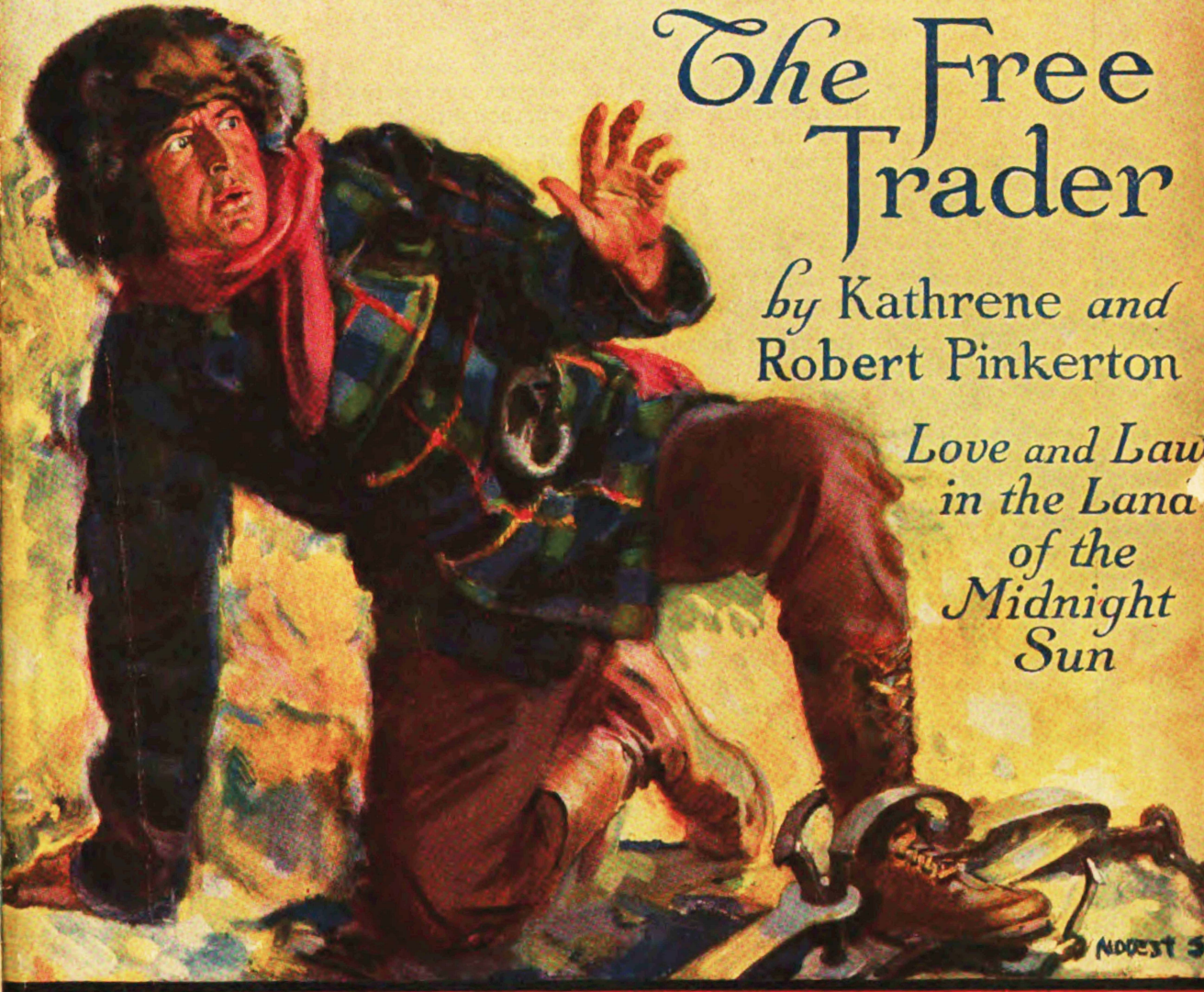
ARGOSY ALL-STORY WEEKLY



The Free Trader

by Kathrene and Robert Pinkerton

Love and Law in the Land of the Midnight Sun

Xmas

What shall I give?

Gifts!

Here are two very sensible answers to this perplexing question, that thousands of readers take advantage of each year

MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE $3.00

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is one of the most fascinating holiday gifts you can make. Twelve big numbers—192 pages every month, containing every variety of fiction entertainment, will be a constant reminder of your thoughtfulness—and just think how your friends will enjoy it. Many of our regular readers purchase six and often eight subscriptions to MUNSEY'S each year as Xmas gifts.

ARGOSY-ALLSTORY WEEKLY:

If among your friends you know several to be ardent fiction fans, then send them each this magazine for a year as a Xmas gift.

The ARGOSY-ALLSTORY is not only the oldest of the ALL-FICTION Weeklies, but the most popular as well. A Fiction-Feast-for-Fiction-Fans is the way one reader describes this richly freighted literary tidbit.

A new novel begins in each issue of the ARGOSY-ALLSTORY—52 a year—and many of these novels are sold later in book form at $1.50 to $2.00 a copy. Every number brimful of the world's best stories of love, adventure and humor, and the cost to you is only—per year for each subscription. . . . .

$4.00

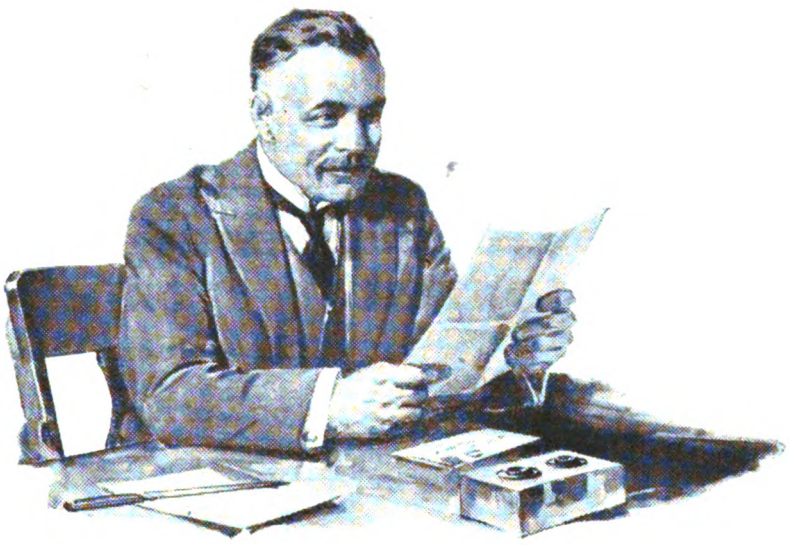
A handsome greeting card announcing the gift in your name is sent, upon request, with each Xmas subscription, so that the magazine and the greeting card are both delivered on Christmas morning.

The most pleasant and lasting gift for Xmas time, one that is appreciated from one end of the year to the other, is a subscription to an interesting magazine. It is the most sensible answer to that perplexing question "What shall I give?"

Send Christmas gift orders early addressed to:

Christmas Subscription Department

The Frank A. Munsey Company—284 Broadway, New York



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"I told Hartley he was a 'comer'—and this confirms my judgment! Listen to this letter:—

Dear Sir:

You will no doubt be glad to know that James H. Blake, one of your employees of whose excellent work as a student we have been advising you each month, has completed his course and has been granted a diploma.

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"That settles the manager question. The man who cares enough about his future to invest some of his spare time in *training* is the kind we want in this firm's responsible positions.

"That $5,000 salary will mean a lot to Blake and his family. But he'll *earn* it—and make good use of it. I'll send for him now! It's a pleasure to promote a man who *deserves* it."

IN offices, shops, stores, mines, mills and on railroads, I. C. S. trained men are stepping up to bigger jobs, right over the heads of those whose only qualification is long service.

There is a job ahead of *you* that some man is going to be picked for. And your boss can't take chances. He is going to choose a *trained* man. Why don't you put yourself in line for that promotion?

You can do it without losing a minute from work and with plenty of time left for recreation. You can do it no matter where you live, how small your means, or how limited your previous education. Yes, you can!

One hour a day spent with the I. C. S. in your own home will bring you bigger money, more comforts, more pleasures, all that success means. Don't let another single priceless hour of spare-time go to waste! Without cost or obligation of any kind, let us prove that we can help *you*. Just mark and mail this coupon. *Do it right now!*

— — — — — — — TEAR OUT HERE — — — — — — —

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Without cost or obligation, please tell me how I can qualify for the position or in the subject *before* which I have marked an X:

BUSINESS TRAINING DEPARTMENT

☐ Business Management	☐ Salesmanship
☐ Industrial Management	☐ Advertising
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☐ Banking and Banking Law	☐ Business English
☐ Accountancy (including C.P.A.)	☐ Civil Service
☐ Nicholson Cost Accounting	☐ Railway Mail Clerk
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Occupation.....

Persons residing in Canada should send this coupon to the International Correspondence Schools Canadian, Limited, Montreal, Canada.

ARGOSY-ALLSTORY WEEKLY

VOL. CXLVII CONTENTS FOR DECEMBER 16, 1922 NUMBER 6

FIVE CONTINUED STORIES

NOVELETTE AND SHORT STORIES

MISCELLANEOUS AND POETRY

When Ann was born they put her in an ash barrel, like an unwanted kitten. But Ann wouldn't stay put. What she did and how she did it, a tale full of laughter, pathos, and love, is told by J. U. Giesy in

RUNAWAY ANN

a three-part serial starting next week.

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

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

Single copies, 10 cents. By the year, $4.00 in United States, its dependencies, Mexico and Cuba; $6.00 to Canada, and $7.00 to Foreign Countries. Remittances should be made by check, express money order or postal money order. Currency should not be sent unless registered

PUBLISHED WEEKLY BY THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY COPYRIGHT, 1922

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

No Money Down

Pudding Pan. Used like this for puddings, cakes, bread. Also milk dish. Two and one-half quarts.

Used as Colander. Handy to rinse berries. Also used as Strainer.

When used as Casserole ideal for baking apples, beans, escalloped potatoes, macaroni, etc.

Convex Kettle. This combination used for cooking and stewing vegetables. Bulged sides, easy to pour liquids off. Used as Windsor kettle.

Used as a Double Boiler cooks cereals, no scorching. Steams vegetables in top. **Kettle Cover** made of thick aluminum.

When used as Preserving Kettle distributes heat evenly. Not necessary to stir the contents.

Corn Popper. This combination is what you want for special things—corn popping, crisping corn flakes, roasting coffee, etc.

Combination Cooker. Used this way for general purposes not so well filled by any other utensil. Ears of kettle hold bail upright or lowered position.

Used this way in Steamer Set. For steaming potatoes or corn on cob. Perforated bottom makes uniform cooking.

Used this way for Tubed Cake Pan. Removable tube. Cakes taken out easily without breaking.

Self-Basting Roaster. When used this way makes juicy, well browned roasts. A perfect self-baster. Steam condenses on cover and drips back.

The Hartman Co. 3911-3925 Wentworth Ave. Dept. 5045 **Chicago, Ill.**

A complete cooking set in this wonderful combination. Send only the coupon and we ship the set, **all charges prepaid. Try it 30 days on free trial,** and then if not just what you want, pay nothing and send it back and we'll pay the return postage charges. If you keep it, pay bargain price at end of 30 days' free trial. Send the coupon.

Wonderful Combination ALUMINUM Cooker Set

5 Pieces, Make 11 Utensil Combinations

Pudding Pan	Tubed Cake Pan	Casserole
Preserving Kettle	Double Boiler	Convex Kettle
Combination Cooker	Strainer or	Steamer Set
Self-Basting Roaster	Colander	Corn Popper

Made of best heavy-gauge aluminum—bright, beautiful, easy to keep clean, light to handle—**guaranteed for life.** This complete set gives you 11 utensil combinations. Outside kettle holds 6 quarts, inside pans 2¼ quarts, other utensils in proportion. All highly polished on outside. Sunray finish inside. When not in use, all pieces nest together. You must see it and use it to realize what it really is. So send at once.

Order by No. 417DMA6. At end of 30 days' free trial, pay only $2.75 if you keep it. Shipped from Chicago, prepaid.

Total Price Only $2.75 Delivered FREE

Pay at End of 30 Days

Yes, yours to use a whole month before you even decide. Not a penny to risk. Sign and mail the coupon and the complete set goes on to you.

FREE BARGAIN CATALOG

5000 bargains similar to the one shown on this page in **furniture, rugs, linoleum, stoves, ranges, silverware, watches, sewing machines, washing machines, dishes, aluminum ware, phonographs, gas engines, cream separators, etc. Anything sent on 30 days' free trial. Easy monthly payments on everything.** *Post card or letter brings it free.*

"Let Hartman Feather YOUR Nest"

368-Page Book FREE

THE HARTMAN CO., Chicago, Ill.
3911-3925 Wentworth Ave. Dept. 5045

Send the 5-piece complete Aluminum Cooking Set No. 417DMA6, all charges prepaid. I am to have 30 days' free trial. If not satisfied, I will pay nothing and ship it back. If I keep it, I will pay your bargain price, $2.75, at the end of the 30 days' trial. Title remains with you until payment is made.

Name.....

Street Address.....

R. F. D..... Box No.....

Town..... State.....

State Your Occupation..... Color.....

Classified Advertising

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

Classified Advertising Rates in The Munsey Magazines:

	LINE RATE	
Munsey's Magazine	$1.50	Combination line rate $4.00 less 4 per cent cash discount
Argosy-Allstory Weekly	2.50	

Minimum space four lines.

January 20th Argosy-Allstory Forms Close Dec. 23rd

AGENTS & SALESMEN WANTED

CLEAN UP $100.00 WEEKLY FROM NOW TILL CHRISTMAS WITH "NIFTY NINE". Weekly average 100 sales—dollar profit each. 30—40 sales daily frequently made. Demonstrating outfit cinches order. 30 other coin-coaxers. All Ideal for Christmas gifts—several at each house. Big rush now starting. Get free Sample outfit offer. Postal brings our unique plans. DAVIS PRODUCTS COMPANY, Dept. 38, Chicago.

TAILORING AGENT: Good men now earning $50.00 to $150.00 per week year around selling our wonderful $29.50 virgin wool tailored to order suits, overcoats. They sell fast because $20.00 cheaper than store prices. You get paid in advance. Protected territory. Prefer experienced; will train inexperienced if right man, write J. B. SIMPSON, personal, 831 West Adams St., Chicago, Dept. 327.

LARGE SHIRT MANUFACTURER wants Agents to sell complete line of shirts direct to wearer. Exclusive patterns. Big values. Free samples. Madison Mills, 503 Broadway, New York.

NEW OIL LAMP BURNS 94% AIR—S. Y. JOHNSON, 900 ALADDIN BUILDING, 609 W. LAKE, CHICAGO, ILL., inventor of wonderful new oil lamp that burns 94% air and beats gas or electricity, is offering to give one free to the first user in each locality who will help introduce it. Write him for particulars.

BIG MONEY AND FAST SALES. EVERY OWNER BUYS GOLD INITIALS for his auto. You charge $1.50, make $1.35. Ten orders daily easy. Write for particulars and free samples. American Monogram Co., Dept. 54, East Orange, N. J.

WE START YOU in business, furnishing everything. Men and women, $30.00 to $100.00 weekly operating our "New System Specialty Candy Factories" anywhere. Opportunity lifetime; booklet free. W. Hillyer Ragsdale, Drawer 93, East Orange, N. J.

AGENTS—Our Soap and Toilet Article Plan is a wonder. Get our Free Sample Case Offer. Ho-Ro-Co, 137 Locust, St. Louis, Mo.

AGENTS—SELL OUR BETTER GRADE JEWELRY. Factory connection. Commission in advance. No delivering. Write MONARCH CRAFTS, Desk D, 1208 Standard Trust Bldg., Chicago, Ill.

AUTOMOBILES

Automobile Owners, garagemen, mechanics, send today for free copy of this month's issue. It contains helpful, instructive information on overhauling, ignition troubles, wiring, carburetors, storage batteries, etc. Over 120 pages, illustrated. Send for free copy today. Automobile Digest, 500 Butler Bldg., Cincinnati.

AUTHORS—MANUSCRIPTS

FREE TO WRITERS—a wonderful little book of money making hints, suggestions, ideas; the A B C of successful Story and Movie-Play writing. Absolutely free. Send for your copy now! Just address Authors' Press, Dept. 19, Auburn, N. Y.

STORIES, POEMS, PLAYS, ETC., ARE WANTED for publication. Good ideas bring big money. Submit Mss., or write Literary Bureau, 110, Hannibal, Mo.

SEND ME YOUR SHORT STORIES AND PHOTOPLAY PLOTS. Submit in any form. I'll Criticise, Revise, Typewrite and help you sell. Send manuscript or write, H. L. HURSH, Dept. 4, 210 Muench St., Harrisburg, Pa.

MICHIGAN FARM LANDS FOR SALE

LANDLESS MEN! Opportunity awaits you near thriving city in Lower Mich; 20, 40, 80 acre tracts; only $10 to $50 down; bal. long time. Write for FREE illustrated booklet giving full information. SWIGART LAND CO., Y-1245 First Nat'l Bank Bldg., Chicago

ONLY $5 DOWN, $3 mo. Traverse City 5 a., with 12,000 people, large canning factories; near Traverse Bay; not much cleared; plenty small fruit, no waste land, only $165; might throw in 50 chickens. Topping, Reaper Blk., Chicago.

HOW TO ENTERTAIN

Plays, musical comedies and revues, minstrel music, black-face skits, vaudeville acts, monologs, dialogs, recitations, entertainments, musical readings, stage handbooks, make-up goods. Big catalog free. T. S. Denison & Co., 623 So. Wabash, Dept. 43, Chicago.

AGENTS & SALESMEN WANTED

$13.45 FOR A STYLISH MADE-TO-YOUR-MEASURE 3-PIECE SUIT—regular $25.00 value. We are making this bargain offer to prove our remarkable values in tailoring. Write for our big sample outfit showing how agents make $35.00 to $40.00 extra every week taking orders for high-grade tailoring. WASHINGTON TAILORING CO., Dept. M-304, Chicago.

$10 WORTH OF FINEST TOILET SOAPS, perfumes, toilet waters, spices, etc., absolutely free to agents on our refund plan. Lacassian Co., Dept. 614, St. Louis, Mo.

AGENTS $25.00 A WEEK FOR SPARE TIME. Suits $13.45, pants $3.45 up. Money back guarantee. Guaranteed quality. Line well known. Samples free. Write CHICAGO TAILORS ASSOCIATION, Dept. 107, Chicago.

AGENTS—FREE TRIAL OFFER. HARPER'S COMBINATION BRUSH SET AND FIBRE BROOM. Consists of five parts, has ten different uses. It sweeps, washes and dries windows, scrubs and mops floors, and does five other things. Over 100% profit. Write for our free trial offer. Harper Brush Works, Dept. 66, Fairfield, Iowa.

AGENTS—MAKE A DOLLAR AN HOUR. Sell Mendets, a patent patch for instantly mending leaks in all utensils. Sample package free. Collette Manufacturing Company, Dept. 306-B, Amsterdam, N. Y.

27,000 RECORDS GUARANTEED WITH ONE EVERPLAY PHONOGRAPH NEEDLE; new, different; cannot injure records; $10.00 daily easy. Free sample to workers. EVERPLAY, Desk 1212, McClurg Bldg., Chicago.

Sell the latest nationally approved cooking utensil, the Squire BROILET. Sells on sight. Convenient to carry and show. $90 profit weekly easy for live agents. Get full details from A. B. Squire Mfg. Corp., 280 Madison Ave., New York.

AGENTS—$15 A DAY—EASY. QUICK SALES—FREE AUTO—BIG WEEKLY BONUS—$1.50 premium Free to every customer. Simply show our Beautiful, 7 piece, Solid Aluminum Handle Cutlery Set. Appeals instantly. We deliver and collect. Pay daily. NEW ERA MFG. CO., 803 Madison St., Dept. 20-M, Chicago

AGENTS—Snappiest Household Line on Earth. Red Hot Sellers—Steady Repeaters—Big Profits. 350 light weight, fast selling, popular priced necessities. Get busy write today—postal will do. AMERICAN PRODUCTS CO., 8003 American Bldg., Cincinnati, Ohio.

MOTION PICTURE PLAYS

EXCHANGE PLOTS FOR $$—Photoplay ideas accepted any form; revised, typed, published, copyrighted. Sold. Advice free. UNIVERSAL SCENARIO CORP., 918 Western Mutual Life Bldg., Los Angeles.

PHOTOPLAYS WANTED BY 48 COMPANIES; $10 TO $500 EACH PAID FOR PLAYS. No correspondence course or experience needed; details sent free to beginners. Sell your ideas. PRODUCERS LEAGUE, 388 Wainwright, St. Louis, Mo.

PATENT ATTORNEYS

PATENTS PROCURED—TRADE MARKS REGISTERED—A comprehensive, experienced, prompt service for the protection and development of your ideas. Preliminary advice gladly furnished without charge. Booklet of information and form for disclosing idea free on request. Richard B. Owen, 68 Owen Bldg., Washington, D. C., or 2278-J Woolworth Bldg., N. Y.

PATENTS. BOOKLET FREE. HIGHEST REFERENCES. BEST RESULTS. Promptness assured. Send drawing or model for examination and opinion as to patentability. Watson E. Coleman, 624 F Street, Washington, D. C.

PATENTS. WRITE FOR FREE ILLUSTRATED GUIDE BOOK and record of invention blank. Send model or sketch and description for our opinion of its patentable nature. Free. Highest References. Prompt Attention. Reasonable Terms. Victor J. Evans & Co., 762 Ninth, Washington, D. C.

PATENTS—WRITE TODAY FOR FREE INSTRUCTION BOOK AND EVIDENCE OF CONCEPTION BLANK. SEND SKETCH OR MODEL FOR EXAMINATION AND OPINION; STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL. NO DELAY IN MY OFFICES. MY REPLY SPECIAL DELIVERY. REASONABLE TERMS. PERSONAL ATTENTION. CLARENCE O'BRIEN, REGISTERED PATENT LAWYER, 528 SOUTHERN BUILDING, WASHINGTON, D. C.

PATENTS. If you have an invention write for our Guide Book, "How To Get A Patent." Send model or sketch and description, and we will give our opinion as to its patentable nature. Randolph & Co., 630 F Washington, D. C.

Classified Advertising continued on page 6.

She Found A Pleasant Way To Reduce Her Fat

She did not have to go to the trouble of diet or exercise. She found a better way, which aids the digestive organs to turn food into muscle, bone and sinew instead of fat.

She used *Marmola Prescription Tablets*, which are made from the famous Marmola prescription. They aid the digestive system to obtain the full nutriment of food. They will allow you to eat many kinds of food without the necessity of dieting or exercising.

Thousands have found that *Marmola Prescription Tablets* give complete relief from obesity. And when the accumulation of fat is checked, reduction to normal, healthy weight soon follows.

All good drug stores the world over sell *Marmola Prescription Tablets* at one dollar a box. Ask your druggist for them, or order direct and they will be sent in plain wrapper, postpaid.

MARMOLA COMPANY
250 Garfield Bldg., Detroit, Mich.

EARN MONEY AT HOME

YOU can make $15 to $60 weekly in your spare time writing show cards. No canvassing or soliciting. We instruct you by our new simple Directograph system, pay you cash each week and guarantee you steady work. Write for full particulars and free booklet.
WEST-ANGUS SHOW CARD SERVICE
72 Colborne Building Toronto, Can.

Skin Troubles
—Soothed—
With Cuticura

Soap, Ointment, Talcum, 25c. everywhere. Samples free of Cuticura Laboratories, Dept. D, Malden, Mass.

Classified Advertising continued from page 4.

HELP WANTED

BE A DETECTIVE, $50-$100 WEEKLY; travel over world, experience unnecessary. AMERICAN DETECTIVE AGENCY, 1107 Lucas, St. Louis, Mo.

OWN YOUR OWN BUSINESS, earn money at home. We teach you a trade with a good future. $1.00 will start you earning money. Send money order today. Delay means you lose money. Charleston Horological Co., Box 471, Charleston, W. Va.

WRITE NEWS ITEMS and Short Stories for pay in spare time. Copyright book and plans free. PRESS-REPORTING SYNDICATE, 433, St. Louis, Mo.

RAILWAY MAIL CLERKS, STENOGRAPHERS, CLERKS, TYPISTS, wanted by Government. Examinations weekly. Prepare at home. Write for free list and plan T, payment after securing position. CSS, 1710 Market St., Philadelphia.

Make 2 to 5 dollars a day painting Parchment Shades, without leaving privacy of your own home. Easy to learn. We teach you to do our work and positively guarantee to supply you with interesting spare time employment. Write immediately for information, United Shade Co., Dept. F, Sturgeon Bldg., Toronto, Can.

SELL US YOUR SPARE TIME. YOU CAN EARN FIFTEEN TO FIFTY DOLLARS WEEKLY writing showcards at home. No canvassing. Pleasant, profitable profession, easily, quickly learned by our simple graphic block system. Artistic ability unnecessary. We instruct you and supply you work. Wilson Methods, Ltd., Dept. G, 64 East Richmond, Toronto, Canada.

HELP WANTED—MALE

BE A DETECTIVE—EXCELLENT OPPORTUNITY; good pay; travel. Write C. T. Ludwig, 126 Westover Building, Kansas City, Mo.

All men, women, boys, girls, 17 to 60, willing to accept Government Positions, $117—$190, traveling or stationary, Write Mr. Ozment, 198, St. Louis, immediately.

BE A RAILWAY TRAFFIC INSPECTOR! $110 to $250 monthly, expenses paid after three months' spare-time study. Splendid opportunities. Position guaranteed or money refunded. Write for Free Booklet CM-30. Stand. Business Training Inst., Buffalo, N. Y.

MEN WANTED for detective work. Experience unnecessary. Write for details explaining guaranteed position. J. GANOR, Former Gov't Detective, LD, St. Louis, Mo.

FIREMEN, BRAKEMEN, BAGGAGEMEN, SLEEPING CAR, Train Porters (colored). $140—$200. Experience unnecessary. 836 Railway Bureau, E. St. Louis, Ill.

HELP WANTED—GENERAL

EARN UP TO $400 MONTHLY, LIVING EXPENSES PAID, IN HOTEL WORK. SPLENDID OPPORTUNITIES FOR TRAINED MEN AND WOMEN—MANY OPENINGS. WE HAVE MORE THAN WE CAN FILL. 80,000 HOTEL POSITIONS TO BE FILLED THE COMING YEAR. WE TRAIN YOU AT HOME. SEND FOR FREE BOOKLET. STANDARD BUSINESS TRAINING INST., 200 CARLTON COURT, BUFFALO, N. Y.

SONG POEMS WANTED

WRITE THE WORDS FOR A SONG. We compose music. Our Chief of Staff wrote many big song-hits. Submit your song-poem to us at once. NEW YORK MELODY CORP., 403 Fitzgerald Building, New York.

STAMPS

FOREIGN STAMPS FREE—Fine Packet from all over the world with big price list of sets, packets, stamp supplies, etc., send 2c postage. GRAY STAMP CO., Station E, Toronto, Canada.

TRADE SCHOOLS

BEST PAYING TRADES—LEARN SIGN PAINTING—Pictorial Painting—Auto Painting—Showcard Writing—Decorating—Paperhanging—Graining—Marbling. Catalog Free. The Big Chicago Painting School, 152 W. Austin Avenue, Chicago.

WANTED TO BUY

Cash for Old Gold, Platinum, Silver, Diamonds, Liberty Bonds, War, Thrift, Unused Postage Stamps, False Teeth, Magneto Points, Jobs, any valuables. Mail in today. Cash sent return mail. Goods returned in ten days if you are not satisfied. Ohio Smelting Co., 801 Hippodrome Bldg., Cleveland, Ohio.

"PEPPERPOT"

This is the title of an absorbing serial by Henry C. Rowland, Sailor, Army Doctor, War Correspondent and Novelist, which will open in the January MUNSEY.

"Pepperpot," as Mr. Rowland's new story is appropriately named, is a stirring tale of love and adventure in the blue waters and tropic islands of the West Indies.

Another feature of the January number will be "The Hands of Men," a novelette by Henry Payson Dowst, printed complete.

MUNSEY'S *January Issue*

On sale December 20th The best holiday reading that you can buy.

In answering any advertisement on this page it is desirable that you mention this magazine.

To Our Readers

"The Real Editorial Force of the Country"

It was the Hon. James J. Davis, Secretary of Labor, who, at a recent dinner at the Waldorf Hotel, declared: "You advertising experts are becoming the real editorial force of the country." We quote this utterance the more readily because it sums up the results and conclusions of The Argosy-Allstory's forty years of concentrated experience.

And so, celebrating The Argosy's birthday, it is not of the high quality of our editorial page we would speak; nor of the ideals of our editorial policy; rather we would have you dwell for a moment on the service we are rendering the American public through our advertising pages.

We wish that everyone who reads this would come to realize that the splendid array of advertisements which grace the pages of The Argosy cost you nothing—nay, it saves you money.

Many people believe that the cost of these finely illustrated, well written advertisements is added to the cost of the articles advertised—that the consumer pays the bill.

Nothing could be farther from the truth!

One hundred per cent of the readers of this magazine are faced daily with the problem of buying the best goods for their daily needs at the lowest prices obtainable. That is the economic duty they owe to themselves.

The publishers of The Argosy-Allstory aid them in this economic duty by presenting to them, through the displayed advertisements, articles of proven merit and guaranteed utility, offered for sale by merchants and manufacturers whose integrity is unquestioned.

To prove, step by step, that nationally advertised goods are the best goods and are cheaper in the long run than the non-advertised goods, is only to prove the A. B. C. of economic buying.

Back of the advertised article stands the merchant; back of the merchant stands the responsible advertising agency; back of the advertising agency stands the magazine and behind the magazine stands that great body of the consuming public which buying the advertised products because they are standard and reliable, has formed itself into a great co-operative purchasing community which makes quality and quantity production possible, and so lessens the cost of manufacture and thus reduces the price to all.

And the quality is higher than ever!

And so we back up the fine utterance of the Hon. Secretary of Labor by saying as a final word to our friends of The Argosy-Allstory:

Realize that the advertising pages of this magazine are as valuable to you as the reading pages; perhaps more so. Realize, too, that back of every one of these advertising pages stands character, reputation, the solid guarantee of business ethics and business honesty. And realizing this, you will come to see, that by patronizing these advertisers you will become at once automatically a member of the greatest co-operative buying society in the world. The thousands who are buying with you—though all unknown to you—are reducing the cost to you; even as your purchases of the guaranteed, standard goods reduces, by so much, the cost to all the others.

It is through our Advertising that we all become members of a mutual benefit association—and that we can only reach our best through mutual help and a common interest, is one of the lessons you may take to heart when you consider: "The Real editorial force of the Country."

Buy advertised goods and get full value

Written by the Wm. H. Rankin Co.

ARGOSY-ALLSTORY WEEKLY

VOL. CXLVII SATURDAY, DECEMBER 16, 1922 NUMBER 6

The Free Trader

By KATHRENE and ROBERT PINKERTON

Authors of "Herdsmen of the Air," "The Hidden Kingdom," etc.

CHAPTER I

A BLONDE BOMBSHELL

THERE was every indication that truce had been declared in the battle for pelts and the battle for souls when the entire white population of the vast empire of which Fort Bruce is the capital gathered at Mrs. Vincent Ashdown's annual August tea.

Great North Company men, free traders and heads of the various missions assembled with their wives and daughters in the big living room of the Ashdown home. A trim little Indian maid in white cap and apron noiselessly passed the cups Mrs. Ashdown filled from the big silver service she had brought from England so many years before.

One uninitiated in the ways of fur land would have seen only amiability and complete accord in the petty chatter of these people who fought so relentlessly through the other days of the year. Mrs. Ashdown was sure it was so and she had often remarked to the Reverend Vincent that, in her small way, she had brought peace to the north country even if for an afternoon only.

Yet Alan Gray, on the verge of becoming an outsider, for his viewpoint was already tinged by the fact that he was bound for his home in the States, stood in a corner and chuckled as he watched the efforts of practically everyone present to keep his or her weapons concealed.

For Alan knew only too well that truces and armistices are never recognized in the war for fur, in the struggle for savage souls and, too, in the conflict for social position among the few white women who dare the north. He saw smiles sheath subtle darts, detected the barbs in simple questions and caught swift glances of suspicion and constant watchfulness.

He saw the Reverend Horace Hepworth of one mission match his unctuousness with that of the Reverend Vincent Ashdown and smile amiably when he was bested in the encounter. Mrs. John Macleod, wife of the district manager of the Great North Company and, thereby, first lady of Fort Bruce, was most generous in her praise of Mrs. Ashdown's afternoon. She contented herself with the sole dart of apparently complete sincerity and found her satisfaction later in confiding to her husband that "the poor frump believed what I said so thoroughly she considered my remarks entirely superfluous."

Father La Foret, the most genuine of the group, devoted himself to simple and sincere gallantries scattered without discrimination among the women of warring companies and sects. John Macleod, whose mother had been a half-breed and whose father and grandfather had spent their lives in the service of the great company, betrayed his aboriginal ancestry only by a constant watchfulness, while he revealed his college education in a discussion of Herbert Spencer's attempt at a synthetic philosophy with Corporal Rippingale, once of Oxford and now of the Northwest Mounted.

Thus, though three hundred miles of lake and forest and two hundred years of precedent separated Fort Bruce from the outside world, there was no touch of the wilderness about it so far as a casual observer could see. Except for the long black robe of Father La Foret and the red uniforms of Rippingale and Starmer, the men were dressed as men dress in cities, and the women, with the exception of Mrs. Ashdown, were only a year behind Winnipeg. Mrs. Ashdown still clung to the styles prevalent in England when she had last seen it twenty years before, while Grimwood Mears, oldest servant of the great company in the district, a man who had spent his life in the north, was at ease in a business suit only two months out of Montreal.

Into this sedate, formal, carefully poised gathering came Madge Chester. She was small, blond, vividly colorful and would have attracted immediate attention had she hidden herself in a corner and kept perfectly quiet. But Madge could not have done either. She was back from a trip to Winnipeg and, consequently, her gown and hat were a year in advance of anything in the room. She had carefully timed her arrival so that everyone would be there, nicely settled and well worked into the mood of apparent enjoyment.

Alan Gray, who had just started across the room to Helen Mears, whom he had met only the day before, stopped and watched Madge. He had heard much of this girl who, upon the death of her father four years before, had fallen heir to a string of three trading posts which she had capably maintained as galling thorns in the flesh of the Great North. And Alan's interest was not only in this girl as a fur trader, but in her flaming self. He had just come from nine months of loneliness.

"Hello, Rippy, old top!" Madge cried after her mischievously demure acceptance of Mrs. Ashton's formal greeting.

The corporal had made his way to her at once, and he was closely followed by Henry Allardyce, a G.N.C. clerk, by the Reverend Ashdown and by Father La Foret. Impudently confident, the girl scattered her favors impartially. The masculine group around her increased until only Mears, Macleod and Alan were left outside. Madge pushed through to where the two Great North men stood.

"Hello, John," she said as she shook hands with the district manager. "I've brought some news for you. The commissioner is on his way up and you'd better get

things shipshape. He's bringing a fine-toothed comb."

Macleod's Indian blood enabled him to smile and thank her easily, but the girl knew how it rankled to have an outsider tell him of this unexpected visit of his superior.

"And you're looking fine, Mr. Mears," Madge continued as she turned to the stiff, grizzled old Scotchman. "I'm sorry you're going out on a pension. It would be fun to have another whirl with you at Barrier Lake. It looked as if you were going to get us for a while last winter."

Mears's face seemed to be bathed with blood behind his white whiskers and his eyes flashed furiously. Madge smiled serenely and even dared to reach up for a quick tug at the long white beard.

"Stay around another year," she said, "and I'll lay a bet on the side we get more fur than you do."

As Mears was about to explode, Madge turned to Ashdown and Father La Foret, who had followed her across the room.

"And how is the soul-saving contest?" she demanded. "You two were running neck and neck the last time I saw you."

Her calm impudence shocked even John Macleod.

Only Alan Gray, who alone of all those present had dared smile at the sallies of this blond bombshell that had burst within so peaceful a gathering, laughed at her remark, or, rather, at the impudence which prompted it.

Madge shot him a quick glance, half of understanding, half of appraisal. Alan was conscious of being weighed and classified by this flamboyant creature and also of a purpose behind her harum-scarum behavior.

"Who is the handsome stranger, John?" she asked Macleod. "You're not at all polite."

The district manager introduced Alan and she immediately drew the young man aside.

"I've heard of you," she said. "You were over at Whitefish Lake for Holton last winter. What are you doing here?"

"I'm on my way out to the States."

"Live there?"

Alan nodded.

"I thought so, soon as I looked at you. You're not quitting the fur game?"

"For a year anyhow."

"Oh, no you're not. You only think so. You're too smart a chap to be pulling out just when you've hit your stride. Be careful not to turn your back to Macleod. He'd like to stick a knife into you for what you did to the G. N. C. at Whitefish."

She glanced about the room, but when she faced Alan again she seemed to have changed completely. Her recklessness had been succeeded by a demureness that was wholly captivating. Alan's good sense told him there was also a purpose behind this; but he was young, he had spent five years in the wilderness with few opportunities to see white women, and there was no denying the attractiveness of Madge Chester.

Nor could any man evade her skillful attack. A little hand on his arm, shy glances from half-veiled, large blue eyes, a voice that caressed and dared, a snuggly, intimate manner of speaking—each was a strand in a rope of constantly increasing strength.

"Listen," Madge whispered after five minutes. "See that girl over there by the window? Do you know her?"

"You mean Miss Mears?"

"Yes, old Grimwood's daughter. Go over and talk to her. Don't be afraid of her touch-me-not air. She can't help that. The Great North's done it to her. You know. The elect of God. But at bottom she's a peach. Beautiful, too, don't you think? I like that dark kind. It's the blondes that are always getting into trouble."

"And making it," Alan added boldly.

He caught another of those swift, appraising glances, cold this time, but it was followed by a warm look of approval.

"You'll do," she said shortly. "I knew you were a fur man. But hurry along now. Talk to a couple of other people first and then drift near Helen. You can make it strong. She'll like it even if she doesn't appear to. And it's your last chance. She's going out to Winnipeg in a few days and on to Scotland. Now run along."

As Alan started she reached out and

caught his arm with one of her soft little hands.

"Keep your ears open all the time," she whispered as she lifted herself on her toes to get close to him. "Especially if you're near Macleod and Mears. And tonight, after dark, mind you, come down to my house. You and I can have a nice chat together."

He felt the soft pressure of her fingers on his arm and she was gone. As he started across to Father La Foret he passed Macleod and Mears and heard the old man whisper angrily:

"The company owes it to me. I've given it my life. It can give me a year."

Alan tucked that away in his memory and went on. Macleod drew Mears to one side.

"Take your pension when you can and go back to Scotland where you can enjoy yourself, man," he said. "Helen needs it. It's a shame to keep such a girl shut up in the bush."

"But didn't you hear that hussy?" Mears protested. "Right here before every one she chided me with the fact that she beat me last winter. I can't quit with that on my mind. I won't quit. And I'm not asking for a three-year contract. A year of it is all I want. And I'm going back to Barrier Lake, John, and you won't stop me. I'm going back there and I'm going to run that Chester post out of business. I'm not ready to quit until I can quit right."

"You have a good record, one any man can rest on," Macleod answered. "She got under your skin. That's all. You'll think differently about it to-morrow."

"I'll come around to-morrow and sign my contract," Mears retorted.

As Alan Gray worked his way across the room he saw evidences of the havoc Madge Chester had wrought in the peaceful gathering. Fur men and missionaries were no longer able to mask their suspicions or an eagerness for information relative to their rivals' activities. The wives and daughters, more vehemently partisan, as women always are, separated into distrustful little groups.

Alan Gray, no longer possessing a vital interest in fur land and, because of his American origin, unhampered by prejudice or precedent, was alone in his enjoyment of the situation. That is, alone except for Madge. She continued her ruthless, destructive course until only Mrs. Ashdown remained heroically by her guns. She was making a special effort to be nice to Mrs. Horace Hepworth, her greatest rival, as Alan passed behind her.

"Vincent is so disappointed," she said, "because he must defer opening a mission at Barrier Lake until next year. It is something he has worked for so long and he did hope to get established there this summer."

Mrs. Hepworth knew the Reverend Ashdown's zeal had begun with the discontinuance of another sect's mission at Barrier Lake three years before, and she was also aware that the remark was indiscreet and that the indiscretion was prompted by embarrassment due to Madge Chester's activities.

"I know how you must feel," she said sympathetically. "Horace was so bitterly disappointed when he was forced to close our mission there. But all that is forgotten now. He has just received word that funds have been provided for its reopening and that the Reverend Ralph Bicknell, who has had much experience in the west, is on his way to take charge."

Alan hurried away for fear he would explode with laughter when he saw the expression on Mrs. Ashdown's face. The final disruption of the party had come. As he hurried across the room, grinning broadly, he saw Helen Mears alone and immediately took a chair beside her.

"You have heard something amusing," she said.

"Yes, the annual truce is a complete disaster. Our hostess has just gone down before Mrs. Hepworth's activities."

Helen laughed, but even as she laughed her gray eyes darkened as she glanced in Madge Chester's direction.

"How does she do it?" Alan asked. "She has completely disorganized our peaceful gathering."

"It gets her nowhere. She is like a little boy throwing stones at a mountain."

"But it seems to me I can see the mountain squirm."

They laughed together and in the laughter seemed to find a comradeship wholly lacking in her rather disdainful treatment of him the day before.

"You see," Alan continued, "I know how it is to be just the small boy throwing stones. I was that to you yesterday."

"You were a free trader then," Helen answered quickly.

"Meaning that tomorrow I am leaving the north," he finished. "How did you know?"

"Just as people learn everything up here. And we are going back to Scotland."

"Yes, I've heard of that. Are you sorry?"

"I dread it. Life will be so different, so close and tight. I am afraid it will be hard to breathe there. I dread the streets and fences and private land with everything ruled and shut off from me."

As Alan looked at her he found it difficult to vision this dark, vivid creature in any city. Something in the swing of her shoulders and the poise of her head told of freedom and conquest.

"Then why do you go?" he asked.

"Because father is to be pensioned."

"He looks good for another three years at least."

"He is," she answered quickly and with a fierceness that startled him. "He should stay. It is all Macleod's—"

She bit her lips to stop the words. Her gray eyes smouldered and a flush came to her cheeks. As Alan watched her take fire in her anger he understood why the spirited beauty of Helen Mears had been a legend in the country.

"I wonder why they've let you go," he said suddenly.

"What do you mean? Who?"

"The men of fur land."

"The men of fur land," she repeated. "Do you know who the men of fur land are to me? The old men, men like my father, men who lived in the old days and made the north what it is, who fought and won."

"But the fight is still on. At least, I thought so when I met you yesterday."

"Now it's different. We merely resent the poachers, never punish them."

"Oh, I see!" Alan laughed. "You would have liked it better in the days of the old North-West Company."

"Yes. It took strong men to fight us and stronger men to win."

"Still, the fight isn't altogether barren of adventure."

"But you are leaving the north," Helen challenged him.

"Yes, and for the first time I am glad. You are leaving, too, and we can go up the lake together."

The daring of his statement startled her and she quickly erected a barrier before it when she said:

"But I am going on the Great North boat."

There was a finality in the simple statement that aroused him.

"So am I," he answered.

"Have you forgotten that you belong to the opposition?"

"Not any more."

"But you have fought the Great North."

"Does that damn me forever?"

"I don't see how you can ask favors of it."

"I'm not. I expect to pay my fare."

"And you ask the comfort its permanency has made possible."

He had been stung into his brusque attitude by her viewpoint, that stone wall of Great North allegiance, that idolatrous worship of those who have spent a lifetime in the service. Now he would have rushed on in his desire to humble this girl who so calmly assumed that the great company was supreme, but before he could say anything more Mrs. Ashdown began to rap on the tea table.

"I know we would all enjoy hearing Miss Chester sing," she announced. "My dear, you surely will not disappoint us?"

"Disappointing people is the best thing I do," Madge answered promptly, "but with a bunch of friends like this it's different."

Alan sensed a deliberate affront even in her choice of words. He knew how her American slang, picked up at Winnipeg,

irritated most of the guests present. He was mystified, too, for he had seen her beckon Rippingale to her side and whisper to him, and immediately afterward the corporal had gone to Mrs. Ashdown. Alan was sure the girl herself had suggested that she be asked to sing.

In the next half hour he understood a little of it. Madge had crossed at once to the old organ.

"What will it be, boys and girls?" she asked as she sat down.

No one made a suggestion.

"Oh, any old thing, eh?" she said flippantly, and immediately she began to sing.

Alan was more amazed than enthralled by what followed. As the girl had disrupted the party, she now reunited it. First a comic song, fresh from a London music hall, brought smiles, titters and at last roars of laughter. A second put every one in good humor, and then Madge suddenly switched to old Scotch ballads.

There was a haunting, moving quality in her voice that gripped her hearers. Alan himself was affected for a time, and then as the girl tightened her hold upon every person in the room he began to marvel. He knew there had been deliberate intent in her disrupting tactics. Now he sensed a purpose in the spell she cast over them through her voice.

The girl, too, seemed to have changed utterly. Soft and alluring, demure and engrossed in her singing, she was the exact opposite of the disorganizing creature who had burst into the room an hour before.

Alan glanced at the other guests. Old Grimwood Mears's eyes were glistening. Mrs. Ashdown was frankly weeping. The haughty air of Mrs. Macleod had vanished. Rippingale, younger son and drifter, was most evidently four thousand miles away.

Madge came to the last verse. Her finger tips scarcely touched the keys, and even when she arose no one realized that the sound of the organ had ceased. Quietly and easily as thistledown she moved across the room. She opened the door and turned. The last haunting notes flowed like liquid from between her red lips. In the hush that followed the door closed softly and she was gone.

Alan turned to Helen Mears, who was preparing to depart.

"Good-by, until I see you on the boat," he said.

CHAPTER II.

TWO GIRLS AND A DECISION.

TEN o'clock came before it was dark enough for Alan to go to Madge Chester's house unobserved. He did not believe for an instant that there was anything except business behind her request that he come and see her. There had been a coquettish tone in her voice and a promise in her glance, but neither had deceived him.

He was not prepared, however, for another complete change in the girl. She was tired and made no effort to hide the fact. Reports, bills, and ledgers were scattered over the big living-room table and the thumb and forefinger of her right hand were smeared with ink. There was no trace of the hoyden or of the demure singer. She was frankly a business woman, and she did not waste time or words.

"What did Mears and Macleod say when you walked behind them just after leaving me?" she began.

"The old man said: 'The company owes it to me. I've given it my life. It can give me a year.'"

"Nothing more?"

"Not in my hearing."

"And Helen told you she is going out?"

"Yes."

"Well, she's not. She's going back to Barrier Lake. Old Grimwood will sign a year's contract in the morning."

Alan tried to conceal his interest.

"I begin to understand," he said, thinking of her remark to the old Scotchman.

"I knew you would. In a way, you are an outsider. Your mind was open. The others were too intent guarding their own little secrets and trying to find out other people's. There is no one so blind as a man who strains to keep his eyes open. What else did you learn?"

"The mission at Barrier Lake is to be reopened. Man named Ralph Bicknell is going in there."

"That's good news!" Madge exclaimed. "There's nothing like a missionary to use as a go-between at an isolated post. Anything else?"

Alan felt no reticence in repeating whatever conversations he had overheard. Fur land's code permitted it. Every guest at Mrs. Ashdown's tea had gone to look and to listen. The good lady believed her affairs were popular. The truth was that no one dared to stay away.

"Anything in all that?" Alan asked.

"A little. I got more myself, but, of course, I went there for that purpose."

"What was the idea of your pouring oil on the water after you had kicked up such a storm?" he demanded.

"I thought you would get that."

"You started the row to make people mad and say indiscreet things, I know."

"And I wanted to go again. They'll remember me as they saw me last. Sheep, Alan, sheep. Sometimes I think the game is too simple. Is that why you are getting out?"

"Partly. I've been in the bush five years, and I want a vacation."

"Would a real fast game with good stakes attract you?"

"The game might."

"You're not polite," she retorted. "But I knew from the first I'd have to lay my cards on the table with you. And I knew from the first that I wanted you. Now I'm sure of it."

"So sudden," he said flippantly.

"I'm talking business. You're going out to Barrier Lake for me."

"'And the blind shall see.'"

"Nonsense! You've seen from the first. Here's the game. I got into old Grimwood pretty hard last winter. He's one of the old-timers. Entered the service before '69, before free traders were allowed. You know the kind.

"Well, I had a good man out there. He started with a whoop and cleaned things up. Then in the middle of the winter he fell for his old enemy. Got in a toboggan load of Scotch from the new railroad a couple of hundred miles south of Barrier Lake, and from that moment on I was loser.

"Mears knows he would have been licked if my man had kept sober, and it hurts his pride to think he must quit after a losing year. That's why I reminded him about it and pulled his beard. He'll go back to Barrier Lake, and I need a man like you to put the skids under him."

"You seem quite sure I can do it," Alan countered.

"Don't get that idea at all," Madge answered quickly. "It will be a good fight. Mears is old, but his hunters are loyal to him, and he's made them believe what he believes—that the Great North owns the country. It will take a man like you to show him something different."

"And then what happens?" Alan asked.

"Anything might. Everything hangs on this winter. It's a case of win or quit. Sometimes I think I have my nerve bucking the big company, but when dad died I had to do it. I haven't always won. That fellow getting drunk on me and a bad year at Split Rock pretty near spelled finish. Things have got to go through with a whoop all along the line this winter or the Chester Trading Company will be only a memory and Mears will go back to Scotland happy. How about it?"

"You have told me about the game," Alan taunted. "How about the stakes?"

"Percentage basis after a certain amount of business, smarty. Oh, you'll learn to know me better."

"It will have to be a long-distance knowledge if I take the job. But how about the future?"

Madge suddenly became serious, grimly so.

"If I pull through this winter, I can go big," she said. "And you can help me. You've made a reputation as a trader, but you've been with fly-by-nights. You know the kind—big profits and a quick finish. With me it's different. I want to buy fur years ahead. I want to show the Great North that it hasn't the exclusive right to permanency. How about it?"

"But it's all guesswork with you," Alan objected. "You only think Mears will get a new contract."

"There'll be some one at Barrier Lake anyway. But I know Mears is going. And,

more than that, Macleod will send Henry Allardyce along as clerk, but really to keep tab on Grimwood. It's all Henry's good for, playing spy, and Macleod doesn't like Mears very well or trust his ability in a pinch. Watch and see if I'm not right."

"I'll think it over and let you know," Alan said as he arose.

"Couldn't you decide to-night?" Madge urged.

"It's a long while since I've seen the cities."

She followed him onto the veranda. All Fort Bruce was asleep, and as he turned on the step to say good night he found her face just level with his. He could not see her clearly in the darkness, and he only sensed that the business woman had remained inside—that before him was a bewitching mixture of the hoyden and the demure singer of the afternoon.

"Good night, Alan," she said softly.

She swayed slightly toward him as she spoke, toward the man who had just come from nine months of solitude. In an instant his arms were around her and their lips had met.

"You devil!" he exclaimed when she made no resistance, though he did not release her.

"Sort of a nice little devil, though, eh, Alan?" she asked softly.

And then, as his arms began to tighten, she was free.

"Good night, boy," she whispered. "Come over to-morrow and tell me what you'll do."

When he wakened the next morning Alan's first thought was of the decision he must make. He would not admit even to himself the reason he had been so undecided the night before. Madge had offered him an opportunity he had wanted for five years, for he had never been satisfied with his connections in the north.

The traditions and the romantic history of the Great North Company had called him to fur land. Then he had hoped the big company would accept him, and it had been only after several vain attempts to force himself, an American, into the ranks of Scotch and English lads that he had turned to the opposition.

Always he had been tormented by the futility of his successes. The free traders for whom he had worked had lacked the big vision which comes with permanency and a position with them had always been precarious.

Now Madge Chester offered a promise for the future and the joy of working with a master trader. For she was that. She had proved it by her ability to keep three posts going successfully, by her conduct at the Ashdown tea, by her uncanny ability to piece together stray bits of evidence, by the grasp of the business she had shown the evening before, and by the courage of her fight against the big company.

Yet as deep an impression as Madge Chester had made, it was not of her he thought, but of Helen Mears and the challenge of her definition of the men of fur land. He knew his decision would await the action of her father.

After breakfast he strolled down the shore past the Great North post. There was something about the buildings, square and solid, their whitewashed sides gleaming in the morning sun, that was symbolical of the great company which had ruled for more than two hundred years. They stood there, bluff, sturdy, permanent, a fitting monument to the zeal and loyalty of those who had served it through so many generations.

And while it challenged him, the great company awakened an unwilling admiration. Through scores upon scores of years men had fought for it, served it, and protected it, keeping its spirit alive, glorying in its traditions.

Alan stopped beside a great bowlder and looked back at the post. It was this huge, immovable thing, this spirit which had pervaded the north for so long, that dared him, that challenged him through the smoldering gray eyes of a slim young girl. He, a David with his puny sling, stood before this Goliath, driven to conflict by an unguessed desire to prove himself a fitting mate for untamed youth. He laughed outright at his own puniness.

Helen Mears leaped to her feet on the other side of the bowlder and looked across it. Her eyes were indignantly questioning.

"Hello!" Alan exclaimed in confusion, for she had been so completely in his thoughts. "I had no idea you were here."

"Do you mean to say you stood there alone and laughed?"

"I'm afraid I did."

"At what?"

"I was looking at the post."

"And laughing at *it?*" she demanded.

"No; at myself. After five years I can't see that I've even scratched the whitewash." Suddenly he dropped his banter and said: "And yet all the time I've fought it I've wished that I was part of it."

"Then, why did you fight it?" Helen asked incredulously.

"I guess I thought that if I hit it hard enough and often enough it might learn to like me," he laughed. "Don't you know what disdain does to men?"

He was looking at her, trying to state the problem which lay between them in impersonal terms.

"It's what you meant yesterday, isn't it?" he continued. "If we can't show our strength within it, we must show it outside."

"But you haven't."

"I could."

He tried to compel her to look at him, but she was watching the post, and he understood that she was not even thinking of him. He, too, looked at the whitewashed buildings, and saw her father and John Macleod coming out of the district office. Mears looked around, saw his daughter near the shore, and waved to her. There was something of excitement and boyish exultation in the gesture.

"He has it!" Helen cried.

Then she turned to Alan.

"I won't see you on the boat after all," she continued delightedly. "We're going back to Barrier Lake. Father has just signed his contract."

"What would you say if I should go to Barrier Lake?" Alan asked.

"How?" she demanded.

"There is a way."

"You mean for Madge Chester?" and her gray eyes began to smolder.

"That would be my only chance."

In that moment Helen had it in her power to determine the fate of a post, the fortunes and happiness of several people. But her idolatrous worship of and faith in the great company blinded her to the consciousness of its significance, and even had she known the circumstances she would not have acted otherwise.

"I'd hate you if you did!" she exclaimed fiercely.

She had found him in a softer mood, and she might have had her way with him. Now the arrogance of the Great North had erected the old barrier between them. Suddenly and inexplicably he found himself desiring to beat down her defiance, to prove his strength, to compel her submission to it in the only way she held open to him.

"I might teach you to do otherwise," he said quietly, and his eyes looked steadily into hers.

The color flamed in Helen's cheeks.

"You couldn't!" she cried passionately. "Not any more than you could make the company accept you with your pebble throwing."

She turned and hurried toward the whitewashed buildings and Alan went down the shore to Madge Chester's house.

"I've decided to go to Barrier Lake," he announced abruptly.

"Good boy!" she exclaimed, her eyes alight. "I thought so. I knew the cities couldn't count against a good, fast game in the bush."

"And you think Mears will make a good fight?" he asked.

"I know he will. It's his last year, and he's desperate. He'll try to revive the old days for you. When did you hear he was going?"

Madge asked the question with apparent innocence.

"Your assurance last night finally convinced me," Alan laughed. "But we can see when their brigade goes out."

He had parried the question neatly. He understood her uncanny intuition too well to let her guess the reason back of his sudden decision.

"Sure, and in the meantime we'll get busy," Madge said as she turned to the table. "There's a lot to do. First we'll go over the requisitions."

She was completely the business woman, and she remained so through the week of preparation. Each day they worked together his admiration for her as a fur trader became greater. Like Helen, who had departed for Barrier Lake with the Great North brigade, Madge had been born and brought up in the north, and her father had been one of the most successful free traders who had ever entered the Fort Bruce district. From him she had absorbed an amazing knowledge of the business, and to this she had added the keenness of a steel-trap mind.

To Alan, Madge Chester, fur trader, was peculiarly fascinating. He liked her crispness, her quick decisions, her uncanny intuitions and her unerring judgment.

"You should have been a man!" he exclaimed one morning as she summed up a situation with startling clarity.

"Think so?" she asked. "That's what dad wanted. Poor old dad! I wonder if he knows the Chester posts are still fighting? Still"—and she paused and looked up at him—"there are advantages in being a woman."

"You mean you use a different set of weapons?"

"Why not? Any set is fair in fur land."

She saw the question in his eyes and added quickly:

"But not with you, Alan. I've laid my cards on the table."

She turned back to the lists of goods before her, and they resumed their work.

At last everything was ready. Alan spent the evening before his departure in the Chester living room. The conversation turned to other things, and Madge surprised him with another of her baffling changes. He had thought of her only as a woman of the north. Now she talked of the cities, not of Winnipeg but of New York, and of the stage, the films, and restaurant life. Her cheeks were flushed, her eyes bright, and into her voice crept a note of longing. For the first time Alan wondered why she chose the long, dreary winters of the north, the isolation and the hardships.

"The city's the place for you," he said.

"It would be nice, in a way," she answered thoughtfully; and then she went on with sudden vehemence: "But everything is make-believe there, Alan. It's not real, nothing you can get your teeth into. This game is different. It's a case of fighting and scheming and outwitting and outguessing. And you know the code. Anything's fair. Nothing counts except 'Get the fur.' Maybe that's what I like about it—the lawlessness and the chances. I like lawlessness and chances; don't you, Alan?"

There was a new note, a drawling suggestion, in the last words that startled him. They had been sitting in the living room, and when the tardy darkness came Madge had not lighted a lamp. He could not see her face clearly, and he did not answer.

"You and I can go a long way together in this game, boy!" she exclaimed suddenly. "For three years I've been looking for you. I hate to think of what we are going to do to poor old Grimwood Mears. It will be a great winter."

"And a percentage of the profits for stakes," he added with a suggestion of a question in his tone.

"Do you want anything else?" she asked softly.

"You're a devil, Madge."

"A nice little devil, Alan."

She had risen and stood close to him, and there was an invitation in her nearness. He crushed her to him. Her arms went around his neck and she made no effort to evade his kisses.

But after a moment he thrust her from him.

"Is that what you mean by woman's weapons?" he demanded roughly.

"Alan!" she protested. "Didn't I tell you I knew I had to play square with you?"

She reached up, took his coat lapels in her hands, and tugged at them gently.

"Don't think that way, boy!" she pleaded. "Don't! But we won't talk of it now. I can't— I don't— Run along, dear—please. Good night, and good night, and good-by, boy. I won't see you in the morning. And when you come back, in June—"

She pulled herself up, kissed his lips, and slipped away in the darkness.

The next morning Alan gathered his In-

dians with the usual difficulty and loaded the two York boats. Madge had already sent in one brigade, and this was the second trip. Often, as he supervised the work, he glanced toward her house, but she did not appear. When everything was ready he purposely delayed, but there was no sign of life in the little log building surrounded by its neat picket fence.

When there was nothing else to do except depart Alan turned to the boats and found John Macleod coming toward him.

"You're going out to Barrier Lake for Madge, eh?" the district superintendent said.

It was more a statement than a question, and Alan studied him closely as he nodded.

"How long does your contract run?"

"There's nothing definite."

"You were on your way to the States when you saw her."

"Yes."

"You did well with Holton at Whitefish. Why did you leave him?"

"It's hardly in the nature of things for a free trader to be permanent about anything, is it?" Alan countered.

Macleod's dark eyes searched his face for the meaning back of the statement, and then a quick flash showed sudden decision. He took a step forward as he asked: "You prefer permanency?"

Alan knew he was dealing with one of the best minds in fur land, and he was well aware that chance had not brought Macleod to the shore coincident with the departure of the Chester brigade. He had been on his guard from the first, and he was eager to match his wits with those of the Great North man.

"The Chester posts have survived for quite a while," he said.

Macleod flushed at the taunt, started to speak, and then abruptly turned away with a muttered "B' jou'."

Alan smiled as he stepped into the boat. He had no idea what the Great North man had come to learn, but he was satisfied that he had been disappointed. He felt that it was an auspicious beginning of the year's work, for he knew Macleod feared him and what he would do to Grimwood Mears. He suspected that the district manager had intended some offer that involved treachery to Madge, and had not dared make it. He had succeeded only in admitting his fear of what might happen at Barrier Lake. With the compliment implied by that fear, and with the memory of Madge Chester's last kiss, Alan left Fort Bruce behind him.

Though the ten days that followed were long and monotonous, free from any exertion except getting out of the boat and walking across the few portages, they were not idle. Alan was busy every moment of the time. He was going into a strange district, to a post of which he knew nothing, so far as the local situation was concerned—except for what little Madge had been able to tell him—but before he had reached Barrier Lake he had stored away an amazing amount of information. The Indian boatmen gossiped freely among themselves, and the head guide, beside whom Alan sat in the stern of the lead boat, proved to be unexpectedly valuable.

The information gathered touched countless subjects and two or three hundred people. To an outsider it would have seemed trivial and unimportant, but Alan overlooked nothing. The disastrous effects of one hunter's second marriage, the illness in another's family, the conjury of one man by his enemy—all went through the hopper and was catalogued and stored in his mind.

The brigade arrived at Barrier Lake one noon. At a distance Alan saw the clever advantage Madge's father had taken of the location of the post near its boundary line. He had built his own so close to the northern edge of the big company's land the buildings appeared to be all one group. Even the architecture had been copied, and half a mile from shore one post appeared to be a replica of the other.

Wives and children of the boatmen were gathered in a group before the Chester post, and the employees of the Great North were watching from its trading shop. Alan searched for the white beard of Grimwood Mears, but the old trader was not to be seen. One figure on the veranda of the dwelling house arrested his attention, and as the boats drew closer he recognized Helen.

He stood up and waved his hat, but there was no answering signal. A moment later she disappeared.

CHAPTER III.

WAR!

WHEN Helen Mears turned back into the dwelling house she met her father in the hall.

"Has the Chester manager come?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Could you see who it was?"

"Alan Gray. You met him. He was at Mrs. Ashdown's."

"What! The young fellow who was with Holton last year at Whitefish?"

The perturbation of the old trader was unmistakable.

"He surely hasn't any reputation," Helen protested.

"I heard some talk of him at Fort Bruce. But Flett has never yet run out the opposition at Whitefish Lake. Gray will find it different here."

He had regained his self-possession and spoke with grim determination.

Helen looked at him proudly.

"I'd be glad if he is a good man," she said. "It will make a better showing when we beat him."

"I knew Madge Chester was up to something. I told Macleod so. And he would have sent out some young fellow."

"Never mind, father," and Helen laid her hand on his arm. "You made Macleod give you the post. He had to. And when we go to Scotland next summer there'll be only one post at Barrier Lake."

"It is the way I'd like to leave it—the way I must. I couldn't quit with the opposition right beside me."

"We won't. We're going to beat them. And we'll show Macleod, too."

"Yes"—Mears's voice became savage—"we'll show Macleod. Macleod's too young to be a district manager. He has a lot of these fool ideas about the fur trade. He thinks I'm an old-timer, not up to snuff—that I need watching."

"Father!" Helen exclaimed. "Is that why he sent Henry Allardyce when you said you didn't need a clerk?"

"Of course. He tried to tell me he wanted to make it easy my last winter, relieve me of the bookkeeping. But I know. He sent Henry to spy on me, and that's all he's good for. He's been an apprentice clerk five years now and he's no nearer being a fur trader than when he came. Before the winter's over I'll make him wish he hadn't come."

He went out the front door and from the veranda Helen watched him as he walked across to the trading shop. For years she had been daughter, wife and mother to this stern and grizzled warrior. As a child, sitting on his knee she had drunk in his stories of the might and prestige of the great company. As a girl she had followed his victories in the war for pelts and not even Grimwood Mears knew how she had suffered because of the success of the opposition of the previous year.

Like her father, she had seen it as an affront to the great company, an insult to the honor in their keeping, and she had desired as ardently as he for one more chance to leave the opposition humbled and defeated.

And now this young man with the laughing eyes had dared to challenge it and to challenge her. When she had left him standing on the shore at Fort Bruce she had told herself his words were only a bit of the bravado of youth and she would not have admitted how often he had come into her thoughts.

She believed she hated him, as her life had taught her to despise all poachers in the huge empire of the Great North. She had derived a strange joy in the thought that he was leaving it, beaten after five years of useless struggle. Now she wondered if he had been laughing at her that last morning, if he had known even then that he was coming to fight Madge Chester's battle against her father, if he had cloaked his secret with his impertinent speeches.

The suspicion of it brought a flush to her cheeks and the smoldering fire to her gray eyes. A strange restlessness possessed her. She found herself glancing often toward the

Chester post and all afternoon, wherever she went, she heard talk of Alan Gray.

"Chester manager he come," Witte, the Indian housekeeper, began as Helen entered the kitchen.

"Yes," the girl answered.

"Kwe-ses she going to cook for him," Witte continued.

Helen did not check her. Fur land strategy values the kitchen telegraph and its quick reports of occurrences in rival households. All winter she would hear of him and learn the intimate details of his life.

And yet they would never meet. Neither Grimwood Mears nor his daughter permitted even the most formal of social courtesies between the Great North and the opposition. They had never entered the Chester post nor invited its manager to their home.

In other posts younger men had refused to make a personal quarrel of the maintenance of the ancient rights of the great company, but Grimwood Mears belonged to the old days when men ruled a district as large as some principalities, had the power of life and death over its people and defended their rights with the austerity of fanaticism.

After supper that evening Helen walked out to the veranda with her father. Both glanced instinctively toward the Chester post. The York boats had been unloaded and the supplies carried to the warehouse.

"Peters tells me they brought in a big supply," Mears said thoughtfully.

"What good will it do him?" Helen demanded. "Madge Chester thinks she got a foothold last year, but the hunters learned a lesson."

"Yes, I saw to that. They were glad to come back in the spring."

"That's why I hate free traders so," Helen continued. "They only tear down and disorganize. And when they have spoiled the hunters with false prices, have cheated them with shoddy trade goods and have undone the work of years, they leave."

"This time it will be different," Mears answered grimly. "There are more tricks in fur land than Gray ever knew and before spring comes—"

He broke off with a muttered exclamation as he saw the Chester manager enter the Great North property. Father and daughter awaited his coming in silence. Neither gave a sign of welcome.

"Good evening," Alan said easily as he stopped at the veranda steps. "As we are to be neighbors for a year I came over as soon as possible to pay my respects."

Mears stared searchingly for a moment. Then, because he could do nothing else, he growled a curt, "Good evening." Alan continued to stand there, smiling, apparently waiting for an invitation. At last Mears walked away with a muttered explanation of duties in the trading shop. Alan turned to Helen.

"Well, I came," he said, still smiling.

"I see you have," she answered shortly.

"Does it mean you hate me?"

"That would be foolish. You will be here so short a time."

The effrontery of her answer startled him and then he laughed.

"Oh, they've been here quite a while," and nodded toward the Chester buildings.

"The post has, but not the men," she retorted. "Don't you see? You are just another of Madge Chester's failures."

He started angrily and then the very assurance of her blind faith forced pity for her. Again he felt himself rebelling at ancient prejudices and privileges, at the spirit of a bygone day which had erected this unnatural barrier between them.

"Why do you do it?" he demanded. "Why do you goad me on to fight you? The old days are over. Fur land is free."

"Free!" she repeated scornfully. "Not so long as the Great North lives. Fur land belongs to it and to the men who have toiled and suffered for it, the men who have made it possible. We have proved it wherever a free trader has tried to gain a foothold. You know it. You are frightened already, and so you try to make terms with your silly talk of freedom."

When she finished Alan's eyes were blazing. She had translated his pity into cowardice and the arrogant defiance of her answer aroused in him that strange desire to conquer and to humble, to compel submissiveness.

"The next time peace is talked of, I will not be the one who asks it," he declared.

He turned at once and walked away.

CHAPTER IV.

"OUTSIDE THE LAW."

FOUR months after Alan Gray's arrival at Barrier Lake he stood at a window of the trading shop watching a dark speck on the ice far down the lake. He knew that Helen and her father were watching that same speck from windows in the rival post.

Each company had sent trippers to the hunters. Alan had started two teams long before daylight one morning and the Great North did not learn of it and send men to follow until forty-eight hours later. Now the identity of the approaching tripper would determine which company had won the first victory in the trading.

It had been a busy and a lonely fall. After his interview with Helen, Alan had plunged into a bitter and relentless struggle with the great company. Always before he had fought for the love of the fight, finding in the fur war of the north a game of infinite possibilities for clever stratagem, for bold, aggressive action and, inevitably, for romance and adventure. But at Barrier Lake something else had driven him on.

Helen had seemed to be unaware of his presence, but he never saw her walk from the trading shop to the dwelling house without experiencing a fierce desire to humble her, to destroy the reason for her arrogance and to compel an acknowledgment of his strength.

It was that which made him issue "debt" recklessly to hunters who had never before traded with the Chester post. He knew the danger of it. It was a policy which had brought disaster to free traders in the past, for the hunters had no long association to compel them to fulfill their obligations.

With the big company it was different. For generations it had been providing the necessities of life for the Indians. It had taught them to depend on it in the fall for the advancement which their improvidence and an idle summer made necessary and it had taught them, too, that an unpaid debt would be known in other districts.

Thus Alan had not dared to wait for the Indians to come in at New Year's, when Mears might get their fur, but had sent out trippers as soon as the ice permitted travel. He had worked with the utmost secrecy, and as Mears had not discovered their departure until they were far out on the trails, Alan counted on the trippers of the Great North finding their camps stripped of fur.

Now, as the dog team on the lake came nearer, the size of the load on the toboggan aroused the hopes and fears of the rival traders, and Alan, followed by George Somers, his half-breed assistant, went outside just as Mears and Helen left their shop. All four watched the racing dogs and then the team swung in toward the Chester post.

"It's Jerry Snowbird!" Alan cried. "Good for Jerry!"

Mears and Helen turned quickly and hurried to their dwelling house.

It was the first fur, the first blood, brought to the post in the sight of all, and Alan could not restrain an exultant shout as the loping dogs halted before his trading shop.

"Did you see any Great North men?" he asked Jerry when the fur had been unloaded and graded.

"Joe Peters," the tripper answered with a grin.

Alan knew there was a personal feud between the two half-breeds, grown out of and fostered by their positions as rival trippers.

"What did he have to say?" Alan asked.

"Oh, he say a lot, but not do anything," Jerry answered.

Alan knew that was all he could learn then, but later George Somers told him the two trippers had met at a wigwam and that Joe had threatened to get even with his enemy. Alan laughed. He knew Jerry could hold his own and that the quarrel would only make him work the harder in gathering pelts.

Two days later he learned through an effective system of espionage he had built up that Mears would send Joe Peters to several Chester hunters the next morning.

Accordingly, when Joe started out in the early darkness his dogs had not reached the ice of the lake before Jerry Snowbird had shouted "Mush on!" to his own team and was following on the same trail.

It was an old trick of fur land. Mears was sending Peters, his best tripper, to the camps of several hunters who had obtained "debt" from the Chester to wean them back to the Great North Company. But Alan met it with a strategy as old when he ordered Jerry to keep close on Joe's heels, to camp beside him at night and to be present whenever he talked to an Indian.

Jerry had listened and grinned understandingly. He had heard of other trippers being thus goaded into a frenzy which had brought defeat and his fertile mind was already busy devising countless irritations for his rival.

But at dark that night George Somers entered the trading shop to report that one of Jerry's dogs had returned to the post.

"Did he run away?" Alan asked.

"He not have any harness and Jerry never take the harness off until he stop to camp. It not camp time yet. And he got a cut on the ribs like it done with a knife."

Alan jumped to his feet.

"Let me see that dog," he said, as he started toward the door.

The animal was weak from loss of blood and, as George had said, there was a slash along the ribs on one side.

"A knife cut the bellyband and he slipped his head from the collar and got free," Alan said. "The dog's scared, too. I thought Jerry was a good man with dogs."

"He is," George insisted. "He drive that same team now two years and he never have trouble. Jerry the best man we got with dogs."

"Tell Charley Cameron to come to the shop," Alan said as he hurried away.

A half hour later Alan, Charley and a team drawing a toboggan loaded with only four days' provisions went down onto the ice in the darkness and started swiftly on the trail Jerry Snowbird and Joe Peters had taken that morning. At midnight they had traveled twenty-five miles and had reached the south end of Barrier Lake. As they left the ice and entered the spruce forest the dogs suddenly stopped, began to whine and then turned their noses to the sky in a death howl.

"I thought so," Alan said as he took his rifle from the toboggan and went forward. "Hold the team here, Charley, and I'll have a look."

He found exactly what the few facts and his fur trader's intuition had led him to expect. Jerry Snowbird lay beside the trail, half buried in the snow. Beyond was his loaded toboggan and near it lay the bodies of four dogs.

Without light to read the signs in the snow, Alan was still able to tell exactly what had happened. He knew that Joe Peters, maddened by his rival's success on the first trip and by being followed so closely, had turned upon Jerry in a blind fury and had killed the Chester tripper with a knife. Then, still in a rage or in an effort to hide his crime, he had started to kill Jerry's dogs. One knife thrust had missed and cut a bellyband and the animal had slipped his collar and escaped. Otherwise Jerry's fate might never have been known.

Because he had expected something of the sort, Alan had brought six dogs instead of the usual five. With Charley's help he slung Jerry's body in a tree, kept two dogs for his own toboggan and sent the tripper on with Jerry's load and four dogs.

"Hurry along to those hunters and buy their fur," he commanded. "Peters won't go near them now because he knows we will be after him. He'll turn off pretty soon. I'll follow him and you keep on to the wigwams. We'll show Mears. We'll get the murderer and the fur, too."

A mile farther they found where Peters had left the route and turned westward. Alan led his dogs onto the hard, beaten trail and followed.

He traveled the rest of the night. For a time the stars showed him that Peters was making a big circle back toward Barrier Lake and then low clouds drove across the sky, the temperature rose and he knew a snowstorm was at hand.

Alan increased his speed. He had a good trail, while Peters had been forced to break it. If he kept on there was a chance he

would overtake the fugitive before the storm hid his tracks or he had reached Barrier Lake Post.

But he was not able to do either. Though he traveled hard through the short day, darkness came before he had cut Peters's lead to less than an hour. The depth of the snow on the trail told him this and as he spurred himself on to the final dash the trail left the forest and he saw the lights of the post across the big clearing.

Alan kept on in Peters's trail until he was satisfied that it ended at the Great North. Then he swung over to his own buildings, turned his dogs into the yard and ran across to the Mears home.

He knew a knock at the front door would be so unusual Mears would expect his coming and he turned toward the rear and burst into the kitchen without ceremony. Helen, her father, two half-breeds and the cook were in the room and Alan's entrance was so unlooked for none of them could hide his surprise.

"I want Joe Peters!" Alan exclaimed.

He was covered with snow. His face was drawn from twenty-four hours on a swift trail and there was a forbidding, determined expression in his eyes. The half-breeds and Helen glanced anxiously from him to Mears and even the old fur trader seemed startled.

"Turn him over!" Alan commanded. "You know why I want him."

It was the first time he had stepped onto Great North property or had spoken to Mears or his daughter since the day of his arrival, but he did not see the girl now. He was looking only at Mears, and did not even notice that Allardyce, the clerk, was absent.

"What do you mean, coming into my house like this?" Mears demanded angrily.

"You know!" Alan retorted. "Peters killed Jerry Snowbird yesterday at the south end of the lake. I've tracked him to this place and I'm going to have him."

"You're mad!" Mears exclaimed. "I don't know what you're talking about. I haven't seen Peters."

"But you know he is here and if you are going to shelter a murderer you can stand the consequences."

Helen had drawn back to the rear of the group and as Alan spoke she started toward the door to the dining room.

"Stay where you are," Alan said sharply. "No message goes out of this room until I get Peters."

The girl turned on him, her eyes blazing, her face flushed.

"You don't dare—" she began.

"What are you going to do?" Alan demanded, ignoring her and addressing her father. "There's no doubt about this man's guilt. He made a circle back here and I tracked him to your buildings. I don't ask anything except that you give him up so that I can turn him over to the Mounted Police at Fort Bruce. I'll guarantee that he gets there and is given a fair trial."

But Mears had been aroused. Alan's commands had been an affront not only to his own dignity and rights, but to those of the Great North.

"Get out of here!" he cried. "If it were the old days you'd—"

"But it's not," Alan interrupted. "The days of unpunished murder are at an end. There is a law now—"

"Law!" Mears snorted. "And a pretty mess the law has made of it. There was order and decency in the north when the Great North ruled it. Now any young upstart can—"

"Break into people's houses and order them about," Helen finished for him.

Alan glanced at her, but before he could speak he heard a step outside and a hand on the latch. He sprang back, his rifle ready, but when the door opened young Allardyce entered.

"He's gone with a fresh team!" the clerk exclaimed. "He can't be tracked in this—"

Mears' scowl finally stopped him and he glanced around to see Alan.

"I thought so!" Alan exclaimed as he whirled upon Mears. "You knew he was a murderer and as soon as you learned it you made plans for his escape. You've set yourself up against the law, outside it, above it—"

"The law you talk of is a long way off," Mears interrupted scornfully. "I've gone through forty years without it and I've had

peace. And I want to tell you that a law that doesn't understand the north is not going to have Joe Peters. If you want to know who is responsible for Jerry Snowbird's death, I'll tell you. You are. You sent him on that trip, knowing the bad blood that lay between them."

"I sent Jerry to protect my own interests," Alan retorted. "Furthermore, this country is free—"

"Yes," and Helen, fiercely partisan, stepped to her father's side. "That's what you free traders always say until the first defeat sends you scurrying to the law."

Alan caught the challenge, but he ignored her.

"Do you mean that?" he demanded of Mears. "Do you mean you will protect this murderer from the law?"

"I mean that the Great North will deal with its people as it has done for two hundred years without the help of any free trader who cries for the law when he thinks he needs it and forgets the law when it is in his way."

"All right," Alan answered quietly. "I'm glad I understand you. You want a fight outside the law. I'm willing. From now on I'll meet you on the terms you have made."

He turned to the door, but as his hand touched the latch he whirled back on Mears.

"And keep Peters well hidden," he said. "Next time I won't talk. I'll take him."

CHAPTER V.

STRYCHNINE, QUININE, AND TEA.

WHEN Alan wakened the next morning his first thought was not of the murder of his tripper, not of Mears, but of Helen and her presence at the scene of his defeat. He had hoped to take the old fur trader by surprise and compel the surrender of Joe Peters. Instead he had come too late and had only aroused the arrogant defiance of the old days, while Helen, her faith in the right and might of the great company unshattered, had watched him go away empty handed.

As her reception of his one attempt to reach an understanding that day of his arrival at Barrier Lake had driven him on to a remorseless fight for fur, now her challenge of his courage determined him to turn Joe Peters over to the law she scorned.

Helen Mears's entry into Alan's life had wrought a strange and inexplicable change in his five-year fight against the Great North. It was not that he warred on a woman. Once he had battled to gain recognition from the great company. Now that arrogance and solidarity which had challenged him had become personified in the girl and he fought, not Helen, but the barrier between them.

He plunged into his work more relentlessly than ever. He kept his trippers hurrying from one camp to another. When hunters came to the post he sent them away impressed by his fairness and generosity and anxious to spread the news of their treatment at his hands. Under his careful coaching his trippers made a favorable impression in the camps.

As a result, when New Year's came with its annual visit of all the nearby hunters, the Chester Indian house was filled to overflowing and the fur began to pour over the Chester counter. Yet to Alan his success was not so much a commercial victory as an evidence for Helen of his power.

The last day of the year he distributed gratuities with unprecedented lavishness. Helen, always the active lieutenant of her father, met his action with a revival of the old Great North custom of a New Year feast. All the Indians were invited to pass through the living room, where they shook hands with Mears and his daughter, and then passed on to the kitchen and great kettles of steaming food. The next day Alan countered by inducing one of the oldest Great North Indians to dispose of his fur at the Chester post.

Yet in one matter Alan remained on the defensive. The murder of Jerry Snowbird was the chief subject of gossip in both Indian houses and Alan knew that until he was successful in bringing the slayer to justice the big company would remain all-powerful in the eyes of the hunters.

After the departure of the Indians, Alan

prepared to send his trippers to the distant camps. But Mears had become crafty and twice he got men away without Alan learning of it. The death of Jerry had left the Chester post crippled, but it had also removed Joe Peters from the Great North employ, and then one day Alan learned through his kitchen telegraph that one of Mears's remaining men was ill.

Immediately he suspected a ruse and the preparation for a trip of more than usual importance. He ordered a toboggan loaded with a trading outfit and arose at two o'clock in the morning to be ready to take the trail himself. But nothing happened.

That afternoon he heard that the tripper was worse. Confident of a ruse, he arose again soon after midnight. No lights appeared in the rival post. And then at four o'clock he heard a dog yelp and saw a team and driver melt into the darkness over the lake.

A half hour later he was following. It had been a clever trick, but he had met it, and as he swung out across the lake he thought not of Mears, but of Helen when she should learn, as he had arranged for her to learn, that he had left.

He drove slowly. He had no idea of the destination of the other man and he did not wish to turn him from his errand by letting him know he was followed. All day he kept out of sight and the next morning he found his rival's camp ten miles ahead of his own.

He quickened his pace and at daylight was swinging along ahead of his dogs when he heard one of them growl. He looked back to see the dog behind the leader gulp something and snarl fiercely at his teammate to the rear. As Alan spoke sharply to them he saw another dog sniffing at the side of the trail and then strain forward.

In an instant Alan had jerked the team to one side and jerked it ahead. He ran back and a few moments' search revealed a small piece of meat buried in the snow beside the trail.

"That's clumsy work," he muttered. "Only one dog is poisoned before I know what is up."

Alan unhitched the dog that had eaten the meat and tried to make it disgorge, but was unsuccessful As he had no emetics he did not waste further time, but put the animal back into the team and started on.

He drove from behind now, watching his dogs carefully, and in the next mile he prevented their eating six pieces of frozen meat they had scented beside the trail. He placed each in a pocket and went on. Before long the dog behind the leader had convulsions and died a few minutes after it was unhitched.

Alan increased his pace and just before dark saw the rival tripper two miles ahead of him on a lake. He made an early camp and after eating supper he tied his dogs securely and went on alone. After proceeding cautiously for two miles he heard the yelp of a dog ahead and immediately swung off to one side.

The Great North tripper had been following a trail made by one of the Indian hunters who had gone to the post at New Year's, and a big semicircle brought Alan to it a half mile ahead of the other's camp. He paralleled the trail until it lifted from a swamp to the top of a steep ridge. He went on across and then back on the trail to the top of the rise. There, carefully estimating where each dog in the team would be when they stopped to rest after the stiff climb, he planted his seven pieces of poisoned meat in the sides of the trail and then retraced his route to camp.

The next morning Alan made a late start. The spruce trees were moaning and cracking under the pressure of a stiff wind, and, while the temperature was not low, he had not started his team before the blizzard began to make itself felt. Travel would be possible in the swamps, but on the big lakes, Alan knew, a man's endurance would be tested to the utmost.

He went on, because he was eager to learn how successful his stratagem of the night before had been. He passed the empty camp site of the Great North tripper, and less than a mile farther came to the ridge. It was still dark, but he heard a voice at the crest. Halting his own team, he went ahead, carrying his rifle.

"Hello!" he called, when he saw the toboggan, a huddled group of dogs and the driver.

There was no answer, and he kept on. The dogs were down, several writhing in convulsions.

"What has happened?" Alan asked in Ojibwa.

"You ought to know," a woman answered in English.

He sprang forward and peered beneath the hood of the skin parka.

"Good Lord!" he exclaimed as he recognized Helen Mears. "How did you get here?"

"Walked, of course," she snapped.

"I know, but I thought, of course— I never dreamed—"

"Go ahead," she prompted. "You never dreamed that you were—"

She, too, left her sentence unfinished. In her anger she had forgotten that dog poisoning was a dangerous subject.

"What's happened?" Alan asked.

"Poisoned—all of them."

"I lost a dog yesterday, and I would have lost the entire team if I hadn't discovered what was up. I never knew an Indian to be so careless in setting out fox bait."

He recognized the disadvantage at which he had her. There could be no doubt but that she had left the poison for his dogs, and Helen was aware that he knew it. On the other hand, while she suspected him, she had no proof, for he had been behind her.

"Are they all dead?" Alan asked.

"They will be in a minute."

"It's tough luck," he said. "And you are two long days from the post."

"I'll get back," she answered defiantly.

"Not in a storm like this. It's going to be a bad one. But the first thing to do is to get your load into a tree. I'll help."

It was a task of which Helen alone would have been incapable, and she knew it; yet she declared sullenly:

"I'll take care of it."

"Nonsense," he said, as he began to remove the harnesses from the dogs.

"It's too bad," he continued as he looked at the stricken animals. "They were a good team."

"The best I ever had," Helen answered, and from her tone he suspected tears. "I raised them from puppies."

There was neither apology in his words, nor reproach in hers. Fur land's weapons have reflected some of the primitive savagery of the country in which it has been waged. What would be a comtemptible bit of treachery elsewhere has been an accepted piece of strategy there. Anything which will halt the tripper has been permitted.

Alan worked quickly. He looped the collars together with a trace and hung them out of the reach of wolves. Then he turned to the toboggan.

"We'll take your sleeping robe and anything else you need," he said as he began to undo the lashings.

When at last the task was completed dawn had come, and as he turned to Helen he saw her face clearly for the first time. Her eyes were blazing. Humiliated as she was at being forced to depend on the man who had so successfully turned her method of attack against her, she was still unbeaten.

"I guess you'll have to come with me," he began.

"I can get back alone," she answered.

"But you can't. You know what this storm is going to be."

"Then I'll wait here for you."

He knew what it was she dreaded; knew how hard it would be for her to see him buy the fur for which she had made such a brave struggle. Suddenly an unaccountable desire seized him, an inexplicable willingness to let his victory slip.

It was fur land, but, after all, she was a woman. He had an excuse in the approaching storm and her dependence on him. They could turn back together and have two days of peace and friendship. The winter had been lonely. He had never realized how he had hungered for the companionship of this girl until she stood there before him, her cheeks flushed, her eyes bright.

"You hate to see me buy it," he began.

"Why shouldn't I?" she blazed forth. "I earned it. I would have had it if it hadn't been—"

"For the unaccountable carelessness of an Indian in putting out fox bait," he finished for her.

They were ranged once more against each

other. His moment of weakening was past —a moment which he now saw to be only a bit of futile madness which in the end would have lost for him what he desired so intensely.

"You'll have to come with me," he decided. "I'm going to swing around to the west on my way back, and I couldn't leave you here anyhow. It was crazy, your coming out at all. I don't see what your father was thinking of."

"There was no one else, and I could have done it," she flared. "I'm as good on the trail as any tripper."

"I know that now," he granted. "I've followed you for two days."

"You think you can afford to be generous."

"No; I'm only trying to be decent. Shall we start?"

She bit her lips, glanced at him quickly, and then turned away.

"Very well," she said. "But I want it understood that I am not—"

"Under obligations, eh?" he finished with a laugh. "All right. Any way you wish."

He ran back, brought up his team, lashed her sleeping robe and a small bundle to his toboggan, and started off in the lead. Helen followed at the rear.

They stopped at noon to make tea. Alan brought a steaming cup of it to Helen, and as he did so he derived pleasure from the thought that he was serving her.

"Can't we call a truce?" he began impulsively. "Mrs. Ashdown has them annually. That is where I met you."

"Yes, but you were going out. It was before Madge Chester got hold of you."

There was a bitterness in her tone which amazed him.

"Would it make any difference to you why I came?" he asked suddenly.

"None whatever," she answered instantly. "You are only another of Madge Chester's traders trying to gain a foothold at Barrier Lake."

"And you think I haven't?"

"I know you haven't, and you never will. A few disgruntled hunters, perhaps, but never many. They have known my father for twenty years, and the company for ten times as long. Don't you know what they call it? 'That to which we owe thanks.' It is contemptible, this thing you are trying to do, and before spring my father will have put you and the Chester post where you belong."

She had risen and was waiting for him to start on. They traveled without speaking, nearly frozen on the lakes, but in the afternoon reached the sheltered camp of two hunters. The Indians watched the two come up, and if they were surprised to see the daughter of the Great North manager in company with the opposition they did not show it. Helen, powerless without trade goods, went inside a wigwam. Alan began his trading with the usual gratuity of tea.

The squaws accepted the packages eagerly and began at once to prepare the brew. Alan gossiped with the hunters, and had just begun his trading with the oldest, who brought out a few pieces of fur at a time, when the squaws called that tea was ready.

It had been a tealess camp, and the men hurried away. Alan followed into the wigwam where all had gathered. The hunter took his first sip of tea. He glanced suspiciously at the white man, drank again, and then angrily dashed the contents of his cup into the ashes.

Before Alan could ask a question the camp was in an uproar. Irate squaws berated him. The hunter began to carry his furs away, while from one woman, who talked more slowly than the others, Alan gathered that the tea was poisoned; that his trade goods were bad, and that he could get no fur.

He was dumfounded. It was an important group of hunters, and he knew the story, if not contradicted, would ruin his winter's trading. He called for the tea and tasted it. It was extremely bitter. He examined the tea in the bags he had given to them. It was all right. Then he glanced at Helen, who was watching with an air of triumph.

"It was not the tea!" Alan exclaimed to the women. "It was your kettle. Throw it out and make some more."

They were sullen and incredulous. At last he persuaded one squaw to try again. He watched her as she rinsed the kettle

and put in fresh tea. Then he sat near Helen until it had boiled. The hunters tasted it gingerly, and their faces lighted with pleasure.

"See," Alan said. "I was right. It was your kettle."

He turned to Helen and spoke in English: "I'll have to ask you to stay outside the wigwams, where I can watch you. You may need your quinine before you get home."

Her eyes blazed angrily, but she went with him.

"Be careful," he warned her. "I might have to tell what you did. That's the trouble with fur-land tactics. There always is a backlash."

At his taunt she turned upon him.

"I will stay here until you have finished trading," she said. "Then I will hire an Indian to take me back."

"No," he declared. "I can't afford to leave you in a camp with my trade goods. You're coming with me."

"I shall employ an Indian if I choose."

"Not now."

"How can you stop me?"

"By telling them just what happened to their tea. And remember that an Indian associates bitterness with strychnine, which he knows, not with quinine, which he does not know. It would be embarrassing, too, if I had to protect you from their anger."

"So long as I live I shall hate you for this," Helen whispered fiercely.

"Then, there's a chance," he grinned. "They say hating comes awfully near to something else."

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.

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LOST ROMANCES

OLD, crumbling, brownstone house austere,
What lost romances you might tell,
What tales of joy and hidden tear!

What faces once from you did peer,
What tragedies about you fell,
Old, crumbling brownstone house austere!

What ghosts of laughter, and what drear
Grim shades of love in you must dwell,
What tales of joy, or hidden tear!

What story, chaptered year by year,
Your staid front binds to-day so well,
Old, crumbling brownstone house austere!

Sad eyes I see, strange footsteps hear;
Through each dark haunted room may knell
What tales of joy, or hidden tear!

For wrapped in gloom and silence here
A book you stand, o'erscored pell-mell—
Old, crumbling brownstone house austere!
With tales of joy and hidden tear!

Arthur Stringer.

The Jack of Diamonds

By FRED JACKSON

Author of "The Dance of Death," "The First Law," "The Third Act," etc.

A NOVELETTE—COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE

CHAPTER I.

UNINVITED.

IN the parlance of the underworld Mr. Bluch Simmonds was a rough worker. To him the delicate mechanism of a lock was an unsolved mystery. He was helpless without the proper key—unless, of course, he had time to jimmy it or dynamite it.

So invariably he managed to effect an entrance into any crib that attracted his covetous eye by flirting with some susceptible female inhabitant. The female inhabitant had to be susceptible, because Mr. Bluch Simmonds was neither an *Adonis* nor a *Don Juan*. He was a rough *Romeo*. But there are all kinds of women, and each has her own peculiar taste.

Mr. Bluch Simmonds succeeded in pleasing a surprising number of spinster caretakers and even more experienced housemaids, for he had a breezy way with him and a cheery smile and usually something pleasant to say. Even domestics respond to compliments, and Bluch had quite a line, achieved by years of concentrated thinking and tireless experimenting.

He had gained access to the Conway apartment on East Sixty-Seventh Street by paying marked attention to the Conways' maid, Suzie, who had been left in charge during the summer months. It was at a motion picture theater that they first met and became acquainted, through having seats next to each other. Darkness, somehow, promotes romance, and in the most exciting part of the latest serial, "The Man with the Iron Heel," Bluch had found Suzie's hand and had held it comfortingly in his stronger one without the lady's disapproval. For Suzie was lonesome—and Bluch had a certain way with him.

Once in Suzie's good graces, it was nothing at all to leave the door on the latch when he was taking his departure after an evening of beer and skittles; to return a few hours later; and take his choice of the Conway belongings, undisturbed by Suzie's tranquil snores.

All that was in the way of Bluch's regular business system. There was no thrill to it. But, having gained his end, he was making his way down the stairs of the apartment house again, on his way out, with his swag in a suit case in his hand, when he came unexpectedly upon the open door of another apartment. There stirred within him the longing for excitement—the craving for adventure—the lure of the unknown and unexpected that had originally set his wayward feet upon the downward path.

A door invitingly open! The door to somebody's apartment—somebody rich, for only rich people could afford to live there!

Bluch stopped in his descent of the white marble stairs and gazed at the open door. Every nerve was tense with caution—curiosity—expectation. Beyond the open door was darkness.

Was somebody there—or had the door been left carelessly ajar? Was it a trap?

Bluch hesitated. He could never think quickly, but now he thought as quickly as he could, and he determined upon a plan of action.

He knocked upon the door frame, as one neighbor might knock upon another's, to make sure that everything was all right.

"I say—is everything all right here?" he called with the most casual and cultured accents that he could achieve. He was careful, however, not to call too loudly, lest he awake the colored elevator boy who was sleeping peacefully below.

No one answered. No sound disturbed the perfect quiet of the night.

Bluch looked meditatively at the suit case full of the Conways' best table silver, toilet articles and other negotiable odds and ends. He looked at the white marble stairway leading to the street below—and safety. Then he looked again at the open door. And characteristically he advanced upon it. He had never been able to choose the safer way.

He pushed the door entirely open—but carefully—so that it would not creak. He gazed into the foyer, beautifully furnished with silken rugs, tapestries, lamps—all the accessories of wealth and magnificence. Still no one challenged him. He spoke again, advancing into the darkness:

"I say—is everything all right here?"

No answer! No sound!

Bluch drew a long breath, feeling tolerably safe. He put down the suit case near the door and found his pocket flash, and his revolver. Being a rough worker, he always carried a revolver. Then, leaving the door open, for retreat, he advanced.

There was no one in the dining room on the left. There was no one in the kitchen or in the servant's bedroom back of it. There was no one in the living room.

The shine and gleam and glitter of expensive objects almost took his breath; but he had been in the game too long to take unnecessary risks. He proceeded with his investigations before gathering in his spoils. He wanted to guard against a surprise attack.

A small hallway before him led on to the bedchambers beyond.

There was no one in the first one. In the second there was a man in silk pyjamas and a dressing gown of Japanese design. He had evidently been reading when slumber had overtaken him, for the reading lamp beside his bed was still switched on and his book had fallen to the floor beside him, where it stood open and on end.

Bluch stood in the doorway regarding him critically. He was breathing so heavily and so regularly that Bluch—who was an experienced judge of slumber—deduced that he had quite recently dozed off and would be dead to the world for an hour at least.

But to make sure, Bluch advanced—his gun held ready—and examined the sleeper at close range.

He was a young man, well groomed, fine looking, obviously a person of importance, of assured position. And he was certainly not faking. He was as sound asleep as a man could possibly be.

Bluch sighed with satisfaction and looked about him. A glance convinced him that he had walked into an Aladdin's Palace of

treasures. An expensive watch, a wallet full of bills, rings, scarfpins, studs, cuff links, were strewn about on the dressing stand in careless confusion. It was just a question of what to grab first.

His eyes wandered to the writing desk, to appraise what might lie there. He saw a sheet of note paper—written over—weighted down.

Thereupon it occurred to Bluch that his host might have decided to commit suicide, in which case it might not be well for him to linger about the premises. He crossed hastily to glance at the letter, and read:

DEAR MR. CLARKE:

When I was in London I had the pleasure of meeting your sister, Lady Noel, and we became such good friends that she made me promise I would write you as soon as I returned and ask you to come to see me.

I am therefore keeping my promise; but as we are to be here at our summer place for another month or so, I am wondering if you wouldn't like to come for a week-end instead of waiting until we return in the fall. I have innumerable messages for you from Eleanor, which I am sure you will be glad to get—and I daresay you will be amused here, for we have the whole island to ourselves, and there are endless things to do in the way of amusement and exercise.

Do come this week-end—the seventeenth—if you possibly can, as we have some very interesting people staying, and the Regatta Ball, on Saturday, is always very brilliant and quite worth seeing. There is a good train from New York to Lakeport at four o'clock—with a club smoker—and our launch always meets it; however, if you prefer to take another train, you can always get ferried to our island by the public boatmen or you can telephone or wire me what train to meet. I do hope you will come—in spite of the unconventionality of all this—as I am looking forward to knowing you. I adore Eleanor.

With regards from mother and me,

Always very sincerely yours,

GEORGETTE RING.

Crystal Isle, Connecticut.

CHAPTER II.

UNEXPECTED.

FOR a long time Bluch stood gazing down at the letter before him. When he had slowly and painstakingly read it through once he began at the beginning again and read it through a second time.

Miss Ring's caligraphy was difficult to decipher—but that was only part of the reason why Bluch read so slowly. He was absorbing and digesting every sentence. His mind was working. Accordingly, it became clear to him, little by little.

First—that the gentleman on the bed was Mr. Clarke!

Second—that he was being invited to Crystal Isle for the famous Regatta Ball!

Third—that there were to be other guests for the occasion—interesting guests—wealthy guests!

Fourth—that Miss Ring had never met him—*had never even seen him!*

She was asking him to the party because she had promised his sister, Lady Noel, in London that she would look him up when she got home! She was going to take him on faith!

She would take any one on faith who presented himself to her as Mr. Clarke! Never having seen the *real* Mr. Clarke, *she would not know the difference!*

Now, Bluch had no social aspirations. To spend a week-end as the guest of the Rings at Crystal Isle was not his idea of having a good time—well known as the Rings were—famous as was their summer residence! But he had heard about their lavish entertainments! The Regatta Ball especially had been written up again and again in the Sunday newspaper that Bluch read assiduously. He knew that the smartest social celebrities graced it with their presence, that it was a gala fête, and that the women wore their most gorgeous jewels. To obtain access to the island and be present at the Regatta Ball was a dream almost beyond conception. And yet—

A plan was slowly forming in Bluch's head; gradually maturing as he stood with his mouth open, his small eyes fixed on the man in the bed. That gentleman, blissfully unaware of the trick that Fate was playing him, slumbered on.

A grin presently overspread Bluch's fat face and—to make quite sure—he reread Miss Ring's charming letter again. Then he tiptoed noiselessly out of Mr. Clarke's bedroom, out of Mr. Clarke's hallway, out of Mr. Clarke's apartment, taking only the suit case containing the Conway swag. He

touched nothing of Mr. Clarke's! He closed the door carefully and silently behind him. He was even tempted to return the Conway loot, now that such visions of glory filled his mind. But he thought better of that.

The negro hallboy was still snoring downstairs when he made his way out into the night.

On Friday the seventeenth, Miss Georgette Ring arrayed herself with particular care, against the arrival of Mr. Renwicke Clarke. She would not have *admitted* that she was making a particularly careful toilette for that particular guest if any one had taxed her with it, but the fact remains that she spent half an hour selecting her gown and hat for tea, and that she was in noticeably high spirits as she came down to the south porch to await the arrival of the launch that was meeting the four o'clock train from New York!

In ordinary circumstances, Miss Georgette Ring was well worth observing. She had a fluff of shining hair of the strangest, most fascinating color; black in some lights; red-brown in others; sometimes almost red-gold in the sun. And her nose was small and straight—that is, almost straight; it tilted up just a *bit* at the end! And her skin was clear and soft and smooth, a kind of rosy-tan. And her eyes were very dark blue, with tremendously long, curved lashes; and her mouth was full and *red!* Most people thought she was a beauty, and nobody thought her plain. The worst that could be said about her was that she was awfully *modern-looking*. In a word she was *piquante!*

Recognizing herself as a type when still at school, she had cultivated a certain originality in dress that set off her charms to perfection; and she had developed it through the years until now—at twenty-three—she was the last word in *chic*—a bit bizarre at times, perhaps, but *fascinating*. And—in tribute to her individuality, she had been accorded a reputation for being "different"—which simply means that she was able to do about as she pleased, and always got away with it.

To-day she was wearing a smart little white suit with red buttons and a red hat and red slippers, a costume which—the *other* ladies on the south porch reflected—no other *nice* girl in the world could have worn, but she looked stunning in it, you may be sure. Even her mother—who sighed resignedly over her a dozen times a day and wondered audibly how *she* could ever have had a child like this—was compelled to observe her with satisfaction.

"Mr. Clarke is coming by this train, isn't he, Georgie?" she asked from the widest wicker chair. She knew quite well that he *was* coming by this train, but was the sort of person who always asked everything a number of times—either to refresh her memory, or to make conversation, or to remind one of the subject.

"Yes—I think so," answered Georgette. "At least, I suppose so! I suggested it in my note, but he didn't mention in his acceptance whether he would adopt the plan or not!"

"In any case, the launch has gone," said Mrs. Ring comfortably. "In fact, it ought to be back by now!"

"And who is Mr. Clarke?" asked Louise Lamson, who had been out several seasons and was naturally interested in any new man.

"Lady Noel's brother—such a charming girl. Lady Noel, I mean," explained Mrs. Ring, fanning herself. "And her husband—Lord Noel—as nice and unassuming as any one you might name. Really quite like an *American!* Isn't he, Georgie?"

"Yes, mother," answered Georgette, "only different. Mother thinks that's the grandest compliment she can pay any one—to say he is like an American. Oh, say can you see! Are they bringing the tea?"

Miss Lamson, whose curiosity had not been gratified in the least, murmured: "And—er—*Mr. Clarke?*"

"I thought I *told* you. *He's* Lady Noel's brother. She was an American girl, you see—Eleanor Clarke, and she married Lord Noel."

Georgette laughed.

"What Louise wants to know," she put in, "is whether Mr. Clarke is young or old, rich or poor, married or single. But that, my dear, is precisely what we cannot tell you, for we don't know ourselves."

"You don't *know?*" gasped Mimi de Estes, opening wide eyes.

"No, Eleanor never went into details about him. She just said he was a *lamb*—and that we'd simply *adore* him—and that he never goes about much, but that she'd write and tell him he *must* come to us! And she must have because he's coming. Of course, as Eleanor is such a knockout herself, we're taking Brother Renwicke—sort of on faith!"

"How *romantic!*" breathed Nita Aldrich.

Georgette nodded.

"It will be if he's the goods," she agreed. "But pretty awful if he's not. I believe that's the launch now!"

The launch whistle had signaled musically from the boat landing even as she spoke, and there was a unanimous movement on the part of the ladies present toward powder puffs, lip sticks and vanity mirrors. As they could not see the landing from the south porch they watched the door through which the newcomers must approach.

"Isn't this *exciting?*" whispered Nita intensely.

And Georgette added dramatically:

"Hark! I hear *footsteps!*"

But it was only Howard Andrews who presently appeared, dragging his golf sticks.

"Hello, everybody!" he called cheerfully. "H'lo, George! H'lo, Mrs. Ring. I sent my bags up, but kept my clubs on the chance of taking some one on for nine holes before dressing time. How about it, George?"

"Not a chance," replied Georgette emphatically. "Not *to-day!*"

"Why—not to-day?" he asked.

"Did you come by the four o'clock train from town?" asked Louise Lamson as Georgette merely smiled mysteriously without explaining.

"Yes. What of it?"

"Any one else come by that train?"

"Lots of people—train was packed," answered Howard.

"Any one else for here, she means. Any *strange man?*" asked Mimi.

"Oh—yes—there was," he answered, recalling. "Funny looking chap—fat—old family butler type—I left him in the hall interviewing Conrad!"

There was a general sigh of disappointment at this.

"Wouldn't you *know* he would turn out like that?" asked Louise Lamson bitterly.

And then Conrad appeared in the doorway, looking more than ever resentful and dignified and a little ruffled.

"If you please, miss," he said, addressing Georgette, "there's a—a gentleman"—the word almost choked him—"in the hall, asking for you, miss. He says to tell you it's President Harding or Mr. Rockefeller or any one you might be likely to receive, as you wouldn't know his own name if you heard it—but it's Mr. Fox!"

"Mr. Fox?" repeated Georgette.

"Then it's *not* Mr. Clarke," said Mrs. Ring, beaming. "I'm *so* glad—so glad Mr. Clarke isn't turning out like that, I mean!"

"But we aren't expecting any Mr. Fox," said Georgette. "The plot thickens!"

And she rose abruptly to follow the butler. But she had no idea, of course, what was really about to happen. The most important events in one's life *often* begin unimportantly and unexpectedly—just like that!

CHAPTER III.

UNDERHAND.

MR. FOX—or Mr. Bluch Simmonds as he was more widely known—had purchased some impressive looking bags and what he considered a highly suitable wardrobe for this dip into the whirlpool of high society, so he was entirely at ease as he lounged in a big tapestry chair in the hall and waited for Miss Ring to come to him.

He had lighted an expensive cigar and was leaning back comfortably pulling on it, when a trim little person in black, with collar and cuffs and apron of white, came tripping down the stairs toward him. She was a little mouselike creature of perhaps forty, with dark hair just beginning to turn gray, and rather wide, frightened eyes. As her gaze fell upon Mr. Bluch Simmonds, however, her eyes became wider and more frightened than usual, and she advanced, gasping in incredulous tones:

"*Bluch!*"

"*Jeanie!*" cried Bluch, no less astonished. "What in the world are *you* doing here?"

"I'm Miss Ring's maid—and companion," said Jeanie. "I've been with her now for three years. Bluch, I'm—I'm going straight!"

"*Straight!*" murmured Bluch. "*You*—the slickest little dip in the business? What's the idea?"

She pressed her hands nervously together and glanced about over her shoulder.

"S-h! Some one may hear you. They don't know about that here, Bluch. And you mustn't tell. I hated the life. I always hated it. I just got into it—because I was too young when I started to know better—and then—it was hard to get an honest job that would enable me to earn a decent living. But at last—I managed it. And I've been going straight for three years. You won't—give me away, Bluch, will you?"

"Sure not," he said, "unless you interfere with *me!*"

"H-how do you mean?" she asked anxiously. "What are you doing here?"

"I'm branching out. I'm planning a big clean-up," he answered cautiously.

"*Here?*" cried Jeanie in agonized tones.

"Sure. Sparklers. The Regatta Ball tomorrow night. If I make as much out of it as I *think* I can, *I'll* go straight, too. What's the trouble?"

He observed her sudden pallor, her trembling.

"*Please* don't, Bluch—not here," she said. "These are—great people—honest, they are. They've been wonderful to me. Don't make me stand by and see them—*robbed?*"

"*What?* Beat it—after the trouble I've had planning this coup and buyin' a lot of clothes and stuff? That's a good joke, that is! What do you think I am? This is my big opportunity, this is! Why, I ain't likely to ever get another chance like this! And you ask me to trot along and let it slide! Say, you've got a nerve, you have! I'm going to stick here and clean up—you can go gamble on that, kid—and just get this—if I'm tripped up, you're going to the cooler with me, because I'm going to swear that *you* planned the whole thing and let me in."

"They'd never believe you—not after my three years here," said Jeanie; "why—I've even had charge of Miss Georgette's jewels!"

"They'd think you were just biding your time, that's all," said Bluch. "Say, you've got a record that would stagger anyone!"

She stood silent, helpless before this overwhelming truth.

"Now, just cheer up," added Bluch, quietly, "keep mum—and everything'll be O. K. *You'll* never be suspected—and, if you like, I'll give you a slice of the receipts."

"I wouldn't touch a penny of it," cried Jeanie, "not a penny!"

"All right, so much the better for me," grinned Bluch. "But you'd better keep mum, just the same, if you know what's good for you. Look out!"

His quick ear, always on the alert, had caught the sound of Georgette's approaching feet, and he added politely—for Georgette's benefit—"Yes, thanks. The butler has gone to tell her I'm here!"

"Very good, sir," said Jeanie, slipping away as Georgette advanced.

She could not decide—on the spur of the moment—just what else to do. Her heart was palpitating with terror. She crept back to her own room, and there sat down weakly, with her hands in her lap, thinking. Her mind worked faster than Bluch's, but it was a good half hour before she finally settled on a plan of campaign and descended again to see what was afoot.

In the meantime, Georgette was studying her unexpected visitor with curious, appraising eyes. She saw, at a glance, that he *was* the old family butler type, as Howard had said.

"Mr. Fox?" she asked, pleasantly.

"Yes, miss," said Bluch, rising, and bobbing his head in a kind of greeting. Then he glanced about cautiously and asked in a dramatic whisper: "Did you ever see a real live detective?"

"*Never,*" said Georgette, "but *I'd* like to!"

"Well, you've got your wish," said Bluch, beaming. "*I'm it!*"

"Not *really*. A *detective?*" repeated Georgette, thrilled.

Instantly, he became more interesting—almost romantic.

"Sure," said Bluch. And he produced a badge from his trouser pocket and flashed it stealthily.

"Secret Service of the United States, No. 13," read Georgette.

"Bad luck for anyone that crosses me, see!" said Bluch. "Now, *you're* wondering what a Secret Service guy is doing here. You are, ain't you?"

"Well—yes. I'm curious to know—naturally," admitted Georgette.

Bluch cast a hasty glance about.

"Ever hear of the 'Jack of Diamonds'?" he asked.

"*The Jack of Diamonds?* No!" answered Georgette.

"*Never heard of 'The Jack of Diamonds'?*" cried Bluch, astonished, or pretending to be astonished. He was not *really* astonished, as he had invented the nickname himself and thought it pretty nifty. "Famous crook? International figure? Never been behind prison bars?"

"Never," repeated Georgette.

"Well," said Bluch, "I'm surprised at that because he always operates among you society folks. That's why I'm here. I'm on the track of The Jack of Diamonds!"

Georgette caught her breath—with difficulty.

"Do you mean to say you think he's coming *here?*" she gasped.

"Pre-cisely," answered Bluch emphatically. "Look! You're having a party, ain't you? Regatta Ball! Lot's of swell Janes! Lot's of sparklers!"

"Ye-es," admitted Georgette.

"And you've invited a guy named Clarke?"

"Yes!" Georgette's interest quickened—if possible. "Renwicke Clarke, the brother of Lady Noel—whom I met in London!"

"But you don't *know* this guy Clarke?"

"No-o!"

"Never even *saw* him?"

"No-o!"

"Never even saw a *picture* of him?"

"No-o," breathed Georgette.

"Well—don't you *see?*" cried Bluch triumphantly, "Clarke isn't coming to your party at all! The Jack of Diamonds got wind of all this and *he's* coming in *Clarke's place!*"

Georgette collapsed into the nearest chair and gazed up at Bluch with eyes that could *not* open wider. She wet her lips.

"The Jack of Diamonds—is coming here—*as Renwicke Clarke?*" she cried.

"Sure! He'd have got away with it, too, without any trouble if I hadn't happened to be on his trail. He looks like the real goods!"

"He—he's a kind of *Raffles*, you mean?" murmured Georgette, feeling that she could hardly bear it.

"Yeah. Looks like a regular swell," said Bluch, thinking of the man he had last seen sleeping soundly on the bed.

"But—but what are you going to *do* about it?" asked Georgette, then. "Wait until he comes and—and *arrest* him?"

Bluch smiled kindly—tolerantly—almost benignly.

"No, I'd have nothing *on* him *then*," he explained. "I've got to catch this bird with *the goods, see!*"

"*With the goods?*" said Georgette. "You mean—wait until he *steals* something?"

"Sure," said Bluch. "Here's the idea: I stay here as if I was only a guest like everybody else. I've got a dress suit and everything in those bags. I'll get by, see, because the Jack of Diamonds don't know me by sight! You put everybody wise, but we all pretend that we believe he is really Mr. Clarke. Then—when he feels safe—and begins to gather up his swag to make his get-away—*I grab him!*"

Georgette's eyes sparkled; she nodded her bobbed head eagerly.

"Let him stay as a guest? Spend the week-end! Pretend to believe he's really Mr. Clarke!" she cried.

"That's it!"

"But that's a wonderful idea!" she exclaimed delightedly. And Bluch swelled up with pride.

"Not bad," he admitted modestly.

"*Wonderful!*" insisted Georgette, excitedly. "I've *always* been intrigued by stories of gentlemen burglars! And it 'll

be a novel entertainment for my guests. Week-end parties are always so dull, no matter what you plan to do. It 'll be like *actually participating* in a detective novel! I must tell the others *at once!*"

She turned and started for the south porch.

"Come along!" she cried back over her shoulder to Bluch. Nothing loath, Bluch followed proudly.

CHAPTER IV.

UNAWARES.

ON the south porch Mrs. Ring was placidly pouring tea, which Conrad and a second man were handing about. Howard was presiding over a wagon on which stood bottles of rye and Scotch—pre-war stuff—tall, frosted glasses and bowls of cracked ice, chilled ginger ale and carbonic. All was peace and tranquillity. And upon this scene Georgette burst like a varicolored bomb, with Bluch in her wake.

"Listen—everybody! The most *thrilling* thing!" she cried. "We're to entertain a highwayman over the week-end!"

"A—*highwayman?*" gasped Mrs. Ring, gazing upon Bluch.

"No—not Mr. Fox. He's only a *detective,*" Georgette went on ecstatically. "The highwayman hasn't come yet—but he's coming—in Mr. Clarke's place. It seems he's found out we'd never met Mr. Clarke—and he's going to masquerade. Don't you see? And he's a gentleman burglar—a regular *Raffles*—known throughout the world as the Jack of Diamonds!"

"George, dear, how *priceless!*" gurgled Nita.

"What a *lark!*" murmured Mimi. "I wouldn't have missed this for *worlds!*"

"How did you find all this out?" asked Howard.

"From Mr. Fox. Ladies and gentlemen—Mr. Fox!" Bluch bowed. Everybody stared at him speculatively.

"Mr. Fox has been trailing this Jack of Diamonds for *years,*" explained Georgette importantly, "but he's devilishly clever and has never been behind prison bars—think of it—though he is a notorious crook. So—as he doesn't know Mr. Fox by sight—the idea is to treat the Jack of Diamonds just as if we believed he really is Mr. Clarke, and let him steal anything he likes!"

"*What?*" gasped Mrs. Ring, losing her breath immediately afterward.

"And then tell Mr. Fox, of course. Mr. Fox is going to arrest him when he catches him with—with the goods—and is going to give *everything back!* Isn't it *fun?*"

She turned to Bluch impulsively.

"I'm *so* glad he picked out my party to come to," she said. "Isn't it lucky, girls?"

"You're *always* lucky," sighed Louise.

"We must all dress for dinner to-night in our very best," suggested Nita, "and wear every blessed jewel we have in the world! Let's dazzle him! Let's knock his eyes out! What do you say?"

"A splendid idea," ventured Bluch.

"That's settled, then," said Georgette, "and for further instructions you must go to Mr. Fox."

"I shall be charmed," said Bluch in his very best manner, "charmed to slip any one a tip at any time."

"Have a drink," said Howard with a wave of the hand toward the table that was under his especial care—and Bluch agreed, declaring that he didn't care if he did—and that he preferred it straight. It was, just between ourselves, the only thing that Bluch did prefer straight.

"Afterward, you must see that Mr. Fox gets comfortably settled in the oak room, Conrad," said Georgette, who arranged all such things for her mother.

"Yes, miss," said Conrad, after trying twice to speak the words in vain. He did not share the enthusiasm of the others in regard to the expected advent of the world-famous criminal.

And then a maid appeared in the doorway to announce that again a gentleman asking for Miss Ring was waiting in the hall.

"He says to tell you it's Mr. Renwicke Clarke, miss," said the girl. And a hush fell upon the noisy assemblage as—one and all—they held their breaths.

"Ask Mr. Clarke to come out to us—here," Georgette managed to reply.

The girl vanished. There was silence—save for the flutter of rearranged draperies,

the snap of vanity cases, the rustling of nervous hands powdering noses, rouging lips, fluffing out bobbed hair, adjusting hats, lighting cigarettes. Even Mrs. Ring assumed a more striking pose in the widest wicker chair as the little black-frocked maid returned, announcing:

"Mr. Renwicke Clarke!"

Mr. Clarke was young and good looking. He was arrayed in perfect taste. His appearance at a gathering of the alumni of any college fraternity would have excited no comment. He would have seemed at home in any ballroom or in any Wall Street office, at the races, on the veranda of any country club, even on the beach at Southampton or Newport.

But he was a distinct disappointment at first glance. For he was not a big man! He was not a dashing, swaggering figure! There was nothing daring or devil-may-care about him.

"Oh!" said Georgette in an accent of disappointment which was quite unmistakable. "*Mr. Clarke?*"

"Why—a—yes," said Mr. Clarke, his color deepening as he found himself the objective of a dozen pairs of critical eyes. "Renwicke Clarke. You seem surprised."

"Well," said Georgette, suddenly smiling, "to tell the truth, I am!" She advanced and shook hands warmly. After all, he was a burglar, whether he looked the part or not.

"Why—weren't you expecting me?" asked Clarke.

"Oh, yes," said Georgette, "but—I had pictured you differently—that's all!"

"Well, I'm sorry if you are disappointed," said Clarke. "I'm sorry I'm *not* different. But there it is, isn't it? I can't think what Eleanor could have told you about me!"

"It wasn't Eleanor—it was—some one else," said Georgette, dimpling mischievously, "but let me present you to my mother—Miss Lamson—Miss de Estes—" and so on through the whole list. Mr. Clarke bore the ordeal bravely, and was rewarded—at the end—by a whisky and soda which Bluch and Howard Andrews together concocted.

The ladies, meanwhile, regarded the newcomer with increasing interest. He was really quite stunning, they decided, in a quiet kind of way. He had blue eyes that were really amazingly innocent and guileless looking, a very good complexion—for a man—hair that would have waved beautifully if such tendencies had not been severely brushed out of it, and a small, very neat mustache. No one would ever have suspected him of being a burglar. You couldn't imagine his doing anything that wasn't quite nice and conventionally respectable—not by the wildest flight of the imagination. But Bluch had caught Georgette's surprised, inquiring eyes and had nodded "yes" emphatically, almost violently, and the others had all witnessed this—so they knew that this almost shy-looking little man *was* the Jack of Diamonds beyond the possibility of a doubt!

He took a seat between Georgette and Mrs. Ring—much to the older woman's obvious discomfort—and turning to Georgette asked frankly:

"Tell me—just what were you expecting me to be—that I'm not?"

Georgette, beginning to enjoy the adventure, found her spirits rising. She had concluded, by this time, that he *had* to be this type of man exactly, or he could never have won the confidence of people, or escaped suspicion and prison cells. It was this very deceiving appearance of his, of course, that made him so successful in his particular line of work. If he had been big and dashing and devil-may-care, as she had expected, he probably could not have been a famous crook at all. And *underneath* he *must* have all the guile of a serpent, the courage and strength of a lion, the shrewdness of a fox, the fearlessness of an eagle.

"Well," said she, her eyes twinkling, "I thought—men of—of your particular calling—were always sort of bold and dashing!"

"Men of *my* calling," he repeated vaguely. "You mean—*brokers?*"

"Yes—brokers," she agreed, looking at him and dropping her lashes. But he caught a strange flash of light in her eyes; he observed the curving mouth that sought to hide its smiles. And he was puzzled, but enchanted.

"I suppose there are all kinds," he said.

"Yes, I suppose so," assented Georgette

demurely. "And I dare say that very meek and retiring manner you have is really an asset—isn't it? It *would* make people *trust* you!"

"Yes, it *does*," he assured her earnestly. "Mothers are always willing to let me take out their only daughters—without a chaperon!"

"I don't doubt it," smiled Georgette.

"Not that I often do," he confided. "I don't make a hit with girls!"

"Perhaps," said Georgette as he sipped his highball sadly, "it is because they don't get to *know* you—really!"

"Perhaps," assented Clarke without enthusiasm.

"I suppose you don't often tell them about your *real* self—for instance," she went on, "your—*work!*"

He looked at her, his blue eyes very innocent.

"No, I *don't*," he admitted. "Do you think they'd like me better if I told them about the *brokerage business?*"

She laughed. He had the slyest, most delightful sense of humor, she thought.

"Exactly. You should tell them about—the brokerage business," she said.

Her mother was looking on at them with the most evident uneasiness and trying vainly to overhear what they were saying. The others were much too noisy for that, however—and Georgette was enjoying her mother's discomfiture almost as much as Mr. Clarke's conversation.

"It's awfully good of you to volunteer this information," he was saying now in tones of deepest gratitude. "I've often wondered just what subjects interest women most. I'll try the brokerage business on the very next one that is my victim at dinner—or my partner at bridge!"

"I would," said Georgette, "because—I'm going to put you next to *me* at dinner—and I shall look forward to some thrilling revelations!

"I say—you're being awfully nice to me," said Mr. Clarke.

"I am—aren't I?" smiled Georgette. "I'm glad you noticed that. It's because—I'm so *tired* of conventional men who do the conventional things in the conventional way. And—you're—*different!*"

He stared, wide-eyed.

"I am," he admitted frankly, "but how in the world did *you* know?"

Georgette smiled mysteriously. She looked lovely when she smiled mysteriously.

"You may be shy and awkward on the *surface*," she admitted confidentially, "but you're a very bold and lawless creature *underneath!* A buccaneer — a pirate — a *hero!*"

"How did you guess that?" he gasped. "You're the most *remarkable* girl I've ever met—I give you my word!"

Georgette's smile faded; she gazed at him speculatively.

"*Good Heavens!*" she murmured softly. "Suppose we fell *in love* with each other?"

Mr. Clarke colored and laughed confusedly.

"That *would* be wonderful, wouldn't it?" he stammered.

"*Wonderful?*" she breathed. "It would be *awful!*"

"*Awful?*" He was just able to articulate.

"You know—on account of your *past!*" said Georgette.

"My *past?*" he repeated, stupidly.

And then—Mrs. Ring leaned forward and interfered. She had succeeded in catching enough at the end to justify interference. She was alarmed.

"My dear, I think you had better let Mr. Clarke go and dress," she said in her most formal tones. "Conrad will show you," she added severely to the awed young man.

But his heart was galloping gayly as he followed the reluctant and shrinking butler up the broad stairs.

CHAPTER V.

UNBELIEVABLE.

ALL the girls flocked into Georgette's rooms when she went up to dress and demanded to hear *everything* she had said to the burglar and everything *he* had said to *her!* They perched on the bed and on chairs and on chair arms and on the floor in their multicolored chiffony negligees,

and fluttered and tittered and exclaimed over the exciting situation.

"He looks so *lamby*," said Mimi sentimentally, "and he has such a cunning mustache! I can't *believe* a man with a mustache like that could be a desperate character!"

"As if his *mustache* had anything to do with his *character!*" scoffed Louise Lamson.

"But it has. I think you can tell a lot by mustaches and beards," insisted Mimi.

"Of course, that kind of mustache *is* a splendid alibi—in a way," admitted Nita. "Because all the little saps at the Plaza and the Green Horse wear them. It makes him look as if a serious thought would prove fatal!"

"But he *has* quite a *few* serious thoughts, I can assure you," put in Georgette. "And the most *delightful* sense of humor—so droll."

"I thought you were enjoying him," observed Louise dryly. "You certainly kept him cornered."

"I know. I did. Sorry," smiled Georgette. "I didn't mean to be selfish—but I was so curious about him. He's the first really and truly bad man I've ever met! I think I like him!"

She began to hum as she looked through her jewel case for earrings, and fastened them on, examining the effect with intense concentration in the mirrors of her dressing table—you got three different views there; so helpful!

"I wonder if he's *really* bad," said Mimi. "I don't mean only stealing—I mean—*murder!*"

Georgette stopped regarding herself.

"I don't know," she said, and thought about it. "He doesn't look cruel! He has nice teeth. Most men with a cruel streak in them have sharp, crooked teeth."

"I could *adore* a murderer," murmured Nita, ecstatically. "A man who would take me by the throat—and throw me about—the way the dancers do in those Apache dances, you know. And I can fancy myself thoroughly enjoying a good beating."

"I can fancy *myself* enjoying it, too. You need it," cried Louise. "You *are* an idiot, Nita! I declare, I can't see why you are all making such a fuss about this—fellow. A common thief! A rascal! Personally, *I* prefer a man of our own sort—some one reliable and trustworthy!"

"With an assured income and an unassailable position in society! I know," nodded Georgette. "Well, I don't! I'm weary of dull respectability! I crave romance—adventure! I want to fall madly, head-over-heels in love with a gypsy violinist and follow him barefoot through the woods. I want to be abducted by a wicked bandit. Or shanghaied by a sea captain with a tattooed chest and a walrus mustache. Give me something out of the ordinary—something *different!*"

She pulled on the orange-colored rubber cap that she wore under the shower and tied it rakishly, looking something like a gypsy herself.

"In a word, girls, I feel full of hell," she added recklessly.

Bluch was the first down for dinner that Friday night, though he probably had more difficulties to overcome in dressing than any other gentleman in the house. His shirt studs seemed absolutely uncongenial to his shirt; his collar and tie seemed to have nothing in common; his boots were uncomfortably tight. But he resigned himself to these minor trials in a truly admirable fashion, and descended in time to drag all the boats into the boathouse and lock the boathouse door before any one appeared to question him or offer any objection.

He was smoking in the lower hallway and resting after his arduous labors when Georgette appeared. She was in white, wore her grandmother's pearls, and looked positively radiant.

"I thought I'd wear these," she explained carelessly, sauntering toward him. "They are worth thousands, you know—*guaranteed* to catch the eye of any really representative crook."

"That's very kind of you, miss," said Bluch.

"Oh, I'm anxious to help you all I can," said Georgette sweetly.

"You won't mind what I've done about the boathouse, then," said Bluch. "I took all the boats in and locked the doors. I don't want *anybody* to be able to leave the island."

"Oh—then we are *marooned* here?" cried Georgette.

"Something like that," said Bluch, who had no idea what the word meant.

"Well, I hope cook has the larder well stocked," said Georgette. "It would be too bad to lure guests down here from town and starve them, even if it *is* in the cause of right and justice. And that reminds me—are you sure this *is* the Jack of Diamonds?"

"Positive," said Bluch.

"He's so innocent-looking," sighed Georgette.

"Precisely," said Bluch. "That's his best trick. Nobody ever believes he's a crook. He's escaped more than once because some woman fell for his bashful stuff."

Bluch spoke emphatically and with feeling—because he, too, realized that Mr. Clarke did not quite look the part that he had designed for him. In bed, in his silk pyjamas and Japanese lounging robe, he had looked more dashing, more debonair. It had been a positive shock to Bluch to see Mr. Clarke walk in—neat, blue-eyed, wavy-haired. But there was nothing to be done about it now but make a virtue of necessity and prove that the fellow's very harmless look was the most fiendish of disguises.

"What worries me," said Bluch sadly, "is—*what's he done with Mr. Clarke!*"

"H-how do you mean?" gasped Georgette.

"Well—haven't you noticed? He's got Mr. Clarke's cuff links, his watch, his cigarette case, handkerchiefs, bags—all marked with the monogram R. C. How did he get them? What's he done with the poor victim of his depredations?" Bluch was very proud of that. "Is Renwicke Clarke—the *real* Renwicke Clarke—hidden away somewhere—or has he been done away with altogether?"

"Oh, I can't *believe* that!" cried Georgette.

"Well, you can't tell. You don't want to be taken in by this guy, miss. Watch out for him—that's my tip to you. He'll pull the wool over your eyes if he can. He's a slick one, that's what he is!"

And, with a dark frown, Bluch went off shaking his head ominously—to see if by any chance the whisky had been left on the south porch. It had. He poured himself a drink and was in the very act of lifting it to his lips when Jeanie came gliding out to him like a shadow.

"What were you doing down there by the boathouse?" she asked in a hoarse whisper, seizing his arm.

"Collecting the boats so that the Jack of Diamonds can't escape from this island," answered Bluch.

"So that you can make your get-away, you mean, and nobody can follow you," said Jeanie.

"Sure! What of it?" asked Bluch, chuckling, and, shaking off her clutching hand, drank his whisky straight.

"But don't you see, they'll suspect you then?" said Jeanie.

"Let 'em suspect! When I get a few hours' start, I should worry," grinned Bluch.

"Bluch," she urged desperately, "give up this life and go straight. Won't you?"

"Quit *now?*" he protested. "With a haul like this almost in my hands?"

"It's not your game. You'll have all the bulls after you—the plainclothes lot, too. If you're caught, you'll go up for a long term."

"I won't be caught," he said.

"Bluch!" she whispered tremulously. "We used to be good friends once. I've often—thought of you—since I quit. Can't you—can't you—give it up and go straight—for *me?*"

She was close to him now in the gathering darkness, looking up pleadingly into his face. He sighed again over the fatal way he had with women.

"Maybe, later, if I can get away with this," he said. "Then I can afford to be respectable!"

She sighed, then, and turned away.

"Later—it may be too late," she said, and vanished, taking with her the boathouse key, which she had neatly extracted from his pocket.

Bluch gazed after her thoughtfully, vaguely troubled by something in her manner—a twinkle in her eyes that did not

match the tone of her voice. Then he remembered her brushing against him—her previous calling—and he guessed, even before he looked, that she had frisked him and got away with the key.

"Hey, come back, you!" he called, and started after her, but by the time he reached the hallway she had vanished.

Meanwhile, Jeanie had scurried up the stairs. On the landing she almost collided with Mr. Clarke coming down. She seized him by the arm and whispered:

"*Sh!* Are you Mr. Clarke?"

"Why — er — yes," answered Clarke, taken considerably by surprise and greatly mystified. "My name's Clarke!"

"Sh!" she said again. "Promise me you won't tell a soul I've spoken to you. Give me your word of honor!"

"Certainly," said Clarke, stammering in his bewilderment and confusion. "But what's the idea?"

"I want to warn you," said Jeanie confidentially.

"*W-warn*—me?"

"Yes," said Jeanie. "There's a man here named Fox! Keep your eye on him, sir! Beware of him!"

Then—having deposited the boathouse key in his pocket, she turned and fled. She was gone before Mr. Clarke could get his breath.

He stared after her in blank astonishment, his face a study in expression.

"See anything?" asked a voice at his elbow.

Mr. Clarke started—not expecting to be addressed from that quarter just at that moment—and turned to find himself looking into Bluch's shrewd eyes.

"I beg your pardon!" said Clarke.

"Granted," said Bluch. "Guess you're Renwicke Clarke, ain't you? My name's Fox!"

"*Fox?*" repeated Clarke, and stared again up the steps when the little woman had vanished.

"Fox," repeated Bluch. "I thought I heard voices as I was coming up the stairs. Were you talking to a little woman in black?"

"Why—yes," answered Clarke slowly. "That is—*no!*"

He decided upon second thought not to give this unpleasant-looking person any satisfaction or information whatever, and, with a nod, went by him and down the stairs. But he could not help wondering what was up.

CHAPTER VI.

UNUSUAL.

MOST of the party had assembled by the time Mr. Clarke descended, and the girls immediately surrounded him. They had been waiting for him at the foot of the stairs; in fact, chatting casually to cover their real purpose in lingering there.

"Oh, *Mr. Clarke!*" cried Mimi as she espied him. "I've been so anxious to show you these. Star sapphires, do you see? And awfully fine ones."

"So they are," he agreed politely. "Beautiful!"

"*I knew you'd* appreciate them," sighed Mimi, opening wide eyes at him.

"My rubies," put in Nita, "are exquisite, you must admit. Genuine pigeon blood, you know. My father got them in India from the Maharajah of Gwypoor."

"And my emeralds are square cut and flawless," said Louise Lamson. "I like emeralds better than any other precious gems, don't *you,* Mr. Clarke?"

"Well," he said meditatively, "they're —among the choicest, aren't they? You—you must be very happy—all of you—with —with such charming jewels?"

He was beginning to think he had come among very odd people.

"You *admire* jewels, don't you, Mr. Clarke?" asked Mimi with a languishing glance.

"Why—er—yes—very much," he answered.

"So we *heard,*" said Louise.

"Really?" said Mr. Clarke. "I wasn't aware that my—my tastes are so well known—that any one was interested enough to discuss them."

"You'd be *surprised,*" smiled Mimi.

"But I *do* pick up a good stone—now and then—when I find one that especially

appeals to me," said he. "My—my father was a collector, too."

"I suppose it's in the *blood*," said Nita intensely.

"Do you think so?" said he.

"But surely you could be *cured*," said Mimi. "Perhaps by psychoanalysis?"

"*Cured?*" murmured Clarke.

"She means—broken of the *habit*—of picking up good stones," explained Nita.

"Why—I don't know. I never looked upon it as a *bad* habit," said Mr. Clarke.

They all stared.

"*My goodness!*" breathed Nita.

"I know!" cried Mimi. "Either one has within one the instinctive appreciation for beautiful things, or one has not. I could forgive any one who'd *steal*—just because a thing was so beautiful he'd *have to have it!*"

It was now Mr. Clarke's turn to stare.

"But stealing's stealing!" he said decidedly.

"Yes, I suppose so," admitted Mimi reluctantly under his stern eye.

"Now, personally," he went on, "I don't care so much for the jewels *themselves* as for what they *represent*."

"Sentimental associations?" asked Nita, gazing up at him.

"Well, no," said he—"I mean what they represent in *money*."

He saw at last a way to follow Georgette's friendly tip.

"Just think," he added, "what all those things would bring you in if they were converted into cash, and the cash invested in stocks and bonds. I know all about stocks and bonds."

He looked about for a sudden hush of expectant interest. None came. The girls were regarding one another questioningly.

"*I know!*" cried Nita, inspired. "Perhaps the *money* appeals to him because he longs to help the *poor*—like *Robin Hood?*"

"Of *course!*" agreed Mimi.

"I suppose," said Louise, "in a life like yours there's nothing but excitement?"

"Well, yes," said he, "I *do* get some excitement!"

"But aren't you afraid of getting *caught?*" asked Nita.

"No," said Mr. Clarke modestly. "You see—I know the game pretty well—and I don't take foolish chances. I stay on the safe side of the market."

"Still — there's always *danger*, isn't there?" asked Mimi.

"Of course. But that's part of the fascination," said he. "Danger—and the awful uncertainty—and the suspense."

"And the joy of pitting your wits against another's!" cried Nita. "*That's* the thrill of the game—isn't it?"

"Yes," said Mr. Clarke, beaming. And he added, with a little laugh: "You know—I never realized before that girls were so interested in the Exchange!"

Dinner was announced at that moment, and Georgette came up to inform him, with mock sympathy, that he was fated to take her in. Mrs. Ring rustled by them, glistening with steel beads and wearing her famous rope of rose diamonds. They fell in behind her, Georgette slipping her hand through his arm—with old-fashioned timidity—and gazing up at him wistfully as she asked:

"Mr. Clarke—*you* haven't got the boathouse key, have you?"

"The boathouse key?" he repeated, astonished.

"Yes. You see, I asked Mr. Fox for it just now. He collected all the boats for me and—and locked them up for the night, you know. And he seems to have lost it. At least," she added truthfully, "he says somebody took it out of his pocket—'*frisked him*' was the exact term he used. But I don't believe that!"

"It's very generous of you—to doubt that I frisked him," said Mr. Clarke. "Thank you!"

She blushed. He put in her chair for her *very* politely, and sat down himself and opened his napkin with great care.

"I thought you might have picked it up," said Georgette.

"No," said Mr. Clarke, "I didn't. As a matter of fact, I shouldn't know the boathouse key if I should see it lying anywhere, and I am sure I should never think of picking it up! I seldom pick things up that way—in strange houses. Nothing would be further from my mind. You see, I really was awfully well brought up!"

She dimpled and flashed him a smile.

"I *knew* you didn't take it! I'm *so* glad I was right! I just *felt* you—you'd see things differently, after—after our meeting to-day. You *do*, don't you?"

"Yes," said he, not quite understanding.

"I don't care what a man has done before the One Woman comes into his life," went on Georgette earnestly. "I think *afterward* he *is* apt to see things differently."

"Oh," said Clarke, beaming, "*yes*. Rather!"

"But of course," she added, "there *was* just a *chance* that you might feel badly about—coming here—this way—and that you might want to *bolt!*"

"Bolt?" said he. "I don't quite get that!"

"Run away—go back to New York without explaining," said Georgette.

Clarke wrinkled his brow in an effort to follow her.

"Supposing I *should* want to run away—though God knows *why* I should want to run away from *here!* But *if* I should—would I have to steal the boathouse key?" he asked.

"Well—yes—I dare say," she admitted. "You see, there isn't a duplicate key."

"Oh!"

"There should be, I know—but there isn't—and *all the boats* are locked up in the boathouse!"

"But *why* are all the boats locked up there?" he asked. "Do you always take them in and lock them up overnight?"

"Of course not," smiled Georgette. "We've a particular reason for locking them up to-night. Can't you guess what it is?"

"No. I—I'm a rotten guesser," he explained. "Always was. You tell me."

"Because there's somebody here that we don't want to leave," said Georgette.

He regarded her incredulously.

"You don't mean—*me?*" he asked timidly.

Georgette looked straight into his eyes.

"Yes," she answered simply.

He saw that she was not jesting; there was a ring of sincerity in her voice. And his head whirled. It seemed simply incomprehensible—too incredibly wonderful to him—that she could have taken such a fancy to him as that!

CHAPTER VII.

UNDISTURBED.

LOUISE, who was on Mr. Clarke's other side—by premeditation and purpose—now leaned forward to engage his attention, and he had no further opportunity of a tête-à-tête with Georgette. Conrad, with his attendant satellites, intervened to offer various viands whenever Louise was not asking him pertinent and impertinent questions; or else the conversation was general. But he and Georgette did manage to exchange some pretty significant and telling *glances*, so the time was really not entirely lost.

Louise's questions, however, kept him on the *qui vive* most of the ensuing hour.

"Are you an American, Mr. Clarke?"

"Where were you born?"

"Where did you grow up?"

"Of course, you went to college?"

"Odd we've never met before—do you go about much in town?"

"Do you know England well?"

"I've never had the pleasure of meeting Lord or Lady Noel, but do you know the Earl of Frome? Or Lord Innestair? Or the Marquis of Devon? Or the Dowager Duchess of Kilcrannie?"

He gave her back yesses and noes, patiently, wondering what difference it all made; thinking how very little *she* mattered, in spite of her white skin and shining hair, her gown of silver tissue cut away so daringly, her lovely shoulders and gorgeous emeralds.

That was just the trouble with Louise; she didn't *matter!* She was pretty; she was charming; she was gracious; she was prepared to be interested; but she couldn't make one *care*. That was why she was still unattached. Men found in her only an opportunity to compare other girls with her—to the greater glory of the other girls.

That was what Mr. Clarke was doing—stealing side glances at Georgette, slim and dark and radiant, alive, aglow, afire, on his

other side—and wishing that this lovely, shimmering, lifeless lady would leave him free to turn in the other direction. But she didn't! And presently they were all rising, to have their coffee and liqueurs and cigarettes on the terrace; and he saw Howard Andrews determinedly taking possession of Georgette.

But in the babble of laughter and banter, the moving of chairs, the tinkle of coffee cups, the rustle of silken garments, he could not hear what the other man was saying—which was just as well.

"What's the idea of giving *all* your time and attention to this chap?" asked Howard, with a jerk of his head back at Clarke. "If it's just because he's a highwayman, only say the word and I'll turn highwayman to-morrow!"

"Don't be childish, Howdy," said Georgette nonchalantly. "I'm naturally interested in a type of man I've never met before—and curious about the world he lives in. All the girls are, you notice!"

"I don't see that he's such a strikingly different type, though," said Howard. "He seems a perfect sap to me!"

"But he *isn't*, you can be *sure*," answered Georgette. "He's just vague—and unexpected—and awfully droll."

She saw Mr. Clarke observing them, and smiled radiantly upon poor Howard.

"I love unexpectedness—and drollery," she added slyly.

"You love playing with fire," he growled.

"I know it," sighed Georgette.

"And flirting!"

"I know it," sighed Georgette. "It's reprehensible, isn't it, Howdy? *Awfully* naughty of me!"

"It's *dangerous*," said Howard, "especially when you begin with a chap who doesn't belong in your crowd."

"I know it," said Georgette again, dimpling. "I suspect it's *that* that urges me on. I like danger."

She sighed.

"Sometimes," he said grimly, "I feel like spanking you!"

"You're just like mother in that respect," murmured Georgette wickedly, knowing well that no young man likes to be compared to any one's mother.

He glared. She hummed a tune lightly and rouged her lips, seizing the opportunity to look through the mirror of her vanity-case to see where Mr. Clarke was and with whom. He was between Mimi and Louise, looking unhappy. Georgette's spirits rose.

"You look as if you're going to bite me," said she. "Give me a cigarette, Howdy, and be pally. You know this heavy lover stuff never appeals to me—from you. I've known you too long, I guess. Now, perhaps, if I couldn't remember you in short pants and socks—"

"You can't!" he answered shortly. "And even if you can, I'm damned if I see how that affects anything. I'm out of short pants and socks for years."

"But when you start to get heavily romantic—I think of them," she smiled, and opened her mouth for the cigarette. He tucked it in frowningly and held the match for her.

She inhaled luxuriously, and blew a perfect smoke-ring upward.

"You are such a well-behaved person, Howdy," she said, "that I never can feel that you need me. You're so well able to look after yourself. I guess there's a lot of maternal instinct in me that—that craves some one to worry over."

"We'd probably have children," he reminded her savagely.

"*Well!*" said Georgette, opening her eyes. And then she laughed. "But *your* children would probably be so proper and well-behaved, even from birth!"

"Not if they were *your* children, *too*," said he.

Mrs. Ring, who was moving across to the biggest armchair, followed by Clifford Fellowes with her coffee, and Conrad with pillows and a scarf, stopped short and confronted her daughter and Howard Andrews.

"What in the world are you talking about?" she gasped, having overheard something in transit.

"What kind of children we'd probably have if we married and had some," said Georgette, grinning.

Mrs. Ring stood transfixed, staring, breathing hard.

"*Well!*" she whispered, chokingly, "*Well!* Well I *never!*"

Georgette, as usual, enjoyed her mother's amazement and horror; Howard Andrews had the grace to blush.

"It sounds much worse—telling about it—" he assured the older woman, hastily.

"I declare I can't think what we're coming to," sighed Mrs. Ring. "In *my* day—"

"Exactly, mother. But your day has passed," said Georgette, cutting in. "This is *my* day!"

"Well, if it is, you are certainly taking advantage of it," said her mother. "And what is going to happen, may I ask, to that young man?"

Her eyes wandered significantly toward Mr. Clarke.

"Is he to be permitted to stay on here—with the girls—turning their heads perhaps? How am I to face their parents if anything dreadful happens to them in my house? Am I to explain that we entertained The Jack of Diamonds until there was evidence enough against him to arrest him? Really, my dear Georgette!"

"If you've quite run out of breath," said Georgette, "perhaps I'll be able to explain that the girls are more than likely to look out for themselves. It's poor Mr. Clarke—or whatever his name is—who needs protection. Look at him!"

They looked. He was surrounded—almost overwhelmed—by feminine loveliness. And he did not seem happy.

"Besides," went on Georgette, "modern society is infested with villains. If the girls can't discriminate and stand firm against the lures and blandishments of evil associates, they certainly ought not to be allowed at large. They've all been warned about The Jack of Diamonds. But the truth is, they find him interesting—as I do. I dare say even in your day, mother, wicked men had a certain horrible fascination. Come, now, 'fess up! Wasn't your head ever turned just a *little* by some dreadful devil that everybody spoke of with bated breath?"

"*Never!*" lied Mrs. Ring. "I declare, Georgette—you're beyond me! I can't understand you! I tremble for you, I do indeed! How *I* ever had such a child—"

She moved on, rejoining Clifford Fellowes, who was waiting patiently near the widest armchair. But she did not pay quite as close attention to his conventional conversation as usual. Georgette's idle chatter had recalled memories of her own youth—and a certain Captain Dearborn. She sighed and wondered what her life would have been like with him.

CHAPTER VIII.

UNDESERVED.

IT was not until quite late—when conversation languished and Conrad was serving drinks, and tables were being made up for bridge, that Mr. Clarke succeeded in escaping from the relentless victims of his nefarious charms—and instantly sought out Georgette. She was on the steps in the moonlight, absorbed in Conroy Neal; but not too absorbed to see Mr. Clarke coming. It was simple, then, to send Neal off for a scarf so that he should be gone before Mr. Clarke reached her, and so remain unaware of her intriguing. She was a skilled and practised campaigner when she chose to campaign.

"Miss Ring! I've been wanting to talk to you!" said he, as he arrived, breathless.

"I've been wanting to talk to you, too," said Georgette, "but there's no use attempting it here. Too many about. Let's go down by the water. It's enchanting on the beach walk in the moonlight."

She arose as she spoke, and they were off long before the unfortunate Mr. Neal had reached the landing where she said she had left her scarf. Needless to say, it was not there, for it did not exist at all. She did not, in fact, own a scarf.

"Was there anything *in particular* you wanted to say to me?" asked this unscrupulous young lady, as she sped down the white path beside him. She thought he *might* be going to confess his villainy and assure her of his reformation. She could hardly wait.

"Yes," said he, determinedly. "I wanted to tell you—"

"*Yes?*" she urged, lifting her eager face to his.

"I hardly know how to *say* it!"

"What difference *how you say it*," pro-

tested Georgette. "It's *what* you say that's *important!*"

"That's right! It is! I've often thought that myself," said he, nodding, "but you see—I'm wondering what you'll think! You—you've known me such a short time! You mightn't understand!"

"I think I might," said she. "I'm a very understanding person, really. Suppose you put me to the test!"

They had come to the beach walk by this time, and she stopped—gazing out across the silver water. The moon lit her face softly. The soft wind blew her hair. And the faint fragrance of her drifted toward him—making it even harder for him to think calmly than it ordinarily was.

"I don't think I'll tell you, after all," he said. "I don't think I'll ever tell you. It might—spoil things!"

"It might be better though for you to tell me than for me to—just find it out—some other way—don't you think?" she asked gently, raising her dark eyes.

"But I don't think you could find it out any other way," said he.

"You can't be sure, though. Besides—I should like to feel that you—*trust* me!"

He drew a long breath.

"Do *you*—trust *me?*" he asked. It was plain, he asked it with difficulty—with misgiving.

"Why—yes—of course! Why shouldn't I?" asked Georgette.

Her wide, innocent eyes met his. It is really astounding—how even quite young women are able to do this.

"But this is so strange," said he, miserably. "I can't explain it! I've no idea how it happened. Nothing like it has ever happened to me before!"

She wondered, now; he had her guessing.

"Really?" she murmured.

"The moment before," said he, "I'll swear it wasn't there! Of course—it couldn't have been! I'd just changed my clothes. But suddenly—psst!—*there it was!*"

"There what was?" asked Georgette.

"*The key!*"

"The key?"

"The boathouse key! I found it—*in my pocket!*"

"*In your pocket?*" she repeated, staring.

"Yes. Right here! I can't imagine how it got there!"

He took it out and held it up. She gazed at it reflectively, realizing that he was *not* going to betray himself after all. And she was aware of a sinking feeling of disappointment, as it was brought home to her that he either did not trust her enough, yet, to confess—or else he was not attracted enough to desire to relinquish his schemes and reform. Her voice was not quite steady as she said, finally:

"I never heard of anything so extraordinary. Fancy a key's popping into your pocket entirely without your knowledge or consent!"

"Of course, it couldn't have done that," he said. "Either somebody else put it there—or I picked it up without knowing it myself! But that seems incredible enough. I suspect Mr. Fox, myself!"

"Mr. Fox?" she cried, curiously. "You suspect *him* of—of slipping the key into your pocket?"

"Yes," said he, firmly. "I'm sorry. But I can't help suspecting him, can I, if I do!"

It occurred to her that he might be trying to find out in this way who Mr. Fox was and why he was about.

"I suppose not," she said carefully, "but why should you suspect him?"

He thought of the warning of the little woman who had accosted him in the hall before dinner, but he could not very well mention that.

"I don't know. He's a curious kind of person to find *here*," said he. "I wondered—if you know him very well. Who is he, anyway?"

"Oh, he's an old friend," she answered casually. "*You* haven't met him anywhere before, have you?"

"No," said he.

"You don't know anything about him—anything to his detriment?"

"No."

"Well—"

"I—I just have a hunch that he's not the right sort," said he, "you know—not quite what he *should* be. I'm a pretty keen judge of character, too, though you

mightn't think it! I wish you'd—sort of look out for him."

She smiled suddenly, ravishingly.

"You know—you *are* a strange person," she said. "I wonder if you'll answer a question—honestly—if I put one to you?"

"Surely," said he, "to the best of my ability. Cross my heart!"

"Well," said Georgette, "suppose that all the boats were locked up in the boathouse—and you hadn't the key—and you wanted to get to the mainland. What would you do?"

"Telephone for a public boat, I suppose," said he.

"But suppose there wasn't time. Suppose the phone wires were cut?"

"Oh, I might pick the boathouse lock," said he, "or I might swim."

"Swim?" gasped Georgette, "clear across to the mainland?"

He followed her glance to the distant glitter of lights.

"Why—yes," said he, "you see—I'm quite a swimmer—in an amateur way. I like the water. That's how I keep myself fit!"

"So—you were *not* making a heroic sacrifice when you returned the key! You *could* get to the mainland if you wanted to escape from the island!"

She guessed, now, that he had just given back the key to inspire confidence and—perhaps—undermine Mr. Fox. It was not a bad scheme, she reflected. He was certainly anything but stupid!

"Of course. One can do almost anything, I think, if one really wants to. But why should I want to escape from the island? I've never been so happy as I am here. It's—it's been such a pleasure to know *you!*"

There was real sincerity in his voice. She sighed.

"Somehow, I believe you—in spite of everything," she said. "There's *something* trustworthy about you—something *dependable!*"

"Why — thank you," said Clarke. "Thank you."

"That's why I'm going to ask your advice. You will give me your frank and true opinion—won't you?"

"Gladly," said he, eagerly.

"Well," said Georgette, gazing off across the water. "Do you think a thief—can reform?"

He stared at her, startled; drew a long breath.

"A thief?" he repeated, curiously, wondering at such a strange question—from her—a question that surely could not be as important to her as she pretended; and yet—she seemed to be really concerned.

"Do you think," she went on slowly, "that a man's a thief—because it's in his blood? Because there's something gone wrong in his brain? Or do you think it's just due to—the wrong associations—the wrong environment?"

She could feel her heart beating wildly as she waited; she dared not look at him.

"I suppose it depends on the individual, don't you?" he answered carefully. "I suppose cases differ!"

"Yes," said the girl, "of course—but *generally—?*"

"Generally," he replied quietly, "I think a thief is a wrong-un—and that he'll *never* change! I think a woman—the right sort of woman—a woman like you—well—the less she has to do with him—the better!"

It was now his turn to turn away. He really turned away out of consideration for her—for what she might be feeling. But she stole a side-glance up at his stern profile, a profile much sterner than you would have supposed his could be, if you just looked at him front-face. And she assumed, of course, that he was warning her off himself—that in an impulse of real manliness and generosity, he was advising her—against his own desires—against the weaker side that he felt he could not control. Quick tears filled her eyes. It really was a dramatic moment; and she was very sympathetic and sentimental, at heart.

"You don't think a woman's influence could—change him?" she asked softly.

"No—I don't think so," said he.

"Not even—if they—loved each other?"

It was very hard to bring that out.

"No," said Mr. Clarke, not quite steadily. "Not even—then! Of course, he would *try!* He might go straight for a *while!* But I don't think he'd *stay*

straight! It would be an awful risk for the woman—a risk I wouldn't like to see any woman I *cared for—take!*"

She laid her hand on his arm, then, much moved.

"I hope you're wrong. Indeed, I hope so," she said, "and—*thank you!*"

Then, she turned and led the way back to the house in silence. Suddenly, she felt very tired, and over and over in her mind, she was saying: "Oh, why did it have to be like this? After all the years I've been waiting. *Why* did it have to be like *this?*"

And he was thinking, "Poor child! She loves some blackguard who isn't worthy of her. Poor child! And I was beginning to think that she liked me."

CHAPTER IX.

UNDESERVED.

BLUCH was not having as exciting a time in the exclusive social atmosphere of Crystal Isle as he had expected. His attempts to fraternize with the other gentlemen present were not what you might call unqualifiedly successful.

Clifford Fellowes—whom Bluch found at the coffee urn when he was refilling his glass with benedictine—listened politely enough to his conversational advances, but answered absently—and moved away with a short nod when he had obtained the additional cup of coffee that Mrs. Ring demanded. Florian Cartwright, an elderly beau, interested only in women and Wall Street, was not even polite to Bluch, when Bluch attempted to interrupt his tête-à-tête with the young and widowed Gloria Stevens-Kerr.

Howard Andrews, in no very agreeable mood, anyway, glared at him when he sauntered up and suggested a game of pool or billiards; and declined so emphatically that even Bluch recognized the decision as final. Young Neal, returning from his unsuccessful quest of Georgette's scarf to find the lady herself missing, shouted a very rude, "No, *thanks!*" to Bluch's beaming suggestion that they get up a little game of Red Dog! And Jimmy Nickerson, sulking over Mimi's neglect, received Bluch's friendly advances with:

"I thought you were here to watch that damned bandit, not to amuse yourself!"

Bluch had no luck at all, in point of fact; and he gleaned the impression that the social elect could have just as bad manners as anybody else; indeed, he reflected that he had made friends a lot easier in barrooms on Tenth Avenue with men that he hadn't even been introduced to.

The women, one and all, looked through him or were so frigidly polite that he had no desire for a better acquaintance. He could not understand it. There he was, supposedly an honest, authentic minion of the law, there in the course of his duties—there to protect them and their belongings from the notorious thief, the Jack of Diamonds, and they merely endured him—with a visible effort—while they catered to and fawned upon the supposed Jack of Diamonds as though *he* were come to succor them instead of to prey upon them! What would they have said if they had known that the supposed Jack of Diamonds was merely Mr. Renwicke Clarke—notable for nothing in particular—not really wicked at all; and that *he*—Bluch Simmonds, Mr. Fox—was in truth a crook, a sneak thief, with a record of past performances as long as your arm, actually a jailbird?

Bluch supposed that they would go down to him on their knees, if they knew the truth, judging by the way they hovered about Mr. Clarke. But he preferred to *forego* the triumph of such an announcement, the humiliation of Mr. Clarke and the glorification of himself, in favor of safety and the securing of the diamonds, rubies, pearls and emeralds that glittered on all sides of him in such profusion.

They represented—even to his rather uninformed eyes—a tremendous fortune. He had never gone in for jewel-snitching, especially, and so was not a particularly keen judge of stones. But no expert was required to discover that these baubles decorating the guests at Crystal Isle were objects of rare value.

Bluch, lonely and bored, sat in the hall by himself and smoked and spent the money that he meant to collect on them. He

bought a red motor car and a yacht and a stock of liquor second to none in the United States. And he swaggered among those of his former associates who had sneered at his rough work and predicted that he would end in the chair. There was some satisfaction in that!

He would have liked to collect his swag and depart that night, but the boathouse key was still missing, and the lock resisted all of his efforts to force or pick it. Miss Ring was not inclined to permit his ramming in the door, preferring to wait until a locksmith could be summoned from the mainland in the morning, so the boats that he had collected were beyond his reach.

Besides, Bluch had suggested a plan to Georgette which had met with her enthusiastic approval. After the Regatta Ball upon the following night, all the ladies were to bring their jewels to Mr. Fox for safekeeping and he was to stand guard over them during the night. Mr. Clarke was to be notified that he was guarding them so that when he attempted to steal them, he would only confront Mr. Fox—and be promptly arrested for his trouble. This plan, which was devised to spare the nerves of the ladies from the suspense and the ordeal of having the Jack of Diamonds prowl through the rooms looking for the jewels, was really intended to save Bluch any effort in collecting the swag. He knew that he was not especially light on his feet nor quick with his hands; and he doubted his ability to go from room to room in search of the sparklers, undiscovered.

So, for that night, Bluch realized the wisdom of biding his time.

Upon the following morning, however, he was the first down, his purpose being to seek a little interview with Jeanie. He was presently rewarded with a glimpse of her, gliding through the halls with her lists and her keys.

"'Morning, Jeanie," he said with sarcastic politeness, confronting her suddenly in the kitchen pantry.

The other servants were in the kitchen, just beyond, having their breakfast at a long table, with cook at the foot and Conrad at the head. Jeanie had a tray sent up to her own little sitting room.

"Sh!" she cautioned warningly, with a finger on her lips, and a glance toward the swinging door. She led the way into the breakfast room, taking up a big wicker basket as she went.

"I'm going to cut some flowers in the garden," she said. "You can come along if you like, and carry my basket!"

"Thanks," said he, gruffly.

She donned a garden hat, a pair of garden gloves much too big for her, and picked up a pair of huge garden shears. He saw that she was getting on for middle age. The strong sunlight brought out the silver threads in her dark hair and the fine lines around her eyes. When he had first known her, years before, she had been a gypsyish little thing, with red cheeks and dancing eyes. But she had been fresh from England, then, where she had served her apprenticeship in the profession they both honored.

"You're gettin' on, Jeanie," he said as they went through the hedge and started down the garden walk.

"Fairly well," said Jeanie, misunderstanding his meaning. "The living's a decent one, and the money comes in regularly. No worry about the next square meal or the next night's lodging. No fear of the bulls. My nerves aren't what they once were. The other game is all right when you're young and strong and fond of your bit of excitement, but as you get older, you can't move or think as fast as you could and you lose your cunning!"

"Is that how you came to quit?" he asked as she bent over a gigantic rose bush and began to cut the coral-colored blooms.

"Yes," said she. "I put my hand in a chap's pocket in the Grand Central. He put his hand in after me and caught hold of mine, holding it fast there so that I couldn't wriggle free. It was an awful moment, I tell you. I saw myself going up for a long term. There'd been a lot of newspaper talk about the crooks owning the city and examples were being made of all they could catch or frame. I got old, Bluch, in the few seconds he hung on to me and turned round."

"Well?" said Bluch.

"When he got a good look at me," went

on Jeanie, cutting roses busily and keeping her eyes on her task, "he said: 'This is a rotten way for *you* to earn a living! You look too good for it! And too sensible. You're sure to be caught and sent up if you keep on. Why don't you get a respectable position somewhere and go straight? The cleverest crooks are caught in the end, you know!' And then he said: 'Here, take this as a *gift*—and for God's sake give yourself a chance. Try it!' And he peeled off a couple of bills—fifties, they were—and slipped them to me and walked away."

"He sure was a softy," said Bluch.

"No," said Jeanie, "he was Reynolds, the cashier that absconded from Boston with a hundred thousand. And the bulls were after him even then. They caught him that night. I saw his picture in the morning paper and read about him next day. And when I read about him I sent him a note sympathizing and thanking him and I went out to look for a decent job. The regular tale is that you can't go straight if you want to—that nobody 'll give you a chance. But I got a job almost at once. And I've never been bothered."

"And you ain't sorry?" asked Bluch. "Don't you miss the game?"

Jeanie raised her eyes and glanced over the rose gardens, the trimly cut hedges, the smooth lawns sloping away to the water's edge.

"No," she said with a little smile, and drew a long breath.

"I might quit myself," he said, "if I pull this job off!"

"You'll quit, *anyway*—for a long time, if you *don't!*" said Jeanie significantly.

He scowled.

"What did you do with the boathouse key?" he asked.

"What did *I* do with it?" asked Jeanie, wide-eyed.

"Come on! I know you frisked me yesterday. You needn't think you got away with it!"

"Bluch," she cried merrily, "don't tell me somebody robbed *you?*"

"You think you're funny, don't you?" he growled. "But you won't laugh so hearty if you make me slip up on this job and I squeal on *you!*"

"Wouldn't it be funny," said she, "if Mr. Clarke *was* a crook after all, and if *he* got all the swag away from *you!* Better keep your eye on that detective badge of yours!"

"Go on—laugh," grunted Bluch, "but mind what I say. If you keep on interfering with me you're going to lose your soft snap here and take a trip up the river, see?"

"That would be too bad," said Jeanie, "because I'm saving up to go back to England and take over an inn in my old town. I've got almost enough saved now. And I know I could make a good thing of it! You see, they haven't heard of me out there—since I was a youngster—and they aren't likely ever *to* hear. I suppose you wouldn't like to come along and—go in with me. I could *do* with a strong man—to run the garage and handle trunks and—so on. I'd give you a small interest. And the hotel business over there, now, is really legitimate highway robbery!"

She smiled.

"No, thanks," said Bluch. "I ain't got a taste for heaving trunks about or running a garage—but when I clean up here I may come over and stop with you. I'm thinking of a motor trip through England!"

"Well," said Jeanie, "the offer stands, anyway." And she took the basket of roses from him and turned back toward the house, going round toward the rear, with just a nod toward him in leaving.

Bluch went somberly up the steps to the south porch and there found Georgette, stunning in sport clothes of deep blue, the color of her eyes.

"Good morning, Mr. Fox," she called cheerfully as he advanced, and added as he drew nearer: "Here is the boathouse key!"

She held it out to him; he stared.

"Where did *you* get *that?*" he asked.

"From Mr. Clarke," said she.

"*Clarke?*" Bluch stared harder than ever.

"He says he found it," said Georgette.

"He did, eh, and of course he brought it *right back*—after taking a *duplicate*, I bet a hat!" This was really pretty good for Bluch.

"Could he have done that?" asked the girl.

"Sure! He probably wanted to establish his innocence, so's you'd get rid of me and leave the road clear for him! Oh, he's a slick one he is! He must 'a' recognized me!"

"I think he has. He insinuated to me that he doesn't quite trust you!"

Bluch snorted.

"I told you, miss, we got to look out for him! There ain't a colder-blooded guy in the game than him. Why, if I was to tell you some of the jobs he's pulled off it 'd take the curl out of your hair—that's what! Honest, I wouldn't leave my grandmother in the same room with him five minutes for fear he'd have the gold out of her teeth!"

At that moment the dreadful object of their discussion appeared, looking rather like a woolly lamb in white knickers, a woolly white sweater vest, and a woolly gray coat. His blue eyes looked bluer than ever, his mustache more innocuous, his hair more bright and wavy. And his cheeks were distinctly pink. He was, in fact, an angel-faced young man. Georgette sighed as she responded to his sprightly "Good morning!"

"I've brought my ukelele," he said as he advanced, and actually held it up for her to see. "I swing a rather wicked thumb, and I thought if we are going out on the water it might be nice to have it along!"

CHAPTER X.

UNREAL.

GEORGETTE, gazing at him, could not restrain her smile. If he had set out to present a complete characterization, she thought, he had succeeded admirably. Nothing seemed more unlikely than that this good-looking, vague, charming, funny person could be the Jack of Diamonds.

She had spent rather a restless night. To tell the truth, she had cried a little! He had seemed so altogether nice—so interesting! The thought that he was really, secretly quite lawless and steeped in sin—distressed her more than she would have believed possible a few days before.

The simple truth of the matter was that he attracted her more than she had ever been attracted to any man in her life before. She could not imagine why. But, then, one never can analyze these things! Our friends put their heads together and wonder what in the world we ever saw in our husband or wife, as the case may be. We get together and express the same amazement over the choice of our friends. The simple truth is that a kind of magnetic force draws certain human beings together, in spite of themselves. Powerless to resist the attraction, they are likewise powerless to comprehend it.

Georgette, for instance, had been courted by dozens of handsome and wealthy American youths; by a few Englishmen and Italians of title; by a romantic French aeronaut and a distinguished Spanish violinist. But she had fancied none of them. And now—here she was—actually crying over Mr. Renwicke Clarke—or whatever his real name was—the very night of her first meeting with him! *Georgette*, of all people! Georgette, the flirt, Georgette the unresponsive, who had proved the despair of so many wooers.

It was incredible! It was the kind of thing you see in plays and books—the kind of thing that never happens. But it had happened! Realizing that she actually cared about this man who was a stranger to her, the hopelessness of such a mating was not lost upon her; and it filled her with woe.

She had risen, heavy-eyed, to gaze askance at herself in the glass—to conceal with the skill of real art the ravishes of the sleepless night upon her delicate complexion and thick-fringed eyes. A dash of rouge, a whiff of powder, a gown selected which would bring out the tinting of her face, a hat which shadowed her from too keen observation; and she had descended to face Mr. Clarke with his ukelele and to find all of her misery vanishing mysteriously.

"You're wonderful! There's no gainsaying it," said she. "Imagine a man like you being able to perform upon the uke!"

"The uke's nothing," said Mr. Clarke. "You ought to see what I can do with a saxophone."

"You haven't brought a saxophone, too, have you?" asked Georgette.

"No-o," he replied sadly. "I didn't have room. I didn't bring my saxophone or my clarinet or my oboe!"

"That's good," said Georgette. "I had no idea you were fond of music."

"I'm not," he assured her. "But I like the popular tunes."

She looked at him and shook her head.

"I never know when you mean things and when you don't," she sighed.

"Hereafter I'll tell you," said he. "I think *that* would be the best plan. And just as a beginning I may as well admit I mean *this: I'm famished!*"

"We'll go in at once," cried Georgette. "This way!"

He followed her into the breakfast room, where Conrad was presiding over various steaming chafing dishes, coffee urns, and toast racks. Breakfast at Crystal Isle was a free-and-easy affair, ready from Heaven knows what hour until noon. You could come in when you pleased; or you could telephone down and have anything you fancied sent up on a tray.

Mimi, the only one of the other girls who was up, sat near the windows, wearing hiking trousers and a thin silk blouse.

"What a household!" she cried. "I've been up *hours*—hiking! You've no idea, Mr. Clarke, how charming this island is—in the early morning. But I suppose you often see the sun rise?"

"Not often," said he modestly.

"Mimi has grown awfully fond of walking—since ladies have taken to wearing *those,*" explained Florian Cartwright, who was with her. He looked older in the morning than at night, but was amazingly well preserved, thanks to a determined will and an unrelenting physical instructor who had him constantly in charge.

Mimi stretched out her legs and regarded them admiringly. They were nice legs.

"Well—why not?" she demanded. "It was no fun walking in skirts, I can tell you. Horrid things always dangling about in one's way. I predict that it won't be many years before women give up skirts *altogether.* The Chinese women, you know, have *fascinating* trousers, and the Turkish women, too. All made of lovely satins, embroidered and beaded and trimmed with gold coins and lace."

"I suppose if they came in by way of Paris they'd be a 'go,'" admitted Georgette. "But the idea doesn't appeal to me very strongly!"

"Why not? I dare say Lucille and the rest could do *wonderful* things with trouser effects. And *I* think if a woman is at *all* feminine, she's *more* so in trousers than in anything else. The contrast brings it out!"

Young Neal came in and instantly monopolized Georgette to reproach her for her disappearance the night before; the widow, Mrs. Stevens-Kerr, in something rather intimate and trailing and alluring, followed presently, looking for her mail; and one or two others gathered to discuss plans for the day. Some one announced that the swimming would be just about right in an hour, and everybody voted to go in—everybody, that is, but Mrs. Stevens-Kerr, whose marvelously done complexion was not water-proof and whose legs were *not* as good as Mimi's.

So, presently, they scattered to don their bathing suits and meet again on the beach.

There had been constructed along the water's edge, below the terrace, a long, low summerhouse, overlooking the stretch of white sand. This house, gay with colored awnings and canvas chairs, was the rendezvous; from here, too, later in the day, the boat races were to be witnessed—races for which entrants had come from a number of States.

Mr. Clarke, arriving in his bathing suit, with a very gay orange-colored beach robe over it, found himself the first to arrive, save for Mrs. Ring, who occupied the summerhouse in solitary splendor.

All in white, very crisp and fresh-looking, her white hair perfectly waved, she was an impressive figure as she waved him toward her with a commanding gesture.

"Are you going in?" she asked characteristically as he advanced.

"Yes, I think I will," he answered unnecessarily, and squatted on a cushion at her side—a cushion that he felt sure had been destined for Clifford Fellowes, her constant attendant.

"I suppose you can swim?" she asked then.

"Yes," said he, "I can swim."

"I never let any one go in who can't," she informed him. "A guest came and drowned himself that way once, and it was most unpleasant—*most!*" She shook her head over the recollection.

"For *him*, I *dare say*," ventured Mr. Clarke.

"For *all* of us," she corrected him. "The red tape with the authorities and newspaper reporters who thought he'd committed suicide, as he'd come without his wife—besides *quite* spoiling the house party. I wonder," she added thoughtfully, "why we say 'red tape'—what the origin of that expression was?"

"I've no idea," said he. "In fact, I never thought of it before."

"No, I dare say not," she murmured. "I must remember to ask Clifford. He always knows *everything! Such* a comfort to me!"

"Really?" said Mr. Clarke.

"Most people don't like him," she said; "but that makes him all the more valuable to me because I can always have him when I want him. Men who are popular with many are seldom devoted to one. I suppose you've been run after more than your share!"

"That depends upon what you think my share is," said he.

"Mr. Fox tells me you've got a way with you that gets you in wherever you've a mind to go," she explained.

"*Mr. Fox?* How does *he* know?" asked Clarke.

"Detectives know everything," said Mrs. Ring. And then, catching sight of his stupefied expression, she cried contritely: "Oh, I shouldn't have said that! I didn't mean to let the cat out! He *would* be annoyed if he knew. Not that it's my place to preserve his incognito—nor to aid in any way unless I've a mind to. Though it would be awkward if the jewels were taken in my house and the newspapers got wind of it. That red tape business all over again, I suppose, in a different way."

She sighed.

"You won't tell any one that I mentioned he was a detective, will you?" she asked. "I'm sure you're a gentleman and wouldn't involve me in any unpleasantness—not while you are my guest, at any rate. You have real breeding, I know. Can't fool me about *that!*"

"Of course I won't tell," said Mr. Clarke, and then sat frowning into space, looking worried, she thought, until Fellowes appeared, and he got up to relinquish his cushion. But what he was thinking was: *"The thief that Miss Ring thinks she's in love with is here, and the old lady has got this Fox man to watch him!"*

He went and sat in the sand to think it out. There Georgette joined him, when she presently appeared in a one-piece suit of flame color. She was ravishing.

"The joy of having a private bathing suit," she said, "is that you can wear what you please. And for swimming, the less, the better, eh? Although everybody wears these in Florida—even quite fat old ladies, who look a fright in them. They think nothing of 'em!"

The others began to appear, similarly clothed. Mimi and Nita and young Neal advanced, playing leap-frog. The widow, stunning in lavender now, smiled from under a pink-lined parasol. Conrad brought drinks and cigarettes. Florian Cartwright, amazingly spry for his age, started a game of tag with Louise, whose suit was the only one that had a ruffled skirt to it, and yet was the most daring of the lot.

"What *are* you thinking about?" asked Georgette as she observed his eyes wander from one to another of the gay group.

"Our conversation last night," said he.

"Which one?" asked Georgette, throwing herself flat on the sand and looking up at him, her hands supporting her chin, her elbows burrowing.

"The one about—thieves. Do you know that your friend Mr. Fox is—a *detective?*"

She was taken completely by surprise.

"Why do you ask?" she parried.

"Because he is, and I thought if you weren't aware of the fact, you ought to be."

"I *was* aware of it," she answered slowly, "but I was not sure *you* were! Half a dozen times I've been on the point of telling you."

"Why?" he asked curiously.

"Because," she said, "I was afraid that if you found it out yourself you might think that I had a *reason* for keeping it from you."

He chuckled.

"As though any one could possibly suspect *me* of—of evil designs," he said. "I'm afraid you're trying to flatter me."

"Would you be flattered to be mistaken for a bad man?" she asked interestedly.

"Of course! They're much more interesting than good ones, aren't they?"

"To meet casually, perhaps—to know *slightly*," said she. She was very, very grave. "But not," she added slowly, "to —have and hold on to. Not to make one's friend. Not to *care* about!"

And then she looked up and saw Howard Andrews looming over them, an inscrutable frown in his eyes. Mr. Clarke saw him, too, and thought: "*This* is the man she loves—*the thief!*"

"Going in?" asked Howard.

He was a little over six feet, and looked very handsome in his snugly fitting bathing suit.

"Why—yes—of course," said Georgette. "Let's go!"

She rose, drawing Clarke after her with a glance, and the three of them proceeded silently to the water's edge. The others, observing them, followed with wild whoops; and presently there was a great splashing about, mock outcries of dread from young Neal and Nita, funny birdlike trills of ecstasy from Mimi every time her head came up out of the water; squeals from Louise, who was trying to escape from Jimmy Nickerson, one of those underwater jesters who enjoy seizing the legs of unsuspecting bathers.

Georgette and Howard and Clarke strode out beyond their depths and began to swim. For a time they kept pretty well abreast, swimming vigorously, then Georgette stopped and began to float. The other two, hesitating, were urged on by the girl, who found a certain satisfaction in watching them and comparing their prowess.

"Race," she called. "Let's see which is the better man!"

Spurred on by this, sensing that the test was in a way significant, and more than a swimming match, they obeyed. Howard felt that Clarke was in no way a rival to be feared. He was slighter and not of an athletic build. But they had not gone ten yards before he realized the other's endurance and skill.

From the first the conclusion was evident. Mr. Clarke had not overstated facts when he had assured Georgette that he was a pretty good swimmer. He was more than pretty good. He was so good that he was able to suggest turning back when he saw that Howard was getting tired, and to swim steadily when Howard was compelled to float and rest. Georgette and some of the others had gone in to watch the race from the summerhouse, but when the contestants started in toward shore the others lost interest, some returning to the water, some going in to dress. Georgette waited, drying out in the sun. All she said when the two men came silently toward her was:

"Highballs?"

She seemed to have forgotten all about the match, but secretly she was pleased with Clarke and sorry for Howard. The supposed highwayman's performance in the lake convinced her of what she had suspected all along—that there was a strong and masterful person hidden beneath his lamblike exterior.

CHAPTER XI.

UNPARALLELED.

THE regatta was as gay as it usually was. There were all sorts of races—rowing races, speedboat races, sailing races. There were decorated boats with music aboard. There were innumerable yachts in to see the events. At the boat-club, whither the Ring party went for tea, the cup presentations were made, and all the other residents of that particular summer colony met and gossiped and exchanged greetings with the yacht parties who had run down from Newport and Bar Harbor or up from New York.

Georgette, surrounded by men, observed that Mr. Clarke seemed to know nobody,

and—what was rather a relief to her mind—that nobody seemed to recognize Mr. Clarke. It had occurred to her that it would be exceedingly embarrassing if he should suddenly come face to face with some former victim—some fair lady whose jewels he had pilfered, or some man who had met him before under other and less happy circumstances. She was, in truth, constantly in dread lest a heavy hand be clapped on his shoulder and a grim voice say:

"I say, I know you! You're the Jack of Diamonds!"

The fact was, she was anything but comfortable or happy the whole afternoon, in spite of the havoc she was creating among the gentlemen present. She breathed a sigh of relief at last when they all started back to their own island.

At dinner, reacting from the afternoon's anxiety and nerve strain, she was enchantingly merry, but her gayety excited no amazement, for the rest of the party was merry, too. The Regatta Ball which Mrs. Ring gave each year was the last event of the summer social season, and usually the liveliest of all. So all the ladies saved their loveliest raiment, their most breath-taking ornaments, for this occasion. And Bluch—sitting well down the table—lost his appetite as he mentally listed the gems about him and attempted to estimate their value.

Mrs. Ring was in black, with a bandeau of diamonds on her white hair, a diamond collar, diamond earrings, the famous rope of rose-colored stones, diamond bracelets and rings. And if it was possible to rival her in brilliance and glitter, the others did—all save Georgette, who wore no jewels at all. Yet to Mr. Clarke she outshone the rest, in a quaint little gray frock that was almost Quakerish in its simplicity. Against the dazzle and glitter, the brilliant flaming colors of the others, she stood out startlingly, her cheeks a little pale, faint violet shadows about her long-lashed blue eyes.

He was not next to her to-night; Howard Andrews had that place of honor, but Mr. Clarke was opposite, where he could gaze upon her undisturbed. He did just that, throughout dinner, in spite of Mrs. Stevens-Kerr and Mimi, who were on either side of him.

There were interminable courses, but the ices came at last, and coffee followed in the big drawing-room.

During the afternoon the hall and stairway had been turned into a bower of palms and the terrace had been prepared for dancing. Lanterns had been hung, the west porch had been arranged for the orchestra; and now, as Conrad, followed closely by his well-trained force, served the coffee and liqueurs, the music began.

Georgette, abandoning Howard to steal a last glance about and approve the final arrangements for the ball, was hailed by Bluch, who had been awaiting just this opportunity.

"We better decide on somethin' for to-night," he said, beckoning her closer, so that they could not possibly be overheard. "You know, we mightn't get another chanst in all this excitement and confusion."

"Yes," said Georgette. "I—I suppose we *had*—though I—I can't help feeling that—that he won't attempt to rob us."

"You think that," said Bluch frankly, "because he's been making eyes at you; but what you don't know is—that's his game. He always does that, and if a single lady in this house wakes up to-morrow morning with a single sparkler left I'll miss my guess!"

"But—you won't let him get away with anything, will you?" she asked nervously.

"I guess not—not while I live—if you just give me a little coöperation."

She was paler than ever as she nodded slowly, wet her lips, and asked: "What do you want me to do?"

"I'll tell you," said Bluch. "Here's my idea. When all you ladies get ready to retire, you better turn over all your jewels and other valuables to me. I'll sit up and watch 'em—see? And if he tries to steal 'em, he will have to take 'em away from *me*. And I'm telling you, miss, that's goin' to be *some job!*"

"I suppose that *would* be best," said Georgette, thinking that if Mr. Clarke knew the jewels were all in the hands of the detective he might hesitate to steal them—and so might escape the trap that had been set.

"Sure it would be best," said Bluch. "You don't want him to go snooping through the ladies' room looking for 'em, do you?"

"*No*," said Georgette positively. She had seen some of the ladies in their boudoir attire.

"No," added Bluch. "You want your guests to get some *sleep*."

"As if any one *could* sleep—with all *this* going on!" murmured Georgette.

"You got to sleep," said Bluch impressively, "or at least stay in your rooms and keep your doors locked. We don't want him to get suspicious, and he's sure to if he sees a lot of lights left on. Besides—you all want to be out of the way in case there's *shooting*."

Georgette drew a long breath.

"Oh, dear!" she said. "I'm not at all happy about all this. But I—suppose it's—for the best. Men like that *shouldn't* be left at large to—to prey upon society, should they? No matter how nice they seem. And—if he does try to steal our jewels—after—after the way we've all treated him—he'll *deserve* to be caught."

"He sure will, miss," said Bluch. "Now, don't you go letting your kind heart mislead you. A guy like that would steal his own mother's wooden leg if it was worth his while—and don't you make no mistake!"

"Very well," said Georgette. "That's settled, then. We'll all bring our jewels to you—after the ball. And I'll try to arrange it *before* him, so that he will know for certain where they are. But if he doesn't try to steal them, you won't arrest him, will you?"

"No, miss—I can't, you see, if I ain't got nothing on him."

"Very well," said Georgette with a sigh. And she went to join her mother as the first car turned into the drive.

Bluch, gazing after her, was compelled to chuckle to himself.

"*That's* the way to be a thief," he thought. "Make 'em come and hand over their sparklers. Don't take a chance on *grabbing* 'em!"

And he went in search of Conrad and the Scotch, to while away the weary hours that must elapse before he could come into his own.

Georgette, like a dutiful hostess, kept her eyes on her guests, and so was aware that Mr. Clarke danced only once—and that once with her. He would have danced with her again, but she had so many claimants for that honor that she was compelled, as hostess, to scatter her favors and not show any particular man undue honor.

Her feet were never still, it seemed. She passed from Mr. Clarke to Howard Andrews, from Howard Andrews to Florian Cartwright, from Florian Cartwright to the young scion of the multimillionaire Harringtons. And so on and so on—swaying rhythmically in the arms of New York's most exclusive and fashionable males, barring none, either for age or weight. And as she whirled her eyes kept track of Mr. Clarke, now lounging in the doorway, watching her; now sitting dejectedly, or at least moodily, at the windows that gave into the music room; now perched on the nearest porch rail, smoking. And when eventually she missed him, it was only to discover that he had been having a drink.

It was a compliment to her, of course, that he did not care enough for the other girls even to tread a measure with them, especially as they had all gone more than halfway to make friends with him. She could not help being pleased, though she told herself sternly that it really meant nothing—that what Mr. Fox had said was true—that making love was just one of his tricks of trade—that *really* he was not attracted to her in the least! She did not like to believe him guilty of such deceit—but he had not confessed his guilty intentions and gone away—as he *would* have done, *surely*, if he *truly* cared.

She told herself that it was easy enough for a man to sit about gloomily and look bored. And she wished that he meant as little to her as she thought she meant to him. But for some strange, damnable, inexplicable reason, she did care. She kept caring more and more as the evening advanced.

She told herself that he was weak-looking—too charming—too consciously

vague and shy. She told herself that he did not ring true; that he was a scoundrel, a thief—everything despicable.

But still she cared, and it was like an ache at her heart—and she felt as though she were betraying him—by letting Mr. Fox stay on to spring his trap.

But she could not retreat now without revealing to everyone that she had begun to care about this bandit—to mind what fate overtook him. And she had too much pride to make such an admission before that frivolous, critical, snobbish, rather cruel crowd. She knew them so well! They would lead him on, those girls; they would amuse themselves with him; thrill over his evil-doing and his wickedness. But they would not let themselves be seriously interested—not even interested enough to save him from the consequences of his own rashness.

She thought of what he had said about thieves—the impossibility of their reforming—and wondered if it was a taint in the blood—a queer malformation in the brain—that lead men into such folly. For it *was* folly to attempt to stand against organized society and fight the world of established law and order, single-handed. And he *was* charming.

She caught his brooding blue eyes fixed upon her as she thought all this and smiled—wistfully—and lost sight of him again as Jimmy Nickerson whirled her away. And then Cobalt Tyler cut in—and then young Neal succeeded him.

Supper was served at one o'clock, and Georgette, between Howard Andrews and Danbury Grey, saw Mr. Clarke ensnared by her mother and diplomatically unloaded upon the unattractive Ryan girl, who was having a dull time and was now in for worse; for Mr. Clarke was charming to her throughout supper—so charming that she had a chance to compare that delightful half hour with the dreary waste before it and the dreary waste afterward, when the dancing began again and he escaped.

Everything is comparative. The poor Ryan girl was not half as unhappy before Mr. Clarke was so attentive as she was after he abandoned her, politely, and left her to face the rest of the night—alone. But life is like that; a little kindness is often apt to turn out anything but kind in its results.

At four-thirty came breakfast — bacon and eggs, coffee, frankfurters, pancakes, waffles, buttered muffins. The weary dancers—weary with enjoyment—gathered together to refresh themselves again before departing. And it was after five—and dawn was breaking gorgeously, spreading red and gold and purple streaks along the eastern sky when the last motor boat finally sped away.

Mrs. Ring and the other ladies of the Ring party, assembled in the lower hall, approached the sleepy Mr. Fox and began to take off their jewelry and hand it over.

"I say," said Mr. Clarke, curiously, as he observed this maneuver. "What's the idea, eh?"

"We're expecting a visit from a famous crook, tonight," explained Georgette, turning. "An international criminal, known as the Jack of Diamonds!"

"Really?" said Mr. Clarke, interestedly.

"And—though I personally do not feel that there is any likelihood of this robbery, still, in justice to our other guests, we are turning our valuables over to Mr. Fox to guard!"

"Oh," said Clarke, glancing sidewise at Howard Andrews.

Howard Andrews was gazing inscrutably at him.

"Steady, ladies. One at a time, please!" begged Mr. Fox, who was being overwhelmed with riches.

"Here are my things," said Mimi. "Not much, but I'd hate to lose them!"

"These odds and ends are not to be overlooked," said Louise, turning over her emeralds.

"Here are my rubies," said Nita. "You will be careful of them, won't you?"

"I'll guard them as if they were my own," said Bluch.

Clarke looked on with a thoughtful frown. He was reflecting that if a thief were able to get into the house he could hardly resist a haul like this.

"Any of you gentlemen want to leave anything?" asked Bluch.

Cartwright and one or two others ac-

cepted the offer and handed over wallets, watches and rings. Clarke, with the rest, declined.

"If anyone wants my property, he'll have to come to *me* for it," said Clarke.

The others guessed that he did not relish the plan of leaving the jewelry with Mr. Fox and was trying to shame them out of it; but they were not to be so easily taken in. So presently, they turned in, calling "good night" and "pleasant dreams" to one another as they sought their respective couches.

And Bluch was left alone in the lower hall with treasure enough to sink a ship.

CHAPTER XII.

UNDESERVED.

MR. CLARKE went to his room, took off his dress coat, donned a lounge-robe of turquoise blue—he was fond of bright colors—and lighted a cigarette. He was not sleepy, though he had not had an especially exciting evening. For he had not been bored, either. He felt that he could never be really bored so long as he had Georgette to gaze on.

Of course, seeing her in other men's arms was not exactly soothing, but he realized he had not the right to object to that. Indeed, he had no reason to believe he would *ever* have that right, judging from her strange mention of thieves and their ways and the off-chance of reforming them. But it was some satisfaction to think about her and go back carefully over everything that she had said to him and he certainly had the right to do *that!*

So he threw himself into the big chintz chair by the window, and gazed up at the sky, and was just settling there comfortably, when there came a low knock on his door.

He doubted at first that it *was* a knock, but when it was repeated, he was sure—and crossing to open the door, he found himself facing Jeanie. He did not know it was Jeanie. He knew her only as the little woman who had warned him to beware of Mr. Fox, but because she *had* delivered that mysterious message, he now gazed upon her with eagerness and interest.

"Hello," he said. "Here we are again, eh? Another warning?"

"No, sir," said Jeanie, "a message!" She looked cautiously over her shoulder to make sure that no one could possibly overhear what she had to say, and then whispered: "It's from Miss Georgette, sir. She says please not to go to bed just yet, but to meet her in the lower hall in fifteen minutes. If she doesn't come promptly, though, you are to wait!"

"Why," gasped Mr. Clarke, "of course—to be sure. Tell her she can count on me to be there!"

"Thank you, sir," said Jeanie.

"Thank you," said Mr. Clarke. And as she was turning away, he added, "By the way—how about this Fox fellow you mentioned before—eh?"

"I think," said Jeanie slowly, "you will be able to understand about him when you've spoken to Miss Georgette."

With that, she slipped away, going like a shadow along the corridor and vanishing as noiselessly.

The message had said, "In fifteen minutes," but Mr. Clarke preferred to be early rather than late; and being considerably intrigued, he forgot completely that he had on his lounge-robe and descended to the lower hall in that.

Bluch, meanwhile, had just succeeded in gathering the swag together in one neat bundle; had just assured himself that the last guest had closed his or her door on the floor above, when Conrad appeared, carrying a very large revolver. Being in evening clothes, exactly as he had circulated among the guests at the ball, Bluch had not a gat on his hip at that moment; so he regarded Conrad's appearance indifferently.

"What do *you* want?" he asked gruffly, forgetting that Conrad had been the one really friendly person he had met at Crystal Isle.

"Come to lower the lights and lock up, sir," said Conrad.

"Never mind that! I'll do it tonight," said Bluch, waving his hand by way of dismissal, and added, "I thought you were after the jewels—the way you were flourishing *the gat!*"

Conrad shook his head.

"It's an old army pistol that shoots pretty well, sometimes," he said. "I thought I wouldn't go to bed tonight! I thought I'd better stay on the job—just in case!"

"Nonsense! You'd better give *me* that! I'll feel *safer*," said Bluch, holding out his hand for it.

"Give you my—my gat," said Conrad, swiftly picking up Bluch's name for it.

"That's the idea," said Bluch sternly, "and you go to bed, understand? I can handle this job alone! Besides, good butlers are scarce; no use risking one of 'em unnecessarily!"

"That's true," said Conrad. "I didn't want to leave you flat, that's all. But if you'd rather handle this on your own, all right! I'm sure, *I'd* rather be in bed! Good night!"

He handed Bluch the gun.

"Good night," said Bluch, with a sigh of relief. "Sweet dreams!"

Conrad disappeared; Bluch picked up the bundle of swag and was just about to start for the nearest exit, when down came Mr. Clarke, in his turquoise blue lounge-robe, with a cigarette in a long amber holder hanging from his lips.

"Oh—*you* still here?" he called cheerily, by way of greeting.

Bluch looked up at him impatiently.

"Yes, I'm still here! This is me," he said. "Anything you want?"

He remembered with some slight annoyance that Mr. Clarke had *not* added *his* valuables to the general collection. And although there were valuables enough without Mr. Clarke's petty contribution, Bluch resented the implied lack of faith.

"No," answered Mr. Clarke pleasantly.

"Just taking a walk?" asked Bluch, with what he considered fine sarcasm.

"No," said Mr. Clarke. "Fact is, I ran out of cigarettes, and came down to look for some!"

"Oh, ran out of cigarettes, eh?" said Bluch, looking pointedly at the one Mr. Clarke was smoking.

"Yes," said Mr. Clarke. "Just on my last one. See?" He held it up.

"Well," said Bluch. "There they are!" He waved magnificently to the humidor that stood on the smoking-stand near the biggest davenport. "Help yourself!"

"Thanks," said Mr. Clarke gratefully, and he did so. But instead of going at once, as Bluch had every reason to believe he would, he then sat down upon the biggest davenport and observed amiably: "Funny, this idea they've got—that some crook is going to break in here tonight. What makes 'em think so?"

"I told 'em so," said Bluch grimly.

"You? Oh," said Mr. Clarke, looking at him interestedly. "And what makes *you* think so?"

Bluch maintained his attitude of calm with a great effort of will-power, though Conrad's revolver itched in his palm.

"I got a letter from the crook," he answered.

"Oh—that's a good one," laughed this extraordinary Mr. Clarke, actually taking him literally. "Guess he doesn't think much of you as a detective!"

Bluch snorted.

"I didn't *really* get a letter from him, you dumb-bell," he cried. "*As* a detective—naturally—certain dope reaches me!"

"Oh!" said Mr. Clarke. "That's very interesting—very! And mighty convenient, eh? By the way, how does one get to *be* a detective, anyway?"

"You just—buy a badge. That's all," said Bluch, witheringly.

"Yes," said Clarke, studying Bluch frankly, "I thought it must be something like that!"

Bluch stared at him, squinting.

"Say, are *you insulting me?*" he asked.

"I don't know," said Clarke. "Am I?"

"If you're not," said Bluch, "you're even dumber than I think you are—and that don't seem possible!"

Mr. Clarke laughed. Observing him closely, Bluch could not decide whether he was a wise guy kidding him, or a regular half-wit.

"You must lead a pretty exciting life, you fellows," said Mr. Clarke, settling himself more comfortably on the biggest davenport, which, by the way, gave him a splendid view of the stairs down which—he supposed—Georgette must come. Bluch

had his back to the stairs. "I wish you'd tell me a few of your experiences!"

"Not now," said Bluch. "I don't think it would be right to keep you up any later, now. I'll come round some afternoon and have tea with you!"

"But I'm not sleepy," said the irrepressible Mr. Clarke.

"Well, *I am*," said Bluch, determinedly.

But Mr. Clarke did not take the hint and rise. Instead, he settled more comfortably in his seat and murmured: "Oh—sorry! Don't let *me* detain you, old chap! Good night!"

Bluch would have given a lot to bean him on the spot, but he didn't dare risk it with that bundle of swag in his mitt.

"You know *no* thief is going to break in here while *you* sit around here like this," he complained.

"Well, you don't *want* him to break in, do you?" asked Clarke, surprised.

"*Sure*, I do! I want to catch him red-handed—grab him with the goods," said Bluch.

"Oh, that's fine for you," said Clarke. "But if you *don't* catch him, how about all those jewels?"

"I'd just like to see any one get this stuff away from *me*," said Bluch, squaring his jaw.

"But what would *you* lose if he *did?*" asked Clarke.

"I'll lose my temper if I hang around here gabbing with you," said Bluch sourly. "When you go up, put out the lights, will you?"

"Delighted," smiled Mr. Clarke. "Good night!"

"Good night!" growled Bluch, and climbed the stairs.

He figured that the quickest way to get rid of Clarke was to go up and try to get out of his window; or else to wait quietly up there until Clarke should get tired and go to bed. It was sickening to have to brook this delay, but there seemed nothing else to be done. He didn't dare walk out while Clarke was there; and he dared not risk braining the nincompoop! So he went back to his room, only to find that as an exit, his window was impracticable. He sat down to wait.

Mr. Clarke triumphantly consulted his watch as Bluch disappeared and saw that Georgette was late. But even as he made the observation, she arrived.

She, too, had doffed her ball gown in favor of a negligee of silver stuff and green chiffon. And she was lovelier than ever in this intimate kind of frock.

"I was just beginning to be afraid you weren't coming, after all," said he, rising and moving to meet her.

"I had to see you," said she.

"Yes. So your maid informed me. I suppose it was your maid! I came right down!"

"I know," said Georgette, nervously. "I was waiting for Mr. Fox to go. I didn't want him to see us talking together. I'm quite sure he wouldn't like what I'm going to do. But I felt I simply *had* to *warn* you—and there was nowhere else we could talk without waking people up."

He gazed at her interestedly.

"You wanted to—warn me?" he repeated.

"Yes. *He knows who you are!*"

Georgette's lips barely framed the words.

"*Who* knows who I am?" asked Mr. Clarke, in a whisper scarcely louder than hers. "Fox?"

"Yes," said Georgette gravely.

"Well," said Mr. Clarke slowly, "suppose he does? What of it?"

"I mean," said the girl, "he knows who you *really* are. He knows you are the Jack of Diamonds!"

Clarke's blue eyes opened wider than ever before in his life.

"Fox knows *I* am the Jack of Diamonds?" he gasped.

"Yes," said Georgette, "we *all* know it! We've known it ever since you've been here!"

"How in the world do you all come to know *that?*" he asked, getting his breath.

She told him—swiftly—dramatically—from beginning to end.

"Wait a minute," he said, as she finished. "Fox told you that I am *not* Renwicke Clarke, but the Jack of Diamonds—and you believed him?"

"Yes," said Georgette.

"Why?" he asked.

"I don't know. He had a badge," said Georgette.

He began to laugh, silently; she stared at him.

"*Aren't* you the Jack of Diamonds?" she asked.

"Of course not, you foolish child," he said. He actually did say just that! "But that's not the point! The point is, you *thought* I was—and yet—you came to warn me that Fox had set a trap for me."

"I had to," she admitted, blushing. "I felt it wasn't sporting—all of us in league against you. And he said you'd never been behind—behind prison bars. I didn't want you to be caught and—sent to jail."

"Bless you," he said, "you really cared that much about me?"

And then he remembered many things—things the others had said to him—and—what she had said about thieves reforming, and he took her in his arms.

"*Little goose!*" he said, and it sounded like a pet name. And then he kissed her.

"And—are you really Renwicke Clarke—Eleanor Noel's brother?"

"Of course," said he, "and maybe she won't yell over this!"

"The Jack of Diamonds?" she asked, her color flaming.

"Unless I miss my guess," he said in a whisper, "*he's* the Jack of Diamonds up there!"

"Mr. Fox?" gasped Georgette. "And we've given him all our jewels!"

"But he hasn't made a getaway with them yet," said Mr. Clarke, consolingly. "And he isn't going to! Have you the courage to run up to my room and get the revolver you'll find in my bag?"

"I don't need to," said Georgette. "There's one here!"

She crossed to the long table and produced one from the drawer.

"Will this do?" she asked.

"Splendidly!"

He looked to make sure it was loaded.

"You'd better go up and wait in your room," he said then.

"Never!" cried Georgette. "I'm going to stay right here with you!"

"Very well, then," said he. "I don't think there'll be much danger. He isn't overbright, apparently—and I mean to take him by surprise."

He switched off the lights, and they sat on the big davenport—hand in hand—waiting.

Half an hour passed; but they were lost in dreams and did not mind waiting.

Then they heard a step on the stairs, and Bluch's voice:

"I say—Clarke—are you there?" he called.

Clarke squeezed Georgette's hand and did not answer.

"Is any one there?" asked Bluch.

Still no sound.

He felt secure, and came softly down the stairs—but as he reached the foot, suddenly, dazzlingly, all the lights came on, and he found himself blinking into the very barrel of a gun, while in his amazed ears rang Mr. Clarke's voice commanding:

"Throw up your dukes!"

Never a quick thinker, Bluch obeyed before he could decide not to; and Conrad's revolver and the bundle of diamonds and pearls and emeralds and rubies rolled upon the floor at his feet.

"What's the idea?" gasped poor Bluch.

"The idea is the game's up, old timer," said Clarke pleasantly.

And Georgette rang the breakfast gong triumphantly to summon the household and exonerate her lover without delay.

It was Mrs. Ring's determination to defeat the reporters and escape notoriety by parolling Bluch in the custody of Jeanie, who told them all about her past when she found Bluch had been tripped up by Clarke, as she had anticipated Bluch decided to abide by the decision, preferring Jeanie's inn in England and the straight and narrow path to the term that was coming to him up the river.

And Mr. Clarke and Georgette were married, of course, and had just as much happiness and just as much *un*happiness and just as many quarrels—with the succeeding joy of making up—as all *other* married couples have had and *will* have as long as the world lasts.

THE END.

Tarzan and the Golden Lion*

By EDGAR RICE BURROUGHS

Author of the Tarzan Tales, the Martian Stories, "The Girl from Hollywood," etc.

WHAT HAS OCCURRED IN PART I.

TARZAN and Lady Jane Greystoke, his wife, and their son, Korak, returning from the mysterious land of Pal-ul-don, find a lion cub and carry him to their home in the African jungle.

Tarzan christens the cub Jad-bal-ja, the golden lion, and miraculously trains him to obey the slightest command. Tarzan sets out to retrieve more gold from the treasure vaults of the Oparians. He comes upon the naked footprints of a white man.

The footprints were, in reality, those of Esteban Miranda, an impersonator of Tarzan, hired by Flora Hawkes, who, in company with Adolph Bluber, Carl Kraski, Peebles, and Throck, are daring the African jungles in an attempt to loot the treasure of the Oparians.

CHAPTER IV *(continued).*

WHAT THE FOOTPRINTS TOLD.

THEY were the footprints of a large man, probably as large as Tarzan himself. As the foster son of Kala stood gazing upon the spoor of the mysterious stranger he ran the fingers of one hand through his thick black hair in a characteristic gesture indicative of deep puzzlement.

What naked white man could there be in Tarzan's jungle who slew Tarzan's game with the pretty arrow of an archery club? It was incredible that there should be such a one, and yet there recurred to the Ape-man's mind the vague rumors that he had heard weeks before. Determined to solve the mystery he set out now upon the trail of the stranger—an erratic trail which wound about through the jungle, apparently aimlessly, prompted, Tarzan guessed, by the ignorance of an inexperienced hunter.

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for December 9.

But night fell before he had arrived at a solution of the riddle, and it was pitch dark as the Ape-man turned his steps toward camp.

He knew that his Waziri would be expecting meat, and it was not Tarzan's intention to disappoint them, though he then discovered that he was not the only carnivore hunting the district that night. The coughing grunt of a lion close by apprised him of it first, and then, from the distance, the deep roar of another. But of what moment was it to the Ape-man that others hunted? It would not be the first time that he had pitted his cunning, his strength and his agility against the other hunters of his savage world, both man and beast.

And so it was that Tarzan made his kill at last, snatching it from almost under the nose of a disappointed and infuriated lion—a fat antelope that the latter had marked as his own. Throwing his kill to his shoulder almost in the path of the charging Numa, the Ape-man swung lightly to the lower terraces and with a taunting laugh for the infuriated cat vanished noiselessly into the night.

He found the camp and his hungry Waziri without trouble, and so great was their faith in him that they not for a moment doubted but that he would return with meat for them.

Early the following morning Tarzan set out again toward Opar, and directing his Waziri to continue the march in the most direct way, he left them that he might pursue further his investigations of the mysterious presence in his jungle that the arrow and the footsteps had apprised him of. Coming again to the spot at which darkness had forced him to abandon his investigations, he took up the spoor of the stranger. Nor had he followed it far before he came upon further evidence of the presence of this new and malign personality—stretched before him in the trail was the body of a giant ape, one of the tribe of great anthropoids among whom Tarzan had been raised. Protruding from the hairy abdomen of the mangani was another of the machine-made arrows of civilization. The Ape-man's eyes narrowed and a scowl darkened his brow. Who was this who dared invade his sacred preserves and slaughter thus ruthlessly Tarzan's people? A low growl rumbled in the throat of the Ape-man. Sloughed with the habiliments of civilization was the thin veneer of civilization that Tarzan wore among white men. No English lord was this who looked upon the corpse of his hairy cousin, but another jungle beast in whose breast raged the unquenchable fire of suspicion and hatred for the man-thing that is the heritage of the jungle-bred. A beast of prey viewed the bloody work of ruthless man. Nor was there in the consciousness of Tarzan any acknowledgment of his blood relationship to the killer.

Realizing that the trail had been made upon the second day before, Tarzan hastened on in pursuit of the slayer. There was no doubt in his mind but that plain murder had been committed, for he was sufficiently familiar with the traits of the mangani to know that none of them would provoke assault unless driven to it.

Tarzan was traveling upwind, and some half hour after he had discovered the body of the ape his keen nostrils caught the scent-spoor of others of its kind. Knowing the timidity of these fierce denizens of the jungle he moved forward now with great wariness, lest, warned of his approach, they take flight before they were aware of his identity. He did not see them often, yet he knew that there were always those among them who recalled him, and that through these he could always establish amicable relations with the balance of the tribe.

Owing to the denseness of the undergrowth Tarzan chose the middle terraces for his advance, and here, swinging freely and swiftly among the leafy boughs, he came presently upon the giant anthropoids. There were about twenty of them in the band, and they were engaged in a little natural clearing in their never-ending search for caterpillars, beetles and other delectable tidbits, which formed so important an item in the diet of the mangani.

A faint smile overspread the Ape-man's face as he paused upon a great branch, himself hidden by the leafy foliage about him, and watched the little band below him. Every action, every movement of the great apes, recalled vividly to Tarzan's mind the

long years of his childhood, when, protected by the fierce mother love of Kala, the she-ape, he had ranged the jungle with the tribe of Kerchak. In the romping young he saw again Neeta and his other childhood playmates and in the adults all the great, savage brutes he had feared in youth and conquered in manhood. The ways of man may change, but the ways of the ape are the same, yesterday, to-day and forever.

He watched them in silence for some minutes. How glad they would be to see him when they discovered his identity! For Tarzan of the Apes was known the length and the breadth of the great jungle as the friend and protector of the mangani. At first they would growl at him and threaten him, for they would not depend solely on either their eyes or their ears for confirmation of his identity. Not until he had entered the clearing, and bristling bulls with bared fighting fangs had circled him stiffly until they had come close enough for their nostrils to verify the evidence of their eyes and ears, would they finally accept him. And then doubtless there would be great excitement for a few minutes, until, following the instincts of the ape mind, their attention was weaned from him by a blowing leaf, a caterpillar or a bird's egg, and then they would move about their business, taking no further notice of him more than of any other member of the tribe. But this would not come until after each individual had smelled of him, and perhaps, pawed his flesh with calloused hands.

Now it was that Tarzan made a friendly sound of greeting, and as the apes looked up stepped from his concealment into plain view of them. "I am Tarzan of the Apes," he said, "mighty hunter, mighty fighter, friend of the mangani. Tarzan comes in friendship to his people," and with these words he dropped lightly to the lush grass.

Instantly pandemonium reigned. Screaming warnings the shes raced with the young for the opposite side of the clearing, while the bulls, bristling and growling, faced the intruder.

"Come," cried Tarzan, "do you not know me? I am Tarzan of the Apes, friend of the mangani, son of Kala, and king of the tribe of Kerchak."

"We know you," growled one of the old bulls, "yesterday we saw you when you killed Gobu. Go away or we shall kill you."

"I did not kill Gobu," replied the Ape-man. "I found his dead body yesterday and I was following the spoor of his slayer when I came upon you."

"We saw you," repeated the old bull. "Go away or we shall kill you. You are no longer the friend of the mangani."

The Ape-man stood with brows contracted in thought. It was evident that these apes really believed that they had seen him kill their fellow. What was the explanation? How could it be accounted for? Did the naked footprints of the great white man whom he had been following mean more, then, than he had guessed? Tarzan wondered. He raised his eyes and again addressed the bulls.

"It was not I who killed Gobu," he insisted. "Many of you have known me all your lives. You know that only in fair fight, as one bull fights another, have I ever killed a mangani. You know that, of all the jungle people, the mangani are my best friends, and that Tarzan of the Apes is the best friend that the mangani have. How, then, could I slay one of my own people?"

"We only know," replied the old bull, "that we saw you kill Gobu. With our own eyes we saw you kill him. Go away quickly, therefore, or we shall kill you. Mighty fighter is Tarzan of the Apes, but mightier even than he are all the great bulls of Pagth—I am Pagth, king of the tribe of Pagth. Go away before we kill you."

Tarzan tried to reason with them, but they would not listen, so confident were they that it was he who had slain their fellow, the bull Gobu. And finally, rather than chance a quarrel in which some of them must inevitably be killed, he turned sorrowfully away. But more than ever, now, was he determined to seek out the slayer of Gobu that he might demand an accounting of one who dared thus invade his life-long domain.

Tarzan trailed the spoor until it mingled with the tracks of many men—barefooted blacks, mostly, but among them the footprints of booted white men, and once he

saw the footprints of a woman or a child, which, he could not tell. The trail led apparently toward the rocky hills which protect the barren valley of Opar.

Forgetful now of his original mission and imbued only with a savage desire to wrest from the interlopers a full accounting for their presence in the jungle, and to mete out to the slayer of Gobu his just deserts, Tarzan forged ahead upon the now broad and well-marked trail of the considerable party which could not now be much more than a half day's march ahead of him, which meant that they were doubtless now already upon the rim of the valley of Opar, if this was their ultimate destination. And what other they could have in view Tarzan could not imagine.

He had always kept closely to himself the location of Opar. Insofar as he knew no white person other than Jane and their son Korak knew of the location of the forgotten city of the ancient Atlantians. Yet what else could have drawn these white men, with so large a party, into the savage, unexplored wilderness which hemmed Opar upon all sides?

Such were the thoughts that occupied Tarzan's mind as he followed swiftly the trail that led toward Opar. Darkness fell, but so fresh was the spoor that the Ape-man could follow it by scent even when he could not see the imprints upon the ground. And presently, in the distance, he saw the light of a camp ahead of him.

CHAPTER V.

THE FATAL DROPS.

AT home the life in the bungalow and at the farm followed its usual routine as it had before the departure of Tarzan. Korak, sometimes on foot and sometimes on horseback, followed the activities of the farmhands and the herders, sometimes alone, but more often in company with the white foreman—Jervis—and often, especially when they rode, Jane accompanied them.

The golden lion Korak exercised upon a leash, since he was not at all confident of his powers of control over the beast, and feared lest, in the absence of his master, Jad-bal-ja might take to the forest and revert to his natural savage state. Such a lion, abroad in the jungle, would be a distinct menace to human life, for Jad-bal-ja, reared among men, lacked that natural timidity of man that is so marked a trait of all wild beasts. Trained as he had been to make his kill at the throat of a human effigy, it required no considerable powers of imagination upon the part of Korak to visualize what might occur should the golden lion, loosed from all restraint, be thrown upon his own resources in the surrounding jungle.

It was during the first week of Tarzan's absence that a runner from Nairobi brought a cable message to Lady Greystoke, announcing the serious illness of her father in London. Mother and son discussed the situation. It would be five or six weeks before Tarzan could return, even if they sent a runner after him, and, were Jane to await him, there would be little likelihood of her reaching her father in time. Even should she depart at once there seemed only a faint hope that she would arrive early enough to see him alive. It was decided, therefore, that she should set out immediately, Korak accompanying her as far as Nairobi, and then returning to the ranch and resuming its general supervision until his father's return.

It is a long trek from the Greystoke estate to Nairobi, and Korak had not yet returned when, about three weeks after Tarzan's departure, a black, whose duty it was to feed and care for Jad-bal-ja, carelessly left the door of the cage unfastened while he was cleaning it. The golden lion paced back and forth while the black wielded his broom within the cage. They were old friends, and the Waziri felt no fear of the great lion, with the result that his back was as often turned to him as not. The black was working in the far corner of the cage when Jad-bal-ja paused a moment at the door at the opposite end. The beast saw that the gate hung slightly ajar upon its hinges. Silently he raised a great padded paw and inserted it in the opening—a slight pull and the gate swung in. Instantly the golden lion inserted his snout in the wid-

ened aperture, and as he swung the barrier aside the horrified black looked up to see his charge drop softly to the ground outside.

"Stop, Jad-bal-ja! Stop!" screamed the frightened black, leaping after him. But the golden lion only increased his pace and, leaping the fence, loped off in the direction of the forest.

The black pursued him with brandishing broom and emitting loud yells that brought the inmates of the Waziri huts into the open, where they joined their fellow in pursuit of the lion. Across the rolling plains they followed him, but as well have sought to snare the elusive will-o'-the-wisp as this swift and wary fugitive, who heeded not either their blandishments or their threats. And so it was that they saw the golden lion disappear into the primeval forest and, though they searched diligently until almost dark, they were forced at length to give up their quest and return, crestfallen, to the farm.

"Ah," cried the unhappy black, who had been responsible for the escape of Jad-bal-ja, "what will the Big Bwana say to me, what will he do to me when he finds that I have permitted the golden lion to get away?"

"You will be banished from the bungalow for a long time, Keewazi," old Muviro assured him, "and doubtless you will be sent to the grazing ground far to the east to guard the herd there, where you will have plenty of lions for company, though they will not be as friendly as was Jad-bal-ja. It is not half what you deserve, and were the heart of the Big Bwana not filled with love for his black children—were he like other white *Bwanas* old Muviro has seen—you would be lashed until you could not stand, perhaps until you died."

"I am a man," replied Keewazi. "I am a warrior and a Waziri. Whatever punishment the Big Bwana inflicts I will accept as a man should."

It was that same night that Tarzan approached the camp fires of the strange party he had been tracking. Unseen by them, he halted in the foliage of a tree directly in the center of their camp, which was surrounded by an enormous thorn *boma,* and brilliantly lighted by numerous fires which blacks were diligently feeding with branches from an enormous pile of firewood that they had evidently gathered earlier in the day for this purpose.

Near the center of the camp were several tents, and before one, in the light of a fire, sat four white men. Two of them were great, bull-necked, red-faced fellows, apparently Englishmen of the lower class; the third appeared to be a short, fat German Jew; while the fourth was a tall, slender, handsome fellow with dark, wavy, brown hair and regular features. He and the German were most meticulously garbed for central African traveling, after the highly idealized standard of motion pictures—in fact, either one of them might have stepped directly from a screening of the latest jungle thriller. The young man was evidently not of English descent, and Tarzan mentally catalogued him, almost immediately, as a Slav. Shortly after Tarzan's arrival this one arose and entered one of the near-by tents, from which Tarzan immediately heard the sound of voices in low conversation. He could not distinguish the words, but the tones of one seemed quite distinctly feminine. The three remaining at the fire were carrying on a desultory conversation, when suddenly from near at hand beyond the *boma* wall, a lion's roar broke the silence of the jungle.

With a startled shriek the Jew leaped to his feet, so suddenly that he cleared the ground a good foot, and then, stepping backward, he lost his balance, tripped over his camp stool, and sprawled upon his back.

"My Gord, Adolph!" roared one of his companions. "If you do that again, damn me, if I don't break your neck. And 'ere we are, and that's that."

"Blime if 'e ain't worse'n a bloomin' lion," growled the other.

The Jew crawled to his feet. "*Mein Gott!*" he cried, his voice quavering. "I t'ought sure he vas coming over the fence. S'elp me, if I ever get out of diss, neffer again—not for all der gold in Africa vould I go t'rough vat I haf been t'rough dese past t'ree mont's. *Oi! Oi!* Ven I t'ink of it. *Oi! Oi!* Lions, *und* leopards, *und* rhinoceroses *und* hippopotamuses. *Oi! Oi!*"

His companions laughed.

" Dick and I tells you right along from the beginning that you 'adn't oughter come into the interior," said one of them.

" But for vy I buy all dese clo's?" wailed the German. " *Mein Gott,* dis suit, it stands me tventy guineas, vot I stand in. *Ach,* had I known somet'ing, vun guinea vould have bought me my whole wardrobe —tventy guineas for his *und* no vun to see it but niggers *und* lions."

" And you look like 'ell in it, besides," commented one of his friends.

" *Und* look at it, it's all dirty *und* torn. How should I know it I spoil dis suit? Mit mine own eyes I see it at der Princes Teayter, how der hero spend t'ree mont's in Africa hunting lions *und* killing cannibals, *und* ven he comes ouid he hasn't even got a grease spot on his pants—how should I know it Africa was so dirty *und* full of thorns?"

It was at this point that Tarzan of the Apes elected to drop quietly into the circle of firelight before them. The two Englishmen leaped to their feet, quite evidently startled, and the Jew turned and took a half step as though in flight, but immediately his eyes rested upon the Ape-man he halted, a look of relief supplanting that of terror which had overspread his countenance, as Tarzan had dropped upon them apparently from the heavens.

" *Mein Gott,* Esteban," shrilled the German, " vy you come back so soon, and for vy you come back like dot, sudden—don't you suppose ve got nerves?"

Tarzan was angry—angry at these raw intruders, who dared enter without his permission, the wide domain in which he kept peace and order. And when Tarzan was angry there flamed upon his forehead the scar that Bolgani, the gorilla, had placed there upon that long-gone day when the boy Tarzan had met the great beast in mortal combat, and first learned the true value of his father's hunting knife—the knife that had placed him, the comparatively weak little *tarmangani,* upon an even footing with the great beasts of the jungle.

His gray eyes were narrowed, his voice came cold and level as he addressed them. " Who are you," he demanded, " who dare thus invade the country of the Waziri, the land of Tarzan, without permission from the lord of the jungle?"

" Where do you get that stuff, Esteban?" demanded one of the Englishmen. " And w'at in 'ell are you doin' back here alone and so soon? Where are your porters? Where is the bloomin' gold?"

The Ape-man eyed the speaker in silence for a moment. " I'm Tarzan of the Apes," he said. " I do not know what you are talking about. I only know that I came in search of him who slew Gobu, the great ape; him who slew Bara, the deer, without my permission."

" Oh, 'ell!" exploded the other Englishman. " Stow the guff, Esteban—if you're tryin' for to be funny we don't see the joke, and 'ere we are, and that's that."

Inside the tent, which the fourth white man had entered while Tarzan was watching the camp from his hiding place in the tree above, a woman, evidently suddenly stirred by terror, touched the arm of her companion frantically, and pointed toward the tall, almost naked figure of the Ape-man as he stood revealed in the full light of the beast fires. " God, Carl," she whispered in trembling tones, " look!"

" What's wrong, Flora?" inquired her companion. " I see only Esteban."

" It is not Esteban," hissed the girl; " it is Lord Greystoke himself—it is *Tarzan of the Apes!*"

" You are mad, Flora," replied the man. " It cannot be he."

" It is he, though," she insisted. " Do you suppose that I do not know him? Did I not work in his town house for years? Did I not see him nearly every day? Do you suppose that I do not know Tarzan of the Apes? Look at that red scar flaming on his forehead—I have heard the story of that scar and I have seen it burn scarlet when he was aroused to anger. It is scarlet now, and Tarzan of the Apes is angry."

" Well, suppose it is Tarzan of the Apes, what can he do?"

" You do not know him," replied the girl. " You do not guess the tremendous power he wields here—the power of life and death over man and beast. If he knew our mission here not one of us would ever reach the coast alive. The very fact that he is

here now makes me believe that he may have discovered our purpose, and if he has, God help us—unless—unless—"

"Unless what?" demanded the man.

The girl was silent in thought for a moment. "There is only one way," she said finally. "We dare not kill him. His savage blacks would learn of it, and no power on earth could save us then. There is a way, though, if we act quickly." She turned and searched for a moment in one of her bags, and presently she handed the man a small bottle, containing liquid. "Go out and talk to him," she said, "make friends with him. Lie to him. Tell him anything. Promise anything. But get on friendly terms with him so that you can offer him coffee. He does not drink wine or anything else with alcohol in it, but I know that he likes coffee. I have often served it to him in his room late at night upon his return from the theater or a ball. Get him to drink coffee and then you will know what to do with this." And she indicated the bottle which the man still held in his hand.

Kraski nodded. "I understand," he said, and turned and left the tent.

He had taken but a step when the girl recalled him. "Do not let him see me. Do not let him guess that I am here or that you know me."

The man nodded and left her. And approaching the tense figures before the fire he greeted Tarzan with a pleasant smile and a cheery word.

"Welcome," he said; "we are always glad to see a stranger in our camp. Sit down. Hand the gentleman a stool, John."

The Ape-man eyed Kraski as he had eyed the others. There was no answering friendly light in his eyes responding to the Russian's greeting.

"I have been trying to find out what your party is doing here," he said sharply to the Russian, "but they still insist that I am some one whom I am not. They are either fools or knaves, and I intend to find out which, and deal with them accordingly."

"Come, come," cried Kraski, soothingly, "there must be some mistake I am sure. But tell me, who are you?"

"I am Tarzan of the Apes," replied the Ape-man. "No hunters enter this part of Africa without my permission. That fact is so well known that there is no chance of your having passed the coast without having been so advised. I seek an explanation, and that quickly."

"Ah, you are Tarzan of the Apes," exclaimed Kraski. "Fortunate indeed are we, for now we will be set straight upon our way and our escape from our frightful dilemma is assured. We are lost, sir, inextricably lost, due to the ignorance or knavery of our guide, who deserted us several weeks ago. Surely we know of you; who does not know of Tarzan of the Apes? But it was not our intention to cross the boundaries of your territory. We were searching further south for specimens of the fauna of the district, which our good friend and employer, here, Mr. Adolph Bluber, is collecting at great expense for presentation to a museum in his home city in America. Now I am sure that you can tell us where we are and direct us upon our proper course."

Peebles, Throck, and Bluber stood fascinated by Kraski's glib lies, but it was the German jew who first rose to the occasion. Too thick were the skulls of the English pugs to grasp quickly the clever ruse of the Russian.

"Vy, yes," said the oily Bluber, rubbing his palms together, "dot iss it, yust vot I was going to tell you."

Tarzan turned sharply upon him. "Then what was all this talk about Esteban?" he asked. "Was it not by that name that these others addressed me?"

"Ah," cried Bluber, "John will haf his little joke. He iss ignorant of Africa; he has neffer been here before. He t'ought perhaps dat you vere a native. John he calls all der natives Esteban, *und* he has great jokes by himself mit dem, because he knows dey cannot onderstand vot he says. Hey, John, iss it not so, vot it iss I say?" But the shrewd Bluber did not wait for John to reply. "You see," he went on, "ve are lost, und you take us ouid mit dis jungle, ve pay you anyt'ing — you name your own price."

The Ape-man only half believed him, yet he was somewhat mollified by their evi-

dently friendly intentions. Perhaps after all they were telling him a half-truth and had, really, wandered into his territory unwittingly. That, however, he would find out definitely from their native carriers, from whom his own Waziri would wean the truth. But the matter of his having been mistaken for Esteban still piqued his curiosity, and also he was still desirous of learning the identity of the slayer of Gobu, the great ape.

"Please sit down," urged Kraski. "We were about to have coffee and we should be delighted to have you join us. We meant no wrong in coming here, and I can assure you that we will gladly and willingly make full amends to you, or to whomever else we may have unintentionally wronged."

To take coffee with these men would do no harm. Perhaps he had wronged them, but however that might be, a cup of their coffee would place no great obligation upon him. And Flora had been right in her assertion that if Tarzan of the Apes had any weakness whatsoever it was for an occasional cup of black coffee late at night. He did not accept the proffered camp stool, but squatted, ape-fashion, before them, the flickering light of the beast fires playing upon his bronzed hide and bringing into relief the gracefully contoured muscles of his god-like frame. Not as the muscles of the blacksmith or the professional strong man were the muscles of Tarzan of the Apes, but rather those of Mercury, or Apollo, so symmetrically balanced were their proportions, suggesting only the great strength that lay in them. Trained to speed and agility were they as well as to strength, and thus, clothing as they did his giant frame, they imparted to him the appearance of a demi-god.

Throck, Peebles, and Bluber sat watching him in spellbound fascination, while Kraski walked over to the cook fire to arrange for the coffee. The two Englishmen were as yet only half awakened to the fact that they had mistaken this newcomer for another, and as it was, Peebles still scratched his head and grumbled to himself in inarticulate half-denial of Kraski's assumption of the new identity of Tarzan. Bluber was inwardly terror stricken. His keener intelligence had quickly grasped the truth of Kraski's recognition of the man for what he was rather than for what Peebles and Throck thought him to be, and, as Bluber knew nothing of Flora's plan, he was in quite a state of funk as he tried to visualize the outcome of Tarzan's discovery of them at the very threshold of Opar. He did not realize, as did Flora, that their very lives were in danger—that it was Tarzan of the Apes, a beast of the jungle, with whom they had to deal, and not John Clayton, Lord Greystoke, an English peer. Rather was Bluber considering the two thousand pounds that they stood to lose through this deplorable termination of their expedition, for he was sufficiently familiar with the reputation of the Ape-man to know that they would never be permitted to take with them the gold that Esteban was very likely, at this moment, pilfering from the vaults of Opar. Really Bluber was almost upon the verge of tears when Kraski returned with the coffee, which he brought himself.

From the dark shadows of the tent's interior Flora Hawkes looked nervously out upon the scene before her. She was terrified at the possibility of discovery by her former employer, for she had been a maid in the Greystoke's London town-house as well as at the African bungalow, and knew that Lord Greystoke would recognize her instantly should he chance to see her. She entertained for him, now, in his jungle haunts, a fear that was possibly greater than Tarzan's true character warranted, but none the less real was it to the girl whose guilty conscience conjured all sorts of possible punishments for her disloyalty to those who had always treated her with uniform kindliness and consideration.

Constant dreaming of the fabulous wealth of the treasure vaults of Opar, concerning which she had heard so much in detail from the conversation of the Greystokes, had aroused within her naturally crafty and unscrupulous mind a desire for possession, and in consequence thereof she had slowly visualized a scheme whereby she might loot the treasure vaults of a sufficient number of the golden ingots to make her indepen-

dently wealthy for life. The entire plan had been hers. She had at first interested Kraski, who had in turn enlisted the coöperation of the two Englishmen and Bluber, and these four had raised the necessary money to defray the cost of the expedition. It had been Flora who had searched for a type of man who might successfully impersonate Tarzan in his own jungle, and she had found Esteban Miranda, a handsome, powerful and unscrupulous Spaniard, whose histrionic ability, aided by the art of make-up, of which he was a past master, permitted him almost faultlessly to impersonate the character they desired him to portray, insofar, at least, as outward appearances were concerned. The Spaniard was not only powerful and active, but physically courageous as well, and since he had shaved his beard and donned the jungle habiliments of a Tarzan, he had lost no opportunity for emulating the Ape-man in every way that lay within his ability. Of jungle craft he had none, of course, and personal combats with the more savage jungle beasts caution prompted him to eschew, but he hunted the lesser game with spear and with arrow and practiced continually with the grass rope that was a part of his make-up.

And now Flora Hawkes saw all her well-laid plans upon the verge of destruction. She trembled as she watched the men before the fire, for her fear of Tarzan was very real, and then she became tense with nervous anticipation as she saw Kraski approaching the group with the coffee pot in one hand and cups in the other. Kraski set the pot and the cups upon the ground a little in the rear of Tarzan, and, as he filled the latter, she saw him pour a portion of the contents of the bottle she had given him into one of the cups. A cold sweat broke out upon her forehead as Kraski lifted this cup and offered it to the Ape-man. Would he take it? Would he suspect? And if he did suspect what horrible punishment would be meted to them all for their temerity? She saw Kraski hand another cup to Peebles, Throck, and Bluber, and then return to the circle with the last one for himself. And as the Russian raised it before his face and bowed politely to the Ape-man she saw the five men drink. The reaction which ensued left her weak and spent. Turning, she collapsed upon her cot, and lay there trembling, her face buried in her arm.

And, outside, Tarzan of the Apes drained his cup to the last drop.

CHAPTER VI.

DEATH STEALS BEHIND.

DURING the afternoon of the day that Tarzan discovered the camp of the conspirators a watcher upon the crumbling outer wall of the ruined city of Opar descried a party of men moving downward into the valley from the summit of the encircling cliff. Tarzan, Jane Clayton and their black Waziri were the only strangers that the denizens of Opar had ever seen within their valley during the lifetime of the oldest among them, and only in half-forgotten legends of a bygone past was there any suggestion that strangers other than these had ever visited Opar. Yet from time immemorial a guard had always remained upon the summit of the outer wall. Now a single knurled and crippled man-like creature was all that recalled the numerous, lithe warriors of lost Atlantis. For down through the long ages the race had deteriorated, and finally, through occasional mating with the great apes, the men had become the beast-like things of modern Opar. Strange and inexplicable had been the providence of nature that had confined this deterioration almost solely to the males, leaving the females straight, well-formed, and often of comely and even beautiful features, a condition that might be largely attributable to the fact that female infants possessing ape-like characteristics were immediately destroyed, while, on the other hand, boy babies who possessed purely human attributes were also done away with.

Typical indeed of the male inhabitants of Opar was the lone watcher upon the outer city wall, a short, stocky man with matted hair and beard, his tangled locks growing low upon a low, receding forehead; small, close-set eyes and fang-like teeth bore evidence of his simian ancestry, as did his short, crooked legs and long muscular

ape-like arms, all scantily hair-covered as was his torso.

As his wicked, blood-rimmed eyes watched the progress of the party across the valley toward Opar evidences of his growing excitement were manifested in the increased rapidity of his breathing, and low, almost inaudible growls that issued from his throat. The strangers were too far distant to be recognizable only as human beings and their number to be roughly approximated as between two and three score. Having assured himself of these two facts, the watcher descended from the outer wall, crossed the space between it and the inner wall, through which he passed, and at a rapid trot crossed the broad avenue beyond and disappeared within the crumbling, but still magnificent, temple beyond.

Cadj, the high priest of Opar, squatted beneath the shade of the giant trees which now overgrew what had been one of the gardens of the ancient temple. With him were a dozen members of the lesser priesthood, the intimate cronies of the high priest, who were startled by the sudden advent of one of the inferior members of the clan of Opar. The fellow hurried breathlessly to Cadj.

"Cadj," he cried, "strange men descend upon Opar! From the northwest they have come into the valley from beyond the barrier cliffs—fifty of them at least, perhaps half again that number. I saw them as I watched from the summit of the outer wall, but further than that they are men I cannot say, for they are still a great distance away. Not since the great tarmangani came among us last have there been strangers within Opar."

"It has been many moons since the great tarmangani who called himself Tarzan of Apes was among us," said Cadj. "He promised us to return before the rain to see that no harm had befallen La, but he did not come back, and La has always insisted that he is dead. Have you told any other of what you have seen?" he demanded, turning suddenly upon the messenger.

"No," replied the latter.

"Good!" exclaimed Cadj. "Come, we will all go to the outer wall and see who it is who dares enter forbidden Opar, and let no one breathe a word of what Blagh has told us until I give permission."

"The word of Cadj is law until La speaks," murmured one of the priests.

Cadj turned a scowling face upon the speaker. "I am high priest of Opar," he growled. "Who dares disobey me?"

"But La is high priestess," said one, "and the high priestess is the queen of Opar."

"But the high priest can offer whom he will as sacrifice in the Chamber of the Dead or *to the Flaming God,*" Cadj reminded the other meaningly.

"We shall keep silence, Cadj," replied the priests, cringing.

"Good," growled the high priest and led the way from the garden through the corridors of the temple back toward the outer wall of Opar. From here they watched the approaching party that was in plain view of them, far out across the valley. The watchers conversed in low gutterals in the language of the great apes, interspersed with which were occasional words and phrases of a strange tongue that were doubtless corrupted forms of the ancient language of Atlantis handed down through countless generations from their human progenitors—that now extinct race whose cities and civilization lie buried deep beneath the tossing waves of the Atlantic, and whose adventurous spirit had, in remote ages, caused them to penetrate into the heart of Africa in search of gold and to build there, in duplication of their far home cities, the magnificent city of Opar.

As Cadj and his followers watched from beneath shaggy brows the strangers plodding laboriously beneath the now declining equatorial sun across the rocky, barren valley, a gray little monkey eyed them from amidst the foliage of one of the giant trees that had forced its way through the pavement of the ancient avenue behind them. A solemn, sad-faced little monkey it was, but like all his kind overcome by curiosity, and finally to such an extent that his fear of the fierce males of Opar was so considerably overcome that he at last swung lightly from the tree to the pavement and made his way through the inner wall and up the inside of the outer wall to a position in

their rear, where he could hide behind one of the massive granite blocks of the crumbling wall in comparative safety from detection, the while he might overhear the conversation of the Oparians, all of which that was carried on in the language of the great apes he could understand perfectly.

The afternoon was drawing to a close before the slowly moving company approaching Opar was close enough for individuals to be recognizable in any way, and then presently one of the younger priests exclaimed excitedly:

"It is he, Cadj. It is the great tarmangani who calls himself Tarzan of the Apes. I can see him plainly; the others are all black men. He is urging them on, prodding them with his spear. They act as though they were afraid and very tired, but he is forcing them forward."

"You are sure," demanded Cadj, "you are sure that it is Tarzan of the Apes?"

"I am positive," replied the speaker, and then another of the priests joined his assurances to that of his fellow. And at last they were close enough so that Cadj himself, whose eyesight was not as good as the younger members of the company, realized that it was indeed Tarzan of the Apes who was returning to Opar. The high priest scowled angrily in thought. Suddenly he turned upon the others.

"He must not come," he cried. "He must not enter Opar. Hasten and fetch a hundred fighting men. We will meet them as they come through the outer wall and slay them one by one."

"But La," cried he who had aroused Cadj's anger in the garden, "I distinctly recall that La offered the friendship of Opar to Tarzan of the Apes upon that time, many moons ago, that he saved her from the tusks of infuriated Tantor."

"Silence," growled Cadj, "he shall not enter; we shall slay them all, though we need not know their identity until after it is too late. Do you understand? And know, too, that whosoever attempts to thwart my purpose shall die—and he die not as a sacrifice, he shall die at my hands, but die he shall. You hear me?" And he pointed an unclean finger at the trembling priest.

Manu, the monkey, hearing all this, was almost bursting with excitement. He knew Tarzan of the Apes, as all the migratory monkeys the length and breadth of Africa knew him—he knew him for a friend and protector. To Manu the males of Opar were neither beast, nor man, nor friend. He knew them as cruel and surly creatures who ate the flesh of his kind, and he hated them accordingly. He was therefore greatly exercised at the plot that he had heard discussed which was aimed at the life of the great tarmangani. He scratched his little gray head, and the root of his tail, and his belly, as he attempted mentally to digest what he had heard and bring forth from the dim recesses of his little brain a plan to foil the priests and save Tarzan of the Apes. And he made grotesque grimaces that were aimed at the unsuspecting Cadj and his followers, but which failed to perturb them, possibly because a huge granite block hid the little monkey from them.

This was quite the most momentous thing that had occurred in the life of Manu. He wanted to jump up and down and dance and screech and jabber—to scold and threaten the hated Oparians, but something told him that nothing would be gained by this, other than, perhaps, to launch in his direction a shower of granite missiles, which the priests knew only too well how to throw with accuracy. Now Manu is not a deep thinker, but upon this occasion he quite outdid himself, and managed to concentrate his mind upon the thing at hand rather than permit it being distracted by each falling leaf or buzzing insect. He even permitted a succulent caterpillar to crawl within his reach and out again with impunity.

Just before darkness fell Cadj saw a little grey monkey disappear over the summit of the outer wall fifty paces from where he crouched with his fellows, waiting for the coming of the fighting men. But so numerous were the monkeys about the ruins of Opar that the occurrence left Cadj's mind almost as quickly as the monkey disappeared from his view, and in the gathering gloom he did not see the little grey figure scampering off across the valley toward the band of intruders, who now appeared to have stopped to rest at the foot of a large

kopje that stood alone out in the valley, about a mile from the city.

Little Manu was very much afraid out there alone in the growing dusk, and he scampered very fast with his tail bowed up and out behind him. And all the time he cast affrighted glances to the right and left. The moment he reached the *kopje* he scampered up its face as fast as he could. It was really a huge precipitous granite rock with almost perpendicular sides, but sufficiently weather-worn to make its ascent easy to little Manu. He paused a moment at the summit to get his breath and still the beatings of his frightened little heart, and then he made his way around to a point where he could look on the party beneath.

There, indeed, was the great tarmangani Tarzan, and with him were some fifty go-mangani. The latter were splicing together a number of long, straight poles, which they had laid upon the ground in two parallel lines. Across these two, at intervals of a foot or more, they were lashing smaller straight branches about eighteen inches in length, the whole forming a crude but substantial ladder. The purpose of all this Manu, of course, did not understand, nor did he know that it had been evolved from the fertile brain of Flora Hawkes as a means of scaling the precipitous *kopje* at the summit of which lay the outer entrance to the treasure vaults of Opar. Nor did Manu know that the party had no intention of entering the city of Opar and were therefore in no danger of becoming victims of Cadj's hidden assassins. To him, the danger to Tarzan of the Apes was very real, and so, having regained his breath, he lost no time in delivering his warning to the friend of his people.

"Tarzan," he cried, in the language that was common to both.

The white man and the blacks looked up at the sound of his chattering voice.

"It is Manu, Tarzan," continued the little monkey, "who has come to tell you not to go to Opar. Cadj and his people await within the outer wall to slay you."

The blacks, having discovered that the author of the disturbance was nothing but a little gray monkey, returned immediately to their work; while the white man similarly ignored his words of warning. Manu was not surprised at the lack of interest displayed by the blacks, for he knew that they did not understand his language, but he could not comprehend why Tarzan failed to pay any attention whatsoever to him. Again and again he called Tarzan by name. Again and again he shrieked his warning to the Ape-man, but without eliciting any reply or any information that the great tarmangani had either heard or understood him. Manu was mystified. What had occurred to render Tarzan of the Apes so indifferent to the warnings of his old friend.

At last the little monkey gave it up and looked longingly back in the direction of the trees within the walled city of Opar. It was now very dark and he trembled at the thought of recrossing the valley, where he knew enemies might prowl by night. He scratched his head and then he hugged his knees, and then sat there whimpering, a very forlorn and unhappy little ball of a monkey. But however uncomfortable he was upon the high *kopje*, he was comparatively safe, and so he decided to remain there during the night rather than venture the terrifying return trip through the darkness. And thus it was that he saw the ladder completed and erected against the side of the *kopje*. And when the moon rose at last and lighted the scene, he saw Tarzan of the Apes urging his men to mount the ladder. He had never seen Tarzan thus rough and cruel with the blacks that accompanied him. Manu knew how ferocious the great tarmangani could be with an enemy, whether man or beast, but he had never seen him accord such treatment to the blacks that were his friends.

One by one and with evident reluctance the blacks ascended the ladder, continually urged forward to greater speed by the sharp spear of the white man, and when they had all ascended Tarzan followed them and Manu saw them disappear, apparently into the heart of the great rock.

It was only a short time later that they commenced to reappear, and now each was burdened by two heavy objects which appeared to Manu to be very similar to some of the smaller stone blocks that had been used in the construction of the buildings

in Opar. He saw them take the blocks to the *kopje* and cast them over to the ground beneath, and when the last of the blacks had emerged with his load and cast it to the valley below, one by one the party descended the ladder to the foot of the *kopje*. But this time Tarzan of the Apes went first. Then they lowered the ladder and took it apart and laid its pieces close to the foot of the cliff, after which they took up the blocks which they had brought from the heart of the *kopje*, and following Tarzan, who set out in the lead, they commenced to retrace their steps toward the rim of the valley.

Manu would have been very much mystified had he been a man, but being only a monkey he saw only what he saw without attempting to reason very much about it. He knew that the ways of men were peculiar, and oftentimes unaccountable. For example, the gomangani who could not travel through the jungle and the forest with the ease of any other of the animals which frequented them, added to their difficulties by loading themselves down with additional weights in the form of metal anklets and armlets, with necklaces and girdles, and with skins of animals, which did nothing more than impede their progress and render life much more complicated than that which the untrammeled beasts enjoyed. Manu, whenever he gave the matter a thought, congratulated himself that he was not a man —he pitied the foolish, unreasonable creatures.

Manu must have slept. He thought that he had only closed his eyes a moment, but when he opened them the rosy light of dawn had overspread the desolate valley. Just disappearing over the cliffs to the northeast he could see the last of Tarzan's party commencing the descent of the barrier, and then Manu turned his face toward Opar and prepared to descend from the *kopje*, and scamper back to the safety of his trees within the walls of Opar. But first he would reconnoiter—Sheeta, the panther, might be still abroad, and so he scampered around the edge of the *kopje* to a point where he could see the entire valley floor between himself and Opar. And there it was that he saw again that which filled him with greatest excitement. For, debouching from the ruined outer wall of Opar was a large company of Opar's frightful men—fully a hundred of them Manu could have counted had Manu been able to count.

They seemed to be coming toward the *kopje*, and he sat and watched them as they approached, deciding to defer his return to the city until after the path was cleared of hated Oparians. It occurred to him that they were coming after him, for the egotism of the lower animals is inordinate. Because he was a monkey, the idea did not seem at all ridiculous, and so he hid behind a jutting rock, with only one little, bright eye exposed to the enemy. He saw them come closer and he grew very much excited, though he was not at all afraid, for he knew that if they ascended one side of the *kopje* he could descend the other and be halfway to Opar before they could possibly locate him again. On and on they came, but they did not stop at the *kopje*—as a matter of fact, they did not come very close to it, but continued on beyond it. And then it was that the truth of the matter flashed into the little brain of the monkey—Cadj and his people were pursuing Tarzan of the Apes to slay him!

If Manu had been offended by Tarzan's indifference to him upon the night before, he had evidently forgotten it, for now he was quite as excited about the danger which he saw menace the Ape-man as he had been upon the afternoon previous. At first he thought of running ahead, and again warning Tarzan, but he feared to venture so far from the trees of Opar, even if the thought of having to pass the hated Oparians had not been sufficient to deter him from carrying out this plan. For a few minutes he sat watching them, until they had all passed the *kopje*, and then it became quite clear to him that they were heading directly for the spot at which the last of Tarzan's party had disappeared from the valley—there could be no doubt but what they were in pursuit of the Ape-man.

Manu scanned the valley once more toward Opar. There was nothing in sight to deter him from an attempted return. And so, with the agility of his kind, he scampered down the vertical face of the *kopje* and was off at great speed toward the city's

wall. Just when he formulated the plan that he eventually followed it is difficult to say. Perhaps he thought it all out as he sat upon the *kopje*, watching Cadj and his people upon the trail of the Ape-man, or, perhaps, it occurred to him while he was scampering across the barren waste toward Opar; or it may just have popped into his mind from a clear sky after he had regained the leafy sanctuary of his own trees. Be that, however, as it may, the fact remains, that as La, high priestess and princess of Opar, in company with several of her priestesses, was bathing in a pool in one of the temple gardens, she was startled by the screaming of a monkey, swinging frantically by his tail from the branch of a great tree which overspread the pool—it was a little gray monkey with a face so wise and serious that one might easily have imagined that the fate of nations lay constantly upon the shoulders of its owner.

"La! La!" it screamed. "They have gone to kill Tarzan. They have gone to kill Tarzan!"

At the sound of that name La was instantly all attention. Standing waist-deep in the pool she looked up at the little monkey questioningly. "What do you mean, Manu?" she asked. "It has been many moons since Tarzan was at Opar. He is not here now. What are you talking about?"

"I saw him," screamed Manu. "I saw him last night with many gomangani. He came to the great rock that lies in the valley before Opar, and with all his men he climbed to the top of it, and went into the heart of it, and came out with stones, which they threw down into the valley. And afterward they descended from the rock, and picked up the stones again and left the valley—there." And Manu pointed toward the northeast with one of his hairy little fingers.

"How do you know it was Tarzan of the Apes?" asked La.

"Does Manu not know his cousin and his friend?" demanded the monkey. "With my eyes I saw him—it was Tarzan of the Apes."

La of Opar puckered her brows in thought. Deep in her heart smoldered the fires of her great love for Tarzan—fires that had been quenched by the necessity that had compelled her marriage with Cadj since last she had seen the Ape-man. For it is written among the laws of Opar that the high priestess of the Flaming God must take a mate within a certain number of years after her consecration. For many moons had La longed to make Tarzan that mate. The Ape-man had not loved her, and finally she had come to a realization that he could never love her. Afterward she had bowed to the frightful fate that had placed her in the arms of Cadj.

As month after month had passed and Tarzan had not returned to Opar, as he had promised he would do, to see that no harm befell La, she had come to accept the opinion of Cadj that the Ape-man was dead, and though she hated the repulsive Cadj none the less, her love for Tarzan had gradually become little more than a sorrowful memory. Now to learn that he was alive and had been so near was like reopening an old wound. At first she comprehended little else than that Tarzan had been close to Opar, but presently the cries of Manu aroused her to a realization that the Ape-man was in danger—just what the danger she did not know.

"Who has gone to kill Tarzan of the Apes?" she demanded suddenly.

"Cadj, Cadj," shrieked Manu. "He has gone with many, many men, and is following upon the spoor of Tarzan."

La sprang quickly from the pool, seized her girdle and ornaments from her attendants and adjusting them, hurriedly sped through the garden and into the temple.

CHAPTER VII.

"YOU MUST SACRIFICE HIM!"

WARILY Cadj and his hundred frightful followers, armed with their bludgeons and knives, crept stealthily down the face of the barrier cliffs into the valley below, upon the trail of the white man and his black companions. They made no haste, for they had noted from the summit of Opar's outer wall, that the party they were pursuing moved very slowly, though why they did not know, for they

had been at too great a distance to see the burden that each of the blacks carried. Nor was it Cadj's desire to overtake his quarry by daylight, his plans contemplating a stealthy night attack, the suddenness of which, together with the great number of his followers, might easily confuse and overwhelm a sleeping camp.

The spoor they followed was well marked. There could be no mistaking it, and they moved slowly down the now gentle declivity toward the bottom of the valley. It was close to noon that they were brought to a sudden halt by the discovery of a thorn *boma* recently constructed in a small clearing just ahead of them. From the center of the *boma* arose the thin smoke of a dying fire. Here, then, was the camp of the Ape-man.

Cadj drew his followers into the concealment of the thick bushes that bordered the trail, and from there he sent ahead a single man to reconnoiter. It was but a few moments later that the latter returned to say that the camp was deserted, and once again Cadj moved forward with his men. Entering the *boma* they examined it in an effort to estimate the size of the party that accompanied Tarzan. And as they were thus occupied Cadj saw something lying half concealed by bushes at the far end of the *boma*. Very warily he approached it, for there was that about it which not only aroused his curiosity, but prompted him to caution, for it resembled, indistinctly, the figure of a man lying huddled upon the ground.

With ready bludgeons a dozen of them approached the thing that had aroused Cadj's curiosity, and when they had come close to it they saw lying before them the lifeless figure of Tarzan of the Apes.

"The Flaming God has reached forth to avenge his desecrated altar!" cried the high priest, his eyes glowing with the maniacal fires of fanaticism. But another priest, more practical, perhaps, or at least more cautious, kneeled beside the figure of the Ape-man and placed his ear against the latter's heart.

"He is not dead," he whispered, "perhaps he only sleeps."

"Seize him, then, quickly," cried Cadj, and an instant later Tarzan's body was covered by the hairy forms of as many of the frightful men as could pile upon him. He offered no resistance—he did not even open his eyes. And presently his arms were securely bound behind him.

"Drag him forth where the eye of the Flaming God may rest upon him," cried Cadj.

They dragged Tarzan out into the center of the *boma* into the full light of the sun, and Cadj, the high priest, drawing his knife from his loin cloth, raised it above his head and stood over the prostrate form of his intended victim. Cadj's followers formed a rough circle about the Ape-man and some of them pressed close behind their leader. They appeared uneasy, looking alternately at Tarzan and their high priest, and then casting furtive glances at the sun, riding high in a cloud-mottled sky. But whatever the thoughts that troubled their half-savage brains, there was only one who dared voice his, and he was the same priest who, upon the preceding day, had questioned Cadj's proposal to slay the Ape-man.

"Cadj," he said now, "who are you to offer up a sacrifice to the Flaming God? It is the privilege alone of La, our high priestess and our queen, and indeed will she be angry when she learns what you have done."

"Silence, Dooth!" cried Cadj. "I, Cadj, am the high priest of Opar. I, Cadj, am the mate of La, the queen. My word, too, is law in Opar. And you would remain a priest, and you would remain alive, keep silence!"

"Your word is not law," replied Dooth angrily, "and if you anger La, the high priestess, or if you anger the Flaming God, you may be punished as another. If you make this sacrifice both will be angry."

"Enough!" cried Cadj. "The Flaming God has spoken to me and has demanded that I offer up as sacrifice this defiler of his temple."

He knelt beside the Ape-man and touched his breast above the heart with the point of his sharp blade, and then he raised the weapon high above him, preparatory to the fatal plunge into the living heart. And at that instant a cloud passed before the face

of the sun and a shadow rested upon them. A murmur rose from the surrounding priests.

"Look!" cried Dooth. "The Flaming God is angry. He has hidden his face from the people of Opar."

Cadj paused. He cast a half-defiant, half-frightened look at the cloud obscuring the face of the sun. Then he rose slowly to his feet, and extending his arms upward toward the hidden God of day, he remained for a moment silent in apparently attentive and listening attitude. Then, suddenly, he turned upon his followers.

"Priests of Opar," he cried, "the Flaming God has spoken to his high priest, Cadj. He is not angered. He but wishes to speak to me alone, and he directs that you go away into the jungle and wait until he has come and spoken to Cadj, after which I shall call you to return. Go!"

For the most part they seemed to accept the word of Cadj as law, but Dooth and a few others, doubtless prompted by a certain skepticism, hesitated.

"Begone!" commanded Cadj.

And so powerful is the habit of obedience that the doubters finally turned away and melted into the jungle with the others. A crafty smile lighted the cruel face of the high priest as the last of them disappeared from sight, and then he once again turned his attention to the Ape-man. That deep within his breast, however, lurked an inherent fear of his deity was evidenced by the fact that he turned questioning glances toward the sky. He had determined to slay the Ape-man while Dooth and the others were absent, yet the fear of his god restrained his hand, until the light of the deity should shine forth upon him once more and assure him that the thing he contemplated might meet with favor.

It was a large cloud that overcast the sun, and while Cadj waited his nervousness increased. Six times he raised his knife for the fatal blow, yet in each instance his superstition prevented the consummation of the act. Five, ten, fifteen minutes passed, and still the sun remained obscured. But now at last Cadj could see that it was nearing the edge of the cloud, and once again he took his position kneeling beside the Ape-man with his blade ready for the moment that the sunlight should flood again, and for the last time, the living Tarzan. He saw it sweeping slowly across the *boma* toward him, and as it came a look of demoniacal hatred shone in his close-set wicked eyes. Another instant and the Flaming God would have set the seal of his approval upon the sacrifice. Cadj trembled in anticipation. He raised the knife a trifle higher, his muscles tensed for the downward plunge, and then the silence of the jungle was broken by a woman's voice, raised almost to a scream—

"Cadj!" came the single word, but with all the suddenness and all the surprising effect of lightning from a clear sky.

His knife still poised on high, the high priest turned in the direction of the interruption to see at the clearing's edge the figure of La, the high priestess, and behind her Dooth and a score of the lesser priests.

"What means this, Cadj?" demanded La angrily, approaching rapidly toward him across the clearing.

Sullenly the high priest rose.

"The Flaming God demanded the life of this unbeliever," he cried.

"Speaker of lies," retorted La, "the Flaming God communicates with men through the lips of his high priestess only. Too often already have you attempted to thwart the will of your queen. Know, then, Cadj, that the power of life and death which your queen holds is as potent over you as another. During the long ages that Opar has endured, our legends tell us that more than one high priest has been offered upon the altar to the Flaming God. And it is not unlikely that yet another may go the way of the presumptuous. Curb, therefore, your vanity and your lust for power, lest they prove your undoing."

Cadj sheathed his knife and turned sullenly away, casting a venomous look at Dooth, to whom he evidently attributed his undoing. That he was temporarily abashed by the presence of his queen was evident, but to those who knew Cadj there was little doubt but what he still harbored his intention to dispatch the Ape-man, and if the opportunity ever presented itself that he would do so, for Cadj had a strong fol-

lowing among the people and priests of Opar, and there were many who doubted that La would ever dare to incur the displeasure and anger of so important a portion of her followers as to cause the death or degradation of their high priest, who occupied his office by virtue of laws and customs so old that their origin had been long lost in antiquity.

For years she had found first one excuse and then another to delay the ceremonies that would unite her in marriage to the high priest. She had further aroused the antagonism of her people by extremely palpable proofs of her infatuation for the Ape-man, and even though at last she had been compelled to mate with Cadj, she had made no effort whatsoever to conceal her hatred and loathing for the man. How much further she could go with impunity was a question that often troubled those whose positions in Opar depended upon her favor, and, knowing all these conditions as he did, it was not strange that Cadj should entertain treasonable thoughts toward his queen.

Leagued with him in his treachery was Oah, a priestess who aspired to the power and offices of La. If La could be done away with, then Cadj had the influence to see that Oah became high priestess. And he also had Oah's promise to mate with him and permit him to rule as king. But as yet both were bound by the superstitious fear of their flaming deity, and because of this fact was the life of La temporarily made safe. It required, however, but the slightest spark to ignite the flames of treason that were smoldering about her.

So far she was well within her rights in forbidding the sacrifice of Tarzan by the high priest. But her fate, her very life, perhaps, depended upon her future treatment of the prisoner. Should she spare him, should she evidence in any way a return of the great love she had once almost publicly avowed for him, it was likely that her doom would be sealed. And it was even questionable whether or not she might with impunity spare his life and set him free.

Cadj and the others watched her closely now as she crossed to the side of Tarzan. Standing there silently for several moments, she looked down upon him.

"He is already dead?" she asked.

"He was not dead when Cadj sent us away," volunteered Dooth. "If he is dead now it is because Cadj killed him while we were away."

"I did not kill him," said Cadj. "That remains, as La, our queen, has told you, for her to do. The eye of the Flaming God looks down upon you, high priestess of Opar. The knife is at your hip, the sacrifice lies before you."

La ignored the man's words and turned toward Dooth. "If he still lives," she said, "construct a litter and bear him back to Opar."

And thus, once more, came Tarzan of the Apes into the ancient colonial city of the Atlantians. The effects of the narcotic that Kraski had administered to him did not wear off for many hours. It was night when he opened his eyes, and for a moment he was bewildered by the darkness and the silence that surrounded him. All that he could scent at first was that he lay upon a pile of furs and that he was uninjured; for he felt no pain. Slowly there broke through the fog of his drugged brain recollection of the last moment before unconsciousness had overcome him, and presently he realized the trick that had been played upon him. For how long he had been unconscious and where he then was he could not imagine.

Slowly he arose to his feet, finding that except for a slight dizziness he was quite himself. Cautiously he felt around in the darkness, moving with care, a hand outstretched, and always feeling carefully with his feet for a secure footing. Almost immediately a stone wall stopped his progress, and this he followed around four sides of what he soon realized was a small room in which there were but two openings, a door upon each of the opposite sides. Only his sense of touch and smell were of value to him here. And these told him only at first that he was imprisoned in a subterranean chamber, but as the effects of the narcotic diminished the keenness of the latter returned, and with its return there was borne in upon Tarzan's brain an insistent impression of familiarity in certain fragrant odors that impinged upon his olfactory organs—

a haunting suggestion that he had known them before under similar circumstances. Presently from above, through earth and masonry, came the shadow of an uncanny scream—just the faintest suggestion of it reached the keen ears of the Ape-man, but it was sufficient to flood his mind with vivid recollections, and, by association of ideas, to fix the identity of the familiar odors about him. He knew at last that he was in the dark pit beneath Opar.

And above him, in her chamber in the temple, La, the high priestess, tossed upon a sleepless couch. She knew all too well the temper of her people and the treachery of the high priest, Cadj. She knew the religious fanaticism which prompted the oft-time maniacal actions of her bestial and ignorant followers, and she guessed truly that Cadj would inflame them against her should she fail this time in sacrificing the Ape-man to the Flaming God. And it was the effort to find an escape from her dilemma that left her sleepless, for it was not in the heart of La to sacrifice Tarzan of the Apes. High priestess of a horrid cult, though she was, and queen of a race of half-beasts, yet she was a woman, too—a woman who had loved but once and given that love to the godlike Ape-man who was again within her power. Twice before had he escaped her sacrificial knife, and in the final instance love had at last triumphed over jealousy and fanaticism, and La, the woman, had realized that never again could she place in jeopardy the life of the man she loved, however hopeless she knew that love to be.

To-night she was faced with a problem that she felt almost beyond her powers of solution. The fact that she was mated to Cadj removed the last vestige of hope that she had ever had of becoming the wife of the Ape-man. Yet she was no less determined to save Tarzan if it were possible. Twice had he saved her life—once from a mad priest, and once from Tantor. And, too, she had given her word that when Tarzan came again to Opar he came in friendship and would be received in friendship. But the influence of Cadj was great, and she knew that that influence had been directed unremittingly against the Ape-man. She had seen it in the attitude of her followers from the very moment that they had placed Tarzan upon a litter to bear him back to Opar—she had seen it in the evil glances that had been cast at her. Sooner or later they would dare denounce her—all that they needed was some slight, new excuse. And that she knew they eagerly awaited in her forthcoming attitude toward Tarzan.

It was well after midnight when there came to her one of the priestesses who remained always upon guard outside her chamber door.

"Dooth would speak with you," whispered the handmaiden.

"It is late," replied La, "and men are not permitted in this part of the temple. How came he here, and why?"

"He says that he comes in the service of La, who is in great danger," replied the girl.

"Fetch him here, then," said La, "and as you value your life see that you tell no one."

"I shall be as voiceless as the stones of the altar," replied the girl as she turned and left the chamber.

A moment later she returned, bringing Dooth, who halted a few feet from the high priestess and saluted her. La signaled to the girl who had brought him to depart, and then she turned questioningly to the man.

"Speak, Dooth!" she commanded.

"We all know," he said, "of La's love for the strange Ape-man, and it is not for me, a lesser priest, to question the thoughts or acts of my high priestess. It is only for me to serve, as those would do better to serve who now plot against you."

"What do you mean, Dooth? Who plots against me?"

"Even at this minute are Cadj and Oah and several of the priests and priestesses carrying out a plan for your undoing. They are setting spies to watch you, knowing that you would liberate the Ape-man, because there will come to you one who will tell you that to permit him to escape will be the easiest solution of your problem. This one will be sent by Cadj, and then those who watch you will report to the

people and to the priests that they have seen you lead the sacrifice to liberty. But even that will avail you nothing, for Cadj and Oah and the others have placed upon the trail from Opar many men in hiding, who will fall upon the Ape-man and slay him before the Flaming God has descended twice into the western forest. In but one way only may you save yourself, La, of Opar."

"And what is that way?" she asked.

"You must, with your own hands, upon the altar of our temple, *sacrifice the Ape-man to the Flaming God!*"

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.

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THE LOVERS OF LAND AND SEA

OH, the Lord of all creation
When the universe He planned,
Called forth the light from the darkness,
And divided sea from land.

And His creatures He divided—
Yes, some He ordained to be
Forever lovers of solid earth,
And some, of the restless sea!

And ever they be divided—
The lovers of sea and land;
And each at the other shall look askance,
Nor ever can understand!

And to each He gave a lover
When He fashioned me and you—
Your homing heart for the green, sweet earth—
But mine for the boundless blue!

You dream of a vine-clad cottage
Shut in by hedge and by tree—
The winds of God's wide heavens
And the deck of a ship for me!

For you, the shade of the elm tree,
For you the scent of the pine—
But, oh, the shade of the flowing sail
For me, and the scent of brine!

The roads that you love lead homeward
Through well-known meadow and lea,
But ever I'm looking seaward—
The road to the shore for me!

You love the things that are growing,
Green things that demand your care—
But I, the emerald gardens
In the deep sea waters there!

And you, when the winds are blowing,
You shiver there by the fire;
But I—oh, I would be going
To follow my heart's desire!

Oh, why did the Lord Creator
When He fashioned me and you
Make you a lover of solid earth,
And me, of the restless blue?

And why did I chance to love you?
Why came you to care for me?
Can ever earth lovers be mated
With the lovers of the sea?

Roselle Mercier Montgomery.

The Come-on-out Bird

By JOHN D. SWAIN

IN most Caucasian minds the reaction of the southern islands is one of voluptuous languor, followed too often by a sort of moral decadence. Upon John Musick, the newest arrival at Olahi, the effect was curiously repellent.

To him there was something subtly immoral in the unbelievably green iridescence of its very lizards; and the astonishing size and luminosity of the tropical moon seemed almost indecent. He felt that it should be at least partially draped in a fleecy cloud.

Here and there, in those first days of his residency, he recognized the florid ancestors of some of the pale blossoms of his own harsh north; and their luxuriance filled him with a curious disgust. At home, one pruned gently; here the ax must literally be laid to colossal plants whose blooms were stupefying in perfume, and of hues so garish that they hurt the eyes of the beholder by sunlight.

He understood—so he told himself—why it was that the Polynesian had never advanced beyond the mere animal joys of existence; and why hardier races, transplanted here, soon fell into a decay akin to the state of the devotee of the poppy—the eater of the lotus!

For here nature had anticipated every primal desire and need. The native had but to sit beneath a shady tree, and delicious and nourishing food would literally drop into his idle lap. Were he to long for a change of diet he had but to roll over to a different sort of tree. A hollow scooped in the warm, clean sand made such a bed as kings lacked, with the eternal piping of the sea for lullaby. Clothes were merely ceremonial; matter of ostentation. But now, of course, since the missionaries brought the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil, garments were a matter of statute.

And women! Nowhere else are there such perfect human specimens. They were not immoral—not until the superior races introduced vice. They ate, and slept, and sang, and loved as nature prompted them.

With exploitation came the inhibitions of the white man, superimposed upon their own ancient taboos. They never became really civilized; but they lost their old innocence, their childish satisfaction with things as they were.

The little group, of which Olahi, the largest island, is but a dot on the maps, is unknown to the tourist. This is largely because it is jealously held as a concession by the old Aberdeen house of Blackwell & Blackwell, and also because it is off the trade routes.

Eastward, four thousand miles distant, lies San Francisco. The Fijis are some four hundred miles southwest by south. Apia, Olahi's point of contact with the outside world, lies a day's journey to the northeast. From it steamers make Aberdeen in from four to six weeks' time.

There are only four whites in the Blackwell concession. All young men, replaced from time to time. They occupy a low, white bungalow behind which cluster the toadstool huts of the servants. To the left lie the factories or warehouses. The products are varied, their very names redolent of the tropics. There is an abundance of good shell in a near-by atoll, from which some rare pearls have been taken. There is a vanilla plantation, a field of climbing orchids whose pleasing seeds find their way to a million kitchens. Long-fibered cotton is grown in small quantities. There is copra, of course.

The duties of the factors are not onerous. Chiefly they are needed to keep the indolent natives at work. Out where the pearl divers toil, vigilance is needed to forestall theft. Considering that the divers are nude, their ingenuity in concealing a rare find is remarkable.

Of laws there are few, but these are inexorable. Not to give or sell spirits to the natives — that is the most important, of course. The Anglo-Saxon has, after centuries of effort, almost immunized himself to the effects of strong drink, as has the Oriental to the seed of the poppy. The powerful, unbelievably healthy native wilts almost overnight beneath the assaults of grain alcohol. In a generation he may become extinct. True he has his palm wine, his concoctions of coconut milk, orange and pineapple juice, "swipes," the beachcombers call them. He has his less enticing *kava*, made by the women who chew ginger root and expectorate into bowls, where fermentation sets rapidly in. These are exhilarating, and one may become very drunk upon them; but they are not to be compared in devastating after-effect with the fortified wines of the Caucasian.

George Mills, a Briton, met Musick at Apia, and helped him transfer to the single-screw company packet which chugged leisurely across the blue, mirror-smooth seas to Olahi. At the little dock, Jules Ferandeau, a Frenchman, and Lem Harper, a Yankee, waited to greet him. They seemed an amiable little family, and made it plain that they wanted John Musick to like Olahi and them.

After a surprisingly good dinner with real champagne, they sat on the veranda with coffee and cigars and long, tapering cigarettes. They asked eagerly about things outside. None of them had been farther than Apia for a full year. They blessed him for fetching along a trunkful of magazines and books.

The moonlight was so brilliant that it was possible to read a newspaper by it. Back of their bungalows the voices of some servants came to them, accompanied by little, softly thrummed guitars with fat bellies, curiously carved. Before them the sea whispered upon sand as fine as chalk.

At midnight, and after he had retired, he was surprised by the entry of his three confreres, clad in pyjamas and wearing wreaths of hibiscus. Each bore a cup of fermented pineapple juice. Solemnly they paraded about his cot, singing their own *International*: *"How dry I am!"*

The words and tune seemed grotesquely out of place in this Eden of the Pacific.

"But it's the true white man's anthem," Harper explained. "Known everywhere. In places like Tibet, and along the Gold Coast, the niggers think it's either a patriotic song or a dirge!"

Musick sipped in turn from each cup, and then they left him, laughing and rollicking like schoolboys. Five minutes later he was profoundly asleep.

In the days that followed he was instructed as to local customs and regulations, and his particular duties. You mustn't quarrel, or be seen intoxicated before the natives. Race superiority to be maintained at all costs! Must respect their meaningless taboos as far as possible. Never meddle with their wives.

"Or daughters," smiled Musick.

"Oh, that's different," they protested.

"But he mustn't go alone to the Slide Rock!" Ferandeau added, whereat they all laughed, but would not explain.

They considerately sought to learn for what his training and inclination had especially fitted him; and, finding that he was a natural bookkeeper, a lover of card indexes and cross filing, they rejoiced to turn over to him the dull, dry accounting which they all detested. It was evident that they would get on famously together. True he did not play bridge; but they would teach him. Chess he played much better than any of them.

The white man in the tropics turns almost inevitably to square-faced gin; but John Musick soon learned that none of his companions was in any sense a hard drinker. They had wine always, with dinner, and they laced their iced fruit juices with brandy, or rum, or gin as they fancied. They were as likely as not to omit cordials with coffee. For factors they were almost abstemious. Musick was pleased to note that they had ordered a case of special Scotch for himself; but ten bottles of it were untouched after a month's residence.

That other question which always rises wherever lonely white men penetrate the wilderness did not for some days crop up in their talk. It was often in Musick's mind, because he knew that the craving for woman's society grows intolerable after a time, where any sort of women are available. Where there are none, as on whaling voyages, or the early stages of a gold rush, men can forget easily enough; but the most caste-bound Caucasian will yield in time to the inertia of voluptuous ease and tropic gorgeousness, and will pour into a brown, or yellow, yes, or a black ear the silly prattle that he must purge his system of. That, even if he goes no further.

And nature has fashioned its Kanaka women as lavishly and cunningly as it has spread its splendid odors, and colors, and ripe fruition over sea and land.

It was a week after his arrival that Musick awoke to hear an insistent bird-call he had not before noticed amid the multifarious voices of the moon-shot nights.

Over and over it repeated three notes, at intervals as regular as if controlled by a split-second watch; but every now and then it skipped a beat. It was this which kept Musick awake. Exasperated, he waited despite himself for the inevitable break in the rhythm; just as sleep had many times been banished in the old Aberdeen homestead by some mouse gnawing, intermittently, in the aged timbers.

The comparison of the unknown songster with our whippoorwill is misleading; because his is a melancholy refrain, and with an odd, whirring sound at the close, as if he were wound up with a key. And while he begins on a rising note, this unknown songster ended on one. With the waning of the moon, he finished his concert and John Musick slept again.

At breakfast he inquired as to the name and appearance of his entertainer.

"Sounds like 'have a peg!' Doesn't it?" Mills said. "But we call him the 'come-on-out' bird. None of us ever had seen him. His nest is one of the local taboos, by the way."

Ferandeau laughed.

"It is the invitation, not so? To-night we shall take Monsieur Musick to Slide Rock!"

They all laughed, but would not enlighten him.

"Just wait. You'll be surprised!"

II.

It was past ten o'clock when their longboat pushed off for the little island in the offing, with four Kanakas paddling.

Musick had seen only three or four women at Olahi, where the only natives were domestics, mostly married couples. They were not especially attractive, nor young; that is, by the tropical standard, which lists all females as old just as soon

as the dew of morn has departed, though they may yet be in their early twenties, or even less. These women wore slovenly Mother Hubbards, as their men preferred dungarees to the more picturesque native garb.

The moon was just past the full; and he noted that, whereas back home it gilds the landscape, here it was present as an element in which they moved as fish move in sunlit depths. One felt that he breathed in this liquid gold, and that it tanned his face like sunshine.

Seen in its amber lucidity, the flamboyant scarlet blossoms of the pepper trees glowed sullenly, like coagulated blood. The heady scents of frangipani and bush-jasmine overcame the more subtle appeal of the white tiaré flowers.

Several little lights beckoned them from the isle as they drew near. They were coconut-shell fires, over which were roasting breadfruit, bananas, turtle eggs, cuttlefish arms. More substantial meat steamed in a pot lined with hot stones and covered with wet pandanus mats. There were many figures running to and fro on the shelving beach. A dozen waded out to meet them and to help their paddlers haul the longboat high and dry.

"*Talofa li!*" They greeted the four young white men, their teeth white in the moonlight. Men and women alike, Musick observed, wore wreaths of flowers or red berries. And little or nothing besides. He averted his eyes; and Ferandeau chuckled.

There was no familiarity; no one laid so much as a finger upon them, and the blended hospitality and tact with which they were made to understand that the beach and all it held was theirs, but that their aloofness would be respected, impressed the Scotchman as something which could not so spontaneously have been expressed in a drawing room.

The lanky American stretched his limbs.

"Time enough to feed later on. Let's go see 'em slide! Those kids do a cruel flop, be-lieve you me!"

They moved along the beach, followed discreetly by those of the natives who were not feasting, or tending the fires.

Half a dozen furlongs down the shore, a curious volcanic rock sloped at an acute angle into the sea. It was, Musick estimated, quite a hundred yards in length; and it glistened like a porpoise. Naturally smooth, its every little irregularity had been patiently scraped and polished by generations of brown palms, using shells for the more obstinate protuberances, carefully removing every barnacle or clinging seaweed, and frequently rubbing with oil of copra.

Down its ice-bare slope slid a succession of laughing and singing girls, with here and there a boy. Singly, in pairs, again in human chains with each individual clinging to her predecessor's ankles; sitting, lying on back or breast, and even rolling over and over, they shot with incredible speed down the black, satiny surface, to enter the water clean as a knife blade, or to tumble in helter-skelter, casting up a phosphorescent spray that rained back into the golden sea liked drops of cool flame.

Seen in that lambent haze of ineffable moonlight, in every posture of unconscious grace and beauty, nature's last word in symmetry, the figures seemed to be translucent, as if the moonbeams passed through their bodies.

For how long he stood enthralled, John Musick never knew. He had never conceived such unearthly loveliness; a loveliness that, oddly, made him feel like weeping. It was the beginning of time; the adolescence of the race. The voice of Mills broke the spell.

"Thought it would hit you, old seed! Nothing like it in all the world. Think of the poor, tired millionaires on roof-gardens trying to get a thrill from a flock of painted hussies wearing clothes!"

Lem Harper laughed.

"Righto! Well—snap out of it, Musick. I'm for a slide! How 'bout it?"

His fingers played with the buttons of his white shirt.

Musick breathed deep. He wondered how long he had been holding his breath. His delight took wings.

"*No!*" he answered, almost brusquely.

"Give him time," Ferandeau said. "He shall wear a groove in Slide Rock, when he loses his timidity! Not so?"

The Scotchman turned away in distaste, as his three companions hurried forward to the rock. He was striding back towards their landing place before an uproar of hoarse merriment rose high above the softer voices of the island folk.

Just outside the glare of the beach fires, he sat down moodily facing the open sea. He did not see a slender figure detach itself from a group about the roasting pit, to approach with timid steps, and by a zig-zag route. He did not hear the sigh which heralded its arrival. But to the soft touch of a hand on him, he awoke abruptly from his reverie.

A comely girl of seventeen, he guessed, though unusually well developed for that age. In fact, she was twelve; but twelve in the tropics means more, and less, than it implies to us.

She smiled engagingly, and gracefully rearranged her wreath of tiaré flowers. There was nothing else to arrange.

"You seeck for home?"

Her voice was, like everything else in these islands, superlative. Her eyes were bigger, her back and limbs straighter, her curves curvier than any—

He was overwhelmed once more with the sense of irritation he could not understand. And for an absurd second or two, everything was swept away; beach—singers—the super-moon—the golden bodies sliding down that black, oily rock into a blazing sea. In their place were the cobblestones, the uncompromising brick houses, the decent black coats and the heavy footfalls, the kippered-herring smell of old Aberdeen.

He opened his eyes, and found himself walking towards one of the little fires about which sat a ring of Kanakas with dripping fingers stuffing morsels of hot food into their mouths. He glanced behind him. The little girl was nowhere to be seen. The feasters politely offered him toasted land crabs, crisp beetle grubs, taro. He refused with grave courtesy, and crossed over to watch a curious *siva-siva*, a sitting dance which brought out the thigh muscles like ropes.

It was hard on to dawn when he was rejoined by his three fellows. They seemed drowsy, and disinclined to talk. John Musick was secretly relieved that there were no girls with them. Later, he learned that his fears were groundless. It wasn't done. On Olahi, there were no women but the old wives—the old wives of twenty-odd years, wearing Mother Hubbards.

"They flirt—no doubt?" Musick asked the question abruptly next day.

"Why waste time flirting?" Mills grinned.

"The pretty dears wouldn't know what it was all about," Harper explained.

Mills was by far the worst of the three, Musick found in time. There was no attempt at reticence in their restricted life. No need for any. They were all full-blooded males, and none was apologetic.

Conditions pandered to them in every way. There were no such complications as lurk behind every intrigue in civilized lands. Of course, had they been so ill-advised as to fancy some young Kanaka's fiancée—or his wife—a new factor or two would have been sent out to replace the missing. But as the women outnumbered the men three to one, there was little or no excuse for imprudences. And according to Polynesian tradition, a girl greatly improved her chances of marriage by winning the regard of a white man. It set upon her the cachet of superior taste and approval. For these were the descendants of the mermaids who had swum out to sea to meet the first trading ships. So far from there being any question of wronging a maiden, or grieving her parents, one enjoyed the complacent feeling of the bestower of charity!

All this John Musick saw, and objectively he even came to condone it. But for himself—never! There was a horny crust of Presbyterianism over him. Not officially, since he took little interest in religion, as such. It was in his blood, rather than his soul.

They chaffed him good-naturedly about it. They told him that it was all a matter of time; the "come-on-out" bird would get him at last, cold-blooded Lowlander though he were! But once he took the step—they rolled their eyes, and shook their heads, and affected apprehension of the huge crop of wild oats that might then be looked for!

As time wore on, and he pursued his

steady gait, they accused him of being engaged to some bonny lassie back home. But no letters ever came to him save from his mother, and a young brother in Edinburgh, and these he usually read aloud to them.

"I'm no affianced," he said with his slow manner; "but some day I'll meet the right woman—and I'll come to her clean!"

They gave him up at length. It took all sorts to make a world, they admitted. And, anyhow, he was unbeatable at chess! The gods wisely enough did not choose to bestow all their gifts on any one man.

The right woman came unexpectedly—as she usually does. Once or twice a month two of the factors, turn and turn about, steamed over to Apia for a bit of change. It is quite a busy little metropolis of some four thousand, with golf and tennis and trap shooting, and haberdashers and afternoon tea. The residents are always eager to see that the many lonely young factors from distant isles get as little sleep as possible during their brief holiday. There are always a few tourists to add zest.

Musick, on his first leave of absence, went in company with Ferandeau. He wasn't particularly keen about the trip, either. Later on he shuddered to recall that he had been on the point of surrendering his turn to Mills!

For it was on his very first dinner out that he was presented to Alice Lockwood. Before his back had straightened from bowing over her hand, he was madly in love with her.

She was the only daughter of a Baltimore sportsman who was cruising in his own yacht, and had left Alice in Apia with an old schoolmate, while he steamed off on some little junket of his own. The day after he met her, Musick played golf all forenoon with her. He played a strong game, though a bit out of practice. In the afternoon they rode and had tea. They met again in the evening at a house party.

Ferandeau also met her, of course. In Apia, one meets every one else. He liked her—but admitted that he preferred blondes. He was rather fed up on brown types! So he attached himself to the daughter of the Swedish consul.

They ragged Musick when he got back to Olahi of course; and the poor devil enjoyed it! It pleased him to be associated with Alice Lockwood, even in jest. They teased him by debating whether or not to let him return in a fortnight, in place of George Mills, who pretended that Apia bored him. But in the end Mills took advantage of his leave, and when he returned, declared that for once Musick had shown good judgment.

"She's a keen little sportswoman!" he declared. "We had some rare tennis, and she carried the first set to deuce!"

He talked so much about her that poor Musick became jealous. He scarcely ate during the two days before his own next holiday arrived.

This time he saw less of Miss Lockwood, because by now she was extremely popular, and had more invitations than she could accept. Still, she was very kind, and her attitude bred a wild hope in the young Scot's heart.

Mills's turn came round again; and he came home full of banter for Musick. He announced that it was whispered in Apia that Musick was to be hired as Captain Lockwood's gillie, to look after his guns and rods, and teach the fair Alice to play tournament golf.

"That's great!" Lem Harper declared. "I remember that Queen Victoria's gillie, old John Brown, was given a military funeral and a monument worth ten thousand dollars!"

"I'm not keen for the funeral, but I'd chuck you chaps' society any day to teach golf to Miss Lockwood!" Musick stoutly replied.

It was on his third visit that he determined to propose to her. It might be rushing matters a bit, to be sure; but her father was due back at any time now, and this might well be his only chance. The match wasn't entirely one-sided; Musick would come into a nice property upon his mother's death, and had a pretty cozy sum even now, well invested in colonial projects.

It was not until his last night that he found himself alone with her, on the country club veranda. A Hawaiian quartet plucked from their steel guitars what has been

termed the music of a dying race. There was no moon, for which Musick was glad. He had come to feel that moonlight was just a wee bit improper—a little loud, down among the South Seas!

It was his dance, and she had played into his hands by asking him to sit it out on the cool veranda, and to fetch her a sherbet. His hand shook as he handed it to her, and some shreds of pineapple fell on her gauzy skirt.

"So sorry!" he begged. "Er—Miss Lockwood — Alice — I — this is the only chance I've had to say something—"

The look in her eyes frightened him. Their pain was unmistakable. The shy, reserved Scot flushed to his sandy hair, drowning out his freckles.

"What—have I—" he stammered.

She put a firm, cool little hand on his.

"John, I'm terribly sorry!" she breathed. There were real tears in her eyes. "I did so hope we could go on being just simply friends—you've been so big and fine—but I've got to tell you now! I've promised somebody else."

Every bit of color fled from his face. He gasped, as if from a blow in the chest.

"Do—do I know him?" he whispered.

She bent her brown head.

"I'm going to marry George Mills. I—I hoped he would tell you himself!"

III.

John Musick turned restlessly in his bed. The light of the full moon flooded his room. Since coming back from Apia, he had not averaged two hours' sleep during the endless tropical nights.

There had been no jests upon his return this last time. They had asked him most politely about Apia, and its doings; but the name of Alice Lockwood had been almost blatantly avoided. George Mills had been especially considerate—*blast him!* Musick gritted his teeth. He had already been accepted when he was joking about Musick being hired as her father's gillie!

He groaned aloud, then reached out for a cigarette from the box by his bedside, and smoked furiously for a time.

The thought of that clean-minded, honest little girl falling into Mills's lecherous arms was driving him steadily onto the rocks of insanity. In his dreams he saw their wedding—it would be a church affair—with a whole flock of little brownish-yellow imps, wearing flower wreaths, capering behind the bride and sticking out their tongues in unholy glee! And in the dream nobody seemed to think it at all unusual. They sat in their pews, craning their necks to see what the bride was wearing—whispering together—and Captain Lockwood stood very straight and military and Baltimorean, ready to give her away *to George Mills!* The antics of the brown babies became more violent. Musick wiped the sweat from his forehead. His cigarette dropped unheeded onto the linen sheet.

"Come-on-out! Come-on-out!"

The bird—the bird that was taboo—began to sing from its hidden place amid the candlenut trees. *"Come-on-out!"*

Its voice was mocking, sardonic, urgent, wheedling.

"Damn you—*I will!*"

Musick rose abruptly and dressed in the moonlight. He did not bother to put anything on his feet.

Outside he stopped to listen. Nothing in human guise was astir. He turned the corner of the bungalow and slowly, cautiously unlocked a storeroom door.

Several trips he made, bearing heavy objects in his arms, storing them with care in the bottom of a little outrigger proa which floated, tied up to the wharf. Nobody saw him as he pushed off, nor marked his shining progress as his paddle ladled up the molten silver of the sea. His path lay straight toward the moon, now low on the horizon. His proa followed a broad, flat street of burnished gold.

IV.

His absence at breakfast caused some surprise. The story of a Kanaka who found his foot tracks and noted the absence of the proa, explained a part; a little later the report of the storeroom boy roused grave concern.

"What the merry hell!" fumed Lem Harper. "What do you suppose the old

square toes is up to? He must have gone plumb cuckoo!"

That afternoon another Kanaka paddled over from the isle of the Slide Rock.

"This settles it," they agreed. "We've got to go get him!"

But until dark they waited, hoping that he would return.

It was nine o'clock when at length they shoved off, with only two Kanakas for paddlers. No signs of life came from the island as they drew near. No singing or shouting, no little fires of coconut shell on the beach.

They found him over by Slide Rock, sitting gravely erect, surrounded by a ring of empty Scotch bottles. He was clad in a lopsided wreath of hibiscus flowers. All around, like the dead, lay the sleeping natives. Mills kicked two or three of them. They didn't so much as grunt in their stupor.

Musick watched their approach with a calm, judicial air. When they had drawn close, he stared owlishly at them.

"I'm king of can'bal islands," he announced. "An' zese my subjec's. They 'lected me 'nanimoushly, an' 'en we gave royal shymposium. Now all gone shleep. Tired out."

"Buck up, old man!" Harper urged. "Be a good scout, and come along with us."

Ferandeau bade the Kanakas gather up the telltale empties.

"Come 'long, noshing!" Musick protested. "Thish my empire. These my subjec's. Me, I'm *taboo!*"

He rose with great care, and using the neck of a bottle, began tracing in the sand a crude circle.

"Shtep but one feet beyond thish shircle—"

The rotary movement was too much for him. He sat down very suddenly.

"Let's get this done with," Mills said. "Come on!"

They tried their best to avoid hurting him any; but John Musick was hampered by no such scruples. He wanted very much to hurt them as severely as possible!

He rose to his feet, and his very first blow spread Mills's nose flat on his face, and loosened two fine front teeth. His next, a raking swing, carried little Ferandeau clean off his feet. Then Harper grappled with him. For a while it looked as if they would fail; but it was a job that had to be done, and finally they did it!

The story spread, as stories do in close little island communities. Nobody blamed John Musick, or despised him. You never could tell how the tropics were going to affect a chap! Some went wrong one way, some another. It was considered rather unfortunate, on the natives' account; but, after all, only two goggle-eyed Kanakas had witnessed the lurid last act.

Musick had been a faithful, sober, and efficient servant. He did not lose face with his employers. And Harper and Ferandeau were on the whole rather relieved to have him break out of his reserve!

George Mills and his young bride leaned on the taffrail of her father's yacht, watching the sun set over Upolu.

"Only suppose," the girl said, "that I had accepted him! I did like him immensely—before I met you. Only, he was so terribly serious he scared me. And to think of what he turned out to be!"

Mills leaned over her with a yearning, protective air. He certainly had a way with women!

"I think, Alice, dear," he answered, "that every good woman has an instinct—or a guardian angel—that tells her when the right man comes along!"

Kain

By MAX BRAND

Author of "The Night Horseman," "Black Jack," "The Seventh Man," etc.

CHAPTER XII.

HE BECOMES A PROMINENT FIGURE.

"LOOK to your left," said Mrs. Stirling as soon as he stepped to her side and started with her through the room. Obeying, he saw at first only a cluster of young men, but scrutinizing the group more closely he made out Kathryn as the center of the circle.

"What an ally you've been!" said she. "The crisis is past and Kathryn is victor of the field. The moment Lydia was gone I wish you could have been here to see my girl career through the lists!"

"Horse and man fell before her lance," paraphrased Kain, "and many a heart was all to-brast!. But now that Lydia is back in the lists?"

"She is back, but she has thrown away her sword," said Mrs. Stirling. "Look at her now!"

Glancing back, Kain saw that Lydia sat beside a solitary youth, the sole reminder of her once numerous cortege. And even this sole survivor sat stiffly silent, looking straight before him in spite of the animated conversation of Lydia. At that very moment a large group moved slowly past the two, but not a single man detached himself to approach Lydia.

"Well," commented Mrs. Stirling, "it's a lesson she has drawn upon her own head, but I can't help pitying her, poor girl!"

"A little less pity and a little more respect," said Kain. "You underrate that girl, Mrs. Stirling. Before the evening is over she shall have won back a good deal of her lost ground."

"If this were a larger city," she replied, "you might be right, but our society is so small that an affront to one member in good standing is an affront to all. Think of it! She has alienated at one stroke the entire

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factions of Bloom and Albemarle with all their adherents. No, it will be a long time before Lydia is readmitted. How did you hypnotize the foolish girl into sitting out four dances?"

"You counted them?"

"I did—with a beating heart. The first one passed without much comment, but very soon a whisper went about that Lydia Morley was sitting out many dances with a comparative stranger—John Kain. Do you know that at this moment you are by far the most conspicuous figure in all these rooms? Don't you feel the eyes that follow you? I'll wager there isn't a girl here who wouldn't trade her slippers for wooden shoes if she could talk for one minute with the man who kept Lydia Morley out four dances. Doesn't such success turn your head, sir?"

"I'm dizzy with it," he replied dryly. "And now what must I do next?"

"Follow me to Mr. Raeburn. He asked after you, and I promised to take you into the library at the first opportunity. Do you mind? He's waiting with that cigar he promised you."

"He's very kind," said Kain, "and I need a rest. You've no idea how I need it!"

"Indeed, you really seem done for!" she said with a touch of concern. "There's a black shadow under your eyes and your hand seems a bit unsteady. Have you been sick lately, Mr. Kain?"

"Insomnia," he answered curtly, "but it's nothing. I haven't time to be sick."

"Yet you don't convey the impression of being a very busy man."

"Don't I? Well, my business is one that takes more energy than time. It is a thing that preys upon one's mind, and it has haunted me night and day lately."

"What can it be? It sounds like finance."

"It has to do with two large fortunes," said Kain noncommittally.

"And you can't tell me its exact nature?"

"Not precisely. It's like a bad conscience. It follows one about, you know."

"I'm so sorry. But here we are at the library, and perhaps Mr. Raeburn will help you to forget."

"Perhaps," said Kain in an indescribable voice. "Perhaps Mr. Raeburn will help me to forget."

They turned into a hexagonal apartment furnished in somber tones and rising to so lofty a ceiling that its upper reaches were lost in shadow. In all its dim spaciousness there was only one spot of light, and that was the reading lamp beside Robert Stanley Raeburn. His fine, lean face went well with such a setting, and as the glow of the light made the hair above his forehead seem almost a pure white, he might have seemed at first glance a monk studying in the religious gloom of the cloister library. At the sound of their voices he laid aside his book and rose.

"I have been waiting for you, Mr. Kain," he said, "with the cigar I promised to you. In the meantime Annette has told me of your adventure, and I see by her face that it has turned out well. Annette, you're fairly bursting with the news, aren't you?"

"And you've taken all the edge from it by reading my face."

She glanced about.

"Will you two men be comfortable here? Bob, you silly fellow, why haven't you taken the screen from before the fire?"

She went on: "Mr. Kain, you must be prepared to complete your service in a little time. The intermission is almost due, and then I know that Kathryn will be the happiest girl in the world if she can take you away from all the rest."

"What does it all mean," murmured Raeburn; "all this maneuvering?"

"You could never understand its importance," replied Mrs. Stirling, "unless you compare it to a financial operation when the stocks rise and fall according as a great financier looks in the morning as if he had slept well the night before. It's just as delicate a condition as that. Can I count on you, Mr. Kain?"

"I'm looking forward to it," he answered.

"Adieu, then. And are you satisfied, Bob? Is everything here that you want?"

"Perfectly satisfied."

"And happy?" she persisted, smiling at her own concern.

He glanced up rather sharply. "Yes, quite happy."

"Then adieu again."

She moved back through the library and Raeburn slipped into his chair, but Kain stood stiff and straight, looking after her, until the orchid-tinted gown grew dim among the shadows and finally disappeared at the door. Then in turn he sank into a chair opposite that of Raeburn.

Fallen into profound abstraction, he studied the glow of the logs, refused Raeburn's cigar with a gesture, and lighted his usual cigarette. The elder man refrained from breaking in upon that train of thought, but puffed contentedly at his cigar, and from time to time turned an expectant glance toward his companion.

"What a woman!" said Kain at last. "What a woman!"

CHAPTER XIII.

HE CONDUCTS A SCIENTIFIC INQUIRY.

AS if dragging himself from his contemplation, he shrugged his shoulders, straightened in his chair, and turned to Raeburn, prepared to talk.

"Mrs. Stirling?" queried Raeburn.

"Who else? Ah, sir, she has the touch!"

Raeburn kept the silence of one who waits for an explanation. "The touch?" he asked after a moment of silence.

"Some pianists have technical ability and emotion," replied Kain; "but if they lack a certain little element which they call the proper touch, they will never be great. And Mrs. Stirling has the touch. She does the right thing at the right time and in just that right way. See how she has surrounded us with her care! It was not much—the removal of a fire screen. But it was done with just the right amount of concern and as a result we are surrounded now with her presence. Don't you feel it? I tell you, Mr. Raeburn, it's this sense of tact which has made women strong rather than their beauty. The same spirit that made her remove that fire screen—carry it a bit further—is the spirit which led the Greeks to Troy. Well, she's gone out among them, again with the same empty heart, I suppose, and now she's smiling at them in the same hollow fashion."

His voice had lowered, and he was brooding over the fire before the speech was ended.

"That's an odd way to talk," said Raeburn coldly. "Just what do you mean by it?"

"Good Lord!" cried Kain. "Have I been thinking aloud again? What did I say, Mr. Raeburn? No, don't remind me of it, but let it be forgotten. This day dreaming is an old habit of mine."

"I can't let this go so easily," answered Raeburn. "Day dream or not, there was a certain ring about it. You mentioned Mrs. Stirling's empty heart and hollow smile. I can't let that go undisputed, sir!"

"Don't press me, I implore you," said Kain seriously. "Let it pass, or we shall shortly be falling into a discussion which will be unpleasant for us both. The words just then must have slipped from me unconsciously."

Raeburn seemed to consider this, but after a moment he shook his head decisively.

He said: "If it referred to almost any other person I wouldn't regard it, but Mrs. Stirling is different. You don't really infer that she is unhappy?"

"Unhappy?" cried Kain, as if the speech were surprised from him. "Why, Mr. Raeburn, couldn't a blind man feel her unhappiness? Couldn't he catch it from the very sound of her voice? Unhappy? Do you suppose Napoleon was happy on Elba?"

"Come, come!" said Raeburn irritably. "This is stretching even your own peculiar license too far, Mr. Kain. What in the world is the similarity between Stirling House and Elba?"

"I tell you," said Kain emphatically; "she is meant for an empire. And to see her confined to this miserable little island!"

"I am glad you have said this to me," said Raeburn, after a frowning pause, "rather than to any other man."

"I'm sorry that I've said it to any one," answered Kain, who was now apparently controlling his emotion of the moment before. "But when I see how wrongly people are matched with their destinies by the Lord, Mr. Raeburn, it makes me heartsick—heartsick!"

The frown of Raeburn relaxed to a faint smile.

"I don't know just how your train of thought started," he said at length, "but I'm afraid you have one fault of younger men. You jump at once to distant conclusions. What more could Mrs. Stirling want? She has the most beautiful home in this city, for one thing, and the most exquisitely appointed."

"How widely you miss the mark!" said Kain, shaking his head in wonder. "A house and furniture can fill the lives of most women, but the mind of such a person as Mrs. Stirling must be furnished with human beings."

"Hasn't she companions?" asked Raeburn, still smiling in great good humor. "Go out into the next room and look about you if you doubt."

"Cæsar had companions in Gaul," answered Kain dryly. "Mr. Raeburn, there are some people who are only content with first place, and they want first place in an imperial home, not in a barbarous Gallic village. They are born to the purple toga."

"And she's one of these? Well, perhaps you're right. I've never thought of her from exactly your angle; but you waste time sympathizing with Mrs. Stirling. There is nothing she lacks."

"I'm sure," murmured Kain negligently, "that I have no desire to argue the question."

But the eye of Raeburn left Kain, rose, and wandered past and beyond him into the distance. There was a touch of color in his pale face and he sat very erect, almost on the edge of his chair, as if the next moment he were prepared to start to his feet and into physical action.

"But I have a desire to argue," he said at last. "Gad, I don't know when an idea has excited me as this one does! Mrs. Stirling unhappy! Why, sir, my conclusion would be that she is the happiest woman I know!"

"How have you gathered that impression?" asked Kain.

"Well, for one thing I've gathered it from many a thing she has said."

"For my part," remarked the younger man, "I have formed the habit of paying less attention to what people say to me than to the manner in which they speak."

"But consider," mused Raeburn, "to what a height she has risen, and from what a humble beginning—yes, from a very humble beginning indeed!"

"But consider," echoed Kain, "that having mounted so high she has formed the habit of climbing."

"Nonsense!" cried Raeburn. "What a remorseless dissection you make. Why, sir, she has a very large fortune at her command."

"Let me call to your mind a few things which you necessarily know far better than I do," said Kain. "One million dollars is a large fortune. Only a hundred years ago it was considered an enormous aggregation of wealth. One million dollars, indeed, is a tremendous quantity of money. It will buy practically all the sheer physical comforts. It will supply all the physical needs of a family. When you pass that figure the extra money no longer buys necessary things. It no longer pays for food or for clothes. It begins to supply feasts and banquets and jewels. It erects palaces and buys the luxuries of power. And when a person is innoculated with the hunger for power there is no period to their desire for money. For money means power. One million is a great fortune, but in the lists of the accumulations of the present it passes unnoticed. Every little town can boast its millionaire, or its near millionaire. Pass on to five millions and you cross a great gulf.

"The man who commands such a fund is able to hold up his head in any group of financiers. He is at last in a position to be wooed as a subordinate ally. But, of course, I bore you terribly with all this chatter about your own medium, money?"

"Not at all," said Raeburn earnestly. "I think you have quite a novel approach to the subject. In fact, I've always made more of a study of making money than of spending it."

"Pass, then, from five to ten millions," said Kain, "and the difference is still greater. The lucky fellow who is ten times a millionaire crosses the ocean in his own yacht. He entertains lavishly. He makes

the fortunes of lesser men by throwing out hints here and there. The newspaper and the public follow his progress about the land. He is a national power.

"Another stride to fifteen millions. This is a great step toward the throne. Here is a man who makes vast donations toward charity? Politicians attend on him. He speaks with authority on all matters. Because he has grown rich in the wheat market divines listen to his opinions on the immortality of the soul. He can take the laurels from the head of Shakespeare with a phrase and make the reputation of an indifferent painter with a single commission. Even in New York he is feared and flattered. He is strong enough to be dangerous, even to the greatest. For there are men greater than he. Take one step higher, one more long stride, and you are among these Olympians.

"Consider, at length, the man of twenty millions. There, you may say, you have entered the final stage. There are, of course, fortunes vastly larger, but a man with twenty millions at his unchecked disposal is within the charmed inner circle. He can venture abroad and entertain royalty. The crowned powers of the financial world receive him in their inner councils. Not only that, but all social doors fly open at his knock. Tell me, is this true?"

Raeburn rose in excitement, walked to and fro through the room with long strides, and then settled down quickly in his chair. He opened and closed a lean-fingered hand.

"It is perfectly true," he said. "Twenty millions is a very great power."

"And now," said Kain, "look back through a long perspective. Look back from the pinnacle of twenty millions to the molehill of five millions. Look back from the twenty millions to Mrs. Charles Stirling. She is the greatest, the highest on her molehill, but tell me how she can expect to rub shoulders with those who live on the mountain?"

"Will you limit life to money?" argued Raeburn.

"What else has Mrs. Stirling?"

"The love of a charming daughter."

"In three years, at the very most, the girl will be married. Cross her off. She will be added to the list of her husband's blood."

"The devotion of Charles Stirling. And speaking of money, Mr. Kain, if Charles Stirling has risen from nothing to five millions, why may he not continue to grow, higher and higher—up to those mountains?"

"I ask you frankly: do you think that he will?"

While Raeburn considered the question, indeed, just as he was about to open his lips with an affirmative, Kain continued: "Isn't Stirling one of those men who reach a limit? Do your remember that during the Civil War certain generals did very well as commanders of brigades and even operated whole army corps with success, but failed miserably when they had to assume the responsibilities of independent armies? Come, come, Mr. Raeburn, you know Mr. Stirling too well not to acknowledge that he would never do as a national figure.

"He has reached his limit. He already shakes under the load of his fortune. All of his energies now are devoted to retaining the boundaries of his empire. He is one of the later Cæsars. Yes, and I think that he has probably acknowledged his limitations to himself. He understands them, even if you don't. Yes, I'll wager that there's a touch of jealousy when he looks at you."

"Jealousy? Stirling?" cried Raeburn. "Mr. Kain, the two words don't go together. The relations of no two men could be closer than my relations with Stirling. I tell you, he's almost my only real friend. He admits me to his inner circle of thoughts, Kain."

"You are his anchor to windward, naturally. You are the strength when he totters. Of course he is aware of that. I should like to know how often he asks your advice, Mr. Raeburn."

"Quite often, I admit."

"And perhaps he might even ask for financial assistance in a crisis?"

"He never has, because he knows that he would get it whenever he asked. Your fault, Mr. Kain, is that you construct an entire philosophy out of one or two small

facts which seem to you to be vitally related."

"That," said Kain, "is severe, but perhaps your judgment is accurate. You see, Mr. Raeburn, I'm more interested in the method than in the result. I admire the means rather than the end. I don't claim that my hypothesis concerning Mr. Stirling is true; I only claim that it *may* be true—that it's worth consideration. It may not be a fact. But it is a logical proposition."

"My dear lad," said Raeburn, smiling, "you shan't tempt me into considering human beings in the light of mathematical or even philosophical propositions."

"Very well. Then reduce your argument to terms of practical action and see what happens. It will be amusing. The first time that Stirling asks for either advice or assistance, refuse it or evade the issue."

"It would be dangerous," answered Raeburn. "Stirling was never a man to be tampered with. He's an outright sort."

"You see," said Kain—and he favored Raeburn with one of those unusual smiles of his—"you are afraid to put your man, and his friendship, to the acid test. You won't put your specimen under the microscope, and you avoid learning the truth."

"What interest would you have in such an affair?" asked Raeburn, and he leaned forward and searched the face of Kain with keen eyes.

Hundreds had winced before that inquiring look, but Kain met it with unshaken calm.

"You have already answered me," went on Raeburn, sitting back in his chair. "You are a student of life, a student of men. You watch them impersonally. Your only interest in Stirling is to discover if your judgment of him is accurate. Do you know, Mr. Kain, that you are more cold-blooded than I dreamed it possible for a human being to be?"

"Not altogether disinterested in this case," replied Kain. "In fact, you will find it hard to believe how earnestly I am drawn to the study of Mrs. Charles Stirling."

"Like a scientist studying an insect under the microscope? B-r-r! Kain, you're a devil!"

"The scientific spirit. You must admit, Mr. Raeburn, that it has its place."

"Not where the human heart is concerned. That defies analysis."

"In parts and at times. Not always. Hear me diagnose the case of Mrs. Stirling. Not like an insect under the microscope, but as one examines a distant star through a powerful glass."

"The simile is more pleasant. You are always interesting, Kain."

"Thank you. But to proceed to Mrs. Stirling. In the first place, I know, of course, that I'm talking with a stanch friend of the family. Otherwise I should never dream of speaking so freely."

"Sir," said Raeburn graciously, "there are very few things which a gentleman may not discuss in my presence."

"I'm glad to hear you say that. Well, to go ahead in this. I began at the end and reasoned back to the beginning to-night. I watched Mrs. Stirling among her guests, and I could not help saying to myself: 'She is out of her sphere; she should move among financial kings, the leaders of art and science and society.'

"Now, Mr. Raeburn, close your eyes and try to conjure up a picture of an assembly so refined and so lofty that it would not be improved by the presence of Mrs. Charles Stirling!"

But Raeburn did not need to take time. His eyes were already closed, and his clenched fist was ground against his forehead.

"There is none," he answered at once.

"Pass from this picture to Charles Stirling. A fine fellow and an honest man, but how did he come at the side of this queen among women?"

"Kain, I mustn't let you go on!"

"Why, then, I'm very glad to stop. I was afraid that you would consider this a personal matter with me."

And, taking advantage of the fact that Raeburn had covered his eyes, Kain allowed his glance to focus like the sun-glass upon his companion, while a singularly mirthless smile twitched at the corners of his lips. Raeburn suddenly dropped his hand and laughed. The sound was as mirthless as the smile of Kain.

"No, no!" he said. "By all means go ahead with your investigation. Hereafter I shall remember that it is strictly in the scientific spirit."

"Good," said Kain. "Then we go back to the beginning. Here's the woman as a girl. She was beautiful in the first place. She was ambitious in the second. She met Charles Stirling. She saw in him a man who was climbing fast and steadily. She saw in him also a man of force and in the third place a fellow of some crudeness which she trusted that her influence would eventually smooth out. Most important of all was a difference of soul between them, but this most significant distinction was screened from her by a mist of love. You follow me?"

"Very amusing," said a hard voice which Kain hardly recognized as the voice of Raeburn.

The financier sat with his fingers locked, his head bowed, and his eyes were fixed on the fire; in that interval the glance of Kain brightened as if through surprise, and then went through and through Raeburn. His eye was that of the man who lifted a stone, idly, and suddenly discovers that it is shot with veins of gold. When he spoke after that, he never for an instant removed his glance from the face of the elder man. He seemed to have guessed at a great secret. He began to separate carefully the metal from the dross.

"She had from the first," went on Kain, "a sharp intelligence. She judged men and events shrewdly."

"Aye, from the first," commented Raeburn in the same changed voice.

"Only, in the case of Charles Stirling, love deceived her. She loved action and force; she saw in Stirling a man possessing both attributes. What she failed to see was that he was a man who worked within more or less fixed limits. She did not remember that the water of the river cannot exceed the rock banks.

"Now, I know nothing of the manner in which he built his fortune, and you will probably shatter all my arguments at this point, but I would be willing to make a solid wager that Charles Stirling never would have been any more than a respectable success if it had not been for luck on the one hand and the guidance of a clever mind on the other. I don't know what that luck could have been, but I would put my finger on Mrs. Stirling as the guiding intelligence."

"Just why?" asked Raeburn.

"Because Stirling lacks the little touch of hardness which iron must have before it will cut; the little temper which men must have before they are successful. He lacks that tempering quality; his wife has it."

"You are completely right in both guesses. In fact," said Raeburn in some astonishment, "you speak as if you already knew the detailed story. But I know you haven't. There *was* luck in the start of Stirling; and his wife did guide him through a rather singular crisis—and many times since."

"Ah! That relieves me on my one great point of doubt. Thank you. She helped him. It was the beginning of a partnership, but not of a complete partnership. In business they met, but outside of business they had no common grounds. They had no grounds of taste, love of the beautiful, or recreation where they could meet. Love does not flourish in an environment like this."

He paused a moment, as if reading further in his own mind, and Raeburn waited, almost agape, as a child listens to the pronouncements of the palmist.

"First," went on Kain, "it softened to friendship. I say 'softened' advisedly, because love in itself is a fierce and bitter thing. It is a flame, and it destroys. In place of love, then, there came friendship, and in place of blind worship there came an open-eyed esteem. But the love, the first impulse, the spark that kindles the fire, had gone out. They had one child and after that she wanted no more children much as Stirling, I'll warrant, desires a son."

"Aye, from the bottom of his heart—poor Charlie!"

"Yes. *She* pitied him, also. But pity is half contempt."

"What!"

"Contempt," said Kain emphatically. "Look into your own mind!"

The sudden question was like the pointing of an accusing finger to Raeburn. He shrank a little and then he regarded the lean face of Kain almost with fear.

"This must not go on," he murmured through stiff lips, but his eyes waited hotly, eagerly, for the next sentence.

"I said that she was open-eyed by this time. The first thing which her open eyes perceived was the limitation of her husband. Next she saw that those limitations set definite bounds to her own ambitions. Ah, Raeburn, it's a bitter thing for a woman when she feels marriage like a chain which drags her aspiration back to the pace of a drone! The gait of the married woman is the gait of her husband! Well, when the average woman feels this galling restriction, she begins to nag. Mrs. Stirling did not.

"I've already suggested that there's an amount of fine steel in her makeup. Instead of wasting effort in complaint she sat back, so to speak, and waited. She made herself amiable to Stirling, enough to keep his love. For a man will remain blind longer than a woman. He is too busy. He has less time for that analysis of himself and others which is the sole occupation of the brainy woman of leisure. By this time she is a habit to him. Without her he would go mad, like the opium fiend deprived of his drug. In fact, I can imagine no keener way of torturing Stirling than to deprive him of his wife."

"A pretty picture," muttered Raeburn hoarsely, and he attempted to smile.

"She accepted the inevitable," went on Kain, "but she has never resigned herself to it. No. She saw the truth and then she sat down to wait with the patience of a Chinese devotee. So there is your picture of what she is, Mr. Raeburn. I have given you merely a suppositious sketch of what she is on the inside. You know the outside by heart. Tell me if the two pictures are complements?"

Raeburn looked like a man who has received tidings of great success and of great defeat at the same moment. At length he murmured: "It's too bitter not to be true." He added slowly: "Too damnably bitter!"

"But for what is she waiting?" asked Kain.

"Aye, there's the point," cried Raeburn. "What can she be waiting for?"

Kain leaned back in his chair and shrugged his shoulders.

"Well," he said, "at this point the problem fails to interest me. I don't attempt to read the future. I'm only charmed in dissecting the past. But I suppose she's waiting for a man. At least, that's the usual answer to questions such as this."

"A man?" said Raeburn. "She?"

"Why not? For that matter, she has probably had him in mind for a long time. Tell me, Raeburn, have you never detected a certain sadness about her?"

"It is true," said Raeburn, terribly moved. "It is true! But I've always thought it to be the same sadness which is an atmosphere around any truly beautiful thing—a flower, for instance. Kain, you have made me unhappy. You and your infernal scientific approach to human hearts!"

"Sorry for that!" said Kain. "But the woman is less interesting to me than the man. I should like to know what he would do, for instance, if you were to refuse him advice or assistance."

"So should I," murmured Raeburn, "by the Lord, so should I! I wonder just how profound his friendship would prove under the test?"

"Well," said Kain, "this little chat of ours has been very pleasant brain-work."

But Raeburn, with his eyes fixed sadly upon the distance, only replied: "Poor Annette! Poor girl!"

"For that matter," said Kain, "why not transfer some of your pity to the man in the case? The unknown, shadowy, third member in the problem? But I suppose, unlucky devil, that he doesn't even dream that she is waiting for him. There are a sufficient number of cases of blindness like this, you know. They run on for years and years. Yet think what he is losing all the time, Raeburn! Think of this queen among women!"

"I shall *not* think of it," answered Raeburn. "I've thought entirely too much already."

"Look!" said Kain. "Here she comes, and music with her!"

CHAPTER XIV.

HE HEARS OF THE VITAL FIRE.

FOR, as she opened the door at the further end of the apartment, a strain of the dance entered with her.

Raeburn rose automatically, his face lighting, and yet his eyes were not more keenly fixed on Mrs. Stirling than the glance of Kain, who rose in turn, was fixed on him. There was exultation, strange to say, in the eyes of both.

"The intermission is here," said Mrs. Stirling, coming up to them. "Do you hear the music die out? Mr. Kain, will you keep your promise and let Kathryn run away with you? The place is buzzing about you more and more every moment. There have been inquiries about you, and I have answered that you are chatting with Mr. Raeburn. I assure you that didn't appease the curiosity. Will you go in with me?"

"I follow you," said Kain. "*Au revoir*, Mr. Raeburn."

"We'll meet again soon," said Raeburn. "I have some questions to ask you, Kain. By the way, Annette, when you're through with Mr. Kain won't you slip away into the library for a few minutes of chat? Or do your guests need you?"

"Why, Bob," she said, turning quickly upon him, "if you want me, all the rest can wait, of course!"

And she carried Kain away with her towards the ballrooms.

"And Lydia?" he asked.

"You were quite right about her," said Mrs. Stirling, "and she's even more dangerous than you suspected. She has frankly avowed that you are the strangest man she has met and that you practically hypnotized her into forgetting all about the dances she was cutting. What other girl would dream of admitting a weakness like that with any man on earth? Well, the result is that other youths feel that they may be able to do what John Kain has done. Fools rush in, you know. Already she has gathered numbers about her. Kathryn still has the advantage of quality, but she needs you to make her victory decisive. See Lydia over there!"

At that moment Lydia was passing out of the largest of the three rooms which were being used for the ball, and a noisy coterie followed her, by all means the gayest of the crowd. She floated among them like bright foam topping the waves. As for Kathryn, she stood with one man beside her, but other pairs converged towards her like iron-filings on paper towards the point under which the magnet is placed. Seen from the distance she seemed more lovely than Lydia herself, and there was about her an exquisite charm of buoyancy, as if she were continually poised somewhere between smiles and laughter.

"Look! Look!" said Mrs. Stirling, shaken with mirth. "Was Alexander ever happier after a victory? Why, Kathryn is transformed! Only a little more and she will have the final touch of charm."

"What is that?" asked Kain.

"I'll tell you," she answered. "Before a woman has ever cared deeply for any one there is a certain shallowness in her. To be sure, she may have a very intriguing quality, a boyish directness like that of Kathryn, for instance, and a keen love of life and of friends. But she lacks the fire that makes her vital and that melts hearts. When a girl learns what love is she gains at the same time a certain appeal, a little touch of significance that carries her straight into your heart. For instance, I would say that Lydia has a touch of that fire."

"I cannot agree with you in that," said Kain.

"Perhaps I'm wrong in the individual example. I'm only sure that if Kathryn were not half so attractive and had only a touch of that fire, she'd be twice as successful. Sometimes I feel as if she were a butterfly struggling to break out of the cocoon. That's a very old metaphor, is it not?"

"And always a striking one," said Kain. "I've often thought that the lives of girls are like the growth of lilies. They grow steadily, tall and straight through many

years, like the tall green stalk which keeps tapering until you think that it is never going to be anything more than that bare stem; but all at once the lily itself flares out from the stalk—almost overnight, you know—and you find that your green girl is a flower, and a woman!"

"A very charming way of putting it, Mr. Kain. But, then, you are full of such things. Do you know, I could apply something of the same description to you. You are a fellow of flint and tinder. So far all the sparks which contact with life has struck from you have fallen on the other fellow and made him burn; but one of these days I suspect that a spark may fall on the tinder which surely is in you, and then there will be a very great fire indeed!"

He stopped short and stared at her.

"What has made you say that?"

"Have I offended you?"

"Not in the least. Only surprised me."

"I'll tell you frankly. We've developed an amazing habit of frankness for so short an acquaintance, haven't we? Well, you impress me as a man who has either lived too much or else not at all. All the tinder has been burned out in you, or else you have never been touched with fire. And I very shrewdly suspect that the second is the case. Am I a little bit right?"

"At least," he replied indirectly, "I've never known a woman to be entirely in the wrong."

"And never entirely in the right? Well, let it go at that. But I suspect that I punctured your armor plate that time, sir!"

"Indeed," he said, starting on with her, "it was a very palpable hit. I feel as if an X-ray eye had been turned upon me."

"Now watch Kathryn," she whispered, "and see if the clever little minx doesn't manage to start her companion toward us in a moment. Walk more slowly, Mr. Kain, and wait for developments. If she doesn't take advantage of this opportunity I've done with her!"

"You're a prophet again," said Kain. "Here she comes."

"Right! Right! In a course lying across ours, but she will turn toward me in a moment and meet us, and then she will be greatly surprised and will have to stop and speak to me about something."

For Kathryn, with her escort, was sauntering through the group which clustered about them and crossing the hall. However, when she was in the very act of crossing the path of her mother and Kain, the girl motioned down the room, swung about with her companion, and came to a halt directly facing them.

"Mother," she said, "I've been looking for Harry Lancing. Ruth Morgan wants him. Have you seen him about?"

"I've seen him lately," replied Mrs. Stirling, "and though I can't remember where exactly, I'm sure that I could reach him again. Will you let me have Mr. Gilbert to go hunting him? That is, if you'll promise to stay here and amuse Mr. Kain. Mr. Kain, this is Mr. Gilbert. Of course, you've met my daughter."

"As I came in," answered Kain, and bowed.

He always made a little pause before and after these salutations of his, which gave them an added point. Mr. Gilbert, without an overly great display of enthusiasm, drifted away with Mrs. Stirling, and Kathryn glanced after them with twinkling eyes.

CHAPTER XV.

HE SPEAKS IN A PARABLE.

SEEN in this manner at close range, she was not nearly so attractive as she had been at a short distance: only the lighted brown eyes were truly beautiful. They were forever restless, eager, and when they crossed another glance it was with the effect of an almost physical shock. Moreover, there was about her a quality which young girls sometimes have—a radiance, a translucence, and a light shining within. She turned back to Kain, laughing more with her eyes than with her lips.

"Now I say that mother is a great artist in her own way," she said. "I told her that I simply *must* have a chance to talk with Mr. Kain, and see how well she managed it!"

"Oh, Kathryn!" cried a girl's voice behind them, and Kain was aware of two

couples bearing swiftly down upon them, the feminine members both well in the lead of the men.

"I don't quite agree with you," said Kain in a voice just loud enough to reach to the newcomers, and he possessed himself of his companion's arm. "Shall we go to take another look at it?"

She started forward with him willingly enough, saying to the others as they passed: "I'll be back in a moment."

"That was a close call," sighed Kain.

She looked her query.

He went on: "You see, I'm no good at this chatter stuff. I've been dodging groups all evening. Mrs. Stirling helped me out a couple of times. Then I managed to button-hole Mr. Raeburn, and now you've come to the rescue," he concluded gratefully.

He had left out the most notable member in his list of rescuers, and she noted the omission with a glint of eyes and a flash of white teeth as she smiled, but she said nothing.

"How long will the intermission last?" he asked.

"Mother will be the judge about that," she answered. "I don't know, exactly."

He mused: "I wonder if we would possibly have time enough to take a short turn through the garden?"

"A breath of fresh air?" she agreed. "That would be pleasant."

So they left the dancing rooms and went out on the columned veranda which stretched along the rear of the house. The view from the front windows of Stirling House plunged down over the city far below; from this rear veranda the grounds dipped gradually away. It was an extensive garden, with little slopes and whole knolls of closely shaven lawn that broke out from under hedges and shrubs, and all silvered, now, with the dew and with the moonlight.

The chill wind of the earlier evening had fallen away. There was only the slightest stir of air, and this was as gentle as a cool hand touching against the face. At first the night was utterly silent compared with the festival sounds within, but in a few moments they caught the continual whispering of the breeze among the foliage—the most intimate and secret voice in nature. It invited them out further from the house, deeper among the hedges, out and across the lawns. Without a word of question to each other they descended the steps and strolled onto the turf. This in turn muffled the sound of their steps; over the blanched lawn they passed as noiselessly as shadows.

"Shall we sit here?" she asked, and pointed to a seat.

"Isn't that better over there, beneath the lilac tree?" he suggested.

It was all in blossom—thick clusters—but by the dim moon they could only guess at the color of the flowers; the breath of the tree, however, blew toward them with a stealthy sweetness.

"Here we are," he said by the lilac tree, but she pointed to the crest of a knoll near by, saying: "Have you ever seen the grounds before?"

"Never."

"There's a fine view from that place. And if there's any wind, it always blows most strongly there."

So they climbed the little hill and stood close together at the top. Behind them Stirling House rose white and enormous against the steel blue of the night sky, a pleasanter and purer white by contrast with the dark waves of foliage which beset it from every side. In the opposite direction the view held across an undulating valley of garden, and further on stretched the lake. The wind was not strong enough to beat it up into the usual myriad of tiny waves. It lay now in sheets of deadly black and brilliant silver, changing slowly from time to time as if the swell of the ocean affected it. Kain could make out a boathouse and a little pier on the water's edge. Accordingly he turned to her and waved his arm toward the lake.

"Shall we go down?" he asked.

She considered him through a moment of quiet.

"There isn't the least reason why we shouldn't go there," she argued.

Yet both lowered their voices as if the great silence of the open spaces might magnify the sounds and carry an alarm far off. To whom? They went down the hillside

and paused at the foot of the pier to listen to the faint, sinister lisping of the water against the concrete piles.

She said: "What shall it be? We can take a rowboat, or a launch, or a canoe."

"The lake is too small for a launch," said Kain, "and rowboats are rather dull, don't you think? But there's one trouble with a canoe, I've never learned to paddle."

"Why," she said, "I think that I could handle the canoe well enough for both. But haven't you ever paddled a canoe—really?"

"Never."

It was not, he thought, actual contempt that widened her eyes, so much as mute surprise that a man could possibly be so limited.

"Well," she said regretfully, "I suppose we shouldn't go on the water anyway. It might make us a little late in returning."

"No," he agreed carelessly, "I suppose it would be hardly right to go."

And he turned a little away, as if prepared to walk on back up the hill.

"But we *will* go!" she decided suddenly. "It's stupid to come so far and then turn back!"

She started out on the pier.

"Really," protested Kain. "I'd rather not!"

She whirled on him.

"And why not, Mr. Kain? Are you afraid of the night air?"

"Partly," he admitted, unmoved.

At that she stamped in an uncontrollable impulse of vexation. At once she threw out a hand in entreaty. "I beg your pardon!" she said. "I didn't mean to do that!"

"It's quite all right," he said, "and to prove it, I'll go along."

"Good!" she cried, and running down the landing steps, she stood in the canoe, balancing herself deftly as the boat rocked. It was so long, so low-lying, so slender, that it was a wonder it supported her weight alone. Kain paused, frowning in apparent anxiousness down at the craft.

"I can't swim, you know," he said.

"You can't swim!" There was a rising emphasis in her voice, and now he felt contempt as well as deep astonishment.

"But I suppose you're a perfect waterman," he concluded, "and I'll trust in you." So saying, he stepped at once into the canoe.

"Thank you," said the girl a little dryly, and she steadied the canoe against his clumsy movements by holding to the edge of the landing place. "Just sit down in the bow facing me. There won't be any occasion for you to paddle, I'm sure."

He obeyed, and she sent the canoe out from the pier with a long, powerful stroke; instantly they were alone on the bosom of the lake.

She wore no wrap, so that the moon made a dance of running silver lights along her arms as she paddled.

The same light fell on the lower part of her face, molding and softening the outlines as a few more years would do in fact; but the upper part of her face was in deep shadow, and only the glint of the eyes reached to Kain most of the time. For a time they floated in silence.

She said at length, as if the quiet worried her a little: "Isn't it a bit unusual for a girl to run off with a man like this?"

"At least," said Kain, "it shouldn't be."

He could see her mouth tighten somewhat at that, and the anger she felt, whatever its cause, went into the next stroke of her paddle; the canoe leaped like a live thing, and the bow splashed heavily down in the water. She allowed the impulse of that lunge to die away, sitting with the bright paddle poised above the water. When she spoke her tone was more guarded than ever, for the sound spread over the smooth water like oil; the directness of her eyes and a trace of sternness about her mouth made up for the fluid quiet of her voice.

"My mother is a very tactful person," she said, "and I wish I had inherited her ability to get information in pleasant ways; but I'm modeled pretty directly after dad. I'm going to get right into the heart of my reason for bringing you out here."

"Did you *bring* me?" asked Kain, with a sudden sharpness. "Did you *bring* me Miss Stirling?"

"At least, it wasn't all chance."

He dropped an elbow on his knee and rested his face against his hand in such a

manner that it completely shadowed his features.

"This is a great pleasure, and an unexpected pleasure, Miss Stirling," he murmured. "Suppose you strike directly into the heart of your subject. I like frankness."

"I wonder if you do? Well, here goes. I want to know, Mr. Kain, just what you want from Robert Stanley Raeburn and from my mother and from dad? Also, what do you want from me?"

As he continued to stare blankly at her she added: "Is that, possibly, a little more frankness than you bargained for?"

"It's rather hard to follow all the possible meanings of that question."

"I suppose it is. Well, I know that if you should tell mother that you had been asked that question by me, and how I had asked it, I should be terribly lectured. Because I haven't a single ground for my suspicion. Call it intuition, if you wish. But, come, Mr. Kain, you *do* want something from us. Tell me what it is?"

"This is a most amazing thing," he answered without the slightest trace of anger. "You apparently imagine that I've brought about these meetings for a purpose. But manifestly it was all a matter of chance. It grew out of my accidental encounter with Mr. Raeburn. But surely you know all this as well as I?"

"It seems obvious," she replied, and she frowned down at the water, "but I can't help feeling that nothing in your life has happened altogether by chance. That last answer of yours, for instance; I feel that you are gaining time to think up the peculiar strategy which you will use on me. Of course these blind suspicions of mine anger you deeply?"

"They do not," he insisted. "I am very interested—too interested to be angry. A woman's psychology is always a fascinating subject." She shrugged her gleaming shoulders at that, and he chuckled. He added: "What first excited your doubts of me?"

"Almost the very mention of your name. When Mr. Raeburn told of his adventure with you, I began to think. Your name sent my imagination back to the biblical character—Cain, the destroyer. And when he repeated your remarks they gave me an impression of a man who wished to be remembered.

"Then the way he met you the second time. You were walking down the sidewalk, whistling and swinging a yellow cane. Why were you whistling and why were you swinging a yellow cane. Was it to attract the attention of Mr. Raeburn and mother?

"It all worried me—it all stayed in my mind. You went about gaining an introduction to our house. I say *gaining* because you were almost studiously careless about it. It seemed to me that you had no good intention. And when I saw you to-night all my suspicions were confirmed by the first glance. Mr. Kain, I felt that there was danger in you. I feel it more strongly than ever this very moment!"

Her voice rose a trifle as she finished, and she sat very erect, facing him with the defiance of the wild and the helpless before the hunter. From the shadow of his face the gleam of his eyes held steadily upon her.

He said slowly at length: "I'm sorry for this."

"Oh," she cried, "if you're to be dignified and quiet, of course I'm disarmed; but please talk. Don't you see that I wouldn't carry my suspicions to you so directly if I didn't know them to be childish, groundless things? I simply want you to reassure me if I've not insulted you with my doubts. But don't be subtle. Don't treat this conversation as a contest. Be frank and simple; or if you won't be that, then follow up my wild ideas and tell me where they started. Mr. Raeburn tells me that you have the finest analytical mind he has ever known."

"I can't do that until you tell me from what point your suspicions started."

"They began in nothing; they end in nothing. I admit that I've been revolving the thing over and over in my mind. To-night after I saw you I went through the possibilities. Were you an adventurer seeking for money? Somehow I knew that was not it. Please bear up against this terrible frankness. It seemed that the only possibility is that you have some grudge against Mr. Raeburn or mother, or both; yet I

know that neither of them has ever seen you before.

"Then what is the explanation of your riddle? Apparently you come from nowhere; you are bound nowhere. You met Mr. Raeburn by accident; you suddenly become his bosom friend and almost a confidant of mother's. You perform for me a most unusual and delicate service this very night. Mr. Kain, there may be no reason behind all these things, but I fear that there is. Won't you give me a hint to solve the mystery—so that we can be friends?"

"Is that what you really want?"

"Upon my word. If I could get rid of the foolish feeling that you are here with a hidden purpose, I know of no one whom I'd rather have as a friend."

"Will you give me your hand on that?" he asked after a little pause.

"With all my heart!" and her hand went out to him.

He held it in his cold fingers for an instant, and his eyes pierced through the shadow which obscured her brow.

"There is no hypocrisy in you," he said with a strong emphasis.

"Why do you say that?"

"I'll tell you why. Because most people are such dyed-in-the-wool, confirmed liars and knaves. Of every one I know there is not a soul—mark that: not a soul!—whom I would trust behind my back for an instant. And yet"—here his unsheltered and unshadowed eyes blazed at her—"yet I wonder if you are not an exception to the rule?"

She raised her head at that, with an air of defiance, and now the moonlight flooded her face and left it open to his probing glance.

She said: "Are you trying to frighten me with such queer talk?"

He answered, resuming instantly his usual tone: "You are shaking inside, however."

She shook her head violently, and by her very violence admitted it.

"You are honest," he said. "One in millions!"

"That's mere groundless cynicism," she answered, recovering her courage and her voice.

He said with a strangely gentle voice: "Can you name me many really honest people?"

"A hundred offhand. Mr. Raeburn, to begin with, and certainly my mother and dear old dad! They are all honest, surely, and I could go on with the list."

"Don't name them!" cried Kain, and he shuddered as if in the grip of an ague. "Don't name them! What do you know even of your mother and your father? Have you ever seen them tried in fire?"

She merely stared at him, shocked by his sudden violence.

"Suppose I tell you my story. Then you'll understand why I say no one is honest."

"Will you tell me everything?" she asked with excitement. "Even what it is that you are pursuing, or what pursues you?"

"I know you will keep the secret."

"Oh, sacredly!"

"Then here's the story. It's not very long. My father died a comparatively wealthy man—not rich like your family, but very well to do. He was the most respected member of our community; his honesty was proverbial. I had been brought up to worship him as the soul of equity.

"But on his deathbed he confessed to me how he made his start in life.

"It seems that he was a member of a corporation in which the controlling interest was held by his dearest friend—a benefactor who had raised my father practically from the gutter to comfortable circumstances. Now, my father secured information which hinted that his benefactor had committed a crime. Mind you, the testimony against his friend was of the most shadowy nature, but a combination of circumstances made it possible for my father to make things look very black for his friend. You infer, of course, that as soon as he heard the story he went to his benefactor and told him all the circumstances—warned him against the danger?"

"Of course," said the girl.

She made no pretense of paddling, but sat with her head tilted back and left her face open to the moon and to the glittering eyes of Kain.

"But listen to what he actually did—my father! With the knowledge in his hand he threatened his friend with ruin unless he immediately gave up his share of the business and left the town. We'll call his friend Craig. Well, Craig was, of course, terribly shocked. He berated my father and then he pleaded. He admitted that he could not absolutely disprove the case against him in a law court, but he swore that it was only the shadowiest circumstantial evidence and that he was really honest. Finally my father was so far moved that he sent Craig to my mother. If she would let the affair drop my father would also let it pass unnoticed."

"And it was your mother who let him go untouched. It seems to me somewhere, sometime, I've heard the fellow to this story."

"Perhaps you have. It's not unique. But you run ahead of the facts. My mother turned her back on Craig and would not lift her hand to save him!"

"It isn't possible!" cried the girl. "At least, Craig must have been guilty of a terrible crime."

"I swear to you," said Kain, and he lowered his voice to control a wild emotion that swelled in his throat. "I swear to you that Craig was not guilty. His whole life disproved the possibility of such a guilt."

"Then it's a horrible tale," murmured the girl, and she watched with parted lips and wide eyes the changed face of Kain.

"Not even in the name of mercy!" said Kain when he could speak again. "She would not spare him even in the name of mercy. Think of it!"

"She was not a woman!" cried the girl.

"Do you say that?" asked Kain in a ringing voice. "Do *you* say that?"

"I do!" she repeated. "Perhaps it hurts you, but I can't help saying it!"

"Her betrayal," went on Kain steadily, "drove my father's friend from the town. His wife and his child were with him. The last news we had was that both Craig and his wife had died and their child was lost to any trace. Think of it, Miss Stirling, three lives ruined and lost because of the heartlessness of one woman!"

She was flushed with her horror, and yet she mastered the emotion enough to answer gently: "She was your mother, Mr. Kain."

"Ah," said Kain, "but if she were even your own mother?"

"I would disown her!" said the girl fiercely.

Kain leaned forward as if he wished to diminish even the slight distance between them, and his glance went through and through her.

"Think twice," he said. "You, at least, are honest, and what you say will strongly affect my actions. Do you mean that?"

"She ruined three lives," replied the girl sternly.

"But both my mother and my father are dead," said Kain. "Tell me! Does the guilt descend upon my head?"

"Surely not!" said the girl. "Surely not!"

He regarded her with a half sad, half hopeless glance.

"I wonder if you are right?" he said at length. "Surely the child must not necessarily inherit the rottenness of his parent?" And he added in an infinitely gentle tone: "Surely you are right! Then I will tell you why I am wandering about the world. I am searching for the child of Craig. When I find him I will try to make some amends to him. At least, I will clear the memory of his father. Yes, I will beg him on my knees to forgive my father and my mother for what they have done!"

"And then this is why you come and go across the world like a bird of passage?"

There was a touch of wistfulness in her voice as she went on: "And what I mistook for subtlety and danger in you is only sadness of heart and distrust of yourself and every one? Will you forgive me?"

Kain sank back in the bow of the canoe, exhausted.

"If I had not forgiven you," he said slowly, "you may be sure that I should never have told you the story."

"Oh," she answered earnestly, "the world has a great deal to make up to you. A very great deal, indeed. I wish I knew how I could help!"

He roused himself and laid a shaking hand on the gunwale of the boat.

"You do help," he answered. "You

would restore some faith in humanity to the devil himself."

She turned the canoe toward the landing place and made for it with swift strokes of the paddle.

"I know one better thing to do to-night," she said. "I shall introduce you to one purely honest man—my father!"

"Ah!" said Kain. "Yes, I should like to meet him—through you. I hear he is like you?"

"People say so," she said happily. "And at least there's something of the same cast about our faces."

"I hope he is different," said Kain heavily. "I hope he is very different. Why, he *must* be different."

"You say that strangely."

"Because no one else can be like you."

The canoe reached the landing and they climbed the steps to the pier. Kain stood like one who hesitated in body and in mind.

"Before we go back," he said, frowning upon the ground, "I have to admit that the story as I told it to you was not the truth."

"Why not?"

"Because the whole truth is too horrible for you to hear. Believe me and ask no more questions."

"I shall not," she said simply. "I will never again question you in anything."

"That is a great deal to say," he answered, and he smiled down upon her in such a way that his face was marvelously altered. "Will you shake hands again on that?"

"Both hands!" she said, and gave them to him.

They were as warm as his own were bloodless, and the smile that went up to him was as full of thrilling kindly impulse as his own was ironical and questioning, after the first moment.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.

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THOROUGHBREDS

YOU may rave of motor cars
That swallow up the miles,
Of engines and of gasolines,
Of speeds and body styles.

You may rant of auto trips
And places you have seen,
The while I will be dreaming
Of the sun-splashed paddock green.

And I will be hearkening,
The while you chatter on,
To thunder of the hoofbeats
In the way the nags have gone.

You may rave of speedways;
I love the racing course,
For man has made the auto,
But, son, God made the horse.

Edgar Daniel Kramer.

A Matrimonial Jinx

By E. K. MEANS

THE first time Vinegar Atts saw him, Milk Shake was up a tree. The colored pastor of the Shoofly church was attracted by the sound of a voice calling for help. The voice showed signs of exhaustion, but it had lost none of its pleading quality by incessant repetition.

Responding to the call, Vinegar walked through the negro cemetery beside his churchyard, and looked across the fence to where a small tree stood in a pasture a short distance away. Milk Shake occupied the branches of this tree. Underneath stood a mule named Jinx, pawing the ground with impatience, and gnawing at the tree.

"Fer Gawd's sake, brudder," Milk cried earnestly. "Come over here an' drive dis jackace away. He's fixin' to git ready to eat me raw."

"I's skeart to come in dat pasture," Vinegar bellowed. "I knows dat mule—he b'longs to me—I knows him real good. Ef you don't come down powerful soon, he'll climb dat tree an' git you."

Then the animal, recognizing Vinegar's voice, made a few remarks in reply. Listening, one received the impression that his bray was larger than he was, the creation out of proportion to the creator. For compass and profundity and sustained power of vocality, it was omnipotent. Listening, one felt that thought could go no higher, imagination reach no further—it was the last effort of language, the richest utterance of earth—a running commentary of scorn at all created things, terrible in its sardonic irony. And it contained always the element of complete surprise, for when you felt sure that every musical note from low G to high C had been exhausted by that tremendous organ of vociferation, and there would ensue a silence in all the earth for half an hour, lo, after that there came faint echoes of vocal sounds perpetually recurring, manifesting the ostentatious prodigality of the musician's gifts!

"Dar now!" Vinegar bawled. "Jinx is done exhausted de subjeck."

"Help! Hell-up!" Milk Shake howled.

Both men thought that Jinx had finished. They learned now that they had been guilty of a discourteous interruption, for there was one more note, rising from a fathomless profundity, gaining volume in the middle register, breaking in nasal falsetto tones in the upper, spraying the listening earth with sound. A mechanic, describing Jinx's best qualities, would have asserted that he possessed a self-lubricating tongue and a friction-proof jaw.

"How'd you git run up dat tree?" Vinegar howled, when the mule's vocal pyrotechnics had exploded in mid-air.

"I wus takin' a shawt cut-off acrosst de pasture to converse you on some private bizzness," Milk called.

"Huh," Vinegar grunted, much impressed with certain aspects of the situation which did not appear to the man up the tree. "Dar's a nigger fool bawned eve'y minute, an' sometimes twins."

Then the men learned that they were once more guilty of an interruption, for Jinx was still vocal, the sound this time seething and growling and bubbling and muttering like a retreating storm. After that he took a big bite of bark off the trunk of the tree.

"Lawdymussy, Vinegar!" Milk pleaded. "Come an' rescue me away from dis mewl. He's tryin' to bite down dis tree—an' he brays like he done swallered a Roman candle an' de ball's keeps a bustin' inside as dey goes on down."

"Is you got any salt in yo' pocket?" Vinegar bawled.

"Naw."

"If you had a little salt to throw on dat mule's tail, I might could ketch him fer you," Vinegar explained.

After some more conversation of this kind, Vinegar consented to organize a rescue party. He hurried down the hill to a soft-drink emporium called the Hen-scratch, and found ten men sitting around the sloppy, sticky, fly-infested tables.

"Come on, niggers," he guffawed to the crowd. "Jinx is done run a nigger up a tree."

"Jinx done—which?" they chanted in a chorus.

The announcement was incredible, for viciousness was contrary to that particular animal's religion, politics, traditions and antecedents. He was so old that no man knew his real age, so feeble that he had long since been retired from service, a superannuated old plaything who had never done any harm in his life. Children pulled his ears, climbed his tail, and piled on his back like a picnic party on the deck of an excursion steamboat. Jinx was friendly to the whole world. The only animation he ever manifested was when he saw somebody coming toward him who might bestow upon him an apple or a lump of sugar. Milk Shake, being a stranger, had misinterpreted the animal's disposition and conduct.

"Dat's whut de nigger said Jinx done—treed him," Vinegar explained with a broad grin. "He thinks Jinx wanted to bite him. Of co'se, ef Jinx wanted to bite a feller, he could take a chunk outen him like a steam-shovel. He's got a mouf like a auto tire."

"You cain't blame nothin' dangersome like dat on Jinx," Skeeter Butts asserted.

"Naw, suh, but dat's de way Milk Shake feels about it. He's up a tree like I tells you-all, an' he's plum' noisy an' high-sterical like a tree full of blue-jay birds."

"Come on, fellers," Skeeter snickered. "Less git all de dangersome weepons in town an' rescue dat nigger from Jinx."

Ten minutes later the rescue party was ready for action. Four men carried double-barreled shotguns, four men carried a pitchfork in one hand and a pistol in the other. Two men carried axes. Rev. Vinegar Atts carried a clumsy scythe and a brickbat. Up the hill they marched, as brave as Roosevelt's army at San Juan, across the cemetery, over the fence and on to the mighty conflict. They closed ranks and advanced in a solid body. Twenty feet from the harmless and sleepy mule every gun was fired, every pistol was emptied in the air!

Jinx realized the superiority of numbers and of military equipment and retreated, the most astonished and mystified mule in seven States. The terrified man descended from the tree with expedition, and stood gratefully in their midst, thanking them effusively, and gazed, pale, haggard, wall-

eyed as a typhoid patient, at the innocuous Jinx.

"Dar warn't nothin' between you an' de ondertaker but a tree, brudder," Skeeter said earnestly.

"When you monkeys wid Jinx, you better keep yo' mind on yo' life insuriance," Figger Bush told him.

"De las' nigger dat Jinx kilt wus a awful messy corp'," Hitch Diamond remarked reminiscently. "He warn't no satisfaction to hisse'f or to de ondertaker neither. He didn't do hisse'f no credit as a corp'. Us lodge brudders had to take Jinx to de fun'ral because most of dat cullud brudder wus inside dat mule."

"Ole Jinx chased me through a cornfield once," Pap Curtain said in his snarly voice. "I tore down so much of dat corn dat de whole field looked like a dish of vegetable salad."

"Many a good chu'ch member has fell from grace an' loss his religium an' learned how to cuss scandalous by exhortin' dat impenitent mule," Vinegar Atts remarked.

"You got to thank us fer yo' marvelous deliveration, Milky," Mustard Prophet reminded him. "You is been standin' on de very brink of a abscess."

"I 'speck we better be gwine away, fellers," Skeeter Butts remarked, as he saw two little boys climbing the fence to enter the field where Jinx was. "Jinx might git riled up some more, an' we done shot away all our ca'tridges."

"Me an' Shake will be down at de Henscratch a little later, fellers," Vinegar told them, as they turned away. "Me an' Shake is got to hab a little civil conversation togedder."

If Milk had looked behind him, he would have seen a little white boy swinging to Jinx's ears, and trying to straddle the animal's neck, and in the rear a colored boy frantically striving to climb the mule's tail.

"I stands treat fer de crowd, brudders," Shake said, his voice yet a little quavery. "Thank'ee a millyum times fer savin' me!"

II.

"I tried to come through dat fiel' to dodge de high water," Milk Shake began when he and Vinegar had seated themselves under the chinaberry tree in the Tickfall churchyard.

"Shore! Dat high water done cut me off from a couple powerful good preachin' chu'ches whar de wusshuppers is plenty lib'ral when I passes de hat. I feels de lack of money, too. But dat water is right behime dis town now an' it keeps a-risin' up."

"High water ain't de only trouble I'm in," Milk continued. "I'm in hot water, too. I needs exputt he'p to git me outen my yuther troubles."

"I hears a good many tribulation tales," Vinegar said encouragingly. "Sometimes I's mighty pore he'p, but I is always ready to listen. Whut ails yo' mind?"

"Gittin' married."

"Dat's easy," Vinegar laughed. "Fust ketch de gal, den fotch her aroun' to me, an' I'll do de rest."

"Dat's whar my little paddle-canoe hits de snag," Milk explained. "I cain't fotch de gal aroun'. Her payrents is solemn donkey idjit niggers who objectivates to me."

"How come?"

"I uster wus a actor in a 'Uncle Tom Cabin' show," Milk told him. "Atter dat I dressed like a Injun an' done a few sleights-of-hand fer a white feller sellin' patent med'cine. Atter I loss dat job, I shuck a nimble foot in a nigger minsteral show whut went bust—dat's how I got my name, Milk Shake. Dem ole folks is a set of proud sort of noboddy niggers an' dey feels like a play actor ain't fitten to marry in de fambly."

"Yo' life's hist'ry shows you is been a pretty active nigger," Vinegar commented.

"Yes, suh, but in dis here case, I ain't had no luck. De fust time I went to see dat gal I passed under a fig tree in her yard an' a June bug drapped on my hat. You knows whut dat means."

"Shore do," Vinegar assured him, as he looked at Shake with appraising eyes. The man was young, slim and straight, with alert and intelligent eyes, with the dress and air of the city.

"Whut name is yo' gal called by?" Vinegar asked.

"Circle Cloud."

"I knows dat outfit," Vinegar responded. "Dem ole Clouds moved up from N'Awleens recent an' stays in de ole Crawton house."

"Dat's her an' her'n."

"Dem ole Clouds is extry pious," Vinegar continued. "Dey pertends to live all de time on de ragged edge of de sweet by-an'-by. Dey acks plenty enthusiastic when dey talks about gwine to heaven when dey dies. Now you take me—I gives heaven a good recommend, but I don't crave to go dar."

"Dat's reasomble," Milk agreed.

"Whut you want me to do about dis mattermony mess?" Vinegar asked after a period of meditation.

"Whutever he'ps," Milk told him.

"I kin do a heap, ef—ef—" here Vinegar paused, ran his hand into his pocket as if to ascertain how much money he had to spend in the enterprise.

"How much do she cost?" Milk asked promptly.

"I charges five dollars jes' to marry folks when dar ain't no complications," Vinegar said. "How much more dan dat is you willin' to bestow?"

"Five dollars is a small town price," Milk said benevolently. "I's a city nigger. Ef you fix it so dat gal will marry me, I'll donate one hundred dollars."

Vinegar's eyes opened wide. One hundred dollars was as much salary as he would receive in four months as pastor of his church. It was poor pay, but it was also poor preach. As little as Vinegar got, he was actually not worth that.

"When does you aim to pay me dat money?" Vinegar asked.

Milk extracted a roll of bills from his pocket, selected one one-hundred-dollar bill and spread it invitingly on his knee.

"I never seed a bill dat big befo'," Vinegar sighed. "You reckin it's good money?"

"Suttinly."

"I is de unknowingest nigger whut is when it comes to money," Vinegar observed apologetically. "I ain't got no way of knowin' how a bill like dat oughter look."

"It looks right an' it is right," Milk assured him.

"You oughter let me keep dat money till I makes good," Vinegar smiled as he reached out an eager hand for the bill. "It kinder freshes up my mind to tote money."

"Take it an' keep it," Milk said cordially. "But remember dis here remark: dis is all de wages you gits fer de wuck you does. I considers you is well paid."

"Me, too," Vinegar announced as he folded the bill carefully and hid it in his vest pocket. "I aims to earn dis money ef I had to flirt wid de jail-house, bust all de laws of de lan', falls from grace, loses my religium, an' gits chu'ched for cornduck onbecomin' a nigger preacher."

"Less go somewhar an' eat," Milk suggested as he arose.

On their way to the Shin Bone eating-house, they passed the Tickfall bank. Milk paused at the door and said:

"You ain't used to totin' big bills aroun', Revun. You go in dat bank an' ast de casher to cash it up fer you in ten dollar bills. Ast him is it good money. I'll go wid you."

While Vinegar was busy at the window, Milk leaned against a desk, examining the blanks, deposit slips, envelopes and other customary literature of banking institutions. A moment later Vinegar came to him with the ten bills he had received in exchange.

"Dat money wus good money," he exulted, as he laid the evidence before Shake.

Shake picked up the money, placed it in a bank envelope and sealed it. On the address side he wrote his own name and the name of Vinegar Atts. He glanced up from his writing to behold a white-haired man of courtly manners who had entered the door.

"Who dat?" Milk inquired.

Vinegar turned and bowed with exaggerated courtesy to the white man.

"Good mawnin', Marse Tom!" he exclaimed. "I's jes' a visitin' wid yo' bizzness a little dis mawin'. I's proud yo' bank is still got plenty money."

"It's money that keeps us doing business, Vinegar," the colonel smiled and passed on.

"Dat's de head boss leader of dis bank," Vinegar told Shake, when he turned again to the desk. Shake handed the envelope to Vinegar and said:

"'Tain't safe to tote dis much money aroun', especially when you ain't earnt it. You gib dis letter to Skeeter Butts, tell him to put it in his safe, an' tell him dat neither one of us kin take it out 'thout de consent of de yuther."

"I agrees," Vinegar said. "Less eat at de Shin Bone an' mosey to de Hen-scratch."

Vinegar deposited the money in Skeeter's safe without mentioning what the envelope contained. Then he told all his Hen-scratch friends of the reason for Milk's visit to Tickfall and of his desire to assist in the match-making. Every colored brother promptly promised to lend a hand.

"Us loves to mess wid mattermony!" they proclaimed.

First, they all had to go to see Miss Circle Cloud. One little circumstance gave them all a common excuse for their call.

For the first time in a number of years, the waters of Dorfoche Bayou had reached the flood stage. The Little Mocassin swamp was one great lake filled with trees, and the bayou in some places was seven miles wide. The backwater had come to the outskirts of Tickfall and a rather insecure levee was keeping it out of a negro section called Crawfish-town, or for short, Crawtown.

The house most exposed to a possible overflow was the one occupied by the Clouds. It was an old plantation house and had survived many overflows. It had been built for high water, standing twelve feet above the ground on a foundation of cypress logs placed endwise on the ground, making the building look like it was on stilts.

All the Hen-scratch crowd called on Circle with the explanation that they had just stopped by on their way to look at the levee. A stranger might infer that it was their business to guard that levee night and day and its security depended upon their untiring vigilance. The fact was that nobody in Tickfall cared anything about the levee and none would have spent five minutes in repairing a break.

Circle Cloud did not care what excuse the men offered for coming. She was glad they came. She had Indian blood, giving her a squat, squawish body, straight hair, high cheek bones which made her face almost square, and she was colored like a meerschaum pipe. The men liked her and showed it by all the clumsy civilities they could devise. She liked them with all the charms and courtesies of the two races she represented.

Finally, Vinegar Atts appeared and found twelve Hen-scratch habitues sitting on the porch. When he beheld this house party he wanted to retire, but he knew that all had seen him, so he walked into the little yard and stopped at the high steps which led up to the gallery.

"Is you been looking at de levee, too?" Mustard Prophet asked.

"Naw," Skeeter Butts answered, without waiting for Vinegar's reply. "He's come here to ax Miss Circle whether dis house faces yeast or west."

"Dat ain't my notion," Pap Curtain volunteered. "I figgers dat Vinegar is done come to ax Miss Circle whar at straight up is."

Vinegar advanced in the midst of this talk and introduced himself to the woman.

"You is number thirteen, Vinegar," she laughed.

"Huh!" Vinegar grunted. "Onlucky!"

He took off his Prince Albert coat, reversed the sleeves, and put that garment on wrong side out. "Bustin' de hoodoo" by this method, he hung around for some time hoping that the others would leave and give him opportunity to talk to Circle about Milk Shake. Sitting on an old hair-cloth sofa, he squirmed and twisted with impatience, but the others sat on with the obstinate persistence of a brooding hen. Then Vinegar sprang up.

"I think I'll move aroun' a little in de yard," he announced. "Dis here present comp'ny is plum agree'ble, but dis ole hair sofy stabs me through my pants."

Nobody objected to his leaving and he wandered to the rear of the house, where he located the parents of the girl. Cautiously he eased around to a discussion of the daughter and suggested diplomatically that it was mighty nigh time she was getting married off. Both the parents were dried and withered like autumn leaves, both had the garrulous volubility of the aged, and

their daughter's matrimonial designs were heavy on their minds. Vinegar listened for twenty minutes to antiphonal speeches which appeared to take a long time to pass a given point and the import of the whole was about this:

"Dem two young niggers is too frivolous to git married. Dey ain't got no notion of de duty an' desponsibility of life. Dey don't think nothin' serious, an' as long as dey only craves to hab a good time, us'll objeck to deir gittin' married."

This was Vinegar's cue as the village clergyman to be distinctively professional. Reclining in an old hide-bottomed chair with the back of his head against the wall, he delivered half a dozen discourses on modern amusements, the frivolity of the young, and the seriousness and importance of human life. He had an attentive audience who approved his sentiments and they listened in silent admiration to the roaring torrent of his pouring language. When Vinegar arose to go, he said:

"I's glad to find you ole folkses so intrusted in yo' minds in dese here notions. I aims to hab a chu'ch meetin' at de Shoofly to-night an' I invites you—all to a front seat."

"Us'll bofe be dar," they assured him.

Suddenly a tremendous idea petrified Vinegar for a moment. His big mouth fell open like a scoop, his eyes showed the whites all around. Rallying, he moved his lips several times before he could utter speech.

Then he merely said:

"I don't want you-alls to fotch Circle to de chu'ch wid you to-night. Make her stay home by herself. I mought say some things dat de young folks hadn't oughter hear."

He left them hastily and went at once to the levee. Seen at a distance beside the water, he looked like a flutter-tailed steamboat, panting and puffing, as if seeking a landing-place.

III.

Vinegar paused many times in his homeward walk along the old protection embankment, studying carefully the lay of the land on the town side of the levee. Then he picked up an old tin can and hung it on the limb of a tree, marking a spot which he could easily find in the dark. After that he cut a long stalk of bamboo, such as is used for a fishing pole, and concealed that among the limbs of the same tree. He knew that he could thrust that fishing pole endwise entirely through that soft levee as easily as a man could thrust his thumb through blotting paper, for the embankment was water-soaked and gave under his weight as if he were walking on giant sponge.

Before the meeting that night, Vinegar went to the pasture, put a bridle and saddle on Jinx, rode him to the churchyard and hitched him to a tree.

Looking over the congregation, he found all the men present who had been on Circle's porch that afternoon. The parental Clouds were also there, and in an obscure corner in the rear of the dimly lighted church sat Milk Shake.

Services at negro churches are usually late in beginning and the congregation on this particular evening was slow in arriving. Shoofly's male quartet consisted of Skeeter Butts, Figger Bush, Mustard Prophet, and Hitch Diamond. Calling these four songsters outside, Vinegar said:

"I wants you brudders to hol' dis meetin' fer me till I gits back. I needs to ride back to town fer a little bizzness."

"Dat suits me," Mustard Prophet remarked with great gratification. "I'm got two new gol' front toofs an' I hankers to stan' up befo' de cong'gation an' sing. I bet I opens my mouf as wide as one of dese here old-style fireplaces."

Vinegar rode straight to the spot which he had marked with a tin can, hitched his mule and walked to the levee. He thrust his bamboo pole through the soft mud at the base of the embankment and the yellow water gushed through the hole as if he had turned on the water from a faucet. Then he mounted his mule and rode back to the church.

The service in progress was what is called a "meetin'-house sing." It gives every person in the congregation an opportunity to make an awful noise without being arrested for disturbing the peace. One song was roll-

ing out of the windows of the old church "like the voice of many waters."

"On Jordan's stormy banks I stan'
An' cast a wishful eye
To Canaan's fair an' happy lan',
Whar my possessions lie."

This was a favorite song, and the crowd began to "weave" and ejaculations were heard expressive of happiness and religious exaltation.

"Sweet fields beyond de swellin' flood
Stan' dressed in livin' green.
So to de Jews ole Canaan stood
While Jordan rolled between."

The prevailing high water, laying hold upon the rich, oriental imagination of the negroes, made this song peculiarly appropriate and effective. While they sang, they saw the great jungle of the Mocassin swamp as a monstrous lake of oily yellow. They saw the little Dorfoche Bayou stretching to a swelling flood several miles in width. They saw the wild beasts of the forest—deer, bear, cats—made singularly tame by distress and privation, lurking uneasily along the edges of that saffron pool. They knew that they would see in the summer the water marks on the trees thirty feet above the ground. Therefore their voices became a mighty chorus, and Mustard Prophet's flashing gold teeth were visible to all as they chanted:

"Could we but climb whar Moses stood
An' view de landscape o'er,
Not Jordan's stream nor death's col' flood
Should fright us from dat shore."

Vinegar sat down in the pulpit and waited. In a little while the door was thrust open by a little negro whose face was ashy with fright and emotional excitement and who struggled for breath after his long run.

"My Gawd, brudders!" he exclaimed. "De levee is done broke an' Crawtown is all under water."

Instantly the two old Clouds, sitting on the front bench, wailed with fright and piteous supplication.

"Our little gal will git drown-dead!" they howled.

"Eve'ybody git busy!" Vinegar howled.

The entire congregation rushed out at the top of their voices, and ran with full speed toward Crawtown. Dozens of white men inquired the cause of the excitement, smiled and passed on, undisturbed. A flood would be good for Crawtown, washing out the yard, sweeping the trash from under the cabins, and carrying all uncleanliness to a remote place in the swamp upon the current of the stream. When the colored folks arrived upon the scene, they found that the water had risen over the top of the low fences, but they also found that the break had occurred at a point on the levee which exposed only one house to the water—and that house was occupied by Circle Cloud.

Circle was standing on the porch holding a lighted lantern and making as much noise with her mouth as half a dozen circus calliopes. The water around the house was about four feet deep and rising steadily.

"Git a boat!" somebody howled, but nobody had a boat.

"Make a raft!" somebody else suggested, but nobody did anything.

All sorts of advice was called across the water to the shrieking girl who did not listen and would not have heeded if she had heard.

Then the hero advanced to the rescue!

Vinegar Atts was stage manager of this theatrical performance and he had held Milk Shake in readiness awaiting the proper moment for a sensational deliverance of the imperiled girl from a watery death.

Milk Shake was mounted upon old Jinx. The mule waded into the quiet, steadily rising pool, for the overflow was backwater and had no current. When the water was nearly up to the top of the saddle, Jinx sidled up to the edge of the porch like a steamboat making a landing, and the squalling, hysterical Circle leaped astride the animal's back, and the solemn Jinx started with his double burden toward higher land and safety.

Thereupon Milk Shake began to sing the chorus of the hymn which had been so vociferously rendered at the church:

"I'm boun' fer de promised lan',
I'm boun' fer de promised lan'—"

And the great crowd "whooped her up" until their voices echoed and reëchoed

among the water-bound trees of the great jungle:

"Oh, who will come an' go wid me?
I'm boun' fer de promised lan'."

IV.

FOUR men were familiar with levee construction, and Vinegar employed them to help him repair the break in the embankment which he himself had made several hours before. The moon was shining, and their work was hard and required a long time, for the old levee crumbled like bread and its soil seemed to go into solution like sugar. Vinegar confessed to them that he had flooded the Cloud house for the one purpose of impressing Circle's parents with the heroic qualities of their prospective son-in-law.

"He done rescued de fair maiden, an' now he's got to marry her—I done read dat in books an' saw it in fawty movie picter shows," Vinegar guffawed.

"'Tain't so," Pap Curtain snarled. "Marriages am made up in heaven. I been kotch in de cuttin'-box of mattermony five times, an' I knows!"

"I don't b'lieve Pap knows, neither," Hitch Diamond rumbled. "Now I married Goldie, an' Goldie herse'f will tel you dat heaven didn't monkey wid dat weddin'—it wus managed by a feller from 'way down below!"

"I married Hopey," Mustard Prophet panted as he piled dirt on top of the nearly completed levee. "'Twan't no rescue—I jes' follered my nose like a houn' dawg ontwell I foun' a kitchen whar de cook made good biscuits an' lubricated de eatin' of 'em by bestowin' a few sirup."

"'Twus de yuther way round' wid me," Figger Bush remarked. "I didn't marry at all—my wife married me—'thout my cornsent an' wid compelment. Ef Proverdunce had done a good thing by me, he would hab rescued me an' substracted me away from dat gal. But as 'twus, I had to marry her or git my clothes tore. As 'twus, she got me an' I had to take her, an' I ain't never wanted nothin' less."

The men stopped. The work was completed. They leaned wearily on their tools and perspiration rolled off them like Niagara Falls.

"Hey, you niggers!" Skeeter Butts called as he broke through the underbrush where they had been toiling. "You is all wanted fer witness, an' Vinegar is craved to pufform a weddin'. Dem ole Clouds is been took in fer de night in a dry cabin, an' Milk an' Circle is fixin' to marry an' sneak off on de log-train caboose. Milk got his licenses in N'Awleens. Come on!"

"Us is all muddy!" Vinegar protested.

"Dat don't make no diffunce in yo' case," Skeeter shouted. "A fat nigger preacher ain't no beauty spot nohow, no time, nowhar, an' you can't fix up an' be no beaut."

Twenty minutes later Milk and Circle climbed on the caboose, bidding good-by to their Tickfall friends. As the train started Milk called to Skeeter:

"Don't fergit to gib Vinegar dat envelope whut we put in yo' safe!"

The six men walked back to the Henscratch Saloon. Vinegar sank wearily into a chair, and his levee repair gang dropped into chairs beside him.

"Now, fellers," Vinegar said to them, "I promised you-all two dollars an' a half per each to he'p me fix dat break."

"Dat's right."

"My money is in a envelope in Skeeter's safe," Vinegar remarked.

Skeeter laid the envelope upon the table. Vinegar tore it open and brought out the money. He laid a ten-dollar bill upon the table and said:

"Skeeter will change dis money fer you, an' each of you kin divide yo' pay."

Skeeter reached for the bill, snapped it in his practiced fingers, passed it under his nose with a contemptuous sniff, and tossed it back upon the table top.

"Nothin' doin'," he said shortly. "No change comin' to you outen dis money."

"How come?" Vinegar asked in a startled voice. "Ain't dis here money good?"

"It depends on whut you want to do wid it," Skeeter said. "Now ef you wus runnin' a 'Uncle Thomas Cabin' show, dis money is good show money. But it won't buy you no vittles, an' you cain't git it changed into no real money."

"My Lawdy!" Vinegar mourned. "When I turnt aroun' in dat bank to make miration over Marse Tom Gaitskill, dat sleight-of-han' coon switched dis Uncle Tom money off on me."

"How 'bout us?" Hitch Diamond inquired. "We expecks our pay in real dollars, an' you still owes us!"

Vinegar caved in like a punctured automobile tire.

"I reckin you niggers will have to take it out in preachin'," he sighed.

"Naw," Pap Curtain snarled. "I'd hab to listen to you preach eve'y Sunday fer a thousan' years befo' I could git two dollars an' a half wuth, an' at de end of dat time you'd owe me fawty-nine cents change."

Vinegar subsided into the silence of a troubled reverie. The four unpaid employees looked upon him with disgusted disdain.

The smoky oil lamp revealed Vinegar's fixed expression of intense gloom, and five men gazed at the tragic black mask of his face. Skeeter Butts alone was at ease. After a long time Vinegar spoke:

"De only way I kin pay you niggers is to sell my mule. Jinx will fotch about ten dollars at auction. I don't need him nohow excusin' in high water. I'm got a flivver."

"Whar is Jinx at?" Pap Curtain asked.

"He's tied to a tree behime de Henscratch."

At that moment Jinx spoke for himself. A bray, profound, appalling, soul-subduing, ironical and sardonic, quenching all human sentiments, scattering all reveries, paralyzing all action, filled woods and sky and air! Everything else sank into insignificance beside it. Silence for three minutes, while the men waited for the operator to change the reel. Then a diminuendo, prolonged and melancholic, wailed the mule's obscene balladry at the dawn of another day.

"I knows what done happened to you, Vinegar," Skeeter snickered. "You is been jinxed!"

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THE DAWNING

I THOUGHT 'twas the moon and the stars that I loved,
The rain and the rainbow, too;
The waking of spring and the thrush on the wing,
The grass and the meadows' dew.

I thought 'twas the moan of the sea that I loved,
Dull tones and the chants of the just;
The wind in the eaves and the rustle of leaves
That fall on the earth's cold crust.

I thought it was wisdom and art that I loved,
And fame with its radiant hue;
I thought, oh, I thought, 'twas the world that I loved—
And all of the time it was you.

Margaret Severance.

Voices

By GEORGE J. BRENN

Author of "Five Dollars—and No Sense," etc.

CHAPTER XV.

TRINITY CHIMES.

"MR. BOYDEN tells me that I cannot be of assistance this evening," said Lorraine Carewe, as they left the table. "I do wish you good luck, however, and I truly hope that you'll do something to regain Mr. Willmer's confidence before morning. If you knew him as well as I do you'd appreciate the fact that his present state of mind presages a more violent outburst. He was particularly mean and inconsiderate to you this evening, and I felt awfully sorry for you. I wouldn't blame you a bit if you entirely discontinued your efforts in his behalf."

"I'm not making any efforts in his behalf," reminded Fenwick. "I'm merely doing a job assigned to me by my superior. So far as I'm concerned Mr. Willmer is entirely out of the picture."

"Then you merely regard this as a disagreeable task to be disposed of as quickly as possible?" she asked. "Sentiment and pride do not enter into it at all?"

"On the contrary, I'm tremendously interested, because the task is agreeable. I do take pride in what I'm doing, aside from striving to find favor in the eyes of my boss. As for sentiment, I shall feel amply repaid if I succeed in driving the troubled look from the eyes of a beautiful damsel who personifies the Moslem's idea of beauty, but who objects to being reminded of the fact."

As a delicate blush suffused the fine texture of her skin and caused the dark lashes to mask the glory of her darker eyes, Fenwick's face held a whimsical smile. Again he had shaken off his diffidence, and had launched his sally in precisely the tone of banter that would give evidence of underlying sincerity.

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for November 25.

"Gallant as ever, Mr. Bell," she observed, when she had sufficiently regained her composure to meet his eyes. "I'm flattered at your efforts in my behalf. Now I'm going to write a letter or two, after which I shall take Mr. Boyden's advice. 'Early to bed, miss!' said Seth, wagging an imperative forefinger. Please tell him that I'm following his admonition to the letter."

"I will," he assured her, and they parted. He immediately rejoined Boyden at the switchboard.

"Anything doing, Seth?" he asked.

"Nary a nibble," answered his assistant, disgustedly. "Hello, here's a bite, now!"

"Just eight o'clock," reminded Fenwick. "Take the call."

Boyden plugged in and flicked the listening key.

"Mr. Willmer's residence," he announced, and then listened intently for a minute or two.

"I'll remember," he informed the calling party. "The clock will strike twelve three times before that happens. Mebbe it won't even happen." He disconnected and turned to Fenwick.

"Frenchman," he advised. "Said that after midnight to-morrow Willmer's reputation would be utterly destroyed. Purty tough, ain't it, Charlie?"

"It may be considerably worse than we think," returned Fenwick, so seriously that Seth's facetious manner vanished instantly.

"What are you goin' to do if Willmer orders you off the case?"

"We're going to continue," answered Fenwick promptly. "He can't interfere with your efforts to locate the missing station in this vicinity, nor can he obstruct my efforts to learn the reason for these attempts at blackmail, so long as my investigations are carried on outside his home."

At Boyden's request Charlie outlined the procedure he wished Seth to follow in searching for the piratical telephone equipment. The discussion continued until the switchboard clock indicated the time as twenty-five minutes past eight. Fenwick exchanged places with Boyden.

"We should have another call within the next five minutes," explained Fenwick. "I've been racking my memory in an endeavor to recall the owner of that voice. Perhaps it will come to me if I hear it again. Sooner or later I'm going to remember it."

"There's your call now!" said Seth.

"I hardly think so," disagreed Fenwick. "This call is on 11,981. We know that the voices are using 11,982, the new trunk." He hurriedly plugged in and answered.

"Please refrain from speaking except on request," ordered a clear, brusque voice. "Are you listening, Inspector Corson."

"Yes," answered a somewhat faint, distant voice.

"You are at Newtown, inspector?"

"Yes. Why?"

"Don't ask questions. Are *you* listening, Mr. Otis King?"

"I'm listening," responded King.

"Do you hear me distinctly at Forest Hills?"

"Fairly well."

"And Mr. Willmer. Are *you* listening, Mr. Willmer?"

"This is Mr. Willmer's residence, but Mr. Willmer is not listening," responded Fenwick.

"Ah, the estimable Mr. Bell! I should have preferred Mr. Willmer, but his chicken heart has apparently failed him. We'll have to get along with Mr. Bell for the present. We are assembled to discuss a matter of tremendous importance.

"After twelve o'clock to-morrow night the newspapers of this city will be supplied with copy of a sensational nature regarding the Triumvirate. The publication of this information will mark the point at which disintegration of that vast financial power will begin. To prevent such a catastrophe, money will be required—a large sum. The money must be furnished by Warren Willmer. Mr. King, may I rely on you to use your influence to this end?"

"As I've said before," responded King, "I'll see you in hell first!"

"You are young and foolish, Mr. King," continued the voice. "I don't despair of changing your mind before to-morrow night. How about you, Mr. Corson? Would you care to advise this heedless youth?"

"Gladly," answered Corson. "I'll undertake to convince Mr. Willmer as well. I'll tell them both that the course you prescribe is the only safe and sane one."

"Good for you, inspector! I hope you mean it. No tricks or traps, remember. If you are hoping to accomplish the downfall of my organization, you'd better abandon the notion immediately. We expect fair dealing. Is that satisfactory?"

"Perfectly," agreed the inspector.

"May we expect your assistance, Mr. Bell?" continued the voice.

"You may not," retorted Charlie. "I shall strongly advise against anything of the kind. Before midnight to-morrow you will have reason to regret every threat you have made."

"You are an excellent telephone man, Mr. Bell," returned the unknown in even tones, "but you are scarcely qualified to act as advisor to a multi-millionaire in an affair of this character. As a sign and warning to all of you I have arranged to demonstrate to-night that Warren Willmer is entirely within the power of the voices. I hope you will profit by the warning. Are there any questions?"

"Just one," put in Corson. "If Mr. Willmer agrees to meet your demands, how are we to let you know?"

"A fair question, inspector. I'll call Mr. Willmer at noon, to-morrow. He must answer the telephone himself, and will then be advised of all the details. Is that clear?"

"Perfectly," assented the inspector.

"Any other questions?" asked the voice.

"Yes," answered Fenwick. "You've explained things pretty clearly and know the attitude of each of us. Earlier this evening you advised that this house would be called by a different member of your gang every thirty minutes. There is no necessity for continuing that farce. Will you entertain a suggestion to discontinue the calls for the rest of the night?"

The man chuckled.

"Hardly," he refused. "I want you to have a definite idea of the number and variety of the persons with whom you are dealing. I want you to note the precision and regularity with which we operate. The calls will be continued! Is that all?"

No one answered.

"Good night!" mocked the voice, and disconnected. Fenwick immediately slipped from his chair, and turning to Seth, briefly acquainted him with the nature of the conversation.

"Get my coat and hat, Seth," he ordered. "I'm going to find the person who called."

"How?" queried Seth. "If he was talkin' from a private branch exchange you should 've let me get on the other wire and find out the number from the operator."

"You couldn't," explained Charlie. "You didn't notice it, but a call came through on 11,982 directly after the one on the other trunk. It was the same fellow calling. He put the other line in use for just that reason. Hurry — my coat and hat."

Seth hustled out of sight, but soon returned.

"Call the Long Island toll board chief operator, right away," advised Fenwick. "Ask her to make a search through the tickets written within the last thirty minutes. We want to learn what Rector number called Boulevard 5381 and Newtown 4987. Stick to the switchboard and take every call that comes in. Be on your guard; they've threatened to demonstrate their power to harm Mr. Willmer. Good-by."

"How do you know it was a Rector number?" queried Boyden, following Fenwick to the front door.

"Tell you when I return; no time now."

Fenwick flew down the stairs and was fortunate to obtain a taxicab immediately.

"Where to?" asked the chauffeur.

"111 Broadway, and snap it up," he ordered.

The chauffeur obeyed his injunction to the letter and the tires fairly sang on the trip down town. Fenwick was not oversanguine regarding the success of his trip, but he felt that it was a fair gamble, and that Boyden would successfully cope with any developments at the Willmer residence while he was away.

The brakes suddenly protested, the driver shifted his gears, and the taxi came to a halt.

"Here you are, sir," announced the chauffeur, opening the door.

"Wait for me," requested Fenwick. He looked about. Halfway up the next block two policemen were peering into a store window. He hurried to the spot. Gilt lettering on the window read: "Branson's Ticket Agency."

"Anything wrong?" he asked.

"We're wonderin'," answered one of the officers. "This place is usually closed after seven in the evenin'. George here spotted a stranger usin' the telephones in there awhile ago. This place is run by two women, and we never saw a man behind the counter before. There's the feller gettin' into that taxi at the next corner."

Fenwick glanced in the direction indicated. A slender chap wearing a light raincoat and cap stepped hurriedly into the waiting cab, which immediately spun around on its small wheelbase and headed uptown.

"No burglar alarm?" queried Fenwick.

"No. The place is open to the street, with a cop passing almost constantly. This feller had a key. I called Pat here, beauz I wasn't sure what to do."

"You should have grabbed him," observed Fenwick. "I'm going to try to catch him."

He returned to his taxi and pointed out the distant tail light of the stranger's cab.

"Catch that fellow," he ordered.

Without a word his driver started off, and made the most of the fact that there was no traffic to interfere with his progress. Passing City Hall Park he turned to Fenwick.

"If we can steal up on him we can catch him," he said. "If he spots us and tries to get away we're done for. That cab's a six cylinder; mine's a four."

He turned to his wheel, and utterly disregarding speed laws, ran his speedometer up to a point that caused the somewhat ancient vehicle to vibrate, creak and knock amazingly. As they reached Canal Street their quarry was less than two blocks distant, but they were compelled to wait by traffic.

"We've got to get 'em soon," explained the driver. "I need gas and oil, both. Besides, I think that fellow noticed me. He speeded up a lot just about here."

As they moved on the rear light of the stranger's cab was again a mere speck in the distance, and it was more than evident that the pursuit had been noted. Fenwick's driver made a despairing final effort, but soon abandoned it.

"No use," he announced. "She's smokin', now." He turned down a side street to a service station, where he procured the necessary gas, oil and water.

"Will you want me any more?" he asked, genuinely disappointed at his inability to meet the requirements of his fare. Fenwick gave him the Willmar address. As if to prove his ability to drive expertly, he overhauled and passed other cars on Broadway with surprising regularity. Once on the Drive, it was merely a matter of minutes before he stopped at the Willmar mansion.

Fenwick paid him, adding a generous tip. "You did your best," he commended.

"Honest, boss, you make me feel like hell!" answered the chauffeur, gazing at the gratuity uncertainly. He touched his cap gratefully as Fenwick ascended the steps.

Boyden admitted him.

"Let's hurry back to the board," he suggested. "I got a call at nine o'clock, but there wa'n't any at nine thirty, and it's quarter o' ten now."

"I doubt if you get any more," yawned Charlie, thumbing the pages of a New York City directory. He ran down a page until he encountered the listing of "Branson's Ticket Agency." "Did the toll board operator tell you those calls to Newtown and Forest Hills were from Rector 23,960?" he asked.

"Yes," answered Boyden, bewildered. "How did you know?"

"I've just been down to the premises at which that telephone is located. Theater ticket agency. A veritable room full of telephones, including a P. B. X. That fellow couldn't have picked out a better place to get us all on the wire and to throw keys and switches so we could all listen in."

"How'd you know where to go?" demanded Seth.

"Trinity chimes. Heard them ring while that fellow was talking to me over the

telephone. Knew that he must be somewhere close by."

"Did ye catch him?"

"No, but I saw him. It wasn't Cartier."

"Who was it?"

"I wasn't near enough to see him very well; in fact, the momentary glimpse I had occurred at a time when he was entering a taxicab. From the clothes he wore, he might easily have been mistaken for Otis King."

"But King was on the wire, talkin' f'm Forest Hills!" protested Seth.

"Exactly, Seth. In other words, we're stopped right there."

Riggs rushed into the room, trousers hastily pulled on over his pyjamas, his manner extremely agitated.

"Mr. Willmer—er—Mr. Willmer, sir—"

"What about him, Riggs?"

"He's dead or dying, sir. Please come quickly."

All three rushed from the room and up the stairs. They followed Riggs into his master's bedchamber. Riggs switched on all the lights. Willmer was perfectly motionless, a more peaceful expression on his face than Boyden or Fenwick had ever witnessed. Fenwick hurried to his side. He felt of Willmer's hands, then threw back the covers and placed his ear to the financier's chest.

"Sleeping soundly, Riggs," he advised. "Don't worry. Why—what's this?"

The exclamation was caused by the discovery of a scrap of newspaper pinned to the financier's pillow. On the margin of it was typed:

> Drugged. We could have poisoned him or shot him. We are all-powerful.
>
> THE VOICES.

He passed it to Boyden, and Riggs peered over Seth's shoulder to read it. The butler's knees sagged and his face paled as he grasped the significance of the note.

"My God!" he muttered hoarsely. "Can't you do anything, sir?"

"I'm afraid I can't, to-night, Riggs," he confessed, slowly and soberly. "How did you discover this?"

"I retired early, sir, as Mr. Boyden directed, but I couldn't get to sleep. I had a feeling that something was wrong. It seemed like hours that I lay there, and finally I couldn't stand it any longer. I slipped on some of my clothes and came in here. Mr. Willmer hasn't slept soundly in some time, but repeated knocks on his door went unanswered, so I used my own key. The minute I saw him I suspected foul play. I called to him, but he didn't answer. Then I rushed down to you."

Fenwick picked up the small glass that stood beside a decanter on the telephone table near Willmer's bed. A quantity of liquor remained in the glass. He smelled it and tasted it gingerly.

"Laudanum," he advised. "The whole bottle has probably been drugged. Put it in a safe place, Riggs."

"Has anything happened?" asked an anxious voice, and Lorraine Carewe glided silently into the room. She was a vision of loveliness in her satin, crape and lace dressing gown of flesh and lavender—colors which contrasted strikingly with her wealth of flowing coal-black hair. Some distance from the bed she halted, arrested by the serious expressions of the three men.

"What is wrong?" she begged, looking from one to the other, the tears welling up in her eyes. Slowly, reluctantly, she approached the bed.

Fenwick touched her on the shoulder.

"Mr. Willmer is in no danger, Miss Carewe," he assured her. "Our concern is due to what might have happened. He has merely been drugged, and is in a deep sleep."

"Drugged? Who—when—I don't understand!" she protested.

He led her to a chair and persuaded her to be seated. Then he repeated Riggs's story, and showed her the note which had been pinned to Willmer's pillow.

She grew pale as she read it, although making an obvious effort to control herself.

"This is the limit of my endurance, Mr. Bell," she announced slowly. "I've been just as brave as I could be, but one simply can't become inured to occurrences of this kind. I can't answer for Mr. Willmer, but he must be told just what has occurred, and be permitted to make his own decision."

"You're absolutely right," answered Fenwick gravely. "I'd hesitate to influence any action he might care to take after this. The inspector will be here in the morning, and we'll go over the whole story. There's no immediate cause for alarm, however, and you'd better return to your room. Riggs and I will stay right here until morning."

She handed him the scrap of newspaper, but hesitated before reaching the door.

"I'm frightened," she confessed plaintively. "I'm forever seeing shadows and hearing noises."

"Seth will escort you to your room," suggested Fenwick. "Riggs had better rouse your maid; you'll feel safer if you have company."

"Thank you, Mr. Bell," she murmured gratefully. "You are as sympathetic and understanding as a woman. Good night."

She took Seth's arm and permitted him to lead her from the room.

"A wonderful young lady, sir," observed Riggs, his eyes glued admiringly to the doorway through which she had just departed.

"Wonderful, Riggs," repeated Fenwick.

"She seems to have a very high regard for you, sir, if I may say so."

"Does she, Riggs?" mused Fenwick, as if turning the statement over in his mind. "I wonder if it can be possible that you are right?"

CHAPTER XVI.

THE BARGAIN.

DESPITE his all-night vigil in the financier's bedchamber, Fenwick began preparations for a busy day early the next morning. He left Riggs with Willmer, instructing him to say nothing regarding the drugging episode until a conference was held later in the morning. Then he breakfasted with Seth, discussing the possibility of locating the station used by the voices and again instructing him in the method to be followed.

"I'd feel more optimistic if it was 'open' wire, Charlie," admitted Boyden, referring to the manner in which wires are strung overhead in suburban communities. In New York City practically all wires used for the telephone, telegraph, burglar alarms and fire alarms are underground, and Seth had only a limited knowledge of the general scheme of conduits, cables, cable boxes and multiple conductors.

"There's nothing to it, Seth," encouraged Fenwick. "Just follow my directions and you'll run across the equipment somewhere."

Boyden telephoned Pierson and obtained some necessary information. He had donned working clothes and had provided himself with an installer's badge and a kit of tools.

"Well, so-long, Charlie," he grinned.

"Good luck, Seth. You're all prepared, I see."

"As it says in the ninth chapter o' Revelations, fifteenth verse, 'Prepared for an hour and a day and a month and a year.'"

"Let us hope it will be an hour, Seth."

"Can't tell. You've given me a double assignment. The thirty-fourth chapter of Isaiah, eighteenth verse, asks: 'Where is the receiver?' Charlie Fenwick is askin': 'Where is the transmitter and the receiver?'"

"You'll find one where you find the other, Seth."

"Guess you're right, Charlie. So-long."

As soon as his assistant left he telephoned Newtown and was advised by a servant that Corson was on his way to New York and would call on Willmer at ten o'clock. As he was about to leave the switchboard, Marie—Lorraine's maid—entered the little room.

"*Mademoiselle* ees not well zis morning," she announced. "M. Willmaire ees not well, too, and Riggs 'ave told me to telephone for ze doctaire."

He waited until she had finished the call.

"What seems to be the trouble, Marie?" he asked.

"M. Willmaire has a spleeting headache," she answered.

"And Miss Carewe, Marie?"

"Ah! You would know zat, too. Eet ees nairves, I t'eenk. Shall I say to *mademoiselle* zat you eenquire?" She flashed him a teasing smile.

"If you will be so kind."

"She will be glad, M. Bell."

The vivacious Marie flitted from the room with a knowing smile, and Fenwick idled about the lower floor until Riggs came down.

"How is Mr. Willmer, Riggs?"

"He has a terrible headache, sir, and I think he suspects that something is wrong. He has a strong aversion to doctors, except for other people, but when I suggested calling on Dr. Robbins he protested very weakly, and finally consented. Of course he may have been influenced by Miss Carewe's condition, since he insisted that the doctor see her first. If I'm not mistaken here he is now."

He admitted the physician, a man of about forty, with a seriously professional demeanor. Riggs showed him upstairs, at the same time explaining that Willmer had probably been drugged, and requesting that the fact be withheld from him for an hour or two. Dr. Robbins immediately grew suspicious and questioned Riggs closely, but the fact that Inspector Corson was expected at the house seemed to satisfy him.

Some twenty minutes later the physician left and Riggs advised Fenwick that he had administered a sedative to Miss Carewe and had advised her to remain in bed. He had also prescribed for Willmer, and had somewhat enraged the financier by recommending a stay of several weeks at a sanatorium.

"Mr. Willmer wished to know if you were still here, and if Inspector Corson was expected. I told him that you wished to hold a conference when the inspector arrives at ten o'clock. He just nodded and said he would see you both in the library. He also said he didn't want Miss Carewe disturbed."

Corson arrived promptly, and the three men met in the room designated by Willmer. Corson began by describing the four-cornered conversation of the previous evening, including the threat of the voices to demonstrate their ability to harm the financier. At this point Fenwick took up the story, and told of his trip down town, his identification of the office within the shadow of Trinity from which the call had originated, and his pursuit of the man who had telephoned. He told of his chagrin at having the man elude him, and of his return to the house. Then he described the agitated appearance of Riggs as he called for assistance, the rush to Willmer's room, and the discovery of the note typed on a scrap of newspaper. He took the note from his wallet and handed it to Willmer.

The financier read it and was silent for a long time. Then he passed the note to Corson.

"You haven't seen it, I believe," he muttered in hollow tones.

Corson examined it closely, but apparently regarded it of slight importance.

"There's just one thing to do, sir, and that is to pretend to submit to the demands of this gang. That fellow who asked me to use my influence said that he would telephone you at noon to-day, and stipulated that you answer the telephone. My advice is for you to do so. Learn how much it is the blackmailers demand, obtain the money in any form they suggest, and find out where they want it delivered. I'll have a squad of men in the neighborhood, wherever it is, and we'll gather them in."

The inspector sounded convincing, and Willmer nodded eager assent, like a drowning man clutching a straw.

"No doubt you're right, Corson," he agreed. "What do you think, Bell? Shall I do it?"

"It can't do any harm to try it, sir," he answered, rather surprised at the question, in view of Willmer's denunciation of his efforts on the previous evening.

"Don't think me ungrateful, Bell," he begged. "I appreciate all you have done. It was splendid of you to labor so strenuously in my behalf last night, after I had given way to my overwrought nerves. Now it's a question of self-preservation. I must act, and act quickly. You will not mind if I follow the inspector's advice?"

"Not at all," responded Fenwick.

"I should like you to remain here, so that you may confer and advise with the inspector, giving him such assistance as he may request. Will you do that?"

Fenwick hesitated.

"If the inspector wishes it," he assented.

"Glad to have your help, Charlie," acknowledged Corson, magnanimously. He

tried to restrain a triumphant smile, but fell short of concealing it.

"Professional jealousy, eh?" queried Willmer, forcing a feeble smile. "Let's work together. I'm going to lie down and try to get rid of the effects of that damned drug. My mouth feels like a dusty desert. Any instructions, Corson?"

"I'm going to ask Fenwick to take the switchboard, sir. When that telephone call comes in at noon he will connect you with the fellow and let you do the bargaining. Fenwick will listen in, and we'll be sure to get everything perfectly straight."

Willmer nodded assent and went to his room.

"I believe we're going to get somewhere," exulted Corson.

"Don't be too optimistic," cautioned Fenwick.

"I can't help it; it's a hunch. The fellow who receives Willmer's money is going to have bracelets slipped on his wrists, surer than Fate. Oh, by the way, Charlie, I'd like you to examine all the telephone instruments in the house. Seems to me I once heard of a case where a man was shot by a cartridge placed inside a telephone receiver. The fellow who put the cartridge there called this chap up and yelled into the telephone until something or other got hot. That set off the cartridge and the chap with the receiver to his ear was shot through the brain!" He walked up and down the room, smiling gleefully and darting quick, knowing glances at Fenwick.

"Stick to your own line, inspector," advised Charlie, good-naturedly. "The case you heard of was in a story book. If you like I'll examine the receiver in Willmer's room. I imagine from your manner that you believe you have stumbled on the explanation to Pendleton Kirke's death. You haven't, I assure you. When I entered Kirke's study, his telephone receiver was on the hook."

"Sure you didn't put it there?" demanded Corson, his smile disappearing.

"Absolutely. You'll have to get another theory."

Disconcerted by Fenwick's refusal to consider what he regarded as a positive answer to the mystery of Pendleton Kirke's death, Corson paced the floor for half an hour, reviewing the entire tragedy from all angles and cross-examining Fenwick in an endeavor to obtain further facts. He was unable to evolve a plausible theory to supplant the ones previously rejected by Fenwick, and gave the thing up in utter disgust and impatience.

"You'll have to tell me, anyway, as soon as I round up the voices," he reminded.

"I will, inspector—when you round up the voices!"

It was nearing noon, and Fenwick went to the switchboard on the lower floor. While awaiting the significant message he telephoned Diamond Jim Ordway and made an appointment to visit that eccentric but intensely human individual at his office at two o'clock in the afternoon. At ten minutes of twelve Corson joined him.

"A penny for your thoughts, Charlie," he offered, noting the young wire chief's preoccupied manner.

"I was just thinking of that four-cornered conversation last night, and trying to visualize the miles of hard-drawn copper wire and tons of equipment it called into use. A year or two from now it will be a comparatively simple matter for a person to talk to thousands without any apparatus to speak of."

"What do you mean?"

"Radio; wireless telephony. Colonel Carty and some of his engineers believe it will be possible for the entire nation to hear the inaugural address of our next President. Think of it, man! Our War Department, if we have one, will be able to instantly mobilize an army of defense all over the country by means of a spoken word or two."

"Marvelous!" agreed Corson. "But won't we have many more cases like the voices when that time arrives? And won't it put a certain phonic criminologist out of business?"

"The answer to both questions is 'No,' inspector. Radio in its present development does not afford the privacy required by criminals. As for my work, I don't specialize in the telephone business; my specialty is the spoken word, regardless of the medium used to broadcast it."

"There's the call!" exclaimed Corson eagerly, crowding close to the switchboard.

Fenwick picked it up, announcing "Mr. Willmer's residence." At the calling party's request to talk with Willmer he established a connection with the financier's room and rang the bell.

Willmer answered promptly.

"You have decided to follow Inspector Corson's advice?" queried the brusque, clear voice of the preceding evening.

"Yes," acknowledged Willmer.

"It will cost you one hundred thousand dollars, Mr. Willmer. Upon payment of that sum the voices will permanently cease to bother you."

"When do you wish this money?" inquired Willmer.

"At one o'clock. In cash—one hundred bills of a thousand denomination. I will send an intermediary to your home for it in an hour."

"Any credentials?" asked Willmer.

"None," returned the voice. "He will merely ask for the money."

"What assurance have I that the voices will cease to annoy me?"

"Nothing but the word of an unknown man. You will have to trust us as we are trusting you. Your friends and associates will regret it exceedingly if you attempt to double-cross us. *You* will be past regretting anything. The money must be ready for my man when he calls at one o'clock."

"It will be ready," assured Willmer; and the unknown hung up his receiver.

Fenwick repeated the conversation for Corson's benefit.

"One hundred thousand!" exclaimed Corson. "I wonder what deviltry the old boy's been up to, that he should be called upon to pay such a price! Call headquarters for me, will you, Charlie?"

Fenwick complied with his request, and in a few moments Corson was arranging to have a dozen plainclothes men keep the Willmer home under surveillance. He issued orders that they were to take no action toward persons entering the house, but were to apprehend any who might leave unless he vouched for them.

As the call terminated Willmer entered the room.

"Did you hear?" he asked.

"Yes," answered Corson. "Fenwick listened in and has told me what was said. Have you so huge a sum on deposit in one bank?"

"Surely. Will it be necessary to actually withdraw it? I could arrange to have the bank say I did, if—"

"Too thin," interrupted Corson. "We will have to go through all the motions. Write your check and send some one to have it cashed immediately. The whole thing must look like a legitimate transaction up to the point where we make an arrest."

"I'll send Riggs," decided Willmer, and went to his room to write the check.

"How are you going to proceed?" inquired Fenwick. "Have you any plans?"

"Don't need any elaborate plans," answered Corson. "When this bird shows up at one o'clock we'll look him over. If he's some one we've suspected we'll nab him. If he seems to be an innocent or ignorant intermediary we'll have him shadowed, and he'll lead us to our man."

The two proceeded to the library to join Willmer. On the way upstairs Riggs passed them, dressed for the street. He advised that he had ordered Willmer's car and was on his way to the bank to obtain the money. It was twenty minutes past twelve, and Riggs expected to make the trip to the Columbus Circle institution and return by quarter of one, which would leave fifteen minutes before the agent of the voices would appear.

As Riggs opened the street door a hearty voice rung out:

"Hello, Riggs! Mr. Willmer at home?"

"Yes, commissioner. He's in his library."

"Never mind announcing me; I'll run right up."

At the sound of the strange voice Corson and Fenwick halted on the staircase. As the huge form of the man appeared in the inner doorway Corson ran down the steps and greeted him with outstretched hand.

"Glad to see you, commissioner," he greeted. "But what on earth brings you here?"

"I might ask the same question, Corson," beamed the other. "My business is

strictly social. I trust you are not here in your official capacity?"

Corson ignored the question and called to Fenwick.

"I want you to meet Deputy Police Commissioner Stacy," he announced. "Commissioner shake hands with Mr. Bell, of the telephone company."

"The great inventor himself, I suppose," grinned Stacy. "I should have expected to meet an older man."

Fenwick regarded with interest the huge, jovial dry-goods merchant whom the mayor had appointed as deputy police commissioner. The man had a winning personality, and Charlie mentally characterized him as a regular fellow.

"I stopped in to see Willmer for a minute," advised Stacy.

"We were just going to join him in the library," observed Corson.

"Well, come along," invited the commissioner. "My business isn't private, if yours isn't."

They ascended the stairs and entered the library together.

"Hello, you old fossil!" shouted Stacy, giving Willmer's hand a hearty grasp.

"Old fossil yourself," retorted Willmer. "You're losing your hair pretty fast, John."

"And feeling fine, Warren. You don't look so well, though. What's the trouble?"

"Nothing much," returned Willmer gruffly. "How's Madeline?"

"About as frisky and expensive as most flapper daughters. And Lorraine? Hope she's at home. I've a message for both of you from Madeline. She's arranged a yachting party. Bermuda. Wants you both to come. The two kids can swim and ride, and we can fish and patronize the American bar at Nassau. What do you say?"

Willmer hesitated.

"I'd like Lorraine to go, John. She needs a change, and the trip would be excellent for her. But I'm afraid I can't get away."

"Nonsense. We won't sail for a week. I know Kirke's death has been a terrible blow, but we can't afford to lose you, too. Besides, it's time young King assumed some responsibility. Take care of all the matters resulting from Pendleton's death that really require your attention, and let Otis do the rest. We'll make the cruise as long or as short as you say."

Willmer presented what he regarded as further obstacles to the proposed trip, but Stacy lightly dismissed them. As he urged the financier to accompany him Riggs entered the room and, placing an envelope before his employer, retired. Willmer opened it, withdrawing a packet of new greenbacks. Fenwick glanced at his watch.

"I've told Riggs to watch the door and to bring the fellow right up when he comes," whispered Corson, and Charlie nodded understandingly.

Stacy continued to urge Willmer to join the yachting party, and Willmer continued to offer objections.

"Won't you help me, gentlemen?" pleaded the commissioner. "All of you may come. That American bar is quite an institution. Better men than Willmer have fallen for it!"

"You forget that some of us have to work for a living," Corson pointed out. "Persuade Mr. Willmer, by all means, if you can."

"I don't believe I can," confessed Stacy. "Where's Lorraine? If I can win her over I know that he'll come."

Willmer advised him of Lorraine's slight indisposition, and Stacy insisted on seeing her. At Corson's suggestion he and Fenwick went downstairs.

"Stacy's quite a fellow," commented Corson. "He doesn't let Willmer awe him a little bit. It's one o'clock, Charlie, and that fellow hasn't shown up yet. I don't imagine he will, either. It would require superlative nerve to visit a man's home in broad daylight and steal a hundred thousand. Come to the window, here. See that sporty fellow with the cane, passing the house? That's Sheridan—one of my men. The rough-looking chap on the corner is Campbell, a regular bloodhound when we let him loose. The others must be around somewhere."

"What are you fellows conspiring about?" demanded Stacy, swinging down the stairs.

Corson was so expectantly tense that he started nervously and then grinned sheepishly when he recognized the commissioner.

"Well, I won out, boys," boasted Stacy. "Lorraine's coming, and so is Willmer."

Corson accompanied Stacy to the outer steps, and shook hands with him.

"I've got some men watching this house, commissioner," he whispered, "with instructions to nab any one who comes out. I think they know you, but I'd better stay here until you're gone."

"That *would* be funny," chuckled Stacy. "So-long, inspector."

As the commissioner entered his limousine Sheridan looked inquiringly toward Corson, who touched his badge significantly, at the same time shaking his head negatively. Sheridan signified that he understood, and the closed car swung up the Drive unmolested. Corson reëntered the house and rejoined Fenwick at the window.

"Ten minutes past one," announced Charlie. "You'll be disappointed if he doesn't show up, won't you, inspector?"

"I'll say so," growled Corson, nervously chewing on a dry cigar.

"Corson!" exclaimed Willmer from the upper floor. "Hey, Corson!"

"Come, Charlie!" shouted the inspector. "I'll bet the fellow's got in the back way and is upstairs!"

The two men ran upstairs and stopped on the threshold of the library, sensing by Willmer's manner that something was wrong. The financier was ashen pale.

"Did you get him?" he demanded.

"Get who?" asked Corson.

"Who? Good God! Who do you think? Stacy! He's got my hundred thousand dollars!"

CHAPTER XVII.

"AND THERE CAME A VOICE."

"WHAT nonsense is this?" demanded Corson, turning as white as Willmer. "Do you know who you are accusing?"

"Of course I do," fumed Willmer. "I'm accusing a deputy police commissioner, a reputable business man, a man who's been my friend for years! This comes of trusting you. You—boob!"

He hesitated and bit the slang expression off sharply like a shot from a catapult. Corson was so taken aback he could only stammer incoherently.

"Joke. It's a joke," he repeated loudly, as if to lend conviction to his words. "Must be. Mistake somewhere—sure to be. I'll fix it up. Leave it to me."

"Yah! Leave it to you!" bellowed Willmer. "I wouldn't let you watch a ten-cent piece. Get out o' here and stay out!"

"What happened, sir?" asked Fenwick.

Willmer eyed him shrewdly.

"I'll tie up to you, young fellow," he announced. "Stacy went in to see Lorraine and talked her into this trip. Then she talked me into it. I finally agreed to go. We discussed some of the details and then returned to the library.

"'That ends my social visit, Warren,' said Stacy, picking up the money. 'I'm the man who was to call for this. You're doing a wise thing. Sorry I can't tell you more.'

"With that he says good-by and walks out of the room, leaving me so astonished I couldn't talk. I was petrified, I guess. I confidently expected him to walk back into the room any minute and throw the money back on the table. When he didn't, and I got my scattered wits together, I called for Corson, but it was too late then."

"Joke," repeated Corson, monotonously. "I'll straighten it out. I'll see Stacy—I'll see the mayor."

"Get out!" roared Willmer, and Corson left the room in a hasty and undignified manner.

"Can you do anything, young man?" demanded Willmer.

"I still have nine and a half hours," returned Fenwick. "I've never stopped working, and Boyden is out on the job now."

"I don't think I'll ever get the money back," declared Willmer, "but I'd like to find out who the blackmailers really are."

"You don't think Commissioner Stacy is involved?"

"Certainly not. John Stacy is as straight as a string. He confidently believes he's done me a great service. Now that it's all over I'm not so sure but what he has."

"I think I can obtain the information you wish," announced Charlie. "Whether you liked it or not, I was going to see this case through to the finish."

"Very well. Get busy, my boy, and see what you can do."

Fenwick left the house immediately, and promptly at two o'clock presented himself at Diamond Jim Ordway's Broad Street offices. He sent in his card and Ordway honored him by coming out in person to usher him into the luxurious inner office.

"Got a fellow in there who's trying to rob me," he complained, jocularly. "Wants me to buy a button opal for five times what it's worth. I'll get rid of him in a minute or two."

A little man, unmistakably Semitic, arose as they entered.

"Take it away, Kempner," ordered "Diamond Jim," indicating the gorgeous fire opal resting on a bit of tissue paper on the desk. "I'm going to be busy."

"Thirty-six hundred?" suggested Kempner, in a final despairing effort at salesmanship.

"Three thousand dollars," returned Ordway, opening a check book. "Which shall it be, 'Yes,' or 'Good afternoon?'"

"'Yes' and 'Good night,'" answered Kempner, who was not without a sense of humor. He accepted Ordway's check and departed. Diamond Jim passed the gem over to Fenwick.

"Worth five thousand," he chuckled. "Probably smuggled. Wish I could match it for cuff-links. Well, Charlie, what's on your mind?"

"Many things," responded Fenwick. "I'm working for Warren Willmer. Willmer's not very communicative, and at times I've reached the point where he's hindered rather than helped me. I've guaranteed to complete my work for him by eleven o'clock to-night. I can't do it unless I learn all about Warren Willmer's early life. He's managed to keep out of 'Who's Who in America,' and the newspapers know precious little about him. I come to you with the idea that you may be able to help me out."

"You came to the right shop, Charlie," assured Ordway. "Willmer doesn't care very much for me; our natures seem to clash. He used to upbraid me every time we met for wasting money on 'gew gaws,' as he termed my collection of jewelry. Warren isn't exactly a spendthrift, you know. Well, sir, one fine day I took Tom Dickerson away from Willmer. Warren was paying Tom about three thousand a year to run a department. I offered Tom ten thousand. Willmer never forgave me. Tom had been with him for years. Of course I could tell you some things about Willmer, but Tom can tell you everything."

"What could you tell me?" quizzed Fenwick.

"Well, I know that he was born in Ithaca; that as a boy he sold newspapers on trains up-State, and that he met Art Carewe and hooked up with him. They were pretty successful young men when they parted company. Willmer went to New York and joined forces with Pendleton Kirke and Otis King, Sr. Carewe remained up-State and was comfortably situated financially until shortly before his death."

"Was Art Carewe the father of Lorraine?" asked Charlie.

"Yes, and a fine chap he was. You'd better get your information first hand, however. I'll take you in to Tom Dickerson. Tom will answer any questions you may ask."

Ordway led the way to an office scarcely less sumptuous than his own, and introduced Fenwick to Dickerson, advising the latter of the purpose of Charlie's visit. He then withdrew. Dickerson was a man of about fifty, who had grown up with the business of the Triumvirate and had acted as a confidential assistant to Willmer. He was clean-cut, frank, and businesslike, and answered Fenwick's questions thoroughly, without wasting words. After a thirty-minute interview, Fenwick returned to Ordway's office.

"I can't tell you how glad I am that I made this visit," he observed. "Your man Dickerson has given me invaluable information. One of the two men I am after comes from Ithaca, and I have definitely established some facts regarding Willmer's early life in that city which will aid me

considerably. I was groping in the dark before."

"Glad we were able to assist the famous Phonic Criminologist," smiled Ordway. "Anything else I can do, Charlie? I suppose you'll be coming to me one of these days for advice regarding the purchase of a diamond solitaire?"

Fenwick blushed.

"Ah-ha! Hit the nail, did I? Who is it? The charming Lorraine Carewe, or that pretty little stenographer back in Springfield? Miss Garrison was her name, I think."

"You're somewhat premature," Fenwick assured him.

"Am I? I wonder. Warren Willmer thinks a lot of that ward of his. You'd best be careful!"

"I'd best be going," grinned Charlie. "Your conversation runs miles ahead of the facts. Thank you for the assistance you've given me. I appreciate it."

Ordway waved a deprecating hand and invited Charlie to continue to call for assistance until his account was entirely squared.

This was a reference to Fenwick's recovery of the stolen jewels, and Charlie felt that he had never met a man so effusively grateful for a small service.

He left Ordway's office and decided to visit Branson's Ticket Agency. The office was fairly busy when he arrived, and he had an excellent opportunity to inspect the premises without exciting suspicion. It was divided into two parts. To the left of the entrance was the theater ticket agency, with its racks of colored tickets, a long counter, telephone switchboard, and numerous shining black telephone instruments. The counter clerks, switchboard operator, and assistants were all young women. The clientele of the place appeared to be exceptionally high class.

To the right of the entrance a dozen cabinet phonograph models were on display, while at a side counter and on the shelves behind it was a fair supply of disk phonograph records. Along the walls were glass-enclosed, sound-proof booths, equipped with phonographs, for the convenience of customers who wished to try records before purchasing them. A dignified glass sign announced:

BRANSON & BRANSON, DISTRIBUTORS,
CHAMPION PHONOGRAPHS.

A pleasant-faced woman of thirty approached him.

"Waited on?" she inquired.

"I wish to see the proprietor," advised Charlie.

"I am Miss Branson."

"It may be rather difficult for me to explain my business, Miss Branson. It is in connection with an occurrence at this establishment last evening. The police have undoubtedly advised you that some one entered last night and used your telephones."

"Yes?" Her manner became frigid.

"May I ask if you are aware of the identity of the man?"

"It was reported to me this morning, but neither my sister nor I credited the story. We thought it purely a figment of the officer's imagination."

"There were two officers," continued Fenwick, "and I am in a position to corroborate their story."

"May I ask why *you* are interested in the matter?" inquired Miss Branson.

"I am a criminal investigator, Miss Branson, and am desirous of apprehending the man who used your telephone. He is wanted on a serious charge."

The woman hesitated.

"I scarcely think I can help you. The police advise me that entrance was effected by means of a key. My sister and I have keys, but none of my employees are provided with them. We employ no men. Really, Mr. —er —"

"Bell," advised Fenwick.

"Mr. Bell, I think you had better apply to the two policemen for the information you require. They have promised to keep watchful eye on the premises after hours. While we are annoyed at the incident, we are not particularly worried, since we feel that there is small possibility of theft on Broadway under the eyes of the police. I haven't the slightest notion of who the fellow was."

"Do you know Mr. Otis King?" asked Fenwick.

"The millionaire? How ridiculous! Of course not!"

The door of one of the booths opened and the strains of a vocal selection rang through the room. Charlie started, then stood as though transfixed. It was a lullaby the singer sang, in a voice of remarkable purity and with unusual clearness of enunciation. It was not these facts alone that stimulated his interest, however. Instinctively, intuitively, as the song continued, he recognized that the singer was "The Man With a Hundred Voices!"

Fenwick specialized in the spoken word as a medium for detecting crime, and prided himself on his unusual talent for recognizing voices, reading character from them, identifying and remembering their peculiarities. As he listened every doubt vanished and he was firmly convinced that he had stumbled over the link that was ultimately to lead to the arrest of the arch-blackmailer.

"What is that record?" he asked Miss Branson.

She again hesitated, and appeared to be vexed.

"A slumber song," she answered.

"Of course. But who is the singer?"

"Algernon Botsford. Not very popular."

"Well, I like his voice well enough to want to own that record."

She shrugged her shoulders.

"The girl at the counter will sell you one."

At the counter he asked to see the record. The salesgirl obtained it for him and he examined the printed matter in the center of the disk. It was labeled "Slumber Song —Vocal—Algernon Botsford."

"I'll take it," he announced. "Where are these records made?"

"The Champion factory is over in Jersey. East Orange, I believe."

He thanked the girl, accepted the large flat parcel and left the store. Without losing any time he returned to the Willmer home and went directly to the music room. Carefully locking the doors, he unwrapped the record and placed it on the splendidly carved phonograph model of Sheraton design with which the room was equipped. He sought to confirm the conclusion he had previously reached.

He listened impatiently to the short introduction. Then the singer took up the song and Charlie strained his ears to catch and identify the peculiarities of the voice. He had no wide technical knowledge of music, but as the selection progressed he was quick to note the unusual range of the soloist's voice. Phonographic records of vocal selections are usually designated "bass," "baritone," or "tenor." He was not slow to realize the reason for the omission in this case. The tones were convincingly baritone at the start, but when the refrain was reached the register appeared to be unmistakably tenor, and the singer negotiated the high notes with ridiculous ease. His was a freak voice.

At the conclusion of the song he readjusted the needle and repeated it. The voice was that of the man he sought; of that he was sure. It was a familiar voice, too, but defied identification. He doubted if he would recognize it, were he in the presence of the singer, since his recollection of its strange qualities seemed to be based almost entirely on the mysterious telephone conversations.

The phonograph, like the telephone, produced the same slight distortions in the human voice. Algernon Botsford, he decided, was the "Man With a Hundred Voices," but who was Algernon Botsford?

Hastily he consulted a telephone directory and obtaining the telephone number of the Champion Phonograph Company, placed a call.

"I should like to speak with the man in charge of your vocal artists," he said, when his call was answered.

"I will connect you with Mr. Poole," the private branch exchange operator advised him. After a short wait a masculine voice answered.

"My name is Bell, Mr. Poole. I'd like to know if you can give me any information regarding Algernon Botsford, one of your artists."

Mr. Poole chuckled.

"Who are you, Mr. Bell? A rival phonograph man, or a theatrical booking agent? What kind of information do you want?"

"I'm a telephone man, Mr. Poole, and merely wish to confer with Mr. Botsford regarding some transmission and reproduction experiments I've been making which involved one of his records. Where and how may I get in touch with him, please?"

Poole hesitated.

"I don't know that I can help you, Mr. Bell," he answered. "The artist's real name is not Algernon Botsford. He does not wish us to divulge his real name for personal reasons. I don't care to assume responsibility for furnishing the information, but if you'll hold the wire I'll put the matter up to our general manager."

Fenwick thanked him and waited. In five minutes Poole returned.

"Our G. M. also refuses to furnish the information. He believes that you should obtain it from Mr. Stewart, our president."

"How can I get in touch with Mr. Stewart?" asked Fenwick.

"I'm afraid you can't. He's in San Francisco."

"H-m. Stung again," mused Fenwick. "Could you tell me where he is stopping?"

"He always stops at the St. Francis Hotel," advised Poole. "If you're very anxious you'd better write him at once, as he'll be starting East within a few days."

Charlie shook his head dubiously as he hung up the receiver. Once more he had been balked at the very threshold of success. He removed the record from the machine, placed it in its paper jacket and carried it up to his room. Upon endeavoring to use his extension telephone he found that it was not connected with central and his signal apparently went unnoticed in the housekeeper's room.

He slammed the receiver on the hook and decided to use the instrument in the library, which was usually connected with a trunk. In the library, however, he encountered Warren Willmer. The financier was reading the newspapers and appeared to be in fairly good spirits.

"How are you feeling, sir?" asked Fenwick.

"Fine. Learn anything."

"Quite a bit, sir. The trail is apparently leading us up-State. In fact, I shouldn't be surprised if it would take us to Ithaca, your old home town."

Willmer glowered.

"That so?" he snapped, testily. "H-m. Yes, I supposed it would. What else?"

"I've found out the name of our mystery man."

Willmer leaned forward anxiously.

"Who is it?" he demanded.

"He calls himself 'Algernon Botsford'," said Fenwick. "Ever hear the name?"

"Never."

"I thought not. It's assumed. I've been trying to learn his real name. Unfortunately, there's only one man who can tell me, and he's in San Francisco."

Willmer studied Fenwick, reflectively.

"Young man," he announced, deliberately, "you're either the sweetest faker I ever met or you're having an unprecedented run of hard luck. Which is it?"

"Hard luck, sir. But I still have seven hours, remember. I'm going to ask this chap in Frisco to give me Botsford's real name, and after that it will be plain sailing."

"He's over three thousand miles away," objected Willmer. "How are you going to ask him?"

Fenwick laid his hand on the telephone instrument.

"By means of this," he smiled. "The telephone is going to help me clean up on time. Were a voice loud enough to be heard from New York to San Francisco it would take the sound four hours to travel that distance through the air. It would take me four hours more to get the answer. That would mean eight hours, and I have only seven. But, once I get my party on the wire, this magic instrument will speed my voice to Frisco in one-fifteenth of a second, or at the rate of 56,000 miles per second!"

"Some traveling!" commented Willmer, "Who's going to foot the bill?"

Fenwick considered it good policy to indulge the millionaire in his parsimony.

"I sort of figured on charging it up to Mr. Reeves," he advised.

"Good enough!" approved Willmer. "Go ahead!"

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK

The Adventures of Peabody Smith

By WILLIAM J. FLYNN,
Former Chief, United States Secret Service,
and GEORGE BARTON.

VIII.—THE CHALLENGE.

PEABODY SMITH was taking his ease in his Washington Square apartments, thinking over the Humphrey blackmailing case which he had accepted the night before, when there was an agitated tapping on the door, followed by the entrance of Mrs. Gaynor, his landlady. It was plain to be seen that the woman was laboring under unusual excitement. Her eyes were sparkling, her lips compressed and her manner militant. She passed a letter to the detective.

"A queer looking creature shoved this in at the door, and he says, says he: 'If ye love old man Smith see that he gets it at once—it's a matter of life and death."

Peabody smiled as he accepted the missive.

"I don't like that reflection on my age, Mrs. Gaynor. It satisfies me that the messenger was no gentleman. What did he look like?"

"He looked like what you said he was—'no gentleman,' but I couldn't get a peep at

The first story of this series appeared in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for October 28.

the blackguard's face. He pulled his cap down over his eyes and kept his ragged collar up around his neck. He needed a wash and some decent clothes, an' I think he was one of them foreigners."

The detective laughed, but did not open the letter until Mrs. Gaynor had departed. He pulled a cozy chair in front of the open fire and slowly slit the end of the envelope with his forefinger. As he read a glint of anger danced in his gray eyes. The communication bore no date and contained no signature. It was jerkily written, and was, as Peabody afterward admitted, "to the point."

The letter that deepened the naturally somber expression of the detective read as follows:

> This is intended as a friendly warning. Give up the Humphrey case. It is a matter that does not concern you, and by butting in you are interfering with the cause of justice. If you do so all will go well with you. But if you do not you will meet the fate that has been promised to John Humphrey if he does not comply with our demands. Take a fool's advice. Drop this case or your life won't be worth a nickel.

Peabody Smith was familiar with threatening letters, but most of them were badly written on dirty paper. There was nothing illiterate about this one; it was legibly written and well expressed. The handwriting was flowing and rather feminine. The detective was studying it when the door opened and Tim Farley, his assistant, came into the room. Peabody smilingly tossed him the letter. The faithful one read it carefully, and his honest blue eyes spread out with saucerlike astonishment.

"What you goin' to do about it?" he gasped.

"What can I do about it?" repeated the veteran with a grin. "It's a challenge, Tim, and you know I never stand for a dare."

Farley shook his head mournfully.

"You don't have to tell me you're not afraid, chief," he said, "but I don't think the game's worth the candle. They may get you and your life is worth more than Humphrey's peace of mind."

While the young man was talking, Peabody Smith was putting on his coat and hat. He turned to his assistant briskly:

"I've got an engagement with John Humphrey this morning, and I'm going to keep it. You may come along—that is, if you are not afraid to travel with a marked man."

Farley scorned to answer this jest. But the look he gave his superior meant more than words. Peabody patted him on the shoulder in a fatherly way.

"My boy, a creaking door lasts long. It's the same thing with these threats. They don't bother me in the least. I'll die when my time comes—and in bed."

Half an hour later Peabody and his assistant were in the library of the fine house of the great banker and insurance man. There he found John Humphrey; his wife, a handsome matron; his daughter, Stella, a beautiful girl, and two friends of the family—Harvey Frazier and Frank West—both admirers of the young woman.

It did not take long to tell the whole story. The magnate had received an anonymous letter directing him to place fifty thousand dollars in cash under a certain tree at a designated point on the Old Albany Post Road at five o'clock the following afternoon. Failure to do so meant death. "It is quite simple," said the letter; "it is your money or your life." The missive was in the same handwriting as the threatening communication to the detective.

Peabody learned that there had been a little council of war before he arrived and that Mrs. Humphrey and Harvey Frazier were strongly in favor of the money being paid. Stella Humphrey and Frank West were for fighting it out. All of them appealed to Peabody Smith to settle the question.

"It looks to me like a deadlock," he said, smilingly, "and the only person who can settle it is Mr. Humphrey."

The banker nodded energetically.

"It has already been settled," he said. "I refuse to be blackmailed and I am going to be guided absolutely by Peabody Smith. I have followed his advice in the past and I have never had reason to regret it."

Mrs. Humphrey was dabbing her eyes with an exquisite lace handkerchief.

"That's all very well," she cried, tearfully, "but all of the money in the world will not compensate me for the loss of you."

"Mrs. Humphrey," said the detective in the caressing tone of voice he knew so well how to employ, "your husband is absolutely right in this matter. If he gives up fifty thousand dollars to-morrow he will be called on for a like sum next week and this blackmailing will continue until life is not worth living. The only way to treat blackmail is to nip it in the bud."

Stella Humphrey flashed him a look of thanks from her fine eyes, and Frank West went so far as to walk over and shake him by the hand. After that the talk was along the line of possible evidence. The detective took the letter and placed it in his pocket, and left the house with the faithful Farley.

Their walk home was past a new building operation which was going on not many blocks from Washington Square. It was about the noon hour when the workmen were at lunch. The detective and his assistant made their way carefully beneath the scaffolding. Just as they emerged on the other side there was a crashing sound, and a great block of granite fell at the feet of Peabody Smith. He was covered with dirt and grime, and one fragment of stone hit him in the face and caused a flesh wound.

Tim Farley, who was the first to recover his self-possession, ran into the building and up a ladder leading to the top of the scaffolding. But no one was in sight. The place was absolutely deserted. He came down slowly and rejoined his chief, who was ruefully brushing the dirt off his clothes. No word passed between them, but as they resumed their walk, Farley said feelingly:

"That was a mighty close shave, boss."

"I'll say so," conceded Peabody cheerfully. "It looks to me as if the ready letter writers were becoming practical. I have no doubt that I am to take that as a warning."

"But will you?" persisted the other.

"To this extent—that I'll get these birds or die in the attempt."

Peabody Smith toiled as he had never toiled before. He had a long conference with the postal authorities, and discovered that other men of prominence had been threatened by the same blackmailer who was after John Humphrey. Also he made an examination of police records and of the Rogues' Gallery. Finally the postmarks on the envelopes indicated that all of them had been mailed from a certain postal district in the Bronx. It was near the close of that busy day that he confided in his assistant:

"Tim, the man I am after is Tony Marks. He's at the head of a Black Hand organization which engages in counterfeiting and blackmailing on the side."

"Why don't you go and get him, then?"

Peabody spread his hands out with an expressive gesture.

"The case is almost complete, but the evidence is purely circumstantial. It would be enough for almost any other man, but he's such a slippery cuss that I'm sure he'd wriggle through the net. I'd like to get that bird in the act. It would be the best day's work I ever did."

It was about dusk when Peabody had concluded his investigations which included an interview with the superintendent of the postal station in the Bronx. He started home in his modest automobile with Tim Farley at the wheel. The detective always felt comfortable with Farley, because he was such a careful driver. When they were skirting around Columbus Circle the old man uttered a word of caution:

"Give that fellow plenty of room—he doesn't seem to be a very competent driver."

The "fellow" referred to was in a closed car, and he had ample space to get around the driveway. Nevertheless, Farley guided his machine toward the curb. He was laughing at his extreme caution when the other man deliberately came his way. There was a crash and a cry, and Peabody and his assistant found themselves on the sidewalk. The closed car had taken the back wheel off the Smith automobile, and then, without waiting, had shot up Broadway. It was too dark to see the number of the license, and the two victims picked themselves up and began to feel their bruises. By a miracle they had escaped serious injury.

"Well, Tim," laughed Peabody, "it be-

gins to look as if somebody had a grudge against me."

"Yes," assented the faithful one, "an' I think they've thrown me in for good measure."

Smith's first thought was to continue his journey in a taxicab, but he finally decided that a Broadway surface car might be safer, even if slower. It was quite dark when they got off the submarinelike vehicle and started to walk in the direction of Washington Square. The streets were filled with hurrying pedestrians, and they had not gone more than a square when some one thrust an envelope into the hand of the detective. He could not see the man—for it was a man—but he heard a mocking laugh, and he saw a figure wriggling through the crowd.

Peabody shoved the letter into his pocket and hurried after the man, with a few words of murmured explanation to Farley. The stranger was several yards ahead of him, and Peabody saw him run into the vestibule of a second-rate apartment house. As the detective got into the hallway the man was almost at the top of the first flight of stairs. He followed him two steps at a time. The chase continued to the third and then to the fourth floor. At that point the pursued one ran into the open door of a bathroom and closed and locked it after him.

"Farley," panted the detective, "go down and get in the house next door. You may meet him coming down. Call a cop to help us if you happen to meet one."

In the meantime Peabody tried to force the door. A crowd had gathered, and when they learned the cause of the excitement offered their assistance. Two or three precious minutes had gone by when two volunteers joined the detective in shoving against the door with a piledriver effect. The lock gave, and Peabody found himself in the bathroom. The window was open, and the room was empty. The bird had flown.

As he expected, the opening led on to a roof which joined the opposite house. Peabody climbed through and made his way to the other apartment house. It was not so easy to gain entrance there, but by the aid of a kindly if unexpected soap box he managed to squeeze through an opening. He found himself in a hallway with a red light at the end. While he stood there, wondering which way to go, he heard a clattering noise, and Tim Farley rushed up the stairs.

"Did you meet any one on the stairway?" demanded Peabody Smith.

"Only the other officer who was working with you," replied Farley.

"The other officer? What do you mean?" asked Smith, rubbing his head reflectively.

"Why, when I was near the third floor I met a man running down. I halted him, but he threw back the lapel of his coat, showed a policeman's star, and said he was working with you."

"What did he look like?"

Tim Farley painstakingly described the appearance of the man on the stairway. When he had concluded Peabody gave something between a groan and an oath.

"Tim," he cried, "you're solid ivory from the neck up. That was the man I was after. That was Tony Marks himself."

The faithful one accepted the rebuke shamefacedly.

"Boss," he said, "I'm sorry. I haven't got the ghost of an alibi."

Peabody placed his arm around Farley's shoulder as they left the building together.

"Don't mind what I said, Tim," he begged. "I guess that fellow's on my nerves. Any one would have made the same mistake you did."

Once more in the Washington Square apartment, the detective opened the envelope that had been handed him. It contained a single sheet of paper on which was written:

You have had two warnings. Beware!

The veteran laughed and placed threat number two with his other documents. Then he called Mrs. Gaynor and ordered her to make a pot of tea. By the time he had partaken of three cups and had smoked two of his favorite stogies his good humor was restored.

He spent an hour in arranging his evidence and then mentally planned his pro-

gram for the next day. He felt that he was near the end of the chase, but he was anxious not to make any missteps. It must have been ten o'clock when he was through, and he was leaning back in his comfortable armchair when his attention was attracted by some white substance moving on the floor.

"Tim," he remarked laughingly, "I think I'm beginning to see things."

He adjusted his glasses and stared down. He was not mistaken. Some one had slipped a white envelope under the door. He walked over and picked it up. It resembled the other two he had received. Peabody opened it and, as usual, found a single sheet of paper. It contained a penciled message. It said:

> This is your final warning! Quit now or you will be a dead man!

Peabody Smith became very quiet and thoughtful. He smoked one stogie after another in absolute silence. It was Tim Farley who spoke first.

"Well, chief," he said, with an attempt at lightness, "they are not getting your goat, are they?"

Peabody shook his head.

"My nerve is all right," he replied, "but I have a very intense desire to live till morning. I have a hunch that I'm going to solve this mystery before this time tomorrow night. But it's evident that the gang is on my trail, and I'd hate them to put me out of commission before daylight."

"Don't get gloomy," counseled the young man with the liberty that came from their intimate association. "You are letting Old Man Imagination loose in your think tank."

"Do you really believe so?" asked the veteran, taking a pull at the inevitable stogie.

"I'm dead sure," answered Farley with a confidence he was far from feeling.

Peabody Smith made no reply, but turned the light out in the living room. He pulled down the shades and walked into the adjoining room. There he found a pillow, around which he draped his long dressing gown. Next he returned to the living room and pulled his easy chair up to the window overlooking the street. He placed the pillow and the dressing gown in this and by clever manipulation managed to form a manikin. Finally he lifted the arms of the dressing gown and propped a newspaper in what should have been the hands. Seen in the semidaylight from the other room, it looked like Peabody Smith engaged in reading the evening newspaper.

Farley was fascinated by this strange performance.

"Say, boss," he cried, "are you going crazy or just playing a new game?"

"We'll call it a new game," was the cheerful reply.

His next move was to turn on the light. Then he sent Farley into the next room and, crawling back on his hands and knees, reached up and raised the shade of the window.

"Now," he said with a sigh of contentment, "we'll try watchful waiting."

They seated themselves in the other room, where they could observe the figure in the chair without coming into the circle of observation from the street. Ten, twenty, and then thirty minutes passed by, and nothing happened. Peabody Smith lit a fresh stogie and passed one to his assistant.

"It is best to keep as quiet as possible," he remarked, "but you can smoke to your heart's content. That will help to make it seem more natural."

He had scarcely ceased talking when a sharp report was heard, followed by the sound of crashing glass. The next moment the figure in the armchair toppled over on the floor. The detective gave a quiet chuckle.

"That's the end of Peabody Smith—I don't think," he ejaculated.

Farley was breathing heavily and looking very sober.

"You are right, and I was wrong," he confessed. "These devils won't stop at anything."

"You've said it, son, and Peabody Smith does not intend to rest until he places the whole gang behind prison bars."

"What's the next move?" asked the faithful one.

"The next move is to get out of this house. They think they've got me, and it will make them careless. That is going to give me several precious hours to clear up the loose ends of the case. But we'll have to go out the back way and keep ourselves as scarce as possible. As soon as we reach the next corner I'll call a taxicab, and we'll make a call on Mr. John Humphrey. I have a proposition to make to that gentleman, and if he agrees we'll get ready to play the last act in this little drama."

They gained the rear of the house without any difficulty, called a passing taxicab, and in the darkness of the night were soon speeding on their way to the home of the great financier on upper Riverside Drive.

Humphrey greeted Peabody Smith in his library. He looked at the detective eagerly as he shook his hand.

"What's the answer?" he asked. "Have you got them?"

"Not exactly," replied the detective, "but I've spotted the gang. Tony Marks is at the head of it, and I expect to get him by to-morrow night if you will agree to coöperate with me."

The financier's face wrinkled in perplexity.

"Just what do you mean by that?"

"Simply that my evidence so far is circumstantial, and that I would like to get this crook in the act. Then there will be no doubt about a conviction."

"But what have I got to do with that part of it?"

"I want you to go through the form of placing the money at the foot of the tree on the Old Albany Post Road."

The tall form of John Humphrey stiffened in protest.

"I thought we had gone over that, Smith," he said. "I'm unalterably opposed to paying tribute to these scoundrels."

The curtains in the rear of the room opened as he spoke, and Mrs. Humphrey appeared. There were traces of tears in her eyes and she had evidently heard part of the conversation. She walked over and placed her hand on her husband's shoulder.

"John, dear," she said affectionately, "Mr. Smith is right and it will relieve all our minds. Please do as he suggests."

At this point Stella Humphrey entered, followed by Harvey Frazier and Frank West. She seemed to sense the situation because, as she caught the eye of John Humphrey, she called out:

"Remember, father, no surrender!"

Harvey Frazier looked at her reproachfully.

"Don't you think your mother is a better judge of this than you can possibly be?"

She stamped her feet energetically:

"I only know that if I were a man I'd fight it out on the line of resistance at any cost."

"Don't you think your father's life is worth $50,000?"

"I think you are impossible," she retorted, "and I don't care for any more of your advice."

This outburst caused the banker to chuckle and made the eyes of Frank West glisten with admiration. They smiled on one another and in that moment he had won her for his bride. As on the previous occasion, they all turned to Peabody for a solution of the problem. The veteran smiled in the way that seemed to illuminate his whole countenance.

"I'm afraid you've all misunderstood me, but my decision ought to satisfy all of you. I want Mr. Humphrey to go to the appointed spot on the Old Albany Post Road and place his big green wallet at the foot of the designated tree. But I don't expect him to put $50,000 in it. On the contrary, I suggest that he fill it with tissue paper to resemble bank notes."

"Tissue paper doesn't resemble bank notes," interrupted Frazier.

Peabody stabbed him with a vicious look.

"I know that very well, but they swell the wallet and feel like money."

This announcement only caused the fears of Mrs. Humphrey to break out afresh.

"My dear," she cried, turning to her husband, "this is suicide. It is only making a bad case worse. These men will be

furious when they find they have been tricked. They will murder you in cold blood."

Peabody Smith shook his head mournfully.

"I'll promise that he will not be in any personal danger. They will not think of picking up the wallet until he has driven away. After that I'll attend to the remaining details."

Humphrey nodded thoughtfully.

"I understand and I agree to what you say. The only thing I won't do is pay tribute to a gang of blackmailers."

"You won't have to," answered the detective, "and if all goes well to-morrow I don't think any other citizen in this neighborhood will have to do it."

As the gathering dispersed, Frank West edged up to the side of the detective, and spoke to him in a low voice.

"I want to congratulate you, Mr. Smith," he said, "and to ask if I can't be of some service to-morrow evening."

Peabody looked at the stalwart young fellow admiringly, and shook his head.

"I'm sorry, but this is my party, West. I'm really more concerned than Mr. Humphrey. This gang has threatened to get me, and I've accepted their challenge. If I slip up it will be my funeral."

Peabody Smith and Tim Farley slept at an up-town hotel that night. The detective did not want to run the risk of going back to his Washington Square apartments. It was just possible that the crooks might have discovered how he had fooled them with the manikin in the armchair. In that event they might be more determined than ever to snuff out his life. He knew them well enough to understand that one death more or less meant nothing to them.

II.

The detective was awake early in the morning and in consultation with the police. Before noon they had made an important arrest and as a consequence of this they sweated enough information out of the prisoner to learn the whereabouts of the rest of the gang. But it was agreed that these men should not be taken into custody until five o'clock in the afternoon. Long before that hour all the plans had been completed and Peabody Smith and his assistants were ready for the big event.

It was shortly after four o'clock in the afternoon that the handsome limousine of John Humphrey drove up to his mansion on Riverside Drive. In a little while he came down the steps and took his place in the car. He was alone, but he betrayed no signs of agitation. It was one of the conditions of the blackmailing letter that he should be unaccompanied, that he should deposit the wallet containing the money at the foot of the tree at precisely five o'clock in the afternoon, and that he should immediately drive away and not return. The financier was prepared to comply with all of these conditions to the letter—except that the contents of the wallet, instead of containing fifty thousand dollars would not be worth five cents.

As the limousine left the front of the house it was followed by four pairs of anxious eyes. Mrs. Humphrey, crying softly, peered through the expensive lace curtains. She could not resist the feeling that her husband would never return to her alive. In the upper story Stella Humphrey followed the movement of the car with quite as much anxiety, but with more hope. Her eyes were glistening and her cheeks rosy with subdued excitement. On the ground floor Harvey Frazier and Frank West watched the departure with mingled feelings. To Frazier, reared in an atmosphere of luxury and sheltered care it seemed like pure foolhardiness. To West it was an exhibition of manliness and courage. He had begged for the privilege of going with Humphrey, but the older man with a smile of gratitude assured him that it would be a violation of the conditions.

"There may not be honor among thieves," he laughed, "but there must be something like good faith between a thief and an honest man."

The driver of the limousine was unconscious of the dangerous character of the journey. All that he knew was that he was to be at the designated spot at precisely five o'clock. He made such good time that he arrived in the neighborhood ten or fif-

teen minutes before the hour. Humphrey, perceiving that he was too early, directed him to drive far enough in the opposite direction to kill that much time. He did so and with such correct calculation that he was able to comply exactly with the condition. He turned back and reached the appointed spot a few seconds before the hour.

John Humphrey climbed out of the car and proceeded to the tree. He looked around him, but the neighborhood was deserted. It was just about dusk and a sort of gray mist hung over the scene. The tree was back from the road and stood there in stately loneliness. The financier reached into his coat pocket and pulled out the bulging wallet which he laid at the foot of the tree. He felt that he was being watched, but he could see no one. It was a dramatic moment, and though he seemed to have the scene to himself he had the feeling that a dozen pairs of eyes were upon him. He hastened to the machine and as he pulled the door to with a bang he called out to the driver in a loud voice:

"Home, William, as quickly as possible!"

The car shot off with a sudden jerk and in a few seconds melted into the fast falling darkness. For a very short time the place seemed to be uninhabited. Then, gradually, another car came from out of the woods on the west side of the road. It halted in front of the tree. The door was opened and the notorious Tony Marks stepped out into the road. He had a cap pulled down over his eyes and wore a long coat. His swarthy face, covered with a three-days' growth of beard, smiled in a sinister manner. He looked around him furtively. No one was in sight. He hurried over, picked up the wallet, ran back to the car and cried to the driver:

"Hurry, as fast as the devil will let you!"

The command was literally obeyed. Fortunately there were no traffic regulations or speed laws in that section of the country. The chauffeur burned up the road. But, with his glazed and peaked cap down over his eyes and his long brown coat wrapped closely about him, he showed expertness at the wheel.

In the meantime there was a commotion within the car. Tony Marks had opened the wallet and discovered a large wad of fine tissue paper. He was swearing violently and with great gusto. If the driver heard it he paid no attention. He was evidently concerned in the attempt to beat all speed records. Presently they left the macadamized roads and entered New York City. The driver slowed up slightly, but still went a little faster than the law allowed. After a while Tony Marks began to hammer on the glass to attract his attention.

"Where the devil are you going?" he shouted in very good English. "Don't you know you have passed our place?"

But the driver with his head bent low, paid no attention to this outburst. Marks, furious with rage, reached for the handle of the door. But at that moment something strange and unexpected happened. The little pane of glass in the rear of the machine was smashed, and when the leader of the Black Hand turned around he found himself looking into the muzzle of a revolver.

"If," said a soft voice, "you dare move or touch that door I'll shoot you through the heart!"

There was something in the tone of the words that convinced Marks. He sank back in the seat, wondering how he was going to get out of this trap. But time had passed, and almost before he realized it the machine had run up an asphalted driveway and they stopped before a dark, frowning building. The man with the revolver, who had been perched on the extra tire at the back of the car, leaped lightly to the ground and opened the door. Tony Marks stepped out and found himself in front of a police station.

"What the—" he began splutteringly.

"You'd better tell that to the judge," interrupted Tim Farley, once again covering the crook with his pistol.

The driver had climbed from his seat by this time and stood in front of the prisoner. With a snarl of rage Marks reached over and pulled off the man's green goggles. The smiling face that confronted him capped the climax of his defeat and disappointment.

It was Peabody Smith, with a smile on his face that threatened to spread from ear to ear.

As the little party entered the cell room, the lieutenant of police saluted the detective respectfully.

"We've carried out your orders to the letter, chief," he said, "and have nine of them under lock and key."

Peabody Smith gave a grateful grin, and the little crows' feet around his shrewd eyes seemed to be alive and dancing with merriment.

"Fine, Kelly," he responded. "Here's the head devil to put away with the rest. I don't know how you feel about it, but I call it a mighty good day's work. And, by the way, I wish you'd send one of your men up the Old Albany Post Road. We were forced to bind and gag the driver of this machine. He's one of the gang, but I don't want him to catch pneumonia."

Next Week: "THE SECRET OF THE FOG."

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A ROUGHNECK ROMANCE

TO peek at me I guess you'd say I dunno what is love;
Well, come again, you're missin' from the start.
I never tells my dame that she's an angel from above,
But I'll tell the woild I got a lovin' heart.

I got a goil, some skoit, some eyes, oh, boy, some shape and grace.
Her name? Well, must you know it? Why, it's Mawd;
I'll lick the guy that has the noive t' tell me t' my face
She ain't the peacherino of the ward.

You think I dunno what is love? Forget it from your mind;
My dame ain't what you guys 'ud call a saint;
I biff her till she's dizzy—then I cry like I'd go blind;
"But that ain't love," you say? The hell it ain't.

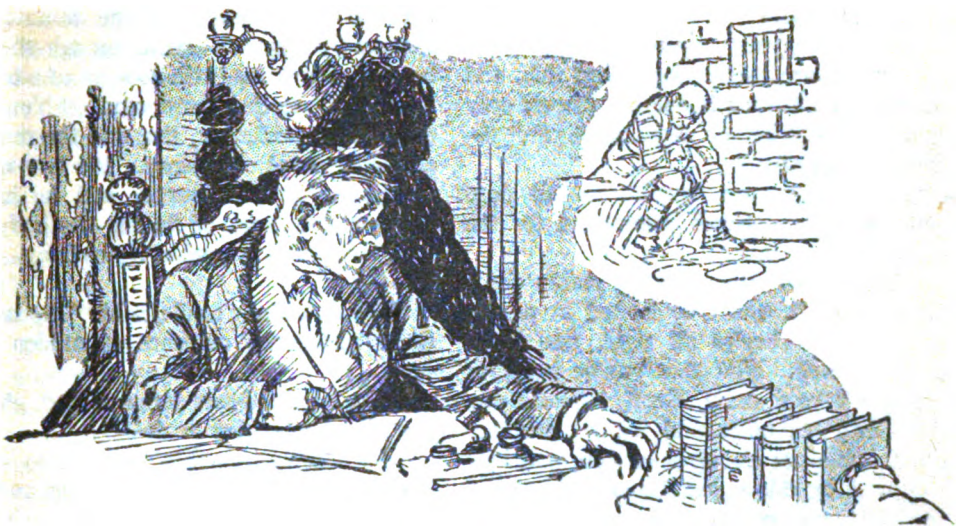
I think of her, and feel I'm great, and nothing of a bum—
A sort of kind of lifted off my feet;
The puddles on the avenoo are lakes of kingdomcome;
You bet yer that the feelin's hard to beat.

Oh, hell, but you should see her when she's ragin' mad about,
"More deadly than the male," that stuff is old;
She nearly chawed my finger off, and then I knocked her out,
But I never break her heart and treat her cold.

You say I dunno what is love? Why, love's my middle name;
You swell guys seldom know that passion's law;
A dame that's mad despises all that pussyfootin' game
When you're too polite to slam her on the jaw.

Your kisses? She'll forget 'em, for they're melted in the years,
Reflectin' on the past when you are gone;
But your weepin's after wallopin's will cause her lovin' tears;
Yet you needn't overdo it, now you're "on."

James S. Ryan.



Above Suspicion

By ROBERT ORR CHIPPERFIELD

CHAPTER XX.

WHOSE HAND?

DR. HOOD sat tilted back in a chair on his front porch, moodily chewing the end of an unlighted cigar and thinking over the situation. Had he got himself into a mess which would make him the butt of the county? He didn't know why he had taken that fool Geoff Peters's word blindly and talked up as he had to Mr. Ashe, but somehow he'd believed him and the boy over in the county jail was almost cheerful, while even little Miss Millie was bearing up wonderfully well.

As for the district attorney, he had succeeded in intimidating that august official by the potent fear of ultimate ridicule so that he had acceded to his request. Sergeant Eliot was foaming with rage and chagrin.

It was that same dread which he had instilled into the district attorney that was hanging over the fat little doctor now. For the hundredth time he was anathematizing the absent, self-elected deputy who had wrought the mischief when all at once he caught sight of a familiar figure sauntering leisurely toward the gate. With an exclamation he brought his chair forward with all its legs on the floor and bounded down the porch steps.

"Geoff! Jumping Christmas, where've you been? I have had Lyons and Allen scouring New York for you! It's a week to-day—"

"Hello, doc!" Geoff grinned cheerfully as they shook hands. "You git my letter?"

"The one you gave Rupert Ashe for me, in which you said you would telephone or write to me? Yes, and it's the last I've heard of you for a week—"

"I've been coverin' considerable ground and run into a lot more'n I expected," Geoff interrupted. "Ain't got time to go over

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for November 11.

it all now. Did you see Mr. Ashe and the district attorney?"

"I did, on your say-so; Mr. Ashe and his lawyers are just letting things ride, and the district attorney is holding Rupert only as a material witness. Now, if we can't deliver the goods—"

"Anybuddy been 'tendin' to my dogs and the mare?" Geoff interrupted for the third time.

"Lord, yes! The whole stable force from Ashcroft, and I've looked in myself every day. They're all right, and Lady is almost well. Now that you've got your family off your mind, Geoff, suppose you come into the office and tell me whether I'm the medical examiner or you, and how soon we'll be able to get Rupert Ashe out of jail and who we're going to put there in his place?"

"It's your job, doc." Geoff's face sobered as he followed the doctor into the house. "We're goin' to git young Ashe out o' jail soon's you've swore me in as a real dep'ty o' yours and took me on the strength o' it to make a call. Then I've got to make 'nother one by myself that ain't goin' to be none too pleasant for nobuddy concerned, and right after that we'll put somebuddy in Rupert's place who you'd think I was clean crazy if I named now, but who'll go willin' and ready to confess.

"I wrote in that letter to you that I never said nothin' I couldn't prove and I'm standin' by it, but it's a job I ain't partic'lar 'bout tacklin' agin; I'd a heap sight ruther be back at my reg'lar trade!"

"You went to police headquarters and asked in my name to see the records about a young man who committed suicide in Benkard's rooms years ago and you never told me a word beforehand!" the doctor accused. "I had to do some quick thinking when Lyons spoke about it, and it's high time, Geoff, you stopped being mysterious and tell me what I'm supposed to be pulling off!"

"Reckon you're right, doc," Geoff assented amiably. "You're goin' to hear all you've a mind to 'bout that young man afore we git through. How's everybuddy up to the Cayley place?"

"Lane has been there since Saturday, but little Miss Millie won't see him. She's kept to her room from the minute she learned of Rupert's arrest, though she has been mighty brave, with no signs of a breakdown yet," replied the doctor. "Newbury came down yesterday, too, and the rest are all right except old Henry. It's two weeks to-night since the murder and he hasn't got over the shock of finding the body; in fact, he's growing weaker if anything. But who—"

"He ain't likely to die, is he?" demanded Geoff with every evidence of sudden concern.

"No, but his heart action is bad. Why, has he got anything to do—"

"He knows somethin' we got to make him tell, doc, and if he was to up and die afore we can git a statement from him we might have a hard time provin' it; besides, I'd have to do considerable more lyin' when I go to make that other visit alone afterward, and I've told so many this last week that I'm gittin' to believe 'em myself!" Geoff turned toward the door. "Come on!"

Twenty minutes later, to Mrs. Cayley's intense annoyance, the medical examiner, accompanied by his now openly acknowledged deputy, intruded himself upon her as she sat with Stoneham Lane and Newbury in the library and courteously but firmly requested permission in his official capacity to see Henry Carp.

"Do you mean, doctor, that you wish to question him again, now when he is just beginning to grow a little better and possibly throw him into a relapse?" she expostulated. "Surely you know the poor, faithful old fellow has told you everything! And what is this man doing here, this man who pretended only last week that he was not your deputy?"

"He wasn't then, Mrs. Cayley, but he is now." There was a slight edge to the doctor's tone. "That was a good suggestion of Mr. Lane's and I followed it."

"'Of Mr. Lane's'?" she repeated. Lane had not moved from his easy lounging position nor did his expression of half diverted boredom change.

"Yes, when he telephoned you a week ago to-day that Geoff Peters was my deputy and must be dismissed. As for Henry, if

he were dying this minute it would be my duty to obtain a statement from him."

"This is an outrage!" Mrs. Cayley rose. "You are exceeding your authority, doctor! I will telephone to the district attorney—"

"Dr. Hood is well within his rights, Mrs. Cayley," the lawyer Newbury interposed smoothly. "I propose, however, that in the interests of us all he permits me to be present at this interview."

The doctor agreed after a quick, questioning glance at Geoff, and it was the latter who took the situation in hand when they had greeted the weak, wizened old man lying on his bed upstairs. At his request also Newbury remained out of the butler's range of vision in the doorway.

"Now, Henry, we wouldn't have bothered you till you git well, but I want you to tell the doctor and me 'bout somethin' that happened a long time ago. First, though, we'll go back to that day in the dinin' room when you and William Dunn let on to the doc 'bout them anonymous letters Mr. Benkard got. It was on New Year's Day four years ago that they started comin', wasn't it?"

Henry nodded feebly.

"Didn't it bring back somethin' to your mind that had happened on 'nother New Year's, down in Mr. Benkard's old apartment on 'Leventh Street?" Geoff pursued. "You didn't say nothin' to the doc 'bout that then, but you'll have to speak now."

There was a slight movement from the doorway, but Henry did not hear it as he started up on his pillows.

"I don't know whatever you mean, Geoffrey! My memory isn't as good as it used to be—"

"Yes, it is, 'bout this, Henry!" Geoff interrupted. "You've been tryin' your best to forgit it for ten years, and mebbe you kin if you git it off your mind. I'm speakin' o' the death o' young Mr. Shirley."

Henry gasped and thrust a tremulous, appealing hand out as if to ward off a blow.

"Please don't ask me! It was a dreadful affair and even Mr. Benkard himself didn't get over it for a long time! Poor, unfortunate young gentleman! I felt for him, Geoffrey, in spite of his being misguided—"

"'Misguided' is right," Geoff commented. "How long had you worked for Mr. Benkard then?"

"About two years." Henry eased himself back, but his clawlike hands were clutching the coverlet.

"And how long before Mr. Shirley's death did he begin coming to see Mr. Benkard?"

"I—I don't recall, exactly. So many gentlemen from Wall Street took to dropping in that I couldn't tell to save me when the first time was that I saw any one of them. I think it was about a year, though, before he—he killed himself, or maybe a trifle over, that the young gentleman came home one afternoon with Mr. Benkard.

"I remember because there was quite a party of them, and it had been snowing outside all day, and I made hot toddies. They were younger than the gentlemen Mr. Benkard usually entertained and very jolly. It was the first time any of them had been there and only two or three called again with Mr. Shirley before they dropped off, too, and he was the only one of that crowd who kept on coming, but not steady, as you might say. Sometimes he'd drop in twice in the week and then again we'd not see him for a fortnight or so."

"He come more often durin' the summer and fall, though, didn't he?"

"The early autumn, Geoffrey. It seems to me, looking back, that he only came once, or perhaps it was twice, in October and then we didn't see him again till—till—"

"Till New Year's afternoon?" Geoff finished for him, and the old man nodded.

"That's what I was going to say."

"All right, then. He came 'bout half past six, and you thought he'd been drinking, didn't you?"

Henry's hands moved restlessly.

"Whoever told you that, Geoffrey? As I recall it, he seemed a bit excited like, and I fancied he might have a trifle more aboard than he was accustomed to, owing to the day, but he wasn't at all downcast or—or worried. He shook hands with me and wished me a happy New Year—"

Again the trembling voice faltered, and Geoff prompted him.

"You told the coroner at the inquest that Mr. Benkard had come home himself just a little while afore and was dressin' to go out to a dinner party, Henry. Is that so?"

"Yes. I showed Mr. Shirley into the living room and then went—"

"Wait a minute. Did you take Mr. Shirley's coat and hat?"

Dr. Hood was staring at his deputy in frank amazement, and Newbury, in the doorway, stroked his tiny, pointed gray beard reflectively.

"Or course, Geoffrey." The old butler glanced up in mild surprise.

"What was he wearing underneath? Don't try to say you can't recollect now, Henry!" He added impatiently: "You can see him afore you right as he was then, and you know it!"

A shudder shook the gaunt frame upon the bed.

"He—he was wearing a dark sack suit and a tie with a ripple of blue through it, and very handsome he looked, Geoffrey, though a trifle thinner than when we'd seen him at the house last.

"His eyes had deep circles around them, but they were very bright, and his cheeks were flushed; it was that and a sort of thick sound in his voice that had made me think he might be a bit above himself. I left him strolling about in the living room—he didn't sit down—and went to announce him to Mr. Benkard, who had just finished shaving. He put on a lounging robe—"

"What kind o' a loungin' robe, Henry?" Geoff interrupted again.

"A quilted brocade, it was, of dark purple and very rich, with deep pockets and a broad collar. I'd picked it out for him myself, he leaving it to me to choose a great many of his things in those days, and if I do say it, no Bond Street shop ever sold a better."

"Did you stay behind in his room to tidy it, mebbe, after he'd gone in to Mr. Shirley?"

"No. He sent me ahead to fetch some Scotch and soda into the living room. When I reached it they were talking together as though neither of them had a care in the world. Mr. Shirley was laughing, I remember. I served them and then went back to my little pantry, waiting till Mr. Benkard should ring for me to show Mr. Shirley out, knowing he had the dinner engagement."

Henry's voice had grown hoarse and he was plucking nervously at the coverlet, but he hurried on as though anxious to have done.

"All at once—it might have been fifteen minutes later or maybe twenty—I heard the sound of a shot and then Mr. Benkard calling me—"

"Are you sure o' that, Henry?" Geoff's nasal drawl had grown suddenly stern. "Are you certain you heard Mr. Benkard call? I know you said at the inquest that you did, but think! Didn't you drop whatever you was doin' in the pantry and rush right out to the livin' room when you heard that shot fired?"

"It was so long—so long ago!" Henry gasped. "I thought I heard him call, but maybe I was mistatken. I know I hurried to the living room and there I saw Mr. Benkard standing crouched over the table and staring over at poor Mr. Shirley, who was lying stretched out on the floor with the revolver in his hand—"

"In whose hand, Henry?" Geoff's voice rang out in the quiet room. "I know what you swore to at the inquest and what you've been paid for ever since! I know what the 'valuable and faithful services' was that made Mr. Benkard leave you fifty thousand dollars in his will, but mebbe you won't live to enjoy it! Mebbe you're a hull lot sicker man than you think! We want the truth as though you were facin' your Maker right now! In whose hand was that revolver?"

Old Henry rose up in his bed as if pulled by invisible wires, his eyes stark with a past horror staring straight before him, and in a strained whisper he replied:

"In Mr. Benkard's."

CHAPTER XXI.

THE MILLS OF THE GODS.

HENRY sank back inert upon his pillows, and as Dr. Hood bent over him, Newbury strode quickly into the room. His face had turned a dull, pasty

gray and his deep, solemn voice shook as he exclaimed:

"That is a lie! This old man is in his dotage, he doesn't know what he is saying! His testimony would be excluded from any court room, and this deputy of yours deliberately led him as a witness, doctor! I was Mr. Benkard's attorney at that time, and I attended to all the formalities incidental to Lawrence Shirley's suicide in his rooms. I am thoroughly conversant with every detail of that unfortunate affair and I know that the revolver was found lying under the young man's own hand!"

"After it had been put there," amended Geoff respectfully but firmly. "Who did it, Henry? You might as well tell the whole truth now. Who put that revolver under Mr. Shirley's hand?"

"It was me, at the last!" A convulsive gasp came from the bed. "Mr. Benkard—he couldn't, his nerve—failed him. I took the revolver out of his hand and—put it where it was found! It's true, Mr. Newbury! I've spoke after all these years, and if the doctor—can only help me get my breath, I'll tell it all!"

"This shall not be allowed!" Newbury cried. "Doctor, I forbid it! This poor old creature is being coerced!"

Dr. Hood drew himself up until his rotund, shabby figure seemed to tower above that of the sleek city attorney.

"Do I have to tell you the law, sir?" he thundered. "Geoff, you go telephone down to the notary public to bring his stenographer and shoot out here in Hank's jitney. I want to get this all down on record and then we'll let Henry rest."

Geoff left the room without a word and was passing along the gallery when Mildred Cayley's door opened and she confronted him. Her pale little face lighted up with a pitifully eager smile as she darted out and caught his arm.

"Oh, Geoff!" she breathed. "I am so glad you have come! The waiting has been terrible, but I knew you would not fail us!"

"I ain't, Miss Millie," he responded gravely. "Things is goin' 'long all right now, but I got some more to do yet and I'm in a hurry. Just you keep up for a few hours longer and I reckon—I shouldn't be s'prised if you wasn't sleepy to-night and looked out o' your window, mebbe you'd see somebody standing underneath it on the lawn."

"Geoff, honestly?" Her eyes glowed.

"I only said 'mebbe,' Miss Millie."

He disengaged the clinging fingers with awkward gentleness.

"You've found out, then, who really killed my uncle? You know—the truth?"

"Yes, Miss Millie. I had it all figured out afore ever I went away, but I had to git proof. Don't you think 'bout that now; just you figure on how you're goin' to slip out for a few minutes to-night without your ma knowin'—mebbe!"

He hurried on down the stairs and into the library. Mrs. Cayley and Stoneham Lane had taken themselves elsewhere, and Geoff phoned the doctor's instructions to the notary public and then returned quickly to the butler's room. As he crossed the threshold Henry spoke, his voice a little stronger now.

"It was all just as I said up to the last time young Mr. Larry called in October, before that New Year's Day. Then they had a very violent quarrel, Mr. Benkard and he. I know my place and I wasn't trying to listen, but the apartment was quite small, and when they raised their voices it was impossible not to hear.

"He was accusing Mr. Benkard of wiping him out on the market, declaring he was ruined and worse and that Mr. Benkard had shown him how to take what he had and now he must show him how to replace it or face the issue with him. Mr. Benkard shut him up at that and pacified him and got him away, and when he came again on New Year's, I fancied they must have met somewhere and patched up the difference between them."

"Henry, you are sure of this?" Newbury spoke in cold, shocked accents. "Mr. Shirley said Mr. Benkard had shown him how to take what he had and now he must show him how to replace it or face the issue?"

"Yes, sir. Those were his very words, I've never forgotten them."

"But the story you have just told us, the story you told at the inquest, was it

true up to the moment when you heard the shot?"

"All true, sir, except that when I brought in the Scotch and soda I could see they'd been quarreling, and although Mr. Shirley was laughing, it wasn't a pleasant sort of a laugh, if you know what I mean, sir. As for Mr. Benkard, he had a look on his face that was dangerous! I've seen it a few times since, but never before then, and it gave me a queer feeling, I—I couldn't quite explain it.

"When I went back to my pantry I left the door ajar and listened, and it seemed to me Mr. Benkard was purposely working the young gentleman up into a frenzy, defying him and asking what he could prove. Mr. Shirley said he could prove enough to drive Mr. Benkard out of Wall Street, even if he couldn't take him behind the bars with him, and that he wasn't going to wait until the accounting was made; he was going straight to the head of the firm the next day with the whole story, and he'd only come to Mr. Benkard then to give him a last chance to keep his word and make good the loss.

"'A last chance?' Mr. Benkard repeated after him, and I knew somehow from his voice that the end of it was coming. 'All right, you young fool, I'll take that chance!' Then came the sound of that shot and—and I realized in a flash what he must have done!"

"Henry." Geoff stepped to the side of the bed beside the doctor. "Did you see Mr. Benkard slip that there revolver into the pocket of his lounging robe afore you left his room when you went to tell him Mr. Shirley had come?"

"No, but it was his. He'd had it since before I came to him, and I think he must have bought it second hand in some other city, for there were no marks on it that could be traced. I searched the pawnshops, quiet like, for a week after that happened, to find another just like it in case there should be something said and Mr. Benkard have to produce his, but there wasn't, not a whisper! Not until now!"

"You didn't hear Mr. Benkard call, though?"

"No, Geoffrey; I didn't. That was the beginning of the story we fixed up between us afterward that fooled everybody, even Mr. Newbury here." Henry gave the stunned attorney a deprecating glance. "After the shot there was a horrid sort of stillness, and it seemed hours before I could get my legs to working under me. I don't know how ever in the world I reached the living room, but there stood Mr. Benkard hunched up over the table with the revolver in his hand, staring at Mr. Shirley's dead body on the floor!"

"Why didn't you call the police?" demanded Newbury sharply.

"I never thought of it, sir," the old man replied simply. "I was in service to Mr. Benkard, and no matter who had the right or wrong of the quarrel nothing could bring Mr. Shirley back to life again. I made sure of that, and then I saw there was powder marks around the wound on his temple—it was his right temple, and I'd noticed that Mr. Shirley was right-handed, sir—so I knew that Mr. Benkard must have been close up to him when he fired and then backed away, across the room. It came to me then what we had to do, and do quickly, in case somebody in the neighborhood had heard the shot and sent to investigate. I walked up to Mr. Benkard and took the revolver out of his hand; he was like a man in a dream.

"'Mr. Benkard, sir,' I said to him, 'Mr. Shirley killed himself. Do you hear, sir? He did it himself! Try to think quick of a reason!' He just turned slow and stared at me as if he was trying to understand and couldn't, but he got it quick enough when I went over to where Mr. Shirley was lying and slipped the revolver under his hand.

"When I turned Mr. Benkard was pouring himself a drink of Scotch, neat, and then he asked me what you did just now, Mr. Newbury, and I gave him the same answer. When he saw he could trust me his brain began to work like lightning, and within five minutes I *was* telephoning to the police, and to you, sir, if you recall, but we had everything arranged then between us and we neither of us had to change a word of the story."

"Geoff, do you want to ask him any more questions?" Dr. Hood turned to his

deputy as Henry ceased speaking, and when the latter shook his head he added: "Then we'll let him rest now until the notary comes."

But a slight bustle and commotion below as they started to leave the room indicated the prompt arrival of that official with his stenographer, and while Henry's statement was being taken down and sworn to Mr. Newbury sought his client.

The matter was briefly concluded, and when they descended the stairs it was to find a white-faced and trembling Mrs. Cayley waiting beseechingly in the hall.

"Doctor, may I speak to you and Geoffrey for a moment after these others have gone?" She drew the medical examiner aside. "Can they be trusted not to talk about this around the village?"

"They are under oath not to do so," the doctor responded stiffly, but his kind heart was not proof against the misery in her eyes. "It's too bad this had to come as such a shock to you, ma'am. I suppose Mr. Newbury has told you?"

"Yes. I cannot believe it! It does not seem possible that my brother could be guilty of such—" She broke off.

"But, doctor, what has all this to do with—with Joseph's own death now? I knew very little of that dreadful affair, for I was not living in New York at the time, but it has all been forgotten for so many years, and Joseph is beyond reach of the law. Mr. Newbury tells me that the young man had no relatives—no one came forward even to claim his body—and it can do him no good now to drag all this old horror into the light. Think what it means to us, my daughter and me, to Mr. Newbury—who may be placed in a position he calls 'accessory after the fact'—to Mr. Lane, who has been closely associated with my brother for the past year—"

"Mebbe it means somethin' to some one else, ma'am, to have the name o' that young man cleared."

Geoff had come up quietly after seeing the notary and his stenographer leave, and now he joined them just as Lane and Newbury issued from the library.

"Mebbe there's somebuddy somewheres that cares whether he was a embezzler and suicide or not, and mebbe it's got a hull lot more to do with the death o' Mr. Benkard than you got any idee o'. I'll have to leave you pretty soon, doc, and 'tend to that little business o' mine that I told you 'bout, but afore I start I'd like to ask Mis' Cayley a few questions."

"I will tell you anything gladly." Mrs. Cayley wrung her hands. "Oh, if you could only see this matter as we—as I do! If you could only see that it would be best—but you are thinking, of course, of those anonymous letters coming on New Year's Day. Can it be that some one, after all this time— My brother was always confident that they were sent by an insane person."

"Insane or not, ma'am, I told Doc Hood, here, last week, that we wasn't investigatin' no murder now; that none had been committed at all, and it wasn't; it was execution! 'Twasn't 'cordin' to law, mebbe, but—what do folks mean 'bout the mills o' the gods grindin' slow but mighty small?"

Geoff had suddenly recalled the phrase old Mr. Robbins had used in his single interview with that other victim of Benkard's machinations, and he turned to Newbury.

"I think"—the suave attorney paused, at a loss how to word his reply in the presence of his client—"it might be said to mean that retribution comes, no matter how late."

"I kinder figured on it bein' somethin' like that," Geoff remarked, adding apologetically: "I wasn't aimin' to hurt you none, ma'am—"

"Do you think that anything could hurt me in the face of this fresh horror?" Mrs. Cayley cried. "Are we never to have done with them? When that stupid lout from the district attorney's office arrested Rupert Ashe last week, bringing new gossip and notoriety linking his name with that of my daughter, and I feared we should all have the hideous farce of his trial to endure, it was maddening enough! Mildred would not have married him, of course—it was merely a foolish infatuation—but in justice to the young man I must admit that I never for a moment doubted his innocence.

"The very idea that he killed my brother is absurd, but now you come with evidence of this horrible thing from the past, and I tell you that I do not care what my brother did, nor who killed him! I am thinking of myself now and my daughter's future. It would be infinitely better for us if this mystery were allowed to die unsolved and pass from the public memory."

"Is that why Mr. Newbury hired the man Mahoney from O'Hare's Detective Agency, who came here and passed himself off as the manager of Mr. Benkard's Broad Street office, Mrs. Cayley?" Dr. Hood asked. "Didn't you want the case investigated on your own account then?"

"Perhaps," the lady conceded. "Could I dream that a crime was to be unearthed in my brother's own life to take from us all I have striven for and close the doors of society in our very faces? Not that I fear for my daughter—she will ultimately be in the best of hands—"

"I trust so." It was Lane who interrupted with suave deliberation as she glanced toward him meaningly.

"Of course, this thing cropping up—God, it's frightful!—will make a great deal of difference to all of us, eh, Newbury? We must adjust ourselves to meet it. I know I've been considered a pretty shrewd speculator and accused of playing close to the line sometimes, but it's always been strictly according to Hoyle with me, and Joe Benkard knew it!

"I've never done anything crooked, but I have been closely associated with him for the past year, and it is going to hit me hard when this comes out, no matter who murdered him! I think, in the face of the storm of added notoriety which is coming to all of us, it would be best for our mutual protection from as much of it as we can avoid if I run up to town and await developments there."

Mrs. Cayley's lips curled slightly.

"As you please, Mr. Lane. Since Henry is still indisposed, shall I ring for Letty to pack your bag?"

"Indeed, no! It won't take me a minute to throw my things in. Dear lady, I am afraid this seems like deserting you in your distress, but it is the most prudent move for all our sakes under the circumstances." He paused, his face slowly reddening.

"Please believe that I am at your service and Mildred's, always. I shall hold myself in instant readiness for your command."

Bowing, Lane turned and went up the staircase, and Mrs. Cayley shrugged wearily and sank into a chair.

"You see?" She included all three of the men in her glance. "He is the first, but that is the way it will be with all of them. Our world, which was tottering before, is crumbling about our ears. My brother's ambitions and mine—to what have they led us?"

"That was one of the questions I wanted to ask you, ma'am; 'bout Mr. Benkard. He was born in Millborough?" Geoff asked.

"Yes. Our family home has been there for generations. My brother started life as a bank clerk, but later he entered the branch of a Chicago brokerage house, and went from there to the main office, and afterward to New York," Mrs. Cayley replied. "I did not see him for years, but after my husband died he sent for me to come with my daughter to the city and live with him. I found him much changed, a man of violent passions not always under control, but he was very kind."

"Kin you tell me, Mis' Cayley, if you've got any notion why William Dunn refused the money Mr. Benkard left to him?" Geoff, watching closely, saw the quick color which swept over her face and then vanished, leaving her even more pale than before.

"I can think of no reason unless the man's earlier troubles have unhinged his mind!" she exclaimed. "For years he has been utterly useless, and I wondered at my brother keeping him on. His refusal of the legacy was the height of ingratitude! I urged Mr. Benkard to dispense with his services long ago."

"Then what was the proposition your private detective Mahoney went to him with last Wednesday afternoon?" Geoff pursued, not unmindful of the swift interchange of glances between the lady and Newbury. "Dunn sent him 'bout his busi-

ness right quick, tellin' him it wasn't no use to argue; that he was through for all time with the folks Mahoney was representin'."

"I can answer that," the attorney interposed.

"Mrs. Cayley felt Dunn's inexplicable ingratitude very keenly, but she was distressed about the man's future, realizing that it would be difficult at his age for him to obtain a position such as he had held with Mr. Benkard, and since there was no capacity in which she could employ him she begged me to find a place for him in my office, doing minor work in connection with the settling of the estate. It was I who sent Mahoney to him with the offer, but he fancied it was in the nature of charity and became highly indignant."

"Mis' Cayley did that, after urgin' her brother to turn him out?" Geoff's tone was filled with artless surprise, but Newbury bit his lips.

"She meant on a pension, of course! Mr. Benkard could have arranged more cleverly than we to assist him without injuring his pride. Is there anything further that Mrs. Cayley or I can tell you?"

"Reckon you could." Geoff slightly emphasized the last word. "Ain't got time to ask you now, though, I'll have to get on 'bout my business—"

He paused as the sound of a motor whirring up the driveway came to them through the open front doors. Mrs. Cayley glanced toward them, then rose with a low exclamation of warning.

"It is Miss Sherwood with Mr. Middleton! Not a word before them of what you have just learned from Henry upstairs!"

She hurried forward and the atttorney followed while Dr. Hood drew his deputy determinedly aside.

"Look here, Geoff, you're not going off on any more business of your own connected with this case unless you tell me about it first. I've had enough of this! You've uncovered a lot of dirt that'll have to be scattered to the four winds, but as far as I'm concerned that's all you have brought to light. Who killed Benkard, anyway? Who knew or suspected, besides old Henry, that he was the prime mover in that embezzlement and shot young Shirley to prevent exposure?"

Before Geoff could reply a quick, buoyant footstep came up behind him and a hand fell upon his shoulder.

"Hello, Geoff! I thought you were working in Long Island City, while our house is going to rack and ruin! Good afternoon, doctor."

Adrian Middleton, serenely unaware that he had arrived at a saving moment for his boyhood playmate, eyed both men with eager curiosity. "Any change in the situation that you can tell a neighbor? We all feel badly about Rupert Ashe, particularly Miss Sherwood, who saw so much of him here. His arrest was an outrage!"

"Good afternoon, Mr. Middleton," the doctor responded. "Sorry we haven't any news at present that we can give out, but I expect shortly—"

"Good Lord, I very nearly forgot!" Middleton interrupted, drawing an envelope from his pocket. "Here's a special delivery letter for you, Geoff. I met the notary in the post office just now while old Jed was sorting the mail and he said he thought you were up here. I remarked that we were going to stop by for a few moments and Jed entrusted the letter to me, so I signed for it in your name."

"Much obliged to you, Mr. Middleton." Geoff stood for a moment turning the envelope over thoughtfully in his hands. It was postmarked 'New York City' and the jerky but almost mechanically legible writing was unfamiliar to him; moreover, it bore no name of a builders' supplies house. Except for these and an occasional demand for his services from some nearby village he had not received three letters in all his life.

But the doctor was looking at him with an almost threatening interest, and muttering an excuse he walked a little away from his companions. As he slit the envelope, Miss Sherwood appeared at the entrance to the patio and he bowed to her gravely before drawing forth its contents.

Wondering still, he turned to the final page for the signature, then abruptly crushed the letter in his hand and, ignoring the questioning glances of the rest, made

for the terrace, where he seated himself on the top step. The somnolent sunshine of mid-afternoon lay over the garden and shimmered on the waters of the Sound and the low drone of a distant lawn-mower came soothingly to the ear, but Geoff read on and on to the end, oblivious to his surroundings.

Then slowly the hands holding the crumpled sheets slipped down between his knees and he gazed out over the shining blue expanse with agonized eyes bearing mute testimony to the torture of uncertainty and conflict within him. Then, as the minutes passed, they cleared and shone with a steady light. Geoff's case had been solved for him at the last.

CHAPTER XXII.

DUNN MAKES HIS CHOICE.

ADRIAN MIDDLETON was still conversing with the doctor and Mrs. Cayley, Miss Sherwood and Newbury sat a little apart when Geoff re-entered the patio and strode hastily over to the latter group.

"Excuse me, ma'am, do you know the telephone number o' William Dunn's apartment?" He addressed the older of the two women, his voice tense and vibrant with an ill-concealed excitement.

"I have it, or rather, his janitor's. He has none of his own." Newbury pulled a notebook from his pocket before Mrs. Cayley could reply. "It is 4089 Fordsworth."

Without stopping to ask permission, Geoff turned and dashed for the library, and in a moment they heard him calling the number in a very fever of impatience. Dr. Hood took a step or two in his direction, then paused and after a minute of indecision, wheeled and joined the others who were openly listening.

The interval seemed very long, but at length they heard him demand in a high, strained tone:

"Hello, there! Get me Mr. Dunn, quick! If he don't answer bang on his door, and if that don't bring him, break it in! I got reason to think mebbe he's sick up there alone!"

"My God!" Newbury muttered beneath his breath.

Mrs. Cayley shuddered and covered her eyes, but those of the doctor lighted with a sudden gleam. Adrian Middleton drew closer to Miss Sherwood's chair.

If the wait had seemed long before it was almost interminable now, but at last their suspense was ended.

"Gosh-Almighty!" Geoff's voice broke with an odd, choking sound. "So he done it! This is a friend o' his talkin'. I just got a letter from him and I suspicioned this! Look here, when I ring off you call up police headquarters direct and tell 'em to send right up and take charge o' things! Don't you disturb nothin' till they git there. That's right, git 'em quick's you can. Good-by."

They heard the click of the receiver and then Geoff appeared in the doorway.

"I reckon you-all got an idee o' what's happened now," he remarked as they sat spellbound, staring at him.

"It isn't—" Mrs. Cayley gasped. "He hasn't—"

"Has Dunn killed himself?" demanded the doctor brusquely.

Geoff nodded.

"The last time I saw him he told me he was going on a little journey, just for a rest—reckon I'd ought to a got what he meant from the way he said it, but I didn't," he replied slowly. "Doc, 'tain't my business, but seein's your case is spoiled now, anyways, hadn't you better git either Lyons or Allen on the job up there so's they kin bring a full report down to you without losin' no time? Dunn's left a—a sort o' confession in this letter. You'll need this to put afore the district attorney to show him young Rupert Ashe ain't necessary no more as a material witness."

"I don't see—" Dr. Hood began in bewildered fashion. "I don't see as the case is spoiled—"

"I meant for a conviction." Geoff's tone spoke volumes. "You can't never bring William Dunn to trial now he's dead!"

The doctor uttered a half-smothered exclamation as comprehension dawned, but it was lost in a shrill cry from Mrs. Cayley.

"Was Dunn the murderer of my brother?"

"That's how the doc figured it out from the minute he set foot in this house after you sent for him, ma'am. Go on, doc, and 'phone. I won't tell no more o' your case than the papers will have tomorrer mornin'."

He waited until the doctor had hurried away to do his bidding and then added carefully: "He may have seemed shocked and real grieved to you because you was expectin' him to be that way, but to a stranger who didn't expect nothin' and saw him for the first time it was plain as day that he wasn't surprised none, nor sorry; he was glad it was over and done, but tryin' hard not to show it. Anybuddy could a-seen, too, that he was keepin' somethin' back when them anonymous letters was talked 'bout—but mebbe I better not go into that now—"

Geoff paused discreetly and Newbury interposed:

"If Dr. Hood has the proof in his possession, as you say, and the man has actually confessed—"

"Do you mean to tell us that he wrote those letters himself?" Mrs. Cayley demanded. "No one ever saw them except my poor brother and he always destroyed them at once! It is quite all right, Vera, Mr. Middleton; it need be a secret no longer that for several years Mr. Benkard was annoyed by threatening letters which came semi-annually, but he always declared them to be the work of a lunatic. There was never any clue to the identity of the man who sent them."

"Why did he write to you?" Newbury asked. "Does he admit in so many words that he is guilty?"

"'Guilty?'" Geoff repeated. "Yes, it's all kinder mixed-up to me; he speaks o' his 'crime' and he killed himself because he thought the police was after him, but they wasn't. He knew the man from O'Hare's, o' course, and he spotted two plainclothes fellers that headquarters in New York loaned to Doc Hood, but they went to see him 'bout somethin' else.

"After that first talk with him the doc told me to keep an eye on Dunn while I was workin' 'round and try to make friends with him; I did, and then I saw him in the city and I reckon at the last a feller wants somebody to write to, so he picked me out, sayin' he hadn't no friend or relation left in the world. It's funny, but he don't seem to have been scared none that he would a-got convicted in the first degree even if he was caught; it was the idee o' goin' to prison that he couldn't face."

"I really find it difficult to believe it of him, he always appeared to be such a weak, spineless creature, but as Mrs. Cayley remarked before about the writer of those letters he must indeed have been mad," the attorney observed as the doctor reappeared. "Does he allege any motive? Some idea must have existed in that warped brain of his."

"It did." Geoff allowed his gaze to wander meaningly toward Vera Sherwood and Middleton. "He'd been kinder nursin' a grudge he thought he had agin Mr. Benkard till it got so big to him he couldn't think o' nothin' else, seems like."

"We have intruded long enough and it is time for me to take Miss Sherwood home." Adrian Middleton turned to their hostess. "My dear Mrs. Cayley, you know that we will wait eagerly for the details, and share in your relief when the whole horrible matter is thoroughly investigated and permitted to drop. If my sister can be of any service whatever—"

"Do you want me to stay here with you for a day or two, Mrs. Cayley?" Vera Sherwood asked. "I will be glad to do anything I can, you know I don't have to emphasize that."

"Thank you, my dear, but I really think I shall be better alone. This news is a shock, of course, but the reaction will pass, and at least the horrible suspense is at an end."

Geoff responded to the doctor's imperative tug at his arm as the visitors were taking their leave and walked with him to the terrace doors.

"Why didn't you tell me this at once, when you got back?" demanded the latter. "Why was it necessary for us to get old Henry's story first? It didn't have any direct bearing on the murder, after all."

"I figure it did," Geoff replied. "Dunn was kinder a lonely cuss all his life, not bein' the sociable kind to mix much with folks, but the few friends he did make he thought a sight o', and young Shirley was closer to him than most anybody, though he didn't give away his association with Benkard. That only got whispered round after his death, and I think Dunn didn't take much stock in it till he got all tied up with Benkard himself later and couldn't git free, not while Benkard lived.

"We'd better be gittin' 'long now to wait at your house for a message from headquarters and then over to the county seat. I s'pose the district attorney is waiting if you talked to him. Did you git Lyons or Allen?"

"Lyons. He said he'd hurry up to Dunn's place in a police car and take charge of everything. What was it Dunn wrote to you?"

"Just a ramblin' kind o' explanation without no actual reference to the murder, but it's plain if you read between the lines. I suspicioned the truth right along, but I couldn't fasten a thing on him. If Benkard could 'a' used Shirley the way he did Dunn he wouldn't 'a' shot him, but he must have seen the boy was too high-spirited to be made no tool of. Dunn guessed the truth after he went to work for Benkard. I knew that when I seen him in his rooms last week, for he never once spoke 'bout Shirley's suicide, but called it his 'death,' and I could tell from his eyes how he hated Benkard, as I'd thought before. I'll give you my letter soon's we git away from here."

"But how did he do it—the murder, I mean? What weapon did he use? You know there weren't any footprints on the sanded floor near where Benkard had been sitting." The doctor halted beside the fountain.

"I don't know how Dunn got down here, but I figure he came by the late train and kinder hung round till the rest o' the folks went to bed. He must have been tolerable familiar with Benkard's habits and took a chance on his sittin' up alone.

"He asked me last week how I thought the murder was committed, same's your doin' now, and when I told him, I saw I'd called the turn from the way he acted. Benkard must have fell asleep after all. Do you remember when you examined the body you got me to lay boards from my pile on the terrace all round the bench so's you could walk on 'em and not leave no tracks?"

His companion nodded.

"Didn't git any notion that the murd'rer might 'a' done the same thing, did you? If he was hangin' round the terrace he prob'bly seen Rupert Ashe and hid till he'd went off again in his motor boat because the boy said Benkard was smokin', the last sight he got o' him from the steps. The murder must 'a' been all planned and figured out in ev'ry detail 'way ahead, and I reckon Dunn brought some sort o' a weapon with him; he could 'a' hid a heavy hammer or a wrench under his coat as easy as not, and we can be certain he had some excuse 'bout important business ready for Benkard so's he wouldn't suspect nothin'." Geoff went on:

"When he asked me I told him I had it figured out that Benkard fell asleep and the murd'rer laid down the boards same's I did for you. I noticed then they didn't make no sound on the soft sand and he must 'a' been partic'lar, o' course, to go mighty easy and quiet. I told Dunn the murd'rer must 'a' laid them boards one after the other, crep' up behind Benkard and hit him just one blow. Then when he was sure he'd finished him he took 'em up agin as he went and put 'em back on my pile.

"There wasn't no blood on 'em, though I looked careful, so I reckon he made kinder a wide circle to git round the bench. He didn't have the nerve to slam him right in the face. Benkard's head must have fell forward on his chest. I figure Dunn hustled straight back to the city—he could 'a' got the early milk train if he'd walked to the county seat—and waited for the news. He told us, if you recollect, that he couldn't sleep that night and went out and walked the streets till most mornin', so he had his alibi, sech as it was, all fixed. But come on, doc. Mis' Cayley an' that lawyer look as though they was waitin' for us to finish our confab and go."

Mrs. Cayley halted them with one final appeal.

"Now that Dunn is dead and there will be no trial, surely—surely it will be unnecessary and cruel to me and my daughter to expose the story about Mr. Shirley's death! There is poor old Henry, too. His loyalty to my brother made him voluntarily an accessory after the fact, and I cannot bear to think that he may have to spend his few remaining days in prison!"

"Well." Geoff glanced at the little doctor.

"There's somebody got to be told, and I guess mebbe the doc will leave it to her to decide."

"A woman!"

"A lady!" Geoff corrected with emphasis. "She was waitin' to marry young Shirley after lovin' him always. Her hair turned gray with sorrow, though she ain't much older'n Miss Sherwood 'pears to be, and she's gentle and sweet-natered. I reckon mebbe if the doc puts it up to her, givin' her proof o' the truth and what it would mean to you and Miss Millie and old Henry to have it come out, besides standin' ready to give the same proof to any o' the townsfolk who knew and remembered the boy she might be willin' to let it be dropped there, though I s'pose she'll want his body brought home now."

"Give me her name and address!" Mrs. Cayley exclaimed eagerly. "I will write or go to her, plead with her—"

Geoff shook his head.

"I couldn't do that, ma'am. When the doc sent me to her it was in strict confidence and nobody else anywheres near New York City knew where she lived except William Dunn, for young Shirley himself had told him 'bout her. We'll do what we kin, but it looks as if she had a right to say what would be done."

"Geoffrey is correct on that." Dr. Hood backed him up valiantly. "The decision must rest with her."

Mrs. Cayley was forced to be content, and when they departed Geoff took the wheel of the little car and handed Dunn's last message to the doctor.

It read:

MY DEAR GEOFFREY:

I can wait no longer to start on that little journey I mentioned to you when you were here, and I am writing to you now because, having neither relatives nor friend in the world, there is no one else who will feel the least interest in my departure except the authorities.

Before I leave I feel I must explain my crime and why I have hated Joseph Benkard all these seven years, hated him even though I served him well, but it was through fear alone.

When I was on the brink of failure, seven years ago, I hypothecated blocks of certain stock belonging to my customers, but it did not save me. I thought I knew Benkard only slightly at that time, but he must have been studying me, known me better than I knew myself and that I would be wax in his hands. How he found out what I had done I never learned, but he came to me at the darkest hour when my books were in the hands of the receiver, and I knew the missing stock would be asked for very soon and—offered to replace it if I would become his secretary. I jumped at the reprieve from disgrace and imprisonment. I was humbly grateful to him, not only for that, but for this mark of his confidence in me—until I learned too late what that confidence was to be! All the negotiations for his secret, underhand, crooked work were left to me. I was the cat's-paw, and if discovery had come I should have borne the brunt of it and suffered in his stead, for he had, with devilish cleverness, made it appear that I was speculating on the side and using his stock without his knowledge.

He kept his word and replaced my customers' stock which I had originally stolen, for he saw I would be too valuable a man for him to lose, and I have become deeper and deeper involved while he kept his hands clean. I could not expose him and nothing but his death would have set me free. I am free now, but my freedom is threatened and I shall not live to be taken.

I thought I was safe to find what peace I could, but within the last few days I discovered that the authorities were beginning to suspect, if they did not actually know, for a private detective has been hounding me and two others from headquarters. They pretend they only want to learn if I have heard from you, but that is an excuse, a lie! Sooner or later they will come with proof and I can make no defense. Only two roads are open to me, prison or the unknown, and I have made my choice. Your life appears to have been simple, Geoffrey, filled with hard work and holding few of the things which men count worth striving for, but you have avoided the pitfalls which lie in the path of such as I, so try not to think too badly of me.

It is nearly morning and I must do what remains to be done before my neighbors

are stirring. If there be a hereafter and I am not judged too harshly perhaps we shall meet again.

Good night,
WILLIAM DUNN.

CHAPTER XXIII.

GEOFF MINDS HIS OWN BUSINESS.

A WEEK later Geoff was mixing concrete for the terrace at the Middleton's old place and whistling cheerily the while when Adrian came out to him. There were deep lines about his boyish blue eyes and his lips were set in an ominous line, but he smiled pleasantly as he greeted the workman.

Geoff had only returned the night before from his second journey to the South and the gentle soul who had waited there for the tidings which he brought, and he had not misjudged her. She had known what it was to live with the stigma of guilt clinging to the memory of one who had passed on and, although it would in this case have been richly merited, for the sake of the innocent relatives and associates left behind as well as the loyal old Henry, Miss Katherine had been content to let the past remain undisturbed except for the few old friends who still remembered.

For herself it was enough that her own, sure woman's instinct had proved true, and the boy, led into temptation by an older, evil genius, had been more victim than accomplice in the crime for which he had paid with his life.

"Thought we never should get you here, Geoff." Adrian seated himself on the low wall. "Wish I could stay to see the house and terrace when you get them all in trim, but I'll be far away by that time."

"You goin' to travel?" Geoff looked up in surprise.

"Yes, I have some property up in British Columbia that I've got to inspect, and no one needs me here. My sister-in-law has Miss Sherwood, you know." He added the last hastily and then went on: "The case of Benkard's murder is settled and done with, did Dr. Hood tell you?"

"I seen him when I got back last night." Geoff nodded. "He says, too, that Mrs. Cayley changed right round and announced herself that her daughter was goin' to marry young Ashe."

"He's a fine boy, and they ought to be happy." There was a wistful note in Adrian's voice which told its own story to his companion. Geoff was mightily concerned. "I was sure Mrs. Cayley would consent in the end; women have a way of changing their minds, you know."

"Don't know nothin' at all 'bout wimmen," Geoff responded hastily. "I aim to mind my own business, and most 'specially where they're consarned."

"You got pretty well mixed up in this Benkard case, though!" Adrian smiled and then the lines of unhappiness settled once more upon his face. "Doc Hood's the big sleuth in the newspaper reports, but I suspect you had more than a hand in it."

"I only done what Doc Hood asked me to," Geoff declared. "The way he figured it, that poor feller Dunn must 'a' brooded over his own failure till he got kinder cracked, and seein' Benkard more and more successful every year he hated him and made up his mind to crush him, and the idee was workin' in his mind all the while he was sendin' them anonymous letters. Both the doc and me had Mr. Lane wrong, though Benkard may 'a' done things in his business that was unlawful if they'd come out, but not Lane. The investigation showed that he was as straight as a die, even if he did pull off some pretty shrewd deals and his 'sociation with Benkard was strictly on the level. He wouldn't 'a' stood for anythin' else."

"I'm glad I'm not in that game," remarked Adrian. "I suppose Dr. Hood told you that the New York medical examiner's inquiry was just a formality; it brought out that Dunn's janitor heard him go out about eight o'clock that night and he never came in again till just before six in the morning.

"They found a short, heavy piece of lead pipe in his rooms that the janitor thought the plumbers must have left last month, but he admitted he hadn't noticed it while he was cleaning up at odd times during the interval. Dunn was a fool to bring it back with him, but it just shows that

his mind was unhinged. It was a horrible thing, of course, but I can't help feeling sorry for him, somehow."

"Me, too." Geoff turned again to his work as the other rose. "He's gone now, though, and whatever we think o' him, nor anybuddy else, can't make no difference. You ain't goin' 'way soon, are you? Mis' Harper Middleton didn't say nothin' 'bout it to me when I come to work this mornin'."

"She didn't know. I only just decided—I mean, I received a report from my representative that made it necessary. A man's work is the only thing in life, after all, that's always waiting for him when everything else he may have hoped for and planned goes to smash."

"Sometimes folks jumps to conclusions and thinks things have gone to smash when they ain't, they only need a little mite o' clearin' up; leastwise, that's how I found it." Geoff picked up his trowel. "I ain't pretendin' to mix up in nobuddy's business, Mr. Middleton, but I've got eyes in my head, and if 'twas me I wouldn't be gittin' my ticket just yet."

Adrian laughed and clapped him on the shoulder.

"You're a good scout, Geoff, but I know when I've been making a fool of myself, and it's time to pull up my stakes. I'll see you again, though, before I go."

He wandered into the house. Geoff took off his cap and ran his fingers violently through his shock of sandy hair. He had hoped fervently that he was through with the whole thing and could go back undisturbed to his trade alone. Was he destined to interfere once more?

"Good morning, Geoffrey."

Miss Sherwood's low, vibrant voice interrupted his musing and he turned to find her standing where the overhanging branch of a luxuriant maple cast soft shadows over the old brick wall. She appeared almost fragile looking, despite her slim height, and her classic face was as colorless as marble, but she smiled faintly.

"You don't seem to be very busy."

"No, ma'am, I ain't." Geoff drew a deep breath. "I got somethin' on my mind and I can't get set to my work proper. I done somethin' that I figured was right, but it's turnin' out all wrong and comin' to nothin'. That's what you git for not mindin' your own business, I s'pose."

Miss Sherwood seated herself on the wall as Adrian had done a few minutes before, the thin white gown outlining the sweeping lines of her figure against the vivid green and her hair shining like copper where a ray of sunlight rested on it.

"Do you want to tell me about it?" she asked. "Perhaps I can help you."

"You could, I reckon, ma'am, if you was only to see things my way, but I'd have to speak about somethin' I ain't told another livin' soul and ain't ever a goin' to. It's what I found out the morning o' the murder that only one other person knows."

"You—found out?" she whispered, her eyes suddenly darkening. "But—but I thought— Hasn't it been settled that poor, deranged William Dunn was guilty?"

"He had no more to do with it than I had!" Geoff gave a determined hitch to his overalls and advanced to the side of the wall close to where she was seated. "You recollect that inner court, Miss Sherwood, that Mis' Cayley calls the 'pateeo'?"

"Of course—" There was a little catch in her breath.

"Well, I been workin' there since the old house was tore down and the foundations o' the new one laid; I seen the blue prints and watched the construction from start to finish, havin' a hand in a hull lot o' the extry fixin's, inside and out." Geoff spoke as though to himself. "I helped build that gallery runnin' round between the first and the second floor—you recollect the gallery, Miss Sherwood?"

"Certainly!" Her foot tapped the floor of the old terrace impatiently. "What—"

"And them posts on the gallery railin'—them posts with the concrete knobs on the top? I fixed them knobs in place myself, and each o' 'em sets down in a socket in the post and has a mushroom base."

"Why—why are you telling me all this, Geoffrey?" Miss Sherwood flicked a tiny, fuzzy caterpillar daintily from her skirt, but when she looked up once more it seemed to be at something just beyond him. "Naturally, I recall the gallery railing and the posts."

"I only wanted to make sure, 's if you was seein' it agin. Thirty foot square, that pateeo is, and forty foot high, countin' the dome; like this here." With the point of his trowel he traced a rough diagram on the crumbling top of the wall. As though fascinated, Miss Sherwood's eyes followed it.

"The bench was there, where Mr. Benkard was a settin' inside them terrace doors, and the gallery run round this way, and right here under this post the lanyards was fastened—the lanyards that h'ist and lower the flag from inside the top o' the dome."

The point of his trowel rested, and again Miss Sherwood glanced up into his eyes.

"You are trying to describe to me something you found out the morning after the murder?" Her voice was not quite steady. "What is it that you know?"

"I reckon I know pretty much ev'rythin', ma'am, but this is the only time I'm ever goin' to speak 'bout it."

Geoff's tone was very grave.

"Nobuddy come a-nigh to Benkard to kill him, because there wasn't a sign o' a footprint, Miss Sherwood, nary one! You recollect that? Somebuddy did come out on that gallery, though, and swing somethin' down *from above* and bash his head in with it, and then haul it up agin!"

"What a—an extraordinary idea!" The thin folds of white over Vera Sherwood's bosom rose and fell with her spasmodic breathing. "But how can you be sure, Geoffrey?"

"I went up on the gallery and tested them heavy knobs o' concrete I'd set in putty on the railin' posts, and sure 'nough, one o' 'em was loose—the one on the post right over where them lanyards was drawed up and tied. I'd fastened 'em myself only the day before, but now the knot was different, all snarled up ev'ry whichaway, and tangled up in 'em was some strands o' a strong cord that had been fastened to 'em afore they was swung down, so's they could be hauled up agin.

"I untangled 'em quick and tied 'em over right and then I done somethin' that lays me open to the law my own self, I reckon, only nobuddy's never goin' to know; I got me some cement and fixed that knob back good and solid once more, though the doc ketched me comin' down the stairs with my trowel in my hand, and I had to think quick."

Geoff added naïvely: "'Twas me, too, that forced the music-room winder, and Letty come after me just 's I was a doin' it, but she never suspicioned nothin'."

"But why, Geoffrey—why did you do these things?" One hand had crept up to her throat.

"'Cause I figured the person who'd done it had some good reason, from what I knowed 'bout Mr. Benkard, and I had my own grudge ag'in' him; folks that beats innercent, helpless critters 'most to death is better dead themselves, I reckon!"

There was a grim note in his tones.

"Mebbe I hadn't no business to mix in it, but I figured I'd do what I could to protect the—the person that had took the law into their own hands, anyways till I found out why. There was somethin' else had me guessin' more lively right then."

"Something—else?" Miss Sherwood repeated.

"Yes, ma'am. Why there wasn't no—no blood on that concrete knob. Somethin' must 'a' been wrapped 'round it, o' course, but it couldn't 'a' been no ordinary handkerchief nor cloth, 'cause the stains would 'a' come through. I found out 'bout that, though, within an hour, for down on the floor o' the pateeo near the fountain I picked up a little piece o' torn, black rubberized silk that couldn't 'a' come from nothin' but a bathin' cap, and the next day I dug up the rest o' it where somebuddy had hid it in the sand on the shore. I took it home and buried it in my own garden, and it ain't never goin' to be found."

Miss Sherwood moistened her lips.

"And you have reconstructed the—the murder from these—a torn bathing cap, a loose knob of concrete and some cord knotted in the lanyards of the flagpole?"

"'Cause there wasn't no other way it could 'a' been done, ma'am," Geoff explained patiently. "I figured the killin' had been intended, but not the way o' it nor the time, and that the person happened to come out on the gallery late that night

and see Benkard settin' down there, right in a line with where the loop o' the lanyard would swing if it had a weight o' five or six pounds on it.

"Mebbe they'd noticed afore that the knob on top o' the post was loose, so they tied it up in the bathin' cap and fastened it to the lanyard with another cord to hold on to, swung it down and crashed the back o' his head in—the blow would 'a' killed a ox from that height with sech a start!—then hauled it back up agin and fixed ev'rythin' as they thought, the way it had been, not noticin' that a little slit had tore off from the cap."

"Why didn't any one else—the doctor or that detective—" She paused as though unable to go on.

"Seems to me 'twas because all the folks workin' on the case went at it with their noses to the ground. It was from above death come to Benkard—a death that he deserved, if ever a man did—and the person who dealt it to him was above suspicion all the time," Geoff replied simply.

The slim hand resting at Miss Sherwood's side suddenly clenched.

"What had he done to deserve it?" Her tones were very low but steady now.

"I only found that out piecemeal—first from some men who had good reason to hate Benkard and who let on that the one he'd probably injured most in his life was a young feller named Lawrence Shirley. Did you say anythin', ma'am?"

Miss Sherwood shook her head. She was staring straight before her once more, and her lips quivered slightly.

"Seems this young feller was supposed to've killed himself ten year ago, after Benkard refused to help him make good for some money he'd stole; but he didn't. 'Twas Benkard shot him down because he was goin' to expose him 'bout that embezzlement which he'd planned and was mainly responsible for. I never found that out till after ev'rythin' else, but I suspicioned it right along." Geoff spoke hurriedly, as though anxious to have this part of his explanation over with.

"I tried to git some more facts 'bout young Shirley, but he didn't seem to have no folks and nobuddy knowed where he come from, till William Dunn told me. Him and the boy had been good friends, and from him I went further till I got at the hull truth."

"And you never meant to speak?" Miss Sherwood cried. "Not even when Rupert Ashe was arrested?"

"I knowed if he was ever held for trial, the one that done it would 'a' come forward and told," Geoff said gently, the nasal drawl for once gone from his voice. "No jury in the world would 'a' brung in a verdict for nothin' more'n justifiable homicide ag'in' 'em."

Miss Sherwood turned her head for a moment and glanced out over the flaming garden.

"Geoffrey"—she seemed to find it difficult to give utterance to her thought—"don't you think the truth ought to have been told when that queer, incoherent confession of poor William Dunn's to you and to the authorities made it logical to put the—the crime on his memory—"

"No, ma'am!" Geoff interrupted earnestly. "I was the one started that ball a-rollin', and I fought it all out with myself first. Dunn didn't leave a soul to care whether he'd done it or not, and he's gone where the name o' it can't hurt him. The crime he mentioned in his letter was stealin' from his customers, not killin' Benkard.

"Young Shirley had been his friend, and I figured if he'd knowed the truth—which he'd suspected so long—'bout how the boy came to his death, he'd 'a' killed Benkard himself, takin' into consideration his own wrongs. Mebbe I took a hull lot on myself, but I figured he'd be glad if he could know his suicide had done one great thing, in protectin' the one who did. He never writ those 'nonymous letters, and as fer that lead pipe—why, you can find a weapon like that in 'most anybody's house, I reckon."

Miss Sherwood rose and stood very straight, looking levelly into his eyes.

"Who—who did kill Mr. Benkard, Geoffrey?"

Geoff swallowed hard, and the cords stood out in his lean neck above the coarse shirt.

"Well," he remarked slowly, "this young Shirley had a little sister, Miss Sallie, who

got killed in a railroad wreck out in Californy some years ago. I figure she'd 'a' been growed up now if she was alive."

Miss Sherwood drew in her breath sharply once more, but she did not speak, and Geoff went on:

"Mebbe she is alive. Mistakes is made right often in accident reports, I've heard tell, and names is easy changed. Mebbe Miss Sallie lived for just that one idee, to git revenge for her brother even if she could not cl'ar his name. That's all, Miss Sherwood. I thought till now I'd done the best thing for ev'rybuddy so's they could forgit the hull affair and be happy, but it seems 's if I ain't; seems 's if some folks is dead set on makin' themselves unhappy when they ain't no need o' it. That's why I can't fix my mind on my work."

A shadow moved far off on a sunlit space in the garden, and Adrian Middleton's solitary figure appeared. Miss Sherwood gazed at him with troubled eyes in which all at once a soft light began to glow.

"Ain't that Mr. Middleton down there?" Geoff asked innocently. "Seems to me he wants you."

"Geoffrey!" Vera Sherwood turned to him suddenly and held out both her hands.

"I had a kind o' idee I heard him callin' you, ma'am." A smile lighted Geoff's homely countenance. "I ain't figurin' on what he's waitin' to say to you, though; 'tain't my business!"

THE END.

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SONG FOR THREE SEASONS

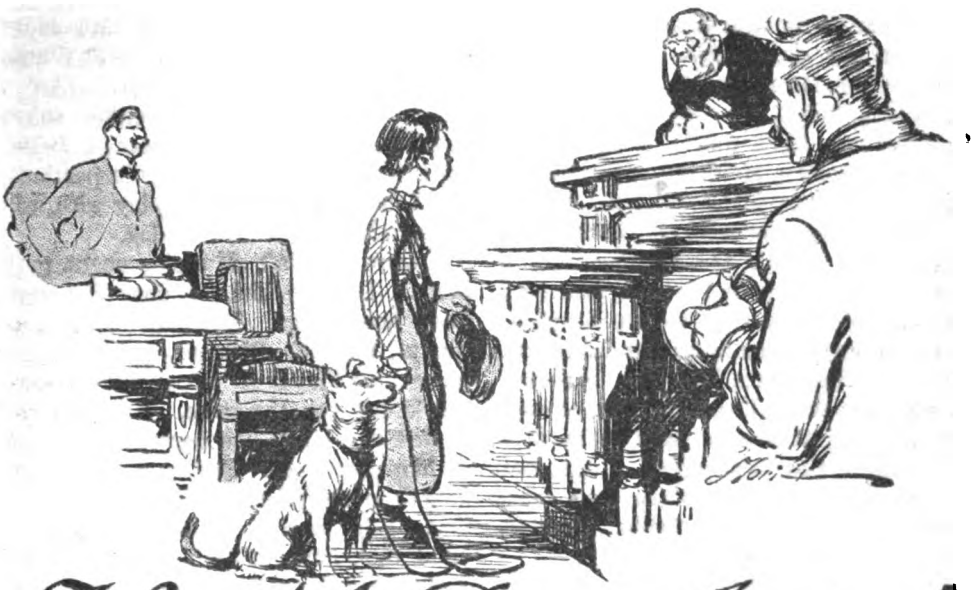
WHERE'S the balm in Gilead?
Beauty's but a name,
Ah, but tides of Autumn break,
Ebb and flow in flame.

Dreams are dust and hope is wind,
All bright things must end,
Stay—the lavish roses seek
Perfumed coins to spend!

Casual hands the world have robbed
Of its fragile bloom,
Yet—the wild geese silent fly
Past a scarlet moon!

Who can wholly wed despair?
Who from Life goes free?
That has such a restless heart
And eyes with which to see?

Faith Baldwin.



He's My Dog, Judge!

By RAYMOND S. SPEARS

PLEASE, Mr. Judge, this is my dog. I bought him an' paid for him when he was just a little pup, six weeks old, an' about so long, sir, an' his hair hadn't grown shaggy yet, but was short, just like a hound dog's. You ain't no idea what a nice-looking puppy he was. An' playful, judge! You ought 'a' seen him 'fore he grew up an' begun to have his troubles.

Yes, sir! He's mine. I owned that dog ever since he was six weeks old, like I said. I didn't give him no name at first. I couldn't think of a good an' fittin' name for that dog, for ever so long. I tried him out with names, first one an' then another. I bet I called him ten names, along at first. I called him King, an' Duke, an' one spell I called him Mister, just like that. He liked being called Mister, I know, the way he wagged his tail and shook himself and cocked his ears; you know the way dogs do when they're appreciated.

But you don't call people or anybody you know real well *Mister*. I couldn't go on calling him that and have any comfort out of him, account of the way it made me feel. So I tried some other names—Jack, an' Jim, an' so on—but they didn't none of them fit. He wa'n't that kind of a dog, exactly. It's like calling some awful big woman Lily, or Rosie, or something like that. Lots make mistakes namin' their dogs so the name don't fit. That's account of namin' 'em too quick, when they're puppies, an' afore they have their growth. So I didn't rightly name this dog for the longest while, not steady an' perm'nent. I just called him anything come to me those days.

We live out by the stone quarry, judge. You know where that is. We always lived there, I guess. It's that house on the right-hand side the road, the one that used to be painted, an' where the barn is all fell down. I took some of the boards an' a piece of the roof, to make a house for my dog. An' I chinked in all the cracks, an' had a floor

in, an' excelsior, an' some burlap, an' a piece of carpet for bedding. I took lots of pains for this dog, judge. I ain't never neglected him, sir, not a bit.

You see, judge, the way it is with us Colebells; we ain't much. Mother's an awful good woman, an' don't drink or nothing. There's eight of us children. Me 'n' my brother's the only one's that work much, to speak of. Dad's the way he is, you know. I expect—probably you remember him, lots of times. He means all right, judge, dad does. You know how it is about him; he works, course he works, but—but coming home he smells a blind tiger or anything, seems just like he can't go by that smell. He knows 'tain't right. I seen that man cry, judge, honest, when he'd come home, an' apologizing to mother, account of him spending his money.

An' theh ain't much time, around our house, for friendlying. Mother's dead tired all the time. An' those children pestering an' squalling around, an' if they ain't hungry they got the stomachache, or are hittin' one another over the heads, the way kids do. You know how that is, judge. But we're away off by ourselves, an' what we does don't disturb nobody but us. An' so, I earned this dog, an' paid for him. I was just a little kid, an' I needed that dog—yes, sir!

You ain't no idea, judge, how I needed that dog. I was just a little kid, like I said. I was ten years old, judge. I sold newspapers down town an' made a stake. I made a dollar, an' I could of wasted the money buyin' candy, or things like that which don't last. Instead, I went right out an' planked down the money to Mr. Lasker's, in tens an' fives, an' bought that dog an' took him home, just like that!

Course, mother she was some provoked. She jawed around some about me having that dog. I told her how it was, how I needed that dog, an' you know, judge, she sort of understood. She sat down an' put her arm around me, hones' she did. She kind of sniffled, too—you know women! I was just a little shaver then, ten years old, like I said. She never said another word about my dog. You see, judge, she knowed I needed a dog to be company with, an' friendly with. Us Colebells don't have many friends or people. We ain't exactly in the city, an' you take those Fifth Warders an' the kids is mean an' tough. An' we ain't exactly in the country, either, so's we could be farmers. We're sort of betwixt an' between, an' ain't nobody in particular. An' I never had nobody to play with, when I was a kid, exceptin' this dog.

I know he ain't all a dog ought to be, judge. I raised him. I done the best I knew how, judge. It wa'n't much, but it was all I could. Yes, sir, judge! I took pains with that dog. If anybody knowed, they'd tell you the same. I started right in first day I had him home, an' took care of him ever since. For four years, judge, I've done everything in the world for that dog. I fed him; I was company for him, an' I took him out with me to train him. I give that dog more attention than I ever had myself. I ain't never neglected him! Never—never!

You see, judge, the way it is: I kind of worked after I had this dog to take care of. I didn't neglect him, never intentionally. I just worked trying to support him right. Dad was mad about him, anyhow. He said he had all the mouths he could keep filled up, without havin' any dog around. That was reasonable, too, judge. I've lots of sympathy for dad. He never had no chance, much. Ignorant the way he is, an' he knows it; lots of times I've heard him say to mother:

"If I wa'n't such a blamed fool, maw! That's what ails me. I don't know nothin', never havin' any chance, no eddication, or anything."

An' many's the time he's whaled me, to make me go to school. But a man's pants make a difference in school, judge. If I'm around school, an' ain't workin', holes or anything make the class look ridiculous. But working, clothes ain't expected to be much. Take in school, an' they expect you to dress right up to the handle, an' if you don't they're sorry for you. When you get out o' school, all dressed up, you look for some dressed up job, bein' used to it. Course, I couldn't, so I worked for my dog, like I said. I despise having people sorry for me, hope to die I do!

He's an awful intelligent dog. He knows every word you say to him. If you speak happy to him, he'll just climb into the air, an' we had some hard times together, too, judge. Take it winters, an' picking up something to eat wasn't always easy. I've been hungry, an' he's been hungry, same as anybody. You know how that is, judge, when you was a boy, not much to eat, an' you can't be particular what you call eatings, either. An'—an' my dog, here, being just a dog, course, could eat lots of things a human don't have to eat, much. At the same time, I notice he appreciated good eating same as anybody. He's some bird and some hound dog in him.

I ain't told you about his name, judge. He wa'n't bad-looking when he was a pup, jumpy, happy, scrambly around the way he was. His hair was short, an' his manners full of life.

I was calling him Royal those days for a spell. Why, judge, that dog was just as upstanding an' proud, sir, as any dog that ever lived. You'd 'a' thought he had a pedigree, instead of being just dog. His head ain't bad, judge, if you look at it; his ears are good, if they was only just alike; an' his eyes, when he ain't ashamed of himself, like he is now—an' has been for a while back—look good an' honorable. 'Tain't because he's ignorant, judge! It's because he knows—because he understands—that he looks so kind of, well, sneaking.

Those days I called him Royal he stepped light an' proud. But the way those dogs down on Gansevoort Street 'd yap at him, an' look at him, an' hold up their heads, 'd make any dog look at himself, wondering what ailed him. You know, judge, the way some kids look at a human, sort of stuck on themselves, an' sort of despising somebody that ain't got such nice pants as they have. Well, sir, my dog felt the way they looked at him.

I could see it. I noticed, them days, that he sort of got so he didn't like to go down town with me, not even when I'd be going to the meat market, looking for meat for all of us. He'd hang back, some.

The first time I ever did leave him behind was those days when I'd have to come down town. I didn't like to. Take it through the Fifth Ward, an' I'd hate that walk. They ain't nobody there that's swell—just a lot of common ornery folks, same as anybody. Still, they've just enough meanness into them for their kids to sprout it out all over the way they act. You can tell folks by their kids. They used to jump me, five or six, bein' brought up, ganging around, but I didn't forget, so when I'd catch two or maybe one of them, separate—an'—an' so they learned to leave me alone. Yes, sir, judge—I never seen two of that kind I couldn't lick at once.

Same way, now, with my dog. He was a good dog, dog to dog; but those little snips, he couldn't eat up, for being what they were. I taught him that. Then in the proud dogs, along of his size, he couldn't see no difference, but they pretended to, an' if he was alone, they'd devasticate him, an' he come home two-three times, with his ears chewed up, or a bit leg, things like that. One time I seen 'im come home when it was gloomy enough to be spookish. I seen 'im, but I couldn't hardly tell it was him.

He just sort of slipped and slithered along among the briers an' second growth across the stone quarry property, an' past the boxes an' barrels, an' past the bobsleds an' under the wagon, headin' for his kennel. An' I could see him, an' I couldn't too, an' it come to me, all of a sudden, I'd ought to call that dog Spook, but I didn't. That ain't no good name for a dog, so I called him Ghost, just like that! Yes, sir, an' the minute I called him Ghost I knowed hit was perm'nent, that name.

He liked that name, judge. That was the way he felt. The way dogs an' humans, mostly, treated him; he couldn't walk right down the middle of the road, er along the sidewalk, with his head an' tail up. Growing up, the way he did, he was always sort of modest an' one-sidey. He'd look to see if anybody was looking at him, an' if the glance was friendly he'd wag his tail. He knowed. If Ghost had only looked like he was as a puppy, it 'd been different. But, again, I don't know. I've seen dogs look at me, an' then they'd go yap at Ghost.

Ghost would come an' crowd up to my legs, sometimes, when somebody who owned

that kind of a dog would look at me. Honest, judge, I wouldn't own that kind of a dog. Ghost never went out yapping at anybody, not at an automobile, not at a horse an' buggy, not at humans afoot, nor at dogs. He knows too well himself how that kind of treatment hurts the feelings. He never was allowed to hurt anybody's feelings, judge. He ain't that kind.

I've known that dog, puppy an' growed up, an' he never insulted nobody, except those that it insults if something common happens to live. I've watched him careful, an' took pains with him, an' he minds his own business, the best he knows.

Take a dog like Ghost, now, an' it ain't his fault if he ain't a thoroughbred. You know that. I bet he knows better than any one else that he never had a chance in this world! Whatever is the matter of my dog, I'm to blame, account of me not being able to do better by him. See, judge? One time a kid down on Gansevoort Street offered me five dollars for Ghost. He was just a yearling, an' showing how smart he was, how likely; I wish—I wish I'd took it, judge. Hones', I do. Ghost has been a heap to me, stood by me, an' never held nothing up against me, but I was ignorant, just a kid. I thought I could do as good as anybody bringing him up.

We've a good place for Ghost to play around—grass an' brush—an' down the side hill there's always been a woodchuck or two. Me 'n' Ghost has killed off quite a lot of those groundhogs. He'd run 'em into a stone wall or into a stump, an' I'd come an' we'd work him out, an' kill 'im. I ain't much for groundhogs, but dad likes 'em, so we had quite a few potpies, an' fried meats thataway. He's lots of use, judge! He's valuable, an'—an' he's a good dog.

One spell when I was going to school, he didn't have nobody around, an' so he took to running up an' down. He was lonesome, the way a dog is. Two-three times, he come to school with me. He'd sneak in the front door, an' come hunting for me, an' the janitor, he belted him. Then they tried to find out who owned that dog. If I'd let on you know what 'd happened to me.

Ghost had three-four mean whalings off that janitor before he was discouraged about following me to school. One whaling is what made his leg crooked, the way it is. I know the janitor bent that leg, for I heard him tell how he give Ghost a clip with a pointer butt. For two weeks that leg was floppy, but by and by it was good and strong again, an' didn't hurt none.

An' take a dog that can't walk, minding his own business, without having dogs yap at him, or kids rock him, or somebody going after him with a club, you can't expect much of him. Just the same, Ghost stood for it. He never grew mean, nor ugly, an' all he'd ever do was tuck his tail between his legs and head for home, or anywhere, to wait for a chance to tend his business.

An' so, judge, Ghost kinda drifted into sleeping days, hiding around and at night coming out. He just didn't want to bother anybody, judge, when he took to running nights. People wouldn't see him much in the dark, an' he could go along, not being bothered by dogs, kids or men. You see how that is, judge!

I've an awful lot of sympathy for this dog, besides his being mine. Yes, sir! You would, too, if you only knowed him the way I do. He's naturally a good dog, friendly and playful. But who's he going to be friends to and who'd play with him?

I'm telling you all about it, judge. I don't want to bother you a lot about just my dog. 'Tain't so much he's my dog as it is Ghost. I could stand 'most anything, judge. I've lots of grit. What I am, what I do, is up to me. If I don't behave myself, then I take the consequences. I'm human, I am. Ghost, here, he ain't nothing but a dog. He ain't nothing but my training to go by, my training and his experience. They ain't always the same, neither, you know that, judge, what you are taught, and what you are slammed with. But I'm human, an' if I have to take what I do, an' you have to take what you do, think what it must mean to a dog! My land, how can a dog stand it sometimes?

That's the way I figure about Ghost. An' I ain't told all there is. Lots of our living is sort of picking up. I never thought much about it. Dad an' me goes down to the river an' fishes. We catches bullheads.

They ain't very big, about three-four inches long, but they're good eatin', rolled in cornmeal an' fried in grease—you don't have to skin 'em any more'n you do a trout. I don't like nothing—suckers, perch, er trout—any better than I do bullheads. An' up the creek Ghost sees us catchin' bass, too, an' pike.

An' then we catches rabbits, along, an' that kind. Lots of times when farmers is killing calves we has them. Wild orchards, too, which nobody takes the apples of, or didn't use to, till just along lately, would give us pie fruits an' sauce, an' if they didn't take too much sugar we'd be well fixed. I know sweet apple trees, which is mighty nice. Turtles is good eatin', an' frogs, too.

Ghost, he goes along with us. He sees me carrying my bag on the road. He sees me climb through and pick apples. An' where the farmers has thrown away green heads, when they dig potatoes, he sees me pick them up. Same way when they've took in pumpkins, an' left some cobbleheads around that's nice and yellow, but small; mother can make two-three of them waste pumpkins into pies enough for all of us to have two pieces; yes, sir; an' she does. My land, judge, I wish lots of people could have pies like them.

I never thought nothing of it, having Ghost along. He seen me going in an' helping myself. He ain't nothing but a dog, judge! You see how he sees me taking what I got a right to, me being human, an' why shouldn't a dog help himself? That's the way he figured, judge. An' you see how a dog might make a mistake thataway?

My land, judge, going out thataway with my dog, off onto the side roads, where the automobiles don't squawk you off the pike and make you jump every minute, I expect I was too—too blamed happy sometimes. Seems like when you begin to get old like me just what you like best to do has a hook in it, to land you right. I never thought nothing how it looked to Ghost, seeing me help myself. Why, I never dreamed of such a thing, about me being responsible for him thataway.

I knowed what I was doing. I wasn't taking what anybody else wanted generally. Anyhow, I didn't take anything that was worth much. I just picked berries an' windfalls an' scrubbings, an' such things. An' Ghost seen me. Sometimes, back in the woods, or around, we'd pick up woodchucks, wild rabbits, and nobody could be happier than we were, meaning harm to nobody. Some people ain't so particular as I am, judge. I know that. They just takes what they wants, good apples out the orchards, an' even dig a man's potatoes. I don't know what Ghost would of thought, living with that kind, but my dad's American, an' he's got principle, he has.

Ghost, here, he ain't had no chance, judge. He never did have much—I see that now. It's my fault, judge, not knowing how it looked to him what I was doing. We meant all right, judge. Ghost and I always did mean all right. It never was in our hearts to harm anybody. Course, seeing me, and him being just a dog, how could he know, judge?

Ghost never did get ugly, being treated any way anybody had a mind to abuse him. Not when those tough Fifth Warder kids tied a can on him did he get mad. They didn't know no better. All Ghost was was just scared.

He never bit nobody, no matter how much he was provoked. If we hadn't had to come down Gansevoort Street, we'd never been miserable, but those kids and dogs on that street is some of them so stuck up and proud and ignorant, they want us to know what swells they are. We don't bother them, except using their street. If we had one of our own it 'd be dif'rent. You know how that kind is, judge. But it's the only way we can go down town.

You see how it is, judge. Take a dog that's always suspicioned an' laughed at an' rocked or canned, an' if he ain't miserable, he's mean. The way a dog feels, that's the way he shows himself when he walks. Take a nice, happy dog, an' he steps along, wagging his tail, lifting his ears an' holding his head up. Ghost, if he wags his tail, expects some kid to tie a can on it, for that's all some kids know about playing with dogs. Those kids ain't never learned no different about mutts an' yellow dogs. They think it is being swell an' having fun, mak-

ing something miserable, my dog or me, or somebody that ain't so big. 'Course, havin' that kind of fathers an' mothers, an' living the way they do, they ain't never had no chance to be friendly or anything but stuck up.

You see, judge, about these chickens I don't know if Ghost took them or not. If he did, he didn't mean any harm. He just did what he'd seen me doing. How'd he know chickens want the same as woodchucks, or rabbits, or pumpkins, or wild apples? He ain't human. He ain't nothing to go by, except humans or what his nature goes by! He meant no harm. Why, that dog just lived to make me happy—'course, that ain't no argument. I know that. I'm working now, an' a man don't play none, unless it's around nights.

I sort-a thought I'd tell you just how it is, judge. When I was a kid I set a big store by that dog. We was great pals. He stood by me when I'd come home, feeling meaner'n a dog with fleas account of having to go to school among all those swell, yapping, stuck-up kids. I never took no comfort among any of them. If I'd had my say, judge, I'd just stayed with him. But you know old Skinny-Legs—he's truant officer—an' was always looking us kids up, an' if we hadn't any fit pants, why he'd complain, an' then they bring me some other kid's wore-out pants, which the kids 'd all know whose they'd been. If they'd left me alone I'd stayed by Ghost. Anyhow, he ain't to blame.

Lots don't think much of that dog. He don't look much outside. Inside I don't know how to tell you about that dog's insides. Such as he is, Mr. Judge, he's my dog! I never had no other. If you take him away he won't be nothing but a fifty-cent dogskin for the glove factory, which that old boy there said was all he is good for.

I don't hide anything, or deny anything. I give it to you straight. Ghost ain't much with nobody but me to talk for him. He's all I have. Don't take him away, Mr. Judge! I'll do anything to save him. I'll pay for those chickens. I'll take him away off yonder. I'll—why, I'll tie that dog up, if you'll only give him another chance, honest, I will, judge! Yes, sir! I promise! I hope to die, I will!

Yes, sir, right away. Now. A good leather collar an' a chain that 'd hold a bull or horse. I sure will, judge, if you won't send him away. Yes, sir. Anything you say, for that dog. If I ain't with him, I won't let him loose. I always fed him all I could get for him, an' I will now. No, sir, he never barked at nobody. He never had no voice, just a sort of whistle or a whine.

Thank-ee, thankee, judge! You ain't no idea what it means to me. An'—an' look't, judge; look't! See! Ghost, he understands! See'm hold his head up? Look't his tail wag? Good dog! Good old dog! Come on, Ghost! We got to get a collar an' a chain. Good-by, sir!

An' I'll come'n pay for those blamed old chickens the first money I earn!

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DISAPPOINTMENT

MY friend said she would come to see me—
My friend is very sweet;
My house was very much upset—
I tried to make it neat.

I cleaned and dusted, scrubbed and polished,
Swept up every crumb;
Combed my hair and dressed and waited,
But—she did not come.

Lilian Nicholson.

The Grease-Paint Mask

By HAZLETT KESSLER

HER make-up was so heavy that she appeared grotesque—this singer at Little Joe's. She might have been twenty years old, or thirty, or forty—how could one tell? Whatever complexion the Creator had given her, whatever lines time or trouble had written, were hidden beneath the veneer of grease paint.

Her cheeks were thick with rouge, her mouth a curved crimson stain. Beneath inky lashes drooping with mascara, her eyes were a brilliant blue, the hard blue of turquoise. Only her hair was untouched; it was fluffy, abundant, and the color of burnished bronze.

Little Joe's was a squalid dive, defiantly dingy, more than a bit sinister. Evil, without any of the glitter of wickedness. It hid itself away down a dark alley, in the worst section of this Middle Western city—a neighborhood where patrolmen did not walk singly. Its patrons were the scum of the half world. To entertain them, Little Joe provided a dopey pianist and this girl, who sang.

At a small side table sat two men who were more at home on white ways than in dark alleys—Kirkland, a visitor from New York, and his acquaintance, Joyce. The latter was leaving the thirties; Kirkland was just entering them.

Through swirls of tobacco smoke, Kirkland stared curiously at the rouge-coated face of the singing girl. "Jove!" he exclaimed to his companion. "What a make-up! She looks almost as though she were wearing a Benda mask."

"But her voice—"

"Not half bad," Kirkland conceded. He fell silent, until the girl had finished her song. Then he leaned toward the other man. "Joyce, I've been recalling the other time I was in this town."

"Yes?"

"As I told you, it was just over one night. Let me see—it was six or seven years ago. At that time there was a cabaret at the Nielson, where I was stopping."

"Yes, I know," Joyce nodded.

"I spent that evening there with two

other young chaps. There was a girl who sang; she hadn't a wonderful voice, but she had the trick—or talent—of making it appear that she was singing to you, personally. I've never heard but three or four who had that gift. She was a beauty, too—as beautiful a girl as I have ever seen anywhere."

Joyce's gray eyes gleamed. "I know," he spoke in a low tone, "you mean Peaches. That was the way she was billed, and every one knew her by that name."

"But why should she have come into my mind here?"

"Because—you have just heard her sing!"

Joyce smiled at the surprised look on the face of his companion.

"No, really," protested Kirkland, "this girl can't be the one I meant. You must be mistaken—have some one else in mind—"

Joyce shook his head. "No mistake. This is the same girl."

"She's come down several pegs in such a few years!" Kirkland's tone was incredulous. "What was the toboggan slide in her case? Drink?"

"No."

"Drugs?"

"Worse than that—" There was a strange note of pity in Joyce's voice.

"Tell me—"

Joyce lighted a fresh cigarette. Then, after a moment's hesitation, he began: "In her day Peaches was quite a local celebrity. I was one of the score or so who were more or less in love with her. She could have had a proposal of marriage every week, but—well, she already had a husband. He played the second violin in the orchestra that accompanied her.

"It was Peaches who made that cabaret what it was. She *was* popular. Strangely enough, it was a—well, wholesome popularity. She was respected—even admired. You just *knew* she was all right. Many a time I've watched her walking along the street in the afternoons. And I've seen lots of people turn for a second look at her. One fellow would catch another's arm, and point her t: 'There's Peaches!' She was a pers age.

"All this admiration pleased her immensely, I know. But she didn't lose her head over it. Really, she just seemed to be happy because people liked her. It's hard for me to make you understand the kind of girl she was." Joyce paused and looked reminiscent.

"I think I know," responded Kirkland.

"How I envied her husband!" Joyce resumed. "You would think that he'd have been the happiest man in town. But he was jealous—jealous of Peaches's popularity, of that spotlight of public admiration that was thrown upon her. He hadn't any real cause to be jealous. I'd swear that there wasn't any other man. Peaches simply wasn't that kind.

"Of course she couldn't help but have a large public following. She couldn't keep the cabaret crowds from yelling: 'We want Peaches! Our Peaches!'

"But this got on the husband's nerves—that damn fiddler who wasn't even good enough to be a soloist. He was nasty to her about it. Perhaps more so because he had nothing tangible to reproach her with—he was that sort of a toad!"

Joyce's voice was a trifle husky. He drained a glass of wine before he continued: "One night the husband's anger was aroused to an insane pitch. Peaches's songs were going big, as usual. I wasn't there, but I heard all about it.

"There was a young fellow at a table near the entertainers' platform. He'd been drinking a good deal. Peaches made a great hit with him. He applauded her songs wildly. Then, all of a sudden, he began tossing money at her feet—greenbacks. Throwing them one at a time, as if they were flowers.

"This was something new at that place. The crowd laughed at the fellow, then applauded Peaches. She was nervous—frightened. Her husband was glowering at her from his place in the orchestra. But she gave another encore." For an instant Joyce fell silent.

"Well, man," exclaimed Kirkland, "what then?"

"Later that night, the husband dashed carbolic acid in her face. 'Let 'em look at you now, damn 'em!' he taunted her. Of course he made his getaway at once.

No one ever had the chance to do for him, worse luck!"

Kirkland gripped the edge of the table.

"When Peaches got out of the hospital her face was frightfully disfigured. You can imagine how horrible that must have been after she'd been accustomed to nothing but admiration all her life. She hid herself away—and the public soon forgot. But she had to live, and she'd never done anything except sing. Now, you know the reason for that grease paint mask—"

"Stop, man; for God's sake, stop!"

Joyce stared at his companion. Kirkland's face was a sickly gray. "What's the matter? You're ill?"

"Oh, God—God, I—I was the chap who threw that money to Peaches!"

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THE LAST LOVE'S BEST

DEAR, when the call to battle came—
(You were not then *my* dear)
Who was it said good-by to you
Upon the crowded pier?
Who smiled a bit and sighed a bit
And cried against your breast?
Ah, she was but an early love,
And the last love is the best.

You had an Arab sweetheart, too—
A woman of the sands,
With velvet lips and slender hips
And cinnamon-colored hands.
She could not stand the test of time,
But she pleased you for a day,
But the last love is the dearest love,
And she is far away.

And when in far-off Flanders fields
You faced the final hell,
You dallied in your idle hours
With many a demoiselle.
But Madelon and Marguerite,
Yvonne, and all the rest,
Are more than half forgotten now,
For the last love is the best.

And when old Blighty claimed you back
From shell and shot and gas,
Was there perhaps a smiling nurse,
Perhaps a London lass?
But if they helped to heal your hurts
Should I not call them blest?
The last kiss is the sweetest kiss,
And the last love is the best.

You have your keepsakes laid away,
Some treasured trifling things;
Some photographs, a wisp of lace,
And two little turquoise rings.
But where's the finger once they graced,
The lips that once you pressed?
You would not claim them if you could,
For the last love is the best.

So let them pass as they have passed,
The love of yesteryear;
They are but happy memories,
And I'm your dearest dear.
The wind is singing in the palms,
Bright parrots cleave the air,
And you are young and I am young,
And so—what should I care?

L. O'Neil.

IZZY KAPLAN'S KOLUMN

Received via W. O. McGEEHAN

DO YOU LOVE THESE OLD MEN?

IT is pretty hard for a feller to know when he is starting to commence to grow old. Of course if a feller is inwesting in monkish glands and grand uproar he knows he is old, but for the averich feller it is different. He has got to keep woiking all the time and ain't got it the time to think about his troubles or what is happening to him. Personally, I been so busy all my life trying to make it a dollar or two and not pay it all for incoming and outgoing texes that I don't know if I am getting old or not and I don't care, neither. When you are in business for yourseluf you got to keep moving or somebody would steal your customers.

When I was up at New Hafen the other day to see the Yales and the Harward Uniwersity footballers playing in the Yale's Bowl I seen a lot of old greds from both of the uniwersities. Some of them was fellers with long white whiskers like they would wear them in Baxter Street or the old country. But the whiter was the whiskers the noiser was the old greds. You know what it is an old gred? He is a feller which he gets greduationed from a college and spends the rest of his life going around to a cless reunion.

I was watching two of these old greds in particular while the game is going on. They was sitting with a lot of young fellers, but they were making all of the noise. They was giving cless yells while the young fellers was ecting kind of quiet.

Pretty soon it is the end of the haluf and the footballing is stopped so that the doctors could go over the field and pick up the worst cases for the amberlances. Of course, time is took out every wunst in a while for individual funerals in football games, but at the end of the foist haluf the arrangements for removing the remains is cheneral on account maybe it is cheaper to have it done wholesale.

The two old fellers went out behind the stands, and pretty soon I seen one of them take out a flesk which it had something in it that smelled like sympathetic gin. You know what it is the stuff which they make it out of good-natured alcohol. I made some myseluf when I had it a colt in the chest and I couldn't get no doctor to write me a description.

The old feller with the flesk holds it out to the other old feller and says: "Would you have it a drink?"

The second old feller reaches under his coattails and gets it his own flesk and says right beck: "Won't you have it a drink with me?" So they start to trading flesks, and right away they are like two old pels, even though one of them was a Yale old gred and the other feller was a Harward old gred, and they are holding their arms around each other's necks and hollering pretty loud.

"Ain't it a shame," says the Yale old gred, "how quiet the college feller of to-day is getting to be? I was up all lest night trying to get some of the young fellers to go out and get soused with me and they wasn't even friendly. All of them was talking about cless work they had to do. Could you beat it?"

"You couldn't even tie it," says the Harward old gred. "I came back to get

ONE OF THE SIGNS THAT A FELLER IS GETTING OLD.

into the old atmosphere wunst more, and I couldn't find nobody who talked my lankwitch but the bartender in a blind pig, and he threw me out on my ear by tweluf o'clock. I told you that the country is going to the dogs when the college man of to-day ain't got no more life than that."

"It is the truth," says the old Yale gred. "What do you think was the big show yesterday on the evenink of the Yale-Harward football game? It was a tea. I give you my word. Up at the Kappa Slappa house they gave me a inwitation, and the feller which he gave it to me said there would be moosic and a dence and it would be the headquarters for all of the old greds."

Then both of the old greds busted right into tears and leaned up against a pole. When they got beck to the game they was hollering louder than the fellers which they was yelling with the cheering leader. By the thoid quarter they was busting each other's hets in a wery friendly way.

Of course if they was a couple old treveling salesmen ecting this way the politz would put them out. But everybody knew they was a couple old greds having a reunion with themselufs, and the young fellers never paid no attention to them. It is chenerally understanded at the uniwersities that the old greds is not to be molested by

nobody unless they are doing themselufs a wiolence, and then they got to be hendled as chently as possible.

Now that is one of the signs that a feller is getting old if he is a college man when he comes beck to the old almer matter and gets mussy. Especially when he starts to say that there ain't no life in the younger cheneration. The older a feller gets the more he thinks he was a pretty wild feller when he was young, and he wonders why the young fellers ain't as wild as he thinks he was.

One of the young fellers told me in confidence that he wished the old greds would stay away when there is a lot of strangers wisiting the uniwersity. " All they do is get soused and esk us why we don't go around and steal a lot of gates and wreck a couple of theaters. They think that college spirits still comes in bottles."

Supposing a feller never had no college education and went through life without no cless yell you could still told how old he ectually is. I got it a system. I go up to him and I say wery friendly: " Chack Dempsey is a great fighter, ain't he?"

The feller give a look which there is a lot of pity in it, and he says: " Chack Dempsey! He couldn't lick the little finger of Chon L. Solomon. If Chon L. Soloman was alife to-day he would chust have to scowl wunst at Dempsey, and Dempsey would run right away. The fighters of to-day is soft and flebby millionaires. There ain't no fighters no more."

Right away I know that this feller is getting old and that he starts to commence to feel it and he shows it. Any time a feller starts to get wery serious about how rotten things is to-day comparisoned to what they were a while beck is a old man and dye in the hair ain't going to make him look young to me, neither. The best present you can give it to a feller who talks that way is a pair of carpet slippers and then pretend you are listening to him.

Or you could walk up to a feller and say: " Have you seen it Mr. Dietrichstein's new show? He is a swell ector, ain't he?"

For a while the feller won't say nothing. Then he will bust right out and say: " There ain't been no ectors since Edwin Boothstein left the perfession. And, besides, you never listened to the ravings of Chon McCollough so you don't know nothin' about the stage at all. I don't belief you ever even heard Billy Emerstein's minstrels, so what is the use of talking to you?"

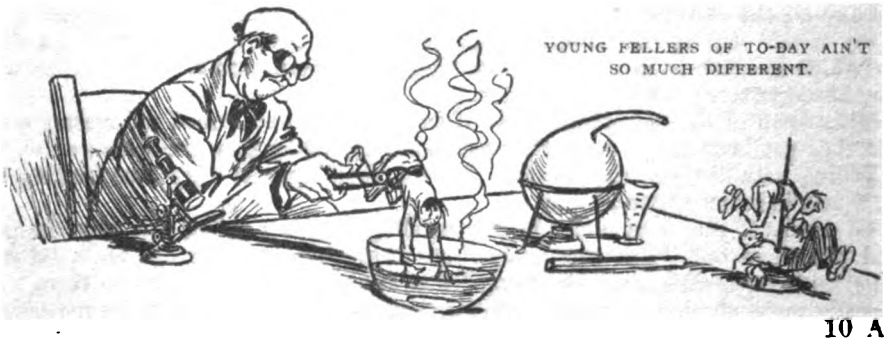
From this conwersation you could easy figure out chust how old this feller is. And so it is with all of them. The minuite they are beginning to holler that nothing is like what it used to be that is the minuite they are starting to show their age. Some fellers is wise about that and they would pretend that the woild ain't getting much rottener so that people would not notice that they are getting to be weterans in the pinocle game of life. I think it is a good ideer to call life a pinocle game on account I never could win nothing in either.

Personally, from my own obserwation, the young fellers of to-day ain't so much different than they was when I was a young feller. Of course they ain't as smart—

What did you said? I am talking like an old feller myseluf? Well, all the same, there are no young fellers to-day who had the brains I had when I was a young feller.

OBSERWATION—If everybody had brains they wouldn't be no use to nobody.

Next week Izzy Kaplan will discuss WHEN YOU LOSE IT A JOB.



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