to snatch the sweater—and wheeled about astounded.

The cruiser's engines had started. She was under way! Already the boat had nosed out into the little harbor.

Sarah called a shout of alarm and started to run toward the rock ledge. She stopped suddenly at a shout from the Sally's deck—a shout of warning.

"Stay right where you are—another foot and we'll fire, Miss Truett."

The voice was Spicer's. The little mate and another—Gus—showed their heads above the bulwark of the low cabin. Each had a pistol trained at her breast.

Spicer was grinning affably. Even Gus smiled. Bradden was not in view—evidently at the wheel.

"Good-by, miss," Spicer shouted. "Hope the walking's good!"

Another head popped up—Carter's.

"Yay!" he jeered. "Thought you were so damned smart!"

The Sally circled and headed for the channel. In five minutes the jack staff at the stern had disappeared behind a corner of rock.

Then Sarah realized.

They had left her deliberately! The thing was planned to its last detail of the sweater hung on the bush—that must have been Spicer's final errand ashore. They were running away from her—with the ivory and her boat! She was marooned.

And all the time she had her pistol handy and had not fired one shot in retaliation. Surging anger brought this reminder and she raced for the nearest point of prominence.

Breathless she reached the top of a bold rock and saw the Sally growing smaller. She sent a dozen shots after it, and for answer there floated to her ears a faint yell of derision.

She stamped her foot and bit her lips to keep back tears.

It was unbelievable they would do this thing. Even now she wondered if they intended some crude joke. Yet she knew better, and finally she scrambled from the point of rocks and walked slowly back to

the coals of their camp-fire. She sat down and stared at these embers, a lonely, disillusioned young woman in mannish apparel. For a little while her bravery and swagger was forgotten. She suffered.

"How d'you like it, being ditched by your pals?"

Sarah looked up with a sharp intake of breath. Whistling Bob had approached without noise. His sudden apparition frightened her.

He saw that her eyes were still wet with tears and his manner became more gentle. "Soft of tough luck when the gang goes back on you, isn't it? Well, if you run with wolves you got to look out for the laws of the pack."

"Look here, you." Sarah's cheeks were reddening. The fighting light reappeared in her eyes. "I've got a gun in this coat pocket and it's pointing your way. There's a lot of room in Alaska—a whole lot. I'd suggest you use some of it."

"That's silly talk."

"If you think so, just linger around here!"

"I shall." Whistling Bob was unruffled. He stood looking down on her, unsmiling, but quite at ease. To all warning signs she displayed he might as well have been deaf, dumb, and blind.

"I came here to talk to you and I'm going to do it. I want to see if we can't team up together."

Sarah's cheeks reddened and an angry exclamation trembled on her lips.

"Wait," he cautioned. "Don't misunderstand me. I'm not proposing anything except, maybe, if you feel that way, we could join forces and help ourselves out of this hole. The gang ditched you, didn't they? I don't suppose you feel particular bound to them by chains of gratitude?"

"Well?"

"Well, I know something of considerable value that I'm willing to trade you for a little support when I need it."

"You're wrong there. You haven't a thing to trade that will in any way interest me—"

"Stop that talk, that silly, chattering babble!" he growled. "Don't be a fool—listen. We sit here and fence like idiots when every minute counts. That gang will be back here pretty quick."

"Back here!" Sarah stared with widened eyes.

"Yes, and if we expect to profit by it—to get ourselves out of this mess, we've got to do something quick—"

"Back here—returning? Who says they'll come back—"

"I know it."

"You know—oh, what a fool I am to listen to you! Now get out—"

"I tell you the Sally will come back, sometime before dark, and if you'll give me a chance I'll prove it to you. Wait!"

He strode away into the trees and returned in a moment carrying something that shone with a familiar glint of polished brass. "That's why they'll come back," he declared and laid at her feet the brass-cased compass of the Sally.

Sarah watched it, amazed and speechless, as if it might of its own volition do some extraordinary feat.

"You recognize it, I see."

"How—how," she spoke in a whisper, "where did you get that?"

"Stole it."

"Stole it—stole the Sally's compass—when?"

"Early this morning, after I—say, listen, now, will you let me explain a little? Will you hear me out?"

She nodded.

"Well, beginning with last night. I saw what you did to Bradden—how you saved my life—"

"I save your life! Why, I—"

"Yes, I know, but you didn't intend letting them murder me in cold blood, did you? No. And I'll not forget that. Then, after they quit blundering about in the dark, looking for me, I came back near the fire. I wanted to know what they were up to—I had to know because I figure I need every trick I can turn to beat their game.

"Well, from what I heard, I gathered they were planning to leave somebody behind—and that somebody—you."

"Why did they do that—why—"

"If you don't know, I'm sure I don't. At a guess I should say you had made them pretty sore when you shot the gun

out of Bradden's hand. Never mind the *whys* just now, it's the *how* we have to figure out.

"My immediate job was to find a way to shoot a little poison into their scheme and do it quick. So I happened to think of the compass and I came aboard and got it—a ticklish time I had, too. It was almost light by then. I figure with the compass gone they'll come back—they'll have to. Bradden knows better than to try navigating without a compass, especially along this coast where fog rolls up so quick—"

"But—but why didn't they discover it was missing—long before this?" Sarah puzzled.

"I figure it this way. They wanted to get off in a hurry, had to in order to fool you. So I just hung an old coat I picked up over the binnacle. But sometime pretty quick, just as soon as they get over this flurry and Bradden or whoever's steering returns to normal habit, he's going to lift that coat off—and he'll make a discovery that will curl his hair." Whistling Bob chuckled.

"If they come back—what?" Sarah's interest in this man of resource had become eager. She began to understand the possibilities of what he had done; was eager to develop his plans. Absorbed in the idea, she ignored the question of personality and from that moment, though nothing was said, both understood they had joined fortunes.

"They'll come looking for me—and in a tearing hurry." The blond man grinned a little. "I aim to hail them from the beach outside, say at the wreck of the Seal, that's the likeliest spot. I'll let them know where I am and by picking my own battle ground I'll force them to send the dingey ashore. After that—" He shrugged.

"You—you'll try to kill them all!"

"I wouldn't mind." His look grew savage. "No, I wouldn't mind if I finished the lot of them. They've got that coming to them after—well, anyhow, I figure if we work together at this maybe we could steal their dingey and make a break for it—"

"You mean—oh, to win back the Sally—to turn the tables on them!"

"If we're lucky—or maybe we could drive a bargain—well, I wouldn't count too much on that. Of course you know them better than I do?"

The last was a question. It implied that Sarah was one with Bradden and Spicer and company. She resented that and at the same time was forced to acknowledge there was truth in it. She was, or had been until recently, their partner. For a moment her attention wandered. Where was the truth in this affair? Among all those desperate men, whom could she trust?

She rose, resolved. "Let's be going then—back to the Seal."

They took the trail rapidly, sparing no breath for talk.

As they hurried their eyes scanned the sea for a sight of the Sally. The cruiser rode too low for long visibility. They could not find her.

They reached the wreck, and Whistling Bob surveyed it with eyes narrowed in thought, whistling the monotonous waltz.

"Two of us can put up a pretty fair fight here," he mused, "if only there was more than one gun!"

"We'll do our best with it," cried Sarah. "That little pistol will do a powerful sight of damage if you give it half a chance."

"Bully! That's the way to talk!" Her companion's eyes lighted. His face looked a little boyish with that keen, appreciative grin that showed even white teeth. His manner had lost something of its hardness and suspicion.

It is hard to resist intelligent appreciation. Sarah Truett could not help a little answering smile nor the sparkle in her eyes. Her spirits were rising fast. There was, at least, promise of another chance to fight for life—to win back what had been stolen from her.

And she had an ally—a strong ally.

That this new partner was a desperate man—a man who by his silence confessed himself under a cloud, probably as bad a man as Bradden had described him—she no longer cared. He was also a fighting man. She knew that. And the more desperate a man is, the better he can fight—if he be all man. And this one answered that requirement.

Then suddenly she pointed. "Look—

they're coming. I saw the flash of white paint out there— Yes, there she is—the Sally!"

They watched a few minutes in tense silence, and verified that first glance. It was the cruiser, and she was turned toward them—coming back.

"Oh, 'Bradden!" Sarah addressed the cruiser, dwindled to a toy by distance. "Come back, Bradden—hustle! I'm certainly glad to see you again!" She examined her small weapon with a grim affection. Suddenly her gaze turned to Whistling Bob.

"I'll say this for you, Mr. Whistling Bob—you've got something in your head besides meat, and you sure know how to use it!"

The compliment caused him to open the gray eyes wider.

"Huh," he stammered. "Humph—thanks. I've found out this much—when you're playing in a crooked game it's a darn good idea to keep an extra ace up your sleeve. Right now this compass is my extra ace—that and you."

CHAPTER VIII.

EVENING THE SCORE.

FOR a moment man and girl stared in silence at the approaching cruiser. They stood shoulder to shoulder on the beach, a striking pair, looking fit for anything. Roughly clad, each had a certain poise and confidence that comes of the combination of brains with hardihood. And facing the prospect of a fight for life against double odds, each was smiling a grim delight. They were glad to have any chance at all.

Whistling Bob was first in action.

"We've got to decide how we want things to happen—and make them happen that way," he declared briskly. "First, we want that gang to meet us here on the point. I'll build up a smudge so they can't miss us."

"And we'll have a flag!" Sarah added. "Just to show them we're game!" At Bob's nod she climbed aboard the wrecked Seal and from the tallest of the stumps of masts fastened her spare sweater. The garment was a gay orange-and-black thing, and the breeze spread it out, a defiance to the world.

Bob meantime was studying the lay of the beach about them. He explained to Sarah how they could make the most effective resistance.

The Seal had been driven bow-first onto the point of rocks and lay canted toward the waters of Cultus Bay; that is, toward the left as one faced from the sea. It was at this side also that the rocks ended and there was a strip of sand where a boat could land with least trouble.

The tide was ebbing, uncovering the reef for a considerable distance beyond the wreck. These rocks were broken and ragged, affording good shelter and forming a natural bulwark against the sand beach beyond.

"Right here's the natural point of defense," Bob explained, leading the girl under the stern of the wreck to a little hollow among the rocks. There was room for both, and the boulders rose almost chin-high about them.

"That's good enough, if they don't take a notion to land the dingey to the right of the wreck," Sarah agreed.

"I'll see that they don't do that. As I have told you, we've got to pick our battle-ground if we're going to get away with this thing."

"Do you really think—we stand—a—chance?"

He eyed her curiously.

Sarah flushed.

"I'm not afraid, I don't mean that. I—I just wondered—"

"Well," he grinned, "about as much chance as a wooden-legged man running through a swamp, trying to beat an airplane; but if you know a better plan—"

"Nope. That's chance enough for me, as long as it has the prospect of evening score with that gang!"

"Fine! I knew you'd say that."

He turned away quickly to throw more sea-weed on their fire, so that it sent aloft a tall, wavering column of smoke.

The Sally was approaching rapidly. They were able to make out the figure of

a man on her deck, who stared toward them evidently through the binoculars.

"Best get into our fort," said Bob. "Got enough ammunition?"

"Luckily I have. I slipped that into my coat-pocket when we first landed, just on the chance I might need it."

"Be careful, then—and don't fire until I say so. Now to get them ashore!"

Whistling Bob climbed to the ridge of rocks and walked slowly toward the sea, to the outermost stepping-stone. He waved his cap above his head from time to time, seeking to attract all the attention possible.

As the Sally swept in closer and somebody aboard recognized his presence with a couple of wild shots, he turned back toward land, walking and climbing slowly in the direction of the sand beach. The cruiser altered its course in response. Presently it was stopped. The anchor dropped.

"They've got to come ashore"—he was talking to himself now, rapidly, earnestly—"simply must come; but will they all risk it, or just a couple of them? It's going to make a mighty big difference—if only they're boiling mad and don't think too much."

Inspired by this thought, his fingers went to his nose, outspread in that gesture of derision which speaks a universal tongue. If those aboard the Sally were watching him they might have thought this man on the sand gone daft. For ten minutes he continued to gesture insults, a fantastic, ridiculous series of capers that in other circumstances would have been laughable.

And as he gestured he shouted taunts—not that he expected they would be heard aboard the cruiser, but because it was in keeping with the part he played. He worked earnestly and hard.

"Damn 'em!" he panted breathlessly, tired with this frantic, grimly necessary foolery. "Damn 'em all, the whole yelping pack of 'em. If they've got any fighting blood at all, they've got to get sore now!"

He had a speedy answer.

Round the Sally's stern the dingey swept—and it carried four men! It was rowed with a desperate haste, and as it neared the beach a ragged, scattering fire sent lead whistling over the rocks.

Bob retreated slowly until he had disappeared from the view of the men in the dingey, hidden by the boulders. As the small boat touched sand he hailed.

"Hello the boat—hello-o-o, Bradden! Hello, all of you, you sulfured, half-witted, blundering imbeciles! Back again so soon, are you?"

"Bob!" Bradden's bellow made the place ring. "You Bob—you can come out of that and get shot, or we'll come get you, whichever you want. You hear?"

"I hear, Baldy, I hear you! Did you miss something off the Sally, Baldy, hey?"

Bradden's answer was a stream of profanity. He ended with: "Take your choice, you forsaken fool—come out or we'll get you—it's all the same to us."

The four of them clustered by the dingey, staring toward the rocks. Each man carried a pistol ready for instant use. Baldy Bradden's mule skull glowed like a Bolshevist battle-flag.

That compact group made an excellent target. Sarah's finger twitched on the trigger. But she obeyed orders and forbore to fire.

"Here I am!" With a shout Whistling Bob leaped from his hiding, standing fully exposed on the rocks before them. His very boldness disarmed them. A moment they gaped, and before their fingers could answer the murderous impulse he had spiked their guns for a time at least.

"Shoot if you want, boys—but you'll never find that compass if you do! Get it straight—I've got the compass hid. You could look all day for it, and all month, and that's all the good it would do you. Go ahead and kill me, though, if you care to."

"Gus, Carter—put down those guns!" Bradden bade hastily.

"Well, Bradden, what's your terms for the Sally's compass?"

A moment Bradden fidgeted. It was plain his desire was to mouth more defiance, but Bob's words had made him worry.

"These terms," he shouted. "Give us back the compass, and we won't touch you.

You can do as you damn please, except you can't come with us."

"And the girl?"

"Oh, her! Keep her—we don't want her! I guess she knows that by now."

Baldy Bradden had no idea how close he came to sudden death at that moment.

Lucky for him that Sarah Truett had a level head!

"That's your best terms, eh, Bradden?"

"That's all the terms you get. And think quick—I'll give you a half-grown minute to do it in."

"Don't need it," grinned Whistling Bob. "You can all go to hell!"

As he said it he leaped back nimbly, sinking out of sight a few seconds ahead of the lead that was spat after him.

"Let her go. Shoot, miss, shoot!" he ordered, and began a rapid crawl around the boulders toward the refuge under the stern of the wreck.

Sarah's pistol took up the challenge. Its immediate effect was to send four men into hiding. They ran to the shelter of the nearest rocks and dropped behind them.

Then for several minutes there was no sound at all. Whistling Bob crouching beside her, teeth bared in a grin, had inched himself high enough to peep through a crack of the barrier. From the other side of the same boulder Sarah peered, ready for the first target that showed. Her hand was steady, eyes bright, and cheeks flushed.

A flutter of cloth to the right of where the four were hiding brought a shot from her.

"They're going that way, behind the wreck," she whispered.

"Sure," he answered. "Some of 'em are going to try circling and taking us from the rear. That's all right—figured they'd try that. Now let's see how many's left."

He raised his arm boldly above the shelter and waved it, shouting as he did so.

The arm was withdrawn with a jerk, and its owner looked ruefully at his finger. It was bleeding.

"Just nicked it," he murmured. "No harm— Listen, two of them, isn't it?"

"Yes, two. Then—"

"The other two must be flanking us. Now I wonder which is which?" He shouted: "Oh, Bradden, had enough yet, you big hunk of cheese?"

Bradden answered promptly and at length and punctuated his remarks with a few foolish shots.

"Must be Spicer and one of the others is sneaking around." He grinned at Sarah. He was interrupted from further speculation by a rapid fire from Sarah's automatic. Both saw that the two men left in front of them were advancing. Their pistol shots were drawing closer, but they kept themselves well hidden.

"Front and rear attack. Well, time to do something." Bob crouched closer to her, whispering.

"I'm going after that boat—and Bradden. Can you hold out here, keep that gang occupied a few minutes?"

She nodded.

"Remember, they're coming from the other side, too, from somewhere round the bow of the wreck. Look out!"

"Yes. And you—"

"It's a long shot, but I'm going to play my hunch. I think I can grab that boat. And when I yell, you come hell-bent? Can you do that—and bring the compass?"

"I'll try."

"Sure you will—you're game! Well, then, good-by." He eyed her a moment in silence, hesitating."

"Say, look here, though—maybe this isn't right. I don't like it somehow—leaving you. Maybe I'm wrong. I tell you, you hail Bradden and offer him the compass and me—see if you can't make some better bargain. Go on!"

For a second she turned her head from her watching, a curious glance that wondered if he was serious. He was. Her cheeks flushed redder.

"You think I'd do that—you dare think such a thing! Get out of here and get busy."

Still he hesitated. "If I was sure it was the best thing—"

"Don't be a fool. About one minute more and you'll lose the chance."

He began to move, dodging low, crawling at times, his direction a slow circle that would bring him in behind the men who cut them off from the dingey.

She whispered after him: "Good-by—good luck!"

Crouched under the overhanging stern of the wreck, her attention fixed on the rocks ahead, Sarah became aware of the whistle of a bullet behind her. Now she had to defend in two directions!

It was Spicer and Carter, who made the detour. They had rounded the bows of the wrecked Seal and were among the rocks there, their intention to creep up on the two defenders. Carter's eagerness to shoot betrayed their position and spoiled the surprise.

A moment Sarah kept the immediate vicinity of this pair in a decidedly unhealthy state. Then there came a shout from Bradden.

Bradden rose from the sheltering reef before her, and Gus with him. They made a rush toward her. The pistol sputtered a waspish protest that sent them into hiding before the advance had covered twenty feet. As they flattened out a yell from Gus signaled she had done some damage.

Spicer and Carter were coming up behind her. A shower of splinters from the planking overhead brought alarming news of them.

At this particular moment Sarah Truett was fighting, one against four. Two were in hiding before her, advancing at a slow, but steady pace; two were coming from round the Seal, flanking her position on the right.

Whistling Bob was gone. She could not see him in the one or two glances she had spared to find him. He was unarmed, but she knew his purpose was murderous, and even unarmed she would match him against any but Bradden.

But there came no sign from him. Perhaps he had been hit, or perhaps—for just a little time she considered the thought—perhaps he had quit! The odds were against them anyway — the man an unknown quantity except so far as his power to make trouble—suppose he had slipped away—given up—abandoned her!

She had very little time to entertain this notion. It needed all her attention to defend at both sides—a bewildering task, and one that grew worse every second.

Whistling Bob had flattened out among the crevices of the reef. He crawled as fast as possible, but he had to be very careful, and he was obliged several times to stop while he made sure of direction. The maze of boulders and jagged teeth was a little bewildering.

But he gained his point, and while Sarah was keeping the air about the wreck hot with lead, he reached the place where he crouched ready, overlooking the depression in which were two of the attackers, Gus and Bradden.

Bradden's back was toward him. Gus was huddled against the stones, holding his right arm with his left hand. The arm was limp and blood trickled from a torn shirt-sleeve.

Whistling Bob reared himself up, crouched for a spring. The wounded man's rolling eyes at that moment recognized the sudden apparition. He yelled shakily—a yell of terror. But before Bradden could turn about Bob had leaped.

He leaped squarely on Bradden's back, and somehow even as he landed, he managed to spare a kick for Gus that sent the sailor into a limp heap.

Under the impetus and weight of the flying body, Baldy Bradden went face down on the rocks. Powerful fingers gripped about his throat and compressed savagely. The big captain choked.

His assailant was well exposed now, but since Spicer and Carter were on the other side of the wreck, there was none to shoot at him.

To Sarah, Bob yelled, "Hold 'em — a minute more—a couple minutes. Hold 'em —then when I yell, beat it!"

With a violent effort Bradden's body upheaved, and the man who rode his back slipped aside. One of Bradden's great hands gripped his leg. He reared himself upward, the breath gurgling in his throat.

There was a flash of time in which Whistling Bob lost his equilibrium — his grip loosened—and in that flash Baldy Bradden had contrived to free himself of the attacker.

Bradden's right arm, his hand clutching a pistol, had been bent and held beneath him when he fell. Now it was free again

and the barrel pressed tightly against his antagonist's body. The captain's finger crooked and tightened about the trigger.

The hammer that rose to send that bullet stopped by a minute fraction short of the point of discharge. The gripping finger relaxed and Baldy Bradden's huge body lay inert.

Whistling Bob had found time to land one blow—a blow of the fist against the captain's temple. Bradden quit fighting.

"Now!" Bob roared, leaping erect. "Beat it—for the boat." At the same time he ran toward the stern of the wreck.

Sarah was up at the word. She clasped the compass tightly to her breast and ran, scornful of the bullets that whistled about her.

Carter and Spicer, too, were on their feet. They rushed in pursuit, shouting—and from round the stern of the Seal came Bob.

Bob carried Bradden's pistol. Carter went down at his first shot. Spicer dropped, but unhurt. From his hiding he sent a few wild shots, nothing more.

The man and girl scrambled across the slippery reef heedless of this feeble fire. They pushed the dingey free of sand and Bob seized the oars.

As the boat swept off the beach and nosed toward the Sally, Spicer ran into view. The mate's fire was now deliberate. He lodged a bullet in the stern of the small boat.

Sarah's reply was even more disconcerting. They saw the hat fly from his head. Spicer turned and ran for the rocks.

For once the mate was not laughing.

CHAPTER IX.

ARMISTICE.

THE dingey touched the Sally's side and both climbed aboard. The row had been a silent one.

Sarah seated herself on the coaming of the trunk cabin and kicked her shoes against the woodwork, aimlessly. She suffered a strange reaction from excitement, a listlessness that made even the simple act of living a labor. She had won, but there was no elation in the victory. Even the thought of starting the Sally for home was lacking in thrill.

Her partner in triumph stood regarding her with a whimsical grin. "Well," he remarked finally, "what next? Going some place and sell the loot, I suppose?"

"The loot—oh! That reminds me, we'll have to row ashore again—I forgot something."

"Go ashore! Well, it must be mighty important if you want to risk more trouble with Spicer and the rest of 'em. They may be hurt, but they're not dead—as you'll find out if you try going ashore."

"Well, I must go anyhow. I've got to search the cabins in that wreck — search Bradden if he's still around, because somewhere I figure there must be papers to show who owns the ivory—and when I find that out we're going to look up the owner and see that he gets it back."

"We are!"

"Yes, we are." She looked at him with a significant, steady gaze. "That's just what we are going to do—and remember I still carry the gun. Now, let's go—"

"Wait! Miss Truett, suppose I told you that stuff is mine?"

Sarah smiled wearily. "Don't you think;" she asked with sweet scorn, "that it's a little late for that remark? You might have done better than that—I credited you with some originality!"

Bob reddened. "Late as it is," he said, "I'm going to make that claim—"

"That's enough! Listen to me, Whistling Bob, I'm taking charge of this ivory—not you. Don't start anything. If you figured you were going to grab the stuff—or share it with me, forget it! Until I find who does own it, it stays safe in the hold of the Sally. All I do know is that it didn't belong to Bradden—I'm sure of that now—and it doesn't belong to me, nor you. But I'll tell you what I will do, and gladly—"

"Well?"

"When we do find the owner we can claim some sort of reward, salvage. I'll split that with you, fifty-fifty and glad to do it. And—and I'll forget to tell just who and what you are. You've earned it. Is that fair?"

Whistling Bob stared, round-eyed. Then he grinned. "That sure is," he exclaimed; "that's more than fair, and—and thank you!"

"Well, I—I thank you," she answered seriously. "I should have spoken of that before. You fought splendidly—you saved my life—it was—was—oh, bully!"

"Thanks," he said dryly. "Let her go double and we'll omit the bouquets! Now, about those papers—it may not be necessary to go ashore. Bradden's cabin on the Sally—didn't he bring any baggage with him? He must have done that or—well, I've already searched the wreck for those papers and I swear to you they're not there."

"Then perhaps he has them," Sarah puzzled, "or, wait — yes, Bradden had one thing, a tin box, a sort of black cash box—of course, they must be in that!"

"They are in that," declared Whistling Bob.

Sarah went below to the cabin Bradden had used. She reappeared in a few minutes, carrying the black tin box. "I'll just keep this by me," she announced coolly. "Meantime, start the engines. We'll slip that anchor and get away from here. I—I—the sight of this bay makes me a little sick!"

"Sick!" he echoed. "Sick! I hope I never see that forsaken piece of Alaska again in all the years I expect to live—never. I've been alone on it—three weeks almost—alone. All I ask of life is that it bring me forgetfulness!"

He swung about, hurrying away to tend the cruiser. Sarah went slowly to the pilothouse, clasping the tin box. "Poor devil," she thought; "somehow I can't help but feel sorry for him—whatever he is!"

The cruiser had been under way about an hour when Bob looked into the pilothouse from the engine-room hatch. He found Sarah Truett absorbed in the perusal of a paper—one of a number she had spilled out of the black tin box.

"Oh!" she exclaimed at sight of him, "I was just about to call you. Something curious has happened, and—"

"You found who owns the ivory!"

"No—not exactly; but I have a clue, and—and who in the world do you think—but then, you wouldn't know him, I suppose."

"Well, who is it?"

"I believe it is—I'm not sure, but it looks as if the owner might be Angus McDonald — Angus McDonald, the Alaskan millionaire!"

"No! You think that?"

"Well, here's a cablegram to Bradden—look!"

The brief message on a government receiving-blank, read:

BRADDEN,
DUTCH HARBOR.
SEAL'S CHARTER O. K. BILL ME FOR ALL EXPENSES.
ANGUS McDONALD.

"What must have happened," Sarah went on, "is that McDonald outfitted the Seal for this ivory hunt, and Bradden, acting as his agent, tried to steal it. Yes, that's plain enough—"

"But the charter itself—the agreement—is there no copy?"

"No."

"Nor the log?"

"Not a thing bearing on ivory or the Seal except this cablegram. The rest is a few letters written to Bradden at various times — old receipts, useless junk. Look here, perhaps you heard talk aboard the Seal—or perhaps you know—is that right; did McDonald charter the Seal?"

He stared at her and his face clouded. "Why ask me?" he grumbled. "You wouldn't believe me anyhow!"

"No," she agreed tartly. "That's true enough, but—but this is so staggering—McDonald chartering the Seal—Angus McDonald—oh, I don't know what to make of it!"

"Why not Angus McDonald, if he wanted to charter her? He can afford it—"

"You don't understand, of course not! But Angus McDonald meant so much to us—to my father and me; he could have done so much to help us. Then to find his name here—"

"Angus McDonald could help you! Tell me how, please."

Sarah Truett launched into the story of

Kanak ledge and her father's struggle to find capital. She told of the old friendship and McDonald's promise. "And now," she sighed, a catch in her voice, "Angus McDonald is dead—"

"Dead! Angus McDonald—dead?"

"Yes, dead! The paper that had the news came the very afternoon I chartered the Sally to Bradden. It was that news led me to make the charter—to come on this wild errand. Because I hoped—I hoped to help my father to win back a little of what he had lost—"

"You are certain he is dead? No doubt of it?"

"The despatch was in the *Oregonian*, an Associated Press item from New York."

Whistling Bob looked out of the window for a long interval. His jaw was set hard, and in his eyes there showed a look of shock and hurt.

He turned from her side without a word and went back to the engine-room. His shoulders sagged, she noted.

"Wait," she called. "What is it?"

Bob gave her no answer.

The morning was fine, clear with hot sunshine after two days of storm. The Sally, delayed a day by troublous weather, at last was in sight of the Kanak island shore, and the pair who peered from the open pilot-house windows found time once more to consider something besides the immediately pressing business of keeping the cruiser afloat and safe.

The last forty-eight hours had been like a bad dream. Capping the hours of excitement and peril at Cultus Bay, they pretty thoroughly exhausted even the unusual strength of the blond man and left dark circles beneath Sarah Truett's fine eyes.

From the time the storm broke there had been little said between them except the most elementary and necessary discussion of their needs. But in common peril they had found mutual dependence that bred a sense of long acquaintance—a friendship.

Whistling Bob's first appearance after a few hours of badly needed sleep was welcomed by a warm smile from the red-haired girl. Together they watched the hills of Kanak growing larger, and Sarah told of her pleasure at coming home.

"I feel like the prodigal son," she laughed. "I'm broke, and I've certainly been among thieves; but—well, home looks awful good to me. If my dad was only there to welcome me I'd do without the fatted calf part of it—poor dad, I thought I'd have something to cheer him up; enough to fix things—"

"You have the ivory—"

"Which isn't mine, as I reminded you before."

"Yes, that's so! Tough luck! Say, it's—it's hell to be honest, isn't it?"

Sarah nodded soberly.

"And—well, say, Miss Truett, I owe you an apology. You know I called you some pretty hard names—"

"You did?"

"Well, when I said you were pals with Bradden and that lot—but I thought you were!"

"It did look that way—I can understand that." Sarah smiled ruefully. "I was pals with them, but not smart enough to see what kind of a sucker they were playing me for. Well, let's forget that—to-day's a new day, and there are a lot of other good fish in the sea—somewhere."

"Sure," he encouraged, "no use helping out the undertaker's business till you can't help yourself. Kind of too bad you're so cussed honest—still, maybe you're right."

"You're a good sort, Whistling Bob! I don't know just what sort of a crook you are, yet, but you've been on the level with me. Bradden was an awful liar, anyhow—did you really try to kill him and Spicer and grab the ivory?"

Bob grinned reminiscently. "I sure did! But then—oh, rot, why tell it! I can't prove anything—"

"I'll believe you. Honestly, I mean it. If you'll tell the yarn—"

"Nope. Not until I've got proof. Meantime, don't think I'm altogether rotten, will you?"

She answered him gravely, her eyes more eloquent than the words. "I shall never think that—again."

Both studied the island in silence. They could see the little town of Kanak, straggling up the hillside, its painted houses shining in the sun.

"Hello," cried Sarah, "there's a steamer in—a big one! Looks like the Northwestern. I wonder what brought her to the island?"

She shifted the Sally's course toward the town.

CHAPTER X.

PEACE.

SARAH'S intention had been to land the Sally in her own harbor at the ranch. Sight of the steamer suggested the possibility of news from her father, and now her head was thrust eagerly from the window as if she must run ahead of the Sally in her impatience.

The man beside her studied that eager face with sidelong glances. He was aware of the charm of this girl who could fight so well and lose with such good grace.

He felt an overmastering impulse to say something—to try to tell her of the feeling she had inspired—and remembered in time how futile it would be to attempt that subject now. In spite of the self-restraint he imposed, his fingers touched a fold of her sleeve and found comfort in the unobtrusive caress.

"Good fathers, look! Give me those glasses!"

Sarah Truett stared a moment.

"It is—there on the dock—that's him. My dad! Oh, oh—" The Sally's siren began to hoot. They saw him turn—stare—and wave.

Whistling Bob pushed Sarah from the wheel. "Run outside and look at him," he commanded. "I'll dock her for you."

Sarah needed no prompting. From the bow of the cruiser she leaned forward, alternately blowing kisses and waving her hat in the air with shouts that attracted attention from everybody in the harbor.

The man in the pilot-house smiled in sympathy. Then his face sobered. "The lucky old rascal! Think of having a girl like that so glad to see you!"

He brought the Sally in along the piling of the dock that loomed above them, berthing on the side opposite from the big passenger steamship. The form of Hillman Truett, white haired, broad of shoulder, tanned, leaned over the string-piece and shouted questions that his daughter answered in an unintelligible jumble of phrases.

A ladder led to the dock above. Sarah Truett jumped for it as the Sally rubbed by, and she swarmed aloft to welcoming arms that snatched her from her feet.

"You old sourdough!" Sarah hammered her father with her two fists while his arms about her left her breathless. "You look better to me than a million dollars in diamonds, all of that!"

"And you, why, kid, I wouldn't trade you for all Alaska; no, not with Siberia thrown in!"

"I know, don't have to tell me," Sarah forestalled her father's story. "It was hard sledding and—and—never mind, dad, there are lots of other claims, plenty of chances for a white man!"

"You—you heard, then, girl, about—McDonald? About his death?"

"Read it in the papers."

"You know that licks me? Kanak ledge—well, I guess we might's well put a tombstone over that scheme—"

"Lots of other ledges, dad."

"Yes—yes, I guess so. Kind of tough, though. I saw the papers before I got to Chicago. Knew it wasn't much use going on, so I back-trailed to Seattle and waited for the steamer."

"But why the Northwestern? Did you charter her?"

"No, that's funny, too. Angus McDonold again! Came up with a Seattle lawyer. He's up here to make a search—Sarah girl, there's just a ghost of a chance yet—for us, I mean—if this chap can find Angus McDonald's boy—his son—"

"McDonald—Robert McDonald!"

The exclamation came from the shrewd business man who had peered idly at the Sally. Whistling Bob looked up quickly, exclaimed his astonishment, and ran up the ladder to take the stranger's hand.

"It is, no mistake, Robert McDonald!" the stranger declared, his eyes dilated with surprise.

"It is. I'm glad to see you again, Mr. Hanley. I—I heard that—my father—"

The lawyer nodded. "I'm very sorry."

They walked away together. Father and daughter, auditors of their talk, looked dazedly after them, turned to stare at one another as if for assurance that this was reality, but found not a word to say.

Finally they turned away together. "Sarah," Hillman Truett's voice shook, "we can't go back to the ranch yet. Not till I see that boy—talk to him. If—if only I can make him listen for five minutes, make him understand who I am, what I am—how his dad and I were tilikums—"

"Oh, Truett!" Hanley the lawyer laid a detaining hand on the older man's arm. "This is my client, young Robert McDonald. Found him, Truett—found him like a miracle. He—he has asked me to present him to you—and your daughter."

Whistling Bob gripped Hillman Truett's hand, and the old sourdough, looking into his eyes, knew before a word was said, that his financial troubles were past.

"My daughter—this is Sally," Truett announced proudly.

"Whistling Bob," said Sarah Truett humbly, "I feel like a—an angle worm—one that somebody's just stepped on. I feel as humble as that!"

They boarded the Sally and started around the island shore to the Truett ranch. On the way Hanley told of his telegraphic orders to make an immediate search of Alaska for Robert McDonald, who had been in the north more than a year, supposedly hunting and adventuring; how influence of Angus McDonald's wealth had put the steamship at his disposal, and how, to oblige Truett, whom he knew of old, he had caused the landing at Kanak, where the search found its incredible termination.

Sarah Truett then told of the charter of the Sally and the story of the ivory cargo. And finally they turned to McDonald to clear up what was yet unexplained.

"Simple enough," he smiled. "I'd been in Alaska more than a year, playing mostly, squandering my father's money. I hated to leave, the north gets into my blood, it's where I belong—but I got ashamed of my idleness. It was up to me to show a little ability at business.

"I'd heard about this ivory cache — it was in a little unnamed bay along the mainland, a natural mine of fossil ivory, embedded in a bluff. Thousands of mammoth had perished there in some prehistoric swamp, I suppose, and left their bones. I visited the place in a launch and verified the find. It was anybody's ivory—a natural mine.

"So I went back to Dutch Harbor and chartered the Seal. We selected only the choice tusks; of course a lot of the stuff was rotten and broken and of little value. When we left with that cargo I felt pretty cocky, as if I'd done something to show my father I wasn't altogether plain fool.

"Bradden had an eye on that ivory from the first. He and Spicer and those choice cutthroats, Carter and Gus, intended all along to steal the stuff some way. I guessed as much from one or two things I heard, and one night, when they tried to pick a quarrel, I got the jump on them and gave them more than they were looking for.

"I thought when they quit they had had enough. They obeyed my orders and the sailing looked smooth. Until the day the volcano tuned up. In the midst of that rumpus somebody, and I strongly suspect Bradden and the mate—assisted me over the rail, with the result that I came ashore in Cultus Bay.

"As for the rest of it, when I found the ivory in the Seal I figured they would come back. So I beat them to it again by taking the stuff away. And luckily the lady pirate who returned with Bradden turned out to be a girl who isn't afraid to fight for the square deal."

When the questions were done, Whistling Bob excused himself and walked forward on the Sally. Then he was heard to whistle that eternal waltz song. Sarah disappeared and was seen to join him.

"Look at them," sighed Hanley to Hillman Truett. "Look at that pair! Strength and beauty and brains. They're alive, man, alive every minute. You can't beat that kind!"

"They're regular Alaskans," Truett agreed. "You're right, Hanley, you can't beat 'em. It's their sourdough blood."

(The end.)

The Bull-Dogger

Part III

by Kenneth Perkins

CHAPTER XI—(*Continued*).

THE GULCH.

MOSSOP was standing now haphazardly in the full glare of the moon. His ugly crooked legs were silhouetted clearly against the sand.

The girl closed her eyes and heard the hoarse bark of the gun—a single shot which reverberated a dozen times in the little gulch. Then she opened her eyes fearfully. A new sort of thrill went through her. She realized that Winborne was playing his own sort of game—a sportsmanlike game, dangerous, skilful, exciting—the sort of contest dear to his own heart.

Mossop was still standing unhurt, but bewildered, casting fearful glances in every corner of the ravine. The huge Indian darted out of the shadow and crossed the ravine like a bounding animal. Mossop started to run one direction—even while the banging of that one shot was still in his ears. Then he stopped, looked around, baffled, crazed, and dashed toward another side of the clearing. The shot could have been fired from any corner, he knew that. It had most certainly been fired by some one close to him, some one right in the heart of the cañon.

If the Indian had had a revolver instead of a shot-gun, Mossop might have come to an immature conclusion. Was the Indian going to murder him? He took out his own gun, glanced around for the safest hiding place, and then rushed across the rattleweed and sand into the very crevasse where Winborne and the girl were hiding.

He waited there pressing himself against the wall so that he was in the pitch darkness, except for a pointing ray of moonlight which singled out the brim of his slouch hat.

Winborne gave his revolver to the girl. "I'm going down to fight Mossop. It's too easy to pot him. This gun is for you to use on the Choctaw."

Without any further comment he leaped off the edge of the rock where they were waiting, and dropped down out of the pitch darkness onto Mossop's back. The girl could see nothing of the fight that ensued; it was merely a brief moment of the banging of fists which sounded like sledge-hammer blows in the stillness of the barranca. A moment later a shot cracked out, and ricocheted over the rocks and sand of the opening.

This struck a new sort of fear in the girl's heart, one that was not a part of horror. Could this shot have meant that Mossop had hit Winborne? Without any further consideration for her own safety she peered over the ledge of the rock.

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for November 5.

Mossop had fired, that was clear, for his hand with the gun was still in the air, where Winborne held it viselike. The little man fired again wildly so that the bullet skipped across the granite bluffs, and spattered a trail of chips. But the vise on his wrist tightened, the gun dropped and he crumpled up with pain. Winborne then took him by the collar, yanked him to his feet and hurled him bodily over the bank. He rolled some distance down the bare adobe slope and tumbled into the upturned arms of a sojuaro cactus where he lay sprawled and helpless, ripping the air with maledictions.

Posey, looking over the edge of the rock, had scarcely realized that this fight was finished when she saw the Indian dart out into the moonlit clearing and look frantically around for the safest way to flee. Realizing that Winborne was blocking the way which led down the cañon toward the horses, the huge panic-stricken Choctaw bounded toward the upper end of the ravine with the speed of a scared rabbit.

As Winborne burst into a laugh, the girl let herself down over the edge of the rock and, clinging for a moment with outstretched arms, dropped to the ground.

Winborne, knowing that he had already disarmed Mossop, and that the latter would have to find his six-gun before he could resume any trouble, went to the girl. Taking her hand he sped with her to the dry creek of the gulch and the two hurried over the boulders and sand to the thicket below.

Here they found the two horses which Mossop and the buck had ridden. Mossop's horse was the white one they had seen before. The Choctaw's mount was Winborne's own pinto which he had tethered at the sycamore bole on their first arrival at the mesa.

"We're fixed now for a good ride," he said to the girl. "We got rid of those two pests without killing them—"

"That was the greatest part of the fight," the girl said. "That you fought with your bare hands."

Winborne looked down at his fist which was covered with blood. Posey wiped it with her handkerchief, and saw how badly it was crushed. Winborne ripped his sleeve with his knife and she bandaged the wound. This was the first mute understanding that Winborne had of his own feelings for the girl.

In the beginning of the evening he had played his part of the old-time pal. There was a new relationship now which budded out naturally almost imperceptibly—but with as much power as a weed sprouting in the crevice of granite and splitting a cliff. He had gone into the cow-town and sworn that he would protect the daughter of old Texas Donnel, and now he had fought for her, and he had been wounded for her. That was a delightful thought. It was the first stage—the granite cliff feeling the distant indescribable power of the plant.

"I have finished bandaging it now," the girl said. "When we get some water, I will clean it and bandage it again."

"You can ride on this white horse," he said, lifting her up. "We've got to plan now for good traveling. And if this horse isn't sure on the trail, it'll be a hard ride."

"But those two men are helpless now," the girl objected.

"Not exactly. That half-pint Mossop can find his gun. And he's got a good mount. When he stole both of our horses, he must have given this pinto of mine to the Indian. What he did with the horse you were riding I don't know. But we've got to remember that he has it somewhere."

"Then what are we going to do?" the girl asked hopelessly.

"Ride south," Winborne said, mounting his own horse and leading the way down out of the cañon to the sage plain.

He was completely ignorant of the country, but one thing he knew: the county road led southward to Mesquite, and the railway. He did not tell the girl that halfway to their destination, on the bench-land directly ahead of them, lay the town of Volcano.

CHAPTER XII.

THE RIDE TO VOLCANO.

THE two riders loped down the plain, rounding the mesa, toward the south until they finally came to the county road. This was easier riding for the horses,

and the girl's stretched out to an easy gallop, although Winborne was forced to keep his knees constantly pressed into the flanks of his lagging pinto.

They reached the crest of the little bench-land after a telling ride. From this eminence Winborne looked back and saw a horseman, a tiny speck in the moonlight; and heard the tiny sound of hoofs—moving across the plain.

Winborne said nothing, but pressed on trying to keep pace with the white horse. Down on the other side of the bench-land and across the big moonlit expanse of the cattle-pass they rode until Winborne's pinto beat heavily and slowly on the gallop of the next rise. From here he looked again, and waited for a moment, giving his little mount a chance for a few deep breaths. On the crest of the bench-land they had left two miles behind, the horseman was following. This time it looked as if there were two, but the moonlight, glaring as it seemed, was deceptive.

For a half hour's ride as the road cut straight across the gently rolling plain, Winborne could see the pursuers. Yes, he was certain they were more than one. It looked now as if there were three riders, but the light was still misty and the background of the thin white road against the black sage was puzzling. A dip into the dry wash of a creek which cut into the alkali plain like a huge scar, then a stumbling climb up the road to the rise beyond, and Winborne looked back again. Three little dots were moving along the white road in file, about a furlong apart.

In the other direction, a few miles ahead on the edge of the next little table of land, was the town of Volcano, its yellow lights winking in the clear desert air.

At the first sight of this line of lights, Winborne felt that they had come to a stone wall, and that the pursuers behind were driving them to bay. To enter Volcano was a dangerous move. Posey had passed through Volcano on the stage when she arrived from the east with McGraw, and at that time everyone had come out eager to see the "bride" of their cattle king. And judging from the lights, practically everyone was now awake, even though it was past midnight. The two fugitives were thus caught between Mossop's gang and the town.

It was impossible to choose in the few desperately fleeting moments they had before reaching the town, just which danger it would be more advisable to meet. There was a way whereby the girl would meet neither and Winborne would meet both.

Winborne realized that his horse could not possibly keep pace with the girl's. He decided to separate from her and to decoy the pursuers away from her. The road, he argued, was the only background against which at all times the pursuing riders could be detected. The plain with its patches of buckeye and other chaparral offered a fairly good protection—that is, if the observer's eye were attracted somewhere else.

Hence if the girl rode out on the plain, and Winborne continued riding on the road toward Volcano, he could inveigle the pursuers to follow him. An added advantage to this plan occurred to him: if he could ultimately shake his pursuers and enter Volcano as a spy, he could probably get some idea about McGraw's campaign to recover his bride. As it was now, he realized that he was helplessly playing his game in the dark.

He showed the girl a little gorge which offered her her first gateway of escape from the road.

"Follow it until it opens out on the plain," he said to her. "Circle around Volcano until you get to the road on the other side. There is where we'll meet. Just make a big half-circle around the town—never getting any closer to it than you are now."

"But if you don't come?" the girl asked pertinently.

"I'll come—maybe a little late. But I'll be there. If I don't meet you two miles beyond Volcano I'll ride on until I come to the first ranch beyond. You do the same, and that's where we'll meet."

"But the men at the ranch—"

"There won't be any men at the ranch. Everyone who can fight is up at the wedding. If you do meet anyone ask for shelter and protection; say you're running away from Volcano. Stall for a few

minutes until I come." He led the white horse into the ravine. "I'll be there, remember that—perhaps after a fight. But remember that I'll be there."

The sound of the riders pursuing them came up suddenly over the last hill. The girl wheeled her horse and trotted down the dark ravine, while Winborne came up to the moonlit road. He dug his heels into the pinto's flanks, galloping loudly toward Volcano. At every rise he looked back to assure himself that the three riders were keeping the road. When they came to the little black gulch where Posey had branched off, Winborne drew up his horse and watched expectantly. If they turned off and disappeared in the gulch to follow the girl, he knew that it would mean he must return, chase them and fight. If they followed him, he could go on to Volcano.

With a feeling of enormous, though temporary relief, he plugged on toward the town, for he saw distinctly that the pursuers had kept to the road. He felt intuitively that it would have been easier to fight the three men out there on the plains alone, rather than in the town where he was liable to meet McGraw, Foreman Call and the sheriff. But when he knew that he had decoyed the three pursuers from the girl, and that Posey was riding alone and free, he felt a tingle of victory and dug into his horse as he mounted the Volcano road.

CHAPTER XIII.

MR. BULLDOGGER AND DAN M'GRAW.

VOLCANO at midnight was always a hullabaloo of carousal, fighting and mechanical pianos. But when Winborne entered it, he found that it had lost the more blatant notes of its swagger. In the full moon, and the yellow lights which streamed from the windows of its main street, he could see groups of men talking, women watching in every doorway, and packs of horses tethered to the snubbing posts, champing and waiting.

The wedding of its foremost citizen, Dan McGraw, had materially changed the aspect of the town. Perched on the bluffs which overlooked the desert horizon, it was like a little seaport momentarily expecting the raid of pirates.

One thing Winborne knew definitely: if he expected to rejoin the girl on the further side of the town, he must get another horse. The pinto he had been riding had already suffered at the hands of Pliny Mossop—or the Choctaw. Winborne saw that another mile would all but kill the horse. The heavy beating of the hoofs, as if the horse were throwing all its weight against advancing, showed plainly that it was rapidly giving out. Indeed when the first house was reached, Winborne decided to dismount.

He understood the signs of the horse's trouble. A very heavy breathing, a terrific abnormal expansion of the flanks, in trying to get its wind, were unmistakable signs of heaves. The animal would plunge, almost stumbling, and then quiver as if its own breathing were cutting into its stomach like a knife. Upon the first sign of the beast's coughing, Winborne dismounted, and fled to the protection of an empty lot, while his horse wandered and stumbled up toward the main street of the town where there were lights and noise and people.

From behind the shed, Winborne watched a crowd gather about his horse, and a few moments later he saw Pliny Mossop and two cow-men gallop into town.

Winborne felt now that he must act quickly. News of his arrival in the town would spread. But even at that he felt confident he could hide in some shed, except for the fact that he rejoin the girl.

He cut across the empty lot, keeping always well within the shadow of the houses, which he felt sure was ample protection from the moonlight. His general direction would have brought him out on the further side of the town, but one thing complicated this plan. He must at all hazards get another mount.

There were plenty of horses in town, but the trouble was every one he saw was in the full light of the street, and within sight of a crowd of men. It was not until he was well across the town, skirting behind the sheds, and darting across the lonelier side streets, that he came within view of a corral where he noticed several fine mounts,

saddled and standing loose. The only trouble with this situation was that they were in the full glare of the light which shone out of the windows of a saloon.

Winborne crept along the side of the building and crossed to the opposite side of the corral, where from the darkness of a doorway he could look directly through one of the panes. It appeared to him that the place was empty with the exception of one man who was busy scattering sawdust on the floor. This gave him courage enough to creep over to the window and make a closer inspection.

It was a raw-looking place—an unvarnished bar, kitchen chairs and gaming tables, still covered with suds. The man looked more like a butcher than a barkeep, with an apron around his waist and a patch over one eye From his general appearance it was a fairly safe surmise that he had not attended the wedding at McGraw's. In this case he would not be apt to know Winborne. The latter decided to go in, ask for a drink and, if possible, find out just what course Dan McGraw and his gang were pursuing in recovering the lost bride. It would be a hazardous game, but infinitely less hazardous than plunging blindly on toward Mesquite without having the slightest idea where McGraw was.

Another point was this: Winborne was aware of the seriousness of appropriating a horse. If he could offer the bartender a big sum, and ask for a mount, he would not leave a crime behind him which would arouse the whole countryside. On that range, he reflected, stealing a horse was considerably worse than stealing a woman. Besides this the mounts he had seen in the corral were no ordinary cattle-ponies. He noticed one in particular which suggested the lines of a race-horse. Even in the moonlight, the straight back, the close coupling and cobby barrel were evident.

Winborne walked rapidly around to the front of the saloon, keeping as much out of the light as possible, and ignoring the fact that directly across the street there was a crowd of men.

"Outside, partner," the barkeeper said. "We're closed up. Got orders to keep men out'n here."

"I want to talk to the guy that owns that black gelding out there."

The man stared at Winborne quizzically. "What the hell! That's Dan McGraw's racer."

Winborne gasped, and felt a sudden qualm in his stomach at this turn of events—a qualm which must have left him pale.

"Dan McGraw's getting married tonight—how is it his horse—"

The other interrupted. "Ain't you heard tell of what's happened? McGraw's wife was stole by a bandit. And Dan's got the best six horses and the sharpest shooters in the county, and they're searching this very town now."

Again Winborne felt the same qualm. But this time it was for the girl who was alone out on the county road.

The bartender studied him with a widening of the eye. There was no other mark of suspicion more telling than that one bulging eye. Winborne jumped immediately to the subject at hand.

"Have you got a good horse—something that I can buy. Here's a roll." He threw down some bills on the counter, and left them there.

"You don't mind my axing, partner—" the man began.

Winborne looked him in the eye as he moved close up to the bar. "What do you want to ask?"

The man flinched. It was clear now that he suspected, and that he was frightened at being in the bar alone. "Will you have a drink?"

The barkeep sidled up behind the boards and took down a bottle and glasses.

"There's big doings to-night, I'll tell you that. The whole town's waiting up for the shootin'." He went on so rapidly and nervously that Winborne knew without the slightest doubt that the man was merely killing time. "And down to Mossop's there's another fight goin' on. Butch Bellowes and his two side kickers was here before Dan come to town."

Winborne cared nothing about this topic. Butch Bellowes and his little grievance over Mossop's bet amounted to nothing now. It was the girl that filled his whole consciousness with thoughts and fears. He held his

drink up to the barkeeper and tossed it off. The latter went on:

"And Butch Bellowes was planning to raid Mossop's ranch. He'll burn the ole place down. Take my word on that. I hear tell of how little Pliny Mossop takes all the money he'd oughter to pay to Butch and his other two ranch-hands, and blew it all in on a phony bet ag'n' McGraw's bull. And I hear tell as how the bull killed a—"

Winborne interrupted him suddenly. The barkeeper, in his rapid babble, had struck a new note. Winborne knew that the man was merely playing for time, probably with the knowledge that some one was about to enter the saloon at any moment. But while he was gossiping on he had said something which caught Winborne's ears with a terrible significance.

"Butch Bellowes, you say has gone down the county road to raid some ranch?"

"Yep, and he's pretty well lit up, too. He came in here and tanked up—him and Giardino and Brindel—crooks, all of 'em. They're goin' down to Mossop's sheep ranch."

Winborne's fear concerned the girl now—a fear considerably more poignant than anything that could concern himself. He recalled that he had told the girl to circle the town and come back to the county road and then ride on east until she should come to the first ranch.

"Where is this ranch of Mossop's?" Winborne asked breathlessly.

"Down the county road—about an hour's ride east I should say. It's the first ranch beyond the town."

As it dawned upon Winborne that he had sent the girl directly into the midst of a big fight, the fight that was going to take place at Mossop's, he realized that he must immediately get the fastest horse in town, irrespective of consequences.

"Come around here on the other side of the bar," he said quietly to the saloonkeeper. The latter sensed the change in the stranger's voice, and looking down at the bar saw that a six-shooter was peeping up over the edge of the wet pine board.

"Look here, stranger," the barkeeper said, "it ain't no use your spillin' that war talk around here. You don't seem to know where you are. This here is Soggy Anderson's place. Soggy is gone out now to join McGraw's posse. And consider this here little point before you pull that trigger. McGraw has made this joint his headquarters. He's out in the street—likely not a block away and a gun-shot would bring him and the whole town jamming in here. And take a look out there in the corral. Them's the fastest horses in the county—horses which belongs to McGraw's posse."

He stopped short and listened, and Winborne listened with him. There was the sound of a group of men approaching the front door of the saloon, talking noisily.

A flicker of a smile came across the barkeeper's mouth. It was not a grim smile, of defeat, but something that had in it an element of triumph. At that moment the man for whom he had been waiting was outside, and with him his posse. The bartender knew that Dan McGraw was at the threshold.

"That money on the bar is for a horse," Winborne specified unmistakably. "You will get me a mount and no palavering. It 'll be taken care of and sent back to you without fail. Now hop to it or I'll drop you."

"Sure, I'll get you a horse, mister." The barkeeper's voice had changed. "I'll get you a horse! Ain't no cause for gun-fightin' over it. I'm just a peaceable barkeep, mister, what never looks for no gun-play."

The little fellow turned his back on Winborne and started to walk cautiously away. His smile was still on his face, he was thinking of a big reward: the reward McGraw had offered for the bandit who had stolen his bride.

The front door banged open, there was a shuffling of heavy feet, rapid talking and a crowd of men entered. The leader was Dan McGraw.

He seemed to tower above the rest, a gray image, as if hewn out of iron. His face was gray and his lips colorless, jaws set and his black eyes narrowed to burning points. He paused suddenly when he saw the two men, dropped his crop, and lowered his brows so as to stare more intently at the apparition his eyes saw, but

which his brain doubted. This saloon was Soggy Anderson's, a member of his own posse. How could it be possible that his enemy had come here?

Winborne, who had been prepared for McGraw's entrance, was not so paralyzed: he grabbed the little barkeeper, and taking him by the neck and the seat of his corduroy breeches, hurled him bodily into the face of the first man who had entered. This man was McGraw, who fell back partly against the door and partly into the arms of Beefy Cull. Both of them drew clumsily and fired without knowing where they were hitting. A splintering in the roof and a breaking of wine bottles checked up the shots.

At the opposite end of the saloon was a crash of glass where Winborne had hurled a chair through the panes and vaulted out into the open.

McGraw picked himself up, cursing, stumbling past the bar and hurling a rapid string of fire through the window. His gang followed, and one by one, they jumped through the smashed opening and out into the corral in time to see Winborne springing onto a black gelding. McGraw gasped in his rage when he saw his enemy—the stranger who had run off with his bride—actually steal his favorite horse. Before he had settled in his saddle Winborne dug into the sleek black flanks and the horse sprang ahead, terror-stricken.

McGraw rushed after them yelling, emptying his revolver. His shots went high in the dark because of an intuitive fear of hitting his horse and because of the fact that Winborne was crouched low over the withers preparatory to taking the fence. As he reached the end of the corral Winborne stood up in his stirrups, gave the horse its head and leaned forward. His mount took the leap perfectly—as McGraw knew only too well it would—and horse and rider disappeared through a crowd of buckaroos down the main street of the town.

McGraw leaped upon the first horse at hand, but because of his weight and the smaller mount, he knew that he could not clear the fence. His posse meanwhile vaulted to their saddles, one running ahead to open the gate. Much time was lost and they knew that Winborne had the fastest mount in the range. Their only hope was that he would be impeded in his flight through the crowded town. But here they made a mistake. Instead of impeding Winborne, the town was not aware of what had happened until the black gelding had galloped down the street and sped out eastward on the county road. The street was crowded with people as soon as he passed, and it was the posse that lost time because of the gathering mob—not Winborne.

It seemed as if every man in town had leaped to horse. A rabble of cow-herds and ranchers and townspeople mounted on every kind of cayuse, followed McGraw and his posse. For a mile's chase over the little plateau on which the town was built, the herd of clattering horses swept on. On the second mile the fastest horses kept ahead in a rapidly dwindling group. Finally it was only Dan McGraw, Sheriff Calmody, Foreman Cull, and Soggy Anderson, the keeper of the Paradise Bar, who formed the vanguard of the chase. The rest of the mob strung back a line of mustangs and pintos, then rangy little cow-horses, and finally a parade of banging, rattling buckboards and heaving old nags.

As soon as he dropped down into the level of the plain again, Winborne pressed his horse on for a ride of about a mile and then cut off in the first creek bed he reached. This would have been a foolhardy thing to do under ordinary conditions, because it was almost certain that Dan McGraw could see far ahead on the moonlit plain and ascertain more or less exactly just where Winborne had branched off. But Winborne's fear of drawing the posse too near Mossop's ranch was the deciding factor. He followed the dry-rutted creek bed for a half a mile, finding it heavy traveling for his horse, which was a racer, not a cow-pony, and unused to rough ground.

The creek led up to a narrow cañon, where Winborne found it necessary to dismount and lead his horse. He climbed by means of a little branch creek and cut up toward a precipitous hill. From this point he could see that the posse had left the county road and had taken his trail through the creek bed. Although he had expected

this he was at a loss to know what step he must now take. The plain toward Volcano was beginning to be dotted with riders. There was a chance, he knew, of dodging his pursuers up there in the hills until morning, but that would be of no use.

The girl was riding eastward on the county road or else waiting for him at Mossop's ranch, where Winborne understood there was going to be a fight. His only move now was to round the little hill and stake everything on the chance that the posse would lose some time in hunting for him at the top of the creek where they were headed. He wheeled his mount and followed a rough cow trail eastward, cutting back to the county road as swiftly as the racer could travel in the rough sage-covered country.

He came back to the road at a distance of about three miles east of the point where he had branched off. When he raced on toward Mossop's ranch he looked up to the hill he had just left and saw the night riders who were pursuing him, silhouetted clearly against the moon.

CHAPTER XIV.

POSEY AT MOSSOP'S RANCH.

WHEN Posey Donnel left Winborne and branched off in the little gulch, she lost sight of the lights of the town. It was not until she followed the gulch to its end, where it spread out in a broad alluvial fan on the plain, that she was again able to get her direction. She circled the town, keeping a radius of about two miles. It was a rough ride with no sign of a trail, and only the instinct of the cow-horse—brought up on the rough plains—kept him on his feet. Even so, he constantly stumbled on the chuck-holes and rocks.

Later in the night—she had no idea of the time—Posey regained the county road, and the horse plunged on toward the Mossop sheep-ranch. If Posey herself had known that she was riding directly toward Pliny Mossop's outfit she would not have given her horse so full a rein.

A half an hour later, jolting down into a small cañon, the horse and rider arrived within sight of the little checkerboard of shacks and corrals. The place was deserted and the only sound that met Posey's ears was the moaning of the wind. Other than that, and the sound of the horse's hoofs beating heavily, there was a deep, perfect silence which seemed a part of the moonlight and of the sweet ever-present odor of sage.

But it was not the silence that the girl feared. If the ranch were completely deserted, a possibility because of the marriage, it would have fitted in admirably with her scheme. But in the main shack a yellow light beamed out in strong contrast to the soft blue monochrome. All other bunkhouses and stables were dark.

As the girl rode into the corral in front of the main house, a half-breed shepherd dog barked loudly. This would call out the rancher, Posey knew, so for a few moments she kept her saddle. After an interminable wait she saw a bald-headed man, in black shirt-sleeves, vest and overalls, coming to the window.

Old Spud Terhune, Mossop's father-in-law, was known by the shape of his head, which was supposed to resemble a potato. Old Spud, observing that it was only a girl, and not, as he had feared, a robber, opened the door, and surveyed her as she alighted and walked toward him.

"Where in tarnation did a gal like you come from?" he asked.

"They told me up at Volcano that you'd give me shelter here for the night," the girl stammered.

Spud eyed her city dress for a moment with every mark of disapproval.

"I'm in trouble. I've got to come in. I'm afraid."

"You're runnin' away?" the old man asked with a surprising prescience.

"Yes—I—"

"What be you runnin' away from?"

"I—" the girl stammered. "I'm runnin' away from up there."

"Stole somethin'?"

"No. I—" She saw him studying her dress again with weak but merciless eyes. "I'm from the Paradise Dance Hall. The proprietor there hired me to dance, but—"

"Ah!" The old fellow nodded his head wisely. "I know! I know! He's a bad lot—Soggy Anderson's his name. I know! He's a bad one!"

The girl followed him into the hot little room, and by the full light the old man turned on her again and looked into her face. His expression changed from grim satisfaction to a new curiosity. The face puzzled him.

"No," he shook his bald head assuredly. "I don't believe you. You ain't one of them dance-gals from the Paradise Hall. *I* know." He continued to look at her. "You ain't one of them gals that dances jigs up to Anderson's. I know too dam' well."

"But I'm running away," the girl pleaded. "Hide me in here. I can't go out on the range again. And they're searching for me. Let me hide here—until—"

"You've come to a bad place. They's goin' to be gun-fightin' here before sun-up. That's why I ain't turned in yet. And that's why I was afraid to go out when the dog barked that there was some one in the corral."

"Gun-fighting!" the girl exclaimed.

"But that may be all the more reason you should hide here. Butch Bellowes and the others will be hangin' about. You mustn't meet up with them." He returned to his other problem. "How is it you say you're a dance-gal when you ain't."

"But I am one. I'm running away from Anderson—Soggy Anderson."

"Well, he's a bad 'un. Whether you're runnin' to him or from him, he's bad."

"Why is there going to be gun-fighting?" the girl asked again.

"Mossop blew in all his coin at the marriage at Volcano. Lost it gamblin'. The men are sore. Ain't been paid sence last season. And this here Butch Bellowes has got 'em started on the war-path. They're talkin' of burnin' down this here ranch. Chipo rode down to tell me about it—and then he shagged out, which is the way with a Mex. Look here now"—he fixed a chair at the table. "I'll warm up some coffee. It 'll cheer you up a bit, and bring some color to your face."

The girl was anxious to hear him talk. She knew it was killing time, and that was her primary object since leaving Winborne. In fact, every moment that he was speaking the girl was thinking of Winborne and praying that he would come.

"How long does it take to ride from Volcano?" she asked suddenly.

"Oh, an hour, I reckon."

"But I mean directly, the shortest way."

"Oh, I always 'low for an hour. But I've done it often in three-quarters of an hour. Pliny can do it better'n that on his roan."

"But I mean, the fastest way, galloping."

"I never timed it thataway. It's a good stretch. Racin' it you couldn't beat half an hour."

From that time on Posey never ceased looking at the big tin alarm-clock on the mantelpiece. She knew that every minute now meant that Winborne was delayed.

"You and me has been thinkin' along the same lines," old Spud said. "I've been tryin' to figure out just how long it 'll take Butch Bellowes and the gang to git down here from Volcano."

He paused for a moment and cocked his head. The girl went to the window. In the still night air they could hear the hullabaloo of some night riders galloping down into the gulch.

"Thar's Butch now! Consarn him!" Spud cried. "I know his voice. And I can tell where he's been when he ripsnorts like that! And Giardino, too! The old booze-fightin', shaggutted wop! They're comin'! They're comin'! Into the dark with you, and I'll see what this here shotgun of mine can do."

The men had already whirled in from the road and were galloping up to the trough. Butch Bellowes leaped from his saddle and ducked his head into the water, letting his frothy horse drink its fill. Posey could see Giardino's tall, ungainly form and mop of black hair, as he threw his hat into the air with a whoop and joined Bellowes at the trough. And she could see the deeply lined face of the youngest—a boy of eighteen—as he tethered the three mounts to the post.

"Get away from that thar window afore they see you!" old Spud cried out to the girl.

She turned around to look again at the clock. Winborne was delayed. There was no doubt about that now. If he had gone through Volcano he could have arrived at the Mossop outfit a half an hour before Posey herself. As it was she had preceded him by half an hour. He had been delayed one hour.

She turned to the old man. Spud's face had paled. He was shaking all over, and his old wrinkled hands appeared absolutely helpless. It seemed to Posey as if he would never get the two bullets into his gun. As he stood in the middle of the room, fumbling helplessly, a loud knock at the door made him drop one of the bullets. He stared around dumfounded, and then pointed to the dark kitchen. Posey obeyed his frantic gesture and hid, keeping the door half open. A second, more importunate knock sent Spud fleeing in Posey's direction.

"I'm afraid to open the door," he cried piteously. "It's Butch Bellowes. He'll kill me. He knows I got money. He's after it! He's after my money."

"Open up thar, grandpop!" Butch called out. "I got a question for you to answer."

"He seen me through the winder. It ain't no use."

Butch fell to kicking and banging at the door while the other two looked in at the pane. One of them broke the glass with his fist. And a moment later Bellowes, with the whole weight of his big shoulder, tore the bolt and fell into the room. Old Spud shuffled frantically to the table and picked up his gun. But Butch, laughing uproariously, jumped for the barrel and whipped it out of his hand.

"I wasn't goin' to do nothin', Butch!" Spud cried. "I ain't got nothin' ag'in' you, Butch. You've always been—"

"Take this old jack-rabbit out and tie him to the waterin'-trough!" Butch shouted to Giardino as the latter entered. "Unless"—he turned to old Spud Terhune—"unless he wants to tell us where Pliny Mossop is."

"He ain't been here, Butch; honest! Don't hold me to account for the dam' little weasel! He ain't been here all day!"

"Then what's that horse doin' out thar by the trough all steaming?"

"He didn't ride down on it, Butch," Spud stammered weakly.

"Lyin'!"

"Honest, Butch." He saw that Butch would not believe this, so he played a different card. "Friend of mine who's a two-gun man and a hopping fighter with a nervous hand, he rode down on the white horse."

"Lyin', I told you! Pliny Mossop's here and we're goin' to get him. Make up your mind to that, old 'un, 'cause we're goin' to cowhide you till you tell us where he is!"

Posey could hear the old man sobbing for them not to hurt him. The pathos of his trying to protect her—and in such a ridiculous way—began to cut her.

She opened the door so that a narrow slit of light shone into the room where she was hiding. Her room was dark; the room with the men was light; so that she could peep through the crack without any danger of being discovered. All she could see through that narrow space, however, was a part of the figure of old Spud and his white, trembling face. She saw his ashen lips incoherently begging the men not to touch him.

Butch Bellowes had one of the old man's scrawny, dried-up hands and was twisting it.

"Now I reckon you'll tell us!" he laughed. "If Pliny didn't ride down on that horse, who did?"

"I said a friend of mine, Butch—a two-gun man."

"Where is he? If it's a two-gun man, what for is it he's hidin' from us! You're lyin'!"

"You're like to breakin' my arm, Butch!" the man wailed.

"Tell us!"

Posey knew that all the old man had to do to free himself was to say that a girl had ridden down on that horse, and that she was hiding at that very moment in the next room. But old Spud would not tell, no matter what happened. She honored him for this and she resolved she could not look on his torture any more. And yet, to save him took nerve.

"All right, then, old wart!" Bellowes

snarled out. "If you won't tell us where Shorty Mossop is, we'll just give you a little cow-hidin'!"

"No, no, Butch!" Spud cried in terror. "I'm an old man, Butch; I couldn't stand a cow-hidin'; it would kill me. I ain't never done nothin' to you, Butch. I'm a good old man!"

"Tie him to the snubbin'-post and whip him till he delivers over the guy what rode that white horse," Butch decreed.

Posey decided that no matter what happened this atrocity must not go on while she stood by without raising a murmur. She expected Joe Winborne back at any moment, and it was an even chance that she could play for time until his arrival.

Wop dragged the old man to the door.

"They's somebody in thar!" Brindel shouted, pointing to the room where Posey was hiding.

Wop and Butch turned to look just as Posey Donnel opened the door deliberately and stepped into the room.

CHAPTER XV.

THE ENCORE.

POSEY had already decided to come out and play a game of her own, to save the old, weeping man.

"What's the noise about, boys?" she asked coolly.

The men stood back, silent. It was impossible to tell whether they were against or merely amused at this new turn of events. Brindel, the youngster, whose wrinkled face made him seem twenty years older than he really was, was the first to smile. Butch Bellowes, feeling himself the spokesman, thrust his thumbs into his belt and shook his shoulders slightly in a quiet chuckle.

"What the—"

"You didn't know I was here, did you?" the girl remarked.

"Can't say that I did. Thought you was up to the weddin' hittin' the lumber to amuse them cow-herds."

"I was. But I'm on my honeymoon now."

All three men burst out in a guffaw.

"If you're on a honeymoon," Butch Bellowes inquired, "how is it your bridegroom is up to Volcano searching the town with a posse?"

"Dan McGraw in Volcano!" the girl gasped with a new horror. In her frantic concern for the safety of Winborne, she groped blindly for an answer to Butch Bellowes. "Why of course, he's up there with his posse. He went there—" Posey faltered. Her mind wandered from its vain attempt to explain why she was at the Mossop ranch while her "bridgegroom" was in Volcano. It wandered again to Winborne. She felt sure now that Winborne and McGraw had met, and beyond that picture she could not think.

"How long has McGraw been in Volcano?" she asked piteously.

"This bein' the weddin' night and you the bride, it looks kind of as if you're the one who had oughter answer that question," Butch laughed. He turned to Brindel and Wop. "It looks to me, mem, like we come here for to do somethin' that ain't exactly what Chief Calmody would call legal. We come here for to get our wages by robbin' this here old seed wart."

"We've got a right to rob him," Wop objected. "The money's ourn."

"But if we do, what's goin' to happen? I asks you, men? Here is a lady and a old bleak-top man to fight agin us, and we comes and burns down their shacks and takes the old seed's money"

"Fight agin you?" Spud cried panic-stricken. "I ain't got nothin' agin you, Butch. I won't fight old Butch—not me."

Bellowes went on as if he had heard no interruption. "Well, men, I figures this-a-way: there'd be a little neck-tie party if we got caught at it. Ay what?"

"What you drivin' at, Butch?" Wop snarled. "We ain't been paid, have we. The money's ourn, ain't it?"

Stew Brindel sided with the radical wing. "Course the money's ourn. Mebbe we can let the burnin' go, because of the gal bein' white. But the money—it's ourn."

"What money? I got no money!" the old man cried again desperately.

"But I got a better idee," Butch objected. "It's a idee what'll mean a lot

more dust than the measly little wad this here old guy's got."

"You won't rob me," the man screamed. "You haven't come here to rob and burn—not a poor old man!"

"The facts of the case is this," Butch went on. "Instead of pullin' off somethin' what'll end up in a tight-rope act, just for the sake of a few hundred dollars, I don't see why we can't get a good deal longer roll, by doin' somethin' which is, as the Little Chief would say, completely within the law."

Posey caught a gleam of light which made Butch Bellowes's words assume a terrible significance.

"It's plain to me," Butch elucidated, "that this here lady has ran away from Dan McGraw, and that Dan, ransactin' Volcano all night, has been really searchin' for his lost bride."

"What do you mean by that!" Posey blurted out.

"I guess you know well enough what I mean by that!" Butch mocked.

"I don't! I don't! You're crazy. You've been sousing till you're crazy blind, drunk!" the girl cried, her chest heaving with her defiance.

"We'll take you back to McGraw," Butch decreed softly.

"We better make sure we're right," Wop counseled. "Suppose we ain't sized the game up right. Suppose we forced the lady back to Volcano and found we was wrong? McGraw would cow-hide us so's they warn't nothin' left but Hamburger steak."

"And some bones for the buzzards," Brindel counseled further.

"Well this is the way we'll work it, men," Butch said. "We'll keep the gal here and treat her lady-like. And one of us will ride up to Volcano, find McGraw and tell him."

"It'll be a hard thing to tell," Wop said gloomily. "You'll have to put it in a way so's you'll get a big reward out'n him, instead of a big noseful of buckshot."

"Leave that part to me," Butch replied. "And McGraw might object seein' as how the lady what's bein' held in custody is his'n and not our'n."

"Mebbe instead of one bird goin' up to McGraw," Butch admitted, "it'd be better for two to go and one to stay. Brindel, you bein' the next best shot will ride up the county road to Volcano with me and back me when I meets up with McGraw."

"It's a delicate game," Brindel replied. "I'm thinkin' we'd oughter consider all the ins and outs of it."

Butch's suggestion struck the same chord of fear in Posey's breast. The girl still clung frantically to the hope that Winborne was coming down the county road from Volcano. But it was now perfectly obvious he had been detained. What if Butch found McGraw, and told him where he could find the girl? What if McGraw came before Winborne—and to the very place where the girl and Winborne were to meet!

Posey resolved that above all else she must kill time—and keep the men at the ranch until Winborne came. After that, she knew, nothing mattered.

Butch walked to the door while Brindel dallied, rolling a cigarette.

Old Terhune mumbled: "Ain't got nothin' against you, Butch. Ole Butch Bellowes ain't the kind of guy who would rob a ole man. No, sir, he ain't."

Wop Giardino flopped into a chair and stretched himself comfortably. This was the moment that Posey selected to go to the mantelpiece for a jug of asparagus gin.

"Got some glasses?" she asked of old Spud. "Maybe the boys will want a little drink before they tell Dan that they've caught his wife."

Butch turned back somewhat surprised. Wop laughed outright, and young Brindel immediately answered, "Sure thing! There's plenty of time, Butch. Let's have a couple of rounds. The gal herself's invitin' us."

"She's kiddin' us," Butch snarled.

"We'll make her dance—if she wants a party!" Wop growled.

"Why certainly," the girl herself chimed in. "That's fair."

"It's fair all right, bein' as how we didn't get to see you dance at the weddin'!"

"That was a shame," Posey laughed. "I'll dance for you right now—out in the

open corral where the moonlight is shining."

"Whoop-ee!" Brindel cried. "Giardino here's got a mouth-organ and old Spud will oblige us with his banjo!"

"That's a go!" Posey agreed.

"I ain't in no rush to meet up with McGraw," Butch announced. "We can at least have a few minutes of fun, ay, men?" "Do I hear any objections to this here ceremony?"

"*No.*" From the other two. "The jamboree first and then the fireworks."

Old Spud Terhune did not have to be dragged out this time to play his dog-eared ragtime repertoire. He toddled eagerly to the kitchen where his banjo hung on a wall nail. Eagerly he shuffled out on the veranda and crumpled up on the steps, his banjo well up against his chest so that his beard barely brushed it. With one crooked old leg crossed over the other he pounded out the time, and plunked away at the old Southern tunes. He watched the slim, beautiful girl dancing out in the dust of the corral, snapping her fingers at the men, mocking her shadow.

He plunked away fervently without understanding the beauty of the dance. The one thing he understood and felt was the terrific tenseness of one who waits. It was a moment of his life—rhythmical and exciting, as it might have been—which was more oppressive than all his years of waiting, as he himself phrased it, waiting for the great two-gun man, who always came and who always won.

To Butch Bellowes the dance had no such funereal suggestion—merely a slip of a girl—a beautiful thing, so fantastic and dream-like in the moonlight—that to his befuddled brain it was scarcely possible to tell which was the shadow, which the girl. The music thrummed deliciously in his ear, the snap of the girl's fingers set him swaying, and the nimble feet, the scarf, the flash of the shoulders in the moonlight were a fleeting thrill in his moment of crime: a girl dancing in the full beams of the moon, surrounded by a gang of outlaws.

And Posey herself was thrilled as she danced. The patter of the feet, the thrumming of the guitar, the hysterical whining of the mouth-organ, were syncopated as barbarically as any savage tom-tom. And there was an undertone to it, an undertone which Posey perhaps imagined at first: the beating of horse's hoofs; every measure of the dance, she felt, would bring Winborne closer.

Such a thing could tame a savage breast, perhaps, but only for a time. Butch Bellowes could catch a momentary glimpse of beauty, could perhaps respond mildly through his distorted vision. But it could not go on. He would want faster dancing, a faster rhythm, a louder stamp of the old rheumatic foot of the banjo player. He would want something more like tom-toms, and yet even louder—the crash of cymbals, the shooting of guns.

As Posey continued breathlessly in her dance, fearing to stop, but obviously drooping, Butch Bellowes's enjoyment waned. Posey had tried and had gained a few precious moments, perhaps, but beyond that she had failed. She was now dancing automatically. Butch was restless. The scene for him was no longer approaching a climax—although for Posey, who was sure she could detect the undertone of horse's hoofs, it was. As old Spud Terhune plunked mechanically on, repeating his last song over and over again, his wrists struck less sharply, his old knees weakened.

Butch suddenly jumped up and ran to the center of the corral. "That's enough! The jane here's been stringin' us guys! She's wanted to kill time. Are we so soused we can't see that! And the old Spud's on her side. Tie him up thar, Wop, and Brindel, you get the broncs. I'm goin' to lock up this gal and you're to watch over her till I gets back!"

Spud Terhune was dragged to the snubbing-post and Butch took the girl's wrist in his big viselike hand. She fought him as he tried to drag her toward the ranch-house, but she was as helpless as old Terhune himself. Just as they reached the door, a streak of light barked hoarsely from the shadow of a shack to the north of the corral, and Butch released his hold on Posey's wrist, whirled about and drew. As he tried to lift the gun up it dropped from his hand and he fell, clutching his shoulder.

Wop and Brindel, baffled into a moment's inaction, realized that they were caught in the open yard with an unknown enemy somewhere behind the sheep-houses, who had been biding his time. Wop released the old man, and fled into the shelter of the stables; Brindel followed, and a moment later Butch struggled to his feet and stumbled after them.

The sound of the gun rang in Posey's ears. It was the first time in her life that she heard a shot without horror. This time, ugly as the hoarse cracking bang had sounded, it was like a part of her dance. There was a crude gripping harmony to it. She knew that Winborne had come; and she felt that someone was coming back to her whom she had known all her life and who had been separated from her for an interminable, heart-rending time.

The girl had been fascinated from the first by Winborne, but she had not thought till now what his return would really mean. There was an awakening that took place within her when the tall figure of a man, mounted on a black horse, came out into the open. Winborne still held the smoking revolver in his hand and looked around to every corner for signs of the men. At the lower end of the stable slinking forms emerged on horse-back and galloped out to the road. In the dim light he was able only to see the indistinct forms, but he was certain that three horses loped up through the narrow gulch to its northern opening. Although he could not see the riders he concluded that Butch, Wop, and Brindel had all fled.

CHAPTER XVI.

GRUB-STAKE FOR TWO.

TERHUNE, considerably cowed by the appearance of the stranger, and observing that he was the girl's lover, shuffled up to the door and invited the two to come in.

"That cactus-eatin' Butch Bellowes has been havin' the D. T.'s," old Spud remarked to them as he poured out a drink. "Actually he makes the remark that this here young lady is the gal what was marryin' Dan McGraw to-night and that she's runnin' away from him." As he could evoke no answer to this except a smile, he went on: "Will you two be stayin' here to-night?"

"We're goin' now," Winborne answered. He pulled out a small roll of bills and laid them on the table. "Look here, Mr. Rancher. There's some money, and I want you to get me three cow-horses that can make rough traveling. I want them now."

"But you already got McGraw's gelding," Terhune replied, bewildered.

"It's no good to me the kind of journey I'm going to take. I want three of your roughest cow-ponies, the kind that 'll cover any ground, rocks and mountains and desert."

Both old Spud and the girl stared questioningly.

"And you'll grub-stake us," Winborne went on. "A regular outfit—coffee-pot, cups, salt, flour, and a side of bacon. And in about half an hour there'll be a man down here asking for me. His name's Dan McGraw."

"Dan McGraw comin' here!" Old Spud was more dazed at each new word the stranger spoke.

"You'll tell him we've ridden on to the station."

"Three cow-ponies and a packin' outfit just to make the two-hour ride to the station?" the old man gasped.

"That's what I said. Saddle them up."

"I'm tellin' you it's only a two-hour ride. For why all this grub-stake?"

"We're going to the station at Mesquite. Now hop to it, old 'un!"

"But a two-hour ride—"

"I'm in a hurry. So shut up!"

"All right, mister. All right. I'll get you anything you want, but a man who'll—" He stopped, catching sight of Winborne's face. "All right, mister. I'll saddle 'em up slick, mister."

Winborne and the girl followed Spud to the barn, and saddled two of the little broncos while the old rancher tied up the packing outfit.

"All three men have gone with their nags," Spud said when he came back. "Guess old Butch climbed on his cayuse

and beat it, too. Dam' his hide! I hope he croaks!"

When the old man was again out of their hearing, Winborne turned to the girl.

"McGraw and Pliny Mossop and the whole gang gave me chase. I cut out across the plain and doubled back so that I lost them. But the last I saw of them they were heading back for the county road. Which way they go I don't know—but if they meet those sheep-herders that I just chased out of the corral they'll know where to come."

"Aren't we going to the station now?" the girl asked.

Winborne shook his head. "McGraw knows I'm with you. He's got the whole town after us now, and the only thing to do is to drop out of sight and wait. We've got to hide—perhaps for several days. Then we can take a chance at going West."

"But where'll we hide?"

"Down in the desert there's the ghost of an old mining town which sprang up in the boom days. It's the last place they'll think of looking. I don't question that. My only doubt is, are you game to take such a trip—and at a time like this? It's a different country and the road's a bad one; it's the desert pure and simple, and it may be a long time before we get out."

The girl did not consider the seriousness of the choice she had to make until he had pointed it out to her. She had to choose now between this man and going back into the arms of McGraw—the groom whom she did not know, the man against whom everything within her had revolted.

"There is this other possibility," Winborne said, realizing that she could not speak. "If you can't go back to McGraw—seeing that he knows you have run away with me—there is another way. Hide here in this house and wait. I will wait out here in the corral and when McGraw comes I'll go out to meet him. That would mean a fight between the two of us—a good chance for either one if it's a fair fight. But it's bloodshed. The winner would be the worse loser. If I killed McGraw the sheriff would take me and I would lose you."

The girl looked up with a surprised light in her eyes. Winborne had posed as her lover. But not until he said this was the girl satisfied that he was no longer posing. He had said something—or it was his tone of voice—which made her suddenly believe in him.

"You mean that you would be willing to die—except that you would lose me? And that I must decide that or else choose the long trail into the heart of the desert?"

Old Terhune shuffled noisily into the barn with his arms full of packages and tin cans. Winborne turned to his horse to straighten out the snares in the saddle blanket once more. The girl waited, holding her little roan bronco until Winborne should bridle it.

"I got you some chile-and-beans and canned tamales," old Spud announced. "Coffee, onions and bakin' powder. You'll only have time for one feed on the way to the cattle depot, but it 'll be some banquet!"

Winborne himself adjusted the pack-saddle. Old Terhune could see how carefully he tied on the pack, so that it would reach no further back than the skirts of the saddle, and high enough so that the horse's wind would not be pressed out of his sides.

"You sure are fixed for a good ride," Spud announced as Winborne and the girl jumped up into their saddles. They plunged out into the corral, and the pack-horse followed at the end of a lariat. Winborne looked around the corral once more, and ran his eyes along the crest of the hills to the northern end of the gulch.

"Better keep a gun on you," Winborne said as a parting warning to the old man. "You'll be having visitors before another hour's up."

With that he dug into his bronco and galloped out to the county road. The pack-horse loped after, and the girl, clinging to her jolting little mount, followed.

Terhune watched them, scratching his bald head in his perplexity. That they were taking the road toward the cattle depot at Mesquite was certain. But for the life of him he could not understand why they wanted a week's grub-stake! He shambled back to the barn for the light and then walked through the long stable to the door

at the lower end. When he passed by one of the stalls he saw out of the corner of his eye a yellowish dark Napatan boot. He was conscious of the fact that it had moved, and this made him afraid to turn around to look. He stood stock still, his heart beating heavily, and presently he heard a man moving in the straw, and lumbering to his feet. Terhune turned around, holding up the lantern so that it fell on the ashen face of Butch Bellowes.

"Get us a drink, old 'un," Butch said. "'Tain't bleedin' any more—just a crease."

"I'll help you," Terhune cried, petrified. "I'll help you, Butch. Old Spud Terhune will always help his friend Butch. Guess mebbe your horse loped after the others without you, Butch. Thought you was gone."

"Winborne's the guy that potted me." Butch's voice changed considerably. "And I'm goin' to get him. I'll get him long before sun-up. Hear what I say. Now where's my six-gun?"

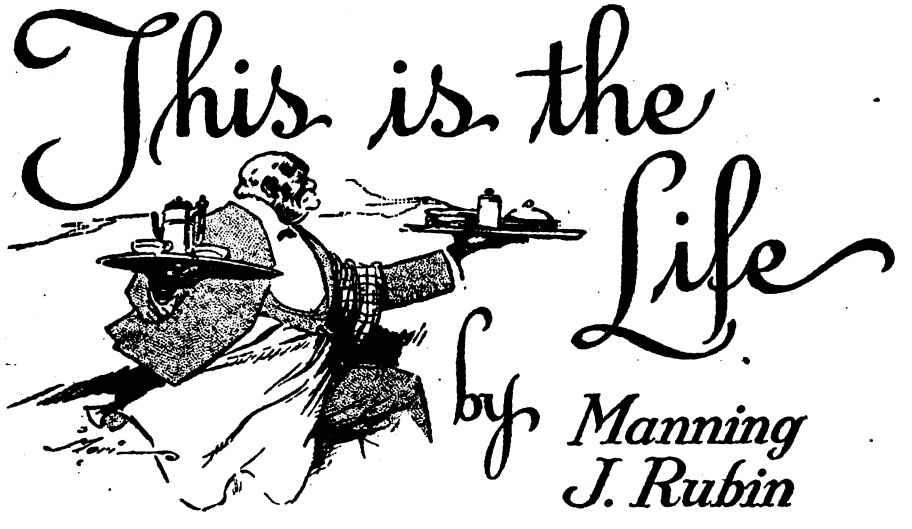
"Was you in here while they was saddlin' the broncos?" old Spud asked, his eyes bulging.

"Right here in the stall next to 'em, hidin' in the hay. I heard every word they said and where they're goin', which it is dam' unlucky for them! When Dan McGraw gets here, him and me will get our heads together."

He stumbled out to the front of the stable, while old Spud followed with the lantern.

"Now then shag into the house and get me some arnica—and a shot of scat," Butch decreed as he fell down on his hands and knees in the corral to hunt for his gun.

(To be concluded NEXT WEEK.)



THE main reason I patronized the Imperial restaurant was that Sam was the first waiter I had seen in that section who picked up a drinking glass from the outside instead of from the inside. As soon as I stepped in the doorway that day, Sam spied me. He punched a check for the other victim, pocketed the dime automatically, and then slung a glass of water before me.

"What's on the bill to-day for a hungry man, Sam?" I asked.

Sam, he smiled. It was as large as two ordinary smiles. I thought the crack would strain his ears. Then his teeth separated into two rows, and behind them loomed a space that looked like the Mammoth Cave on a cloudy day.

"Boss," said Sam, "yo' sho'ly am lucky. Yo' am jest in time to git a dish of that country sausage we got to-day. A fresh shipment, suh, d'reck f'um th' farm!"

Sam to this day don't know how close he came to leaving behind a widow and five

orphans. I was just able to control myself. I crashed the glass on the table and picked up a fork and shook it at him.

"Darn your hide!" I shouted. "If you mention 'farm' again to me you're going to think a mule kicked you. Gimme some bacon, eggs, buttered toast, baked apple, coffee, and shut up!"

"Boss, I didn't mean no harm, suh," worriedly came from Sam. "Ev'ybody's been tickled to death wid dem farm saus—"

"That 'll do!" I cut in. "I'm different from everybody — see? Commit that to memory. Fill my order and remember that the next man that mentions 'farm' and 'country' to me is going to a land from which he won't ever come back—and don't forget to have the toast buttered."

I didn't like to be rough to Sam, but you know how it is when somebody brings up your favorite aversion. If you had been caught at bootlegging, would you care to attend a lecture on prohibition? If you had been divorced four times, would you want some ignorant fool to talk about married bliss? But I'll tell you how it come about.

Just to be fair, I'll admit that at one time I didn't hold any particular grudge against rural life even in its most extreme forms. I suppose there ain't a man living that won't take off his hat and salute when the band plays "Back to the Farm." Most of us hanker a bit after cornfields, cows, chickens, and a weekly newspaper. I was that way myself before we struck Charleston, South Carolina.

When I say "we," I mean the Bolton Sales Company, of which I was the Bolton and the company, and Teddy Rawls was the Sales. The Bolton Sales Company goes from city to city, holding special sales for stores that need money. We puts a big red sign in front of the store, stacks up price-cards showing in big black figures how regular two-dollar sheets are offered for seventy-nine cents. We advertises for one hundred salesgirls, from which we selects about seven, uses up most of the available advertising space in the local papers, gets two policemen stationed at the entrance, and then we admits the eager populace free of charge.

Charleston was where me and Teddy found out that there was something in life besides reduced prices. We—

I want to say right here, that in my opinion Teddy Rawls was the greatest master of the English language that ever lived. I'm not claiming that he was literary, like Shakespeare, but give 'em both a stock of goods to sell, and let 'em advertise in their own way, and the women would be buying Teddy Rawls out before Brother Shakespeare could find a word to rime with "value." Teddy didn't depend altogether on the English language, either. He had his own way of making words to fit the occasion.

He was the Babe Ruth of advertising. He had the noblest gift in the world—the knack of crowding a store with women and men falling over themselves to spend money. He could take an ordinary three-dollar waist and trim it so with words that women would skip their weekly instalments on the electric washing-machine to buy 'em.

Our first week's effort in Charleston was a howling success, and we enabled a men's wear merchant to retire from business and take his family to the mountains for the summer. Then we put on a sale for the Emporium, and it happened. We did a wonderful business the first day, but the second was dead, miserable.

"What in the name of mischief has gone wrong with you, Teddy?" I demanded, after the doors were closed and we were checking up. "That ad you had in the papers this morning was awful. There wasn't no crowd here to-day at all. I was mortified when I read that ad with our name to it. It was as weak as if you hadn't written it. It was flat, stale, punk."

"I—I think it was all right," muttered Teddy, but he sort of stammered and averted his gaze, and I grabbed his shoulders and yelled at him:

"All right! All right?" I let go of him and brought a copy of the morning paper from the counter. "Here's the ad," I snapped out. "Read it, and if you think the ad is all right, why wasn't there no results? It's dead, it's rotten. It ain't nothing but a scrap of paper."

I shoved the sheet at Teddy, but he let

it slide to the floor. He rubbed his hand wearily across his forehead, and when his eyes met mine, I seen a worried look in his.

"Yes, the ad's punk," he painfully admitted, and he looked like the results of an overdose of moonshine; "but I couldn't do any better, and the same ad is in to-night's paper. I can't explain it. Just couldn't put my mind to it. Sorry, Bob."

He sunk his face into his hands, sighed, twisted his feet around the legs of the chair that he fell into, and looked as miserable as a man who indorses a note for a friend and gets stuck. Naturally, I felt sorry for the lad. In fact, I was almost scared. It was his ads that was chiefly responsible for our success, and he had never written one like that before.

"Tell me what's wrong, Teddy," I suggested, pulling his head out of his hands. "Maybe I can help you."

Silence.

"Of course, Teddy," I said, "your personal affairs are not mine, but when anything affects the Bolton Sales Company like this, it's up to you to tell me what's wrong. Aside from that, you ought to talk out to an old friend."

Teddy looked up, give me a stare, hesitated, and then surrendered.

"I'm going to tell you," he said; "but remember this—you're my boss, and you're my friend; but if you let loose any of your funny remarks, you're due for one to the jaw. That's straight goods—get me? None of your sarcasm and wit, none of your biting observations." He glared at me, then blurted out: "I'm in *love!*"

It was like a blow in the solar plexus. Or even worse. I felt weak, dizzy, disgusted, done for. The lad's confession shocked, horrified me. I didn't want to believe it; and yet I could tell by the guilty look on his face that it was true. For a few seconds I couldn't operate my mouth. I choked when I first tried to speak, but soon I came to.

"I won't make any sarcastic remarks, no biting observations," I told him. "It wouldn't do no good. No use for me to tell you how many kinds of an idiot you are. No use for me to—"

I broke off at that point, because Teddy was getting up out of the chair, and he had a "Halt, there!" look on his face. And he had one hundred and fifty pounds to my one hundred and thirty.

"At any rate," I hastily resumed, "love is your mess if you want to get mixed up in it, but this sale is *my* business. I'm paying the advertising bills. Why can't you be in love and write advertisements at the same time? Edgar Allen Longfellow," I reminded him, "was knee deep in love, but it didn't keep him from writing 'The Last of the Mohicans,' did it? Julius Cæsar, John D. Rockefeller, and others were in love, but if anything it made them do their work better. You'll starve on your variety of love."

"Oh, you don't understand," growled Teddy, and he said something under his breath that I was sure glad I didn't hear.

"The public don't seem to understand, either," was my rebuttal. "Do you think," I sarcastically asked, "it would be all right to run a postscript to our ads—'P. S.—Please excuse rotten ad-writing, because our adman is in love'?"

Teddy smiled, but it was the sickest smile I had ever seen. Then he sighed, and started scraping the floor aimlessly with his right foot.

"It's this way, Bob," he finally explained, and I could see he was glad of the chance to confide in some one he could trust, "I've fallen dead in love with Molly Rupert, the girl who works in the office of the *Daily Democrat*. She's the only thing in the world that matters. I used to think that meals, money, taxes, drinks, and things counted, but they don't. I'm unanimously fond of her, and I can't think of anything else. Every time I try to write, her eyes get in the way. They're big and brown, and beautiful."

The lad had untied himself from the chair and was pacing up and down the short aisle between rows of red-ticketed merchandise.

"You ought to see her, Bob," he pleaded. "She's prettier than a paragraph set in Cheltenham old style, and her voice is more musical than a cash register ringing up nine dollars and ninety-eight cents. She's a rare value, but—but—"

He hesitated, cut out the walking, and stood up like a lost infant.

"But?" I encouraged. "But it out, old man."

"I can't convince her of my desirability," he said despairingly. "I can't seem to create a demand for myself as far as she is concerned."

"No wonder," I told him, "the way you act. What's her antipathy?"

"Blamed if I know," Teddy moaned. "She doesn't fall for the line that most girls fall for. That's one reason why I'm so dead in love with her. She answers my specifications of what a real girl ought to be—but evidently I don't strike her that way. I don't know how to make a hit with her. She isn't silly, like other girls. She's pretty, but sensible."

"Sensible?" I echoed. "Maybe that's why you don't attract her."

"Whaddaya mean?"

"Your natures are too opposite," I explained. "If you had sense you wouldn't let the *Romeo* in you kill the Andrew Carnegie that's also there. You're just a rank amateur in love. You don't know the first principle of it, as any girl connected with a newspaper would fall swiftly for a man that can write ads like you can. It's fortunate you've got me to help you out. I mean to make it my business to win this girl for you. I'm an expert at that sport. But you'll have to do your work better. Do you promise?"

Teddy stared, then grabbed hold of my shoulders.

"Are you kidding?" he demanded, and there was a pathetic look of hopefulness on his face.

"Of course not!" I assured him. "Do you promise?"

"Absolutely!"

"Then compose yourself and some better advertising," I shot into him. "If you've turned in your ads for the morning already, go down to the papers and touch them up. To-morrow evening you take me to see the girl. All I want is a line on her nature, her habits, and characteristics, then I'll pave the road to her heart for you. In my day," I added convincingly if not conservatively, "I had many a girl wild over me, and the girl don't live that I can't fathom. I could manage 'em like magic, and it soon got so monotonous I grew tired. Just a gift of mine. I'll fix it up for you, infant."

"You really mean it?" wistfully.

"Sure! Just make a date for to-morrow evening, fix up decent ads in the mean time, and the girl is yours. We'll visit this pair of eyes to-morrow, and if I can't locate a vulnerable point in her heart I'll make a will in your favor and commit suicide. Rest easy, Teddy," I concluded. "I can hear the wedding bells."

II.

So the next evening Teddy and I marched over to see Miss Rupert, the girl who had made our sales fall off on Tuesday. We walked for two blocks after we left the street-car, and finally Teddy stopped.

"Here," he whispered reverently, as if it might be a church we were to visit. When he rang the bell, a little kid opened the door.

"Hello, Harold," greeted Teddy, as he handed the youngster a package from the toy-store. "Is Miss Molly in?"

"Yeth, thir," said Harold, joyfully grabbing the package. "Come in, thir."

He led the way, put our hats down, then beat it up-stairs. I could see right off, the way things was arranged, that it was a house kept by refined, educated, friendly folks. It was a real home, and I began to think less harshly of my advertising man.

The girl met us in the hall. There was only a pretty little table lamp burning, but it gave enough light for me to see that regardless of Teddy's faults he didn't lack an eye to looks.

"Good evening," came quite the sweetest voice I had ever heard down South. And she had one of the tiniest and neatest hands I ever shook, and many's the four fingers and thumb that's moved in unison with mine.

"Good evening, Miss Rupert," Teddy said. "I want you to meet a good friend of mine—Mr. Bolton. This is Miss Rupert, Bob."

She smiled cordially, and darned if I

didn't mean it when I said I was glad to meet her.

"Teddy has told me many nice things about you, Miss Rupert," I informed her, "but I see now he was conservative."

I was telling the truth, too. No doubt about it, when a Dixie dame is comely and sweet you don't have to look twice to appreciate the fact.

"An unusual accomplishment for an advertising man, isn't it?" and she laughed her symphony of a laugh.

"Defend yourself, Teddy," I advised the lad.

I had business to attend to. I proceeded to take a look around the room to get a line on the girl's nature, to dig up clues to what hobbies she might have. You can always judge a girl by the way she fixes up a living-room.

The first thing that struck me was a large painting on the wall, showing a farm scene. There was a blue sky, with a daub or two of clouds. In the foreground stood a miserable shanty, with an old lady sitting down in a rocking-chair on the porch, peeling potatoes. In front of this shack were some kids playing in the grass, and some chickens picking at the worms. And in the back was a mortgaged farm with a son-in-law driving a pair of lazy mules.

Exhibit number two was another little picture showing a bubbling brook, with some stepping-stones over it, because the county was too stingy, I suppose, to build any sort of a bridge. There was some trees on both sides, and I guess there was lots of malarial mosquitoes that was too small to show up. Just an ordinary scene, but put up in a neat bronze frame.

And on a table lay a magazine which the girl had evidently been reading. *Rural Folks* was the name of this snappy publication. "Fighting the Potato Blight" ran the title of the thrilling romance where the magazine was open, and on the opposite page I spied a line drawing showing a meadow with a dinky little lark flying next to the border, while under the illustration nestled a rime entitled: "In the Spring."

It didn't take no ouija to tell me right then and there that the girl was daft on the subject of farm and country. It was staring at me from the walls, and shouting to me from the table; and it strikes me, too, that the girl didn't seem like the kind—the jazzy, dressless, flighty variety—that likes the gay city and uses the kind of perfume which the Egyptians in the advertisements affect. I turned to her.

"You appear to be fond of the country, Miss Rupert," I said, smiling approvingly. "We're just alike there. I was born on a farm."

"You were!" she exclaimed, breathlessly. "How wonderful!"

Sure enough, I was on the right track.

"Yes," was my comment. "I owe my good health and my disposition, in fact all that I call my own, to the fact that until I was a young man I lived the rugged, healthy life of the farm boy, and breathed the sweet, pure air of R. F. D. number eight."

And there was Teddy, mouth open, eyes about to pop open, and doing all but shouting "Liar!"

"How fortunate you were, Mr. Bolton," the girl said. "Do tell me something about your experiences."

"Oh, there ain't much to tell," I answered. "I used to get up in the morning at four o'clock, and after reading the paper do the chores, milk the cows, wake the chickens and feed 'em, oil the plows, water the crops, and turn the worms. Then after breakfast I used to breathe the wonderful, bracing air for an hour or two, take a plunge in the ole swimmin' hole, and then rake the hay. It was great!"

"And how were the crops?" was her next question, as she gazed at me in fascination, like I was her hero.

"Scrumptious!" I told her. "It was a world of fun, Miss Rupert, as I look back upon them days. Great big crops of wheat, canned corn, oranges, boll weevils, flax, hominy, beans, and puffed rice. And such orchards — pears, watermelons, tomatoes, apples, grapes, prunes — everything. And such meals!"

"It sounds so thrilling."

"Fresh eggs, milk, chicken, and turkey three and four times a day, home-made cider — oh, it's the life. You remember, when you was a kid, visiting us, don't you, Teddy?"

"Er—yes," replied that simpleton uneasily. He looked troubled.

The ambition of my life at that moment was to land a sledge-hammer on Teddy's head. Here I was subjecting my soul to everlasting fires, and him standing up like a statue, not having sense enough to fall in line. The girl, in the mean time, was regarding me — well, not suspiciously, but mysteriously. I don't know whether my stuff was convincing or not, and just to appraise the situation I idly turned over the pages of the magazine.

"If I had been in your place, Mr. Bolton, I'd never have left the farm," said the girl. "Would you have, Mr. Rawls?"

"No, indeed," telegraphed Teddy. "I'd have stayed there."

"The world is too citified, in my opinion," Miss Rupert preached, sitting down, and facing us two with eyes seeming to be everywhere. "I think that what we need is more of the simple life. Too many girls are in offices that ought to be milking cows, and too many young men are filling the pool-rooms that ought to be driving mules."

"No question of that!" I agreed. "The government ought to make every youngster spend at least a week or two on the farm. How," I asked, "can you expect a kid to know anything about bees, turnips, tractors, and meadows and them things just by going to school and reading books? What do you think of it, Teddy?"

"Why," answered the hopeless idiot, "I've never given much thought to the subject. I've always thought that the city and the farm were both necessary. We buy the wheat and cotton from the farmers, and they buy their machinery and clothes from us. I'm a city man by heritage, I guess. Both my parents were born in Philadelphia. So was I."

"Nothing to brag about!" I yelped at him, praying that he could read my mind. "You can lead a jackass to the road," I told myself, "but you can't make him follow it." I frowned at the imbecile, and then went on as follows: "You forget that the greatest men in the world—Luther Burbank, Sergeant York, Christopher Columbus, and others—were born on farms. There ain't nothing as good as agriculture for making a man."

Thus ran the conversation, but Teddy simply couldn't catch the cue. Whenever he got an opening he brought in the romance of modern commercialism, the batting averages of the American League players, and his views about Federal taxes. We didn't leave until about twelve o'clock, just as I was on the verge of exploding from suppressed goat getting. As soon as we were out of hearing distance I grabbed the lovesick idiot by the shoulders and shook him until he got a trifle indignant.

"Teddy," was my verdict, "when they dished out brains in St. Louis you must have been in Philadelphia. In my day I've seen some helpless, senseless, empty-headed, batty, insane, hopeless animals shaped like human beings, but you hold the title to the world's championship."

"How's that? Whaddaya mean?"

Can you beat it?

"Helluver lot!" I jabbed. "Why, you one hundred per cent numbskull, it took me only five minutes to read that girl like a book, to find out what appeals to her. I found the key to her heart while you were flying way up in the air. Her pet hobby!"

"What's it?" Teddy demanded, showing sudden interest. "You must be a wizard, Bob."

"If you want to get her interested," I divulged, "from this time on, you're a rube, a hayseed, a poet. You're a lover of nature, a son of the soil."

"What's the game?"

I just helplessly shook my fists into the air and spluttered before I could talk.

"Ain't you got a fragment of sense?" I demanded. "Didn't you hear me perjure myself, and didn't you see how that girl swallowed all the bunk I handed out about the country, and about farm life and all that rot? She's one of those numerous city folks that's never seen a farm and thinks it's the life. You've got to humor her, got to talk fondly and sympathetically about it, like I did, and you'll draw her to you as surely as your ads draw the crowds to the stores—when you write 'em right."

"But what do I know about farms and all that junk you were talking about?"

Teddy asked. "I can't tell a cow from a sheep, or a grain of corn from a pumpkin. I'm not sure you're on the right track, Bob."

"Confound your hide!" I yelled, and somebody opened a window to see what was going on. "I tell you the girl's dippy on those subjects, and you've got to humor her. That's how *Othello* won *Juliet*. Talk farm and rurality to her—chickens, cows, hay, fresh eggs, larks singing, bees humming, meadows, crops. And tell her how the last thing you did when you left St. Louis was to plant a garden in your back yard. Then pop the question, marry her, and forget all about it."

Teddy Rawls thought painfully for some three or four minutes, and then he surrendered.

"Maybe you're right," he officially announced, "but I doubt it. I'll try it, though. I'm no expert on girls, like you, but I don't think I'll get away with it. I hate farmers, and roosters, and bugs, and mules, and weeds, and I don't like to deceive Molly. I'm just naturally a city man, but I'd talk about astronomy, relativity, and certified public accounting if I thought it would win that queen. Isn't she some girl, though? I'll try your advice out, Bob."

"That's the stuff!" I exclaimed. "You've shown sense at last. But it 'll win the girl for you if anything will. And in the mean time, get back, and *stay* back in advertising form. You'll please bear in mind that's what I've taken all this infernal trouble for."

Believe me, it did me good to know that I had prevented a good man from going to the dogs, and to know that Teddy's punch and pep was saved, and that the Bolton Sales Company could continue to draw the big crowds. Could you blame me for being proud of the way I solved Teddy Rawls's problem?

III.

THE very next evening Teddy trotted out to try the new weapon. He bought a tremendous box of candy, a book of pastoral poems, and sallied forth. I started to stay awake to learn how he had fared and all the details of the victory, but one o'clock being as late as I cared to dissipate, I retired without seeing the peasant any more that night.

The next morning I woke up twice; once when the hotel clerk called me at seven o'clock, and again when I read our advertisement in the morning paper.

Talk about punk advertising—wow! Teddy's latest simply nauseated, stunned me, gave me a chill and fever. A dead Chinaman could have written a better one. It was weak, flat, stale, a rehash of all the old arguments the public had rejected ten years ago.

I paced up and down the room, my temper rising about five degrees a second. I was just framing up the kind of raking I'd give Teddy when the idiot pounced in on me, all smiles, and started shooting off his mouth before I could say a word. Then he lamped the look on my face.

"I know this ad is punk and all that," he told me in a hurry, "but honest, Bob, it won't happen again. It was just the worrying about Molly, but Bob, old boy, congratulate me!" He smiled from ear to ear, and added: "Your plan worked beautifully, Bob. We're engaged!"

"What!"

"Absolutely!" Teddy said. "I started talking about all that sort of farm stuff last night, and first thing you know we were just as friendly as if we had known each other for years. You're a wizard, Bob. You put me on the right track. The wedding takes place in two months. Ain't it great, old scout?"

"Oh, I knew I'd fix it up for you," I admitted. "And now I hope you'll be sane once more. I don't want any more ads like this infernal mess here."

"No danger of that," Teddy said. "It won't happen again. In fact, Bob, I'm giving up my job. I resign."

"What!" I yelled, in horror. "You resign?"

"Can't help it, Bob," was Teddy's answer. "You see, Molly promised to marry me only on condition that we settle down in the country, and buy a farm. She's wanted to do that all her life."

The Super-Swing

Exploits of the Shadowers Inc.

Part IV

by David Fox

Author of "The Man Who Convicted Himself."

WHAT HAS ALREADY HAPPENED

THE Shadowers, Inc., an association of seven crooks who are specialists in as many kinds of crime, have organized a discreet detective agency. Robert Frost, butler to Phineas Sneed, a wealthy recluse, presents his master's card and asks them to call upon the latter to investigate a threatening anonymous letter. They find Sneed reluctant to help them beyond giving them the letter. He is unwilling to allow them to examine a safe which he claims to have invented and which he admits has been tampered with. He also refuses to give them any information concerning the mechanic who installed the safe and who has since supposedly died.

Phil Howe, the Shadowers' safe expert, takes charge of the case. He turns the anonymous letter over to the handwriting expert, who believes it was written by an old man at the insistence of a younger. He deduces from evidence in the letter that the old man is English and the younger American. On the envelope Phil discovers the numerals—"o-4-2-6," which he recognizes. He then has one of the Shadowers establish himself in Coney Island to search for two old troupers, man and wife. At the same time Phil discovers that a man who has taken the office next door is attempting to spy upon them. Rex Powell, head of the Shadowers, moving among former friends of high social position, learns that a young man named Raeburn is enormously interested in Mr. Sneed and also in the activities of the Shadowers. He further discovers that Sneed has recently visited a certain sanitarium for the hopelessly insane. At dinner he sees Sneed dining with another Shadower, Lucian Baynes.

Through his assistants Phil tries to locate an ex-convict called the Gull. He does not find his man, but he learns that his prison number was "0426," that he was loved by the daughter of Jim Peterson, that he was a skilful mechanic and had invented a device called the Super-swing, which is strangely similar to Sneed's private safe, and that he was railroaded to jail by the false charges of a corporation lawyer who is now Sneed's personal counsel. Phil has just learned this when a telephone call from Lucian Baynes, who is stopping at Sneed's hotel, informs him that something has happened in the latter's apartment and that complete details will follow.

CHAPTER XI.

PHINEAS SNEED COMES ACROSS.

"FIRST I had better tell you that hunting a needle in a haystack would be a sinecure to picking out the writer of that anonymous letter from among the people, guests and employees, who have either been at the hotel longer than Sneed himself, or were there five years ago and have returned lately," Lucian Baynes declared.

It was early the next morning, and he had arrived at the office fresh and immaculate to the point of fastidiousness, to find that the other five Shadowers, worn and weary from a conference which had lasted until the dawn, had preceded him. Even

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for October 29.

Ethel had yawned as widely as her small, red mouth would permit as she greeted him, for the others had forgotten her in the heat of their discussion until, the protracted session at length adjourned, they had filed out to discover her still at her post, but asleep with her golden head pillowed on her desk.

"You have the lists of those who have actually been at the Burlingame as long as Sneed, though, haven't you?" Phil asked.

"Here they are. As you can see, they take in the majority of both guests and employees. All of them have access to the hotel stationery, and any one of them, given a motive, could have written that letter. But about last night." Luce settled back in his chair. "The first I knew that anything unusual was going on in our client's apartments was when Albert came for my dinner tray and the old chap was muttering to himself and so agitated that he could scarcely gather the dishes together. I asked him what was wrong, and although he was reluctant to tell me at first, saying it was a rule of the house that the employees must not gossip about the guests, he finally admitted that Mr. Sneed had 'had a sort of fit.' I told him to bring me some fresh coffee—which gave me a chance to telephone to you—and when he returned with it I offered him a bracer from my flask. That loosened his tongue a bit, and I managed to gather that there had been rather a scene when he served Sneed's dinner.

"Our client had been in a towering rage about something when he appeared with the tray, and old Robert had seemed half dead from fear of him, while even Jane was pale and 'all of a tremble.' It was she who admitted Albert to the apartment, and Sneed turned on him as soon as he saw him, with some wild sort of accusations which the waiter couldn't make head nor tail of, to use his own expression. In the midst of a violent tirade Sneed had fallen back into a chair, frothing at the mouth, and seeing that Robert was useless Albert had started down-stairs to report the matter to the management so that a physician could be called in, but Jane had stopped and told him that if he said anything about it to any one it would mean his own dismissal from service.

"It was plain that the poor old chap didn't know what he ought to do, but I told him that from what he had said Jane seemed able to cope with the situation and he had best leave it in her hands."

"Is that all?" Phil demanded in obvious disappointment.

"All for last night, and I didn't think it advisable to call attention to myself by offering my services, even though Sneed had dined with me the night before. This morning—not an hour ago, in fact—when Albert brought my coffee, he was his usual calm, punctilious self again, but he seemed embarrassed, and on my asking about Sneed he assured me that the old gentleman was quite recovered and had given him the largest tip he had ever received from him. Sneed had questioned him pretty sharply, however, as to whether he had mentioned his seizure the night before to any one or not, and Albert besought me respectfully, but with evident anxiety, to repeat nothing of what he had told me, saying that it was as much as his place there was worth.

"Of course, I reassured the poor old fellow and let him go, but when the chambermaid came a few minutes later I could see that she was all excitement about something. She is middle-aged, Irish, and voluble, and it took merely a question or two on my part to set her going. One of the private maids employed by a guest in the hotel had disappeared during the night. Inquiries had been made for her through the office, but no one had seen her, and it wasn't known when nor how she left. She was a respectable married woman, not over-young, and one that kept herself to herself; but her going like that, without a word to any one, had caused a lot of talk among the help employed by the hotel."

Luce paused and added: "I see you've guessed it; it was Jane."

"Gone during the night," Rex repeated meditatively. "From my brief observation of her on Saturday, I should not have fancied her the type to run away from anything, and it is evident from the waiter's

story that she was the only one of that ill-assorted trio last night to keep a level head, whatever the situation was which had arisen. Could Sneed have sent her somewhere to get her out of the way for a time?"

"Isn't it rather more likely that he dismissed her in temper?" George suggested. "Aren't we making too much of this possibly trifling domestic scene?"

Cliff opened his lips to voice an opinion, and Henry hitched forward in his chair when all at once the buzzer sounded softly but insistently, and with a warning glance about at the others Rex touched the spring concealed beneath the edge of the table at his place. Instantly Ethel's clear tones came to them raised in brisk inquiry: "What is your name, please? I'll see if the head of the firm is—"

"Confound the girl!" Sneed's unmistakable, high-pitched voice exclaimed irascibly. "I want to see Powell at once! What does my name matter?"

"Nothing to me, I am sure, sir!" It was evident that Ethel's nerves were a trifle on edge that morning, though her tone was sweetly deferential. "I have instructions not to announce any one unless the name is given, so if you don't care to do that—"

"I'm Mr. Sneed—Phineas D. Sneed! And I warn you, young woman, that I shall report you for insolence."

"Yes, sir." Ethel still spoke quietly, but she clipped her words with a certain precision which made Henry chuckle audibly. A moment later the telephone rang, and she announced through that medium: "Mr. Phineas D. Sneed would like very much to speak to Mr. Powell if he is disengaged."

"Show Mr. Sneed in, Ethel," Rex responded and turned quickly to the rest. "Luce, you and Henry go into your own rooms and listen in from there. He needn't know you as one of us yet, and he has never seen Henry."

Lucian obeyed, and Henry had barely squeezed himself through the aperture leading to his laboratory when the other panel opened, and Ethel, with her head held high and a bright little spot of color in either cheek, ushered in the wizen, almost ridiculously dapper form of their fuming client.

"Good morning, gentlemen." He glanced half suspiciously about him with his small, feverishly glittering eyes, and then, placing his hat and stick upon the table, he accepted the chair which Rex drew forward. "I would have sent for you to come to me, but the matter is one that I prefer to discuss outside the hotel."

If Phil had thought him looking badly when he had called upon their client on Sunday afternoon, the change was now startlingly obvious. His pallid face was waxen, and a bluish tinge had settled about the thin lips, while between sentences he caught his breath sharply. On their first interview he had appeared more aged than his years, due seemingly to his foppish attempts to create an opposite impression, but now it was almost as though an animated mummy had thrust itself upon them, bringing with it a chill as of the tomb. An uncanny sense of repulsion seized upon them, but Rex replied in even tones:

"You have news for us, Mr. Sneed? Or is it that you have come to tell us something which you forgot to mention on Saturday when you promised to be utterly frank with us?"

Sneed started slightly and his deeply sunken eyes fastened themselves upon his interrogator.

"I am here, sir, because it has become vitally necessary for me to disclose certain facts which I withheld at my own discretion during our first interview. I placed the anonymous letter which I had received into your hands and commissioned you only to find the author of it and turn him over to me, giving you all the information possible without baring a most painful matter that I have been at great odds to keep secret for years.

"I admit my mistake. I should have seen the writing on the wall, for now the letter has faded into insignificance beside a greater trouble which has descended upon me. Gentlemen, when I told you that I did not know who wrote that letter, I spoke the truth, for the writing itself is utterly unfamiliar to me; but I do know at whose

instance it was written, and to what it refers."

"You ought to!" Phil blazed out, unable to control himself longer. "It was through you that he was railroaded, wasn't it?"

"Railroaded?" Sneed lifted his eyebrows and his boring glance shifted. "The scoundrel went of his own free will where opportunity offered, and I have no reason to deny that the opportunity was placed his way through my instrumentality. But I see that you know more than I had thought. Have you found the fellow? Have you?"

His thin, reedy voice rose almost to a scream, and he tottered to his feet, but Rex interposed.

"We have not, Mr. Sneed, and I would suggest that you calm yourself and give us those facts which you withheld from us at the start." He added sternly: "*All* the facts, if you please, or here and now we will wash our hands of the case."

"You—you couldn't do that, Mr. Powell!" Sneed sank back in his chair, and his tones took on a pleading whine. "You cannot desert me now in my extremity. I will make a clean breast of everything, but you can understand my former reticence when you realize how I have striven to keep my secret, the self-imposed exile in which I have lived for these past five years in order that I might guard it—years that can ill be spared from life when a man reaches my age! You will respect the feelings of a—a father!"

His chin sank upon his breast, and Phil uttered a startled exclamation as he stared from Cliff to Rex, but George was gazing fixedly at their visitor.

"We were unaware that you had any children, Mr. Sneed," Rex remarked at last.

"So is the world." The old man's voice was a mere whisper. "I have a daughter, however—unhappy child! You noticed the peculiar arrangement of my rooms, and no doubt inferred that I had the apartment so built through an exaggerated fear lest some one would break in and rob me; it did not occur to you that it might be to prevent the escape of a maniac who, although she might at any moment become dangerously violent, was still dear to me, and who I would not place under restraint in an institution while there remained a spark of hope that her reason could be restored."

"Great Scott!" Phil ejaculated, and then catching himself up he added slowly: "But you've given your daughter's case up as hopeless just lately, haven't you, Mr. Sneed?"

"I have, sir, but unfortunately I did not act quickly enough. Last night she escaped from my apartment."

"Escaped? Alone? Unaided?" Rex demanded sharply. "Your two servants formed a sort of body-guard for her, did they not? How did she manage to elude them, and who could have aided her? If you have kept her sequestered for five years—"

"The scoundrel who caused that letter to be written!" Sneed's voice broke in shrilly upon him. Then he clenched his hands until the gloves strained over his gaunt knuckles, and went on more calmly: "Eva—my daughter—has been at schools abroad, first Switzerland, then England, since my wife died years ago. Her mind became affected when she was about seventeen, and she has been subject to recurring periods of dementia ever since, but in those early days they were so mild in form that they would have passed for mere moodiness.

"She was permitted during a brief vacation to visit at the home of a school friend, and there she met and became infatuated with the man of whom I speak. He is an adventurer, a thoroughgoing blackguard, and he had doubtless learned that my daughter would come into a large fortune some day. He had the effrontery to write to me and ask for my daughter in marriage, and I hurried to England, investigated, and broke up the affair."

"Just a minute, Mr. Sneed." George spoke in a soothing, sympathetic tone. "When did this occur?"

"Five years and a half ago, when Eva was nineteen. It was immediately afterward that her dementia assumed an active form, and I was obliged to place her in a

nursing home, a sort of private hospital, until I could return and make arrangements for her personal care over here.

"It was then that I leased the entire top floor of the Burlingame, where I had already been residing for some years, and had it built over to suit my new requirements. I was sure that Robert and Jane would be faithful to me. I went back to England and brought my unfortunate daughter home. But we are wasting time, gentlemen! All this can be explained afterward."

"We must know everything before we can begin to search for your daughter," Rex announced firmly. "You say that you broke up the affair between her and this man?"

"I took her away, and then arranged that a position be offered him which would take him out of England. A year or two later I learned in a roundabout way of his death, but with the tenacity of the insane Eva would never believe it and clung to her infatuation."

Sneed paused, and then his agitation mounted once more as he exclaimed: "Until that letter came I did not know that he was still alive! He must have managed in some way to communicate with her, and in her distraught condition she has run away to join him! *She* was the 'treasure' to which he referred in that letter, and he would marry her in spite of her mental condition simply to acquire control of her inheritance from me. Think how such a character would treat an insane wife, and you will realize that no time must be lost in restoring her to me!"

"What is she like? Have you a comparatively recent photograph of her?" asked Rex.

"None since she was a very young girl. She is of medium height and slender, with brown hair, blue eyes, and a clear, pallid complexion. There is nothing distinctive about her except perhaps a certain vacuity of expression due to her mental disease, and in her lucid intervals she appears normal in every way, with a gentle, retiring manner."

"And in the recurring periods of dementia?" Rex continued his interrogation while the others listened. "Are there any preceding symptoms to denote when an attack is coming on? What form does this dementia take?"

"There are no premonitory symptoms. Eva may be calm and rational at one moment and the next wildly hysterical, the dementia taking the familiar form of distrust and fear, with delusions of horrible shapes about her, and she struggles in terror with creatures born only of her poor, crazed brain.

"It is sometimes necessary to restrain her lest she do herself harm, and Jane is strong and capable, but always gentle and patient with her. These attacks have been recurring more and more frequently of late, the hallucinations taking a wilder and more dangerous form—dangerous to herself and others."

Sneed paused and then, turning abruptly to Phil, he asked: "How did you know that I had given my daughter's case up as hopeless?"

"Where did you go a week ago last Sunday, Mr. Sneed?" Phil countered with unexpected finesse. "It was at the time when you thought an attempt was made to rob your safe, do you remember? You told us that you had motored out of town to look at some property."

Sneed's lips curled back over his suspiciously white, even teeth, and he clawed at the arms of his chair.

"So you have been prying into my affairs! I thought as much when you called on me and were so insistent about learning where I had gone." His voice cracked. "You were not engaged to investigate *me*, but the author of that letter. What have you done to find him? At this very instant my daughter may be in his hands. If you must know, I went to make arrangements for her care at a private sanatorium in the country, but you seem to have already ferreted that out. We are wasting time in mere quibbling."

"Then suppose you give us the exact details of what happened last night?" Rex put in, adding suavely: "When did you first learn of your daughter's escape, and how long afterward did Jane, too, disappear?"

"You know that?" Sneed seemed for a moment to shrink visibly before their eyes. "There is some one in the hotel spying upon my household?"

"There is some one in the hotel also who is connected with the author of that anonymous letter, Mr. Sneed, for it was written upon the stationery supplied by the management of the Burlingame," retorted Rex.

"Can it be possible?" gasped the old man. "You are sure of this?"

"We have proved it, and it is a part of our duty to protect our clients," Rex returned coldly. "You have not answered my questions, Mr. Sneed."

"About my daughter's escape?" He passed his hand over his veined forehead as though striving to collect his thoughts, but it appeared to George's watchful gaze that beneath that screening gesture his eyes darted from face to face in keen questioning. "You know that the rooms of my apartment are built on four sides of a square, roofless court, and I told you it was for the purpose of ventilation, but in reality that court is a sort of patio or garden for my daughter's use, that in her sane moments she might have air and exercise. Since her last—and worst—attack of dementia two weeks ago she has been more tractable and seemingly normal than for some time past, and she spent nearly all of yesterday afternoon out on her roof-garden.

"Jane took tea to her there at about five o'clock, and when she went to remove the tray Eva was apparently asleep in her chair. As chronic insomnia is one of the afflictions incident to her condition, Jane forbore to awaken her until dinner-time, and when she went again to the garden my daughter had vanished. A minutely thorough search of the apartment failed to reveal her, and the door of the reception-room as well as that at the foot of the stairs in my private hall, which is the only means of communication with the lower part of the hotel, had neither of them been tampered with.

"Gentlemen, I have nothing left to conceal now, and my only desire is to give you any assistance that lies in my power to further your search. My daughter's disappearance and the manner of it are an absolute mystery to me!"

"You were at home?"

"I have not left my apartments since Sunday evening, when I returned from dining with an acquaintance, until I came to you an hour ago."

George coughed slightly and Rex exchanged glances with him, and then leaned back in his chair.

"Mr. Sneed, did you yourself see your daughter out in the roof-garden yesterday afternoon?" George took up the inquiry.

"No. There are only two doors leading to it, one from the kitchen in the left wall and the other in the north wall, from the servants' sitting-room. Eva's own bedroom is just back of the library, where I took you to see my safe, and in order to reach the roof-garden she had to pass through her dressing-room, which immediately adjoins the kitchen. Do I make myself clear?"

"Perfectly; but we will have to see the apartment and the arrangement of the rooms for ourselves before we can undertake our search," George replied. "When did you see your daughter last?"

Sneed hesitated for a fraction of a minute, and then spoke hurriedly as though to cover the momentary pause.

"On Sunday morning. I omitted my usual daily visit with her yesterday because I had feared my presence might excite her and bring on another attack of her trouble, for on Sunday she had been insistent that I permit her to take a drive, a request which I was, of course, compelled to refuse. I heard her voice, though, out in the garden when Jane took the tea-tray to her. I had followed Robert from my own private apartment into the servants' sitting-room for a moment to give him some trivial instructions. But surely you cannot suspect that Jane—"

"She, too, left later without her husband's ostensible knowledge or yours, did she not, Mr. Sneed?" interrupted George.

"She was not in her room this morning and discreet inquiries about the hotel failed to find any one who had seen her," the old man admitted. "Personally, it is my firm

belief that she has gone to search for my daughter, perhaps on some clue which Eva may have let fall in a moment of delirium. Jane reproached herself bitterly last night for negligence, but she was in no way to blame for my daughter's escape."

"Did any one enter or leave your apartment from five o'clock until your daughter's disappearance was discovered?"

"No one to my knowledge." Again there came that odd hesitation in Sneed's voice. "Do not forget, though, that my safe was tampered with in broad daylight only a little over a week ago. That has nothing to do with this affair, as I assured you, and I was uneasy about it merely because it showed that the defenses with which I had surrounded my daughter were not as impregnable as I had thought. If any one could enter and leave my apartment unmolested and unseen I feared that Eva, with the cunning of the insane, might some time contrive to run away."

"I wonder, then, that you did not caution your servants to keep a more careful watch over her," George remarked.

"You forget that Eva has been so well lately. I did not dream that in a lucid moment she would attempt to escape from my care, nor that this man or any agents of his could reach her even if he knew where she was; remember, I thought until that letter came on Saturday that he was dead." Sneed rose. "Gentlemen, I can tell you anything more that you wish to know while I am showing you over the apartment, and if you must see it before you begin your search, in Heaven's name, let us lose no more time!"

"Mr. Sneed is right," Rex remarked, raising his voice a trifle that the unseen listeners might take their cue. "We will all four of us accompany him now and you can decide later, Phil, what part each of us shall assume in the search."

George, Cliff, and Phil preceded him with their client and he delayed for a moment to leave a few instructions with Ethel for Henry and Lucian, so it happened that the others had already reached the elevator when he emerged into the main corridor. The door in the opposite office was ajar and its occupant stood on the threshold gazing after the quartet so intently that he did not observe Rex, nor note the curiously inquiring glance which rested for an instant upon himself. His eyes seemed fastened upon George's unconscious back with an expression of such utter ferocity mingled with pain as a man might wear who had plumbed the nethermost depths, and Rex paused. At that moment the young man wheeled and met his gaze, then retreated hastily and the office door was closed in his face.

CHAPTER XII.

THE MAN IN THE CASE.

ON reaching the Burlingame Sneed conducted the four Shadowers up to his own apartments, admitting them with his keys, and they caught no glimpse of Robert as they passed to the right of the reception-room through their client's bed and dressing rooms to the comfortable sitting-room he had provided for the servants.

There they came upon the old man seated with his head in his hands and, although he rose with instant respect at their entrance, he regarded them with lack-luster eyes which seemed to hold no sign of recognition in their apathetic gaze. His bald head nodded more tremulously than ever and his bent, palsied form shook so that he appeared scarcely able to stand.

"Has Jane returned, Robert?" Sneed demanded.

"No, sir. There's been—nothing, sir. No word." His voice had sunk to a hoarse whisper and he spoke in little gasps.

Without a second question Sneed opened a door in the south side of the wall and led the way out into the brilliant sunshine of the quadrangle. It was paved with concrete, but masses of flowering plants in boxes and tubs stood all about, their groupings intersected with little winding, sanded paths in a passable imitation of a garden. A pergola was built out from the farther side and beneath it a low wicker chair and tea-table, the former heaped with gay-colored cushions, gave a feminine touch to the scene.

"I endeavored to omit nothing for my

poor daughter's comfort during her brief periods of sanity." Sneed's high, thin tones took on an almost tearful note. "I would have purchased a dog or cat as a pet for her, but I feared that in some sudden moment of violence she might attempt to strangle it and it would turn and injure her."

"Isn't that an empty bird-cage hanging over the tea-table?" asked Cliff, who stood nearest to him.

Sneed nodded.

"It contained a Hartz Mountain canary, a rare songster, and I thought it might cheer her up, but she opened the door and set it free, and Jane found it dead in the path; it had dashed its life out against the walls."

Rex, who had been talking in an undertone to Phil just behind them, came up in time to hear the last sentence and he glanced up at the walls. They were at least fifteen feet high and of a somber brick which the thick vines trained against it tried vainly to conceal. Nothing showed above but the square of blue sky and none of the windows of the taller buildings which surrounded the Burlingame could look down into it.

"We will hope that your daughter will not meet the same fate as her bird," he observed gravely.

Sneed darted a quick glance at him, but before he could speak Phil broke in.

"Does that door lead to the kitchen?" He was pointing to a small door in the center of the east wall, and Sneed started toward it.

"Yes. My daughter's rooms open from it to the south, and Jane's and Robert's to the north. But where is Mr. Roper?"

As if in answer to the question George appeared at that moment in the doorway leading to the servants' sitting-room, and Rex remarked:

"He probably lingered for a moment to talk to Robert. Since your daughter's apartment has already been thoroughly searched we will only glance superficially about it and then proceed to business. I personally shall want a further talk with you, Mr. Sneed, before we take any active steps."

Sneed glanced quickly at him once more, but made no comment as he opened the door and ushered them into the kitchen. It was a spacious room with a skylight, but no windows, and Rex noted that the door to the left, leading into the servants' sleeping quarters, was heavily bolted and padlocked. Their client followed his gaze.

"We found it necessary that that door should be made capable of being securely fastened on both sides, for once in a violent spell Eva managed to escape from Jane and ran almost around the hollow square formed by the conecting rooms," he explained. "There are similar bolts on the door leading from the sitting-room to the quadrangle—"

"I thought you told us that the only means of communication with the rest of the hotel was that door at the foot of the stairs in your private hall, Mr. Sneed!" Phil turned suddenly. "Isn't that a dumbwaiter in the corner over there?"

As he spoke he gestured toward the corner just to the right of the door by which they had entered. A square casing of woodwork jutted out into the room, with the familiar small door cut into it waist-high.

"Oh, that only goes to the floor below," Sneed replied. "The waiter brings my trays up from the restaurant in the elevator, and then hoists them up the extra flight on this, coming up himself by way of my private stairs after Robert has admitted him, to serve me. It opens into a sort of pantry on the floor below, which in turn adjoins the linen-room. The door is so small that I doubt if my daughter could have squeezed through it, slender as she is, and she certainly would not have been able to lower herself in the dumbwaiter, but I had already thought of that as a possible means of communication and guarded against it. If you will look closely at the handle you will see a small lock in it and the key to it never leaves Jane's person. She unlocks it when the trays come up and relocks it after Robert has removed them. It is only in his occasional absence that a hotel waiter ever enters my apartment."

Phil examined the lock, and then with a shrug he followed the others, who had passed into the boudoir adjoining. A sparklingly

white bathroom opened from it to the left, at the eastern side of the building, and a spacious, triangular clothes-closet cut off the corner obliquely to the right, while directly facing them through a doorway in the opposite wall appeared the outlines of a gracefully carved white-and-gold bed.

Sneed himself opened the closet door, displaying quantities of filmy tea-gowns and negligée garments suspended by hangers from a center pole, and rows of small satin slippers on shelves. A delicate perfume stole out upon the air and a feeling of intrusion caused Rex and Cliff to stand aside, but Phil was attracted by no such refinement of sensibility. He swept the silky garments away until he had bared the two sides of the triangle which met in a point at the rear, but there would not have been space even for a child to conceal itself, and he retreated, closing the door.

"Are those all the clothes your daughter had?" he demanded. "What if there had been a fire?"

"That emergency was provided for from the first," Sneed replied jerkily, his fingers toying with the black ribbon suspended from his gold-rimmed pince-nez as though they could never remain still. "Jane has a long, dark cloak and a heavily veiled motor hat, together with a pair of heavy shoes put away in her closet for my daughter's use should it be necessary to remove her without warning, but that occasion has never arisen. Eva has required no other attire than that which you have seen, and I spared no expense to please her in her lucid intervals with the pretty things which all girls like. This is her bedroom, and beyond it is a narrow storeroom, the windows in the farther wall of which face the side street, as do those of the library, for we are now at the southeastern corner of the building."

"Do you mean that the library is just back of that wall there?" They, together with George, who had followed them, had passed into the bedroom, and Phil pointed to the left. "Then the triangular space in which your safe is built must meet one side of that three-cornered clothes-closet in there."

"It does, I believe, and this fireplace is back to back with the one in the library, only there I burn real logs, and these are for gas, with a stop-cock which Eva could not turn." Sneed swept the room with a nervous gesture. "I tried to make it all as attractive and luxurious as I could for her in her sad affliction, and I think you will admit, gentlemen, that nowhere is there a suggestion of—er—restraint."

The bedroom and boudoir were windowless, but provided, as had been the kitchen, with huge skylights in the ceiling, and dainty lamps stood all about. The furnishings were simple but charming, and the soft blues and pinks of the upholstery and draperies lent a cheerful, girlish note. It was as he had said: nowhere was there a hint that for five years this invitingly appointed apartment had been used as a forcible retreat for one of unsound mind.

They retraced their steps to the kitchen, and after a glance into the sleeping quarters of Jane and Robert, proceeded on around the square to the reception-room once more. From there Sneed led the way through his huge living-room into the library and sank into a chair, gesturing toward others which stood about. His waxen pallor had taken on a grayish hue and the shriveled features and wizen body appeared more mummy-like than ever.

"You see, it is as inexplicable as I told you!" he exclaimed. "There *is* no way in which my daughter could have escaped or been abducted, yet she is gone! I realize the almost insurmountable difficulties before you, gentlemen, but you are my one hope! Eva must be restored to me, but the search for her must be conducted as secretly as possible; I cannot endure the thought of notoriety and scandal, the thought that after all the years of concealment it should be known that Phineas Dilworth Sneed was the father of an insane child!

"Of course, I am thinking first of her own safety and protection from the scoundrel of whom I told you, and you have seen with what care and affection I have surrounded her, but to have the sad truth come out now would be a crowning blow!"

"We'll come to that man in a minute, Mr. Sneed." Phil took the floor determinedly. "There are one or two other things I want to ask you about first. You said

a while back that the hotel waiter never entered your apartment when Robert was here to serve you, but he's been bringing your meals up pretty regularly lately when Robert was home, hasn't he? He did last night, anyway, and this morning—"

"You saw Robert a few minutes ago!" Sneed retorted. "Did you think he was in any state to wait upon me? He has been utterly useless since that letter came on Saturday, and frequently before that when his doddering ways got upon my nerves I have employed the services of the room waiters from down-stairs. He is getting very old, and if it had not been for his faithfulness and that of his wife in their care of my daughter I should have pensioned them off long ago."

"You had a little trouble with the waiter last night, didn't you?" Phil persisted.

"Trouble? Jane had only a few moments before reported to me the disappearance of my daughter and I was beside myself with grief and anxiety! Rage, too, for at once I thought of that letter and the wretch's threat to come and claim Eva, whom he had the effrontery to call 'his own'! I felt that he must have had a confederate in the hotel if he had managed to get word to her, and Albert—the waiter who has been serving me of late—is the only one of the staff who ever on any pretext whatever enters my apartment. I am afraid I uttered some accusations against him in my almost distraught state of mind, but of course he could not understand, and I regained control of myself before I betrayed the secret which I have guarded so carefully."

"You had inquiries made through the office about Jane, though, Mr. Sneed?"

"That was a different matter. I could not understand her departure without a word, nor convince myself that she had actually left the hotel until I had made sure. I acted hastily, but when I could collect my thoughts I realized that she must have gone herself to look for my daughter, and I am certain that she will either return or communicate with me in a day or two at most. What did Robert tell you, Mr. Roper?"

Sneed turned suddenly to George, and the latter eyed him steadily but blandly as he replied:

"Substantially the same as you have told us as far as your daughter's disappearance is concerned, Mr. Sneed, only he did not mention the idea of any man in the case, of course. In regard to Jane, he said that even after you had retired to your room they had talked until far into the night and he had fallen asleep, exhausted at last, believing that she, too, had gone to bed. She did not wake him as usual this morning, and he found that her bed had not been slept in, and her bag and some clothes were gone. She had left no word for him, and the shock, coming on top of the trouble about your daughter, seems to have prostrated him so that I could get no further details from him. He doesn't appear to have the least idea where his wife has gone, nor why. Personally, I think he is too crushed to realize the situation as yet."

He had spoken as much for the benefit of his associates as to satisfy their client's curiosity, and now Rex leaned forward in his chair.

"Mr. Sneed, you said that you had a photograph of your daughter taken when she was a very young girl. A glimpse of it will be of more value to us than any amount of description. Will you show it to us, please?"

"If you will excuse me." He bowed with old-fashioned courtesy, which had been lacking during their first interview, and left the room. They heard his footsteps crossing the reception hall, and then the sound of a closing door. After a moment of silence, Phil demanded in a subdued tone:

"What do you fellows think of all this, anyway?"

"I think that Mr. Sneed would very much like to know what we think of it, too!" George replied quickly. "He is sincere enough in wanting us to find the girl for him, and what details he has told us of her disappearance must be the truth as far as it goes, but whether it is the whole truth or not remains to be seen. There's one question in my mind, though: why does he keep remarking on his kindness to his daughter, and pointing out the things he has done for her comfort? What should

he care about our approval of his line of conduct for? Is he trying to acquit himself in advance of any accusation of harshness which she may bring against him when we find her? Why is he playing safe?"

"We're only hearing his side of the story now," Phil remarked. "I know one thing. I'm not going to mention the Gull or the lies Sneed has told us about that safe of his just yet, but before this case is finished I will sift that whole affair to the bottom."

"Hush!" warned Rex as the door in the distance was heard to reopen and the queer, mincing footsteps of their client approached. He entered and placed in Rex's hands a small photograph. It was only a mounted snapshot, faded and slightly light-struck, of a young girl in a field of golden-rod, with an old farmhouse and windmill behind her, and in the far background a hill with a curiously shaped rock formation jutting out from it. The girl was bare-headed and the delicate oval of her face upturned in the sun showed features that while not strictly beautiful, held nevertheless a subtly appealing charm. The hair rolled back in soft waves from a broad, high forehead, the nose was small and straight, and the parted, smiling lips above the pointed, cleft chin were exquisitely curved.

The eyes, however, held the attention above all else. Big and soft and rimmed with long, curling lashes they seemed to look straight into those of Rex with a world of meaning in their steady, compelling gaze, as though they bore a message, and he searched their depths in vain for any foreshadowing of the mental cloud which was to darken the coming years.

Passing the little photograph along to his associates, Rex observed:

"As you say, there is nothing particularly distinctive about your daughter's appearance, Mr. Sneed, or was not at the time that picture was taken. By the way, when was this?"

"Ten years ago when she was fifteen, on the occasion of her last visit to this country, before I was obliged to bring her home, a mental wreck. It was during her vacation when I had taken her from a school in Switzerland, and just before I entered her in one in England, and she spent it with an old nurse of hers—since dead—whom she loved devotedly."

"I think that with your permission we will take this with us to show to our alienist." Rex ignored the look of startled questioning from their client and added: "Now, Mr. Sneed, we should like to hear about the man in the case. He was an adventurer, you say, yet he must at least have been able to pass for a gentleman. Your daughter was young, unsophisticated, impressionable, but she does not look like the type of girl to have been attracted by any man obviously not of her own class."

"He was well-educated, if that is what you mean, and he managed to worm his way into good society on the other side," Sneed admitted reluctantly. "I suppose he would appear to be as much of a gentleman of the modern school as the average man one meets, and naturally he had assumed a certain charm of manner; that was his stock in trade."

"Beside desiring to marry your daughter for her money, as you say, what had he done which made him impossible as a son-in-law? Was he a swindler, a crook? Had he any standing in the business or professional world?" Rex pursued.

"He professed to be a mining engineer, and I never heard of his doing anything actually criminal, but he had been mixed up in the deals of more than one shady company and was a wanderer on the face of the globe, without a penny to bless himself with!" Sneed's voice was rising again to an irascible squeak. "He was broad-shouldered and square-jawed and swaggering—just the type to catch the romantic fancy of a mere chit of a girl! The scoundrel!"

"What was his nationality?"

"He claimed to be an American."

"Look here!" Phil had been growing more restive during the course of the interrogation, and now he broke in irrepressibly. "What is the man's name, Mr. Sneed?"

"Just a minute." Rex spoke quietly, but a sudden gleam had come into his eyes, which his associates knew. "Had you known this man before your daughter met him?"

"I—er—yes." Sneed stammered in surprise. "That is, I had met him casually in connection with the exploitation of some mining stock over here. But what made you think—"

"You once showed him your collection of weapons, or at least told him about them, didn't you?"

Sneed seemed to shrink yet more deeply into his chair and his small eyes narrowed to mere slits in his wrinkled face.

"I did, yes." His voice quavered. "I don't see how you knew it nor what bearing this has on the affair—"

"You will in a moment, Mr. Sneed. You tell us that you broke up the attachment between this man and your daughter, and arranged for him to be offered a proposition which would take him out of England. A year or two later you learned that he was supposed to have died. That news wasn't wholly unexpected, was it?"

"What do you mean?" The old man half rose from his chair and then fell back again.

"It wasn't exactly a healthy country that you sent him to, was it? The climate isn't particularly salubrious for white men, especially for those from temperate or cool countries."

"I didn't send him! He went of his own free will!" Sneed's tones rose to a thin scream. "Lots of young Englishmen go out there every year and mortgage their souls to get there, on a bare chance of fortune! But what do you know about it, sir?"

"The place where this alluring proposition was situated was Africa, was it not?" Rex paid no attention to the other's question, and the old man's staring eyes gave answer enough to his. He added slowly: "The man's name, Mr. Sneed, was Gerald Raeburn!"

CHAPTER XIII.

THE SECOND THREAT.

"AM I, or ain't I, supposed to have charge of this case?" Phil demanded in an aggrieved tone as the four, after taking leave of their almost collapsed client, were bowling back to the office in a taxi. "I didn't hold out on any of you guys when I got some dope in the last case, and here Rex has had this up his sleeve all the time!"

"I'm sorry, old man," Rex apologized. "It looks bad, I know, but I honestly haven't been holding out on you. I've heard a few things about this Raeburn during the last day or two, but I didn't connect him with the case until just now, when Sneed spoke of his daughter's admirer as being an adventurer and a mining engineer. I remembered then that another engineer—whom I met Saturday evening, and golfed and dined with on Sunday, while I was trying to dig up some information about Sneed's past—spoke of Raeburn, and of having met him in Africa a year or two ago. He liked him and said he was a thoroughbred, but that something must have hit him pretty hard, for he looked sometimes like a man who had been through hell."

"How did this Raeburn's name come up, anyway?" asked Cliff.

"Well, I had got the crowd to talking about Sneed—out at a country club, and there were several financiers present who had known the old man in his Wall Street days—and some one remarked that he hadn't even thought of Sneed for years, but this was the second time in a week he had heard his name mentioned, and the first time had been by Raeburn, who wanted to know if Sneed were still in the game. He went on to say that the only thing in life which interested Sneed besides money was a collection of weapons, and the chap who had met Raeburn in Africa spoke up, and said that Raeburn had known a man who had a similar collection. That was really all I had to go on when I hazarded that guess—"

"What is the matter?" George leaned forward and stared into his friend's face as Rex halted suddenly.

"Great Heavens! It couldn't be, and yet—" He spoke as if to himself, in a tone of mingled amazement and incredulity. "Broad-shouldered and square-jawed—like a movie Westerner, Ethel said—"

"Rex, if you don't come out of that trance and tell us what has hit you—"

Phil began in exasperation, but the other broke in.

"Raeburn's name didn't come up in that conversation just the way I said it did! I remember now! There was a man present to whom I had sent one of the circular announcements of the Shadowers, and he spoke of us; said he had shown the circular to 'young Raeburn,' and he had been enormously interested. Of course I kept discreetly silent, but can't you see what I'm driving at now? Young man, splendid physique, curious about us, has had some sort of a rotten deal or pretends that he has—"

"Holy cat!" Phil exclaimed. "The guy across the hall— Say, you're nearest; tell this fellow to drive like—oh, we're here!"

They piled out of the taxi, tossed a double fare to the chauffeur, and dived into the Bolingbroke building, but the elevator cages were empty, and as they stood waiting for a car to descend George moaned:

"If only I had had an inkling of this yesterday! I could have laid on that message from the stars so thick that he would have bolted straight for our office instead of his own. He couldn't have had a hand personally in abducting Sneed's daughter or helping her to escape, though, for he was here in his office at the time she disappeared. We're a fine lot of sleuths! Here the man we have been looking for was right under our noses all the time!"

"How do you know he was?" Cliff demanded. "He might have dictated that letter, but he didn't write it, and Phil's excitment about this person called the Gull set us all off in quite other directions."

"I don't care!" Phil declared doggedly. "You'll find before we're through that the Gull had a whole lot more to do with this case than you think now!"

The descent of the elevator put an end to the argument and they mounted to their own floor in a silence, which was pregnant with strained suspense.

Alighting, they waited until the elevator had disappeared from view and then made their way down the corridor to the still unlettered office opposite their own suite. To their surprise they saw that the door was slightly ajar, and when no sound came from within, Phil whispered to George:

"Go ahead and knock. You're the only one of us who has talked with him."

George rapped firmly, but no response came, and after a glance at the others he pushed the door open. Save for some blank papers littering the floor the office was empty.

"Stung!" Phil wailed while the rest stood speechless with astonishment and dismay. "First Red Peterson's girl and now this guy! He made a quick getaway in the last hour, furniture and all! You fellows go into our own place and wait for me; I'm going down to have a talk with the superintendent!"

He shot off toward the elevators, and the others, after a final glance around the empty office of their late neighbor, went slowly to their own.

"Did you notice that the man across the hall has gone?" Ethel greeted them as they entered. "I heard some bumping and banging going on out there and opened the door just in time to see a couple of men carting off his desk and chairs; that's all he had in there."

"We saw that the office was empty as we passed." Rex spoke with assumed carelessness, but after George and Cliff had joined the wildly impatient Luce and Henry in the council-room he lingered for a moment. "You didn't see the fellow himself, did you?"

"Sure, I did!" she affirmed. "He was standing in the doorway watching the second-hand men—"

"Gracious, child! How do you know they were?" Rex asked, amused in spite of the anxiety of the moment. "He might have been sending his stuff to storage—"

"Did you ever hear of a storage man giving you money to let him take your things away?" Ethel demanded imperturbably. "That's what the old gink with the whiskers did; gave the man who had the office a couple of bills off of a roll that would choke a tunnel, and then he and the other second-hand guy went away leaving the man still standing there. I felt awful sorry for him."

"Why?"

"I guess he must've failed before he started, whatever business it was he tried to horn in on, for he looked kind of sad and angry, too, like somebody had double-crossed him. He'd ought to have had some pal around to slap him on the back and tell him to buck up, but he sort of did that for himself after a minute or two. He stood turning his hat over and over in his hands and looking down at it, and then all at once he straightened and put his shoulders back and started off for the elevator without even stopping to shut the door behind him."

"Did he see you?"

"He didn't see anything except just what he was thinking about, but he wasn't walking in his sleep; he stepped out like he'd made up his mind and knew where he was going and what he was after." She shrugged and then asked with a change of tone, "Is that old grasshopper who was here and called me 'young woman' the guy we're working now?"

"Yes, Ethel," Rex responded gravely, although his eyes still twinkled. "We're handling his case now."

Her small chin was lifted ever so slightly.

"He said he was going to report me for insolence because I wouldn't send him in without getting his name first. Gee, it isn't such a pretty one, Mr. Powell, but that he can keep it to himself and welcome, for all of me! I hope you get him and get him good!"

With a nod and smile Rex slid the panel aside and entered the hexagonal inner office where he found Henry and Luce listening raptly to George's description of what had taken place during their visit to Sneed. Cliff sat a little apart studying the photograph of the missing girl.

"There doesn't appear to be any sign of insanity in that face, do you think?" Rex asked with a gesture toward the slip of cardboard. "Has Henry seen it?"

"You wouldn't expect even a real alienist to get anything from that snap-shot, would you?" Henry retorted. "It's clear, though, if it is faded and it will come in handy as a means of identification when we find the girl."

"I wasn't looking at her for the moment, but at the old house and the hill behind it." Cliff spoke absently. "Do you see that rock jutting out from it shaped like the head of an animal? There is something familiar about that view, and I fancy I must have seen it a long time ago. But I hear that you pulled off some big stuff, Rex, and doped out the name of the villain who has run off with Sneed's daughter!"

Rex commenced a modest disclaimer when the panel was thrust violently aside and Phil strode in, to fling himself into a chair.

"That guy across the hall called himself 'Raynor' and said he was a mining promoter," he announced. "He'd taken the office for a year, but this morning, just after we left he went out and came back with cash to pay the full term of his lease, and a couple of men in tow to take away the few sticks of furniture he had put in. He was pleasant spoken enough, but the superintendent wasn't sorry to see him go, for he thought it was funny that Raynor had no callers and made no move to have a phone installed; he was afraid he might try to run some fake scheme or con game. Raynor told him that he was suddenly called West again, but the superintendent thinks that his mining company, whatever it was, has failed."

"So does Ethel," Rex remarked. "If you think he is the man we are after, Phil, that makes three missing persons who we must find—Eva Sneed, Jane, and Raeburn."

Phil nodded.

"I didn't realize what I was wishing on myself when I asked you fellows to let me handle this case, but I'm not going to welch now. You made a pretty close guess the other day, Rex, when you said that if old Sneed kept a harem he couldn't guard it more carefully. It wasn't a harem, though, just one poor, loony girl! And, say, there's something else I can't get through my head; you told Jen Gillen down at Coney yesterday that the Gull called his invention the 'Super-swing.' How did you know?"

"You said so yourself, the minute you laid eyes on Sneed's safe! By the way, are you going to let that end of your research drop—those convict number, I mean, that were on the corner of the envelope?"

"Not by a long shot! The Gull or some one acting for him is mixed up in this affair, but the first thing is to find Raeburn and the girl." Phil shook his head. "I'm up a tree about that guy; unless he's on to our working for Sneed and is playing a part, his manner this morning certainly didn't show that he was as happy as he'd ought to be if he had got the girl and knew she was safe, but maybe he thought she was really sane and now she's gone suddenly cuckoo on his hands! His making a getaway this morning looks funny—"

"Not to me," George interrupted. "He wasn't watching us on account of our connection with the case, because he took that office before Sneed ever called us in and he'd heard of us, remember, through one of our circulars which a friend of his had received. It is my opinion that he meant to give us a stall and engage us on his own behalf to find Sneed's daughter for him."

"Then why did he go—"

"I can answer that, if George's hypothesis is correct," Rex interrupted. "When we left the office with Sneed this morning you two and Cliff walked ahead to the elevator and I followed behind. Raynor, as he called himself, stood in his doorway and I thought it was George at whom he was looking, but I see now that it must have been Sneed. He had the same expression on his face that my engineer friend probably saw there when he said he looked like a man who had been through hell. I think he was on the point of consulting us and then suddenly saw Sneed and realized that we were in his pay; that was why he lost no time in getting away."

"All right, Rex; then we'll lose no more time in finding him again!" Phil straightened in his chair with an air of decision. "I want you to get hold of that man who showed him the circular, and that engineer who knew Raeburn in Africa and get all the dope on him that you can, especially as to when he came back to New York, where he has been living and if he has an elderly English servant or buddy of some sort. Take Luce with you if you like; he can mix with those kind of highbrow guys that you know."

"I think I will," Rex replied slowly with a smile. "Luce already knows a friend of mine who may be useful to us. His great aunt introduced them; she had taken a great fancy to the solicitous Mr. Ballantyne."

"What the deuce—" Lucian stared.

"It was a little matter of a ruby cross which disappeared during a voyage on a trans-Atlantic liner," explained Rex blandly. "We'll settle the details of our campaign later. What are you going to do about the girl herself, Phil? How do you think she escaped from the Burlingame?"

"There was a guy sent up for pinching college dough when I was doing my first stretch who used to tell me about a nutty idea that he called 'the fourth dimension,'" Phil observed. "If there was any sense to the darned thing I'd say that was the only way Sneed's daughter could have beaten it. If a girl who's half dippy managed it we ought to be able to dope out how she worked it; I'll bet another woman could; they can always get on to each other's curves, somehow. Ethel's a little queen, but we couldn't very well plant her in the hotel as a guest the way we did Luce. She can be up-stage for a few minutes at a time, but somebody'd get her goat and she'd come back with a line of Third Avenue repartee and it would be all off. Besides, I want Henry to take a room there. He could pass for a Southerner who had heard of the Burlingame from one of the F. F. V.'s. Got a Southern accent, Henry?"

"Ah have, suh!" Henry responded with dignity. "I made a right long visit to Atlanta, Geo'giah once, though Ah saw ve'y little of that fair city, suh!"

"You'll do!" George grinned and then his face sobered as a fresh thought came to him. "Say, couldn't Henry have come North to have a little visit with his niece and take her to the Burlingame for a stay? She can play a brisk young business woman to the life."

Phil looked at Rex, who nodded.

"It might work," the former said slowly. "Let's call her in and put it up to her. She ought to be tickled to death at the chance to live at a swell hotel like that for a few days."

But Ethel was not at all enthusiastic at the prospect, for strictly personal reasons.

"I'd do anything to help your game along, whatever it is," she protested. "I was respectful to that horrid old man this morning because it's part of my job here in this office, but if he should lamp me in that hotel and give me any more of his lip—"

"He won't, Ethel!" Rex promised. "There's a young lady who is a—a sort of invalid missing from his apartment. No one in the hotel except his own servants knows that she was ever there and we want to find out, if possible, how she got out and who helped her. She's his daughter."

Ethel's eyes and mouth opened wide.

"Why didn't anybody know?" Her quick mind flew to the truth. "What's the matter with her? Is she a nut?"

"Just a little weak in the upper story, my dear," Henry explained. "If she should return and you run into her you needn't be afraid of her—"

"Huh! Four men couldn't handle my dad when he was on a regular jag and going strong, but I could make him eat out of my hand! I guess I'm not scared of any skirt, no matter how batty she is!" Ethel announced in fine scorn. It was the first time in their association that she had referred to her antecedents, but the Shadowers forbore to make her conscious of her revelation by glancing at each other. "I don't get on to this game any more than I did the other, but if you'll give me the dope on it and tell the old guy to lay off of me, I'll go right along with—with Uncle Henry."

Rex told her as many of the details as he thought prudent, coaching her in the part she was about to play, and added diplomatically:

"Phil—Mr. Howe—will get Sneed out of the way and give you an opportunity to examine Miss Sneed's room thoroughly and the little roof court or garden where she was last seen yesterday afternoon. If you can just put yourself in that girl's place and imagine that you were locked up there for a long time, during part of which you were consoious and realized everything while the rest was like a horrible dream—"

"I'd get out," Ethel interrupted briefly. "I'd beat it if I had to claw the walls down, and I guess what that girl did I can do, whether she had somebody to help her or not. Are we going there right now, Uncle Henry?"

"That's the stuff!" Phil chuckled. "I'll fix it for Sneed to come here this afternoon and his old man-servant will let you in his apartment. Get a room for Ethel as near the entrance to Sneed's private hall and stairway as you can, Henry, and then you hang around the lobby and smoking-room and mix in. We'll do the rest. George, did you get anything more out of old Robert than you told us there in front of Sneed himself?"

"Not very much, for he was too dazed from the shock of his wife's desertion. *He* hasn't any delusion that she has gone to search for the missing girl nor has he seemed to attempt to figure out where she may be. As a matter of fact, he didn't speak as though he thought she were coming back. It's easy to see that she has done the thinking for both of them all these years, and whatever emotion he showed because of her departure was not grief so much as downright fear." George tilted his chair back and gazed ruminatively at the ceiling. "The old fellow is scared to death about something, and he wouldn't talk of Sneed's daughter at all except to say that he had only acted under his employer's orders. The last he saw of the girl was when she passed through the kitchen on her way out to the roof-garden early in the afternoon. I'd like to have another chance to pump him about his wife—"

"That's what I want you to do," Phil interrupted. "Find out where she came from originally and who her relatives and friends are. Get as much of a line on her as you can and follow up any lead old Robert may choose to give you. When Sneed comes here this afternoon to interview Cliff—"

"What's that?" interrupted Cliff in his turn. "Am I to be left here to keep house while all the rest of you take a hand in the game, even Ethel? I haven't any excuse for interviewing the old chap, either."

He spoke in an aggrieved tone, but before Phil could reply the bell of the main telephone in the outer office rang, and Rex replied to it, for Ethel and Henry had taken their departure. When he returned to the others his face was very grave.

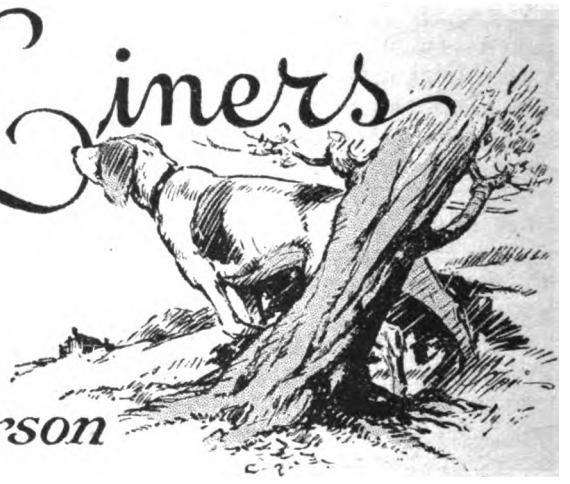
"That was Sneed himself on the wire, and you won't have to invent any excuse for interviewing him, Cliff. He has received another anonymous letter!"

"What!" Phil exclaimed. "Is it in the same handwriting? When was it mailed? Is he on his way here now?"

"No. I told him to come at two this afternoon, so as to give Henry and Ethel an opportunity to establish themselves," Rex replied to the last question first. "He says it is the same writing and on the same paper, but it wasn't mailed at all. Robert found it in the lower hall just now at the foot of the private staircase, and the ink was scarcely dry upon it!"

(To be continued NEXT WEEK.)

Top-Liners



by Rose Henderson

TED WESTON bowed to the perfunctory applause that greeted the close of his crack shooting act, scowled as soon as the curtain hid the audience, and strode off stage with the silent scorn of the artist whose highest achievements pass unappreciated. It was a sultry September afternoon, the second day of the Majestic's opening week. Weston's face was beaded with sweat which brought out high lights on the grease paint. He hugged his rifle in the crook of his elbow and ran down-stairs past a troupe of trained dogs who were waiting to go on as soon as their stage set was arranged.

Weston scowled again as he passed the dogs. He was billed below them, and the thought rankled. The humiliation was for more than the moment, too. By unhappy contrast it recalled the years when he was a popular top-liner. His act was fifty per cent better now than it had been then, yet he was slipping steadily downward. He threw off his trim hunting jacket and glared disgustedly at himself in the dressing-room mirror.

He was a handsome figure, slender and agile as a boy, though his hair was touched with gray. And he had the keen, alert face of the trained sportsman. Realizing the demand for novelty in the vaudeville game, he had added new and difficult features steadily. Yet the act failed to bring its old response. Imitators had taken some of his easiest stunts, given them a unique or spectacular setting, and captured the capricious public which had once thrilled to his simple, steady nerve and unerring skill.

There was Tim Badger, who appeared in cowboy costume, did fancy dances, twirled a lariat, and shot about half as well as Weston. There was Desideria, advertised as an Indian Princess from Oklahoma, with long braids of black hair and fringed skirt and leggings, who shot almost as well as Badger. And there was Angela Roe who

posed in flesh tights and did a little fancy shooting along with acrobatics.

"They want leg shows and colored lights and—trained dogs," muttered Weston. "Darn them dogs!"

He mused in the manner of a man who is much alone and has found himself congenial company. Indeed, Weston was about as solitary on the vaudeville circuit as he was at his Rocky Mountain shack where deer grazed within range of his rifle. He spent his summers at the shack, where he hunted, fished, and kept up his target practise. Yet he loved the stage as he loved the wild solitudes. He had come to it from early circus-riding days. But it had never had for him the comradeship of the circus.

Weston held himself aloof from the other players, as a rule. It was the audiences that gave him the companionship he required. Now he felt them growing cold, and the realization stung him cruelly. Half of his life, the warm, pulsing, human half, seemed to be slipping away. He could go back to his mountain hermitage, but it would be pallid and desolate in winter. He could never stand the continual silence and isolation. He wanted also the glow of lights, the sea of faces beyond, and the quick sympathy of applause. He loved the sense of bringing something from the green trails to the brick-bound cities.

Because he had restricted his life so narrowly to this one human contact he was staggered at the possibility of losing it. And he knew only too well that the moment he let this haunting fear possess his nerves he would lose the keen adjustment that made his performance possible. His eye must not fail him for a second or his hand waver a hair's breadth. He must know exactly what he could do. He must keep calm, poised, and eternally fit.

Weston gritted his teeth with fresh resolve as he mopped off the grease paint. Up-stairs the orchestra was stressing the trained dog tricks and the house roared at frequent intervals. Weston dressed in his street clothes and hurried out to his hotel. He wanted to escape from the theater as from a scene of defeat. He hated the quarreling acrobats in the dressing-room next his own. He hated the dogs leaping about, dancing, begging, kneeling at the gesture of their trainer. Some of them wore waiters' caps and aprons. Some of them were dressed like children. Three of them rode in a doll carriage which another pushed.

"Why can't they let a dog be a dog?" growled Weston.

In his hotel room he tried to read. He had a new book on woodcraft, his favorite hobby, and he had a mystery novel of the Northwest. He had bought both books the day before because he knew he should need diversion, but they failed to hold his attention. Somewhere in the back of his brain a sullen dread gnawed faintly, the dread of losing his nerve, of failing ever in the humble position in which he was now booked. And he loathed himself for the weakening fiber, for the doubt that threatened to sap his poise. He had felt the fear dimly for months, but he had tried to smother it, to laugh it away. This afternoon he had gone on with a grip of will that left him weak and exhausted at the end of his act. He stretched his hand out before him and detected a faint tremor at the finger-tips. With an effort he held it steady.

At dinner that evening he was unable to withdraw himself as he usually did from the chattering crowd around him. It seemed as if the players he knew who were seated about the dining-room stared at him with amusement or pity. It seemed that they must know of his failure and were anticipating his ultimate fall. A wave of bitterness and resentment swept him, a feeling vastly different from his habitual tolerance, his shy, kindly remoteness. He ate his food mechanically and then went for a walk through the strange streets, peering into shop windows, glancing furtively at the people he met. All at once he had grown tired of being alone, and yet he dreaded meeting the people he knew. It seemed they must read his secret fear and would emphasize it by their own distrust of him.

II.

WESTON made up early that evening and awaited his turn with the anxiety of an amateur. He kept picking up his rifle, swabbing off an imaginary speck, putting

it down again and pacing about the room. He heard the orchestra tuning up, caught the dull rumble and chatter of the filling house. The two acrobats jangled good-humoredly in the next room. It seemed a habit with them, this animated verbal combat, a relaxation, a harmless diversion. But it got on Weston's nerves.

He studied his watch and realized that he had half an hour before time to go on, and in sheer desperation went up-stairs to watch the bill open. One of the acrobats came along after him.

"Say, Bud, that's a bully act of yours," the man observed.

Weston eyed him suspiciously. "Yes, it is!" he grunted.

"Sure thing! I mean it, Bo. Best shootin' I ever see, and I know the nerve it takes to keep it up. Tried a little target work myself wunst, but I got scared after a while. Couldn't keep muh form."

Weston felt the flood of confidence which the man's first words had given him ebbing away as he brooded over the final confession.

"Yes, he—he got scared. Lost his form," he said to himself as he ran down-stairs again and began fumbling with his gun, looking at his watch and trying to keep his impatience in check.

Yet he walked on twenty minutes later with his old air of assurance. He did his most difficult feats with unwavering accuracy. Somehow his personality got the thing over, and the house came back enthusiastically. The question was how long he could keep it up.

Weston remained in the wings at the close of his act. He felt a thrill of triumph through the nervous weakness that shook him. And he felt again his new need of companionship. He watched the dogs in a snarl of waving tails off stage. Some of them enjoyed it. But others looked pathetically bored. And there was one, a fine English bird dog who obviously regarded the whole performance as an outrageous indignity.

One of the pointer's tasks was to trundle the doll carriage. Weston saw the shrinking of the slim, sensitive body as the toy was pushed up for the dog to take on. "Get up there, Bird," ordered the trainer. The dog put his forefeet on the handle-bar and toddled out grotesquely, a white cap over one ear, apron strings dangling, and the audience greeted his reluctant appearance with shouts of mirth. Clear around the stage went the little procession, three poodles riding, the pointer pushing, and the other dogs dancing along on their hind legs.

"Poor Bird, he don't like it," said Weston, as the doll carriage came off at last and the dog sat down to wait until he should be ordered out to say his prayers and help form the pyramid.

At the sound of Weston's voice the pointer looked up with such a human expression of gratitude and appeal that Weston was startled. Words could not have been more eloquent than that beseeching look.

"Naw, he's a piker," commented the trainer. "Works the worst of any of 'em. We gotta get rid of him."

Weston laid his hand on the dog's shoulder. Bird nosed the sympathetic fingers and started to follow Weston, but was ordered back to say his prayers. But Weston couldn't get the dog out of his mind.

"Looks like old Pal," he mused. "Same kind of eyes."

He fell to thinking of Pal, of tramps they had taken, of game they had bagged. He had thought he never wanted another dog after Pal died. But this creature's misery haunted him. It was as if a brother of Pal's had asked him for help and he was passing the plea cold-heartedly by. A proud, intelligent, courageous breed, all nerves and endurance on an open trail, faithful unto death to the masters they served. No wonder poor Bird drooped and suffered under the ignominy of a white cotton cap, apron-strings, and a doll carriage.

"Gee, I'd like to show him the time of his life! Wonder if he's been trained to point," thought Weston.

III.

He was on hand to watch Bird every bill, after that first meeting. The new interest steadied him, made him forget his panic, and the dog showed that he was ready to lay down his life for his friend.

Weston wired his manager for time off on account of ill health, and at the end of the week be bought Bird and took him to New York. The dog was a trained pointer, and Weston was already looking forward to their summer at the mountain shack. But it was about another matter that he wanted to see his manager.

In two weeks he opened again at Minneapolis. As the curtain went up on the new set the house rippled with applause. The back drop was an exquisite expanse of blue lake. The stage represented an autumn forest. A yellow leaf dropped casually to rest among its fellows beside a mossy path. Sunlight dripped through a tangle of boughs. And in the middle of the stage stood Bird, rigid as a statue, pointing.

The simple perfection of the scene grew upon the audience and a second ripple swept them before Weston ran on in hunting clothes and began his spectacular target work. Weston himself felt the old thrill of the days when he sprang into a circus ring. He was as cool as a clam, with the singing ecstasy underneath that told him he couldn't fail. His work caught on as it used to when he first began in vaudeville. And when Bird brought him apples to quarter and plates to halve, and finally ran on to lay a dead duck at his feet, the house howled with glee.

The act closed with the two hunters building a camp-fire. The obvious comradeship of man and dog got over as well as the marksman's skill. Weston bowed and Bird pointed as they took curtain after curtain. And out in front of the theater at the top of the bill flamed "Weston and Bird" in tall black letters.

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RECONCILIATION

I SOMETIMES wonder when and how
You will come back to me,
Across what stretch of burning sand,
Across what sobbing sea?
What word will break the silence long
That now sweet Speech denies,
And what will be the tale that each
Reads in the other's eyes?

Will folds of sunshine, golden fair,
Across our pathway flow,
Or will our souls in rapture meet
Beneath the starlight's glow?
Will flowers bloom, birds sweetly sing,
To welcome in the day,
Or will dead leaves be blown across
A sky of tearful gray?

Let it be soon! Come as it may,
Enough there is of pain
Without the added weight of wo
If love like ours were slain;
Come back to life and hope and joy,
These arms are open wide;
Come back and find our early love
Thorn crowned, but sanctified!

Clarence Urmy.

Trailing Back

Part VI

by Charles Alden Seltzer

Author of "Riddle Gawne," "Drag Harlan," etc.

CHAPTER XXIII.

SURRENDER.

BUD LUCAS'S surmise that Redmond had known Jennifer, because of the horse ridden by the latter, had been only partly correct. Redmond had caught a flashing glimpse of Jennifer himself. Jennifer had ridden within arm's length of him on his northward flight during the fight.

Redmond's attention had been directed to a piebald horse, which had been racing, apparently riderless, out of the agitated group of horsemen at the river. Because of the animal's color he had involuntarily picked it from among a number of other riderless horses. And he had instantly recognized it, having noticed Jennifer riding it a short time before his meeting with Pennington in Loma.

However, he would not have paid any attention to the animal had he not noticed a man clinging to the saddle, riding Indian fashion, with one leg thrown over the horse's back, and an arm crooked around its neck, bringing his body below the beast's back, to conceal himself from anyone who might be impelled to use him as a target. In the semidarkness Jennifer might have escaped without being noticed, had the piebald horse sheered off when it approached Redmond and his men. But the animal had plunged straight through the group, so close to Redmond that the latter could have touched it with a hand; so close that he had seen Jennifer's face turned toward him.

Redmond knew Denby had enough men to subdue the rustlers without his assistance, for at the first fire a number of them had been shot from their saddles; and he had a personal interest in Jennifer. Therefore he called sharply to Lucas, wheeled his horse, and started in pursuit of the rustler.

However, he had some trouble accomplishing the rearward movement, for there were horses behind him and excited men who evidently could not understand why he wanted to get to the rear when all the action was in front. And so when he finally got out of the press and headed north, Jennifer was well on his way into the flat.

Redmond's horse did well, but failed to gain on the rider ahead of him. That was partly because of Jennifer's familiarity with the trail, and because Redmond's horse had been inactive for two or three hours. He fell back during the first fifteen minutes of the ride, but after he began to warm to his work he regained some of the distance.

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for October 15.

The animal under Jennifer was fast and spirited. Redmond could tell that by the way he lengthened the distance between them when he reached a section of upland. Jennifer was two miles ahead of Redmond, when the latter's horse rushed over the north rim of the flat and straightened out for the run over the big level that stretched clear to Loma, which lay about ten miles north of the flat.

Redmond, however, was not particularly anxious to overtake Jennifer before he reached Loma. It made little difference to Redmond where he met the man.

Yesterday morning, in Loma, when he had seen Jennifer, he felt that his responsibility for the safety of Martha Moyer should have first consideration. He could not afford to run the risk of being killed in a fight with the man, to leave the girl in Loma unprotected, and ignorant of the evil intentions of Egan. Pennington, of course, had forced him to fight, and he had been glad none of the others had interfered.

Now the situation was different. He had taken Denby into his confidence; Jennifer and his men had been apprehended in the very act of stealing cattle, and could not seek the protection of the law.

Redmond's hatred of Jennifer was almost as intense as his hatred of Egan. For at the trial Jennifer had sworn that he had seen Redmond shoot Tim Owens, when as a matter of fact Jennifer had not been in the vicinity at the time of the murder.

His plans for killing Egan, having been temporarily defeated through his consideration for the feelings of Martha Moyer, Redmond's passions now centered with terrible definiteness upon Jennifer. He felt at this moment as he had felt when he had reached the K Down to find Sneddon and Craim in a room of the ranch-house. The accumulated resentment, and the impotent rage of two years contemplation of the wrong done him by Egan and Jennifer was again seething in his veins, filling him with the urge to slay.

It seemed Jennifer knew some one was on his trail, for he did not spare his horse on the ride over the level, though he gained little.

Redmond did not force his horse. He felt certain Jennifer would halt at Loma, for Pete Goin's gambling house had always been headquarters for Egan, Jennifer, and their outlaw crew in the old days, and Redmond had no doubt that Jennifer would go straight to the Low Card as a homing pigeon flies to its loft. If Jennifer could reach the Low Card without being seen by any of Loma's decent citizens, he could induce Pete Goin to swear that he had been in Loma all night. Thus he would escape the net that Denby was drawing around the outlaw band.

Daylight came suddenly while Redmond was still a mile or so from Loma. A minute before the world had been swathed in semigloom; now a dazzling white light bathed it; and Loma, squatting in the sudden radiance, seemed as forlorn and ghastly as a heap of bleached bones in a desert.

Jennifer had vanished. His lead of two miles had given him several minutes in which to make himself invisible—conceding that he had divined the identity of his pursuer—and when Redmond finally rode up to the hitching rail in front of the Low Card Jennifer's horse was not even in sight.

The Low Card was closed; its windows covered with rough board shutters. Dismounting, and placing an ear against the closed door of the place, Redmond listened. Hearing no sound, he hesitated an instant, and then ran around the side of the building, where he knew an outside stairway ran to the upper story, to a hallway.

Redmond went up the stairway with huge leaps, turned into the hallway, and pounded heavily upon the door of a room.

With his first blow on the door, a voice penetrated the thin partition—Pete Goin's.

"Who's there?"

"Redmond," said the latter. "Open up!"

"What do you want, Redmond?" Goin's voice was belligerent.

"Visitin'," said Redmond.

"I'm not receiving this morning, Redmond," came Goin's voice freighted with sarcasm.

"Open up or I'll bust the door down!" threatened Redmond.

"That's different," laughed Goin. There

were two or three steps on the bare floor; then the door swung open, and disclosed Goin in his night clothing, an ironic, speculative smile on his face.

He stepped back a little, bowed derisively and started to speak. But Redmond brushed past him, paying no attention to his extravagantly polite movement—drew his gun and strode to a closet, into which he glanced.

"Looking for somebody, Redmond?" said Goin.

"Where's Jennifer?" demanded Redmond.

"I didn't know Jennifer was in town." Goin's gaze met Redmond's steadily, with cold hostility.

"You're a liar, Goin! You've got Jennifer hid out some place."

Goin bristled with rage. He stepped close to Redmond. His voice exuded hate.

"I let no man call me that, Redmond!" he said.

Silently, Redmond leaped for him. The pistol was still in his right hand; the fingers of his left gripped Goin's throat. Goin was forced back against the outside wall, against which he was flattened, squirming, kicking his legs grotesquely, trying to break the grip of the other's iron fingers, while his face purpled and his eyes bulged with terror.

"You're some particular how folks talk to you, you damned smooth sneak!" said Redmond. "I'm warnin' you that I ain't goin' to fool with you. Where's Jennifer?"

The grip of the terrible fingers relaxed. Goin's body started to sag, but Redmond's left hand shifted, and Goin was held to a perpendicular by a vicious pressure against his shoulder.

It was some seconds before he could speak. Meanwhile Redmond's eyes, gleaming with deadly earnestness, held his.

"I'm giving it to you straight, Redmond; I haven't seen Jennifer since last night."

Evidently Redmond believed him. The pressure against Goin's shoulder relaxed; he sank limply to the floor, while Redmond, without a glance backward, strode to the door, ran down the hallway to the stairs and thence to the street.

Loma's citizens arose with the dawn. When Redmond appeared in the street there were half a dozen men in front of the Low Card, draped over the hitching rail, waiting for the doors to open. Farther down the street were other men, lounging in front of other buildings. Two or three of the other saloons were already open.

Redmond strode to the group of men at the hitching rail in front of the Low Card. He had sheathed his gun, but there was a light in his eyes which brought a queer paleness to the faces of the men who beheld him.

"Seen Jennifer?" he questioned.

"Seen him last night," answered one of the men.

"Not this mornin'?"

The man accomplished an awed negative, and when Redmond passed on toward another group of men farther down the street the man whispered hoarsely to his fellows:

"I reckon Jennifer's aimin' to cash in. Lord, Redmond's riled!"

"What did Jennifer do?" questioned another man.

"Hell, man—that's Larry Redmond! Forgot you got here after. I reckon it's about that trial. Jennifer testified Redmond killed a man. In the basin, it was—three years ago. There's a lot of folks around here that have got an idea Jennifer lied about that killin'. Redmond's just got back from prison, an' I reckon he's got the same notion. I'm a heap tickled I ain't Jennifer!"

Redmond inquired further about Jennifer. It seemed no one had seen him ride into town. And yet Redmond was convinced he had entered town. He searched every building; forcing his way in when necessary, the menace in his manner silencing all objection.

His search did not cease with the stores and dwellings. He explored stables, sheds and other outbuildings; and at last found Jennifer's piebald horse.

Convinced beyond all doubt that Jennifer was hidden in one of the town's buildings, Redmond again searched them. He had confided his errand to no one, but as he continued his search several of the decent citizens, divining his intentions and

wishing ill to the man they had long suspected of being leagued with the sinister power that had ruled the vicinity, followed him at a respectful distance.

Redmond's final search brought no result. Jennifer's hiding place was a good one.

Redmond had been active all night, and the incessant exertion of the past few hours had told on him. He scowled at the good men who had been dogging his footsteps, so that they discreetly withdrew to their several abodes—or pretended suddenly to have business elsewhere, permitting Redmond to walk alone down the street. He halted presently, and leaned against the stone wall of a building. He was disappointed, puzzled.

He was still determined to find Jennifer, and from his present position he could look down the length of Loma's one street and over the flat level country surrounding the town. He meant to stay where he was until Jennifer showed himself.

Glancing westward, he saw two riders coming, racing toward him rapidly. He watched them as they drew closer, at last identifying them as Denby and Lucas. Grimly satisfied, for now he would have help in his search for Jennifer, he took a step toward the approaching riders.

At that instant a voice reached his ears—a whisper that seemed to come out of nowhere.

"Redmond!" it said.

Redmond gazed sharply about. There was no one near him. Directly across the street from him were a store and a blacksmith shop and a livery stable. The doors and windows of these buildings were closed; the street in front of them was deserted. At his back was the building whose wall he had been leaning against, and next to it on the east was a private dwelling. Adjoining on the west was another private dwelling. The doors and windows of both these buildings were closed, the window shades drawn.

Farther down the street were several men, but they were too far away to whisper to him.

Again, while he stood glancing uncertainly about his name was repeated, still in a whisper, in a voice that was strangely familiar. This time he located the direction from which the voice came, wheeled swiftly and saw Slim Morton looking at him from behind the iron bars of a little window in the stone wall against which he had previously been leaning.

Slim grimaced at Redmond when he met the latter's astonished gaze, and shook his head with a violent, negative motion, which Redmond interpreted as a signal for silence.

"Sh-h!" he whispered again. "Jennifer's in here—in the cell next to me an' Shorty! Corwin's hidin' him!"

In an instant Redmond was at the door of the building. The door opened at his vicious shove, and he stood on the threshold, facing Corwin, who was sitting at a desk which stood against the farther wall of a room that the sheriff used as an office.

Corwin's back had been toward the door; he swung around and faced Redmond at the sound of the door opening.

"Why, it's Redmond!" he said.

The sheriff's fat face was flushed. But he settled back in his chair with heavy deliberation and regarded Redmond with a disagreeable smile.

"Come to give yourself up?" he questioned.

"You're a bad guesser, Corwin," said Redmond. "I've come to see Jennifer."

Corwin cleared his throat and spat thinly on the floor before he answered. His disagreeable smile broadened.

"It's ag'in' the rules for any one to see the prisoners, Redmond. I got to refuse."

"What's Jennifer in for?"

"For breakin' the peace. He got loaded on Pete Goin's forty-rod."

"When?"

"I don't reckon that's any of your business, Redmond," said Corwin. "But seein' that you're so damned inquisitive, it was last night. If you're that particular, I'll give you the time. It was exactly nine-thirty when I brought him in here."

"So that's the game you're playin', Corwin," said Redmond. "You're tryin' to frame an alibi for him. It don't go. Get up on your hind legs an' flash the keys to that door, an' to Jennifer's cell!"

Redmond removed his right hand slight-

ly, and his six-shooter lay in the palm. The weapon was unaimed, but its dark muzzle seemed to be staring straight at the sheriff.

The latter's face swelled with impotent wrath. His hands sought the arm of his chair, tightening upon them; his muscles strained; he glanced downward at his own weapon, then up at Redmond's. Then his gaze went beyond Redmond, to the door leading to the cells.

"Hell!" he said disgustedly. "I reckon I've got to give them to you!"

His right hand moved toward his hip pocket as though to reach for the keys, then jerked quickly forward as he twisted in his chair and leaped to his feet.

If he thought the movement would disconcert Redmond he had erred. For as his gun came free Redmond's weapon crashed spitefully, the lancelike flame from its muzzle seemed to touch Corwin's wrist. Corwin staggered, screamed with agony, grabbed his right arm with his left hand and held it tightly against his stomach, while his gun struck the floor and was kicked into a corner by Redmond.

Then several things happened so quickly to Corwin that afterward he could never clearly remember them.

He saw Redmond's blazing eyes as Redmond leaped toward him. Then Redmond's right fist, starting low, struck Corwin's jaw and he tumbled backward, to land on the top of his desk. He was not unconscious and he tried to fight back; but his huge bulk was twisted and lifted and turned on the desk-top until he was wound with rope and flat on his back, unable to move. The rope, he knew, came from a peg on the wall of the office; he had hung it there himself the night before.

He felt Redmond's hand in his hip pocket dragging forth the keys to the jail. Then he was lifted and dumped violently into a corner, where he lay, cursing fluently and watching Redmond unlock the big door that led into the corridor to the jail's two cells.

Redmond's gun was still in his hand as he swung the big door open. He slipped into the corridor, flattened himself against the wall and began to move toward the nearer of the two cells. Before he could reach the edge of the first he heard Jennifer's voice.

"Hell!" said the voice. "I hear you comin', Redmond. "I'm licked. I ain't achin' for none of your damn gun-play! It's too cursed certain!"

Slim's voice instantly followed.

"You've sure put the fear of God into him, boss," he chuckled. "He's got his sky-hooks grabbin' for the roof! Come a-runnin'!"

Jennifer was standing in the center of the first cell with his hands raised above his head when Redmond came into view. Through an iron grating in the stone wall between the two cells Slim was watching Jennifer, his face plastered against the bars, a huge, exultant smile on his lips.

Jennifer stood rigid while Redmond unlocked the cell door, entered, and took his gun. Apparently Jennifer realized the futility of further efforts to escape from the trap in which he and his fellow rustlers had been caught.

He stood, silently watching as Redmond opened the door of the other cell and let Slim and Shorty into the corridor, and quietly obeyed when Redmond ordered him to precede him down the corridor to the office where he had left Corwin.

When Redmond reached the office Denby and Lucas were standing in the outside doorway, staring at the sheriff, who still lay where Redmond had left him. At sight of Denby and Lucas, Jennifer looked glum, though there was a question in his eyes.

Denby answered it.

"It was a clean-up, Jennifer. There's an even dozen left. You make thirteen. Unlucky, eh?"

"Sort of," said Jennifer tonelessly.

"There'll be twelve left," said Redmond. He was facing Jennifer, his eyes were blazing with a wanton light that made the outlaw catch his breath sharply.

"There'll be twelve left in another minute, Jennifer," he said. "You sure was wise in puttin' up your hands when you heard me comin'. You knew I couldn't kill you then. It's different now. I'm warnin' you fair. I'm wantin' you to tell the truth about the killin' of Tim Owens!"

For an instant Jennifer sullenly met the

steady glare of Redmond's eyes; then he smiled crookedly.

"I never was strong for that deal, Redmond," he said. "I'm wantin' you to know it now. You'd always been white. I reckon Moyer had us all locoed. Moyer killed Owens. The whole gang saw him do it. We was hidin' out in the hills an' saw you ride down into the flat where Tim was. I lied at the trial. Dugan an' Pelton an' all of Tim's outfit was in the deal. Moyer was runnin' things. They was runnin' off stock right under Tim's nose, an' Tim thought they was square. It was when he found Moyer out that Moyer killed him. That's straight."

"It's sure refreshin' to met an honest man, Jennifer," said Redmond. "You talk like you was goin' to live a few years longer—if you keep on tellin' the truth. We're aimin' to run this town clean, from now on, an' we don't want to have any one hangin' around here who'd be tickled to shoot you in the back for the talkin' you've alread done."

Jennifer's gaze went to Corwin.

"You white-livered sneak!" raged the latter, glaring at Jennifer.

Jennifer sneered as he gazed at the sheriff.

"I wouldn't want *that* hangin' around," he said.

"Any one else you carin' to name?" suggested Redmond.

"Pete Goin," announced the latter, grinning coldly. "Him an' Moyer was hogs on the split. An' there's the new judge—Pond. He promised to work with us. I'm sort of doubtful about him, not trustin' him a heap."

"Otherwise you wouldn't have talked as much as you have—eh, Jennifer?"

This last remark was from Denby. He was smiling.

Jennifer's eyes quickened, and he grinned reluctantly.

"I reckon I had him sized up right," he said.

"You did, Jennifer," said Denby. "Judge Pond was sent here by the Governor to help us round you fellows up. He was to pretend to be with you."

Jennifer's eyes glittered with passion for an instant, then he made a gesture of resignation.

"I reckon that's all, gents," he said.

"That will be all for a few minutes," said Denby. He reached out and took the jail keys from Redmond. Then he ushered Jennifer back into his cell, ordered Slim and Shorty to carry Corwin into the other; sent Slim for the town's doctor, who would care for Corwin's shattered arm, and himself went for Judge Pond, who returned with him and properly attested Jennifer's statement regarding the murder of Tim Owens.

While Denby and Judge Pond were in the jail, Redmond strode outside into the sunlight.

He was satisfied with the result of the night's work. The outlaw band had been broken up, and Jennifer's statement would set him right with those in the vicinity who had doubted him.

But there still remained the problem of how to deal with Egan. Martha was still at the Bar R, and apparently she was satisfied of his innocence. But he felt that there would come a day when she would decide to go back to the K Down, to face Egan. And then—

He became aware that Shorty was standing beside him.

"I slipped out to tell you," said Shorty. "I been dyin' to tell you all along. Martha Moyer's gone. Her brother come for her. Corwin jumped on me an' Slim night before last, when you said we could go to town. Yesterday mornin' Corwin took me an' Slim down to the Bar R. Mint Moyer was with us—he'd got in town the night before.

"Moyer showed us up—told the girl she'd been fooled about Dugan an' Pelton—that we was them. Your mother admitted it. An' Martha went back to Moyer's ranch with him, feelin' mighty mad. I reckon I ought to have told you about it a—"

Shorty was startled to a pause; for Redmond was running down the street toward the hitching-rail in front of the Low Card, where he had left his horse; and while Shorty watched him, he mounted with the animal in motion and rode eastward.

In five minutes horse and rider had dwin-

dled to the proportions of a dot in the green-brown space; and in five minute more they had vanished completely into a tiny dust-cloud that seemed to travel with inconceivable rapidity toward the horizon.

CHAPTER XXIV.

PURSUIT.

WHEN Redmond had reached the K Down in his quest for Egan, and when he had been facing Sneddon and Craim in the room of the ranch-house that night, his passions had been violent. But compared with the cold fury that gripped him as he raced his horse over the back trail, his passions of the earlier day were as water to strong wine.

On that other day his chief emotion had been hatred; now the hatred had become intensified, and something had been added to it—a jealous rage.

As he sent the big horse scampering over the level, heading him into the sixty miles of rugged country that stretched between him and the girl who was being tricked by the man who had killed her brother, and who now must think Egan innocent of the killing of Tim Owens because of her discovery of the real identity of Slim and Shorty, he was determined to put an end to Egan's crimes. He meant to kill the man regardless of what Martha might think of him.

However, despite his furious impatience to reach the K Down, he knew his horse could not travel the sixty miles at the rapid pace into which he had been forced at the beginning of the ride, and after a run of several miles Redmond reluctantly drew him down.

He walked the animal down a long slope, conserving his strength for a run across a lower level, which began at the bottom of the slope; but after he had traversed the level at constantly increasing speed, due to an impatience that he could not conquer, he gave the horse the reins and permitted a burst of speed that sent the miles spinning rearward with amazing swiftness.

He had taken the south trail; the one that led through Conklin's Pass; the one Martha and he had traveled on their way to Legget's Basin.

A nameless emotion gripped him as he thought of her reluctance to enter the town, after he had given her some intimation of its character. Her manner that night had told him more plainly than words of the sturdy honesty that governed her, and of her loathing of vice and crime in all their varied forms. Had he given the words she would have ridden down the precipitous basin trail rather than spend one night in Loma.

Yet, despite her instinctive distrust of all things that bore an appearance of evil, she had trusted him from the first, when she had entered the kitchen of the K Down ranch-house to find him at the cook-stove. He assured himself that he would never forget her eyes when she had stood in the doorway looking at him.

That picture of her was vivid. And there were others that flittered before his mental vision. All along the trail were places that he would never forget—spots where they had halted; others where she had spoken to him. As the big horse flashed by those spots Redmond identified them swiftly—they were mile-posts that marked the progress of his gradual surrender to her charms.

He told himself that he had been too eager, too impetuous. If he had delayed arranging the impersonation of Bill Dugan and Judge Pelton by Slim and Shorty; if he had waited until now—when the band of rustlers had been broken up—he might have told Martha of Jennifer's confession.

She would have believed Denby, and she would not at this moment be with Moyer, convinced, no doubt, that Moyer had been maligned, and that he, Redmond, was an unprincipled scoundrel.

But he was not so much concerned over what she must think of him as he was for her safety. So far Egan had treated her with respect and consideration; but how long would he continue to do so? Redmond hoped Egan would delay whatever crime he contemplated. But he had little expectation that Egan would delay, now that he had the girl again in his power and was aware that he, Redmond, had returned from prison to seek revenge. Egan would work fast now!

At a small river fifteen miles from Loma Redmond halted his horse and permitted it to drink sparingly. He himself drank nothing.

The sun was well overhead when he reached another river—the place where he had bathed, where he had seen signs that she had done likewise, at a spot farther down the river. Though he was traveling at a good pace he could still see the imprints of her bare feet in the baked adobe mud of the place.

Five miles farther on he swung his horse sharply southward and crossed a barren stretch of country—a section of desert featured by lava beds, huge dead rocks and hardy weeds. A dust-cloud rose behind him as he rode, marking his progress, spiraling upward into miniature whirlwinds, dropping heavily when the breeze suddenly died down.

He had cut across this desert because doing so shortened the distance to the K Down a little—not much, but perhaps a mile. A great deal could happen while a man rode a mile.

His horse was laboring when he finally got out of the deep sand and struck a long slope that led into some hills, beyond which loomed the shoulder of a mesa. He walked the horse through the hills; got off and ran by his side up the long slope to the edge of the mesa.

There Redmond swung into the saddle and urged the horse onward, with a grim determination to push the animal to the limit of his endurance.

Toward the middle of the afternoon, while he was riding in a little flat with the gun at his back, he felt the big horse stumble. Farther on the animal stumbled again. Redmond halted him, got out of the saddle and went to his head.

The beast's eyes were wild, his nostrils were blood-flecked; he heaved air into his lungs with great wheezing gasps; his head drooped, and his legs were sprawled wide. Redmond drew the drooping head to him and sympathetically stroked the quivering muzzle. The animal whinnied and again stood erect.

Redmond did not get into the saddle again for a long time. He looped the reins in an arm and strode forward, eastward, following the dry bed of an arroyo, which he knew would presently lead to water. He reached the water after a while—a narrow stream that he could have jumped across, but clear as crystal—and for some time bathed the animal's head with the sparkling liquid that he dipped from the stream with his hat.

After a short time he permitted the beast to drink sparingly, and a little later he stood on the bank and watched it roll in the water.

But all this had taken time. Redmond cast a troubled glance at the sky. The sun was just above the peak of a mountain on the far horizon, seeming to touch it with a blazing rim.

Redmond estimated that he had ridden nearly fifty miles. That would still leave about ten. He gazed pityingly at the horse, which had clambered out of the water and now stood, somewhat refreshed, but still trembling.

"I reckon there ain't any help for it," said Redmond.

He threw the saddle on the animal's back, tightened the cinches, slipped the bridle on and swung into the saddle.

They got out of the flat, went up a timbered slope—Redmond walking to save his mount's strength—and reached a level which was featured by low, flat hills, trees and nondescript brush.

Again Redmond mounted. The horse seemed to have regained his strength, for at Redmond's word he broke into a run. They had got far into the hill section, and the horse was still going well, when from a clump of brush beside the trail came a streak of blue-white smoke shot with crimson fire.

Redmond tumbled forward, limply. The bullet had struck him in the left shoulder. He threw himself out of the saddle, landing on his hands and knees beside a mesquite tree. He had twisted himself around, so that he could reach for the gun at his right hip. He got the weapon out. But that action seemed to mark the limit of his strength. He lunged forward, falling on his face, his left arm awkwardly doubled under him; his right hand, still gripping the pistol,

stretched straight out on the ground, his head seeming to rest upon it.

CHAPTER XXV.

CONFESSION.

MARTHA MOYER had kept her thoughts pretty much to herself on the homeward trip. And Egan had respected her evident desire for silence; for he rode a little distance ahead of her for hours at a time, saying no word except when absolutely necessary. In that manner they traveled many miles.

They rode fast, for Egan was in the lead, and he seemed, to Martha, to be impatient to reach the K Down. As a matter of fact, Martha was several times on the point of objecting to such haste, but as the annoyance was merely physical, she kept silent.

Since the developments of the early morning, she, too, was eager to get the Bar R as far behind her as possible. She had no means of knowing what lay behind Redmond's trickery, but that he had some deep motive was obvious, for he had even influenced his mother to take part in the scheme to deceive her.

She liked the man who rode ahead of her very little; the affection she felt for him was of a negligible quality, if affection existed at all. For example, though he had saved her from being imposed upon by Redmond, she was not conscious of any degree of thankfulness toward him. As a matter of fact, she was slightly enraged over the contemplation of his manner during his brief visit to the Bar R. He had seemed too sure of himself, too certain that she would be convinced by his rather dramatic action in magically producing Slim and Shorty from out of nowhere. If he had betrayed a little excitement when he had faced Mrs. Redmond she might have felt more charitable toward him. But he had stood there derisively smiling, most unhumanly enjoying his victory.

So, therefore, she was not enjoying the prospect of returning to the K Down with him, though she followed him meekly enough, and resolutely kept the even pace he had set.

Egan took the south trail, and made few stops. By maintaining a good pace, and by keeping almost incessantly at it, they made surprisingly good time, and shortly after sunrise they were slightly more than half-way to the K Down.

They halted for breakfast, which consisted of some dry soda biscuit and several strips of "jerked" beef which Egan had packed in his slicker against the trip to Loma, after Martha. The food was washed down with some weak coffee, made hastily by Egan in a small coffee-pot which he also took out of the slicker.

Egan did not eat much, nor did Martha, for that matter. She was thinking of Redmond's remarkable cooking on the ride westward, and of his consideration for her; of his action in giving her the larger share of the bacon that morning. She had pretended not to notice his generosity, because she hadn't wanted him to think she was accepting it. But there was a mighty contrast between this breakfast and the other.

Egan gulped his food hurriedly and left her while she still sat on the grass, eating. He was gone quite a time, and she was beginning to worry about him, when he appeared from the east, walking toward her along the bank of the river—the river in which she and Redmond had bathed, unknown to each other.

Egan smiled at her, but she noted that his face was flushed. However, she said nothing as he saddled the horses, and followed him quietly as they took up the last half of their journey.

Martha noticed that Egan did not travel so rapidly, now; though they held to a fairly even pace. Yet the afternoon was well along when they crossed the river where Martha had accused Redmond of neglecting her; and the sun was low when they finally dismounted at the gates of the K Down corral fence and turned their horses into the enclosure.

"Home again—eh?" said Egan, smiling at her. "I reckon you're sort of glad to be back again?"

"Yes—I think so," she said.

She was appalled at the atmosphere that now seemed to envelop the ranch-house. It all seemed dull, drear and lonesome after—

after the Bar R. In some subtle way the ranch-house seemed to menace her. It was not a presentiment; it was merely feeling that something *might* happen to her. Of course the feeling was founded upon her recently conceived dislike of her brother, and of course it meant that she liked Redmond and was reluctant to come back here where she might never see him again.

She felt better when she got into the ranch-house and saw her personal belongings in her room; but when Egan rode away shortly after their arrival, telling her he was going "down the river a piece," she went into the big room where she and Redmond had sat while he had told her about the killing of Tim Owens, and sat there long, her chin in her cupped hands, staring into the cheerless fireplace.

She kept seeing Redmond's face. During his talk he had stood beside the mantel, smoking; and she remembered that she had been impressed with the honest gleam in his eyes while he had talked; with his seriousness and his quiet vehemence.

She sat in the big room until dusk fell. Then she got up, lit all the lamps — for somehow she felt she needed them to help banish the sense of loss that seemed to afflict her—and went out into the kitchen to prepare supper, knowing that her brother would be hungry when he returned.

She heard him ride up while she was standing at the stove pouring water into the coffee-pot—water that she had got from the river after dusk. And when she heard him washing his face from the basin that stood on the little rear porch, she mentally confessed, with reddening cheeks, that she would prefer getting supper for Redmond. For despite the trick he had played on her she liked him better than she liked the man who was about to enter the room.

She experienced a distinct shock when Egan came in. Whether it had been because Redmond had called her attention to it or whether her instinct had become acute through her growing dislike of the man, she felt as though she were facing a stranger who had no right to be in the house with her. For the first time since she had lived at the ranch-house she was conscious of a fear of the man.

He seemed different. There was something new and strange about him. He didn't look brotherly as he stood in the doorway watching her.

His legs were sprawled apart, his arms were folded over his chest; his chin was thrust forward a little and his eyes held a bright, odd gleam.

It wasn't a gleam of brotherly affection. It seemed strange, foreign, eager, amused, merciless. It was an odd, mingled expression of many emotions, none of them suggesting their relationship.

"What has happened to you, Mint?" she questioned. Her voice quavered and she laughed in an effort to keep him from noticing it.

"Nothin's happened," he said shortly.

Abruptly he turned his back to her—she thought he did it so that she could not see his eyes—and stood for an instant staring out into the darkness beyond the open door. Then, without looking at her, he walked across the room and sat down in a chair at the table upon which she had already placed a cover and dishes.

She busied herself at the stove, and in walking from the stove to the cupboard and the table, placing things where she wanted them. Several times as he sat at the table she threw covert glances at him, to note that he watched her steadily, following her movements as she walked about the room.

She delayed as much as possible, for she was afflicted with a reluctance to sit at the table opposite him; but at last there came a time when she could not delay longer for fear of arousing his suspicions. When the last dish was on the table she dropped into a chair and smiled at him.

"I suppose you are hungry?" she said. "I don't seem to be—very much."

"You'd better eat," he advised.

But she couldn't eat. She was too disturbed by his strange manner; over the stranger thoughts that persisted in crowding themselves into her brain. She merely nibbled at the food she took on her plate, and sought to dispel the illusion that had seized her upon her brother's appearance—that he was a stranger and had no right to be here.

He ate rapidly, and when he finished he laid his knife and fork on the table beside his plate, leaned his elbows on the table top and cupped his chin in his hands. He stared straight at her, his eyes agleam with the strange emotions she had seen in them when he had entered the room—emotions that she could not analyze.

"Well; we're back," he said. "Redmond didn't grab you off."

"What do you mean?"

"I reckon you know well enough what I mean. I mean that Redmond's stuck on you; that he took you over to the Bar R to have you near him. I reckon you understand that, don't you—you're of age."

"I don't pretend to know what was in Redmond's mind," she denied. "If he had any such thought as that it was through no act of mine."

"Of course not," he jeered. "You're innocent. I reckon after a while you'll say you don't like him."

"I do like him!" she declared, resenting his tone. "In spite of everything I think he is a real man!"

His face crimsoned, his eyes flashed with a strange malignance.

"You like him better than you like me, I reckon."

"You are my brother," she said. "Naturally if I like another man I don't like him in the way I like you. You couldn't expect it, could you?"

For a time he sat silent, watching her. Then he said, abruptly:

"It's time this thing was straightened out; time you knowed just where you stand. There ain't no sense of foolin' around any longer."

Alarmed at his manner she pushed her chair back from the table and started to rise. He gruffly ordered her to stay where she was.

"We're goin' to settle this thing right now," he said. "I'm wantin' you to know that Redmond didn't kill Tim Owens. I killed him. I shot him because he caught me burnin' a cow's hoofs, an' we saddled the killin' onto Redmond because we wanted to get rid of him."

"We?" she said.

"Me an' the rustlers you're so damned concerned about!" he said, venomously. "Bill Dugan an' Judge Pelton was in it. We framed Redmond an' sent him to jail!" He laughed. "That's the kind of a guy you've throwed in with!"

Amazed, speechless from the shock of this startling revelation, she sat, wildly staring at him.

"I've been some stuck on you ever since I saw you," he went on, grinning at her. "But I've waited, tryin' to find the coin your dad hid, an' waitin' for Redmond to show up so's I could kill him. I knowed the first time I seen him that he was wise to what happened down on the Rio Pecos, an' I knowed he'd be back from jail to tell what he knows. But Redmond's dead by now, an' I'm givin' it to you straight!"

"Redmond dead!" she gasped.

"He's dead if he tried to follow you here," he laughed. Sneddon started to Loma with me—after Redmond bored Crain in Conklin's Pass. About half-way to Loma, Sneddon's horse broke a leg an' I had to leave him there. I reckon you remember when I left you for a while this mornin'—there by the river when you was eatin' breakfast? Well, I was talkin' to Sneddon. He was hid out in the brush; he'd seen us comin'. I left him there, tellin' him to watch for Redmond. Redmond will hit the breeze here when he hears you've come with me, for he knows what happened on the Rio Pecos. An' when he strikes the place where the north an' south trails meet, Sneddon will down him."

Terrible cold had invaded Martha's veins. An icy ring seemed to have been set around her head, and her brain seemed to be utterly unable to grasp the significance of what the man seated before her was saying.

"Mint," she said, "what happened there—on the Rio Pecos? And what do you mean by saying you are 'stuck' on me? Why, Mint; you are my brother!"

"Brother—hell!" he laughed, brutally. He suddenly got up—so suddenly and with so little regard for obstacles that his chair went down behind him and he brushed the table aside with one sweep of his right arm, so that it overturned, sending dishes crashing to all parts of the room.

"Brother, hell!" he repeated, following her as she retreated toward the door that led into the big room. "I ain't your brother! Do you suppose your brother could be jealous of Redmond? Do you suppose he could have watched you like I've watched you for three months, tryin' to be patient until the time comes when I could own you?

"Well, that time's come. I've give up hope of findin' the damned money. I'm takin' you instead. Your brother!" He laughed stridently and kept coming toward her. "Your brother was killed years ago in the Rio Pecos. Moreover, I killed him!"

"Oh, my God!" shrieked the girl. Her face turned the color of ashes; her knees sagged. Two or three steps she took toward the door leading to the big room; then she fell limply forward in a huddled heap near the stove.

Egan took one step toward her. Then he stood with statuesque rigidity in a walking position, one leg slightly in advance of the other, his arms stiffened, his hands open, clawlike.

For from the open outside doorway had come a voice, low, exultant:

"Egan!"

Egan turned slowly, his face whitening, his eyes wide with fear and amazement.

Just inside the doorway stood Redmond. He looked as a man looks who has run far and long. He was breathing fast, his chest swelling with each mighty breath he drew; his hat was gone and his short black hair was damp and matted with dust. His shirt was stained redly where Sneddon's bullet had struck; and he swayed a little as he stood there, looking at the man he had come to kill.

"Redmond!" whispered Egan.

The exclamation came through his teeth. Slowly, watching the man in the doorway with intense concentration, as though he hoped to fascinate him into one more second inaction, he turned so that he faced Redmond.

Then he reached for the gun at his hip.

The flame from Redmond's weapon followed the jerky little movement of his right hand toward his holster so quickly that it seemed simultaneous.

Egan's gun dropped from his loosening fingers. He took one step toward Redmond, to run into a second flame spurt that seemed to strike his breast. Then he coughed, thickly, stopped, and pitched forward noiselessly, going down so quietly that it seemed he was merely tire-

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE BACK TRAIL'S END.

IF the memory of tragedy endured always the world would wear a solemn visage. Nature has provided wisely.

Besides, the real tragedy of Martha's life had occurred some years before on the Rio Pecos. The man Redmond had killed had been a brutal trickster—and Redmond himself was sitting beside her on the porch of the Bar R ranch-house.

Down near the bunk-house were several of the Bar R men; they could hear Mrs. Redmond softly singing inside the house; and near the stable Mary Redmond was romping with a shaggy dog. The afternoon sun was coming slantwise over the house, creating a welcome shade on the porch, and a steady breeze was sweeping over the basin, rippling Redmond's black hair and blowing some stray wisps of Martha's into his face. It was a week after the tragedy at the K Down.

Martha turned to Redmond.

Her eyes were marvelously bright and the satiny skin of her cheeks was tinged with a warm, new color.

"Larry," she said, "I knew all along that you were telling the truth. I wanted to believe you, but I couldn't. I think it was because of the way you treated me that night in Conklin's Pass. I hated you, then."

"Well, I reckon I don't blame you a heap. But you see, I had to be the boss, then. Next week it will be different—you'll be the boss."

"Larry," she said, blushing, "that's too soon."

"All big things happen suddenly," he said. "Look at me meeting you at the K Down. I'd gone there to kill. Instead, I fell in love, right off. I reckon the Crea-

tor's got his own notions about how to run things. I'm sure thankin' him a heap for havin' you there when I got there."

"You haven't told me how you escaped Sneddon," she said, after a pause. "He—Egan—told me he had left Sneddon back on the trail to kill you."

"Sneddon's still there on the trail," said Redmond. "Some of the boys went over from Loma to take care of him. I reckon it ain't important how I got away from him. He's there an' I'm here."

"And you knew all along that Egan wasn't my brother," she said. "Why didn't you tell me?"

"Shucks," he said, gently reproving her. "I've been hittin' the back trail for a good many years, tryin' to get right with folks who thought I wasn't straight. Now I'm through with it I'd like to forget it. Things ahead are more interestin' than things behind."

And then he talked to her of the days that were to come, of a home he intended to build for her after a while when his affairs shaped themselves so that he could afford it. He called her attention to the great sweep of green brown country before their eyes; dwelling long upon the beauty of fleecy clouds and a sky of rarest blue; and he spoke of the day when they would ride to Loma to stand before the new judge.

And so they sat, while the afternoon waned, dreaming of the future. And Mary, playing with the dog, the cowboys at the bunk-house and Mrs. Redmond in the kitchen saw them there, and left them alone with their dreams.

(The end.)

The Low Cost of Living

by Grant H. Code

IT is the tragedy of a good many lives that marriage turns a love affair into a business venture. For example, there was Caroline Harris and Percy Dalton. She fell in love with him because he took her to the theater and dances. He fell in love with her because she was pretty. Call the causes trivial if you please. There is always the bigger cause behind, that the young people are young and ripe for romance. They were sincerely in love.

Well, they got married. Percy spent ten years trying to earn more than he could, and Caroline spent the same ten years trying to make a home for him on what he earned. By the time their marriage was a success as a business venture, Caroline was no longer pretty, and Percy hadn't taken her to the theater for ten years.

They do these things better in France. There, marriages are arranged as business ventures by parents who stand as guarantors for them and who finance the critical period. Love takes its own course. A

young man and a young woman placed in the intimacy of marriage are likely to fall in love with each other, provided they haven't been in love before. If they should fall in love with other persons, due allowance is made for that possibility and the business of married life is not disturbed.

Matilda was a lovable young animal of seventeen, with a wardrobe of snares for susceptible youth and no more business sense than a grasshopper.

Fred was a penniless college graduate of twenty-two, who, true to good form and heedful of what was expected of him, had stifled the cravings for love during six years of physical maturity while he completed his education and got ready to begin to start to stand on his own feet.

When he got out of college the first thing he did was to propose marriage to Matilda; the second was to look for a job. Matilda accepted him. That satisfied some of the cravings by those demonstrations of affection condoned in the newly engaged. It also made half a man of him in a quarter of a day by giving him in prospect responsibilities he saw no way of meeting adequately for a number of years.

Fortunately Rufus MacGreagor also accepted him as clerk on fifteen hundred a year in the office of a business in downtown New York which has nothing to do with our story.

All might still have been well if Fred had prolonged the engagement until he had saved enough to permit him to marry decently and support the lady in question in that style to which she had been accustomed, that style, namely, which it had taken her father the better part of fifty years to achieve. Odd, isn't it, how young men are expected to begin where their wives' fathers left off? Engagements often solve such difficulties by getting drawn out so long and fine that it doesn't take much to break them.

Fred, though, was one of those pigheaded young men who thought he had to pay his bills when they fell due. Accordingly an early date was set for the wedding, friends donated all sorts and conditions of cut glass and silver that would come in handy whenever Fred built a palace on Fifth Avenue and employed extra help to polish and clean the gifts. The marriage was solemnized with the usual flowers and tears, and both spent all they had in the bank on a honeymoon. Not that they wanted to see the Adirondacks, but because a honeymoon was the thing to have.

Then they borrowed enough to furnish an apartment in a part of New York where their friends would not mind calling, and proceeded to have a real honeymoon with Matilda doing her own housework; not that Fred wouldn't have paid for a cook if she had let him, but she wanted to express her love by working with her own hands.

In the course of a few months it developed that the landlord was utterly heartless, that the gas and light companies, being corporations and therefore incapable of sympathy, were quite willing to discontinue service at any time and let young people eat raw food in the dark unless bills were paid, that the grocer and the butcher were equally tactless persons, and that it was probably safer to do without sprees and pay the bills.

A year later there was adequate evidence that a son and heir is quite as expensive as he is adorable; that a princely increase of ten per cent in salary bears the same proportion to a young family's total expenses as that young family bears to the entire population of Greater New York; that if debts increased in successive years as they had increased during past months, Fred would have to begin earning the income of a multimillionaire very shortly in order to be solvent in time to die in peace.

About this time Matilda began to wish that Fred didn't have to work so hard and to wonder why her former friends didn't invite her out any more. The tragedy was well under way.

Here, Fred, whose foresight had been sharpened by the contemplation of a collection of souvenirs in the form of bills and a series of problems in elementary arithmetic over them every evening as well as by an uncommon sympathy and understanding of his duty to his wife, proposed a number of inexpensive diversions to take the place of expensive sprees that postponed the breaking point, but increased the

certainty of it. The diversions were not wholly successful, but the young couple pretended they were.

At this point: enter the other man.

This story is not based upon the eternal triangle. The other man was merely one James Durkin, also clerk in Mac's office, a married man of somewhat longer standing than Fred. The entrance took the form of an invitation to Fred to bring his wife and offspring down to Pinocle Flats, a most unfashionable part of the Jersey coast, to spend the week end.

"You can send regrets if you like," Fred told Matilda. "I let Jim understand I didn't know what your plans were. Jim and Nelly are jolly folks. I had lunch with them one day when Nelly was in town. But they're not quite the sort you are accustomed to."

"I have a good mind to accept," replied Matilda. "Car fare to Pinocle Flats and back will cost less than the theater, and I have been sick for the sea."

"You won't find the sea there, not as you know it. There's just a strip of beach all cluttered up with little houses and a scrawny town behind. Jim warned me."

"I don't care. Tell him I'll come."

They came. They stood up all the way on a local that was made up of cars that were too shabby to use on any other run. They walked from the station over streets that were not paved but were preferable to sidewalks that were supposed to be. They followed a path cluttered with tin cans and old rags across lots to the wrong side of a row of shacks constructed of rough boards painted long ago and very crudely then.

They emerged upon a sand beach that was two parts dirt, and cimbed up wooden steps to a porch that was screened with cloth mosquito netting instead of wire.

In the living-room that occupied the front half of the house, Jim, who had accompanied his guests from the city, was mobbed by two small boys, quite naked, and a little girl just able to toddle and half out of a wet bathing-suit. As Fred thought it over afterward he gave a good deal of importance to these three children, and especially the fact that they were strong, well sunburnt, plump, perfectly healthy, and gloriously happy. It was his experience that the children of the people he knew were none of these things, nor would they have appeared at ease in the natural costume of young savages.

Mrs. Durkin hurried out the kitchen to disperse the trio, one the son of a neighbor, in search of clothes, and to welcome her guests. She had the bronzed, glowing face of a young sea-nymph, the athletic grace of an Indian, and the clean, simple costume of a cook. She greeted her guests with something warmer and more genuine than was often to be found in the drawing-rooms of the people Fred knew.

"Your bedroom is to be the front porch," she said. "I want you to have as much of the sea as you can absorb while you are here. You will find those two Gloucester hammocks the most comfortable things to sleep in that were ever invented. I'm going to put the children on the couches right here. Jim and I are going into winter quarters; that means the bedroom."

During the course of the evening Matilda had time to notice that the front room was as far superior to her fashionably uncomfortable parlor as the neighborhood of Pinocle Flats was superficially inferior to the block of elegant apartment houses in the part of town her friends were accustomed to visit. In proportions the room was a double square. A large brick fireplace faced the front door, and on either side were doors leading respectively to the kitchen and the bedroom. Off one end of the room a small enclosed porch with a glass roof was fitted up as a bathroom. The other end of the room and the entire side facing the porch was then open to the sea air, but could be closed by windows that were folded up to the ceiling. The rest of the wall-space was taken up by bookshelves that extended from floor to roof. All round the walls ran couches that were boxed in below to afford locker and shelf space and provided with springs and mattresses covered with green burlap, so that they could serve as beds.

The large table was removed from the center of the room to the porch to serve as a dining-table there, leaving the large

room free for dancing to phonograph music afterward.

Saturday began, of course, after the deep sleep that sea air brings, with a swim. After breakfast Jim announced that the day would be spent in a sail up the coast in his open catboat to a better beach than Pinocle Flats afforded, where there would be a picnic lunch and swimming. Bathing suits, with which one of the lockers was filled, were voted the costume of the day.

It was not until Sunday night that Fred, talking to Jim, managed to bring the conversation round to family finances.

"It's very simple," Fred explained. "Nelly and I came down here on a lark one day while we were engaged. We were puzzled at that time how we were to make a go of marriage on my salary. We happened to strike this place just as an old fellow was moving out. I talked to him, and he offered to sell me the shack and his boat thrown in for a few hundred dollars.

"I told him I could hardly afford a real home, much less a summer one to boot, and then Nelly sprang her big idea. She is the brains of our firm. I can tell you that right now. She said she was crazy to get away from the city, and also had a lot of ideas about what she could do to this shack. She wanted to have me buy it and live here all the time. I did, and we have. We don't owe any one a cent. On the contrary, we have saved enough so that we can afford to move to the city when the kid here is ready for school. This will be our summer residence then. I don't have the worries about keeping up with the style that some people have. We make our own style here. And the result is I have more brains for work and am getting along well. To let you into a secret, the boss has promised me a real job the first of the year."

"I say—" began Fred.

"Is there a shack near this part of the coast looking for an owner?" Matilda completed the question.

"As a matter of fact, there is," replied Jim, "and I could pick up a catboat for you at a bargain. A good many people are selling them now to buy the new model."

You see the whole story is spoiled. The domestic tragedy is nipped in a vulnerable spot. If you like sob-stuff, though, you probably won't have to round the corner to find some. Marriage, like other business ventures, is subject to bankruptcy.

Strategy

by Herbert Louis McNary

"HELLO, sweetness!" and smiling, curly headed Jack Cummings greeted his girl wife with an embrace as bearlike as when he first was under the influence of her velvet-brown eyes; and "sweetness" had been ready for the embrace as soon as she had heard Jack's key rattle in the keyhole. Almost two years of married life, and still, even in the privacy of their little flat, lovers.

"Eats ready, Grace?" inquired Jack as his wife hung his coat and hat in the hall closet. "I'm as hungry as a half-starved kid in a bake-shop."

"I've been keeping it warm on the stove, Jack. You are late to-night, aren't you?"

"Yup. Service is terrible in the rush hours. You got to be a football player to even get in the cars. Wish I was one of those guys that has a chauffeur call for 'em every night. Some people are lucky."

Grace glanced at her husband with something akin to hope in her eyes, but when she spoke it was without enthusiasm.

"I wish so too, Jack."

"Never mind, kitten, a guy can't have everything; and there's no one got a wife like mine." And he planted another kiss on the red lips and gave her a little squeeze. "Run along now and spread the works while I remove some of the city proper from my face and hands." Jack slipped into the bath-room, while Grace returned to the kitchen.

A few minutes later he came into the kitchen and dropped into one of the chairs, and watched his wife scurry from pantry and stove to table. Save on Sundays, or when they had company, the Cummings partook of their meals in the kitchen. Hungry as he claimed to be, Jack seemed entirely satisfied to watch his efficient little wife hover about him solicitously, and he waited until she was seated opposite him before he looked at what the evening meal was to consist of. Grace watched him furtively while he helped himself.

"Hash—again?" His tone was hardly a complaint, but, coming from Jack, Grace recognized it as a protest.

"Yes, Jack; the rent is due Monday—and everything costs so much. I have to plan—" And at the tremulous note in her voice Jack was penitent.

"That's all right, kitten," and Jack's blue eyes smiled cheerfully, "we can't expect to live like millionaires or plumbers on thirty-five a week."

But now that she had an opening, Jack's little brown-eyed wife was not going to drop the subject. She was reluctant to find any flaw in the good-natured, well-dressed boy she adored; at least, if she recognized any faults, she found it difficult to call his attention to them.

"Jack, why don't you get more money?"

"Because Lamson & Fletcher, Wholesalers, Incorporated, want all the money in the world for themselves, sweetheart."

"That isn't the reason, Jack. They would pay you more if you were worth it—I mean if you showed that you were worth it," she corrected as she saw her husband start to grin.

"Well, how am I going to show it? I do my work all right; but I'm no wizard. All I have is common sense."

"And that's all you need, Jack. You think quick and straight, and you take suggestions readily. You must have some ideas of your own—"

"Yes, and give them to some one else to get the credit for them?" cut in Jack as he buttered another slice of bread.

"That might happen once or twice, Jack, but if you can show them that you have some constructive ideas they will come and ask you for them."

"Well, I'll think about it, honey," and Jack devoted most of his interest to his food. "Thirty-five isn't so tough," he added a moment later. "We live pretty decent. Got a good flat, good clothes, and everything."

"But we aren't saving anything for unusual expenses like sickness or—or something," and her eyes softened.

"Why worry about unusual expenses?" responded Jack without glancing up, or else he would have noticed the warm color that suffused the young wife's cheeks.

"But, Jack, there are only two of us now; but soon—"

Jack replaced his cup in the saucer and looked at her searchingly. Immediately he pushed back his chair and was around at her side of the table.

"Why, Grace, I didn't know. You will have to get a servant and doctors—and whatever else there is."

Grace smiled tolerantly as she ran her fingers through his curly blond hair.

"Servants and doctors and 'whatever else there is' cost money, Jackie."

"I'll get it, some way," declared Jack, now unnaturally serious. "I'll get another job with some real dough. I'm not tied to this place."

"No," counseled the wife, "don't do anything rash. Your chances ought to be good right where you are. There must be some opportunities."

"Not in the cost department," grumbled Jack. "Thompson's a wet rag, and there's three ahead of me waiting for him to die."

"Well, look around, Jack. There is no hurry. I've been saving. I guess we can stand hash once in a while."

"I can live on kisses with you, honey," and he again left his chair that he might give her a demonstration. "Gimme an apron, and I'll help you with the dishes, and we can beat it to a show."

"A show costs too much, Jack."

"Well, the movies, then. The bank-roll can stand that, now that I've been bitten by the ambition bug."

"No, Jack; let's go up to the Social Center. They have free entertainment."

"Oh, Grace. They only have stereopticon pictures there, or if it's movies it will be 'How the Natives Make Straw Hats in Bulgaria,' or something equally thrilling."

Grace laughed an easy, girlish laugh as she placed the dishes in the pan.

"Oh, Jack, you're hopeless. It isn't anything like that at all. Mae Halpin goes up every Wednesday night, and she says they have a good picture and a comic, and then they have a short talk given by some prominent business man."

"Oh, that's all right," and in his eagerness Jack almost dropped the plate he was wiping. "Know who's spilling the coke to-night? Thomas J. Lamson himself."

"Your boss, Jack?"

"The head of the firm," corrected Jack. "What fun can I have listening to him?"

"May be he will say something that you can use to advantage," declared Grace, an eager light of anticipation glowing in the large brown eyes.

"Maybe he will tell how he came to the city with a dime, like the rest of them—and he's got the same dime yet." But Jack made no serious attempt to cool his wife's enthusiasm, and eight o'clock found them in the assembly hall of the district high school ready to accept the evening's entertainment.

After the picture had been run off the director stepped on the stage and introduced the man with him as "Mr. Thomas J. Lamson, of Lamson & Fletcher's." Lamson was a tall, rather heavy individual, well along in years; but there was nothing of the crabby type about him that Grace had been led to expect. In fact, he disclosed a sense of humor that astonished Jack more than probably any other in the audience.

"Success, to my mind," declared Lamson, getting down to his theme after several jocular references to the superior quality of his foodstuffs, "comes to the man with initiative. It is appalling what a lack of this quality there is in the average man to-day.

"Give him work to do, and he will do it. He never thinks of providing the work for himself or the relation of his task with some one else's. They say Opportunity knocks but once. That may be, but he doesn't knock until you give him your address. You have to make him come around. You have to plan, you have to use strategy, to place whatever you have to sell in the highest market."

There was considerable more to Lamson's talk, but this was the gist of it, and it was the theme that Mr. and Mrs. Cummings discussed on the way home.

"Did you hear what he said, Jack, about initiative? You have initiative and ideas. There's your chance."

"A lot of good they would do me. I told you that any idea I might have would be choked to death by the time that old woman of a boss I have, Thompson, got a look at it." Then Jack concluded, with a little more enthusiasm: "If Lamson wasn't just shooting off hot air, I might have a chance if any idea I might hatch out should reach his attention."

Grace was silent for a while, and when she finally spoke there was more expression in her eyes than in her voice.

"You mean," she asked, "that if you could get in contact with Lamson himself that that would be an opportunity?"

"Yes," replied Jack; and then, as though fearing a trap, he started to hedge. "That is, if I had some worth-while idea, and Lamson could be really interested—"

But Grace was determined—more determined than she thought herself capable of being—and she proceeded to spring the trap and hold her victim fast, despite his endeavors to untangle himself.

"Jack, didn't you hear what he said about giving Opportunity your address?"

"Oh," protested Jack, "that was just a figure of speech, Grace."

"Well, hold him to it. Bring yourself to his attention—"

"Have a heart, kitten; he doesn't even know I work for him."

"That's just it. Make him know you; use a little strategy, as he said; or—why don't you go directly to him to-morrow and tell him that you heard what he told us to-night; that you had some ideas, and that you had to bring them to him, and that—"

"Whoa! Wait a minute, wait a minute. Do you want him to think I'm a nut? He'll slam me in the psychopathic ward."

"No, he won't, Jack. He will be glad to think you have the interest of the firm at heart. If you put it to him right, he will at least have to discuss it with you; and that will mean that he knows about you, at any rate."

Grace was talking earnestly, trying to convince herself as well as her husband.

They had reached the house now, and Jack made no reply; and they entered the flat in silence; but if Grace thought her victory complete, she was mistaken. As soon as he had his coat and hat off and had dropped into the most comfortable chair in the parlor Jack rebelled again.

"Say, Grace, that stuff sounds all right when you spring it, but you can't actually pull it off."

But Grace was patient; felt that she was in the right. She crossed the room and, sitting on the arm of his chair, ruffled Jack's hair and attempted to kiss away his frown.

"It won't do any harm to try, Jack, and I'm sure some good will come out of it."

"But, Grace," protested her husband, "your whole argument is based on the assumption that I have ideas. Who said I had any? I can't think up things on the spur of the moment that will sound anything but foolish to Lamson."

"Of course you can, Jack. Wasn't it your idea to carry separate cost accounts for each department, and didn't you suggest that they have one central filing system, even if Thomson did get the credit for it?"

Jack was weakening, but he made one final attempt like a patient struggling for an excuse that will postpone his appointment with the dentist.

"I'll tell what I'll do. I'll observe things for the next few days, and get some real ideas, and then I'll go to Lamson."

But Grace refused to compromise.

"No, Jack"—and she smiled tolerantly—"that will be too late. You must go to Lamson to-morrow morning. That's settled," and she slipped off the chair arm and left the room.

She was up early the next morning and gave extra attention to her appearance and to preparing Jack's breakfast. The coffee had never been better, and the eggs were boiled just the way he liked them; and Grace, neat and dainty and as bright as the morning sun, quickly dispelled any gloom that might have settled on her husband when he recalled the task she had imposed on him.

She hummed snatches of popular songs as she fussed over his tie and brushed his coat. She was unusually cheerful, partly to encourage him and partly to conceal her own fears, for she realized that she was demanding of Jack something she would never have nerve enough to do herself. She watched him out of sight from the parlor window, and spent the rest of the day alternatingly hopeful and fearful.

Jack was not without his share of nerve and confidence, but if the door to the private office of Thomas J. Lamson had not opened so easily it is doubtful whether he would have dared to face his boss. Lamson glanced up inquiringly; but Jack was something of a gambler, willing to stake his all on one chance and play that chance to the limit. He gradually recovered his equanimity as he laid down his cards.

"My name is Cummings," he began. "I have been a clerk in the cost department for three years. I heard your talk last night, and it impressed me, because I think I have initiative. I am under the impression, Mr. Lamson, that you put your finger on what has held me back when you spoke about giving Opportunity one's address. I

have been responsible for some ideas that the firm has used—the central filing idea was really mine—but I find it difficult to reach the proper people with these suggestions."

All the time Jack was speaking Lamson had watched him closely, but nothing in his expression would indicate the impression the other was making upon him. Now as Jack paused Lamson cut in shortly:

"For example?"

There was no offense in his tone—in fact, some indication of interest—but it caught Jack unprepared. However, he had a saving sense of humor, and unconsciously he grinned good naturedly; at the same time he thought fast.

"Well, Mr. Lamson," he answered with a smile, "while I have a few ideas in mind I have not had a chance to analyze them closely enough to present them to you just yet in the right way. I came to you now because I wished to come as soon as possible after your talk last night, and because I would like to get your permission to do a little investigating.

"I believe I have a fair share of observation powers, and I think if I were permitted to drift around from department to department I might be able to make a few suggestions that would mean quite a saving."

Lamson looked at his clerk thoughtfully for some time before he spoke.

"Well, Mr.—er—Cummings," he said, and half smiled, "when I gave that talk last night I had no idea that it would be brought home to me in this way. However, I don't wish to discourage you, and I guess I can afford the experiment. If you have any worth-while ideas I would be glad to hear them."

So saying, he shifted his gaze to some papers and gave Jack an opportunity to exit.

II.

GRACE met her husband at the door that evening with an inquiring look in her brown eyes, but Jack teasingly kept her in suspense until supper was ready.

"Well, kitten, I tackled the lion in his den to-day, and told him that I wanted to drift around the place looking for ideas, and he told me to go ahead."

"Oh, Jack! I knew you could do it."

"Then maybe you know," responded Jack, "just where I'm going to get the ideas. Thompson thought I was crazy when I told him about it, and I think he had a sneaking notion that Lamson himself was getting dotty in his old age; but I let Thompson think what he pleased, and started out to get the ideas—only I didn't get any."

"Never mind, Jackie boy," his wife encouraged him; "don't let that disturb you. Take all the time you want, and you will get something worth while. I can give you one idea that might be worth something," and she left the table and crossed to the pantry, returning immediately with a small package of saleratus.

"See that, Jack?" She passed the package to him. "That was put up by your people, and it cost only ten cents; but when I opened the package it was but three-quarters full. If every woman feels about it the way I did, why, your firm is going to lose a lot of its good-will. I wouldn't mind paying a little more or getting a smaller package half as much as being taken advantage of like that."

"I guess you are right," admitted Jack as he turned the package between his fingers. "The price of saleratus has gone up, and we had a lot of packages on hand; but there is no need of pulling anything as rough as this. Well, that's one idea I can work on; maybe it will lead to more."

In the days that followed Grace refrained from asking too many questions. She knew that when Jack had news to tell he would only be too anxious to take her into his confidence, and she wisely recognized that too much curiosity on her part would only serve to make him impatient. Besides, she had complete confidence in him. She was convinced of his ability to make good, once he had the opportunity, and she never for a moment considered that any of the credit for any success he might meet with in his new enterprise should be given to her.

Jack was progressing slowly. He had made no brilliant suggestions, but one or two trifling changes had indicated that he

was on the right track. He was open-minded, and, besides, he had the proper attitude for his position. Naturally genial and cheerful, he was aware of the fact that most people resent innovations if not accomplished tactfully. But Jack was never offensive.

He never pretended to know it all, and was so obviously grateful for any information that the party interviewed usually entertained a proprietary interest in any improvement involving himself.

While Jack had made many small changes that meant a considerable yearly saving, he had made very few radical suggestions, and he had no way of telling how his work was impressing Lamson. But one day Lamson sent for him.

When Jack entered the private office he found the president inspecting two cards. Jack recognized them to be the old and the new style of cards that the mail-order department used.

"Cummings," began Lamson, "I understand that you had this old card replaced by one of this style. Will you give me the story of it?"

"Yes, sir," and Jack went around the desk to illustrate. "You see this old card, Mr. Lamson, has the words 'Name, Street Address, and City or Town' on three different lines. There are sixteen girls in the mail-order department whose job it is to fill these out.

"Now a girl only has to make out one to know that the name and address have to go at the top of the card, but with the words printed on the card she has to waste a lot of time filling in on the proper lines. On this new card there is just a blank space at the top. I timed the girls, and found out that it takes one-quarter less time with the new card than with the old."

"How many girls are there?" asked Lamson.

"Sixteen."

"How much do they get a week?"

"Fifteen."

"H-m. About three thousand a year wasted right there, eh?"

"About that, sir?"

"All right. Now I have something special I want you to look up. There is something about our attitude that has made us lose considerable business. I don't mean our general business; I mean with the big concerns. For example, I understand that Fowler, of Rice & Parkman, broke relations with us because he was not handled properly when he sought some information. That account meant several thousand dollars to us. If you can find the trouble you will save us a lot of money."

Jack spent most of the day worrying over this special problem, but without any success; and Grace guessed that night that something was bothering him. She said nothing, however, until Jack chose to take her into his confidence.

"Grace, Lamson called me on the mat this morning and made me a sleuth. Something's wrong with the firm when they're doing business with the big guys, and I'm to find out the reason."

"Maybe it is the telephone service," suggested Grace immediately. It must have been instinct, but as she saw that she had interested her husband, she continued: "I've called you up several times, Jack, and there's one operator who is awfully provoking. It isn't that she is insulting, but she seems to indicate that it is an imposition to ask her to do anything, and as for getting any information out of her, that's impossible."

"I know who it is," grinned Jack. "That's Helen Judson, on the switchboard. She's a wonderful looker, and knows it."

"Well, you don't see her when you are talking to her on the phone," Grace declared. "I know I wouldn't be very keen to do business after I tried to find out something from her."

"She ought to change places with Miss Hutchins. Bradley, the general manager, was telling me that Hutchy got on his nerves every time he looked at her. She must have given up hope of ever landing a man years ago, and now she dresses for spite. But she has a pleasant voice, and she certainly knows all about the business."

"Why don't you change them?"

"What? Make Hutchy a telephone operator? Why, she gets twenty-five a week now."

"What of it?" maintained Grace. "If she can mean the difference of several thousand dollars a year in extra business, she should get good pay, no matter what her position is."

"Gee, I think I'll try it, Grace; but I bet there will be some fireworks."

The next morning, just before he went to lunch, Jack made a report to Lamson in the president's private office, and when the latter stepped out Jack picked up the phone and gave the operator his house number.

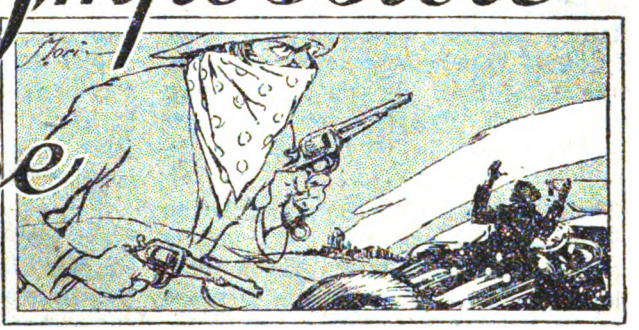
"Hello, Grace? It worked, kid, and—what do you know?—I had Hutchy call up Fowler, of Rice & Parkman, to find out why he had dropped us, and, between the two of us, we swung him back. That tickled Lamson silly."

It was the natural sequence of effect to cause that shortly after this, when Lamson chanced to pause at Jack's desk, he heard the latter talking over the telephone.

"Yes? Oh, Mr. Fowler, of Rice & Parkman. Yes, this is Mr. Cummings. Why, no, I had no intention of leaving. How much do I get now? Thirt—"

"Tell him five thousand a year, and hang up!" directed Lamson. "What does he think? That I'm training men for him? I don't know what your official position will be, but I guess you'll be worth five thousand to me."

The Impossible Posse



by Jack Whitman

LITTLE Roy Mills was rich, healthy and reasonably wise. But he was far from happy. In fact, his whole life might be summed up as an unhappy quest for happiness. Short, round-faced and fat, Romance had passed him by. Not only the romance of adoring women—he didn't care so much about that—but the romance of the high seas, dangerous adventure, glorious combats. In him there burned a heart that fevered for the broad highways and the wide seas and the purple nights of adventure.

When he sat in his club, fraternizing sycophantically with wayfarers of the world, he was as close to happiness as he ever came. But all of his exploits were vicarious. He had never had a chance for himself.

Now, as he drove his roadster skilfully up the winding mountain road, he observed every detail of the picturesque country through which he passed. It was a country that might have come out of a book, preferably a Bret Harte book. Rugged, wild, thinly settled, it might well be the haunt of bandits, the home of outlaws, bad men, rustlers, gamblers and the whole fraternity of the West of romance.

Roy sat back easily in the car and imagined what he would do if he were in the thick of a fight. Suppose now a big bandit should leap from his horse just around that bend in the road, point two guns at him and command him to throw up his hands. Would he do it? Well, he

might, but he would have a card up his sleeve. He would show the fellow that nobody could get the best of him.

His fingers clenched over the wheel as he exulted, imaginatively of course, in the joy of sinking them into the throat of a dangerous two-gun man. His fancy raced ahead of the roadster and peopled the dark turns and twists of the ascending road with the folk of a hundred novels. If only something would happen! He'd show 'em what he could do!

He recalled savagely the story Arthur Roderick had told the night before—a story as thrilling as a dime novel and as true as a record of history, of adventures in innermost China. Roy hated Roderick for his superb calm, his poise and assurance, when he himself was agog with dismay at the mere recital of events. The fellows had laughed at him, kidded him in his one sensitive spot.

If only something would happen! If he only had a chance, he could be as heroic as the rest of them. He would have a story himself to tell. Imagine everybody's surprise if, for once, he could really play the hero.

The mountain road became more dim as twilight descended upon it. The heights above were bathed in mist. The fashionable summer hotel where he was to spend his vacation was still fifteen miles away. Romance still had a chance. Opportunity was knocking loudly at her door, but the lady was slow to answer.

Roy switched on the lights, less from choice than from his habit of always doing the safe thing. The car swerved around a rocky ledge and began a short descent into a mountain valley, turning sharply with the road. Outside of the narrow path of light the way was darker than ever. Here and there a break in the jagged cliff was black with mystery. Passing places like this Roy shuddered and delighted at the same moment.

As a right-angled turn suddenly appeared he threw on the brake and brought the car almost to a standstill. The rear tires skidded in the gravel, and the engine missed. Roy cursed himself for dreaming when he should have been watching the road.

Before he could start again up the long climb that now lay before him, a harsh voice issued from the dark and he heard the familiar words of romance, "Throw up your hands!"

Romance was late. It was too bad, for by being late she caused Roy to miss a perfectly good chance to be a hero. Right now he was too busy with the car to be disconcerted. His was a single-cylinder mind, and he had been schooled so long in the practical that he couldn't dismiss a missing engine, grinding brakes that might not hold, and a rear tire cut on the rocks of the road just to enjoy himself with a bandit.

It was with a feeling of deep resentment rather than welcome that he obeyed the bandit's command.

"Keep 'em up!" the voice commanded, and a figure stepped out of the dark.

The figure was really small, slender and even frail. But in the light cast upon the side of the road a gigantic shadow loomed. Roy watched the shadow with terror in his eyes. The bandit was easily six feet four! And the size of the shoulders! The length of the arms!

Two guns! Even before he looked Roy knew that the bandit carried two guns. He didn't have to look to know that. And they were both pointed at him. The figure approached, a handkerchief mask concealing all of the face but the deadly cold eyes, a broad-brimmed hat drooping low over the forehead.

Roy felt a gun tickle his ribs. He gasped, but did not move. He waited. While he waited he tried desperately to think of the card up his sleeve. What had he planned to do in such a situation? For the life of him he could not remember. The muzzle of that gun drove everything out of his mind but fear.

The bandit had pocketed one gun, apparently, and was systematically emptying Roy's pockets. A hand had shot into his inner coat pocket and had come out with his billfold, fat with treasury notes. The cold gray eyes quickly and silently counted the money. Then a deft, slim hand drew clinking silver from another pocket and lifted Roy's expensive watch.

Evidently another road, coming up the mountain from the far side, joined the first one here. As the bandit lifted the watch and tugged at the chain that held it, a clear tenor voice floated up to them, singing happily:

"The sons-o'-guns, that's what I say—
They rustled my pile—my pile away!"

The watch was dropped back into Roy's pocket and for the first time the gun wavered from his rib. While he still held his hands aloft the bandit was lost again in the dark.

Then as the gay singer came into the range of his lights, the bandit, mounted on a small pony, dashed across the range of his vision, off the road and down through the brush of the mountainside. His last cent was gone, but as his hands dropped to his sides Roy was relieved to find his watch safe.

The singer had finished his song tunelessly and a second later rode up to the car.

"What's up?" he asked.

"I—I—I've been robbed!" sputtered Roy. "There he goes—down there!"

The singer whistled, paid no more attention to Roy, and turned swiftly down the trail in pursuit of the bandit.

II.

CRASHING through the manzanita, stumbling, half falling, jumping, the bandit's horse descended the mountainside. The frail rider clung low in the saddle and urged the sure-footed mustang to greater speed, for already the pursuer was to be heard. Riding as fast as the bandit the man in pursuit neither sang nor whistled.

The bandit reached the bottom of a little barranca, leaped a stream and dashed toward the cover of a small cabin and barn. The man in pursuit stopped short, gave a little gasp, and drew his gun. Then he rode carefully forward, slowly, as noiselessly as he could, straining his eyes and cursing softly as the bandit approached the cabin.

A hundred yards from the other the pursuer stopped and waited. Up above he heard the low hum of Roy's motor. Then a flash of light appeared in the little barn near the house, where the bandit was evidently leaving his horse. A moment later a lamp was lighted in the cabin, a curtain drawn, and the pursuer saw no more.

Dismounting and walking softly forward he proceeded to the rear of the cabin, threw the reins over his horse's head, spoke softly to the animal, and approached the cabin. He went to a door that was near the window where he had seen the light and listened carefully. All he could hear was a soft murmur. He endeavored to look through the cracks of the door into the room, but could not manage it. Then he crept to the window and tried to peep under the curtain. This, too, was a failure.

Further search resulted in the discovery of a keyhole, through which he could catch a glimpse of the room's interior. His mouth fell open with astonishment at what he saw there, he almost whistled in surprise, and then he laughed softly to himself.

He restored his gun carelessly to his holster, went back to the door and threw it open, humming casually:

"The sons-o'-guns, that's what I say—
They rustled my pile—my pile away!"

III.

WHEN Roy Mills reached the mountain hotel, after the most thrilling driving he had ever done, he remembered many things he might have done to the bandit. He was filled with remorse now that the latter had caught him unaware, off guard, and that he had had no chance to act. Even if the bandit was a six-foot-four, two-gun man, and terribly coarse and brutal besides, intelligence and quick wit—had it been quick enough—would have won against him. He might have tried that jiu-jitsu trick he had seen demonstrated in the gym. He might have laughed at the outlaw. He might have asked for the makings of a cigarette, nonchalantly, and then blown the tobacco into the fellow's eyes. That's what they did in the movies. If he had only thought quickly enough.

At the hotel, however, he decided excitedly that although he had missed one chance he still had another. The bandit was not

far away—he couldn't have gone far so soon. And one man was on his trail. With a posse he could go in pursuit, capture the bandit, get his money back and probably have his picture in the next day's paper—so all the fellows at the club could see it.

He jumped out of the car and ran into the hotel, stepping indiscriminately upon the toes of two flappers and one elderly vacationist. He was perspiring, red of face, wide-eyed with excitement, and altogether ridiculous, as he dashed up to the rotund innkeeper, who was there to welcome him. But in his heart the white flame of Romance was burning brightly.

"I'm Roy Mills, of Los Angeles," he announced. "I've been robbed—coming up here. Big Mexican bandit—six foot and over! Brutal-looking cuss! With two guns!"

Roy spoke louder than he knew and succeeded in winning the attention of everybody in the long room. Flappers from fifteen to fifty, prim school-teachers, youths in immaculate white flannels, a clerk with tortoise-shell spectacles—everybody heard and gathered around Roy. It was the most enjoyable moment of his life.

Only the manager—a native of the mountains—was unexcited.

"Robbed? Waal, don't that beat all! Thar ain't been a robbery on that road for twenty years!"

The clerk, who was a wise guy from San Francisco, called the manager aside.

"Bunk!" he whispered. "It's a new way to get credit!"

The manager laughed.

"Not this hombre! He don't need it—he could buy this here hotel, chop it up and sell it for kindlin' wood! Anyhow, he's already paid for his 'commodations here. We gotta treat him right—myself, I think he's liquored or loco, 'cause thar ain't no robbers hereabouts, but we gotta believe him jes' the same!"

Having an audience Roy lost no time in making his speech. What he wanted, right away, was a posse! He wanted volunteers to go with him, capture the bandit and make the country safe for law-abiding men and women. He inserted a very effective period about the safety of "our women folks." After that there wasn't a pair of white flannel trousers in the hotel that didn't yearn to mount a horse and dash down the trail. The posse was well organized by the time the manager rejoined the group. And Roy was its leader—until then.

There were two difficulties in the way of its success, said the manager. First, they were too few in number. Second, they didn't know the country well enough. In order to overcome these difficulties at the outset he offered the services of his employees. As to the second difficulty he and his best guide would go along.

All of the servants except the clerk, who was too near-sighted to know a bandit if he saw one, were called from their various duties. Among them came a Britisher who had been a very aristocratic butler in his day, a voluble French *chef*, a hissing Japanese houseboy, and two Chinese laundrymen. Then the manager called Bill Jenkins, his guide, and the entire force was led out to the stables to be armed and horsed, followed by the admiring flutters of every skirt-wearer in the hotel.

It was a motley crew, as both Bill Jenkins and the horses could testify. Bill would have flatly refused to allow the "furriners" to ride his ponies if the manager hadn't insisted "that everything goes, Bill, an' the bill will be sent to Mr. Mills."

At last, armed with pistols of all makes and calibers, rifles, shotguns, and clubs, they set forth, cheered by the admiring ladies. Roy, who had been temporarily done out of the leadership by the quiet efficiency of the manager, and Bill Jenkins, now rose to the occasion and expressed the sentiments of the posse.

"Ladies," he orated, "we go forth to wage battle for you, nor shall we return until we have taken the enemy!"

Even the Chinamen cheered.

Under the direction of the manager, supplemented by canny trailwise suggestions from Bill Jenkins, the posse descended the road and spread out over the countryside. Every man in the party, not excluding the Orientals, was filled with a firm determination to bring home his man. The French *chef* brandished his weapon with the same fierce Napoleonic gesture with which he attacked a lamb chop.

In the midst of such romantic excitement little Roy Mills came closer to his goddess than ever before. He was riding after an outlaw! He was on the adventure trail! It seemed too good to be true. His funny little body slid unconcernedly over the large saddle, from one too-long stirrup to the other, and the horse jogged him unmercifully, and he did not care, as he rode beside silent Bill Jenkins on the road of romance.

The posse that swept down upon the barranca from all sides was as unlike a Western posse as one might imagine. At least ten times some one in the party shouted, "Here he is—this way!" only to discover, a moment later, that he was setting his fellows upon his best friend.

Roy rode more or less silently, except when he, too, was startled out of his pose by thinking he saw the outlaw, and preserved as well as he could the expression of William S. Hart. Being favored with a round, full face, Roy really looked more like Fatty Arbuckle.

Bill Jenkins gave out explicit and laconic orders. He told the men just which direction to take, he familiarized them with the topography of the country, and pointed out the only possible egress from the barranca. In response to their inane questions he shrugged his shoulders silently and prayed that all tenderfeet might be consigned to a more torrid region that the Mohave Desert. Bill, after half an hour with the posse, was frankly on the side of the outlaw.

Bill and the manager and Roy were riding together. The others had spread out along the rim of the barranca and were descending noisily toward the little cabin.

A light burned in the latter, but the shade was still drawn and nothing could be seen. Suddenly, however, one of the man-hunters on the far side of the building saw a man plunge out of a lighted doorway, run to the barn, leap on his horse and dash away. The man-hunter, judging that the man was the bandit who had heard them approaching, raised his shotgun and fired, carefully closing his eyes at the same time.

When he opened his eyes again he saw a riderless horse run past him, and a moment later the outlaw, half stunned on the ground, was surrounded by half of the posse.

An enormous din arose. The man who had shot rode up to his prey and insisted that his was the reward. A Chinaman who held the supposed outlaw claimed it vehemently in a mixture of pidgin English and Chinese. His claim was disputed by his countryman, but they were both silenced by the insistent shrieking of the French *chef* and the loud dignity of the British butler, who could get no further in his speech than "Hi say—Hi say—"

"What the hell!" asked the man on the ground, shaking off his talkative captives and rising to his feet. "What's goin' on here—a meetin' of the League of Nations?"

Bill Jenkins, Roy, and the manager rode up just then, and Roy proclaimed positively, "You're under arrest!"

The man addressed silenced everybody by his loud laughter.

"Don't be hasty," the manager advised Roy. "You gotta identify this hombre first before we pinch him. Are ye sure this here's the outlaw?"

Roy jumped off his horse and ran up to the man. He gave him a quick glance.

"He's the man! He's the man who robbed me!" he decided. "I know the big brute. Just what I told you—a big brute, over six feet, wearing two guns!"

The charge against him seemed to inspire the man to greater, louder laughter.

"Aw, hell!" said Bill Jenkins, recognizing the clear tenor of the laugh. "This hombre ain't no bandit, you pore little spindle-legged lubber! This here is the sheriff of Caliente County!"

"Hello, sheriff!" greeted the manager, elbowing Roy out of his way and shaking hands with the supposed bandit.

"What you pullin' off, Joe? A little entertainment fer your boarders?"

The manager grinned apologetically.

"It's like this, sheriff. This hombre—which I thinks is loco—comes up to the inn and announces as how he's been robbed. He wants a posse right away, see, to go and get the bad man. He's a pretty rich hombre, see, so I says to myself if he wants it let him have it. We aim to please. Now we round you up and you're it in the little game of catch. It's all a pipe-dream, see?"

Roy was about to interrupt when the

sheriff stopped laughing and put his hand firmly on the city man's shoulder. A new note came into his voice.

"It's you and not me that's wanted!" he said. "You're wanted down in the city fer bank robbery! Come on with me!"

Roy gasped and sputtered, but could not make himself heard above the excitement caused by the sheriff's words. The sheriff winked solemnly at the manager.

"Better take your International Hotel Workers' Union back home and put 'em to bed before some of these weapons go off and kill a tree squirrel!" he advised.

"That's what I say," Jenkins mumbled.

They turned away, but Roy broke loose from the sheriff and clung to the manager's coat.

"You know me!" he pleaded. "You can identify me! This charge is absurd. Tell this man who I am—"

"Son," said the manager, "I can identify you jes' as well as you identified the robber—and that ain't very well! You better go along with the sheriff. He's a reg'lar feller and he'll treat you real nice. But remember that both of them guns is loaded and he's the hombre to use 'em!"

The posse collected itself and left Roy to his fate and the sheriff.

"Listen, Mr. Man," said the sheriff as the last Chinaman rode out of sight. "I know you ain't a bank robber, and I ain't meanin' to detain you long. But when you was so sure about me bein' the one that stuck you up I jes' wanted to show you how wrong you was. Besides, I wanted to give you back your roll."

"Then you are the bandit!"

"Naw! I got the bandit over in that thar cabin, and I'll get your roll back. But you gotta promise me you won't never tell anybody about this here bandit or I won't let you in on it. Promise?"

Roy's imagination leaped ahead. Again he was touching the skirts of Romance.

"I—I promise!" he said excitedly.

The sheriff took him over to the cabin and opened the door. Roy stepped in. It was a bare, clean room of good dimensions, and in one corner an old man with white hair lay on a bed. His face was turned toward Roy, and the latter thought he had never seen a face more pained. Beside the bed, kneeling, was the figure of a girl in khaki riding-trousers. Her back was turned, but her hair fell down over her shoulders.

The sheriff pointed to the floor beside the girl, and Roy saw suddenly a wide, flopping sombrero, a red handkerchief that might be used as a mask, and a small silver pistol. His mouth opened in amazement.

"Yeah!" said the sheriff. "Thar's the whole story. This little girl, which is goin' to be Mrs. Sheriff, is the bandit and that's the two guns that stuck you up. It ain't loaded.

"Ye see, this little girl's daddy ain't none too well. In fact, he's downright sick. An' he's gotta go away fer an operation which he can get only in the city. Bein' as how he didn't have any money—an' I didn't have enough—I went away to borrow it. But I was kep' away longer than I expected, and this little girl got worried. So she decided to get the money herself. Yuh see, mister," and the sheriff's eyes were blurred with tears, "it's a matter of life and death!"

The sheriff stepped over to the bed and picked up a roll of bills. He handed them to Roy. "I borrowed enough, so we don't need this. Thanks jes' the same!"

The girl had risen and gone to her sweetheart's side. Her face was as lovely as her hair. Roy looked into a pair of deep blue eyes and then into the fine open face of the sheriff. Here, indeed, was Romance.

Roy blinked and discovered that his own eyes were wet. His hand had touched the bills, but now he pushed them back into the clasped hands of the lovers.

"You might need more than you borrowed," he said. "And if you don't I'd like to make it a wedding present. Please take it!"

"I couldn't do that!" the sheriff refused.

The old man on the bed groaned, and both of the youngsters turned to him with that quick affection that spells utter devotion.

While their backs were turned Roy Mills stole softly out of the house, leaving his wedding present behind. Although he had called it that, it was a great deal more. It was an offering on the altar of Romance.

From Nine Dollars a Week To Part Owner of a Business

The life-story of a man who wouldn't stay down. How Purwin got out of the rut and made good in a big way.

By Robert G. Hill

TO every man who says that he "never had a chance" or that "Fate is against him," I want to relate the story of Klemens Purwin—"the man who wouldn't stay down."

Nine years ago his time card read K. Purwin—laborer—$1.50 a day.

Today his business card reads—Klemens Purwin, Consulting Engineer, The Stoney Foundry Engineering and Equipment Co., East 66th and Hubbard Ave., Cleveland.

KLEMENS PURWIN

MR. PURWIN'S first job was as a laborer with the American Steel and Wire Company. His second was in a tinner's shop in Chicago. His third was as a pipe fitter with the Illinois Central Railroad. His fourth with the P. R. R.

Mr. Purwin—or K. Purwin, as he was known in those days—was drifting. He was $800 in debt when he got his next job—this time with the Erie Railroad at Cleveland.

He told me the other day that when he got his first pay envelope from this company he sat down in the corner of the shop and did a heap of thinking.

"Am I always going to work for such a small salary?" he asked himself. "Other men are getting ahead—why not I?"

The more he thought about it, the more he realized that the difference was simply this:—they had trained themselves to do some one thing better than anyone else. And he—K. Purwin—was just one of the thousands of unskilled workers who are always the first to go when business slacks up.

THAT night, K. Purwin made the decision that was to change his whole life. Reading through a magazine he came across an advertisement of the International Correspondence Schools at Scranton. It told how the Schools had helped thousands of men to increase their salary and to make themselves indispensable in business. How the Schools come to a man in his home, and how they train him in the spare time that is ordinarily wasted! How any man—no matter what his means or previous education, can go forward through the help of I. C. S.

That night K. Purwin tore out that familiar coupon, marked it and sent it to Scranton.

Every lesson helped him with his work and in three months he secured a job as a machinist with the Ferro Machine and Foundry Company of Cleveland. After a few months he was made assistant foreman—then foreman. Then one day he said good-bye to his overalls and went into the drafting room.

Advancement followed advancement. And today, as I have already said, K. Purwin, who was once a laborer at nine dollars a week, is not only Consulting Engineer for The Stoney Foundry Engineering and Equipment Company, but part owner as well!

IT is up to you, my friend, it is up to you. If you really want Success, you can have it. Not by sitting idly by and wishing for it, but by studying in the spare time that now goes to waste.

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- ☐ Gas Engine Operating
- ☐ CIVIL ENGINEER
- ☐ Surveying and Mapping
- ☐ MINE FOREMAN or ENG'R
- ☐ STATIONARY ENGINEER
- ☐ Marine Engineer
- ☐ ARCHITECT
- ☐ Contractor and Builder
- ☐ Architectural Draftsman
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- ☐ PLUMBING & HEATING
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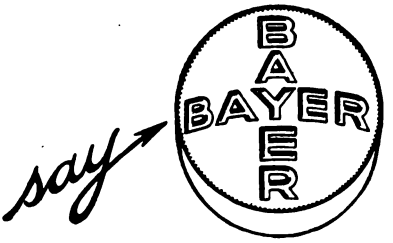

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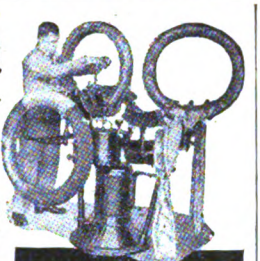

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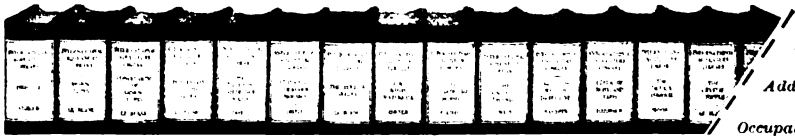

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