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J. N. MARSHAND

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THE GOING OF THE

By Edgar Franklin

Of a gem that was lost in New York on
day it was found in London.

CHAPTER I.

THE WANDERER RETURNED.

“WHAT!”

Dr. Sheldon readjusted his glasses and took another and more prolonged look at the card in his hand.

“Henry E. Randall!” he cried, more softly. “Well, I’ll be——”

Just there he stopped, for the maid was watching him with slightly elevated eyebrows. She was a very prim and satisfactory maid, too, and there seemed no use risking her nerves by the undue use of joyous profanity. Therefore, the doctor concluded:

“Well, tell him to come right in, Helen.”

“There are two gentlemen in the waiting-room, sir. They’ve been there ten or fifteen minutes.”

“Eh?” The doctor had just come up from a late breakfast. “Nothing the matter with them, apparently?”

“No, sir, but they gave me their cards, and——”

“All right. Bring ’em in when Mr. Randall leaves, then,” Sheldon ordered. “He won’t be here long. Show him in.”

Two minutes later he dropped Randall’s hand with a final grip and returned to his chair with an approving grin.

“So you’re actually back at last, and as suddenly and unexpectedly as you left, Henry!” he said. “Sit down.”

“Well, I only dropped in for a moment,” Randall hesitated. “There’s some one ahead of me, the maid said, and——”

“Sit down!”

The approval grew as the doctor sur-

veyed the thing so carefully
e line.”

He returned, and stood before the jeweler, hands in adall, contemplating the ion, finally sighed resign-

a fool thing to do, I sup- rather a silly thing to re- Say, pull down those

in here.”

on the street-level,

veyed his visitor, stuc, risks!” clean-cut face of a ma. The shades thirty, the powerful lines out came off, body that has profited by much to Shel-

“Lord, Henry! Six months can a ging around hasn’t injured you! Your brown as a nut, and—yes, all of fifty pounds heavier, aren’t you?”

“About that,” Randall laughed. “Yes, a jaunt around the world is a bit of a freshener, Tom. I’ve made pretty certain of that.”

“Just where did you go?”

“From here to England,” Randall smiled. “From England to South Africa. From there to Holland—to England—and home again!”

“And you landed?”

“Last night,” said Randall. “How has the world been treating you? Killing off the population as successfully as ever?”

Sheldon did not answer immediately. He looked steadily at the other, and a strong light of curiosity came into his eyes.

“Did you—get it?” he said softly.

“The—the diamond I went after?” Randall started slightly and lowered his voice. “I—why, of course.”

“And——”

Randall merely smiled oddly, nodded, and remained silent. The doctor pursed his lips, and just the slightest hint of a frown appeared.

“Henry,” he said, in low tones, “you’ve known me for twenty years or so, and you know that I’m not given to prying into people’s affairs—yours less than any.”

“But, at the same time, when a man starts off, as you did half a year ago, without warning or apparent reason,

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Sheldon had
was growing even
Randall before him.

"I suppose not." The
ed his chin and looked at his
with twinkling eyes. "If I tell
the truth, can you contain it for
ty-four hours?"

"Twenty-four years!" Sheldon an-
nounced. "Hand out the tale, Henry,
and end the suspense!"

"Well, all right." Randall glanced
toward the door and drew his chair to
the doctor's side. "I'll put it in half a
dozen words, then, and skip on down-
town, Tom. It's not an overwhelming
mystery, you know."

One hand went with a queer furtive
motion toward his left armpit. Randall
drew breath and began:

"For a start, just three days before
I saw you last a gentleman by the name
of Gardner was ushered into my private
office in the jewelry store, down-town."

"Which Gardner?"

"P. E."

"Phew!" Sheldon opened his eyes.
"The one with the large, large bank-
account, eh?"

"Yes, the millionaire. Well, he closed
the door and sat down, and informed me
that he had done business with my father
in the same store thirty years ago; that
he understood I had inherited the store
and was carrying on business as usual,
and that he believed I was one of the
diamond experts of New York. I in-
timated that he had pretty nearly hit the
nail on the head, and invited him to pro-
ceed.

"He did. A year ago next month,
you know, he married Miss Marjorie
Pelton, the society beauty, a lady about a
quarter of a century younger than him-
self. He's pretty well convinced that the

sun rises and sets for her especial benefit,
and *vice versa*.

"At any rate, he wished to make her
a little gift on the first anniversary of
their marriage, and he wanted to prepare
for it ahead of time. In short, he wished
to consult me about obtaining the largest
possible single diamond."

"Aha!" observed Sheldon.

"Well, I've been digging a pretty fair
profit out of New York's fashionable
set," Randall chuckled, "but I can tell
you, my heart warmed to that sort of
customer. I ran over several stones that
I had in mind, for his benefit.

"There was one perfect peach of a
diamond I could have bought for about
twenty thousand, and another that forty-
five might have taken; and—er, some-
where within a dozen miles—there is a
perfect old-fashioned bouncer that might
be acquired for eighty-five or ninety
thousand dollars!"

"Great Scott!"

"That was what I thought he'd say,
but he didn't. Gardner's a good sport,
Tom. He merely asked whether there
wasn't something *larger* to be had!

"That rather staggered me for a little
while, but it set me thinking harder. In
the end I went the limit and told him
that the largest diamond of which I had
any inside knowledge was a certain tre-
mendous chunk of rock, not as yet wholly
cut, and recently mined in South Africa,
known as the Great Gordon.

"What it could be bought for, if at
all, I couldn't say. Certainly, it was one
of the biggest stones in the world, and
the only really abnormally big one any-
where near being on the market.

"Gardner simply nodded, inquired if
I would leave at once, personally under-
take the buying and cutting of the Great
Gordon, and bring it back here in time
to be set for the anniversary. I con-
sidered it for just five minutes, and
agreed. There was something about that
deal too fascinating, too infernally profit-
able, too altogether absurd, to resist!

"He invited me to meet him at his
bankers' on the following morning, to
arrange letters of credit and an unlimited
cash-supply. Thereafter, I was to leave
as soon as possible, accomplish the mis-
sion, and get back. I did it. There is
the whole story."

"With the exception of about nine-tenths of it," Sheldon commented, while his face betrayed his lively interest. "You must have had worries and responsibilities and adventures by the ton."

"Dozens of them." Randall smiled easily. "There were several rows before I acquired the stone at all; there was a secret night-departure from the mine that would put a dime novel in the shade; there was an isolated brigand on the coast who forced me to demonstrate how fast an automatic pistol can work when it gets warmed through; all that sort of thing."

"Well, I'm off. I'll raise your hair with stories of the trip when we've both more time. Just now I'm slightly anxious to get the Great Gordon into the big vault and put a guard outside."

"You have it with you?" escaped excitedly from the doctor.

"Hush!" Randall said sharply. "Of course I have! You don't suppose I ship the thing around in a trunk, do you? Except for the time when it was in the hands of the diamond-cutters, it hasn't left me once. Well——"

He held out his hand in farewell. Sheldon ignored it. He rose and stood beside the jeweler, and there was rather a remarkable quality in his gaze.

"Henry!" he almost whispered. "Let me see that stone!"

"What?"

"Do it!" the doctor urged. "I've never seen a diamond of that kind, and you have increased any previous curiosity about a thousandfold. Let me have just one glimpse of it!"

"But my dear fellow——" Randall broke off.

If his smile was not annoyed, it was at least somewhat puzzled.

"You know, this whole affair is a regular dyed-in-the-wool secret, even from Mrs. Gardner. Only Gardner himself, Pelton, his brother-in-law, and I are aware that the stone is on my person."

"Well, I'm not going to publish the fact. Just let me have one look at a stone that's worth—how much is it worth?"

"Away up in six figures," said Randall absently. "I don't know. I suppose it wouldn't do any particular harm,

but I've guarded the thing so carefully all along the line."

Sheldon walked across the room and locked the door. He returned, and stood expectantly before the jeweler, hands in pockets. Randall, contemplating the eager expression, finally sighed resignedly.

"Well, it's a fool thing to do, I suppose, and it's rather a silly thing to refuse, but—— Say, pull down those shades, Tom!"

"No one can see in here."

"Look here, we're on the street-level, and I'm not taking any risks!"

The doctor obeyed briskly. The shades came down, and Randall's coat came off, and his vest as well. Somewhat to Sheldon's bewilderment, the jeweler began a rather lengthy expedition into the inner recesses of his apparel. His right hand groped and groped in the region of his left armpit.

He grunted a little and twisted at something. He groped farther, and still farther.

In the end he grunted again, with apparent satisfaction this time, and regained his coat and vest. In his hand he held up a rather unique contrivance; and Sheldon, after a moment's study, became enlightened.

It was an odd affair in its way, the product of Randall's ingenuity and a Cape Town harness-maker's craft. There was a short, stout strap, to buckle over the shoulder; there was another, crossing it and sewed hard to it, which was obviously meant to encircle the upper arm. Between the two a pouch was fastened, so placed as to hang under the arm. All in all, it was a jewel-pouch with a degree of secure anchorage.

"My own invention," said Randall softly. "When this affair's over I'm going to patent it and make a million or two on my own account. Well—sure that door's locked?"

"Yes," said Sheldon rather breathlessly.

In the darkened room he watched tensely as the jeweler opened the mouth of the pouch. He hardly breathed as a velvet bag came forth. But he gasped aloud when there rolled to his desk a gleaming, glittering diamond of size hardly conceivable!

"That! That! A woman's actually going to own—to wear *that*?" he cried.

"Such seems to be the plan."

Randall lingered nervously over the thing. His fingers fairly twitched as the doctor raised the stone and looked at it, wide-eyed and startled beyond words at the immensity and brilliancy of the gem. He let a sharp breath of relief escape as Sheldon's fingers, positively cold now, returned the crystal fortune.

In a matter of possibly two seconds the Great Gordon was returned to its bag, and the bag to the pouch, and Sheldon shook his head dazedly.

"It's the—the most tremendous thing of the kind I ever dreamed of!" he said. "I—why, it's worth half a dozen fortunes, Henry!"

"Well, what I handed the customs people alone yesterday afternoon would keep one or two families in comfort for a while," Randall muttered thoughtfully.

"I declared it for even every cent it's worth, for the sake of getting her through in a hurry and with as little excitement as possible. Well, now I'm off in earnest, Tom."

"Going to put it back?"

"Um—no!" Randall considered for a moment. "I'll strap it around my wrist and—eh?"

There was a sharp knock at the door. Randall, clutching his treasure, turned swiftly. The doctor hurriedly threw up the shades, and in a twinkling his bewilderment vanished and his professional calm returned.

He opened the door to confront the maid and hear:

"The gentlemen, sir, that are waiting. They sent in their cards, and said they'd drop in another time if you were still busy."

"Well—*hello!*" Sheldon turned to his visitor with a smile. "One of the waiting ones is Mr. Fenway Pelton, Henry!"

"Mrs. Gardner's brother?"

"The same person. He's one of my patients."

"And he's growing impatient!" a hearty voice in the corridor announced. "Alone yet?"

"Going to be now," laughed the doctor. "There's a—an acquaintance of yours in here, Mr. Pelton."

For a second Randall scowled his frank annoyance. Down the corridor steps were coming; in another moment Gardner's own brother-in-law would be in the room, and there he was, standing with the Great Gordon in his hand. At the very least, the fact that Sheldon had had the first view of it would be obvious!

Rapidly he thrust it into the side pocket of his coat, just as the tall, broad, and immaculately fashionable figure of Mr. Fenway Pelton came through the door.

"Doctor, I want to introduce Mr. David Lane," he said. "He's troubled with a few of the things you specialize, I believe, and— Hello, Randall!"

He crossed to the jeweler as the slender, rather pale man behind him shook hands with the physician.

"By George! You're looking well, Randall!" he cried. "Diamond-chasing seems to agree with you!"

He drew off his gloves and said more softly:

"So you did get her here safely! I imagine Philip was a little relieved when you 'phoned him last night that you were actually ashore with the thing."

"I wasn't particularly sorry myself."

"No, I fancy not." Pelton dropped into a chair and stretched his long legs. "Where is she now? Locked up downtown, I suppose?"

"Just at the moment, the Great Gordon diamond is in my hand, in this pocket."

"Phew!" Pelton opened his eyes somewhat. "You don't mind lugging fortunes around, do you? Still, I suppose jewels don't impress you much more than greenbacks do the bank-teller."

"Perhaps not." Randall smiled, rather thankful for the suggestion. "I try to take pretty good care of them, though."

Pelton nodded, and stretched the fingers of his gloves thoughtfully. The doctor and Lane crossed to them, and Randall prepared for the third time to make for the comforting depths of his own big vault, farther downtown.

Again he was to be halted, however, for Pelton looked up suddenly.

"I say, doctor—and you, too, Lane—you're not addicted to talking about things that are not to be mentioned? No,

of course you're not. Get ready for a revelation, then, and keep it quiet for a little while.

"Gardner, my brother-in-law, has imported a diamond about the size of a pumpkin, by way of Randall, here! That was the reason for his trip; and the reason I mentioned it here," chuckled Pelton, "is that I want a squint at the stone!"

"Here?"

Randall's brows contracted a little.

"Certainly. Why not?"

"Well, it's not exactly a judicious thing to display such a stone where people can look in," the jeweler began.

"Pull down the shades, then."

Pelton suited the action to the word. For the second time that morning, the room was darkened, and a slight smile came to Sheldon's lips. Randall hesitated a trifle. Pelton, to be sure, was Mrs. Gardner's brother and in the little secret; and probably Lane would keep silence.

There seemed to be no good grounds for refusing the request, save, perhaps, that Gardner himself should have had first look at the stone, yet the jeweler hesitated instinctively. Pelton, however, was waiting; and in the end the queer little pouch came forth.

The bag was opened again; the huge crystal rolled out on Sheldon's blotting-pad.

"Great Caesar!" gasped Pelton, while Lane's jaw dropped suddenly.

"Is—is that *real*?" he cried.

"About the realest thing in the diamond line that ever happened!" Randall laughed uneasily.

"Well, when Philip does a job he certainly does it well!" commented Gardner's brother-in-law, staring at the stone in his palm. "What on earth will Marjorie ever say when she sees it?"

Startled silence settled upon the pair. Sheldon, being a somewhat tactful person, evinced even more than his first interest in the diamond, bending over it and muttering enthusiastic words. Lane seemed to have lost speech in his wonder at the phenomenon.

Randall watched them without comment, and with a rather amused smile. This, thank goodness! would be the last inspection before the official one. When

Pelton was through he could depart and get the Great Gordon under lock.

And Pelton finished his examination presently. He replaced the stone in its cases and laid them on the desk, and, hands in pocket, he surveyed the little leather bag.

"Well, if I——"

Another brisk knock at the door interrupted him. Sheldon hurried over and met the maid on the threshold, and behind her the dancing figure of a little old gentleman.

"I tell you, I won't suffer any longer!" came from the hall in an elderly, piping voice. "Confound it! I don't care whether he's busy or not! I—oh, there you are, Sheldon! I say——"

The trio by the desk turned and looked toward the door in some amusement.

Dr. Sheldon spoke soothingly:

"Ah, yes, Mr. Frothingham. In pain again? Tut, tut; too bad. I'll attend to you in just——"

"I wish to be attended to now!" the querulous voice announced. "Damn it, sir, I'm in infernal agony, I tell you! You said that the operation would be slight and sure, and I positively must insist upon instant——"

"If you'll just step into the waiting-room for five minutes," Sheldon smiled, "I will prepare things and be quite ready for you. Thank you."

Partly of his own volition, partly because the maid had executed a flank movement, partly because the office door had closed gently, the sufferer moved toward the waiting-room.

Sheldon walked back to the group with a hopeless smile.

"It's no use!" he said. "I'll have to attend to him at once. He has these fits periodically, and if I don't relieve him he'll tear down the house."

"I'll drop in another time," Lane supplied. "There is nothing particularly urgent about my own matter."

"And I'll go over to the club with you for those papers," remarked Pelton, as he drew on a glove.

"And I will——"

Randall's voice died away suddenly.

The other three turned and stared at him in mild amazement.

The jeweler's face was ashen white, his mouth was open, his eyes fairly

popped from his head. One violently shaking hand pointed to the blotting-pad on Sheldon's desk.

The space was wholly blank!

The Great Gordon, pouch, straps, and all, had disappeared!

CHAPTER II.

AN APPARENT EVANESCENCE.

IF old Mr. Frothingham had actually opened operations by tearing down the ceiling the shock would have been rather gentler.

The four men stared at one another in thunderstruck silence for a matter of minutes; a remarkable sound, half groan, half wail, escaped Randall.

It was Sheldon who first regained his wits, however. He shook himself together and laughed—and the spell broke.

"The thing hasn't walked out of the room, you know," he said. "It may be a remarkable sort of stone, but it hasn't legs."

"But it was—was there! It was lying right there, Tom, and—and——" Randall mouthed, incoherently.

"Yes, and now it is lying somewhere within three feet of there!" said Sheldon, with a good deal of briskness, as he crossed the office and threw up the shades once more.

With the coming of more light four highly interested pairs of eyes centered on the desk. They as well might have centered on the chandelier or the mantel or the door-knob.

Typically neat as all his other possessions, the flat expanse of Sheldon's desktop held nothing unnecessary; it revealed a small ink-well, a prescription-pad, a book or two—and nothing more!

"Well, it slid off the desk, then!" said the doctor, with a note of impatience in his voice. "In the excitement over Frothingham one of you must have jarred the desk, or the pad, or something of the sort."

"I don't think any of us were near enough to touch the desk, doctor," said Lane.

"And if that were the case why isn't the pad crooked now?" asked the jeweler excitedly.

"Eh? Why—Lord! I don't know.

Maybe one of you brushed it off with his coat when turning. Some of you look on that side."

The doctor dropped to his knees and searched the rug. It was rather an unnecessary proceeding, for the leather contrivance could have been seen plainly the length of the room, but in the excitement the physician's nose went almost to the carpet.

Here and there he moved, searching energetically; he moved chairs; he peered under the table; he looked even into the entirely empty fireplace.

In the end he rose with a puzzled grunt.

"It's over that side!" he observed.

Pelton also stood erect, and Randall with him.

"There isn't a sign of it here, Sheldon!" said the former.

"No! Not a sign! Not the first sign!" the jeweler cried wildly.

"Do you mean to say that that diamond isn't on the floor within two feet of you?" the doctor exclaimed, in some bewilderment. "Why, bosh! It must be! Let me look."

He came quickly around the desk, and his sharp eyes ran across the floor. It was a search of painful simplicity, and quite as fruitless as the one he had just completed.

From side to side, from corner to corner, of the office, practically every inch of floor was visible. An object the size of a thimble would have been instantly perceptible. There was no indication of the Great Gordon.

Sheldon scratched his head and frowned for an instant.

"Well, here, then!" he said. "It's gone under the desk—that's all. One of you take hold there, please. Yes, that's right. We'll move it away from the wall altogether and carry it into the center of the room. That's it."

Randall was on his knees again as the desk rose and was moved away; breathing hard, he craned forward eagerly. And some two or three seconds later he sank back somewhat limply.

"It isn't there!" he announced.

"What!"

"Not a trace of it!"

"Can—can we have dragged it along under the desk?" Sheldon suggested.

Perhaps the confounded thing's caught in the bottom part."

His hands closed on the desk and tilted it upward bodily; the three crouched together for a view; three heads shook together.

"Nothing doing, Sheldon," Pelton remarked.

The doctor stared blankly at him.

He rolled the desk back to its old place and perched on top; and for a little he looked at the trio in silence. Extreme bewilderment was written upon two of those faces; bewilderment and horror on the third. Sheldon began to feel peculiarly as he faced the problem.

"Gentlemen," he said, "I'm not addicted to profanity, but I'd unhesitatingly pronounce this about the damnedest happening on record."

Randall was gathering his courage, it seemed. He looked from one to the other; and suddenly his uppermost thought crystallized into words:

"I—I," he said, uncertainly—"I don't like to say it, but this—this matter seems to lie between the three——"

He stopped and reddened a little.

"Eh?" Sheldon's eyes opened and a faint smile appeared on his lips. "Don't be absurd, Henry. You're excited, and all that sort of thing, but don't begin by accusing us."

"But that stone never——"

"Henry!" said the doctor, with a sharp snap of his fingers, "do you believe me capable of stealing that or any other diamond?"

The men faced each other, and Randall surrendered suddenly.

"Frankly, Tom, I know you didn't!" he muttered.

"All right. Pass on to Mr. Pelton, then. He's Mrs. Gardner's brother, for one thing. For another, he hardly needs the stone. As for Mr. Lane——"

"I'll vouch for Dave Lane," said Pelton, with a grave smile. "I've known him for fifteen years, Randall."

The doctor nodded.

"Therefore, Henry, gather your wits together. If there was a stranger here, or if any one else had even been in the room, theft might have been a possibility. As it is, we've got to face the situation and sit down and reason out just where that infernal stone is."

He set the example and found a cigar.

"Let's see. What do we know about it?" he went on thoughtfully. "It was on the desk, for one thing. Who laid it there?"

"I did," said Pelton.

"And you had not touched it, Henry?"

"I was just going to pick it up when that old man arrived, Tom."

"But you hadn't laid hands on it?"

"No."

"And when Frothingham came to the door you all turned toward it, if I remember right?"

"Yes."

"And when you turned back, a second or so later, the thing was gone. Humph!"

Sheldon stared at the wall behind the desk and whistled a bar or two.

"Well, by George! It passes me! If there was a trap-door in that wall, or an open chimney within reaching distance, I'd almost say that some insanely intelligent person had gathered it in."

He ended with another shake of the head.

"As it is," groaned Randall, "the Great Gordon is simply gone!"

"Well, it hasn't gone into thin air," Sheldon pursued dryly. "We know that much, anyway. Sole-leather doesn't vaporize, at any rate. Um! Henry, is it possible that you may have picked it up and thrust it into one of your pockets when the door opened? Subconscious cerebration, you know?"

"Do you suppose I shouldn't have found it out by this time?" Randall cried, running hopelessly through his pockets. "No."

"One of you gentlemen, then?"

"Not I, certainly," said Lane, with an uneasy laugh, as he rummaged through the various receptacles of his person. "No, doctor, there's nothing of the sort here; and furthermore, I may say that, on account of its huge value, I hesitated at even touching the gem when Mr. Pelton offered it to me for inspection."

"And you, Mr. Pelton?"

Pelton had removed his gloves again and was running through his pockets.

"I'm afraid that I shall have to spoil your theory, Sheldon," he said. "I cer-

tainly did not touch the Great Gordon after placing it on the desk."

The doctor, frowning again, investigated his own person. He ended by throwing up his hands with a helpless gesture.

"Not here, either!" He looked from one to the other of them, and exclaimed: "Good Lord! I'm not a detective or an analyst of this sort of freak happening. Hasn't one of you a suggestion to offer?"

Blank, staring silence was his only answer. The doctor chewed his cigar meditatively and looked around the floor again. It was as empty of diamond as his own brain of a solution of the mystery.

"Young woman!" came from the adjoining room, in a thin, cracked voice.

"Frothingham!" muttered the doctor.

"Young woman! Come here, I say! Positively, I must insist that you inform the doctor at once that I am waiting here and suffering."

Sheldon rose slowly.

"Gentlemen, I'm afraid that I shall have to ask you to step into the waiting-room for half an hour or so. Mr. Frothingham has evidently gone his limit. He'll be in here in a moment."

"Well, I think I won't wait, Sheldon," said Pelton. "I have a number of things to attend to this morning with Mr. Lane."

He, too, arose, and Lane with him, and upon the latter's face was a degree of perplexity.

"Mr. Randall," he said slowly, "this—this has been a most remarkable, a most unfortunate, occurrence. I—well, I quite understand that in your mind, at least, a certain degree of suspicion must rest upon all three of us. Before leaving the room I wish very much indeed that you, personally, would make a thorough search of me."

Pelton nodded approval.

"Good scheme, Dave. Go ahead with it, Randall. It is the best plan all around."

"And count me in on it," added the doctor, as he removed his coat and held it forth for a beginning.

Randall faced them with a weak smile.

"Do you suppose for a moment that I'm going to do anything so absurd un-

der the circumstances, and particularly in the face of a plain invitation? I am bound to confess, gentlemen, that I can't conceive any of you taking the Great Gordon, if for no other reason than that none of you had the opportunity to do it."

"But nevertheless, Mr. Randall," Lane insisted, "it is due to us as much as to yourself. If you will be kind enough to begin with me. Our time's a little limited, and the old gentleman seems to be uneasy."

"I'm not going to search you!" the jeweler cried, almost impatiently. "It is fair and square of you to suggest it, but—I'm not going to do it."

He turned to Sheldon. "Good-by, Tom."

"Good-by, old man. I'm infernally sorry."

"Thank you. And you will keep it quiet, for a little while, at least?"

"Of course, but——"

"And promise me another thing," Randall said miserably. "When you get rid of the old chap, in there, make another search of this room, and as thorough a one as you know how."

"I certainly will. I'll tear the whole place to pieces, Henry, if I have to devote the day to it. If she's here, I'll have her before noon, and I'll telephone you."

"Thank you, Tom."

Randall's voice was almost quivering. His head seemed to jump with every pulse; his feet scuffed weakly along the hall behind the other two men.

It was only on the steps once more and in the outer air that the full meaning of his loss swept over him.

Not half an hour ago he had walked up those steps secure in the possession of one of the world's largest diamonds, cheerfully satisfied in the execution of a commission that had netted him thousands of dollars and considerable prestige.

Now he was walking out, and—Pelton was speaking:

"I didn't like to say it in there, and perhaps I shouldn't say it in Lane's presence, Randall, but I suppose you realize that a pretty serious thing has occurred this morning?"

"Serious!" burst from the jeweler.

"Do you suppose that it is possible for any one to realize it more strongly than I do?"

"Yes!" Pelton's voice was decidedly sharp. "Mr. Gardner, for example, is likely to feel the loss quite as keenly. He has spent a fortune—and not a small one—to secure the Great Gordon. Fortunately, having seen it myself, I can testify that you at least brought it into the country, but when he learns that the stone has vanished?"

Pelton's aristocratic eyebrows went up a trifle.

Randall moistened his lips. He too had been considering that phase, and in a measure he was prepared. His eyes, turned upon the other, were fairly imploring.

"Mr. Pelton," he said huskily, "if it turns out—I can't believe it, but if it does turn out—that the stone has really vanished for good all the reparation that I can make will be made, whether it takes every dollar I have in the world or not. But until I can feel more certain that the Great Gordon is not going to reappear, may I ask that you keep the affair a secret?"

Pelton's eyebrows went higher.

"My dear sir!" he protested, "Gardner is my brother-in-law, you know. I'll hardly be justified, knowing what I do, in keeping quiet."

"I understand that, but—but just for a little time, Pelton; just until I get back my breath and—and am able to take steps toward recovering the stone."

Randall waited.

Pelton tapped the pavement annoyedly with his cane as they sauntered along, and his expression did not look altogether hopeful for the jeweler.

"That's—pshaw! That's rather a remarkable proposition, you know, Randall. I don't half like it. Gardner, naturally, should know at once. It's a sort of family treason for me even to contemplate keeping quiet, too."

"Just for a little while!"

"Well, for how long a period?"

"One week!" hazarded Randall.

"Um!"

Pelton stopped at the corner and studied the curb in silence. When he faced Randall it was with a doubtful smile.

"Well—I'll do that," he said. "Whatever sort of position it may put me in, I will say nothing for one week. But, Randall," and his finger shook menacingly, "at the very latest, if you should not get track of the diamond, you will make the disclosure yourself, one week from to-day."

"Yes."

A word from Lane, and they separated. Randall watched them walk away, in something of a haze. Finally he turned half blindly to the car line which would land him at the store.

Could it actually be possible that the diamond was gone?

Was he dreaming, or was the Great Gordon actually *gone*?

Wasn't it some beastly, hideous nightmare, from which he would awaken to find the gem under his arm and the pistol under his pillow, as they had been for so long?

His hand went up with the familiar furtive motion. No, that sensation of emptiness in his armpit had but too solid foundation. No thick little case was there now. It was all plain, hard fact. He and the Great Gordon had parted company. Randall turned from the thought with a shudder. He would have to calm down first and try to analyze the situation afterward.

Like a gloomy ghost, he entered his own store for the first time in months.

The dozen or so clerks were amazed. Once the genial employer, with a nod and a smile for every one, Randall seemed to have returned from his pleasure-trip a changed mortal. His step was leaden; he saw no one; even when Thorne, his manager, hurried forward with outstretched hand he was hardly aware of the presence.

Into his private office at the rear he went, with a dull steadiness. The desk was just as he had left it, the chairs in the same position; the books and the catalogues on the shelves might never have been out of his sight, so familiar were they. The dream-aspect of the affair returned with fresh strength as he sank into his chair and threw up the desk-top.

Now he must settle down to business, must collect himself and brace himself.

"There's a gentleman been waiting

for you some minutes, sir!" said Thorne from the doorway.

"Eh?" Randall's head came up with a jerk. "Who is it?"

"It's Mr. Philip Gardner, sir!"

CHAPTER III.

INTERVIEWS AND DEDUCTIONS.

GARDNER!

Of all people on the face of the globe whom Randall did not wish to interview just then, Gardner was certainly the most unwelcome.

For an instant the jeweler almost contemplated precipitate flight by way of the window. Then, in the dire emergency, calm came over him rapidly. There was no earthly way of dodging it: Gardner knew that he was there; Gardner himself had appointed the interview the night before over the telephone. Now he would have to be faced.

Plainly, the truth would be out of the question just then. Plainly, also, he would have a somewhat difficult job in concocting a suitable falsehood. Meanwhile, Thorne was waiting and studying his employer with frank curiosity; and Randall said shortly:

"Show him in here, Thorne."

And now for it!

The jeweler sat rigid and listened.

He heard Gardner's big voice; he heard the heavy steps approaching along the aisle, like so many strokes of his own business death-knell; he heard the millionaire's hearty chuckle at something and shuddered. If he were not able to brazen it out, about how many minutes more would Gardner be chuckling?

But as the door opened again and Randall arose he felt, with vast relief and much surprise, that his smile was all it should have been; he was aware, joyfully, that the hand which shook the millionaire's no longer trembled; and he returned to his chair with a stifled sigh of faint satisfaction.

Gardner smiled approvingly at him, and with delicious irony summed up the situation in:

"So it's *all* right!"

Randall almost caught his breath; and in spite of all the grim humor of the remark, brought a smile to his lips.

"Yes, it's *all* right!" he assented.

"Have much trouble buying it?"

"No more than I told you. After I secured it, everything went smoothly."

"Have any bother with the customs people?"

"Not a bit. I put it through there like a streak of lightning. By the way, I have a balance of three or four thousand dollars that still belongs to you."

"Ah? All right. The fact of your bringing in such a stone didn't leak out anywhere, did it?"

"No, I'm sure it didn't."

Randall was talking quickly, and thinking even more rapidly. Now, because of the latter condition, silence fell. A half-minute, and it had become uncomfortable silence. Gardner, with a little justice, was waiting for something; and presently he announced the fact.

"Well, let's have the first glimpse of the wonder, Mr. Randall."

"Eh?" The jeweler's eyes opened in apparent astonishment. "Did you want to see the Great Gordon this morning, Mr. Gardner?"

"Why, of course!"

"Did you? Pshaw! I——"

"What? What's the matter?" Gardner asked quickly. "Isn't it all right, Randall?"

"Why, the stone is perfectly safe, of course," said the jeweler, with the suavest of smiles. "There were one or two of the facets that needed just the least trifle more polishing, that is all. I took it down-town early this morning and left it with the diamond-cutters."

"Perfectly safe there, is it, Randall?"

"As safe as if it was locked in a treasury-vault, sir!"

If a case must be made out of thin air, Randall was impressed with the fact that it had better be made as strongly as possible.

"Well, will you take a run down with me now for a look at the stone?" the millionaire inquired suddenly.

"Eh?" The jeweler wondered whether insane horror were gleaming from his eyes.

"There's nothing to prevent, is there?"

"Certainly not. I *will* go, if you're very anxious," Randall said slowly. "But would you not do better to wait

and see the stone in absolute perfection, Mr. Gardner? The Great Gordon is a magnificently beautiful gem; I should very much advise waiting until it is in the finest possible shape."

"And how long will the cutting take?"

"It will be returned one week from this morning. It is a rather more careful job than the diamond-cutter encounters ordinarily, you know."

Gardner pursed his lips thoughtfully. Randall's left hand, out of sight, was silently snapping its fingers at the rate of two snaps to the second as he watched the millionaire.

In his comparative ignorance of diamonds and their handling, in his confidence in Randall, would he accept the excuse, would he consent to wait? Or would he insist on going down to the mythical cutter and viewing the Great Gordon? Was disaster, after all, to come at once, and—

Gardner was nodding reluctant acquiescence.

"Well, you probably know best, Mr. Randall," he said rather grudgingly. "I should have liked to see the thing, considering its purpose and all the time and money that has been spent on it. Still, you're probably right. The first impression had better be the most perfect possible one. You can't hurry the work any?"

"It would be the last thing advisable, Mr. Gardner," said Randall, earnestly.

And then, after a few minutes of chatting and the recital of several adventures of the trip, the jeweler was alone once more.

He called for Thorne and further astonished that individual by ordering that all details requiring his attention should wait, that he was not to be disturbed. He locked the door and lighted a cigar; and head in hands he undertook to wrestle with the problem.

At first, the gloomy side of the affair overwhelmed him. Up to leaving home that morning, the bringing of the Great Gordon had been nothing more than a combination of decided enjoyment and good business. He had seen the world, he had a good profit in view, and all things were satisfactory.

And now?

Well, now it appeared that the Great Gordon had turned on him with all the force of which its immense value was capable. From the probable termination Randall turned shakily. He would have to make good; that went without saying, both by reason of Gardner's power to compel him and by reason of his own conscience.

It was going to be a somewhat cheerless process; it would involve the signing over or the selling out of his splendid inherited business; it would mean that his almost lifelong home would have to go as well. And even that would not square the debt, for when he had rendered himself penniless and without income other than what he might make on salary somewhere, there would be a balance due to Gardner!

All in all, the Great Gordon seemed to have changed to the veriest hoodoo the mind could conjure.

However, there was another side. Thanks to Pelton's goodness and Gardner's acceptance of the lie he had offered, he had still one week in which to act.

Stones do not go into smoke without reason; a mass of sole leather does not pass out of existence in a twinkling; somewhere or other, diamond, pouch, and all must still exist. His part was to find them, but—how?

First and most natural inspiration included the police. Randall brightened momentarily, but only momentarily.

The realization swept over him that the very last people who must know of the disappearance were the police. To communicate with them meant, in all probability, publicity; publicity signified instant ruin! Not only present ruin, either. It would be bad enough in all conscience to have Gardner upon him for an accounting, but his prestige in the trade would suffer tremendously as well!

A man who can take a diamond of immense value and lose it in such a manner that there is absolutely no trace, is unlikely to be trusted with other diamonds, great or small.

Moreover, what could the police do? The idea of using them carried with it the accepted idea of theft; and this Randall was not ready to assume.

Sheldon he simply could not suspect;

Pelton he certainly could not suspect; Lane, too, seemed vouched for and, even more, as nearly as Randall recalled he had been farthest from the desk in that fatal second or two that witnessed the mysterious passing of the gem.

But if theft did not enter into the proposition, what then?

The stone had emphatically neither blown nor slid from the desk; there had been not the slightest indication of it or the pouch on the floor or elsewhere. And had it dropped, there should have been some noise to the process; case and all, the Great Gordon was not a feather-weight outfit.

Bah!

Why hadn't he taken the three men at their word and searched them on the spot? Beyond doubt, it would have been an embarrassing, a most uncomfortable proceeding to go systematically through their pockets, but it would have established at least that neither of them was carrying the diamond.

Or did that need to be established? Was it exactly likely that any man, rich or poor, good, bad, or indifferent, with a stolen fortune on his person in perfectly detectable shape would offer himself to be—nay, would insist upon being—searched?

Randall's head began to swim. Out in the store, several of his beautiful clocks began to strike off the hour of twelve, and he started up. He must have pondered the problem for a considerable time, and without any result. Since he had but seven days, the half of one of them was far too precious to spend in fruitless mooning.

He must have help, some sort of skilled help, and at once. From what quarter? Obviously, the private detective field.

There was Bell, who kept the very quiet and unadvertised agency on the other side of the city. Bell had done well enough last spring, in that little matter of the stolen rubies; indeed, now that Randall came to consider it, he had done everything possible each time he had been employed by the house, for his labors inevitably ended only when the criminal had been detected and jailed.

Randall gave a decided nod and reached for the telephone directory; and

five minutes later he had Bell's assurance of a visit at one o'clock.

The hollow farce of lunch over, Randall returned to find the detective waiting.

He was a most ordinary appearing man, this same John Bell. His features, his clothes, his ready-made necktie were ordinary to a degree. He might have passed for a bookkeeper or a clerk or a man waiting hungrily to insure your life.

You might have gone by him ten times in a crowd, and on the eleventh failed to realize that you had ever seen him before; and it was this same quality of utter conventionality of appearance that formed no small part of his stock in trade.

"Another job for me, Mr. Randall?"

The jeweler dropped into his chair.

"If you can find the biggest diamond that has been sold in the world during the past ten years—yes!"

"Stolen?" Bell's expressionless features betrayed only the slightest interest.

Randall locked his door and plunged into the story in a low voice. Bell listened without comment; his face grew a trifle more animated as the jeweler described the mysterious taking off of the Great Gordon, and when the recital came to its miserable close he crossed his legs and smiled a little.

"Mr. Randall, you are quite positive that some outside party didn't walk in, tie a string to your case and suddenly jerk it through shade and window—or up the chimney—or through the key-hole?"

Randall frowned at the levity; Bell smiled a little more.

"And as a diamond expert, you would go to court and swear that it is impossible for a diamond to go into a vaporous state at ordinary room temperature?"

"Certainly, but——"

"Then, my dear sir, how can you see anything but the simple fact that one of those three men stole it?"

"But it's impossible, I tell you! They——"

"Nothing's impossible, unless it be an impenetrable mystery, Mr. Randall. If you can show me that that diamond

wasn't stolen, I'll chip in all my worldly goods with yours, if bad luck should make restitution to Gardner necessary.

"Now who stole it? Let's see. For a starter, we're bound to get a motive. Which one of your three gentlemen needs money the most?"

"None of them do!"

"The doctor is well fixed?"

"Very well. More than that I have known him for——"

"Well, that doesn't necessarily alter matters," Bell chuckled. "How about Lane?"

"If he is the David Lane I looked up this noon, he is a person very comfortably supplied with this world's goods."

"And Pelton?"

"Man alive! He's wealthy, and he's Mrs. Gardner's brother in addition!"

"Ah?" Bell studied the ceiling. "I wonder if there's any little family row lurking around this thing. I'll have to look that up, too."

"Still," he rubbed his chin. "Unlikely, I suppose. Well, we've established that none of them has any particular reason for wanting to steal diamonds. Next item: why *did* one of them steal it?"

"Bell, it may sound absurd, but I can't believe that they did!"

"It does sound absurd, decidedly so. You are positive that the maid or the old man you mentioned did not enter the room?"

"Absolutely."

"And that windows and doors were closed and that the diamond was only in the hands of those three men. Confound it! That certainly settles it! *Why* did he do it? Was it the overpowering fascination of a jewel of such size?"

"It might have been that, Mr. Randall. So far as you know, are any of the three temperamentally nervous—high-strung, imaginative—anything of that sort?"

"Sheldon certainly isn't. Pelton doesn't look or act it, if he is."

"And this Mr. Lane?"

"Well, he's rather a nervous, frail-appearing person, Bell," Randall said thoughtfully. "He's a fidgety sort of mortal, I think."

"Ah!" Bell's face brightened a little. "Now, isn't it supposable that he may have been overtaken by an insane desire to acquire the thing?"

"Well, if that were the case, why should he insist on being searched?"

Bell laughed shortly.

"It is a sort of sticking-point, that searching business, isn't it? I suppose we might consider a theory on psychological grounds that he was simply incapable of returning it of his own will, that he wanted to have it discovered on him and taken away, but—oh, it's pretty thin."

"And if such a thing had occurred, they're all men of education and sense. If one of them had yielded to such an impulse, aren't the chances ten to one that he would have regained his senses in a minute or two and handed it back?"

"Perhaps he would—perhaps he would!"

Bell considered his cigar for a time.

When he looked up it was with a new idea:

"Mr. Randall, as you tell the story, the taking of that gem must have been a lightning piece of work. Are any of the three particularly quick of motion—in a general way, I mean?"

"Only Lane—he seems to move in little jerks, Bell. Pelton's big and ponderous and pretty slow. And for the matter of Sheldon, he was across the room when I discovered the loss."

"Lane again, eh? Lane!"

Bell's hands went into his pockets. He rose and walked slowly back and forth for a time.

"Any objection to my calling up your friend Sheldon, Mr. Randall?"

"Not the slightest. Why? Had anything turned up, he would have sent a message before this."

"Doubtless, but I'd like to have a chat with him."

Sheldon answered the wire in person, and the jeweler's nerves tingled as he watched Bell's face. Hope against hope though it might be, he waited for the suddenly animated expression which would mean good news.

It failed to come. Bell announced his identity and, speaking sharply and with more authority than Randall would have supposed possible, put a line of

more or less pointed questions. He seemed to receive answers in no sense startling.

In the end he rang off and shrugged his shoulders.

"He has nothing to tell, it seems. He says that he has been over every inch of the floor, has taken the drawers out of the desk and even gone into the chimney with a light, and that there is absolutely nothing to be found.

"He says that he locks the office behind him when it becomes necessary to leave and asked me if there was anything more I could advise him to do. There wasn't."

The detective smiled, somewhat ruefully.

"Do you know, I had a notion that if I went at him hard and fast, as I did, it might startle him into giving some sign of knowledge of the affair," he said.

"And while I'm not out as an expert criminal detector by means of the telephoned voice, I'm bound to say that

(To be continued.)

there was no sign of agitation and that more open talk I never heard!"

"And if you knew the man . . ."

Randall began. Bell was not listening. His unattractive brow was wrinkled in thought as he stared at the floor. He whistled an endless melody of his own composition and beat time with his foot; until, facing Randall again, he seemed to have reached a decision.

"Well, sir, we have just one course to pursue."

"And that?"

"That involves the most careful sort of watch on all three men up to the very moment we locate the Great Gordon. I'll set men on the job this afternoon. Oh, don't start, Mr. Randall. They won't know any more than that they're shadowing somebody."

His eyes narrowed into a squinting smile.

"Meanwhile, if you want my private opinion, your diamond is in possession of one Mr. David Lane!"

OUR LADY OF THE SNOWS.

By Helen Tompkins.

THE sacrifices of love are the last to be appreciated and the first to be forgotten. ❀ ❀

HORACE JESSUP shivered a little as he drew nearer to the roaring fire upon the wide hearth.

"Pete will find it very hard getting through to-night," he remarked impartially. "The drifts in Gatto's Cañon were almost impassable at day-break and the Yellowstone was whimpering like a half-starved wolf-cub. It is going to be a fearful night, Bob—even for the Bad Lands."

The man to whom he had spoken, a well-knit, young fellow with the face of a seraph, rose languidly from his seat at the narrow deal table and crossed the

room to the one window which the shack afforded.

"I thought that it would clear up before noon," he remarked non-committally. "Damn this climate, anyway. It is early spring now down in God's country, Jessup. The yellow jasmine is budding along the banks of the creeks and the mocking-birds are singing——"

He stopped short suddenly.

"Did you speak to me, Jessup?" he asked, but Jessup was poking the fire noisily and did not answer.

Perhaps he heard above the hissing of the soft, wet snow upon the panes the echo of a bird's love-song. Perhaps he saw in the thousand circling sparks that melted in the black maw of the wide chimney the fluttering fireflies that braided a brooding Southern night with torches of palest gold.

"The storm has been growing heavier

all day," he went on after a while, disinterestedly. "Our Lady's coat and mantle are white with snow now. We stand to lose more cattle than I like to think of, Jessup—unless the storm breaks soon."

"It is a damnable business," said Jessup shortly. "It is fast making a callous brute of me, Porter—as it has made brutes of better men before me. When I think of the thin, half-starved, helpless creatures exposed to this cruel cold——"

"I told Paolo to keep them herded in the lower meadow to-night," said Porter easily. "The men won't have any easy job of it, either, I can tell you that." He flashed a quick, suspicious glance at his companion, who had turned to the fire again. "It's no use, Jessup," he said more gently. "If the storm does not hang on too long over the range we will cut the whole thing before next winter and go back home—you and I."

"Not I," said Jessup promptly. "I've got the gipsy instinct in my blood, lad. And I have no home."

Porter, in his usual aimless way, had lounged across the room and was staring out of the window.

"Odd how little a fellow can know of his associates out here," he commented indifferently. "Odd how little one comes to care to know—in time. Take you, for example——"

Jessup's proximity to the fire had been rather close for comfort. A slow red stained his sallow, unshaven cheeks.

"You'd better take somebody else for an example—of any kind," he said, and laughed nervously.

Porter stared.

"No, but I am in earnest," he persisted stubbornly. "What do I know about you—or you about me, for the matter of that? Beyond a vague, shadowy idea that you, like myself, are a native of one of the Southern States, I know absolutely nothing. I care, it is true, still less. In your own home town back yonder, you may have been a minister or an embezzler—a saint or a sinner. You see——"

"I beg your pardon, but I fail signally to see what you are driving at," said Jessup in an annoyed fashion, "or how my past can possibly be any concern of yours!"

"Don't be an idiot, old chap," remarked Porter amiably. "I didn't intimate, did I, that back in that pleasant little town——"

"Yes, you did!" said Jessup sulkily. "You were hinting at all sorts of nasty things. Chock it, Porter, and attend to your own business."

"There it is, you see," complained Porter, who was enjoying himself hugely. "It is only a convincing proof of your softness, my friend, that you accept with such childish faith the cognomen which I have given you as my own. My name back home may quite as well have been Smith or Brown or Cox or Loomis."

The heavy iron poker in Jessup's hands fell with a little crash to the floor and he turned savagely to his tormentor with a brow like a thunder-cloud.

"Will you be good enough to tell me just what you meant by that last brilliant remark of yours?" he asked savagely.

Porter flushed.

"I didn't mean anything, you fool!" he retorted. "You are such a sensitive, thin-skinned idiot, Jessup, that it is hard to resist the temptation to take a rise out of you now and then."

Jessup stumbled a little awkwardly over the poker without seeing it and crossed the floor to the window. His voice, a trifle shaken, had the odd affectionate ring in it when he spoke again.

"I have never been able to talk about—the past—like the rest of you fellows," he said then with an effort. "To tell you the truth, old fellow, I left some things decently buried back there at home that I—would not care to have resurrected—that is all. And I don't want to talk about it, Porter. I don't want even to think about it any more than I am obliged to."

Porter looked at him a little uncertainly. "There's not much of the vulture about me, Jessup," he said then, calmly enough but in a slightly embarrassed fashion. "I don't know what lies back of you where the rim of the horizon bounds the Bad Lands, and to be brutally frank with you I don't give a damn! It's well enough that the thing came up, though, I guess, for now I needn't be eternally touching you upon

a raw spot. You've been a good friend to me though, old chap, and if the time ever comes when I can do you a good turn——"

Jessup did not look at him.

He still stared through the tiny window at the barren sweep of the dreary waste of butte and cañon, the swollen current of willow-bordered water creeping along under the sullen sky to join its alkali-roughened voice to the roar and clamor of the Yellowstone, so lately freed from its bonds of ice. Late in the season as it was the scene was especially gloomy, with no faintest hint of vegetation, no vaguest promise of a resurrecting spring.

Horace Jessup dragged his eyes away from it to the scanty fringe of conifers that formed the green border of our Lady's mantle, and higher yet to the pure white, shrouded form, half-veiled in the drifts of swirling snow.

"I think that I hear Pete now," he said, still without turning. "I guess he is going to make it, after all. And the storm can't be so heavy as you fancied, Porter, or he never would have been able to get the stage through."

Porter had flung himself on the lounge and now raised himself on his elbow.

"Good, old boy!" he said approvingly. "I didn't say that he wouldn't get through. I didn't speak so positively."

It was nearing night-fall, and the stage stopped short at the low fence of lodge-pole pine that surrounded the shack. Pete climbed down from his seat a little stiffly. His weather-beaten face, bitten blue by the cruel wind, looked drawn and puckered, like unripened fruit that the frost has nipped. His voice, however, was cheery enough.

"I'll have to camp here with you fellows to-night," he said casually. "I wouldn't try to get any farther—not for any amount of money. I ought to 'a' got through, too. I've got two passengers in the stage booked for Pike."

"Two passengers!"

Something in the bland artlessness of the stage-driver's face had made Porter, who had followed Jessup to the door, vaguely suspicious.

Pete nodded.

"Petticoats!" he said pleasantly in a stage-whisper. "A young woman and her aunt. And say, Porter, she's a peach all right—the young one is. The other——"

"Is this the place where we are to stop, driver?"

The clear, metallic, frosty tones had an immediate effect upon Pete. He winked at Porter, and turned hurriedly.

"This is the place—yes'm," he said genially. "We can't get any farther to-night, and that's the plain truth of it—and there's no use trying. The horses have been floundering belly-deep in snow for the last four hours, and they are plumb beat now. And with night coming on——"

The woman who had spoken said something in a lower voice to her companion, who seemed to agree—a little reluctantly.

"If you are quite sure that it is for the best," she said in a low, sweet voice.

Porter pushed the grinning stage-driver aside and assisted the two to alight.

"You are both very welcome to the little that we have to offer, I am sure," he said hastily. "We can at least assure you a roof over your heads and something fairly decent to eat. Jessup!"

But Jessup, with unwonted shyness, had vanished.

"You are very good," said the elderly woman stiffly. "I had no idea that the roads would be so impassable now that it is almost the last of April. Back home——"

The young man looked at her wholesome, middle-aged face a little wistfully.

"Perhaps I had better introduce myself," he ventured. "My name is Robert Porter, and my partner and I have only been West a little over a year. I am from Louisiana. He——"

"From Louisiana!" The older woman looked at him a little oddly. "Do you hear that, Margaret, my dear? The young man, as we are, is from Louisiana. The world is a little place, after all. We are from Shreveport, Mr. Porter, my niece and I. My husband was a Norris, you know. We are going——"

The girl, a slender, blue-eyed thing, created a momentary diversion, much to Porter's relief.

"I am almost frozen, Aunt Martha," she complained, "and you are keeping Mr.—Porter—bare-headed in the snow. We had better go in the house, dear, since he has been so good as to say that we might. The explanation, you know, can come later."

Porter, still more than a little puzzled by something peculiar in the situation, went before them a little slowly up the path. The older woman peered beyond him through the swirling drifts at the cabin and caught above it for a fleeting instant the vague outlines of the rock-formation called by the natives "Our Lady of the Snows" that towered above them. Then the black, bitter gloom of a night in late spring in the edge of the Bad Lands closed down and shut the vision out.

"How spiritually inspiring your surroundings are," she said, still a little stiffly. "What an uplift such soul-communings with nature must bring about."

"Yes, no doubt," agreed Porter pleasantly, if a little absently. He was wondering nervously whether he would have time to whisk a certain black bottle and well-thumbed pack of cards off the table before her eyes would fall upon them. "Confound Jessup!"

"You are fifty miles from the railroad here, are you not?" asked the girl. The icy wind snatched the words from her lips so greedily that Porter scarcely caught them. "I don't know how you manage to exist. It is so desolate and dreary."

"It is better in the spring," said the young man hurriedly. "You would not think what a difference there could be. I'll admit that there is little cheerfulness even about 'Our Lady of the Snows' now. The night and the snow have veiled much of her beauty. But in the spring she is very gay, you know. Then her mantle is blue, with wild larkspur, and she wears a wreath of deep-red wild-roses like a string of coral about her throat. There used to be a tiny mission tucked away in the cañon at her feet, but it was abandoned long ago."

She stared at him through the darkness, striving vainly to see his features.

"My name is Margaret Loomis," she said. "We ought never to have undertaken the journey at this season, but we were told——"

Her companion pushed the door of the cabin open, almost seeming to ignore the fact that she was talking.

A bright fire flared a welcome to them from the wide hearth, and two lamps had been lighted. But the absent-minded Jessup had evidently forgotten the palpable tokens of his own and his friend's depravity. The cards still lay face upward on the table, and the half-emptied bottle of whisky was still very much in evidence. Jessup himself was not visible.

"He—my friend—may be helping Pete with the team," said Porter, trying to appear at ease and agonizedly conscious that the eyes of the older woman were resting frostily and accusingly upon the damning articles lying on the table. He was keenly sensible that any attempt at apology would only make matters worse.

The two women took the seats which he placed for them near the leaping flame, and they both—the younger especially—showed a decided inclination to maintain a dignified reserve—even with erring compatriots of her own.

"I am horribly tired," she said to her companion in a low voice. "You may tell them—these people—as much or as little as you like, dear. I think that I should like to lie down at once, if you do not mind."

Young Porter had been dragging things about clumsily behind a gaudy print curtain that concealed one-half the cabin from view.

"We have few visitors here," he said apologetically, emerging with a very red face from behind it. "An occasional cowboy—— I am afraid that the very best that we can do will be bad enough, after all. But if the young lady cares to rest——"

The girl thanked him with a rather watery smile.

"I have understood that visitors are always welcome in the West," she said in a forlorn little voice. "We are very grateful to you for your hospitality, I am sure, Mr. Porter."

She vanished behind the flimsy curtain ablaze with flaming poppies and gay with green roses as she spoke.

"The child is tired out," remarked the older woman briefly. "Tea? Oh, I

think not, thank you. I seldom drink it."

Porter, still slightly mystified by Jessup's unaccountable absence, placed food upon the table a little absently.

"I am sorry that I cannot offer you more," he said shyly. "A half-breed does the most of our cooking for us—and she is away now. I dare say——"

Mrs. Norris eyed him coldly.

"I had better come to the point at once, if we are to understand each other, I suppose," she said coldly. "Mr. Porter, we—my niece and I—are looking for a lad who left home two years ago in a fit of perversity. The stage-driver——"

A sound behind him made Porter turn sharply.

"Oh, it's you, is it?" he said to Jessup, who was shaking the loose snow from his wide-brimmed hat. "I couldn't think what on earth had become of you."

Jessup looked beyond him at the woman still seated at the table. She faced them both alike with level, uninterested gaze.

"One of the horses had cast a shoe," he explained monotonously. "I had to help Pete about it a little."

Mrs. Norris had bowed to him coldly enough. Evidently she was not prepared to take him as readily into her good graces as she had taken his friend.

"I thought at first that the stage-driver might be able to tell us what we wanted to know," she said slowly, reverting to the subject again. "He looked as if he might. But he turned glum of a sudden and would say just nothing at all."

"Pete is a half-breed," remarked Porter explanatorily. "They are shy, you know, and quick to take alarm when they are questioned. And mostly they are governed by a vague sense of honor, and there is a certain crude code to which they conform. Perhaps Pete suspected that you were asking questions—which you had no right to ask."

She flushed.

"The lad for whom we are searching left home over two years ago, as I have said," she repeated. "He went away because of a miserable mistake—a misunderstanding with my brother. It seems——"

"Are you speaking of—the young

lady's brother?" There was a vague change in Porter's voice.

"I am speaking of my niece's cousin—the lad to whom she was engaged. You see, my brother was an old man, and a sum of money was missing. He was very generous with his nephew; generous to the point of insanity I think, and——"

"Well?"

"Well, my brother awakened one day, as I have said, with a large sum of money missing, and there was Meg with a diamond which must have cost an extravagant sum flashing on her finger; a stone which no one but a rich girl had any right to wear."

"Had he given it to her?"

"Most certainly. Who else could have done so? That was not the question, however. The foolish boy chose to deny that my brother's money had paid for it—chose, indeed, to refuse to answer any of the questions which he asked. After that it seemed that there was nothing that could be done to bring about a reconciliation between the two. My brother refused to prosecute, but the search for the money was at once abandoned and the breach remained absolute. The stubborn lad had forfeited the affection of his guardian and abused the confidence of the young girl who had promised to be his wife. She told him so."

Jessup had not seen Margaret Loomis. Naturally, he was not so interested in the story as his friend was. He stirred restlessly in his seat.

"The lad was as foolish as he was young. He forgot that his uncle's bark was worse than his bite, and that the girl whom he loved was an impulsive chit who did not know her own mind ten minutes together. He treated them both to a theatrical display of something that was half temper and half eloquence and quitted home in a huff. We have not seen him since."

"So far the story is a very ordinary one," said Porter evasively. "I fail to see——"

The woman laid the bit of untasted bread back upon her plate. There were tears in her eyes.

"My brother died very recently," she said in a lower voice. "Just before his death he discovered that he had accused his nephew unjustly, and that another

man was responsible for the theft. I don't know where Arthur got the money that he paid for Margaret's engagement ring. I don't care to know, and neither does she. She is breaking her heart over the injustice that sent him out in the world. I am going to help to find him for her, if I can."

For the first time Jessup spoke.

"Maybe the way the boy got the money was quite as much to his discredit as you thought, even if your brother was not the victim," he said harshly. "His flight would certainly indicate it."

"I don't care whether it was or not," said the lady, with some agitation. She wiped her eyes defiantly. "He may have committed highway robbery for all I know—or care. I am not going to have his life ruined or Meg's heart broken if I can help it. He is my dead brother's son, and I think shame to myself and shame to the dead that we allowed him—our own lad—to sneak out of his own house at night like a convicted felon!"

Porter looked helplessly from her to Jessup and back again.

"I don't see just what help you can expect from us," he said undecidedly.

For the second time the woman showed traces of impatience.

"We heard once that he was out in this part of the country somewhere," she said. "The stage-driver practically admitted that he had heard of him. And then, as I have told you, he shut up like a clam and not another word from him."

"You might ask Porter," he said at last, when Margaret could not restrain her tears. "You see, he lives where he gets a sight of just about every stranger that comes into the country first and last. We call this place the 'Gate of the Bad Lands.' I don't know whether he knows anything about it or not, and I can't promise you that he will tell you anything about it even if he does know."

"Where are you from, young man?" she asked Jessup suddenly and sharply.

Jessup reddened. He made a graceful effort, however, to overlook this deliberate, if unconscious, breach of the cardinal, fundamental laws of hospitality. "I am from Arkansas," he admitted hastily.

"You look like it," agreed the woman. "You've got the same malarial— Not

that you can help it, of course. Well, it seems that neither of you are inclined——"

"It isn't a question of inclination," objected Porter hastily. "It has been nearly two years, you know. You said that yourself. And she—the girl he loved—if she accepted his guilt without a protest——"

There was a little vague, indeterminate stir at the door and it fell open.

A young woman crossed the threshold noiselessly. The high cheek-bones, the shy movements, the straight black hair, the lithe grace of the figure told unmistakably of Indian blood. She looked from one to the other of the little party in surprise, not unmixed with a tinge of dread.

"This young woman was connected with the mission of which I spoke to your niece just now," said Porter, bridging an awkward pause. "She is called in the language of her people 'Swaying Reed.' She understands English perfectly, so it might be as well——"

Martha Norris's face did not soften.

"What is she doing here?" she asked pertinently.

The Indian woman had looked at her at first indifferently, and later with something that was almost like trouble in her dark eyes. Again she cast a quick, bewildered glance from Porter to Jessup, and then back again to the former.

"Shall I go now?" she asked simply.

Jessup did not answer, but Porter, with a glance at Mrs. Norris, shook his head.

"Not now," he said simply. "The storm is growing worse. I will take you back a little later myself."

But still Jessup neither looked at her nor spoke.

"I asked you where you came from on account of your name," said the older woman, addressing Jessup again and reverting to her grievance. "Our lad's mother was a Jessup, from the northern part of the State. I thought it likely that you might be related to some of our people."

Jessup stared at her as if fascinated, but shook his head.

"All the people that I have are in the West," he said stubbornly.

He looked across at the half-breed

for the first time, but she had averted her face and her eyes were quite hidden under their long lashes.

"Well, I hope that you will both think it over," said the woman, with a sigh. "Maybe when you have thought about it a while it will come to you—whether you have seen him or not, I mean. He was always a great hand for stock of all kinds. When I do find him I expect to find him in the cattle business. Margaret and I have talked it over, and we both feel just exactly the same about it. All that I am afraid of is——"

She hesitated.

"The Jessups were always fools about women," she said regretfully. "If I were to find Arthur entangled with an Indian woman——"

Porter flushed.

"She," he said shortly, referring to the half-breed girl, "understands English as well as you do. I guess you have forgotten that I told you that just now. You will remember that I mentioned that she was educated at the mission. And, personally, I guess that I might just as well tell you now, first as last, that in my opinion the Indian women are, as a rule, far and away too good for the white men with whom they associate."

He hesitated in his turn.

"I might tell you about a man whom I knew once, and who came out West to the Bad Lands," he said a little vaguely. "He—had got into trouble of some kind back in the States and had been run out. Maybe it was his own fault and maybe it wasn't. I guess that he was about the only one that could say as to that. He wasn't a very attractive object when he got here. He had stopped over in St. Paul or somewhere, and had gone just about all the gaits, I guess—and a little more. He wasn't fit for a decent woman to touch with a pair of tongs."

The half-breed had evidently found the presence of the strangers embarrassing. She arose from her seat in the corner impulsively and with a pleading word or two in her own tongue, but Porter shook his head and she sank back again in her place.

"He was sick a long time—some sort of a malignant fever they thought it was

at first. You see, they couldn't get a doctor. Then smallpox in an especially nasty form developed. One or two people had clung to him up to that time. They left him then—all of them."

He paused significantly. The Indian woman sat quite still, as if carved out of stone. Her unwinking gaze never for an instant left the leaping flames. Nor did Mrs. Norris move. She looked from one to the other of the young men dully. And behind the dividing curtain a little current of air set the poppies nodding feverishly and caused the painted roses to lift their fading heads. Only Jessup looked at none of them. His clenched right hand, thrown across the table, unclenched slowly and nervelessly. He did not speak.

"There was one creature, a woman—scarcely better than a child—to whom this man (he might have been the nephew of whom you spoke, this type of the eternally masculine) had been kind. I do not know in what way. He was not bad to look upon at the very first before the fever struck him down, and it may be that he had tossed her a kind word now and then as you might toss a bone to a starving dog. But when the others had quitted him and left him to die, as not even a decent dog is left, she went to his relief.

"Maybe you don't know what she braved—maybe I don't. The Indian is a bundle of contradictions, sometimes, even to those who know him best. And, mind you, this girl had no exaggerated illusions in the matter. She knew exactly what she had to expect when she watched the lodge-poles of her father's teepee fall that cool morning and saw his slim-legged children, brown and sinewy, break the trail, matted with kinnikinnick and Oregon-grape that lay northward.

"Deliberately she shut her eyes on the mist that closed down over the faint, far-away trail, to the distant tangling smoke that columned upward and came to her with a personal message; deliberately she would not breathe the tang of the wood-fire, the scent of salmon broiling on the coals, the odor of the tamarack, and the bruised fruit of the Oregon-grape; deliberately she closed her ears to the thousand sounds of the forest that called to her.

"She went inside the white man's cabin, looked down upon what had once been a man, and closed the door behind her.

"She stayed there eight weeks. Part of the time, when delirium held its victim strongest in its ruthless hold, she suffered actual abuse at his hands. It is easy to strike, you know, when there is no resistance. Her wrists and hands were black and bruised. Once when she resisted his attempts to rise from his bed he struck her savagely—a brutal blow in the face with his clenched fist.

"It left a mark that she will carry to her grave. She was always his inferior—admittedly. Sometimes—rarely, for he talked little—he raved of the girl who had cast him off for a trifle. His blows left physical scars; his words left spiritual disfigurements that will last until death—and after.

"He began to grow better finally, thanks to her care and nursing. The fever left him weak mentally as well as physically. The others of her race and his did not return.

"Then winter came again, and if they were to live through the long months, when the ice slowly choked the raucous cry of the Yellowstone into a feeble whimper, there was much to do. And she, never strong, was enfeebled by the long confinement and by the disease that, taken in a milder form than his own, had fed upon her childish frame. And during all this time he never—I have had it from his own lips—gave her one loving word. She never asked for one.

"The winter deepened, and her people came back into the sheltered little valley under the smile of Our Lady of the Snows. The first voice she heard—the first face she saw—I think that I will spare you that. I will not tell you what either brought her.

"But a day came, she had worked hard and was tired, when something happened. She had been engaged in the most menial tasks—the gathering of fagots to keep the dogs of cold at bay through the long winter, and had strayed some distance from home. Coming back that day when the twilight was almost gone, she found a tiny pool of alkali water fringed about with thin,

starved grasses that the ice had never found.

"She stared down into the clear mirror, and the slender vestige of vanity and self-respect that his treatment and open contempt had left her took flight forever. The Indian woman loses youth and good looks early enough at best, and the half-breed—that alien blossom of ill-nourished soil—withered usually long before the flower is perfected. It was a woman of middle age, haggard and tired and faded and ugly, who looked back at her from the little mirror set in the silver frame of frosted alkali.

"I have no idea of what she was thinking as she went back to the cabin that night. Only God, who is very merciful to the women of His sinful world and who of all people need mercy most, can know!

"It was very late when she opened the door of the little cabin, and he had grown tired waiting for her. He was hungry and cold and lonely. Remember, I am not trying to excuse him. He was not trying to excuse himself when he told her about it later. She crept about her delayed tasks in the Indian way with his brutal words stinging her.

"She was so engrossed that some one had called outside more than once before either of them heard it. He did not raise his head when she looked at him appealingly—it was one of his glum days—and she opened the door hurriedly herself.

"The moon was shining, and above the toil and fret and trouble Our Lady of the Snows looked down with something of the same vague pity that her gentle heart had held even in the midst of her own sorrow when she looked at those who hung one upon either side of Her Son upon the trees that bore such strange, unnatural fruit that morning long ago upon that nameless hill above the garden.

"'Hello!' the voice called again.

"'What do you want?' It was the impatient voice of the man behind her. He pushed her roughly aside.

"'I want to know who lives here and if you are the party I want. I am looking for a fellow that lives somewhere in the valley. A squaw-man—'

"No, I don't suppose that there is

any use going on. He left her next day. And you can see just about what it must have meant to her. She was not all Indian, you know. There were the long months at the mission, and her white blood. And there was another element to reckon with, unfortunately.

"She loved him—God knows why! Women are made that way. And she was just Indian enough to snatch up the gift that another woman had thrown away, and just enough to suffer—suffer!"

He looked curiously over his shoulder. There had been no sound behind him, but Margaret Loomis stood there, white and motionless, the gaudy poppies no longer flaunting, lying frost-bitten against her colorless face. She did not speak.

She only stared at Porter, and from him to Jessup, with a growing horror of comprehension in her face.

As for Jessup, even Porter, who had fancied that he knew the man—his faults and weaknesses—as no one else did or could, looked at him as at the face of an utter stranger. The wind out-

side had strengthened, and the whisper of the snow upon the window had changed to the hurtling mutter of sleet. The sound had a chord of summons in it, steadfast and clear as the note of a bugle.

The fire on the hearth had died down just a little, and the flickering sparks were no longer like the flicker of the fireflies of a brooding Southern night, or if so, it was that of a night whose moon had gradually gone down at midnight.

Then Jessup rose, and slipping the resisting hand of the Indian woman in his, turned and faced the others.

"I have been a brute," he said, "and worse. I have sunk to depths of cowardice of which even the most craven of wretches never dreamed. I thank you, Porter, for your words of to-night. In uttering them you have cancelled every debt that you ever owed me.

"I may be lacking in the elements of a hero, but I will no longer forget my manhood, so help me God! Aunt Martha—Margaret—you will allow me to present my wife!"

TRUANT LOVE.

By Clinton Scollard.

LOVE has gone a-truanting
 Down the aisleways of the spring—
 Down the aisleways dense and dim;
 He has ta'en my heart with him.
 "Oh, return!" to him I cry;
 Not a word he makes reply;
 "For my loss requite me, pray!"
 Is it echo answers "Nay"?

Love has gone a-truanting,
 Left me only sorrow's sting,
 And the longing and the ache
 Lovers know for Love's dear sake;
 Though I follow, lithe and fleet,
 Ever Love hath nimbler feet;
 Who is there that wotteth of
 Aught that will avail with Love?

Love has gone a-truanting!
 Yet I dream some magic thing—
 Something subtler than the sense
 Grasps, will yield a recompense;
 Hope will whisper, while I yearn,
 That the wanderer may return;
 Ah, the bliss, the ecstasy,
 Should but Love come back to me!

ENSHROUDED.*

By E. R. PUNSHON.

The tale of a beautiful woman who was held in bondage at memory's mercy.

SYNOPSIS OF PREVIOUS CHAPTERS.

ARTHUR DALE, artist, on returning, one night, to his cottage in the Scotch Highlands, sees before his door a packing-case, in which, when he opens it, he finds, to his horror, the apparently lifeless body of a young girl. He succeeds, however, in resuscitating her, but she, upon regaining consciousness, is unable to remember even so much as her own identity, much less the series of events which preceded her mysterious arrival. The mist becomes so thick that it is impossible to leave the cottage that night, so the girl retires to sleep in the loft. Dale goes out for a moment, and on returning is greeted by the sight of a stranger loading a revolver in front of his fire. This is Sir George Belville, who tells Dale that he is in search of four strangers who have been seen about the moors. Dale distrusts Belville, believing him to be involved in the packing-case mystery, and his suspicions become stronger when Sir George, suddenly dashing out into the night, disappears in the fog and a sound of firing begins. Dale rushes out also, and when he again returns finds three more strange men in the house, one of whom, dressed as a groom, threatens him with a revolver and admits knowing all about the box, but believes that it contained a lifeless body, and insists on being led to where Dale has buried it. Dale, presuming it best to allow the groom to remain deceived, agrees to lead them to the place. The girl, in the loft, makes a slight noise, and Dale, upon being questioned, says that it is his wife. The groom says she must come, too. The two other men attempt to get into the loft, but the trap-door leading up has evidently been fastened down. While they are working to force it the girl, who has escaped by a window, opens the cottage-door from the outside. Dale knocks down the groom, and with the girl runs out into the fog. There they encounter a regular running fight, in which Sir George and his servant, Montague, are pitted against the groom and his followers. After a series of adventures, Dale leads the exhausted and fainting girl back to the cottage, where, in a pool of blood on the floor, is the groom—dead. And in death the fact is disclosed that it is a woman in man's clothes.

CHAPTER VI.

ABDUCTION.

DALE relighted the candle and surveyed the gruesome sight. It was as horrible as anything he had ever looked upon, and he was more than glad that the girl, in her faint, was saved from seeing it.

With little liking for the task, he took up the body of the unfortunate woman and carried it outside to the rear of the cottage, where he left it beside the mysterious packing-box. In his mind was the conviction that the dead woman was immediately concerned with the events which must have preceded the arrival of the box, and as he walked back to the

house he rejoiced, almost, at the divine retribution which had overtaken the vicious little groom.

After putting the room in somewhat decent order and removing or hiding the signs of the tragedy, Dale for the third time set about reviving the girl. Gradually, under his ministrations, she returned to consciousness. Dale watched her heavy eyelids flutter.

"Is that you, uncle?" she murmured. "I was dreaming of the Princess. Why, where's your beard?" Then with a sudden start she seemed to realize all that had happened. "Oh," she cried, "where are they? Are we safe?"

"You remember?" he asked eagerly, imagining that at last it was to be

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thrown on the mystery in which he was involved. "You remember, don't you?"

She made a gesture of despair.

"It has gone from me again," she said dully. "For a moment I knew. For a moment I remembered. There was an old white-bearded man. There was a woman, a dark woman—but it's all gone from me now."

And she shook her head, gazing into his eyes with dumb anguish that cut into his heart.

"Let me go," she cried suddenly, springing to her feet. "I'm sure I'm a crazy woman. Let me go. Why should you be troubled with my madness?"

"Have you so soon forgotten," he asked, taking her hands, "what we said to each other out there in the mist?"

"It's not possible; indeed it's not," she panted, trying hard to release herself. "How can you care for one who can't even tell her own name?"

"If that's all," he answered tenderly, "I'll give you a name. To me you shall be always 'Beloved.'"

She did not speak, but presently he found that she was weeping, and though he did his best to soothe her, it was long before her sobs ceased; but at last weariness overcame her and she fell asleep in his arms. He laid her again on the settle, then went outside and sat down with his back against the door.

His thoughts were many and strange. He knew it to be a black business, undoubtedly concerned with attempted murder, and now, probably, with abduction. The people of whom she had spoken—the Princess, her uncle, the old man with the white beard; those whom he had seen—Belville, Montague, Wilkes, and the quasi-groom—were they all her enemies? Were any of them her friends?

It was imperative that they get to a town of some size and consult authorities, and so, about sunrise, after long hours of thinking and dozing, he went to rouse the girl. It took a deal of knocking to wake her, but finally he heard her sleepy voice asking what was the trouble.

He answered that it was morning and time they were away, and heard her, after a moment's silence, give a little sobbing exclamation, as though the mem-

ory of the events through which she had so recently passed had rolled back upon her mind. He knocked again, and told her that in the chamber above she would find such toilet requisites as he possessed—at any rate, clean towels and a hand-basin.

It was not long before they were taking a hasty meal.

The girl was weary and nervous; her face pallid, her eyes rimmed, yet it was borne in upon Dale that he had absurdly underestimated her charms, for though before he had thought her lovely—an adjective he perceived inadequate—now indeed she was a beautiful woman. He did not realize that love had touched his eyes with tender exaggeration.

The meal was silent, the girl hardly speaking, Dale almost as quiet, for in his heart the young artist was praying very fervently that she might never have cause to regret his advent into her life.

As soon as they had finished, they started off, over the rough track, to the village. The walking was hard, and the girl still tired and somewhat lame; yet they made fair time, and in an hour or so were at the village inn, a small establishment, hardly more than a public-house. The landlady, however, was a decent, pleasant woman, and in her charge Dale placed the girl while he went to find the village police (in regard to the death of the groom), and to the railroad station.

"There's no train," said the landlady, "for twa hour or mair."

"I'm going to order a special," said Dale impatiently. "The lady's business is too serious for a moment's delay. See that you make her comfortable, and allow no one to trouble her."

He went away, assuring the girl, who was clearly ill at ease at being left alone, that he would not be long, but, as it happened, fully three-quarters of an hour had passed before he returned. He had had some trouble in arranging for the special train, but at last was able to make his way back to the inn with the knowledge that they were already getting up steam in an asthmatic old freight-engine, which would be ready for him by the time he returned with his companion.

In the hall of the inn Dale met the

landlady. Her air of subdued anxiety struck an instant chill into his heart.

"What's happened?" he demanded.

"Weel, sir," replied the woman, "ye see the bonny young leddy's fayther——"

"Father!" interrupted Dale. "Did she know him?"

"Ken her ain fayther?" echoed the landlady wonderingly. "'Twould be a sorry lassie that didna, sir; but I didna ken, for I just telt him whaur she war an' in he went. But I thocht I heard a cry a while sine."

Dale, when the thought came to him that this was but another seeking to harm the girl, was swamped in a wave of impotent anger and discouragement.

"Woman, what have you done?" he groaned.

"What's ailin' ye?" she asked him. "Would ye hae me keep the bit lassie frae her ain fayther?"

He didn't answer, but with bitter self-reproach that he should have allowed the girl for even one moment out of his sight went blindly toward the room where he had left her. The door was bolted on the inside, and when he called there was no answer.

His pale face grew still paler, and disregarding the shrill outcry of the landlady, he drew back a few feet, and putting down his shoulder, hurled himself with all his might at the panel nearest the bolt. It gave at once. He pushed his hand through the splintered wood, drew back the bolt, and flinging the door open, burst into the room.

A glance showed him that the room was empty, and so terrible had been the pictures conjured up in his mind that for the moment he felt a certain relief. A second glance showed a wide-opened window through which exit must have been made. All his fears came back. What her enemies had failed to do by violence they had now effected by guile.

There was no sign that the girl had been there; she had vanished as she had come—without warning. All the love in Dale's being cried out at being thus deprived of its object. He felt his energy sapped from him as though by an illness. For a moment he stood helpless and uncertain; then determination came back to him, and again heedless of the shrill protesting landlady, he leaped

through the open window into the courtyard.

Here his fierce, stammering queries, that half-frightened the rustics, revealed that two strangers, a man and a girl, had been seen walking away a short time before.

He listened impatiently till they began to repeat themselves, then hurried a horse from the inn stable, and jumping upon it, galloped off in the direction the rustics had indicated; then he tore through the village, beating his old mount till it reached an acme of fear unknown to it since colthood and setting all the population agape.

The road they were on led only to a bare moor, he knew, where he could surely overtake them. So confident was he that at the foot of every rise he more than half expected that upon reaching the summit he would come up with the fugitives. As he rounded the shoulder of a hill he noticed, without paying much attention, the faint odor of gaseous smoke; then as he turned into the open and came out with the wide moor on his left a groan of utter disappointment burst from his lips.

Not three hundred yards away was a large motor-car, in which were seated two men; between them, with drooping head and rounded shoulders, was the huddled form of the girl he sought. The car was moving slowly, but as he appeared ran up its speed, and in less than a minute it was more than half a mile away, the puffing of its motor coming back faintly to his ears, the dust rising in a dun cloud behind it.

Dale's first impulse was to pursue. Then, grimly laughing at his idiocy, he pulled up short.

Broken in spirit, he slouched dejectedly on his useless horse and watched the girl disappear.

CHAPTER VII.

SIR GEORGE'S SLAVE.

FOR a while he stared after the car as it drew away, now scurrying along the edge of the heath, now burrowing down out of sight beyond the hills and rises, to come up again in a cloud of dust and steam.

In the end he jerked around the head of his disgusted horse and was about to gallop back to town, when he heard his name called and saw hurrying toward him two men.

Of these, one was Montague, Belville's servant, as demure and decorous as ever; the other was Wilkes, late subordinate to the dead groom. When last Dale had seen them they had been in deadly conflict with each other; now they appeared to be comrades. Wilkes reached the road first, and came to a halt in front of the rider, who looked down at him uncertainly and angrily.

"Beg pardon, but this 'ere bloomin' gent wants to speak to you," said Wilkes, panting after his run. Then he added, with an affable nod at Dale's unfettered hands: "See you've got 'em off then. Reg'lar 'orrid feelin', ain't it? But, 'Eavins, we done it tender, long the wye them peelers 'andle a bloke."

"What do you want?" asked Dale impassively, speaking over Wilkes's head to Montague, who had by that time come up.

"Sir George Belville's compliments, sir," said the man, his face as unexpressive and immobile as ever, "and he is arranging to have you hanged for murder unless you promise not to interfere any longer in this matter."

Dale gasped.

"Are you crazy?" he started. "Why——"

"I can't answer for myself, sir," replied the man, with a momentary lifting of his strangely pale eyes, "but my master is quite sane. I am to make you understand, sir, that he is arranging to have you arrested for murder unless you promise to leave here at once, to preserve silence about all that has passed, and to resign the young lady to his care. Sir George bids me add that his only desire is to save and protect the young lady from a certain great peril that menaces her."

"I can believe your last half-dozen words," said Dale, watching him keenly to see if he was aware of the girl's disappearance. "But the lady you speak of is—there." He turned and pointed to the motor-car that was now but a moving dot far down the rough moor track.

Montague coughed and raised his hand to his mouth. Dale thought he grinned as well as coughed under the cover of his palm.

It was Wilkes who finally spoke, and he said:

"Blimee, d' ye' mean to sye they've got 'er agyne?"

"Who are they?" asked Dale, and then, as Montague hesitated to reply, he added earnestly: "If she is in any real danger I wish you would tell me. Give me some idea, at least."

"In danger, yes," Montague answered slowly, "but not immediately, I should judge, unless their hands are forced by publicity. Especially she should be safe, if it's true, as you say, that her memory's lost. After all, I don't suppose they have any wish to kill her if they can manage without."

Dale leaned down to Montague.

"I'll give you," he said, "a hundred pounds if you'll tell me all you know about this matter."

Wilkes, who had been craning his neck to hear this last sentence, for all—or perhaps because it was clearly not intended for his ears—gave vent to a long whistle.

"Lor' love ye," he said, "I'll tell all I know for a fiver."

But Montague shook his head in silence, and for the next few minutes stood quiet, his mind, evidently, far away in thought. Dale stared at him, wondering what sort of man he might have been before he became mixed up with this Belville. After a while he grew restless.

"Well," he said, "I suppose you're as big a rogue as your master. Give him my compliments and tell him that within an hour or so I shall be on my way to the police to tell them the full facts. Then I think he will be compelled to give the explanation he now refuses. Up at my cottage there is something that cannot well be hidden."

Montague looked up at him suddenly.

"But you see you ain't got no cottage now," snickered Wilkes.

Dale jerked round and stared at him. The man was grinning inanely.

"Yes, sir," supplied Montague, "Wilkes and myself have just been burning your cottage down."

"But what for?" The colossal nerve of the thing, somehow, struck a humorous chord in Dale's make-up rather than one of anger. He almost could have smiled.

"We buried the body, too, sir," Montague continued deferentially, "and took the liberty of placing beside it a long sharp knife of yours which we found, in order that it might seem to be the weapon with which the woman was killed.

"At present Sir George is, I believe, drawing up the story Wilkes and I are to swear to. It is to be represented, I understand, that—well, I won't go into detail. Suffice it that the story is distinctly disagreeable and will, I imagine, prove detrimental to both your good name and to your health."

Dale listened, numb with wonder.

His sensation of amusement was rapidly changing to one of helpless wrath. He knew himself to be powerless, and as the fulness of Belville's intentions came to him he pictured the future very black before him. Besides the personal danger and harm of the story, it flashed across him, too, that if he were entangled in such a mesh of lies he would be able to do little for the girl.

He could not, he believed, cope at the same time with her enemies and with this accusation against him. Nevertheless, he answered:

"I shall tell my story regardless, and I think it will be the more plausible. The truth is apt to hang together better than a fabric of lies."

"Ah"—Montague bowed apologetically—"there I must beg to differ, sir. Your statement will not hold when the lies are being woven by a gentleman so proficient in prevarication as my master."

"A gent," added Wilkes, "with a nat'ral-born gift fr it. Such a gift!"

He rolled his eyes in an ecstasy of admiration, and then, looking at Dale, went through an unpleasant pantomime of choking, with his head lolling on one side.

"Of course," resumed Montague, "Sir George's plans may have altered now that the lady is no longer in your care."

Dale nodded in reply.

There seemed to be little to say. He was clearly fighting with odds against him; against one, at least, who could outdo him at every turn when it came to ingenious perversions of the truth and shady machinations. How could he best save the girl, who, with her lack of memory, was as great a hindrance as an aid?

Montague watched him in silence, the light of constrained passion behind his strange eyes glowing with an intensity of hidden feeling. It seemed as if he guessed the artist's thoughts, for he waved Wilkes aside and said in a whisper:

"Mr. Dale, your best chance of helping her is to keep at liberty. Belville's chief idea is to get you out of the way; but now that she has disappeared again, his plans, as I said, may change. Let me advise you. Come and see him before acting in this matter. I think he will be willing to postpone anything in order to rescue her from the Princess."

"From the Princess?" repeated Dale sharply; then he went on: "If you're honest, if you're at all friendly, why can't you tell me what you know? How can I judge what is best for her while I'm so mazed?"

"Sir George's heel is on my neck," replied the other, with an inexpressible play of emotions across his mask-like face. "I am his slave—body and soul he owns me, and makes me do what he wills me to do. If I dared, I would act readily enough, but I daren't."

He spoke with a great bitterness, and Dale felt again even more acutely, how formidable was his adversary, who could reduce men to such complete and loathsome subjection.

"What are you afraid of?" he asked, but the other only shivered for answer.

"Fight him in the dark," he broke out; "that's your only chance. Your story is too strange to be believed, especially with Sir George weaving lies about you. Agree with him now and bide your time or you will deprive the girl of one of the only two friends she has in the world."

"Two friends?" said Dale swiftly.

"Who is the other?"

"I," said the man.

"You?" Dale almost laughed in his

face. "You don't expect to be believed, do you?"

The other shrugged his shoulders.

"Oh, no," he said, with apathy, then his voice changed, grew small and hard. "But I tell you, and swear it by my hate for this man Belville, that I hug to my soul by day and by night, that your best chance of helping and saving that girl is to ostensibly yield to Sir George and work with him till the time comes. Till the time comes," he repeated.

Dale hesitated for a moment. Montague was very likely right. So—

"Take me to him," he said. "At least I'll find out what he has to say before I go to the police."

Montague changed again. Dale was beginning to feel him an emotional weathercock.

"Look here," he cried, throwing his arms wide, as though in an appeal—"look here; I beg of you that, if you value your life, you'll go on a sketching tour to Italy for the next six months or a year. Don't match yourself between these two, the Princess and Sir George."

"That advice," said Dale, "I think I shall not follow."

"You don't know Sir George," said Montague, with a sigh. "He will get his grip on you as he has on me. It would be like Brute Belville just for the fun of it to make you best man at his wedding, to stand by and watch while he married the girl."

"Now," cried Dale, stung to fury by the suggestion, "by my honor—"

"Ah," interrupted Montague, "I swore that oath once."

"As I'm a man," said Dale, "I—"

"I, too," interrupted Montague again, "was once a man."

"Well, take me to him," exclaimed the artist, with an angry gesture.

CHAPTER VIII.

A TREATY OF ALLIANCE.

It was to a small shooting-lodge that Dale was conducted by Montague, who now had suddenly reverted to the demure and respectful man servant, interlarding his conversation with "sirs" and much hat-touching, and seemingly quite oblivious to the fact that a while before he had

displayed a different side to his character.

He was shown into a very comfortable and neatly arranged little sitting-room, where a fire burned cheerily in the grate. He sat down, wondering a good deal what was going to happen, for after his first impulse to accede to Montague's suggestion it had occurred to him that he was acting rashly in thus visiting alone and unarmed a man as desperate and unscrupulous as Belville seemed to be.

His cogitations were broken into, however, by the sound of the baronet's voice, very loud and fierce. There came another voice, as though in extenuation, the cracking sound of a blow, and a heavy fall. Dale sprang to his feet as the door burst open, and Belville, his handsome face black with wrath, his left arm in a sling, came furiously into the room and ran straight at him.

"You fool," he screamed. "Do you mean you've lost her?" He raised his arm as though to strike.

"Look out," warned Dale, in a low voice, while through the open door he watched Montague, who with a dazed look on his white and bleeding face crawled to his feet. Belville's hand went down, and he turned away, evidently in disgust. When he faced Dale again his features were less contorted, though he was anything but pleasant to look upon.

"I thought it was all over, and now it seems that things are worse off than ever. What happened? How were you fool and coward enough to lose her?"

"If explanations are to be given," said Dale, "I think you might begin."

"You fool, you utter fool, explain to you? Why, I've only to lift my fingers and you'll swing from the gallows."

"That sounds very pretty, but I fear you are oversanguine about my death. It is possible that I may be put to that amount of trouble and inconvenience, but rest assured that I shall take care that you—"

Belville cut him short.

"While we are fighting each other, what about this lady, to whom the first sign of publicity may be fatal?"

"Why?"

"Because the dead are more easily hidden than the living."

There was a quality in his tones that

frightened Dale. The threat aimed at himself he could afford to disregard. Formidable as it was, he felt competent to defend himself. But how if in his blindness and ignorance he should take steps that might seem beneficial only to prove fatal to the unknown girl whom he loved?"

"Why can't you tell me?" he broke out. "I don't know how to treat you. I only know I mistrust you." He paused; then, with a quick gesture of his hands, exclaimed: "Who is this lady?"

"She is the lady," replied Belville, "whom I intend to marry."

"That, at least, is untrue," was Dale's retort.

The other started with an angry exclamation, and his piercing eyes became fixed on the young artist. Then he flung back his head and laughed.

"Sits the wind in that quarter?" he jeered. "My good fellow, put such ideas out of your head. That the lady shall become my wife I have sworn the most solemn oath a man can take."

"Fortunately," observed the other, "from what I have seen of Sir George Belville a broken oath more or less can matter very little."

He turned and walked toward the door.

Belville waited till his hand was on the knob; then he called to him:

"Where are you going?"

"To the police, since you'll tell me nothing. It will be strange if they can't find out something about all this."

Belville caught him up with:

"And while they're trying to find out, what will be happening to the poor girl you've allowed to slip into her enemies' hands?"

"I see no other way to help her," said Dale simply.

"Have you forgotten that I told you that the first hint of publicity will almost certainly cause her immediate death?"

"How have I the slightest idea that you are telling the truth?"

The other didn't answer, but rocked on his heels before the fireplace, his eyes staring through Dale and out of the window beyond him. Finally he said, his voice a little softened:

"Because I love her."

Dale winced.

"All my life long I've loved two things—my own pleasure and power over other men. Now it seems I must love a slip of a white-faced girl. The more fool I for my pains."

He fell silent again. Dale was torn between a desire to spring at him and finish him for good and all and a sort of admiration for the man's love, which, when he gave voice to it, sounded sincere. Here was a rival, Dale thought, whom, were he an honest man, it would be worth while defeating.

Belville broke into his thoughts with: "It's the princess, of course, who has her."

It had been so useless in the past to find out just who was this princess that Dale, though itching with curiosity, let the remark go.

"Speculation," went on the other, "is, however, useless. The practical question is to rescue her."

"The police?" Dale reiterated.

"Oh, tut! How often have I said to you this morning that police interference is impossible. What sense, moreover, in pitting them against one of the keenest brains in Europe. I'm not desirous of having the authorities meddling in this, anyway. It's too delicate an affair." He paused again and looked keenly at Dale.

"My dear sir," he said suddenly, "if I should propose a treaty of alliance, what——"

"Alliance? With you?" Dale gasped at the assurance of the man. "If you were to propose such a treaty with me I should know, Sir George, that you were planning some fresh villainy against me."

"Not till she was safe," said the other, with a somewhat sardonic grin. "I am sufficiently in love with that girl to be honest in getting her, if I can get her no way else. Can't you see I love her?"

As he spoke there was truth in his eyes and in his voice.

"I love her, too," said Dale quietly, "and if it please Heaven no other man shall win her."

"I *will* win her," cried Belville, "whether it please or displease Heaven—or her. Give me your help to save her now, or death may win her from us both."

"What is it that you want me to do?"

"Return to London; make the acquaintance of the princess. The divinely dangerous, the audaciously plain, princess. From her you can get a clue to the girl's whereabouts. I can't go. The princess would suspect me. But you—a total stranger—can, with your youth and freshness, win where I should fail."

"We should be good friends—good allies, rather," said Dale, "till the lady we speak of is rescued. After that——"

"After that as good enemies as you wish," Sir George finished the sentence.

Dale sat musing in indecision.

"How is it," he asked, after a pause, "that that fellow Wilkes seems to be in your employ now?"

"A fellow like that is easily won over by a well-aimed, steady pistol," said the baronet carelessly.

"Who was the woman, then? The one disguised as a groom?"

"I don't know," replied Sir George. "I didn't see the body, being too busy nursing this shoulder, which some one slipped a knife into. She was an agent of the princess's, I fancy."

"I've been imagining this morning that it might have been the princess herself. Who was it killed her?"

The other shrugged his shoulders; his face was not pleasant to look upon.

"In such affairs all must take their chance. One strikes practically without seeing. Besides, how was I to know she was a woman?"

The brutality of the man struck Dale like a blow. The room grew close; he could feel the perspiration break out all over his body.

"I think I will go," he said, rising. "I think we have talked enough."

Belville rose, too.

"Will you go to London to see the Princess Fianona?" he asked.

Dale walked past him toward the door without answering. The baronet, both amused and annoyed, followed him with his eyes.

"You haven't told me yet," he said, with mock politeness, "whether you agree to my proposition?"

The smile on his face was almost a leer, so that when Dale turned to him he could barely keep from shuddering. Afterward, it seemed to him that perhaps this smile was what quickened his deci-

sion; that he felt that the brain behind it would be less harmful working with him than against him.

He didn't hide his disgust when he answered.

"I don't understand how I can," he said, "but I agree."

The baronet bowed. Dale opened the door and passed out into the hall.

On his way out of doors he passed the obsequious Montague, his pale eyes gleaming over the bandage which hid the cuts on his face.

CHAPTER IX.

THE CHASE BEGINS.

A DAY or two after the events which had brought his stay in Scotland to such a sudden end Dale was back in his rooms in London, prepared to overcome all obstacles in his search for the girl.

That on the whole he had done wisely in accepting Sir George's offer he was now fairly satisfied. After all, he persuaded himself, he felt no obligation to avenge the death of the strangely disguised woman who had perished in the fight on the misty hillside, and to have informed the police would but have entangled himself in a network of complications, just when he had need of perfect freedom of action.

He quieted that part of his conscience that questioned his allowing the Scotch fight to remain hidden from the authorities and turned his attention to his quest.

His agreement with Sir George had already proved satisfactory, for he had received from the baronet a communication requesting him to go that evening to the "Apollo," a well-known and fashionable restaurant, where arrangements had been made for him to be introduced by a certain Major Bennet to the Princess Fianona.

At last he was to meet this redoubtable person, whom now he realized to be the center of the whole grim business. He felt hope grow in him, as the chase became warmer, and set out at once to arrange for an individual hunting party on his own hook. For this purpose he made his way riverward and climbed to the top floor of a dingy building.

His knock was answered by an un-

healthy-looking elderly clerk who took his name and then showed him to an inner room, where a little thin man of tired appearance and bored manner sat dozing in front of the fire.

"Oh, Mr. Dale," he said, looking up and stifling a yawn, evidently with some difficulty. "Take a seat, sir, please; yes, I had your letter—proud to oblige any friend of—of——" He rummaged among his papers in a kind of mild despair at his own forgetfulness. "Oh, yes, of Mr. Rawson."

It was with quite an air of triumph at having remembered at last that he brought out the name of the solicitor who had recommended him to Dale as the smartest and brightest inquiry agent in the country.

"What can I do for you, sir?"

"You are Mr. Mooney, I presume?" asked Dale, hesitating a little to introduce the business on which he had come.

The other nodded.

"My name, sir," he said, with a deep sigh that turned into a yawn, and then he subsided again into a state of apparent sleepiness, being, as a matter of fact, not unused to clients who found it somewhat difficult to state their business.

Dale still hesitated, hardly knowing what to say. Really, his chief idea was to obtain some reserve force on which to call in any moment of emergency.

He felt, too, that at present, while he and Belville were working together for one object, it was hardly fair to go to any one behind his back; yet he entertained toward the baronet so deep a mistrust that he felt their partnership might be broken at any minute.

"Mr. Rawson," he said at last, "spoke very highly of your abilities, Mr. Mooney."

"Very good of Mr. Rawson," murmured Mooney, "but perhaps too good. My ability is slight; what I do best is to sit still. Most people, you know, find that impossible."

"Well," said Dale, after another long pause, during which little Mr. Mooney appeared lost in meditation, "can you tell me anything about a lady—the Princess Fianona?"

"Most dangerous woman in Europe," replied Mooney, for the first time showing a sign of real animation.

"In what way?"

"In every way," replied Mooney, sinking again into his manner of repose. "Sometimes, sir, after a good dinner, or on a warm summer afternoon, I permit myself pleasant dreams of some day laying my hands on that woman. But I never shall. Too much to hope for—too much to hope for."

He gave a profound sigh, as of a wizened little peri in tail-coat and trousers gazing into a paradise that he knew was not for him.

"Not even by sitting still?" asked Dale, with a faint smile.

"Not even by sitting still," replied Mr. Mooney, with undiminished gravity. "But if it is about her you want my advice, I can give it you in two words—steer clear. My fee will be ten guineas, please, and you never got more for your money, either."

"But unluckily I can't steer clear, for I am to dine with her this evening."

"The last gentleman who dined with her——" mused Mooney. "It cost him three pound ten that night, seven thousand within six months, and a bullet through his brain before the year was out. But he hadn't laid out ten guineas to such good purpose as you, Mr. Dale."

"There are circumstances," replied the young artist, "that make it necessary for me to see as much of her as I can at present. But I should like you to keep a watch on her and all her movements."

Mr. Mooney rubbed the end of his nose reflectively and looked more sleepy than ever.

"Too vague a commission to have any good results. Only, as it rather curiously happens, I am watching her already—or, rather, her maid."

"Oh, Betty Brown, do you mean?" asked Dale.

"Um," said Mooney, shooting at him a quick glance from beneath his half-closed lids, "you know something, then? May I ask who gave you that information?"

"Sir George Belville," replied Dale, somewhat hesitatingly.

"Oh, Sir George Belville," said Mooney, and he seemed to sink into reflection so deep as to become quite oblivious to the presence of his visitor, who

presently came to the rather angry conclusion that there was little help to be obtained from this sleepy and meditative person.

He was just thinking of going, when Mooney looked up and remarked:

"The combination of Princess Fianona, Betty Brown, and Sir George Belville means trouble for some one. Where those three are gathered together there is the devil to pay. But I hardly see how I can help you, sir, unless you're more explicit."

"I'm afraid I can't tell you more at present," replied Dale. "I merely wish you to take what lawyers, I believe, call a 'watching brief.'"

Mooney shook his head and sighed deeply.

"No man," he murmured, "can do good work in the dark."

"All I feel at liberty to say is that I have reason to believe that Princess Fianona has obtained possession of the person of a young lady whose very name I am ignorant of, and I cannot imagine what aim the princess has to serve," said Dale. "But I do know that there is some devilry at work, which I intend to defeat."

"A hard thing to do," murmured Mooney, trying to shift into a more comfortable position, "where Sir George Belville is concerned with the Princess Fianona. I have much affection for them both, especially Sir George."

"He is a strange man, sir. In times of war or adventure, or in a position of danger and responsibility, he might have made a great name for himself, but as it is, he is one of the most formidable men I know of—violent and unscrupulous, yet oddly checked by a crooked sense of fair play and sportsmanship."

"He would ruin a man by the most subtle treachery, and yet, face to face with him, you could be assured he would not lie to you, though if you were a woman he would think lying to you the best joke in the world. On the other hand, he would probably die rather than strike a woman, while I have seen him beat some unfortunate fellow, who he fancied had been lacking in respect to him, within an inch of his life."

"I tell you this, sir, that you may realize in how deep water you sail in

the company of Princess Fianona and Sir George Belville. Two people," he added, with another deep sigh, "for whom I have a profound admiration and affection."

"But you have not told me, yet, whether you will accept my commission?"

"I fear I can do little for you, sir, unless you can tell me more."

"Do you mind telling me why you are watching this maid of hers?" asked Dale. "It is possible there might be some connection between that and the affair I have come about."

"Hardly, I think," answered Mooney, "but—of course in the strictest confidence, sir—she is wanted by the French police on a charge of murdering a mistress of hers in Paris some years ago. A Frenchman named Acquin was over here the other day to identify her, and she will be extradited, though at present some legal hitch in France is causing delay."

"In a panic lest she should escape during this delay, the murdered woman's relatives have telegraphed to me to watch her, and on the whole I am inclined to think Miss Betty Brown's head ought to feel rather loose. Can you give me a couple of days to consider your commission?"

Dale agreed and went away. Scarcely had he gone when Mr. Mooney slipped into his outer office.

"Parsons," he said to the clerk, "how is my charity account?"

"You are about seventy pounds to the good, sir," replied the clerk, after referring to a ledger.

"Oh, very satisfactory indeed," smiled Mr. Mooney. "Parsons."

"Yes, sir."

"Book a bet of a hundred to three that Princess Fianona will have Mr. Dale her slave, ready to kiss her feet at her nod, within—within—well, we'll give him three months, Parsons."

"Yes, sir," said Parsons, imperturbably making the entry.

"A wonderful woman!" mused Mr. Mooney, with a kind of restrained enthusiasm. "An adorable creature! I could love her myself once I had the handcuffs on her."

It was an opinion about his future that,

had he known it, would probably have rather amused Dale. For he, walking slowly back to his room, was thinking not at all of the princess, but of the pleading eyes and the sad face memory of which never left him.

Deep in thought, he was standing on the curb waiting a favorable moment to cross the street, when from a hansom that momentarily slackened its pace as it passed there leaned forth a woman, heavily veiled and muffled in a huge cloak that covered her from head to foot, and whispered:

"Take care! Beware—oh, beware of driving in a motor-car."

It was her voice.

Dale, in his astonishment, gaped, fish-like, and before he could speak the cabman lashed suddenly at his horse, and in an instant the hansom was half-way down the street, paying no attention to the shouts of Dale, who was running in pursuit.

Another cabman near at hand saw a chance of earning something substantial.

"Jump in, gov'nor," he called, "and I'll catch 'em for you."

"Two pounds if you do," cried Dale, and made one spring into the cab, which at once started at a hot pace, rocking round corners and threading a practically abandoned course through the press of the traffic.

Now a lumbering omnibus would delay them, now a stretch of clear street would give them an advantage, while Dale, his hands nervously clutching on the door-knob, ready to spring out, asked himself whether he could have possibly been mistaken in thinking he had recognized that soft, clear voice which had uttered so strange a warning.

To his dismay, a policeman lifted his white-gloved hand to stop the traffic. Now was the chance for the fugitives to escape. But his driver whipped up his horse and cut across, with a shouted apology to the policeman to the effect that he couldn't "'old 'im in so quick."

The first cab turned into a side-street, where, half-way down the block, it stopped. Its single occupant jumped out, went lightly up the steps of an unpretentious house, and in a second was out of sight in the vestibule.

Dale's own cab slackened speed, and,

not waiting for it to stop, he took a flying leap to the pavement, luckily kept his feet, and while the passers-by gaped at the sight of his haste, made after the girl. He dashed into the entrance into which she had gone, to find it empty.

On the door was a small brass plate that bore the words:

PRINCESS ANDRETTE FIANONA.

CHAPTER X.

PRINCESS FIANONA.

A STRANGE tumult of fear and of dismayed bewilderment arose in Dale's mind as he saw whither his pursuit had led him. With a kind of sinister derision, it seemed to him, the door-plate twinkled up at him as if mockingly demanding what reason he imagined had this girl for flying from him, who loved her, to take refuge with her deadliest enemy, who was almost certainly responsible for her strange and terrible arrival in Scotland.

Hampered with hesitation, he stood there on the landing for four or five minutes. At one moment he felt that he must obtain entrance and discover certainly who it was he had seen enter. Then it seemed to him that this would be foolish, that it might result in consequences all the more dreadful to his imagination from their very vagueness.

He felt like a man oppressed by a nightmare, struggling with an impalpable terror, or walking blindfold among dreadful pits.

Then the door opened quietly and there glided out a little workman carrying a small bag of tools.

Dale glanced at him carelessly as he moved aside to let him pass, but as the man brushed by he whispered:

"I can do no good at all, you know, sir, if you interfere and make her suspicious."

"What! Mooney?" exclaimed Dale, recognizing the sleepy little detective, who certainly seemed to have shown no sleepiness in his recent movements.

"That's me, sir," he said. "And it

doesn't help a man's disguise to shout out his name."

"Did you see that lady who just entered the flat three or four minutes ago?" asked Dale eagerly.

"Yes, sir, but we can't talk here," replied Mooney. "Just follow me, please."

Without another word he slipped off down the stairs, and after a moment's vacillation Dale followed, reflecting that in the end he could return to the flat, if desirable, when he had heard what Mooney knew. At any rate, the girl could not be in any immediate danger, since she seemed to be at perfect liberty.

Accordingly, he went slowly in pursuit of Mooney, who, after several blocks were passed, dropped back and talked with the young man.

"When you told me what little you told me, sir," he remarked, "I confess I did not attach much importance to your story. I have changed my mind now."

"You saw that lady, then?"

"Yes," answered Mooney, shooting at the other an odd and very alert look from beneath his half-closed eyelids, "I saw her very plainly. I was working in the vestibule when she entered."

"That's the one whom I want to help," said Dale, atremble with excitement. "How can I see her and talk with her? Shall I go to the house and ask to see her, do you think? Or shall I wait till she comes out again?"

Mr. Mooney rubbed the end of his nose very hard, and his air of weary dejection was more pronounced than ever as he sighed in response:

"That young lady who came in just about five minutes before I came out in a big cloak and a great hurry—do you mean her, sir?"

"Yes, and I must speak to her." Dale jumped to his feet, his face flushed, his voice trembling with eagerness. "Did you hear who she was?"

"Her name," answered Mooney slowly, "is Betty Brown, and she is the Princess Fianona's maid."

Dale stared at him blankly. Then he shot out his arm across the table and caught Mooney by the collar.

"Do you think this a time for joking?" he demanded fiercely.

"I never joke," said Mr. Mooney in-

dignantly. "Only fools joke, things being what they are."

Dale relaxed his grasp upon the other's collar, and then turned slowly toward the door.

"I don't understand," he said briefly, "but I don't care to be played with. I wish to have nothing more to do with you, Mr. Mooney. I shall go straight back to the flat and see for myself."

"Of all the hot-tempered young gentlemen," complained the detective, "you're the worst. How do you propose to gain admittance to search a strange lady's flat?"

The other hesitated, perceiving that he had set himself no easy task. He frowned and bit his lip. Mooney went on in a slightly brisker tone:

"I pledge you my professional reputation that in the flat, at the moment I left it, there was no other person but the princess herself, Betty Brown, who had just come in, and old Mrs. Brown, Betty's mother, cook and housekeeper to the establishment and, as I believe, the worst of the lot."

"But I tell you I saw her go in there. A man must believe his eyes."

"Not if he knows how often they deceive him," retorted Mooney. "I assure you, sir, I have examined every room in that flat since I saw you. I knew something was wrong with the electric light, so I represented myself as a workman sent to see to it, and I went into every room."

"It is only a small flat—two living-rooms, two bedrooms, and the kitchen. There is certainly not space to hide a cat, let alone a young lady. But there was one thing, sir, that has made me decide to accept your commission, if you still wish it, though I had fully made up my mind to decline."

"What is that?" asked Dale, whose certitude was a little staggered by the detective's positive assurance that the flat held but the three people he had mentioned.

"Why, this," said Mooney, "that while I was there a gentleman named Bellingham, from Exeter, came to see the princess."

"He's a doctor well known in the west, I believe—an old man with a long white beard, of which he seems very

proud. A bit ago his niece and ward was drowned from one of the Irish boats. I happened to be on board, and I saw one or two things that struck me as—rummy. And now when I find him apparently on intimate terms with Princess Fianona, I think that is—rummy, too.

"They didn't give me a chance to learn much, but I heard Dr. Bellingham say something was 'terribly audacious,' and 'risky,' and the princess replied, with that nasty little laugh of hers, that she found it the most profoundly amusing experience of her life.

"And I," concluded Mooney, with a tremendous sigh, "would give a lot to know what they referred to. For it sounded ugly, Mr. Dale—it sounded terribly ugly."

"Then you'll take my commission to watch this princess and report anything suspicious or unusual?" asked Dale.

"Yes, sir," replied Mooney, "but you must understand I can't promise good results unless you give me fuller information."

"That's impossible," returned Dale; "at present, anyway. You're simply to keep her under observation, with a view to discovering the identity and present whereabouts of a young lady against whom I believe this woman to be plotting. But I can tell you nothing about the young lady in question, except that I saw her enter the flat just before you came out."

"Which I know she didn't, unless, of course, she is identical with the princess, whom I know well; with Betty Brown, whose head sits so loose upon her shoulders, or with Betty's mother, wicked old hag that she is. Moreover, if the princess is plotting against the young lady you speak of, how could it be possible for her to take refuge there?"

"I must believe what I saw," said Dale obstinately.

"But what did you see? Probably you just mistook Betty Brown for her. Or perhaps the young lady wished to avoid you and managed to dodge you."

They talked a little more; then Dale went away to dress for his dinner at the "Apollo" with the mysterious princess.

It was in a mood of some depression that he made his preparations, for, certain

as he was that he had made no error—the very suggestion seemed treachery to his love—he felt the full baffling force of the detective's testimony. The more he saw of the matter the blacker it seemed.

The "Apollo" was already full of diners when he arrived, and on the threshold he was met by Major Bennet, a tall, dissipated-looking man with a long, fair mustache and the reputation of being able to live more extravagantly on less money than any other man in town.

The major, though he had met him but two or three times before, greeted him with the warmth of an old friend, and in a moment or two Dale found himself bowing low as he was presented to the Princess Fianona.

He almost imagined there must be some misunderstanding, so different was she from all his expectations.

In a vague way he had anticipated some vision of resplendent and fascinating beauty attired fittingly in an exquisite dress and wearing magnificent jewels. Instead, he saw a rather plain, heavy-looking woman, obviously no longer young, and making no attempt to conceal the fact; on the whole, probably the most dowdily dressed woman in the room. And she was so eagerly intent upon her dinner that she had hardly a word to say.

He experienced a vague sense of disappointment, until the wonder of her full, lustrous black eyes dawned upon him. And as the meal progressed he lost his sense of disappointment and found himself taking far more than his usual part in the conversation. It was not that the princess herself spoke much—she hardly said a word till she had finished her soup, and afterward she conversed chiefly in monosyllables.

But somehow she seemed remarkably sympathetic, showed an interest in her companions, and in particular, displayed so much knowledge of his own pictures that Dale could not help responding. It was not often in his life he had talked so well, and once or twice when the princess turned her full black eyes on him with smiling approval of something he had said he experienced a singular feeling, as though his innermost thoughts

were being read—and read with admiration.

The thought crossed Dale's mind that possibly there was some mistake about the alleged criminality of the princess. He wondered whether Sir George had practised some deep treachery, and if she were a victim herself of some obscure plot.

"You are looking at me very intently, Mr. Dale," said the princess's slow voice. "I wonder, now, if I dare ask you a favor."

"I should be delighted."

"That's what you men always say," answered the princess, looking at him as though he were the only person in the world for whose opinion she had any regard; "yet some day, perhaps, I shall ask you to paint my portrait. So you're fairly warned."

"I should be delighted again. I should regard it as a great privilege."

He repeated it earnestly, and it was as though he heard some small voice whispering in his ear that it was not only a motor-car of which it was necessary to beware.

"But how would you make me look, I wonder?" she asked, flashing at him a very swift and piercing glance; "for they say, you know, you painters have such terrible insight into character. Why, I should be almost afraid."

"You must come to my flat and we'll discuss it. But not to-morrow, for I intend to go motoring in the afternoon—to 'mote,' as these fast, up-to-date people say. Do you care for motoring, Mr. Dale?"

"No," he answered, "comparatively little. As a rule, I preserve an old-fashioned love for horses, I've not been in a motor-car for years."

"Oh," she cried, clapping her hands with more animation than she had shown all through the dinner, "then you must certainly come with me to-morrow and be converted, for mine is an electric car, and so delightful. I shall expect you at three; be sure you do not fail, Mr. Dale."

Once more it seemed to him that he stood upon the curb, while a low, sweet voice whispered a strange warning, but the princess's black lustrous eyes were upon him, and it almost seemed as though

they dragged from him by magnetic force the affirmative he pronounced.

"So good of you," she murmured, and smiled at him very pleasantly.

CHAPTER XI.

IN SPIITE OF WARNING.

It was with strange thoughts that, at the appointed hour that afternoon, Dale stood waiting on the princess's stairs. He hoped that perhaps the unknown girl herself would answer his ring, but instead, a grim old woman appeared.

She was very tall, and in spite of her age, seemed still vigorous, though the skin that covered her gaunt, hawk-like features was as yellow as parchment. The hooked nose and the projecting chin almost met over the cruel thin lips, and as he caught the glance of two pale, evil eyes of a cold blue-gray it seemed to him that he had either seen them before or eyes very like them.

"Mr. Dale?" she said, without waiting for him to speak. "My mistress is expecting you, sir."

She paused and looked him up and down, and then laughed wickedly to herself.

"Aye, aye," she muttered, with a kind of senile malice, "she is expecting you, our little Andrette."

Mumbling something unintelligible, she conducted him to a very pretty and dainty little drawing-room, carried out in an effective scheme of white and gold.

"What an old beldame that woman does look," thought Dale to himself when she had gone. Instinctively he took out a pocketbook and began, from sheer force of habit, to sketch the old woman's face.

"Only I hope," he muttered, as he paused and surveyed his handiwork, "she doesn't look quite such a fiend as my sketch has turned her into, somehow."

There was a light step just outside the door, and then a faint, restrained sound of scuffling, as if all those who struggled were equally anxious to avoid noise. It had a strange, sinister effect, this soft conflict and subdued muttering that reached him through the closed door of the dainty little drawing-room, and for a moment he stood intently listening.

Then something seemed to touch a familiar chord in his heart. He sprang hastily toward the door. As he put out his hand it opened suddenly, and the princess, dressed for motoring, in a neat-fitting jacket of moleskin and a heavy white veil, came rustling in.

"Isn't it too awful, Mr. Dale?" she said, a slightly heightened color on her cheeks. "That intolerable maid of mine has been drinking again."

Dale made no answer, but stared at her stupidly; the vague memory that had awakened in his mind died utterly away.

"I would send her off this instant," continued the princess, "but it would break my dear old nurse's heart. And, after all, it is not often Betty breaks out like this."

"Betty," repeated Dale, like a man in a dream.

"That's her name," the princess explained—"Betty Brown; she is my old nurse's daughter, and it is only for her sake I keep Betty."

"It must certainly be trying," said Dale slowly.

"I am sorry for the delay," she remarked again. "I don't want to be overtaken by the dark."

Dale murmured something suitable as he opened the door for her, and then following her, had just closed it behind him when he seemed to hear the faintest echo of a cry of pain, poignant with inexpressible agony, and yet so low, so instantly suppressed, that he could not be certain whether he had heard it at all, and whence it had proceeded, or whether it had not been a trick of an excited imagination.

But already the princess was in the street, where a smart-looking electric-car was waiting for them, and though reluctantly enough, he saw nothing for it but to run down after her. As he assisted her to her seat she suddenly produced two letters from her capacious muff.

"I had nearly forgotten them," she said. "Do you mind posting them for me?"

He walked across to the post-box near, and in slipping them in noticed that the uppermost one was addressed to Sir George Bellville.

At first, after he had taken his seat by the princess, he had been surprised to see that she intended to drive the car herself, but he soon perceived that she was thoroughly competent. Proceeding at a moderate pace, she kept her machine well under control, steered with considerable dexterity, and showed a good regard for the customs and courtesies of the road.

The more Dale studied her the more he recognized in her a woman of unusual mind and character. Commonplace in appearance, dowdy in dress, there was yet about her a curious magnetism to which no man could be entirely indifferent, and to which Dale's sensitive artist nature responded readily.

Her gift was not of the beauty of which men tire, but of the mind that is always fresh, and few ever escaped from her fascination until she herself threw them away.

As it was, she had worked herself through many disadvantages, from her birthplace in a low Liverpool court, where all the evils of life flourished, up to her present position of apparent wealth and rank, through a career where the mile-stones were the ruined souls of the men on whom she had smiled as now she smiled on Arthur Dale.

"Mr. Dale," she said suddenly, "I wonder if you know how handsome you are? Men are sometimes rather ashamed of their good looks; I hope you aren't."

"I don't think so," he laughed, finding her abrupt frankness rather piquant. "Are you not afraid of making me vain?"

"Now, I see, you are angry with me," she remarked, with a quaint grimace; "but do not forget I'm old enough to be your mother."

"Hardly, I fancy," said he, laughing again, "seeing I am twenty-five."

"And I——" she answered. "It is a profound secret. You will not betray it, will you? But I am five years older in age and two centuries in experience."

"Oh, well, if you are over two hundred years old I am prepared to admit you might have been my mother."

The princess, after that, did most of the talking, speaking freely and intimately. There was, somehow, a warmer

tone in her conversation, and it surprised Dale to see how friendly they seemed to have become. On one occasion she made a half-sad, half-bitter reference to her past life that impressed the young man with a sense of sympathy toward one who had suffered.

From what she said, it seemed she had been married young to Prince Fianona—which appeared to be an Italian title—and Dale gathered that though the prince had been fond of her, he had been a man of vulgar habits and of an absolute hatred toward artistic interests, which naturally filled so large a part of her life.

"Shortly before he died," she remarked, "the poor fellow made me promise never either to paint or to sketch again. He seemed to be possessed by a morbid hatred of the arts."

"But surely——" exclaimed Dale.

"Ah," she interrupted, "one must keep one's word; that's necessary, if one is to steer straight through this tangled world. Especially a promise to the dead."

What could Dale do but bow before so high a display of principle?

Almost certain was he now that Belville had attempted to inveigle him into a plot against a perfectly innocent woman of the highest character.

He grew quite indignant, and in his angry thoughts there was, for the time, small room for memories of certain soft brown eyes, however sweet and pleading, or of a certain gentle, sad face.

They grew even more intimate when they began to discuss the portrait of the princess that Dale was to paint soon, and then quite suddenly she brought the car to a full stop.

"What's the matter?" he asked, for into her eyes had come a sudden fear, as though she perceived some danger from which they had but barely escaped.

"I was thinking," she replied, "that we'd better turn here and go back."

They were in a deep and narrow lane, in one of those solitary patches of country still to be found near London. To turn here would be awkward, even dangerous, for a deep ditch ran by the side of the road.

Dale looked at her in surprise.

"It's an awkward spot for turning,

isn't it? Hadn't we better run through that grove of trees in front? We'll probably find an easier place to turn farther on."

She agreed with him, and started the car slowly forward.

Suddenly he was aware that she was looking at him curiously, though the moment she realized that he had perceived she turned hastily.

"I didn't make you angry just now, did I," she asked softly, "when I said you were so handsome?"

"Certainly not," he answered; "why should you think you had?"

"I like the lad," she murmured, her hands moving restlessly on the steering-wheel. "Besides, he would add just the supreme relish to the whole affair—pay the child out beautifully, and give the Lamb a lesson."

Then she seemed to remember that she was muttering aloud and broke off, frowning.

"A foolish trick of mine," she said, with a forced laugh. "I learned it during three of the most monotonous and tedious years of my life that I spent once in France. I think we can turn here."

She seemed in hesitation as she slackened the speed, and her rather heavy features showed a perplexity, even an alarm, quite unwarrantable.

"But if you just pass that grove," said he again, "turning will be easy and safe."

Again she started the car, and this time it bounded forward rapidly—faster, in fact, than it had theretofore traveled.

There was a curious set look on her face, as if the pace made her nervous. He leaned forward to suggest that she should moderate it, and at the same moment it was as if the car bounded in the air. Dale found himself flying through space to crash headforemost into a small bush and to the green turf beyond. He lay quite still, at first, conscious only of a pain in his left arm.

With an effort, remembering that the princess might also be hurt and in need of help, he dragged himself to a crouching position. He vaguely saw two men, a few yards farther on, rise from behind the shrubbery on the roadside, and with bludgeons in their hands come running toward him.

Faintly he recognized in the first of them Wilkes, and in the second that thin red-whiskered man whom he had seen running in blind panic through the mist on that night of battle.

Between them and him ran the princess, with arms uplifted, though whether in encouragement, in defiance, or in greeting he could not tell.

He tried to get to his feet, and with the motion a terrible pain shot through his body.

A tumult of shouting and wild oaths reached his deafened ears.

Before his fleeting sight floated a cloud of pale, angry faces and brandished weapons.

Then he fainted.

(To be continued.)

MRS. PICKETT'S TEMPTATION.

By John Barton Oxford.

WHEREIN a connivance with
the criminal turns out to be
an assistance to the virtuous. ✱

It was a gentle tapping that sounded at the back door—so gentle, indeed, that it seemed almost apologetic; yet at the sound of it Mrs. Pickett started nervously in her chair, and her hands, which were holding a piece of yellowed paper close to the feeble light of the lamp, began to tremble.

Nevertheless, she arose, and making her way across the creaking floor of the tiny kitchen, answered the summons.

On the door-step stood a disheveled young man, his clothes covered with dust and torn by the underbrush of the woods; his shoulders drooped with weariness, and a two days' growth of stubbly beard covered his face. She noticed, with a little gasp of surprise, a small, well-defined scar on the left cheek.

The instant the door had opened the stranger had removed his battered felt hat, and now he lifted to Mrs. Pickett's face a pair of very tired blue eyes.

"Good evening," he said in a low voice, which also had something of apology in it. "I hope I haven't startled you. Can you get me something to eat? I'm willing to pay you for it," he added, in smiling explanation.

She looked at him doubtfully for a

moment. Her heart was pounding madly, and she felt her knees weakening beneath her. A second glance, however, gave her courage. He was not a large man, and, moreover, he was very plainly tired out; his face, too, had an expression of almost childish frankness.

Mrs. Pickett swallowed what few of her misgivings remained and stepped back from the door.

"Come in," she said, holding it open for him to enter. "I guess maybe I can accommodate you."

The young man shuffled into the little kitchen, and sank into a chair against the wall with a sigh of relief. In the fuller light of the room his appearance was even less disquieting than it had been on the door-step.

Despite the fact that he was covered with dust and haggard and unshaven, there was something rather attractive about his face. The last of Mrs. Pickett's apprehensions vanished as she began to bustle about preparing the meal. The stranger sat very quietly in his chair, his head tilted back against the wall, and his eyes closed. Presently his hat slipped from his hand to the floor, and Mrs. Pickett, looking up from the place she was setting at the table, saw he was asleep.

A grim light came into her eyes. She tiptoed cautiously to the sleeper's side and stood looking down at him.

"Guess I didn't have no call to be scared of him," she muttered half

aloud. "That is, if it really is him," she added.

She moved noiselessly to the clock on the mantel-shelf, and from beneath it drew a paper—a copy of a circular she had seen at the post-office two days before. She had copied the circular, that she might recognize this man and avoid him; that she might lock herself in the house in case he appeared in the vicinity.

That she would ever assume the offensive, in the event of meeting him, had been the farthest thing from her mind; now that he was here, such a course seemed absurdly easy—he was so frail-looking and so altogether worn out. She unfolded the paper and ran her eyes over the description it contained, fitting it bit by bit to the sleeping man before her.

"'Five feet seven and a half,'" she read. "That part's all right. 'Weight, one hundred and forty-six pounds.' Looks most too pindling for that, but maybe he does. 'Blond hair and blue eyes.' That fits to a T. 'Sandy complexion.' You can't tell nothing about that, he's so sunburnt, but it might be sandy just as well as not. 'Small scar on left cheek.' If I had any doubts, I guess that would settle 'em. I guess it's him, all right, and I guess I might just as well have the reward as anybody else. There ain't nobody who needs it any worse'n I do, that's one thing certain."

She dropped the paper into the fire and then put the supper she had prepared onto the table, after which she shook the sleeping man into wakefulness.

"Your supper's ready now," she said, as he sat up staring about him stupidly.

He rubbed his eyes, and for a moment seemed trying to collect his scattered senses.

"Supper? Ah, yes. Thank you," he said, at length. He drew a chair to the table and began eating hungrily, like a man half famished.

Mrs. Pickett sat watching him narrowly. She was perfectly cool; there was not a trace of agitation about her. Very deliberately she planned it out in her mind. She would offer to get him some fresh water; then, as soon as this ruse had got her clear of the house, she

would go to the wood-shed and load the double-barreled gun.

As soon as he had finished his supper she would order him to the front room and mount guard over him until such time in the early morning as she could summon aid from the workmen on their way to the quarry.

No sooner had the plan formulated itself in her mind than she proceeded to act upon it. She got hurriedly to her feet and lifted the water-bucket from its shelf by the sink.

"Maybe you'd like some fresh water?" she hazarded.

"Don't bother," said the man between mouthfuls. "I'll get it myself if I want any."

"I'd just as soon," she said, and slipped out of the house.

Once outside, she set the bucket on the ground, softly opened the door of the wood-shed, and cautiously felt her way through the darkness of the place to the corner where the old shotgun rested in the angle of the walls. Fumbling about on the shelf above her head, she found the box of shells, snapped the breech open, and thrust one into either barrel. Then she made her way out of the wood-shed and stood panting in the back yard.

Through the kitchen-window she could see her unsuspecting guest still eating hungrily at the table. A sudden wave of compunction seized her. Her knees began to tremble, but by sheer force of will she stilled the tumult of her mind.

"He ain't nothin' to me," she told herself angrily. "I hadn't ought to have no fool qualms about sendin' him back. If I don't do it, some one certainly will, an' I need that money—Lord knows how I need it."

She crossed the yard, to stop irresolutely again at the back door. Three times she essayed to lift the latch, but each time her arm fell back to her side with the simple deed still unaccomplished.

The man had finished his meal and was pushing back his chair. Mrs. Pickett took up the gun, and with a heart pounding violently against her ribs, opened the door and entered the kitchen. The man's eyes widened in surprise. They fixed themselves finally on the rusty shotgun in Mrs. Pickett's hands.

"It's loaded," she said, very grimly.

The young man smiled in deprecating fashion.

"I'm mighty sorry I've frightened you," he said gravely, his eyes still on the gun.

"You ain't scared me none," Mrs. Pickett returned. Then very deliberately she cocked the gun and raised it to her shoulder. "You'd better be goin' now," she commanded.

The young man seemed not in the least perturbed. He looked quite steadily into the barrels of the gun and then at the woman.

"I guess you've made some sort of a mistake," he began.

"I ain't made no mistake," Mrs. Pickett returned. "You'd better go, an' go quick, before I change my mind again. I know who you are. You're Dave Samson. You got out of the penitentiary at Danville day before yesterday. They're huntin' for you all around these parts now, an' there's a cirkeler down to the post-office givin' a description of you an' offerin' a reward of a hundred dollars for your capture. I know'd you soon's I clapped my eyes on you. You can't fool me. You'd better go."

Her guest stood before her, smiling quietly. He made no motion to leave. Instead, he put his hand into his pocket and drew out a handful of silver and began picking out some coins.

"How much is my supper?" he asked calmly.

"I don't want your money," said Mrs. Pickett. "You keep it. Like enough you'll have need of it before you get away from 'em. Now you'd better start right off. You're temptin' of me every minute that you're staying here. I need money very much. There's a mortgage on this house, an' the interest is long overdue.

"They're goin' to foreclose on me if I can't raise fifty dollars before next Wednesday. When you come here tonight I was figgerin' it up an' prayin' that I might get that fifty in some way, but I ain't a goin' to get it in no such way as this. I ain't goin' to send you back to Danville for the sake of havin' it. Now, you go, d' yer hear? You go right off."

The young man looked at her thoughtfully for a moment. Then he picked up his battered hat and opened the back door. On the threshold he turned. Mrs. Pickett, with the gun still held to her shoulder, was watching him with steady eyes.

"I'm much obliged to you. I sha'n't forget it," he said quietly, and disappeared into the darkness.

She heard his dragging footsteps crossing the yard. Suddenly she put down the gun and ran to the back door.

"Say, you," she called.

"Yes," came a voice out of the darkness; "what is it?"

"You'd oughter be careful about goin' to houses," she cautioned. "An' if you was to take some of the outside shells of shagbarks an' grind 'em up between your hands an' rub 'em on your hair 'twould darken it up considerable."

"Thanks," the voice returned simply.

She heard him crashing through the underbrush at the edge of the woods. She listened intently until the sounds grew fainter and finally died away. Then she sank down on the door-step and wept weakly.

Two days later, Mrs. Pickett opened a letter addressed to her, at the post-office, and stood staring stupidly at a fifty-dollar bill pinned to the bit of scribbled paper within. It was some time before she could collect herself sufficiently to read the brief note written in a sprawling hand.

MRS. PICKETT.

DEAR MADAM: I was not Dave Samson, as you seemed to think. As you will see by my signature, I am a deputy sheriff of this county. I got Samson the next night after I'd had supper at your house. It was a good supper. I don't know when I ever enjoyed one more. But for your hospitality I could never have kept on Samson's trail and finally run him down. Permit me, therefore, to enclose half the reward, which, it seems to me, belongs to you.

A mist rose to Mrs. Pickett's eyes as she read.

"I sha'n't take it," she told herself stoutly. "but maybe I'll borry it for a time."

CLIPPING THE TIGER'S CLAWS.*

By Hudson Douglas.

How a handful of men made the torrid zone hotter than it had been for some time.

SYNOPSIS OF PREVIOUS CHAPTERS.

BEATRIZ YBARRA, cousin of President Ybarra, of the South American republic San Benito, loves Colonel Armytage, a British officer, but Ybarra, who wishes to marry her for money, abducts her from New York by means of his tool, Gonzalez. Through a chain of circumstances she is accompanied by Fifi Sariol and Cornelius Kerrigan. Armytage gets up an expedition to rescue Beatriz, and enrolls Allardyce and Corbyn, who start for San Benito on a ship carrying, unbeknown to them, arms for San Benitan revolutionists, and on which an unexplained mutiny occurs, wherein the young men have a taste of fighting. Ybarra learns of the cargo of this ship, and when it arrives at La Boca, the San Benitan seaport, just after Beatriz is brought there, decides to destroy it with torpedoes.

This he succeeds in doing. Allardyce and Corbin escape destruction by diving just before the shock, and are rescued from the water by Challoner, a New York newspaper correspondent and a friend of Armytage, who has been warned that the two young men from Manhattan will turn up on the Hilario. Challoner, consequently, feeds them, gives them dry clothes, and sets them on the road to La Boca, where they pass the president and his kidnaped fiancée, and Kerrigan and Fifi—bound, by carriage, to Cruz Alta, the country's capital—and are "spotted" by Gonzalez. In some fear they go to the Golden Eagle, a hostelry whose landlady is devoted to Armytage, but in the night are captured by lancers, sent after them by Gonzalez, and taken to the city prison. Meanwhile, Ybarra and his party have decided to go still farther into the interior, to a place known as the Golden Horseshoe. Challoner learns of this and informs Armytage, who has at last arrived safely in San Benito, and the latter, with his little troop, picked to accomplish the rescue of Beatriz, sets out and first liberates Allardyce and Corbyn, and then proceeds, with colossal nerve, to travel through Cruz Alta and after the fleeing president.

CHAPTER IX.

CORNELIUS KERRIGAN INHABITS A PALACE FOR HALF AN HOUR, AND DOÑA BEATRIZ DEFIES THE PRESIDENT, TO THE GREAT GLEE OF QUINTIN SARIOL, WHOM SHE INVITES TO ATTEND HER WEDDING.

THE city of the golden spires was sparkling in the morning sunshine when two dusty traveling-carriages drew up before the great pink-marble palace which looks loftily across the Plaza Principale.

Cornelius Kerrigan helped Fifi from the first of these, and Karl von Rudolf stood bowing by the other while the president alighted.

Beatriz came forth also, but without availing herself of the hand extended by her august relative.

They all went up the steps together, and the guard presented arms, while such of the populace as were astir and passing through the square peered in upon them from behind the gilded railings, gaping at the spectacle, but giving no sign or sound of approval. For the Tiger's yoke pressed full heavily upon the common people. But as they reached the pillared portico and there came running forth to greet them one who had been watching from within a cry of "*Viva Sariol!*" resounded from the background, and Ybarra bit his lips.

The black frown faded from his face, however, as he shook hands warmly with the effusive newcomer, and turning to his cousin, he said ceremoniously:

"I have the honor to present to you Don Quintin Sariol, vice-president of the republic and my most valued friend."

*Began February All-Story Magazine. Single copies, 10 cents.

"I kiss your hands. I am your humble servant," declared Sariol, with breathless volubility. "But have you heard, Ybarra, that the Englishman is hard at your heels? Pray pardon my abruptness, *señorita*, but we live in troublous times, and it is for his excellency's welfare."

"What is the latest from La Boca?" asked the president, cutting him short. "Has any message reached you from the Pass?"

"The wires are down," said Sariol, without attempting to suppress the malice in his voice. "There will be no more messages in the meantime, I'm afraid."

Ygnacio Ybarra glared at him, but made no other comment on the news.

"Order fresh horses, Von Rudolf," he snapped over his shoulder.

The general coolly transmitted the order to an adjacent sentry in a tone of indifferent contempt. He was no lackey, and though it pleased him for the present to ride at the head of the presidential life-guards, he was ready and willing to show this South American savage that it was Karl von Rudolf, and not a menial, who wore his livery.

Nor was his excellency slow to realize that he had made a false step.

"I wish you'd take my cousin in to breakfast, Karl," he said, in a conciliatory tone. "I've business to discuss with Quintin, here. Show those two, also, where to find food, if you will."

Fifi and Kerrigan followed without a word as Beatriz moved forward on Von Rudolf's arm, and after she had been bestowed within the president's private apartment they were shown into an adjoining room, wherein was spread a repast, at the sight of which Cornelius whistled mellifluously:

"No more chop-sooy and cheap rapid-fire meals for mine. It suits me better to inhabit a pink palace."

Von Rudolf shot a swift inquiring glance at Fifi and withdrew.

Ybarra did not waste much time over affairs of state with the vice-president. He rejoined Beatriz within ten minutes, and having seen that all her wants were supplied, dismissed the servants, helping himself from the buffet before he sat down beside her.

"Listen, my cousin," he said sharply, and she looked up at him in obvious astonishment. "There is no time for further trifling, and we must understand each other clearly. The crisis approaches fast. I have not weeks to woo you in. I have no option but to act. You know that I intend to marry you; and that our union will save San Benito from——"

She interrupted him with flashing eyes.

"Peace, man!" she cried, "and do not perjure your unfortunate country."

"You know that I will never marry you. Not even in order to fill your empty purse. You know that if you are forced from your dictatorship to-morrow San Benito will be better off than it is to-day."

"You know that my troth is pledged elsewhere, and let me tell you, since there is no time for further trifling, that I hold my least pledge sacred. Would you could say as much!"

His face grew livid as she thus defied him, for heretofore their intercourse had been more guarded, and he had never doubted that in time he would be able to achieve his object. Her allegiance to his rival, set forth thus in words for the first time, was in itself sufficient to provoke him to the point of frenzy.

"Who was this English dog that would dare to beard the Tiger of San Benito?"

"*Cuerpo de Dios!*" swore the president. "I'll free you from your troth, fair cousin, and no least pledge will bind you to a lifeless body. Without, there! Chamberlain! Tell Father Agustín he is to travel with us. We leave for the Golden Horseshoe within five minutes. Let the people know that I shall bring back a wife—the Doña Beatriz Ybarra."

The official, who had come at his call, went hastily to carry out his orders. When the travelers set forth again there was a priest in their company.

All the church-bells were ringing wildly. At the street-corners there were cheering crowds. His excellency's waning popularity had apparently received a fillip, and that in the nick of time.

But Quintin Sariol, standing on the palace-steps, whence he had sped the couple whose announced engagement had so pleased the fickle populace, laughed with low glee.

"The fool!" he said, speaking thus disrespectfully of his superior. "The stupid fool—to think that such a woman would defy him with mere words!"

A long day's journey took the tired travelers into the far recesses of that great *sierra* whose volcanic peaks look down on five republics. Von Rudolf, faithful to his task, went with them all the way, and it was well he did, since within a wild ravine they were beset by a strong body of insurgent infantry, wild mountaineers of no mean marksmanship, who under efficient leadership might have put period to this history there and then.

But after a fierce contest they were driven from their coigns of vantage with only the death of a dozen government troopers to their credit. The pass was picketed, fresh horses were harnessed in the place of those which had fallen under fire, the two women came forth from among the rocks, where they had been led to shelter, and they reached safety without further accident.

The Golden Horseshoe, so called from its shape, was an enormous cup-like hollow, scooped by some eternal power out of the sheer cliff-face which spread for leagues on either side of it and towered mistily above. Its only opening looked across the intervening hilltops, toward Cruz Alta, and was guarded by a ridge of rock through which a narrow entrance had been blasted by the hand of man.

Within lay an almost circular expanse of level pasture, watered by a stream which showed like a white thread against the golden rock five hundred feet above. Sheer in the center there rose from the green plain a steep, unscalable islet of stone, an altar to the gods, pushed up entire out of the solid earth. Upon this stood a number of low white buildings.

With a sufficient garrison at the opening of the Horseshoe, the place was absolutely impregnable, and it was Ybarra's property. He had been born there, on his father's *hacienda*, and still farmed the fertile acres which encircled his old home.

"Is this the local Sing-Sing?" asked Kerrigan, staring about him in blank amazement. "It won't be easy to break out, at any rate. Did you ever see such a place, Fifi?"

"It's very wonderful," the girl answered gently, her eyes on the golden glow cast by the setting sun upon the stupendous walls about her.

Their carriage stopped under the fortress-like shadow of the central height and they alighted. Ybarra and his cousin took the lead, and all slowly descended a steep winding staircase cut in the solid rock.

It was a long climb to the top, but once there they could not restrain the exclamations of surprise that rose to their lips as the full beauty of the scene displayed itself.

Even Ybarra was touched for an instant as he looked back toward the city of the golden spires all glittering in the tender sunset beyond the blue hills in between.

"You will be happy here, my Beatriz?" he whispered. She turned from him with a faint gesture of contempt.

"Not with you," she answered steadily.

Her hand was on her heart, against which nestled a fragrant faded rose.

Cornelius had not failed to notice that the stair was well guarded; he saw the twinkling camp-fires on the inside of the ridge that encompassed the Golden Horseshoe, but noticed that in addition to the sentry at the top of the steps, there seemed to be no armed men on the plateau.

"It's safe enough without them," he mumbled disconsolately. "No visitors without wings will trouble us here. I'd hate to go too near the edge on a dark night."

There were wide, unkempt gardens about the white buildings, and beyond those a thicket of low trees which sheltered them from any sudden blast.

"Two acres and a cow—on the top of a perch!" Kerrigan remarked to Fifi, and showed her the quadruped in question—a draft-ox at the windlass of a well.

Once within the walls, however, they forgot the strangeness of their situation in the midst of solid comfort. Ill kept as the surroundings seemed to be, there was no detail missing in the interior of the rambling dwelling.

Servants were waiting to receive

them; all were treated with consideration. The women were taken charge of by two maids, the president had two men to attend him, and Cornelius one. The priest seemed to have betaken himself elsewhere for the time being.

But he appeared again at dinner-time, and ate below the salt with the two others, while Beatriz sat with her cousin at a separate table.

It was a silent meal, and every one was glad when it was over. Ere they separated for the night, however, Ybarra took the opportunity to explain his plans and dispositions.

"You know the rules, Dom Agustín," he said, turning his chair to face the other table; "you, Mr. Kerrigan, may learn from the holy father. My poor house, here, with all that it contains, is at your disposal, so long as you do not transgress my rules.

"I have come hither to attend a wedding—my own with Doña Beatriz Ybarra. It will take place within our private chapel to-morrow night, at this hour. Dom Agustín will marry us, and you two will attend as witnesses.

"Ladies and gentlemen, I give you the good night."

He arose, and left them sitting, dumbly conscious of their helplessness in his hands. Presently the women went also, weary enough to forget their troubles in sleep.

Kerrigan was fatigued almost beyond endurance, but he sat on for an hour and sucked a very sound cigar that the priest had produced, hoping to extract therefrom some temporal comfort.

Ybarra seemed to have forgotten that neither could understand the other, and the rules of which he had spoken could not, therefore, be imparted to the stranger within his gates. Father Agustín knew no English, Kerrigan little Spanish. They compounded on such few words of Latin as the actor still carried in his memory, and having exhausted these, parted with mutual compassion, very little the wiser for their intercourse.

It was late next morning before Cornelius awoke, and having breakfasted, at the instigation of his servant, in his own apartment, he went out into the garden to smoke.

Fifi and Beatriz were there before him, pacing an open path together, chatting in low tones, with ever and anon an anxious glance in the direction of Cruz Alta.

"You haven't a revolver, have you, Mr. Kerrigan?" Fifi asked as he approached.

"I have that," he answered cheerfully. "But why?"

"Would you—will you let me have it this evening?" Beatriz begged impulsively, but he shook his head.

"Excuse me, Miss Ybarra," he replied, "but—if there's any shooting to be done, I'll do it myself. Now, don't mistake my meaning. I'm going to be best man at this interesting ceremony to-night, and it will be my painful duty to show cause why the ceremony should be stopped by the simple but effective method of corpsing the chief performer.

"If you see me stoop to tie my shoelace, stand fast—and don't scream."

She shuddered in the sunshine.

"There you are, you see," he added. "You'd be far too nervous."

"I meant it for myself—not him," she whispered. "That would be the easier way."

He shook his head decidedly.

"I'm going to be best man," he repeated. "Leave all the details to me."

A flash as of lightning flared up from above Cruz Alta, and was followed by others in steady succession.

"What's that?" Fifi asked curiously. "It's been going on all morning."

"Somebody jiggling a shaving-mirror in the sun," Cornelius answered from the depths of his superior knowledge. "Perhaps they're trying to signal. That's it, sure. A heliograph, of course. They're talking to us here. I only wish I could read it."

"Beatriz!" cried a voice from the veranda behind, and turning, they saw the president.

"Our good friend Quintin Sariol sends his respects and asks me if he may attend our wedding. Shall I say yes?"

"Say yes," Cornelius whispered to her from behind, and on the impulse of the moment. She nodded, and his excellency looked well pleased.

"I'm glad you're agreeable," he re-

marked, and went back again to where, at one side of the house, a field telegraphist was receiving and answering the distant signals.

The day passed somewhat drearily despite strong efforts on the part of all to show at least an outward unconcern. The two girls dreaded, in anticipation, the seemingly inevitable tragedy that every hour was bringing nearer. Kerrigan was cudgeling his brains for some faint semblance of a plan to prevent the atrocious wrong Ybarra was ready to perpetrate.

He knew too well that it would be but by a miracle that he could hope to carry out his wild idea of shooting the wrongdoer down on the steps of the altar. His excellency was by far too clever, too well accustomed to such methods, to afford him any opportunity of using the ineffectual weapon he had strapped to his ankle. (He had done this with the idea that he might be searched.) Come what might, he could not let the victim of the wrong take her own life.

"I'd throw myself off this cliff if it would help her," he reflected wretchedly. "But, as things are, that would be worse than a useless sacrifice. We'll have to wait and see what happens."

The dinner-hour came round relentlessly, and with it Father Agustín appeared again. The five of them sat mutely through it, and after coffee had been served Ybarra rose.

"Come, cousin," he said coldly.

She followed him without a word.

The priest went next, and after him walked Kerrigan, with Fifi leaning heavily on his arm.

"You mustn't faint," he said to her in an anxious whisper as they passed through a long passage. "Be brave—for just a little while longer."

She shook convulsively, but soon her steps grew steadier, and he was able to spare a morsel of mental advice to his own raw nerves.

"Keep cool, you shivering snipe!" he said savagely to himself, "and, when the time comes, act like a man."

They went downward into the earth, by steps that were slippery with damp and gray with mildew, toward soft music that came as if from behind closed doors.

"A merry sort of marriage—in a catacomb!" commented Kerrigan inwardly. "But all the more convenient for a funeral."

A double door in front moved noiselessly back upon its hinges; a blaze of light burst through. Kerrigan crossed the threshold of the church behind the priest, and stared about him blindly for a moment as he moved toward the altar.

It was indeed a most surprising scene that met his view.

A cave in the interior of the tableland on which the *hacienda* buildings stood had been converted, in the course of many lifetimes, into a chapel, perfect in every detail, from the most intricate carving of the massive pillars to the grained arches of the natural roof. The loving labor of centuries had gone to make the cave a casket worthy of its purpose.

It was a masterpiece—a monument to the dead men who had perfected it.

The crash of a great organ echoed in the vault above, and many voices were uplifted in a curious chant. The edifice was full to overflowing, and the effect was almost deafening.

Ybarra stopped before the altar, and his cousin faced him as the priest passed up the steps. Fifi would have gone forward, but he held up his hand, and from the ranks of men in uniform on either side four stepped forward.

Two tackled Kerrigan, and in such wise that he had little chance to struggle. The other two took each a hand of Fifi's, holding her gently where she was.

The whole affair had been stage-managed to a nicety, and Beatriz Ybarra, looking wildly about her, saw all chance of escape cut off.

The singing ceased and at that instant there came thrusting up the aisle Don Quintin Sariol, in boots and spurs, and breathless from his journey.

In his great haste he had forgotten to doff his hat, and when he did so it was too late to stay him in his purpose.

"Let no man move a finger, or I fire!" he cried. And no man did move.

For he had the prospective bridegroom by the throat at arm's length, and with his head bent back upon the altar. In his right hand he held a cocked revolver,

with the muzzle making a white mark on the prospective bridegroom's forehead.

For a tense moment this endured. Then Ybarra spoke, quite calmly.

"You're earlier than I expected, Armytage," he said. "I wish you wouldn't press so hard upon your pistol."

CHAPTER X.

DON QUINTIN SARIOL SHOWS CURIOSITY, AND SUFFERS THE CONSEQUENCES WITHOUT COMPLAINT, WHILE JOAQUIN GONZALEZ SHOWS THE WHITE FEATHER.

IT had struck Quintin Sariol as highly humorous that his superior in the executive of San Benito should have assumed the task of bending Beatriz Ybarra's will to his.

"The wedding ceremony will be entertaining—to the spectators," the vice-president told himself, and grinned across the table at his secretary.

"Make me a cipher message to his excellency," he commanded. "Say that affairs of state will take me to the Golden Horseshoe on the instant, and that I hope to reach his side in time to attend his nuptials."

"Afterward, order horses—three relays."

"And any escort?" asked the man of letters.

"I'll take two orderlies. Von Rudolf and his men have doubtless left the road safe, and—I'm not afraid."

He left the room to change his clothes for the journey, and his underling glanced after him through gold-rimmed glasses.

"You're a deep well, Don Quintin," said that worthy to himself, "and if you meet a few Reds by the way it will not inconvenience you. I only wish I knew which of you is coming out on top."

There was an answer to the message waiting when Sariol came in again.

"At half past nine to-night," it said, and that was all.

"I'll start at once, and dine with them at eight. It will be amusing to watch them together," he reflected mischievously, and so set forth.

He made good speed upon the journey, finding fresh horses ready for him

at each stage, and sunset saw him at the entrance of the gorge wherein the president had been attacked the day before.

"We'll wait on this side until dark comes down," he told his scanty escort. "It will be safer then than in the half-light."

He threw his reins to one of the two troopers and sauntered along the roadside, smoking contentedly, as they ensconced themselves behind a boulder to avoid unfriendly observation.

A hundred yards away he, too, sat down and looked about him curiously.

Suddenly his attention became concentrated on a split tree-trunk not a stone's throw from where he was sitting, he saw clearly a brown gun-barrel resting upon the fork, and behind it two white eyeballs that were fixed steadily on the top left-hand pocket of his waistcoat.

He did not stir, nor yet cry out, because he had already recalled to mind the unfortunate fact that a warm wind was blowing from behind him, wherefore his voice might not carry far in that direction.

He did not move when he heard stealthy footsteps on the splintered shale among the undergrowth at one side.

When a sharp voice said "Hands up!" he held his hands up promptly.

Some one behind him drew the pistol from its holster in his belt, and having made sure he had no other arms concealed about him, said suavely:

"Thank you. I think you may drop your hands now, if you wish. But don't make any noise."

The speaker stepped in front of him, a slim youth in the uniform of an officer of cavalry, and Sariol looked non-plused for the first time.

"What means this outrage, *señor teniente?*" he asked stiffly. "Is the vice-president of San Benito to be treated thus by soldiers of the republic?"

"Call up your men, and order them to lay their arms down," his captor ordered, as if he had not heard, and Sariol did so.

The troopers tramped along on foot, leading the horses, and stared up to where he was sitting.

They handed their weapons over at a word from him, and were bidden to

face about and get back to Cruz Alta at top speed, on foot. A thing they set out to do without delay, being only too thankful that their throats had not been cut.

But Sariol was led, still smoking philosophically, into the presence of Major Armytage, who seemed pleased to see him.

"We met in Cruz Alta three years ago, Don Quintin," said that gentleman in response to Sariol's puzzled inquiry.

The vice-president looked relieved.

"My old friend Don Antonio!" he exclaimed. "I am delighted. I might have known. But then your men are wearing our new uniforms. Von Rudolf will be jealous if you don't look out. And when he hears how you rode through Cruz Alta. In—*pataploim!* Out—*sass!* He will be almost cross with you. You're brave, my old friend, and, as they say, none but the brave deserve—success."

"Ybarra's at the Golden Horseshoe?" Armytage asked as they sat down together by a deadwood fire within a hollow on the hillside.

"He is. And it may interest you to know that he intends to wed the Doña Beatriz to-night. The hour is set for half past nine, and I was on my way to the ceremony."

He turned his head to hide the malicious grin called forth by the major's startled malediction.

"It's only half past seven now," he added tentatively, looking at his watch. "There is still time."

"Excuse me for five minutes," his host interrupted, and calling Corbyn over from an adjacent fire held whispered conversation with him.

Don Quintin made no demur when he was presently requested to exchange his clothes for a full cavalry uniform. He yielded up his papers without protest and supplied the correct countersign as if he had been performing an agreeable duty. Which in part he was, since any misfortune which might overtake Ybarra would help his own succession, whereas, once the president had the mastery of his cousin's millions, he himself might look for a short shrift.

It therefore suited his own hand to help the Englishman, and, when that

rash spirit rode forth on his risky errand, he knew all that Quintin Sariol could tell him concerning current dispositions at the Golden Horseshoe. That did not amount to a great deal, since his excellency had always been astute enough to guard the secrets of his final refuge very jealously, but Armytage was glad to gather all the details thus available.

The night passed quietly after he had gone, and Don Quintin made himself quite at home with his remaining hosts. He was, at worst, a cheerful scoundrel, with few illusions as to honesty in walk or conduct.

"In San Benito we are not yet civilized," he said to Allardyce as they sat smoking, "and might is right. My friend Ybarra rules with a high hand, and he has Von Rudolf to help him, but now that there is a woman in the case we may see changes."

"Lopez, of Paraguay, was still alive when I was born, and he had cause to curse the petticoats before he died. Ybarra also calls himself 'the Tiger,' but as for me, I need no alias. When the time comes I shall be merely Sariol, the President, and at your service always."

The bait was clumsy. Allardyce ignored it and the other said no more.

Next day hung very heavily on the hands of those who were waiting the news which did not come.

The orders left by Armytage with his subordinates were that they should stand fast for four and twenty hours, whereafter, failing receipt of word from him, they were to act as should seem to themselves most fitting.

When dusk came down again, Corbyn and Allardyce consulted long and anxiously. With them now lay responsibility for the next step and twenty lives as well as their own depended on their decision, wise or unwise.

"Let's put it to the others first," Corbyn suggested, after they had formed a plan whose sheer foolhardiness had for sole excuse the lack of any one more feasible, and his friend readily approved the proposition.

"You talk to 'em, old chap," said Allardyce, "and I'll look after the vice-president."

Corbyn agreed, and to the group

which gathered round him while the Englishman relieved the guard explained the matter thus:

"The game's against us, boys, at this stage and we're going to chance a bluff. You know how weak our hand is, and I'll tell you honestly that it may cost us all our chips. If any of you feel like coming in, it's boot and saddle right away, but we'll think none the worse of those that stand out."

He stooped and loosened his own horse's halter from the picket-line, led Allardyce's also to the spot where their accouterments were stacked and got both ready for the road. Some one had saddled Sariol's before he went back for it, there was much noiseless bustle in the neighborhood; and, when he numbered off the ready rank in front of him, there were just twenty men who had made up their minds to go the limit.

"There's no four-flushers in this bunch," said a gruff voice reprovingly.

Corbyn laughed softly as he answered, "That's a sure thing, McGuire."

They led their mounts, all fresh and willing after the long rest, down to the roadside, where they were on the point of starting southward when from the direction of Cruz Alta there was audible the thud of many hoofs, the clank of metal, the echo of an angry order.

Out of the shadows which lay thick in the ravine appeared two shaggy heads, bent beneath wicked-looking horns and swaying to and fro on heaving shoulders. Slaving lips blew steamy breath almost in Corbyn's face before he realized that he saw nothing more nightmarish than mountain-oxen. A span of twenty shuffled past, the rear-most yoke bent almost to the earth beneath the weight of a high two-wheeled cart.

The driver was on foot, wielding both whip and goad. Perched up above him on the vehicle there was a woman, quarrelsomely inclined, to judge by the way in which she presently began to rate him for their slow progress. The man made no reply beyond redoubling his efforts to hasten the pace of his leisurely team.

"Halt, there!" cried Allardyce, and at the words dark figures darted out upon the driver, who obeyed with busi-

ness-like celerity. The woman sat quite still and did not even scream.

Corbyn ran up.

"Drop that gun," he said to her in English. "I've got you covered. Climb down, quick!"

His tone was ominous, and she did as she was bidden, descending from her perch with the agility of a young girl.

"Who—who are you?" she asked, her accents thin and shaky as she peered intently at the uniforms about her.

And Corbyn snapped, "Shut up, Gonzalez. Don't ask silly questions."

He had recognized his enemy's voice.

A hurried consultation resulted in the release of the wagoner, who proved to be a stupid peasant, pressed into the present enterprise at pistol-point, and he made off rejoicing, after he had handed over all his passenger's property, consisting of a rifle, a rusty revolver, and a full suit of man's apparel.

As to Gonzalez they were in two minds till Sariol begged speech of Allardyce and helped them to a prompt decision.

"Where are you taking me?" the spy asked fearfully of the two troopers who had bound his hands and were now thrusting him toward a point where the highway hung starkly over a deep gorge within whose unseen depths a mountain stream made mournful music. He tottered as he walked, his teeth were chattering, great beads of perspiration bedewed his pallid face. In his ridiculous disguise he made a singularly unattractive picture, and they who had heard of the Hilario answered sternly, "To a safe place."

He gave vent to a groan and would have fallen but for their support.

At the edge of the precipice they dropped him, a huddled heap, and drew back while a half-circle of their comrades hemmed him in with ready rifles.

Corbyn had charge of the firing-party.

"Get up, Gonzalez," he adjured the guilty wretch who was groveling wildly at their feet.

"Don't shoot! Don't shoot, *señor!*" that coward screamed. "Show mercy for a moment. It's worth your while, I'll swear. Don't shoot! I'll buy my life from you. I'll tell you everything. Don't shoot!"

"There's nothing you can tell us we don't know," said Corbyn. "For the last time, stand up."

"My God! but wait," protested the doomed man. "I'll tell you how to reach the *señorita*. I'll take you through the Golden Horseshoe."

"If you could take us through the Golden Horseshoe we might spare you—for the present," Corbyn interpolated in a most disbelieving tone. "But since you can't—"

"I can; I can," Gonzalez urged. "There is a way—"

"Take him along with you," said the American contemptuously, and at the words the whimpering poltroon was picked up and led away.

To the vice-president they bade a brief farewell before they started and he expressed great pain at parting.

"Yes, I'll go straight back to Cruz Alta," he assured them. "I do not pine to interfere between you and the Tiger, although I should have liked to look on—from a distance.

"Some day I may be able to serve you, *caballeros*. Until then, discretion, eh? That which has passed is safe as between gentlemen. Command me to his excellency. Good-by."

He went his way on foot, chuckling contentedly, and they silently on into the mountains.

Gonzalez had no horse and they had none for him. He tramped along, his wrists fast to the stirrup-leathers of the leading files, and was most useful there, for, at two different points, the road was picketed. He gave them timely warning of the fact and they were able to pass onward unmolested at sole cost of a short *détour* in each case.

At three in the morning they were within long range of the ridge enclosing the *hacienda*.

"There are two regiments behind it," he told them in a terror-stricken whisper. "That foreign devil Von Rudolf is in command. We must bear west to where the stream comes forth, and then—"

He hesitated.

"What then?" demanded Corbyn suspiciously.

"There is the tunnel it flows through."

"Which will be guarded!"

"There is no guard, *señor*. That is the secret with which I have bought my life."

He looked up furtively and licked his dry lips, well knowing that the secret might be worthless.

"Your life will be short unless we get safely through," Corbyn said grimly.

Leaving the road, their way lay through the broken country at the base of that gigantic peak within whose skirts the *hacienda* was hidden; soon they had to dismount and lead their horses, but in time they came to the shallow gorge through which the crystal torrent, responsible for the due irrigation of its acres, had exit.

There was no great head of water running; and Gonzalez gasped relief; had the great sluice within the ridge been wide there would have been small hope for him.

"You'll have to leave your horses," he explained.

"Where?" asked Allardyce.

"There is an opening in the bank. See—there. With grass and water in abundance."

It was too late to balk at details, and they left the animals behind, hiding the saddles as best they could.

A breathless scramble up the bed of the stream took them to a low cavern in the cliff-side. They entered blindly.

Gonzalez led the way, a stirrup-leather fast about his waist; Allardyce held an end of it in one hand, while in his other was a cocked revolver.

"Make no false steps," observed that anxious follower, "lest I should blow your brains out by mistake."

"Be very careful, *señor*," begged his guide uneasily. "I'll take you safely through, upon my honor. A short half-hour will see us on the other side."

Nor did he speak beside the mark, for, five and twenty minutes later—five and twenty years they seemed to the torn and bedraggled climbers—the thick gloom gave way to dim starlight and they emerged within a well-like opening over which waved ghost-like grass and rustling leaves.

Allardyce drew Gonzalez back into the earth again.

"Why is this entrance left unguarded?" he inquired menacingly.

"It is his excellency's private exit, only known to him—and me," the spy replied. "By opening the water-gate above it can be blocked."

"Why is the gate closed?"

"To fill the dam up for the garrison."

They waited there till word came up the line that the last man was within touch, then Corbyn crept ahead to see and make sure that their course was clear.

"There's no one within sight or hearing," said Gonzalez. "We're well within the ridge, and all the troops are kept in close quarters there lest they should spoil or destroy his excellency's crops. See, there's Señor Corbyn signaling to you."

Up above, in the open air, no time was wasted.

Gonzalez pointed out the black bulk of the strange table-land on which Ybarra's refuge stood, and they held straight for it in single file behind him, their backs toward the twinkling points of fire which told them that breakfast was being made ready for the regalement of the regiments set there to withstand them.

He did not lead them to the stair-foot, where there was also a fire burning and a sleepy sentry ready to discourage visitors, but, skirting the other side of the plateau, reached a long range of cattle-sheds and byres.

"Be very cautious," he requested breathlessly. "The peons' quarters lie beyond these buildings and there may be dogs about."

Even as he spoke, one growled suspiciously and a dozen others at once answered it.

"Run!" said Gonzalez, and they ran, in time and no more to escape the pack which came hotfoot upon their trail as they shut to the door of the long stable they had entered.

They clambered to the loft above and from there through an ivy-covered trap-door into a crevice of the overhanging cliff.

At the far end there was a second door for which Gonzalez had a key, and, once within it, he assured them that there would be no pursuit.

"Only his excellency comes and goes

by this and the water-gate," he said. "The stair on which we stand leads to his private chapel."

CHAPTER XI.

THE DISAPPEARANCE OF DOM AGUSTIN AND OTHERS RESULTS IN AN APPOINTMENT FOR VON RUDOLF.

"I wish you wouldn't press so hard upon your pistol," said Ygnacio Ybarra. "It hurts my head."

"You'll have no head immediately," Armytage answered, and his trigger-finger trembled as he heard a rustle at his side.

"Unless," he added, doubtfully, "you are prepared to carry out the orders I shall give you."

"Spare him—for my sake, Tony," cried a woman's voice, and Beatriz Ybarra would have laid a timid hand upon his arm but that he ordered her back abruptly.

"Stand still!" he said again in Spanish, "or I fire."

"Let no one move," Ybarra echoed, "until I give the word."

Then their eyes met again, and he continued: "Tell me what you would have me do, and I—I'll do it."

Armytage tried hard not to look relieved. He had not dared to hope that he could thus coerce his rival, who, among many evil qualities, had never been accounted a coward. Ybarra's reckless disregard of death, his stubborn courage, had helped him to the place he held and enabled him to sit secure where a more cautious man would most assuredly have come to grief.

His smooth assent to that which was thus required of him, without demur or counter-stipulation, made things much easier for the Englishman.

"Order your men to ground their arms," that strategist requested, and the president complied.

His words were audible throughout the edifice. The rank and file laid down their rifles; the staring subaltern in charge cast sword and pistol clattering on the tessellated pavement. He felt the degradation of this strange surrender keenly, but for Ybarra's sake he yielded.

"Say, friend," Cornelius Kerrigan

broke in. "I'm on your side. I'll help you if you'll let me have a gun."

"Who is that man?" Armytage asked of Beatriz.

"Yes, he's a friend; he'll help," she replied. "I'll take a rifle also, Tony."

"Come up the steps, then, both of you," he said, and they came forward, armed. Their reinforcement carried matters more swiftly forward, and when Fifi also volunteered, the congregation was quite cowed by the three rifles leveled at them, while in the background was his excellency, helpless in the hands of a mysterious stranger, his very life dependent on their prompt obedience.

"Have the church cleared," commanded Armytage. "The women first and then the workmen; the troops will follow, with the lieutenant last."

"They are to leave the *hacienda* by the stairway. I have men posted there, and any one who speaks ere he or she sets foot upon the road below will be shot down without a moment's mercy. The first shot fired will also sound your death-knell. Bid them be very careful to obey exactly."

An angry light shone in Ybarra's eyes even as he confirmed this disposition. He could not imagine by what means Armytage had succeeded in obtaining entrance for the men of whom that anxious diplomat had spoken so glibly. He could not know that there were only two, or that these, in the uniform of his own army, had replaced the topmost sentries by the expedient of a flask of potent spirit duly drugged. For the first time he began to doubt the durability of his luck. If his opponent held the stairway, his own position would be doubly difficult.

There was no present help for it, however, and he heard his wonder-dumb dependents and his guards shuffle away in silence. They streamed up the long passage to its exit, out into the darkness, down the stair past the two troopers stationed there, without a whisper.

And when the keepers of the stair-foot would have questioned them the women broke and ran, with white lips, for the safe shelter of the huts behind the stables. Their men-folk followed sheepishly, and after them the soldiery came forth in impotent array.

The last to reach ground-level was the boy-officer who had been chosen to command the guard of honor. His black eyes were suffused with tears of shame, his empty fingers twitched convulsively, his cheeks were chalk-like in their pallor.

He formed his men up and marched off to camp, there to inform Von Rudolf of that which had befallen.

Ybarra was by this time bitterly repentant for that he had not bidden the general himself to attend the ceremony. But he had been so secure in the inaccessibility of his private stronghold that he had thought it more prudent to insure the safeguarding of the outer gate.

Furthermore, the said Von Rudolf had to perfection that most debonair and winning way with women which Don Ygnacio was ever striving to attain, but with equivocal success. It had not seemed advisable to his excellency to challenge comparison of himself with the *beau sabreur* in all the glory of full regimentals, and it had seemed still less so to expose that most susceptible young man to further contact with the Doña Beatriz.

He was still cursing his precautions for the general good when Armytage stepped back and bade him stand upright.

He did so gladly. The two rivals faced each other for the first time since they had dropped their masks. At one side stood the girl for whom they were prepared to fight to a finish. Fifi and Kerrigan looked on, the latter with his rifle ready for eventualities.

Armytage asked his name and, learning it, knew who he was. Corbyn had spoken of him.

"You know this place better than I, Mr. Kerrigan," he said pleasantly. "If you will reinforce my men above-ground I shall be easier in my mind. The stair-head must be held at any cost and if there's any other entrance to the *hacienda*, it will be well to guard that also. It won't be long before we have Von Rudolf to reckon with."

Cornelius sought a sign from Beatriz and she nodded. He went away to carry out the duty imposed on him, and, when he found that all the company he could count upon for the defense consisted of two devil-may-care cavalry

troopers with a West Point vocabulary, he barely escaped brain-fever; but he soon assimilated some of their ideas as to the wisdom of evading worry until that specter should assume a tangible and concrete shape, and so sat down to help them hold the fort there, since he knew no other vulnerable point.

While down below them the dumfounded guardians of the stair-foot squatted about their fire and spoke in whispers of the incomprehensible movements they had witnessed.

"You're foolish, Armytage," Ybarra said; "to come here thus. You have me at a disadvantage for the moment, but you can scarcely hope to escape with your prize. Can we not settle matters amicably? I'm willing to make terms."

Beatriz was about to speak, but checked the impulse. Armytage was looking fixedly at her half-cousin, whose eyes soon fell before the Englishman's straightforward glance.

"You take me for a fool, Ybarra," he answered presently; "and perhaps you're right. I'd rather be an honest fool than a clever rogue. But if you think I'm fool enough to take your word for anything, you've overshot the mark. Pardon my speaking plainly, but it will be best to understand each other.

"No terms that you could offer would tempt me to trust you. Your reputation is not that of a fool, and still less that of an honest man."

The president's pale face grew paler and his teeth clenched under the unvarnished rejection of his right to treat in honor with an enemy.

It was so long since any one had dared to twit him with his weaknesses that he had grown to think himself no worse in that respect than any of his neighbors. Upon his pedestal of autocracy he had been immune from criticism. Its personal application now stung him to the verge of violent outbreak.

But with an effort he controlled his feelings.

"You have me at a disadvantage," he repeated, "for the moment. What do you mean to do?"

"I have accomplished my immediate object," Armytage responded, "which was to prevent your molesting the lady who will shortly be my wife. I don't

know that I need discuss with you my further plans."

"It would perhaps be waste of time, if they have any reference to the Doña Beatriz," Ybarra countered, and his cousin at length broke silence.

"Tony," she said in a tense whisper, and her lover held out his right hand.

She moved toward him and he caught her in a close embrace which somewhat salved the hurt that his first words to her had left. All the time he kept his left arm free and both eyes fixed upon his excellency, who was inwardly cursing his astuteness.

"Tony," she said again, and shyly nestling against his shoulder, "there is a priest here. Why should we not——"

"We will, sweetheart," he answered rapturously, "and right away. It was to that end that I ventured to detain his reverence.

"Come forward, holy father. There will be a ceremony, after all."

Dom Agustín obeyed with terror-stricken readiness. Pinned in beyond the altar he had been prevented from escaping with the parishioners, and had waited dumbly while the two men talked.

"We'll need another witness," Armytage observed to the now blushing Beatriz. "Miss—Miss Florian might perhaps ask Mr. Kerrigan to step down. I'd go myself, but it would not be wise."

"I'll go," said Fifi bravely, and passed swiftly down the aisle. The echo of her footsteps became fainter and then ceased.

Ybarra moved an inch or two to one side.

"Stand still," his adversary ordered, and the words clicked like the snapping of a steel trap. He stood still, since he could see the blue-nosed bullets in the revolver-barrel. His teeth showed bare behind the black mustache and his whole attitude was that of a beast about to spring. Armytage held him at bay with unwinking watchfulness.

There was a sudden flash, and Beatriz uttered a single strangled cry as she saw Armytage sink to the floor without a sound. So instantaneous had been the impact of the great golden candlestick, which the priest had used as missile, that no shot was fired. The stricken man

relaxed his trigger-finger with the others, and lay starkly still.

Ybarra sprang at her and held her lips, his chaplain helping him to silence her. Voices resounded from the stairway. Fifi and Kerrigan were coming down together. The two men lifted her and disappeared.

She was aware of an unpleasant, earthy odor and that they were descending. Almost immediately they stopped and set her on her feet.

And one said sneeringly, "Your pardon, cousin, if we have seemed rough or hasty."

She did not answer, knowing that nothing she could say would help her plight.

The place in which they were standing was pitch dark, but she assumed that it must be a crypt connected with the chapel.

Ybarra spoke again, quite confidently, confirming her impression that it would serve no purpose to cry out for help.

"Dom Agustín will lead the way," he ordered. "Come, Beatriz. Tread carefully; the steps are slippery—in places."

He led her forward, and she followed his directions dumbly. They entered an abruptly sloping tunnel and began a journey which seemed never-ending.

Their progress was slow; twice Ybarra urged the priest ahead to greater speed; but as he was about to speak a third time, there resounded from in front a bitter and blood-curdling cry—a long-drawn wail that rose full-voiced without a moment's warning and thinned away into illimitable distance like the last echo of a lost soul's farewell. Even Ybarra shivered.

The girl beside him stopped and thrust her fingers into her ears; her knees were trembling under her; she would have fallen but that he upheld her and spoke soothingly.

"Be brave," he said. "We are quite safe."

"What—what was that?" she asked, a shrinking horror of him in her tone.

"It must have been . . . It was . . . Never mind," he stammered, "we are quite safe."

"It was the priest," she whispered brokenly. "And—and—you knew that he was going to his death."

"I thought he knew the secret," said Ybarra sullenly. "I would have warned him, but . . . It was an oversight—an accident. I was not thinking—I am not to blame. We must get on—away from here. Come. Close your eyes if you feel giddy. You need not fear while I am with you."

He struck a light and looked about him. His face was wet and ghastly.

A few steps farther down there was a cresset in the tunnel wall, and over against it in a niche a plentiful supply of pine-knots. He paused to kindle a handful in the iron basket and the light from them lasted until he had led his unresisting companion across the chasm into which their ill-fated predecessor had fallen.

It was a twelve-foot fissure within the very heart of the titanic altar upon which the *hacienda* stood, a crack which came together overhead and at some distance on either side of the tunnel; below it seemed to open out in bottle shape.

Beatriz, looking unblinkingly into its abysmal depths as Don Ygnacio guided her to safety on the other side, saw for herself the secret of which he had spoken.

The narrow stairway led directly to its edge and began again upon the other side. An infernal ingenuity had fashioned the steps on both sides in such wise that a stranger, either mounting or descending in the dark, must surely slip and so slide smoothly into space.

For those who knew there was a narrow gallery, a two-foot ledge cut for a man's height in the rock around the edge, skirting one corner of the open mouth.

Ybarra breathed more freely after they had set another hundred steps between them and the gaping *oubliette*.

"I hate this passage!" he said, savagely. "I've always hated it. Thank God, we're nearly through."

His spirits rose again, however, as soon as they had clambered unobserved from the ivy-covered cliff-face behind the farm buildings on which the entrance abutted. Thence they went forward to Von Rudolf's camp, and by the way Ybarra chatted volubly.

"Dom Agustín is dead," he said reflectively, "and more's the pity. But

the monks who made my private passage—the Golden Horseshoe was a mission when the Spaniards ruled here—must shoulder the responsibility.

"There is no other priest at hand and I must wait a day or two before I nominate a new chaplain. He was a faithful fellow, Beatriz, and always wide awake. He caught my idea about the candlestick at once—a telepathic sympathy, no doubt."

She bore with him because she must, but speechlessly, and was unspeakably relieved when the sharp challenge of a sentry interrupted his reminiscences; for then he took upon himself again the dignity of his high office and his habitual reserve.

Von Rudolf galloped out to greet them, when he heard of their miraculous appearance at the picket, and having satisfied himself that it was really they, made hasty disposition for their accommodation in camp, and walked at his excellency's side discussing all the aspects of the case and planning prompt reprisals.

They sauntered slowly through the lines, that their men might reassure themselves as to the president's capacity for further mischief (the story that the guard of honor had brought back had not improved his prestige)—and see beside him Doña Beatriz, the beautiful and the wealthy, upon whose whim, it had been rumored, depended all the back pay due them.

Von Rudolf's field-pavilion had been swept and garnished for his excellency's cousin. She pleaded fatigue and passed within, leaving the others to their own devices.

Once inside, secure from observation or intrusion, she threw herself despairingly on the thick rugs with which the floor was covered. Her head fell forward on her forearm; two tears of misery ran down her wrists, and then she slept, the deep and dreamless slumber of exhaustion.

When she awoke, refreshed and strengthened, it seemed strange to her that day had not yet broken. The inner chamber, where she lay, was dark, but in the anteroom beyond a lamp was still burning. And seated in a rocking-chair, was Fifi Florian, busily sewing.

She lay still for a moment, struggling to recollect, somewhat bewildered. Between the curtains she observed Fifi rise, as a step came softly toward the canvas porchway, which was also discreetly draped.

Some one tapped gently and a hand was thrust through with a note. Fifi, eyes downcast, squeezed the one and took the other; then she turned back and read the note, scribbled a hasty answer on the reverse side, entrusted that to the five fingers visible behind the screen, gave vent to a coy giggle as they made a grab at her and fled back to her rocking-chair with much modest confusion and a mincing gait.

The hand was withdrawn and steps died quietly away.

"Damn that fellow anyway!" commented the occupant of the rocking-chair, facing about with guilty haste as Beatriz came through, laying finger on lips with an imploring gesture.

"I'm one of Armytage's men," he explained. "My name is Allardyce."

CHAPTER XII.

THE MAN BEHIND THE TIGERSKIN TAKES PART IN A TRICKY TURN; AND FIFI FLORIAN TAKES A FRIEND'S PLACE.

BEATRIZ looked at him with an expression of the most blank amazement.

"Kerrigan made me up," he continued, as if anxious to dispel her doubts at once. "He would have come himself, but I am more like Fifi."

She held a hand up and he paused.

"I don't—I can't—where have you come from?" she asked dully. "How long have I been here?"

He looked at her in turn, and what he saw in her clear eyes helped him to understand.

"You have been here for nearly four and twenty hours," he answered, speaking distinctly, "and much has happened in that time. I think you must have had some opiate to make you sleep so long.

"In the first place, the major's none the worse for the priest's blow, which only stunned him. He has commissioned me to take you to the *hacienda*. I reached his side with the remainder of his force some hours ago and came on

here as soon as Corney—Kerrigan, this is—had fixed me up to look like Fifi.

"The pickets passed me readily enough and I went straight to Von Rudolf with a note from Armytage saying that you would be sure to want your maid. He brought me here and has been corresponding with me ever since. I told him in reply to his last *billet doux* that you were angry with him for disturbing you and that he must stay away until I want him.

"His excellency is at present on his way here from Cruz Alta, where he went yesterday to slaughter Quintin Sariol, who, he thinks, is plotting to supplant him. He intends to bring a priest back with him.

"The coast is therefore as clear as it will ever be, and, if you feel all right again, we'd better go as soon as possible."

"Yes, I am wide awake now," she declared. "I think they must have drugged the glass of water that I drank just before daylight. It seems so short a time since I saw dawn across the threshold. What chance is there of our escaping from the camp?"

"Where is the glass you drank from?" Fifi's double asked, and she fetched it along with a glass *carafe* still half full.

Allardyce held it up to the light, then shook it slowly. Its contents clouded over, and he chuckled.

"They're third-class criminals, and clumsy ones at that," he commented cheerfully. "Do you know Mr. Challoner, Miss Beatriz?"

She shook her head, and seemed surprised.

"That's all right then," said he. "And now if you will—if you will change your costume for that which I have brought you in this suit-case, I'll have you safely settled at the *hacienda* with the real Fifi by the time his excellency comes to pay his morning call upon you. But you must not delay a moment in the process, please. If he should catch us by the way——"

She caught up the case and had disappeared ere he could finish.

He turned away and lifted up a corner of the tiger-skin which covered a dim corner of the anteroom behind the chair in which she had been sitting.

"The game's afoot, old chap," he whispered. "If any trouble comes to you through the part you have played send up the signal and I'll come to your assistance."

"The *Wireless* will be wild if they hear how I've been behaving," he answered Challoner with a wry grin. "As for Ybarra, I don't give a damn. He doesn't dare interfere with me. I've too much pull. Crank up and get her going."

The Englishman dropped the rug over him again, turned the lamp lower, and passed swiftly to the porch. He thrust a hand out through the curtains there and waved it in a manner which he hoped might be set down as ladylike and languid. Soft footsteps once more sounded on the sun-baked soil without, and some one, stooping, kissed his fingers.

He shook with silent laughter, but composed his features as Von Rudolf pulled the screens apart and peeped in roguishly.

"Angel adorable!" whispered that flatterer in French.

But his charmer with shy gestures indicated the necessity of caution, so in pantomime he promised everything she asked and, as she drew back before him, crossed the threshold on tiptoe.

She raised her eyebrows and held up her hands, with a wild glance toward the inner room, always retreating. When he was opposite the rocking-chair she signed to him to sit down, while she assured herself that there was no one watching.

He did so willingly and waited with a complacent smile, while she tripped to the partition, laid an ear against it, listened for the fraction of a second and came back behind him.

Flash-like Von Rudolf's long legs were shot out in front of him, the rocking-chair tipped backward and a cravat of cord, across his throat, cut short the cry of anger and astonishment to which he would have given voice.

Allardyce choked him thoroughly and there emerged, from underneath a tiger-skin, one who, unseen, secured his ankles first and afterward his wrists. It was a very workmanlike garroting.

A scarf shut sight of the canvas ceiling

from his staring eyes. He choked and swallowed as the contents of a *carafe* splashed into his open mouth. To gag him efficaciously was easy, and after that he was quite powerless; sight, speech, and hearing were shut off and the languor of drugged impotence was loosening his limbs.

The Englishman made all his dispositions at top speed, then turned his attention to providing Challoner with an alibi which should be unimpeachable. He tied him also hand and foot, but tenderly, tucked him away beneath the rug again, patted his curly head approvingly and held up a handkerchief.

"Ready, old chap?" he asked.

The correspondent nodded.

"That was a tricky turn!" he said.

"Give Armytage my love, and don't forget to tell him that I'm working for the *Wireless*. I don't mind lending him a helping hand at an odd moment now and then."

"I'll tell him you're a wooden brick," responded Allardyce in a gruff voice. "What hope would I have had of getting his girl back to him, if you hadn't stepped up?"

"'Nuff said," snapped Challoner. "Get busy with the *mouchoir* or I'll bite you."

He signified, as soon as he was gagged and blinded, that he could live quite comfortably till relief came. Allardyce gave him a very gentle farewell pat, and pulled the rug up carefully.

There was another young man waiting when he rose. A shapely youth with motor garb and goggles, short coat and cap and puttees all complete, but who was blushing vividly.

She started at the sight of Von Rudolf's figure covered with a table-cloth and stood aghast when Allardyce faced her in the general's field-uniform.

"It's I, all right," he said to reassure her. "Do I look like him?"

"I thought it was he, and that you," she answered, staring at the outline in the chair.

"You're Challoner, a correspondent of the *Wireless*, come through Cruz Alta from the coast in search of news," he explained rapidly. "Your motor-bike's behind Von Rudolf's tent.

"Von Rudolf's going round the

pickets now and you'll go with him. When we get to the outermost we'll have to make a break for the stair-foot which Armytage's men hold now. If anything goes wrong you'll run for it, while I keep any friends that follow us in check. Whatever happens you make for the *hacienda*. Ready?"

"Quite ready."

"Off we go then, and—good luck to us."

He extinguished the lamp and they started.

Their way led through the officers' lines, and from the bell-tents the sound of snoring smote upon the small hours. Beyond these were the servants' bivouacs, rude shelters, screens of platted grass. And then the kitchens, where a night-cook, boiling water for the duty detail, sprang to attention as they passed and startled Beatriz so that she all but screamed. Von Rudolf had apparently succeeded in imbuing his subordinates with a profound respect for Austrian etiquette.

Allardyce lifted a forefinger in perfunctory response and, looking back from a safe distance, saw that the man had squatted down beside his fire again.

"I think that we'll pass current," he encouraged her.

They followed the made road which ran straight from the ridge to the stair-foot and twice met orderlies bringing reports in from the pickets. Allardyce opened these and read them, striking matches in the shelter of his great-coat, his chin well down within the collar.

The first of them he sent on into camp, the second was instructed to return whence he had come and bid the non-commissioned officer in charge await the general's arrival.

Allardyce lit a cigarette and, taking his companion by the arm, strode forward chatting cheerfully in French of the most nondescript. As they approached the outpost set half way between the *hacienda* and the ridge he stopped to illustrate a point of no importance, puffing smoke the while.

They turned the guard out in his honor despite his indifferent protest; he looked it over quickly and passed on. Only a last outlying picket lay between safety and disaster.

They had all but won through when from behind sounded the call to arms. A single rocket soared up and dropped two blue stars. They heard the sound of feet running after them and in front had to face seven rifles waiting the word to fire.

Allardyce gnashed his teeth and swore vociferously at the picket's corporal who presently came forward and was most apologetic when he saw the general, but would by no means part with him.

"It is by your own order, general," he said appealingly, "and you will doubtless have me shot like those poor fellows who let Señor Sariol through, if I do not obey the very letter of it. There were two stars and that means 'hold all comers whatsoever.' It is by your own order, general. My God! Do not push past me or I'll fire!"

"Now run!" cried Allardyce in such a tone that his companion did not dare to disobey. At that instant his left hand shot forth, the corporal fell over backward with a final grunt, while the mere rank and file, too bewildered by such a strange display upon the part of their redoubtable chief to offer further resistance, were glad to see him disappear into the darkness ahead. As soon as he was out of sight they judged it well to open an aimless fire upon the surrounding scenery.

Two or three bullets whistled past the fugitives, but they paid no attention to such trifles. What frightened Allardyce far more was the faint thud of hoofs behind his back, that did not die down, but gained in volume, until he knew that the pursuers must be dangerously near.

"Keep straight on," he told Beatriz abruptly and stopped short himself.

She knew that it would only hamper him if she should lag and went on, most unwillingly, but with renewed energy. If she were out of the way, there would be more chance for him. She heard the crack of his revolver and loud cries.

A moment later she fell headlong into the arms of a gray shadow traveling outward at a great pace and with others following behind.

"Who's this?" it asked most anxiously. She replied, "Tony! He's back there. Oh! quick—or you will be too late."

He was too late and that though he lost no single instant. There was a hot skirmish in the dark between his bandful and the hurried reinforcements which had made the picket's position impregnable to him. But for the darkness he would have been cut off from his own base and even as it was he had to fight hard to regain the stair-foot.

There he found safety in the end, but as he carried up the steep stone steps the slim boy whose recovery had cost the capture of another, his gray eyes were dim, and he held Beatriz very tightly to him, for she was doubly dear, since she had cost so much.

Fifi was waiting at the top and led Beatriz in to the house. Kerrigan and Corbyn spent the remainder of the night in proving to each other and to Armytage that when fate steps in, human effort is of no avail.

"It's just the narrowness that pinches," Corbyn concluded as day broke. "Less than a hundred yards we lost him by, I reckon. I wish that he had let me go instead."

A clear, cold dawn showed that the plain beneath was empty save for the customary outposts. The scant light strengthened and the sun changed the gray walls of their prison to gold. Spirals of smoke rose slowly from the ridge, and the world about them woke without discord. It seemed that they were not to be molested yet awhile, and, since the hour for a daylight attack was safely past, they tried to sleep.

Then Beatriz came forth in her own guise and paced the garden paths with Armytage till Fifi came to call them to breakfast. Both girls were heavy-eyed, but strove to show a brave front to the others. It was a melancholy morning.

They fumed and fretted all forenoon in forced inaction. It would have been sheer madness to attempt a sortie and yet every man among them itched to propose and to take part in it. But common-sense prevailed and no one annoyed his neighbors by suggesting an impossibility. Their business was to get the women safely to the coast and at all costs they must attend to that.

A sudden idea struck Kerrigan and he communicated it to Armytage, who jumped at it with concentrated eagerness.

"Where did you say they signaled from?" he asked. "The south side? Come along. We'll find the tackle if it's anywhere about the *hacienda*."

Nor had they far to look, for under a loose plank in the porch they discovered all the signaling equipment used for communicating with Cruz Alta when his excellency happened to be in the Golden Horseshoe.

Armytage carried the tripod out and Kerrigan the leather case containing the two mirrors. They set the apparatus up, sighted it on the main-guard at the ridge and the major, to whom all such matters were as an open book, sent an insistent call across to the enemy.

Within ten minutes there came back an answering flash, and he held speech with Don Ygnacio.

His first inquiry was as to Allardyce. Allardyce was alive.

He asked if Don Ygnacio would exchange him honorably for Gonzalez, but was informed that he might hang that individual out of hand and so save Don Ygnacio trouble. It seemed that Don Ygnacio was not at all pleased with his ex-spy.

"And—as to—the—Señor—Allardyce," Armytage read mechanically, turning the text of the flickering message into English for behoof of his listening men, "he will be shot—at—dawn—tomorrow. The rest—of—you—will be treated—likewise—when—the—time—comes!"

"We need waste no more words on him," said the major curtly. "I'll see whether I can't call up Cruz Alta. Vice-President Sariol might do something for us."

But ere he could achieve his purpose it had been forestalled, a message from the ridge forbidding the city to answer any signals but those preceded by the president's cipher. All he could do was to read off the news that came thence to the camp, and since the bulk of that was also coded he learned little.

Corbyn and Kerrigan in turn took their commander to one side in order to propound to him a private plan whereby each might take Allardyce's place; or, failing that, lead a forlorn hope to his rescue. It was, of course, impossible for Armytage to countenance such a

suggestion, or he would have gone forth himself.

Fortune had called a forfeit, fixing on Allardyce to pay it. That he would do so with good grace and manliness no one doubted. The irrevocable could not be gainsaid, no matter what it might cost to look on.

Next morning they could not help but rise early, so sleepless had the night been. Standing upon the cliffs they once more watched the dawn and heard the minutes tick away.

The doomed man's friends saw clearly through their glasses all that passed. There was a band, which played a dismal parody of the dead march, and, close behind it, a rough coffin on a cart. After the cart there walked a woman, closely guarded.

Armytage groaned aloud.

"Poor chap!" he said. "They've made him wear the clothes he was disguised in. What an inhuman brute Ybarra is!"

The sad procession halted half way between the two opposing camps, and waited there until all the troops visible had massed upon it. They formed a hollow square, on one side of which a dozen sappers had dug a narrow, shallow grave.

The woman stepped toward it without hesitation and stood facing the firing party, while an officer acting as provost-marshal declaimed in a loud voice her crime and its sentence. Faint echoes of his speech floated to the *hacienda* on the rare atmosphere.

And while the men there strained their ears in a vain effort to catch a chance word, they heard a cheery voice behind them saying:

"Gad! but I'm glad to see you all again."

It was Allardyce himself, who shook hands with them after they had got over their first fright.

"What's doing down there?" he asked wonderingly.

As he spoke, a thin, white, straggling vapor wreathed the rifles of the firing-party, the woman in front of them fell forward on her face and lay there, very still. A sudden, discordant crackle sounded jarringly upon the silence.

And, at that moment, Beatriz Ybarra,

come from her room, stepped out upon the piazza beyond the untidy flower-beds.

"Where's Fifi?" she called to them. "I can't find her anywhere."

But no one answered. All the others looked at Allardyce and he was looking down at where a dozen sappers were industriously shoveling.

(To be continued.)

GINGER HANDASYDE'S HOME-COMING.

By Robert Aitken.

OF a long-absent lover, whose second return dispelled the grief his first had brought. ❀ ❀

It was very hot in Sao Pedro.

The fat ship-chandler's clerk ambling along the shady side of the Calle Desierta paused for a moment to mop his moist countenance with an unpleasant-looking pocket-handkerchief. In order that he might do so the more conveniently he dropped upon the dusty pavement the tiny octagonal tin case, labeled for the mail, which he was carrying toward the lifeless post-office at the end of the street, and leaned his great white, green-lined umbrella against his shoulder.

The laths in the outlook of a sun-shutter behind him moved creakingly. A pair of hot, feverish eyes, peering out in vain quest of coolness or change, rested fretfully for a moment on the blinding brightness of the discarded package and were instantly withdrawn. The wayfarer, glancing mechanically upward, saw only the impenetrable screen.

A pariah dog paused perfunctorily to nose the glittering jetsam and he kicked it in the ribs. It snapped at his ankles and fled in haste with a mouthful of trouser-leg.

The fat man swore sanguinarily in seven languages, and disregarding in his wrath the adverse climatic conditions, sought with exceeding fervor some scheme of retaliation. The dog lay down in the dry gutter at a distance, with a view to making a meal of its mouthful.

The prayerful eye of the avenger

lighted upon the twinkling tin. He picked it up again, thankfully, sidled down the street in the shadow of the houses, and casting his missile with Teutonic accuracy, smote the enemy to its hurt. Wherefore he recovered the case and pursued his way peacefully, under a halo of perspiration, pocketing, with tender solicitude, the half-chewed shred of cloth which the cur had dropped.

The incident thus ended, Paul Methuen, who had witnessed it with languid amusement, lay back in his chair again with a groan of disgust.

He might have been a passenger by the same steamer which would take the parcel away from Sao Pedro but for a bout of fever which, coupled with Ginger Handasyde's unaccountable failure to turn up in time, had caused him to delay his departure for another week. It made him tired to think of such misfortune, and—in five minutes he was fast asleep.

Sleep is scarce and precious during the long days and nights when the Norte blows across Brazil like the breath of a blast-furnace. It is worth more to an invalid than many doctors, and when a grating, guttural voice recalled Methuen, the recently recovered, from the snow-sweet realm of dreams to a hateful, sweltering consciousness of mundane misery, that irritable convalescent rose limply from his lounge, resolute to shed the blood of the injurious soliloquist.

It was the ship-chandler's clerk, who, addressing to the still apparent mongrel noisy, Judas-like endearments, would fain have decoyed it within reach of his resentment. He was still carrying the curious case, had evidently missed the mail, and held it morally responsible for the mischance.

Methuen, lacking personal interest in grievances other than his own, opened fire upon him with an overripe orange. The bullet found its billet on the nape of the unconscious alien's neck.

That injured individual almost broke down under the bespattering misfortune which had thus befallen him, but faced about and entered into acrimonious argument. In the midst of this he threw the tin, with great cunning and swiftness, at his aggressor's head.

Methuen caught it deftly, weighed it for a moment in one hand that he might the more rakingly return the compliment, and—fell fainting.

His projectile clattered over the window-sill onto the flags. The fat man once more retrieved it hastily, and melted away in silence.

The dog barked delightedly, and having composed itself to slumber, snored audibly throughout the afternoon.

It was very hot in Sao Pedro.

Up-river, a hundred miles from the seashore, it was, if anything, hotter, and Ah Chow, chopping wood in the primeval forest, sighed wearily.

His heart was not in his work; his thoughts were wandering. It therefore happened quite suddenly that he chopped a joint off his left forefinger.

His attention thus pointedly recalled to the matter in hand, he dropped his implement and eyed the damaged digit frowningly.

"Velly dam luck!" said Ah Chow.

He tore a thread from the ragged shirt which composed his costume, and with the help of his teeth tied it tightly about the wounded finger. Then he lit a small fire, heated the blade of his chopper therein with great patience, and cauterized the bleeding stump unflinchingly.

As soon as the chopper was once more cool he went on deliberately with his chopping.

Toward sunset he rested from his labors in that direction, setting himself instead to the tying up of neat little bundles of fagots with cordage of flexible creepers.

When he had builded up a yellow man's burden of these he shouldered it uncomplainingly, and made his way with cautious steps toward an extremely in-

eligible abode pitched on foot-high piles above the sodden bank of a sluggish stream which wandered through the dankness of the undergrowth like a wounded serpent, wherein, on a couch of dry leaves, lay Ginger Handasyde, delirious.

Ginger was no coward, but he had fled from Sao Pedro to escape the epidemic which seemed likely to decimate the scanty population of that insalubrious spot.

He had been risking his life there for five long years in order to accumulate a competence, and now that he had almost achieved his object, had not scrupled to flee before the plague until such time as he should be ready to set sail from its stronghold for good and all.

That was already arranged. He had promised to accompany Paul Methuen by the Cotopaxi at the end of April, by which time the balance of his modest fortune would be forthcoming in cash. With it in his hand he would go back to civilization and match the Marchmont millions for a wife.

Such was the proposal. But the disposal was otherwise, for it fell out that the fever followed him. He was one of the first to be stricken by it in the little country village whither he had retreated.

Help there was none. The populace was panic-stricken, believing that he had brought the pestilence within their walls. They pursued, with him, the time-worn tactics of superstitious ignorance, turning him out into the wilderness to die—as live—as an all-wise Providence should ordain; and the chief of police officially annexed his portmanteau, which was a new one and looked quite nice once his initials had been inked over.

In deference to his obvious gentility, they exiled with him the surprised Ah Chow, professional vagrant, and ordered that unfortunate to see the matter through under pain of their most pronounced displeasure. After which they forgot all about both, for the sickness ceased.

Ah Chow, having pondered the situation deeply, decided to carry out the trust imposed upon him. He had found it not unprofitable in the course of his career to deal justly by such of the human race

as were of ruddy countenance, with red hair and blue eyes. He knew, moreover, that he might well be shot at sight by any black-browed local patriot who should chance to find him wandering from the narrow path of duty, and in view of all these inducements to well-doing set himself philosophically to tend his gratuitous charge, whom he feelingly described, for his own private edification, as "velly sick pidgin."

He was by no means a bad servant, and he was also a fatalist. He made his patient as comfortable as might be under the very uncomfortable circumstances, keeping house for him on such slender resources as were to be had for the gathering within the great forest which hemmed them in.

Ginger grew rapidly worse, and Ah Chow, who had acquired an easy liking for the helpless white man, correspondingly sorrowful. Sorrow and fatalism, with a blending of sanitary instinct, induced the faithful Chinaman to cut much fire-wood, which he persisted in storing immediately underneath the rotten floor of Mr. Handasyde's temporary dwelling, and Mr. Handasyde's cursory objections to this dangerous habit he met with diplomatic evasiveness.

Ginger spoke rationally to him at infrequent intervals, and Ah Chow always answered civilly to the best of his ability, lightly undertaking many ill-understood commissions of importance in order that his master might sleep with an easier mind, until, at the end of an interminable week, that sufferer did drop off.

He slept for twelve hours, and Ah Chow, watching over him, grew very weary. He slept for twelve more, and the Celestial decided that it was high time to jog the memory of that particular joss which had so evidently forgotten a worn-out Chinaman at his post.

He looked long and carefully at the motionless figure on its leafy couch, held a steel mirror to the breathless lips in vain, stood upright dizzily, and shook his head with doleful significance.

He placed his last handful of rice and a pinch of rock-salt upon the dead man's breast, moistened the lips of the corpse with water against the long journey, groaned heartrendingly, and applied a light to the carefully prepared

pyre. The dry fagots flamed up, sobbed inwardly, and were all ablaze.

Ah Chow sat down at a safe distance and closed his tired eyes, moralizing in the Confucian manner upon the mutability of human purpose until an indignant family of monkeys stopped his snoring with a shower of nuts. Having now overcome his mixed emotions, he returned to the site of the riverside mansion, which was now no more.

The most prized of the poor Oriental's worldly possessions was a small octagonal tin, of curious workmanship, wrought with quaint devices in the shape of dragons and serpents, enwrapped in blue paper bearing the announcement:

"Ly Chee."

This he sacrificed upon the altar of friendship, soaking it in the stream until its gaudy wrapper was no more, polishing it with the plenteous mud to an exceeding brightness.

He took two double-handfuls of promiscuous gray ash from the heap which represented the deceased, dropped them decorously into the tin, and having also enclosed a calling-card, inscribed with certain shaky words, entrusted to him by Ginger in an interval of sanity, soldered the lid back into its place with a brand from the fresh fire. That accomplished, he departed coastward circuitously, satisfied that he had done his best for all.

Arriving at Sao Pedro after manifold and blood-curdling trials, he sought out Samuelsen, the ship-chandler, from whom it had been his habit in happier days to purchase pennyworths of preserved ginger, and laid before that uninterested individual an addressed envelope containing a letter written by the defunct American, as also the tin containing all that was left of the letter.

By some species of legerdemain he produced, from nowhere in particular, the sum of two milreis in small change, the harvest of a somewhat prolonged plowing in the wilds of Brazil, and having spread that out upon the counter, departed penniless to hire himself, in the capacity of cook, to the skipper of a Swedish bark then lying in the roads. This, later on, had to be abandoned on the high seas because of the contagion which went on board with the Chinaman.

He was no longer visible when Mr. Samuelsen again looked up from his ledger and that gentleman was considerably incensed by his casual conduct, but, notwithstanding, instructed his clerk to forward the aforesaid letter and parcel to the address indicated on the envelope; which the clerk finally did at the inclusive cost of one and a half milreis, two trips to the post-office, and a vast amount of grumbling.

He and his employer were then taken very sick, and had to stay in bed for a fortnight before they felt better. Neither they nor the Swedish skipper can speak of Ah Chow without emotion to this day.

In due course, and after being disinfected by the quarantine officials, the letter reached its destination on Long Island Sound, and May Marchmont felt uncommonly glad, when she had read it, that she had had faith enough in the future to refuse that morning, for the fifth time, the unconditional offer of her cousin Tommy's hand and heart.

Five years is a long past to a modern maiden of three and twenty, and Tommy's annual appeal had served to remind her, however unnecessarily, that she had had no word from the other in all that interval; for Ginger, poor, proud, and dipped in debt before his departure, had not dared to put his aspirations into words ere he set forth for foreign parts in search of that fortune which should enable him to make her a similar and more acceptable offer.

Wherefore, perhaps, he had maintained a higher rank in her esteem than any of the other suitors who had come and gone in his absence.

His written message was a formal one, but she could read between the lines, and what she saw there brought brighter color to her cheeks. It would be her turn now to call the main, and—she owed this Mr. Handasyde some sleepless nights.

Should she take toll of him, when he appeared, for the quixotic stubbornness which had kept them apart, which might easily have cost them both their happiness? Or should she rather reward at once the single-minded purpose which had brought him back from the struggle to sue for his prize? She

laughed delightedly and went indoors out of the sunshine, making her way toward the drawing-room, whence sounded the voices of visitors.

There was evidently a man among them, and she thought it only kind to round up Tommy, the disconsolate, for his more masculine entertainment. That youth she discovered in a very dejected attitude and a capacious armchair before the fire in the billiard-room. He made no objection to honoring his aunt's tea-table with his presence, given that there was another male on the spot to support him against the opposite sex, and followed his cousin back to the drawing-room obediently, although without enthusiasm.

A tall, thin, cadaverous-looking stranger rose to intercept them as they came forward, and with a simultaneous start they recognized Paul Methuen.

"How d' ye do, Miss Marchmont?" said that wanderer cheerfully, and held out his hand. "How do, Tommy? How're things with you? All brisk, eh?"

They returned his greeting warmly, and having saluted the other guests, returned to talk. Paul had been a great friend of theirs before he went abroad.

"And how are you?" May asked. "You don't look very——"

"Strong as a horse," he reassured her heartily, "and quite ready for a good time. I had a go of fever, y' know, and lost weight a bit, but I'm all right now."

Thus euphemistically did he describe the very narrowest escape from death at which the overworked Danish doctor in Sao Pedro had ever connived during a long experience of that joyless spot.

"How did you leave Gerald Handasyde, Paul?" asked Mrs. Marchmont's gentle voice, and her daughter listened intently.

"Quite well last time I saw him," Methuen answered. "He went up-river to get away from the fever. It's been pretty bad this summer—or winter, as you call it here."

"What sort of fever?" Tommy interpolated, and the traveler turned toward him again.

"Yellow Jack," he explained in a lower tone. "A nasty, dirty sort of sickness. Knocks a man out in quick time—"

and then they cremate you in case you recover."

"I've heard of it," said Tommy. "When's Ginger coming home?"

May's heart sank as Methuen frowned and shook his head, but she could feel the edge of the envelope in her lap, and that helped to uphold her.

"Extraordinary thing!" he replied. "Ginger and I agreed, months ago, to travel by the same steamer; but he didn't turn up, although I waited a week for him, and I've had no news of him since."

"Perhaps we'll hear by the next boat."

More people came in, and there was nothing else said on that subject. Tea over, a move was made toward the tennis-courts, and Paul claimed May as his partner for the first set on the plea of his own rustiness; but she did not seem to be in the best of form, either, and they were hard pushed by their opponents.

The appearance of the station-messenger trundling up the avenue on his wheel afforded them a pretext for a moment's breathing-space while she inspected the mail.

Paul Methuen, watching her admiringly as she came tripping back across the turf, saw with sudden horror that she was carrying poised on her racquet what seemed a faithful duplicate of the curious case which he and the ship-chandler's clerk had used for projectile in the Calle Desierta a few short weeks before. He felt a sudden dryness of the mouth as she dropped it outside the court, and his play became so shocking that the other side had no difficulty in bringing the game to an early conclusion. Whereupon he apologized lamely, and she went off laughing to welcome some new arrivals, so that the ill-omened article lay where she had left it until Tommy Marchmont, passing, picked it up.

"More cigarettes, May?" he asked in jest.

"Open it," she answered, "to disprove the libel."

The case was tightly soldered, however, and the inquisitive youth had some difficulty in broaching it with his knife; but he finally managed to cut round the lid, and forcing the jagged ends back, handed it to his cousin, while half a dozen of the loungers looked on with idle curiosity.

She peered into it half fearfully, and inserting her hand, drew forth a calling-card, soiled and smeared with fine gray dust.

Methuen, watching the process with a fascinated stare, a sick anticipation of evil, sprang forward to save her, but he was too late; the card fell fluttering from her fingers as she pitched forward on the grass, unconscious.

Ah Chow's tin treasure had been lying in the Handasyde burial-place for a full week before May Marchmont could recover from the shock of its arrival; and then she went down-stairs again to face things out. Since she had sold her heart's secret to the world she would take the consequences without crying in public.

She blushed hotly when Paul Methuen met her in the hall—he had fallen into the habit of riding over every day to ask for her—but he kept his eyes elsewhere and talked triflingly, so that she soon recovered her self-possession and was even glad of his countenance as they entered the crowded drawing-room together. In the midst of that ordeal Tommy came in, and the two men carried her off to a quiet corner where they entrenched themselves, one on each side of her, and under pretense of being desperately hungry, occupied themselves with eating and drinking.

Paul was in the act of taking a large bite out of a larger muffin when the drawing-room door was opened from without and a hysterical housemaid announced: "Mr. Gin—Gerald Handasyde."

A frozen silence fell upon the company as a gaunt-looking individual, not unlike the dead man save for the damning difference between his snow-white hair and the flaming shock which had been the hall-mark of the genuine Ginger, advanced shamefacedly toward them, and no one answered his ingratiating "Good evenin'."

He flushed, and stopped short. Paul Methuen sprang up with a stifled exclamation, confronting him squarely. Tommy reenforced his friend, and the two together shouldered the stranger quietly but firmly out of the room.

May Marchmont, her face buried in her hands, set her teeth in an agonizing

struggle to be still. The others, in pity for her plight, took up again their broken sentences, and a low buzz of conversation once more filled the room.

Outside in the hall three angry men were eying each other unpleasantly, until at length the newcomer spoke for the second time.

"What's the matter with you all?" he demanded with great indignation. "Are you mad—or what?"

"Damn it, man," Methuen answered as fiercely, "you're dead! Dead an' buried—an' cremated at that!"

"I'm nothing of the sort, you fool!" said the specter savagely. "You're mad, at any rate." And it turned to Tommy.

"Well," it inquired coldly as he gaped vacantly in its direction. "Are you Tommy Marchmont—or a paralytic idiot?"

"Ginger, old fellow!" Paul Methuen interrupted in a choking voice. "Ginger, old fellow, is it really you?"

"Is it really me?" the apparition mocked without regard for grammar. "If I didn't know you too well, Polly Methuen, I'd try to knock some of the silliness out of your fat head. Who d'ye think it is, that you must bounce up and boot me out of this room when I drop into a friend's house for a cup of tea?"

"You're ratty, my lad; that's what's the matter with you! Take my tip and swear off for a time till you get the knots out of your noddle."

Methuen gulped down his joy, and unappalled by this utterance from the tomb, seized one hand of the wraith, which he shook like a pump-handle.

"Ginger, old fellow!" he repeated ecstatically. "Ginger, old fellow!"

And did not for a moment leave off his hand-shake.

Tommy bolted back into the drawing-room.

"It's him!" he cried, and at the words his cousin ran past him into the hall, so that when the less impulsive of the gathering followed her they were in ample time to behold the edifying spectacle of a beautiful heiress locked in the arms of a haggard and by no means lovely lover.

Gerald Handasyde was haled into the drawing-room again, and there held forth for a time concerning the manner

of his most marvelous resurrection; but the billiard-room edition of his adventures, which was shorter and more to the point, must serve the purpose of these pages, wherein brevity is the soul of worth.

"I saw the dirty heathen popping his beastly bundles under my bed," said Ginger wrathfully, while Tommy held a glass for him and Methuen poured, "but I'd no idea of the trick he intended to play me.

"I was feeling sort of cheap at the time, and thought a ten minutes' snooze'd do me a lot of good; but if you'll believe me, I'd no sooner closed my eyes than the worthy Ah Chow lighted me up and cleared.

"I'm pretty hardy, but not quite hardy enough to stop in bed when the blankets are burning, so I vamoosed the ranch, one-time. Nothing to wear but an old top hat of the heathen's that I grabbed in passing, all my money raked in by the local aristocracy before they footed me out into the forest, an' devil a shave for weeks—I didn't need a mirror to know that I was a beauty!

"I strolled over toward the village to investigate, but some sportsman with a second-hand rifle headed me off at the outskirts, which I took as a warning that I need never hope to be a welcome guest there.

"I struck out for the coast—it took me ten days to cover the distance—and when I at last reached it my troubles began. But I borrowed a pair of trousers from a man I met—that's the mark of his knife on my neck; he didn't want to oblige me—and swam out to an old dago windjammer that was loading timber in a creek I came to.

"The skipper shipped me as a distressed seaman, and I worked my way to New York. Got there last night, and wired you first thing this forenoon, Polly, you brute! You'll find my message when you get home, I suppose."

"And what about Ah Chow?" asked Tommy thoughtlessly.

"What about Ah Chow?" Ginger answered, with great earnestness. "Well, I think I'll have enough left out of the wreck to bury him handsomely.

"When I next meet Ah Chow he will suddenly cease."

THE FOUR-POOLS MYSTERY.*

By David MacLise.

The strange story of an apparition that came by night-time and wrought despair.

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SYNOPSIS OF PREVIOUS CHAPTERS.

COLONEL GAILLARD, with his younger son, Radnor, receives his nephew, Arnold Crosby, the narrator, at his Southern place, Four-Pools Farm. Arnold learns that the elder son, Jeff, disinherited by his father, has evidently gone to the bad out West, and that the negroes are terrified by a "ha'nt" that has appeared at Four-Pools. That night he sees a repulsive negro, "Cat-Eye Mose," sneaking with a bundle to where the ha'nt was seen. He tells his suspicions to his hosts, who laugh at him.

Radnor and Jim Mattison, the sheriff, are rivals for Polly Mathers. At a dance at Four-Pools, Radnor, in a sheet, plays the ha'nt. After some time he rejoins his guests, strangely excited. Polly snubs him. That night Arnold sees *him* sneak off mysteriously.

Radnor and Mose now have some secret. Ugly stories are circulated about Radnor and the ha'nt, some of which come to Polly, who becomes even colder.

Mose sees the ha'nt and is terrified. Arnold sees Radnor again at night. This time he drives away with a mysterious some one. Hardly has he gone when Mose rouses the household by his fright at having seen another awful ha'nt in the house.

Next morning five thousand dollars in bonds and cash is missing from the safe. Radnor, though perturbed, will not tell where he spent the night, but vows he knows nothing of the robbery. Ill feeling arises between himself and the colonel, who engages a detective. He reports that Radnor is guilty, but Crosby keeps this from the colonel, whose mental state is now of the worst, and who breaks out and brutally beats a negro suspected of chicken-stealing.

A trip is made to the Luray Cave. Polly Mathers leaves her coat in the cave and the colonel turns back for it. Radnor disappears, to turn up again very much excited, while the colonel fails to appear, and Crosby in anxiety sets out again for Luray, where he discovers the dead body of the missing man.

Crosby suspects Cat-Eye Mose, the more so that he has disappeared, and offers a reward for his apprehension; but the rest of the community believe Radnor guilty, because of the quarrels that he and his father had had, and because of the strangely excited condition that the young man was in on the day of the murder. Radnor will do little to help his cause, being so reticent that Crosby feels sure that he is shielding some one, and that the mysterious "ha'nt" is somehow involved. Jim Mattison is especially vindictive against Radnor, much to the disgust and grief of Polly, who is much broken up over the affair and shows that she is devoted to Radnor. Crosby, believing that the culprit may be the scapegrace brother, Jeff, telegraphs concerning him, but gets the reply that on the day of the murder Jeff was at his home in the West. The situation becomes hopelessly involved, and Radnor, at the inquest, makes so poor a showing that he is sent to jail. Then all of a sudden Jerry Patten, an old friend of Crosby's and an exceedingly clever New York newspaper man, sends word that he is coming down to solve the mystery.

CHAPTER XV.

JERRY COMES.

THE moment I caught sight of Jerry as he swung off the train I felt involuntarily that my troubles were near their end.

His sharp, eager face, with its firm jaw and quick eye, inspired one with the

feeling that he could find the bottom of any mystery. It was with a deep breath of relief that I held out my hand.

"Hello, old man! How are you!" he exclaimed with a smile of cordiality as he grasped it.

Then recalling the gravity of the situation, he with some difficulty pulled a sober face.

*Began January All-Story Magazine. Single copies, 10 cents.

"I'm sorry that we meet again under such sad circumstances," he added perfunctorily. "I suppose you think I've meddled enough in your affairs already; and on my word, I intended to stay out of this."

"But, of course, I've been watching it in the papers: partly because it was interesting and partly because I knew you. It struck me yesterday afternoon as I was thinking things over that you weren't making much headway and might like a little help; so I induced the *Post-Despatch* to send down their best man. I hope I shall get at the truth."

He paused a moment and looked at me sharply.

"Do you want me to stay? I will go back if you say so."

I was instantly ashamed of my distrust of the afternoon. Whatever might be Jerry's failings, I could not doubt, as I looked into his face, that his Irish heart was in the right place.

"I am not afraid of the truth," I returned steadily. "If you can discover it, for Heaven's sake do so!"

"Well, that's what I'm paid for," said Jerry. "The *Post-Despatch* doesn't deal in fiction any more than it can help. It's a terrible affair," he added briskly, as we climbed into the carriage. "The details, as I have them from the papers, are not full enough, of course, but you can tell them to me as we drive along."

I should have laughed had I been feeling less anxious. His greeting was so entirely characteristic in the way he shuffled through the necessary condolences and jumped, with such evident relish, to the gruesome details.

As I gathered up the reins and backed away from the hitching-post, Jerry broke out with:

"Here, hold on a minute. Where are you going?"

"Back to Four-Pools," I said in some surprise. "I thought you'd want to unpack your things and get settled."

"I haven't much time to get settled," he laughed. "I have an engagement in New York the day after to-morrow. How about the cave? Is it too late to visit it now?"

"Well," I said dubiously, "it's eight miles across the mountains and pretty

heavy roads. It would be dark before we got there."

"As far as that goes, we could visit the cave at night as well as in the daytime. But I want to examine the neighborhood and interview some of the people; so I suppose," he added with an impatient sigh, "we'll have to wait till morning. And now, where's this young Gaillard?"

"He's in the Kennisburg jail."

"And where's that?"

"About three miles from here and six miles from the farm."

"Ah—suppose we pay him a visit first, then. There are one or two points concerning his whereabouts on the night of the robbery and his actions on the day of the murder that I should like to have him clear up."

I smiled slightly as I turned the horses' heads toward Kennisburg. Radnor, in his present uncommunicative frame of mind, was not likely to afford Jerry much satisfaction.

"There isn't any time to waste," said Jerry, as we drove along. "Just let me have your account of everything that happened, beginning with the first appearance of the ghost."

I briefly sketched the situation in Four-Pools as I had found it on my arrival and the events preceding the robbery and the murder.

Jerry interrupted me once or twice with questions.

He was particularly interested in the three-cornered situation concerning Radnor, Polly Mathers, and Jim Mattison, and I was as brief as possible in my replies; I did not care to make Polly the heroine of a Sunday feature article. He was also persistent in regard to Jefferson's past.

I told him all I knew, added the story of my own suspicions, and ended by producing the telegram proving his alibi.

"H'm!" said Jerry, folding it thoughtfully and putting it in his pocket. "It had occurred to me, too, that Jeff might be our man—this puts an end to the theory that he personally committed the murder."

"There are some very peculiar points about this case," he added. "As a matter of fact, I don't believe that Radnor Gaillard is any more guilty of the crime

than I am—or I shouldn't have come. But it won't do for me to jump at conclusions until I get more data. I suppose you realize what is the peculiarly significant point about the murder?"

"You mean Mose's disappearance?"

"Well, no. I didn't have that in mind. That's significant enough, to be sure, but nothing but what you would naturally expect. The crime was committed, if your data is straight, either by him or in his presence, and of course he disappears. You could scarcely have expected to find him sitting there waiting for you, in either case."

"You mean Radnor's behavior on the day of the murder and his refusal to explain it?" I asked uneasily.

"No," Jerry laughed. "That may be significant and it may not. I strongly suspect that it is not. What I mean is the peculiar place in which the crime was committed. No person on earth could have foreseen that Colonel Gaillard would go alone into that cave.

"There is an accidental element about the murder. It must have been committed on the spur of the moment by some one who had not premeditated it—at least at that time. This is the point we must keep in mind."

He sat for a few moments staring at the dashboard with a puzzled frown.

"Broadly speaking," he said slowly, "I have found that you can place the motive of every wilful murder under one of three heads—avarice, fear, or revenge. Suppose we consider the first. Could avarice have been the motive for Colonel Gaillard's murder? The body had not been robbed, you tell me?"

"No, we found a gold watch and considerable money in the pockets."

"Then, you see, if the motive were avarice, it could not have been immediate gain. That throws out the possibility that the murderer was some unknown thief who merely took advantage of a chance opportunity. If we are to conceive of avarice as the motive, the crime must have been committed by some person who would benefit more remotely by the colonel's death. Did any one owe him money that you know of?"

"There is no record of anything of the sort, and he was a careful business man. I do not think he would have

loaned money without making some memorandum of it. He held several mortgages, but they, of course, revert to his heirs."

"I understood that Radnor was the only heir."

"He is, practically. There are a few minor bequests to the servants and to some old friends."

"Did the servants know that anything was to go to them?"

"No, I don't think they did."

"And this Cat-Eye Mose, did he receive a share?"

"Yes, larger than any of the others."

"It seems that Colonel Gaillard, at least, had confidence in him. And how about the other son? Did he know that he was to be disinherited?"

"I think that the colonel made it plain at the time they parted."

Jerry shook his head and frowned.

"This disinheriting business is bad. I don't like it, and I never shall. It stirs up more ill feeling than anything I know of. Jeff seems to have proved an alibi, however, and we will dismiss him for the present."

"Rad has always sympathized with Jeff," I said.

"Then," continued Jerry, "if the servants did not know the contents of the will, and we have all of the data, Radnor is the only one who could knowingly have benefited by the colonel's death.

"Suppose we take a glance at motives of fear. Do you know of any one who had any reason to stand in fear of the colonel? He wasn't oppressing anybody? No damaging evidence against any person in his possession? Not levying blackmail, was he?"

"Not that I know of," and I smiled slightly.

"It's not likely," mused Jerry, "but you never can tell what is going to come out when a respectable man is dead.

"And now as to revenge. With a man of Colonel Gaillard's character, there were likely to be a good many people who owed him a bad turn. He seems to have been a peppery old gentleman. It's quite likely, is it not, that he had some enemies among his neighbors?"

"No, as far as I can discover, he was very popular in the neighborhood. The indignation over his death was something

tremendous. "When it first got out that Rad was accused of the crime, there was even talk of lynching him."

"And the servants all appeared to be fond of him?"

"The old family servants were broken-hearted at the news of his death. They had been, for the most part, born and bred on the place, and, in spite of his occasional harshness, they loved the colonel with the old-fashioned devotion of the slave toward his master.

"He was in his way exceedingly kind to them. The night that old Uncle Eben died, my uncle watched all night by his bed."

"It's a queer situation," Jerry muttered, and relapsed into silence till we reached the jail.

It was an ivy-covered brick building set back from the street and shaded by trees.

"Rather more sumptuous than the Tombs," Jerry commented. "Shouldn't mind taking a rest in it myself."

We found Radnor pacing up and down the small room in which he was confined, like a caged animal; the anxiety and seclusion were beginning to tell on his nerves.

He faced about quickly as the door opened, and at sight of me his face lightened. He was growing pathetically pleased at having any one to talk to.

"Rad," I said with an air of cheerfulness which was not entirely assumed, "I hope we're nearing the end of our trouble at last. This is Mr. Patten—Jerry Patten, of New York, who has come to help me unravel the mystery."

It was an unfortunate beginning; I had told him before of Jerry's connection with the Patterson-Pratt affair. He had half held out his hand as I commenced to speak, but he dropped it now with a slight frown.

"I don't think I care to be interviewed," he remarked curtly. "I have nothing to say for the benefit of the *Post-Despatch*."

"Oh, you'd better," said Jerry, imperturbably. "The *Post-Despatch* prints the truth, you know, and some of the other papers don't. The truth's always best in the end. I merely want to find out what information you can give me in regard to the ghost."

"I will tell you nothing," Radnor growled. "I am not giving statements to the press."

"Mr. Gaillard," said Jerry, with an assumption of gentle patience, "if you will excuse my referring to what I know must be a painful subject, would you mind telling me if the suspicion has ever crossed your mind that your brother Jefferson may have returned secretly, have abstracted the bonds from the safe, and two weeks later, quite accidentally, have met Colonel Gaillard alone in the cave?"

Radnor turned upon him in a sudden fury. I thought for a moment he was going to strike him, and I sprang forward and caught his arm.

"The Gaillards may be a bad lot, but they are not liars and they are not cowards. They do not run away; they stand by the consequences of their acts."

Jerry bowed gravely.

"Just one more question and I am through. What happened to you that day in the cave?"

"It's none of your damned business!"

I glanced apprehensively at Jerry, uncertain as to how he would take this. He did not appear to resent it. He looked Radnor over with an air of interested approval, and his smile slowly broadened.

"I'm glad to see you're game," he remarked.

"I tell you I don't know who killed my father any more than you do," Radnor cried. "You needn't come here asking me questions. Go and find the murderer, if you can, and if you can't, hang me and be done with it."

"I don't know that we need take up any more of Mr. Gaillard's time," said Jerry to me. "I've found out about all I wished to know. We'll drop in again," he added reassuringly to Radnor. "Good afternoon."

As we went out of the door he turned back a moment and added with a slightly sharp undertone in his voice:

"And the next time I come, Gaillard, you'll shake hands!"

Fumbling in his pocket, he drew out my telegram from the police commissioner and tossed it on to the cot. "In the meantime, there's something for you to think about. Good-by."

"Do you mean," I asked as we

climbed back into the carriage, "that Radnor did believe Jeff guilty?"

"Well, not exactly. I fancy he will be relieved, though, to find that Jeff was two thousand miles away when the murder was committed."

Only once during the drive home did Jerry exhibit any interest in his surroundings, and that was when we passed through the village of Lambert Corners.

He made me slow down to a walk and explain the purpose of every one of the dozen or so buildings along the square. At "Miller's store" he suddenly decided that he needed some stamps, and I waited outside while he obtained them, together with a drink in the private back room.

"Nothing like getting the lay of the land," he remarked as he climbed back into the carriage. "That Miller is a picturesque old party. He thinks it's all tommyrot that Radnor Gaillard had anything to do with the crime. Rad's a customer of his, and it's a downright imposition to lock the boy up where he can't spend money."

For the rest of the drive Jerry kept silence, and I did not venture to interrupt it. I had come to have a superstitious feeling that his silences were portentous.

It was not until I stopped to open the gate into our own home lane that he suddenly burst out with the question:

"Where do the Mathers people live?"

"A couple of miles farther down the pike—they have no connection whatever with the business and don't know a thing about it."

"Ah—perhaps not. Would it be too late to drive over to-night?"

"Yes," said I, "it would."

"Oh, very well," said he good-humoredly. "There'll be time enough in the morning."

I let this pass without comment, but on one thing I was resolved; and that was that Polly Mathers should never fall into Jerry's clutches.

"Well, here we are," I said, as we came in sight of the house, "and the cook is expecting us."

"So that is the Gaillard house, is it? A fine old place. When was it built?"

"I'm not sure. About 1830, I imagine."

"And that row of shanties down there?"

"Are the haunted negro cabins?"

"Ah!"

Jerry rose in his seat and scanned them eagerly.

"We'll have a look at them as soon as I get something to eat. Really, a farm isn't so bad," he remarked as he stepped out upon the portico.

"And is this Solomon?" he inquired as the old negro came forward to take his bag. "Well, Solomon, I've been reading about you in the papers. You and I will have a talk by and by."

CHAPTER XVI.

WE SEARCH THE ABANDONED CABINS.

"Now," said Jerry, as Solomon and the suit-case disappeared up-stairs, "let's have a look at those haunted cabins."

"I thought you were hungry?"

"Well, I am, but I still have strength enough to get that far. Solomon says supper won't be ready for half an hour, and we haven't half an hour to waste. I'm due in the city the day after tomorrow, remember."

"You won't find anything," I said. "I've searched every one of those cabins myself and the ha'nt didn't leave a trace behind him."

"I think I'll just glance about with my own eyes," said Jerry. "Reporters sometimes see things, you know, where corporation lawyers don't."

"Just as you please," I shrugged. "Four-Pools is at your disposal."

I led the way across the lawn and into the laurel growth. Jerry followed, with eyes eagerly alert; the gruesome possibilities of the place appealed to him. He pushed through the briars that surrounded the first cabin and came out on the slope behind, where he stood gazing down delightedly at the dark waters of the fourth pool.

"Gee! This is great. We'll run a half-page picture and call it the 'Haunted Tarn.' I didn't know such places really existed; thought writers made 'em up."

"Come on," he called, plunging back to the walk, "we must catch our breath. I don't want this scenery to go to my head."

We commenced at the first cabin and went down the row thoroughly and systematically. At Jerry's insistence one of the stablemen brought a ladder and we climbed into every loft, finding nothing but spiders and dust.

The last on the left, being more weather-proof than the others, was used as a granary. A space six feet square was left inside the door, but for the rest the room was filled nearly to the ceiling with sacks of Indian meal.

"How about this—did you examine this cabin?"

"Well, really, Jerry, there isn't much room for a ghost here."

"Ghosts don't require much room; how about the loft?"

"I didn't go up—you can't get at the trap without moving all the meal."

"I see!" Jerry was examining the three walls of sacks before us. "Now, here is a sack rather dirtier than the rest and squashy. It looks to me as if it had had a good deal of rough handling."

He pulled it to the floor as he spoke, and another with it. A space some three feet high was visible; by crawling one could make his way along without hitting the ceiling.

"Come on!" said Jerry, scrambling to the top of the pile and pulling me after him, "we've struck the trail of our ghostly friend unless I'm very much mistaken. Look at that!"

He pointed to a muddy footmark plainly outlined on one of the sacks.

"Don't disturb it; we may want to compare it with the marks in the cave. Hello! What's this? The print of a bare foot—that's our friend Mose."

He took out a pocket-rule and made careful measurements of both prints; the result he set down in a notebook. I was quite as excited now as Jerry.

We crawled along on all fours until we reached the open trap; there was no trace here of either spider-webs or dust. We scrambled into the loft without much difficulty, and found a large room with sloping beams overhead and two small windows, innocent of glass, at either end.

The room was empty, but clean; it had been thoroughly swept, and recently. Jerry poked about, but found nothing.

"H'm!" he grunted. "Mose cleaned well. Ah! Here we are!"

He paused before a horizontal beam along the side-wall and pointed to a little pile of ashes and a cigar-stub.

"He smokes cigars, and good strong ones—at least, he isn't a lady. Did you ever see a cigar like that before?"

"Yes," I said, "that's the kind the colonel always smoked. A fresh box was stolen from the dining-room cupboard a day or so after I got here. Solomon said it was the ha'nt, but we suspected it was Solomon."

"Was the cupboard unlocked?"

"Oh, yes; any of the house servants could have got at it."

"Well," said Jerry, poking his head from the windows for a view of the ground beneath, "that's all there seems to be here; we might as well go down."

We boosted up the two meal-bags again, and started back toward the house.

Jerry's eyes studied his surroundings keenly, whether for the sake of the story he was planning to write or the mystery he was trying to solve, I could only conjecture. His glance presently fixed on the stables, where old Uncle Jake was sitting on an upturned pail in the doorway.

"You go on," he said, "and have 'em put dinner or supper or whatever you call it on the table, and I'll be back in three minutes. I want to see what that old fellow over there has to say in regard to the ghost."

It was fifteen minutes later that Jerry reappeared.

"Well," I inquired, as I led the way to the dining-room, "did you get any news of the ghost?"

"Did I? The Society for Psychical Research ought to investigate this neighborhood. They'd find more spirits in half an hour than they've found in their whole past history."

Jerry's attention during supper was chiefly directed toward Nancy's fried chicken and beat biscuits. When he did make any remarks he addressed them to Solomon rather than to me. His questions principally concerned the household and the farm, and Solomon in vain endeavored to confine his replies to "yes, sah," "no, sah," "jes' so, sah," but in five minutes he was well started, and it would have required a floodgate to stop him.

In the midst of it Jerry rose and, dismissing me with a brief "I'll join you in the library later; I want to talk to Solomon a few minutes," bowed me out and shut the door.

I was amused rather than annoyed by this summary dismissal. Jerry had been in the house not quite two hours, and I am sure that a third person, looking on, would have picked me out for the stranger. Jerry's way of being at ease in any surroundings was absolutely inimitable.

He appeared in the library in the course of half an hour with the apology:

"I hope you didn't mind being turned out. Servants are sometimes embarrassed, you know, about telling the truth before any of the family."

"You didn't get much truth out of Solomon," I retorted.

"I don't know that I did," Jerry admitted with a laugh. "There are the elements of a good reporter in Solomon; he has an imagination which I respect. The Gaillards appear to be an interesting family with hereditary tempers."

"That may be," I doubtfully acquiesced.

"H'm!" Jerry frowned. "And Solomon tells me tales of the colonel himself whipping the negroes—there can't be any truth in that?"

"But there is," I said. "He didn't hesitate to strike them when he was angry. I myself saw him beat a nigger a few days ago," and I recounted the story of the chicken thief.

"I see! A man of that sort is likely to have enemies he doesn't suspect. And how about Cat-Eye Mose? Was Colonel Gaillard in the habit of whipping him?"

"So I understand; but the more the colonel whipped Mose, the fonder Mose appeared to grow of the colonel."

"It's a puzzling situation," said Jerry.

He took off his coat and rolled up his shirt-sleeves; then, shoving everything back from one end of the big library-table, he settled himself in a chair and motioned me to one opposite.

"Now, see here," he said, "you told me you weren't afraid of the truth. Just be so kind as to tell it to me, then. Now, exactly what sort of a fellow is Radnor? I want to know for several reasons."

"Well, he did drink a little," I said,

"but he had stopped lately. And as for gambling, several of the young men around here have got into the way of playing for rather high stakes, but for a month or so past Rad had pulled up in that, too.

"As for his ever having been disinherited, that is a newspaper story, pure and simple. I never heard anything of the sort, and the neighborhood has told me pretty much all there is to know within the last few days."

"His father never turned him out of the house, then?"

"Never that I heard of. He did leave home once because his father insulted him, but he came back again."

"That was forgiving," commented Jerry. "In general, though, I understand that the relations between the two were rather strained?"

"At times they were," I admitted, "but things had been going rather better for the last few days."

"Until the night before the murder. They quarreled then? And over a matter of money?"

"Yes. Radnor makes no secret of it."

"And if you will allow me to go a step farther, why did Colonel Gaillard object to settling something on the boy?"

"He wanted to keep him under his thumb. The colonel liked to rule, and he wished every one around him to be dependent on his will."

"I see," said Jerry. "Radnor had a real grievance, then, after all—just one thing more on this point. Why did he choose that particular time to make his request?"

I shrugged my shoulders.

"You'll have to ask Radnor that," I remarked. I had my own suspicions, but I did not wish to drag Polly Mathers's name into the discussion.

Jerry watched me a moment without saying anything, and then he, too, shrugged his shoulders.

"I won't go into the matter of Radnor's connection with the ha'nt just now. I should like to consider first his actions on the day of the murder. I have here a report of the testimony taken at the inquest, but it is not so full as I could wish in some particulars.

"You say that Radnor and his father did not speak at the breakfast-table.

How was it when you started on the picnic?"

"They both appeared to be in pretty good spirits, but I noticed that they avoided each other."

"Did you notice Radnor through the day?"

"Not particularly."

"Did you see either him or the colonel in the cave?"

"Yes, I was with the colonel most of the time."

"And how about Radnor? Didn't you see him at all?"

"Oh, yes. I remember talking to him once about some queerly shaped stalagmites. He didn't hang around me, naturally, while I was with his father."

"And when you talked to him about the stalagmites—was there any one else with him at the time?"

"I believe Miss Mathers was there."

"And he was carrying her coat?"

"I really didn't notice."

"At least, he left it later in what you call the gallery of the broken column?"

"Yes."

"I see," said Jerry, "that the coroner asked at this point if he were in the habit of forgetting young ladies' coats. That's more pertinent than many of the questions the coroner asked. How about it? Was he in the habit of forgetting young ladies' coats?"

"I really don't know, Jerry," I said somewhat testily.

"It's a pity you're not more observing," he returned, "for it's rather important on the whole. But never mind. I'll find that out for myself. Did you notice when he left the rest of the party?"

"No, there was such a crowd of us that I didn't miss him."

"Very well, we'll have a look at his testimony. He left the rest of you in this same gallery of the broken column, went out, strolled about the woods for half an hour, and then returned to the hotel. I fancy 'strolled' is not precisely the right word.

"Now, that half hour in the woods is an unfortunate circumstance. Had he gone directly to the hotel from the cave, we could have proved an alibi without any difficulty.

"As it is, he had plenty of time after

the others came out to remember that he had forgotten the coat, return for it, renew the quarrel with his father, and after the fatal result make his way to the hotel while the rest of the party were still loitering in the woods."

"Jerry——" I began.

He waved his hand in a gesture of dissent.

"Oh, I'm not saying that's what *did* happen. I'm just showing you that the district attorney's theory is a physical possibility.

"Now, let's glance at the landlord's testimony a moment.

"When Radnor returned for his horse he appeared angry, excited, and in a hurry. Those are the landlord's words, and they are corroborated by the stable-boy and several loungers about the hotel.

"He was in a hurry—why? Because he wished to get away before the others came back. He had suddenly decided while he was in the woods—probably when he heard them laughing and talking as they came out of the cave—that he did not wish to see any one.

"He was angry—mark that. He lashed his horse quite unnecessarily as he galloped off. And he was not, Solomon gives me to understand, in the habit of maltreating horses.

"Now, what do you make of all this? Here is a young man with an unexpended lot of temper on his hands—bent on being reckless; bent on being just as bad as he can be. It's as clear as daylight.

"That boy never committed any crime. A man who had just murdered his father would not be filled with anger, no matter what the provocation had been. He might be overcome with horror, fear, remorse—a dozen different emotions, but anger would not be among them. Young Gaillard had not injured any one; he himself had been injured. He was mad through and through, and he didn't care who knew it.

"He expended the most of his belligerency on his horse on the way home. By evening he was probably considerably ashamed of his conduct. He doesn't care to talk about the matter for several reasons. Fortunately, Solomon is not so scrupulous."

"I don't know what you're driving at, Jerry," said I.

"Don't you?" he inquired. "I don't know myself, but I think I can make a pretty good guess. We'll call on Miss Polly Mathers in the morning and see if she can't help us out."

"Jerry," I said, "that girl knows no more about the matter than I do."

He ignored my remark and went on with:

"There are just two more points connecting Radnor Gaillard with the murder that need explaining: the footprints in the cave and the match-box. The footprints I will dismiss for the present.

"But the question of the match-box may repay a little investigation. I want you to tell me precisely what happened in the woods that day before you went into the cave. In the first place, how many older people were there in the party?"

"Mr. and Mrs. Mathers, a lady who was visiting them, and Colonel Gaillard."

"There were two servants, I understand, besides this Mose, to help about the lunch. What did they do?"

"Well, I don't know exactly. I wasn't paying much attention. I believe they carried things over from the hotel, collected wood for the fire, and then went to a farm-house for water."

"But Mrs. Mathers, it seems, attended to lighting the fire?"

"Yes, she and the colonel made the fire and started the coffee."

"Ah!" said Jerry, with a note of satisfaction in his voice. "The matter begins to clear. Was Colonel Gaillard in the habit of smoking?"

"He smoked one cigar after every meal."

"Never any more than that?"

"No, the doctor had limited him. The colonel grumbled about it regularly, and always smoked the biggest cigar he could find."

"And where did he get his matches?"

"Solomon passed the brass match-box from the dining-room mantel-piece just as he passed it to us to-night."

"Colonel Gaillard was not in the habit of carrying matches in his pockets, then?"

"No, I think not."

"We may safely assume," said Jerry, "that in this matter of making the fire,

if the two were working together, the colonel was on his knees arranging the sticks while Mrs. Mathers was standing by, giving directions. That, I believe, is the usual division of labor.

"Well, then, they get to the point of needing a light. The colonel feels through his pockets, finds that he hasn't a match, and—what happens?"

"What did happen," I broke in, "was that Mrs. Mathers turned to a group of us who were standing talking at one side, and asked if any of us had a match, and Rad handed her his box. That is the last any one remembers about it."

"Exactly," said Jerry. "And I think I can tell you the rest. You can see for yourself what took place. Mrs. Mathers went back to the spot where they were building the fire, and the colonel took the match-box from her.

"No man is ever going to stand by and watch a woman strike a match—he can do it so much better himself.

"At this point, Mrs. Mathers—by her own testimony—was called away, and she doesn't remember anything further about the box.

"The colonel was left to light the fire alone. He recognized the box as his son's, and he dropped it into his pocket. At another time, perhaps, he would have walked over and handed it back; but not then. The two were not speaking to each other. Later, at the time of the struggle in the cave, the box fell from the old man's pocket, and formed a most damaging piece of circumstantial evidence against his son.

"On the whole, I had arrived at my own conclusions from reading the papers; what extra data I needed, I managed to glean from Solomon's lies.

"And as for you," he added, gazing across at me with an imperturbable grin, "I think you were wise in deciding to be a corporation lawyer."

CHAPTER XVII.

JERRY ARRIVES AT A CONCLUSION.

"AND now," said Jerry, lighting a fresh cigar, and after a few preliminary puffs settling down to work again, "we will consider the case of Cat-Eye Mose. It won't be my fault if we don't make a

beautiful story out of him. You, yourself, I believe, hold the opinion that he committed the murder?"

"I am sure of it," I cried.

"In that case," laughed Jerry, "I should be inclined to think him innocent."

I shrugged my shoulders. There was nothing to be gained by getting angry.

If Jerry chose to regard the solving of a murder mystery in the light of a joke, I had nothing to say; though I did think he might have realized that to me, at least, it was a serious matter.

"And you base your suspicions, do you not, upon the fact that he has queer eyes?"

"Not entirely."

"Upon what, then?"

"Upon the fact that he took part in the struggle which ended in my uncle's death."

"Well, certainly, that does seem rather conclusive—there is no mistake about the footprints?"

"None whatever; the Mathers negroes both wore shoes."

"In that case, I suppose it's fair to assume that Mose took part in the struggle. It says here that the bootmarks of two different men are visible."

"That's the sheriff's opinion," I replied. "But I myself can't make out anything but the marks of Mose and the colonel. I examined everything carefully, but it's awfully mixed up, you know."

"As I understand it," said Jerry, "Mose has the reputation of being a harmless, peaceable fellow, not very bright, but always good-natured. He never resented an injury, was never known to quarrel with any one, took what was given him, and said thank you."

"He loved Colonel Gaillard and watched over his interests as jealously as a dog. Well, now, is a man who has had this reputation all his life, a man whom everybody trusts, very likely to go off the hook as suddenly as that, and—with no conceivable motive—brutally kill the master he has served so faithfully?"

"It is very possible," I said, "that people were deceived in Mose. I have been suspicious of him from the moment

I laid eyes on him. You may think it unfair to judge a man from his physical appearance, but I wish you could once see Cat-Eye Mose yourself, and you would know what I mean."

"One night he drove Radnor and me home from a party, and I could actually see his eyes shining in the dark. It's the most gruesome thing I ever saw; and take that on top of his habits—he carries snakes around in the front of his shirt—really, one suspects him of anything."

"I hope he isn't dead," Jerry murmured wistfully. "I'd like a personal interview."

He sat sunk down in his chair for several minutes, intently examining the end of his fountain-pen.

"H'm," he said, rousing himself, "it's time we had a shy at the ghost."

"Well," I said, "the first definite thing that reached the house was the night of my arrival when the roast chicken was stolen. I've told you that in detail."

"And it was that same night that Aunt What-ever-her-name-is saw the ghost in the laurel walk?"

I nodded.

"Did she say what it looked like?"

"It was white."

"And when you searched the cabins did you go into the one where the grain is stored?"

"No. Mose dropped his torch at the entrance. And, anyway, Rad said there was no use in searching it. It was already full to the brim with sacks of corn-meal."

"Do you think that Radnor was trying to divert you from the scent?"

"No, I am sure he hadn't a suspicion himself."

"And what did the thing look like that you saw Mose carrying to the cabins in the night?"

"It seemed to be a large black bundle. I have thought since that it might have been clothes or blankets, or something of that sort."

"So much for the first night," said Jerry. "Now, how soon did the ghost appear again?"

"Various things were stolen after that, and the servants attributed it to the ha'nt, but the first direct knowledge I

had was the night of the party, when Radnor acted so strangely. I told you of his going back in the night."

"He was carrying something, too?"

"Yes, he had a black bundle—it might have been clothes."

"And after that he and Mose were in constant consultation?"

"Yes; they both encouraged the belief in the ha'nt among the negroes, and did their best to keep every one away from the laurel walk. I overheard Mose several times telling stories to the other negroes about the terrible things the ha'nt would do if he caught them."

"And he himself didn't show any fear over the stories?"

"Not the slightest; appeared rather to enjoy them."

"And Radnor, how did he take the matter?"

"He was moody and irritable."

"How did you explain the matter to yourself?"

"I was afraid he had fallen into the clutches of some one who was threatening him, possibly levying blackmail."

"But you didn't make any attempt to discover the truth?"

"Well, it was Rad's own affair, and I didn't want the appearance of spying. I did keep my eyes open as much as I could."

"And the colonel, how did he take all this excitement about the ha'nt?"

"It bothered him considerably, but Rad kept him from hearing it as much as he could."

"When did the ha'nt appear again after the party?"

"Oh, by that time all sorts of rumors were running about among the negroes. The whole place was haunted, and several of the farm-hands had left. But the next thing that we heard directly was in the early evening before the robbery, when Mose, appearing terribly frightened, said he had seen the ha'nt rising in a cloud of blue smoke out of the sink-hole."

"And how did the colonel and Radnor take this?"

"The colonel was angry because he had been bragging about Mose not being afraid, and Rad was dazed. He didn't know what to think; he hustled Mose out of the way before he could be questioned."

"And what did you think?"

"Well, I fancied at the time that he had really seen something, but as I thought it over in the light of later events I came to the conclusion that he was shamming, both then and in the middle of the night when he roused the house."

"That is, you wished to think him shamming, in order to prove his complicity in the robbery and the murder. And so you twisted the facts to suit your theory?"

"I don't think you can say that," I returned somewhat hotly. "It's merely a question of interpreting the facts."

"He didn't gain much by raising all that hullabaloo in the middle of the night."

"Why, yes, that was done in order to throw suspicion on the ha'nt."

"Oh, I see!" laughed Jerry. "Well, now, let's get to the end of this matter. Was any more seen of the ha'nt after that night?"

"No, at least not directly. For five or six days every one was so taken up with the robbery that the ha'nt excitement rather died down. Then I believe there were some rumors among the negroes, but nothing much reached the house."

"And since the murder nothing whatever has been seen of the ha'nt?"

I shook my head.

"Just give me a list of the things that were stolen."

"Well, the roast chicken, a box of cigars, some shirts off the line, a suit of Rad's pajamas, a French novel, some brandy, quite a lot of things to eat—fresh loaves of bread, preserves, a boiled ham, sugar, coffee.

"Oh, any amount of stuff; the negroes simply helped themselves and laid it to the ha'nt. One of the carriages was left out one night, and in the morning the cushions were gone and two lap-ropes. At the same time a water-pail was taken and a pair of Jake's overalls. And then to end up came the robbery of the safe."

"The ha'nt had catholic tastes. Any of the things turned up since?"

"Yes, several things, such as blankets and clothes and dishes have gradually drifted back."

"The carriage cushions and lap-robcs, ever find them?"

"Never a trace. And why any one should want 'em, I don't know."

"What color were the lap-robcs?"

"Plain black broadcloth."

Jerry got up and paced about a few moments and then came back and sat down.

"One thing is clear," he said, "there are two ha'nts."

"Two ha'nts! What do you mean?"

"Just what I say. Suppose, for convenience, we call them ha'nt number one, and ha'nt number two. Number one occupied apartments over the grain bin and haunted the laurel walk. He was white—I don't wonder at that if he spent much time crawling over those flour sacks.

"He smoked cigars and read French novels; Mose waited on him and Radnor knew about him—and didn't get much enjoyment out of the knowledge. It took money to get rid of him—a hundred dollars down and the promise of more to come.

"Radnor himself drove him off in the carriage the night he left and Mose obliterated all traces of his presence. So much for number one.

"As for number two, he appeared three or four days before the robbery and haunted pretty much the whole place, especially the region of the sink-hole. In appearance he was nine feet tall, transparent, and black.

"Smoke came from his mouth and blue flames from his eyes. There was a sulfurous odor about him. He was first seen rising out of the sink-hole, and there is a passage in the bottom of the sink-hole that leads straight down to Hell. Solomon is my authority.

"I asked him how he explained the apparition, and he reckoned it was the ghost of the slave who was beaten to death, and that since his old master had come back to haunt the laurel walk, he had come back to haunt his old master.

"That sounds to me like a plausible explanation. As soon as it's light I'll have a look at the sink-hole."

"Jerry," I said disgustedly, "that may make a very picturesque newspaper story, but it doesn't help much in unraveling the mystery."

"It helps a good deal. I would not like to swear to the flames or sulfur or the passage down to Hell, but the fact that he was tall and black and comes from the sink-hole is significant. He was black—mark that—so were the stolen lap-robcs.

"Now you see how the matter stands on the night of the robbery. While ghost number one was out driving with Radnor, ghost number two entered the house through the open library window, found the safe ajar, and helped himself.

"Let's consider what he took—five thousand dollars in government bonds, two deeds, an insurance policy, and a quart of small change—a very suggestive lot of loot if you think about it enough.

"After the robbery he disappeared, nothing seen of him for five or six days; then he turned up again for a day or so, and finally disappeared forever. So much for ha'nt number two.

"He's the party we're after. He certainly robbed the safe and he possibly committed the murder; as to that I won't have any proof until I see the cave."

He stretched his arms with a laugh.

"Oh, this isn't so bad. All we've got to do now is to identify those two ghosts."

"I'm glad if you think it's so easy," I said somewhat sullenly. "But I will tell you one thing, if you go to basing any deductions on Solomon's stories you'll find yourself bumping against a stone wall."

"We'll have Rad over to dinner with us to-morrow night," Jerry declared.

He rose and pulled out his watch.

"It's a quarter before ten. I think it's time you went to bed. You look about played out. You haven't been sleeping much of late?"

"No, I can't say that I have."

"I ought to have come down at once," said Jerry, "but I'm always so blamed afraid of hurting people's feelings."

I stared slightly. I had never considered that one of Jerry's weak points, but as he seemed to be quite in earnest, I let the remark pass.

"Do you think I could wake up one of the stablemen and get him to drive me to the village? I know it's pretty late, but I've got to send a couple of telegrams."

"Telegrams?" I demanded. "Where to?"

Jerry laughed.

"Well, I must send a word to the *Post-Despatch* to the effect that the Luray mystery grows more mysterious every hour. That the police have been wasting their energies on the wrong scent, but that the *Post-Despatch's* special correspondent has arrived on the scene, and that we may accordingly look for a speedy solution."

"What is the second one?" I asked.

"To your friend, the police commissioner of Seattle.

"You don't think that Jeff——"

"My dear fellow, I don't think anything unless I have some facts to think about. Don't look so nervous; I'm not accusing him of anything. I merely want more details than you got; I'm a newspaper man, remember, and I like local color even in telegrams.

"And now, go to bed; and for Heaven's sake, go to sleep. The case is in the hands of the *Post-Despatch's* young man and you needn't worry any more."

CHAPTER XVIII.

JERRY FINDS THE BONDS.

I WAS wakened the next morning by Jerry clumping into my room dressed in riding-breeches and boots freshly spattered with mud. They were Radnor's clothes. Jerry had taken me at my word and was thoroughly at home.

"Hello, old man!" he said, sitting on the edge of the bed. "Been asleep, haven't you? Sorry to wake you, but we've got a day's work ahead. Hope you don't mind my borrowing Radnor's togs. I didn't come down prepared for riding.

"Solomon gave 'em to me; seemed to think that Rad wouldn't need 'em any more. Oh, Solomon and I are great friends," he added, with a laugh, as he suddenly appeared to remember the object of his visit and commenced a search through his pockets.

I sat up in bed and watched him impatiently. It was evident that he had some news and also that he was going to be as leisurely as possible about imparting it.

"This is a pretty country," he remarked as he finished with his coat-pockets and commenced on the waistcoat. "It would be almost worth living in if many little affairs like this occurred to keep things going."

"Really, Jerry," I cried, "when you refer to my uncle's murder as a 'little affair' I think you're going too far."

"Oh, I beg your pardon," said Jerry good-naturedly, "I guess I am incorrigible. I didn't know Colonel Gaillard personally, you see, and I'm so used to murders that I've come to think it's the only natural way of dying.

"Anyhow," he added, as he finally produced a yellow envelope, "I've got something here that will interest you. It explains why our young friend Radnor didn't want to talk."

He tossed the envelope on the bed and I eagerly tore out the telegram. It was from the police commissioner in Seattle, and it said:

Jefferson Gaillard returned Seattle May seventh, after six weeks absence. Said to have visited old home, Virginia. Appeared to be in funds.

"What does it mean?" I asked.

"It means," said Jerry, "that we've spotted ghost number one. It was clear from the first that Radnor was trying to shield some one, even at the expense of his own reputation. That narrowed our search considerably. Leaving women out of the case it pointed pretty straight toward his elder brother.

"So much of your theory was correct, the only trouble was that you carried it too far; you made him commit both the robbery and the murder. Then when you found a part of your theory broke down you rejected the whole of it.

"You see how the matter stood. Jeff Gaillard was pretty desperately in need of money. Probably the debt was not entirely honest; may have been misappropriating funds or something of that sort. Seattle too hot to hold him and he lit out and came East.

"He applied to Radnor, but Radnor was in a tight place himself and couldn't lay his hands on anything, except what his father had given him for a birthday present. That was tied up in another investment and if he converted it into

cash it would be at a sacrifice. So it ran along for a week or so, while Rad was casting about for a means of getting his brother out of the way without any fresh scandal.

"But Mose's suddenly taking to seeing haunts precipitated matters. Realizing that his father's patience had reached its limit and that he couldn't keep you off the scent much longer, he determined to borrow the money for Jeff's journey back to Seattle, and to close up his own investment.

"That same night he drove Jeff to the station at Kennisburg; the Washington Express does not stop at Lambert Junction, and, anyway, Kennisburg is a bigger station and travelers excite less comment. This isn't deduction; it's fact. I rode to Kennisburg this morning and proved it.

"The station-man remembers selling Radnor Gaillard a ticket to Washington in the middle of the night about three weeks ago. Some man, who waited outside and whose face the agent did not see, boarded the train, and Rad drove off home alone. The ticket-seller does not know Rad personally, but he says that he knows him by sight. So much for that.

"Rad came home and went to bed. When he came down-stairs in the morning he was met by the information that the ha'nt had robbed the safe. You can see what instantly jumped into his mind—some way, somehow, Jeff had taken those bonds—and yet figure on it as he might, he could not see how it was possible.

"The robbery seemed to have occurred while he was away. Could Jeff merely have pretended to leave? Might he in some way have got back? Those are the questions that were bothering Radnor. He was honest in saying that he could not imagine how the bonds had been stolen, and yet he was also honest in not wanting to know the truth."

"He might have confided in me," I said.

"It would have been a good deal wiser for him to do so. But in order to understand Rad's point of view, you must take into account Jeff's character. He appears to have been a reckless, dashing, headstrong but exceedingly at-

tractive fellow. His father put up with his excesses for six years before the final quarrel.

"Cat-Eye Mose, so old Jake tells me, moped for months after his disappearance. Rad, as a little fellow, worshiped his bad but charming brother. There you have it. Jeff turns up again with a hard-luck story, and Mose and Radnor both go back to their old allegiance. He wants his presence kept a secret, and they do so.

"After the robbery Radnor is too sick at the thought that Jeff may have betrayed him to want to do anything but hush the matter up. At the news of the murder he does not know what to think; he will not believe Jeff guilty, and yet he does not see any other way out."

Jerry paused a moment and leaned forward with an excited gleam in his eye.

"That," he said, "is the whole truth about ghost number one. Our business now is to track down ghost number two, and here, as a starter, are the missing bonds."

He tossed a pile of mildewed papers on the bed, and met my astonishment with a triumphant chuckle.

It was true. All five of the missing bonds were there, the May first coupons still uncut; also the deeds and insurance policy just as they had left the safe, except that they were damp and mud-stained.

I stared for a moment, too amazed to speak.

"Good Heavens, Jerry! Where did you find them?" I gasped at last.

Jerry shrugged his shoulders with a tantalizing laugh.

"Exactly where I thought I'd find them. Oh, I've been out early this morning! I saw the sun rise and breakfasted in Kennisburg about six-forty-five. I'm ready for another breakfast, though.

"Hurry up and get dressed; we've got a day's work before us. I'm off to the stables to talk 'horses' with Uncle Jake; when you're ready for breakfast send Solomon after me."

"Jerry," I implored, "where on the face of the earth did you find those bonds?"

"At the mouth of the passage to Hell," said Jerry gravely, "but I'm not quite sure myself who put them there."
"Was it Mose?"

"It might have been—and it might not."

He waved his hand airily and withdrew.

(To be continued.)

THE BURGLARY OF SANDMOUTH.

By Walter E. Grogan.

HE who aims to cheat others must watch out that he is not hoist with his own petard.

THE little town of Sandmouth was in a state of extreme excitement. For weeks it had panted for something to break the monotony of the dull months preceding the summer season. Now it had come with a vengeance!

The shop belonging to Mr. William Jarvis had been broken into and jewelry abstracted. In the first glow of enthusiasm, reports vaulted high as to the probable loss. Thousands were mentioned, tens of thousands hinted at. A jeweler's shop, the principal jeweler's shop of a prosperous east-coast seaside resort, looms large in local eyes as a Golconda of wealth. And in front of the season, just when the new stock was laid in and the bills of the Summer Season Sale already printed!

Some one early in the forenoon hazarded that the work was the work of a person who knew Sandmouth and knew Jarvis. The remark created consternation.

"And him in the town yesterday," said Owen Jones, a draper, breaking the silence fallen cloud-like upon the office of the Ring o' Bells.

Mr. William Jarvis was a little gray-haired man, with a hard mouth and a determined chin. His little black eyes, deep set, looked out from under straggly gray brows in a challenging fashion. He was a close man—close-fisted, close-hearted, close-mouthed. Sandmouth paid him the deference due to his position,

bought its rings and trinkets at his shop, but did not love him.

He was a hectoring man, and bullied his fellow members upon the Council; and, like all great men in little places, he was absurdly jealous.

The jeweler had a daughter—Emily Jarvis. Some people held that that was his one redeeming point; others regarded her as the chief jewel in his shop.

In reality she was just such a pretty, laughing, healthy, lovable girl as encouraged extravagance in compliment. She helped in the shop, and made out the bills in the neatest of handwriting, biting her penholder with her pearly teeth and shaking her curls in despair when she had to compute two and a half per cent discount.

Being a close man and a good business man, William Jarvis was well aware of the value of Em. Visitors were known to buy dozens of his Sandmouth "Souvenir Spoon," one at a time, merely for the pleasure of looking at her. And so, being aware of her business value, William Jarvis regarded all efforts on the part of young bachelor tradesmen to transfer her attraction to their own shops with a jaundiced eye. Not even the case of expensive engagement-rings was more safely and jealously guarded than Em.

She was luckily of a happy disposition, and little tempted to rebel. She laughed her way light-heartedly enough until a few months previous to the Sandmouth Sensation. That was a month after the engagement of a new assistant.

His name was Charles Gower, a dark-haired, handsome young giant, whose advent changed the fortunes of the Sandmouth Football Club. Hitherto, William Jarvis had eschewed handsome assistants. Gower's remarkable indiffer-

ence as to wages tempted him, and he succumbed, not without twinges of uneasiness; yet the new employee proved an admirable salesman, business was brisker than it had ever been before during the dull season, and old Jarvis kept him longer than his better judgment suggested.

He argued that if he remained in the shop with his daughter and young Gower as much as possible nothing in the way of love-making could happen.

Which was unworthy of his wisdom.

One day William Jarvis discovered something—a kiss, a note, possibly only a look, for old Jarvis could be sharp. Em's manner had rendered him suspicious. She had become self-conscious and given to sudden flushings, to odd moods, to tears unaccountably, and to smiles quite as unaccountably as the tears.

The interview that followed—between William Jarvis and his assistant—in the glass-fronted room leading out of the shop where the old man had his repair-bench was brief, but unpleasant.

"She's none for you!" snapped the old man finally.

"Em loves me," protested Charles manfully. "I have a good trade, and you know as well as I do that I work well."

"You are only an assistant."

"I can rise."

"Not in my shop. I won't have it! My girl is mine, and I keep her. D' you see? Look at my position. I'm a counselor—you're an assistant, nothing more."

"You're afraid if I married her as you'd lose some custom!" Charles cried unwisely.

The accusation was near enough to the truth to anger the old man exceedingly. Set in plain words, it sounded terribly selfish.

"You're an impudent rascal! If you were Em's only chance, you shouldn't have her!" The old man raised his voice.

"Why?" demanded the young man.

"Because I don't like you personally, nor your ways, nor your deeds. I was going to give you the sack on Friday, before ever I caught you at your under-hand dealings with my daughter."

"I kept it secret because Em would have it so. She was afraid of you. Why were you going to give me the sack?"

The old man, hot with anger, cudged his brains for a reply. He had lied, and he must substantiate his lie. Suddenly a suggestion came into his brain that made him smile in an ugly fashion.

"There's been some things missing, and cash."

The young man took a step forward. Every vestige of color had deserted his face, his eyes blazed.

"What do you mean, Mr. Jarvis?"

"I mean nothing," said the old man steadily, not flinching. "I have missed things, and I was going to get rid of you."

"Do you accuse me?" Charles demanded.

"No. I have no proof. But you'd better go to-night."

"You are trying to blacken my character in a cowardly way! If you were not Em's father you should answer for this!"

"Aye, bluster—that's the way. I've got no proof, I tell you; you're safe enough. But you stay no longer in my shop."

The wrangle ran on for a few minutes longer, and then Charles flung out of the inner room. Emily, who was in the shop, trembling at the sound of the angry voices, came to his side.

"Stand away, Em!" cried her father. "You shall have nothing to do with him. I have discharged him."

"I love him," Em answered fearlessly.

"You shall not!" her father thundered.

"When the time is ripe I shall come for her," said Charles, "and she will go with me. Nothing that you say will stop her. That is so, sweetheart, is it not?"

"That is so, Charles," she answered.

"A pauper—and worse!" sneered old Jarvis. "Be off before I turn you out!"

"I shall not always be a pauper, and be assured I shall come one day for Emily."

With that, Charles Gower turned on his heel and quitted the shop, and three hours later quitted the town of Sandmouth.

Old William Jarvis hinted industriously that his last assistant had been dishonest, and some believed him, but the many did not.

Emily grew sad and pale. Whether she heard from Charles no one knew. Her father said no word to her about her lover after the day on which he dismissed him. But in his heart he knew that whenever Charles Gower came for her she would go. Hatred of the man who had made him lie grew fiercer even than his desire to keep the attraction of his daughter in his shop.

Another assistant, an elderly man with a gaunt figure and long hair, was engaged; and the broken love-story was three months old when, right in front of the summer season, came the sensational news that William Jarvis's shop had been robbed.

The house, a three-storied building in the main street, had a small back yard, with a door in the wall leading into a lane used for the discharge of merchandise to other shops. The whole of the ground floor was given over to the jeweler's business. The iron-shuttered shop came first, then the little windowed room looking into the shop where Mr. Jarvis had his bench, and at the back a workshop.

The door leading into the back yard was bolted inside at night besides being locked. In this workshop slept a fox-terrier, an admirable house-dog. The upper part of the house composed the living-rooms.

On the morning of the burglary William Jarvis came down to find the back-door bolt cut out, evidently by a chisel, and the door unlocked. A hasty glance around the shop discovered the fact that a case of gold watches and a tray of plain gold wedding and chased keeper rings were empty. Mr. Jarvis opened the door of the shop and called a policeman.

This was a little after seven in the morning.

The constable entered the shop, looked around, and gave his opinion that there had been a burglary. Examining the iron shutters, which were still up, and the front door, he added that an entrance must have been made from the rear.

As the bolt of the back door had been bodily cut out, this surmise did not impress Mr. Jarvis. Sergeant Wynn passing the door, was immediately summoned by the constable, who scratched

his head in thankful relief at so quickly transferring the responsibility of investigation.

Sergeant Wynn made a more or less intelligent examination. The dog who barked at him when he entered the workshop puzzled him greatly.

"There's no doubt the house has been entered from the lane, Mr. Jarvis," he said. "The door into the lane was scaled. It's easy enough for a tall man. There are scratches all the way up, as if the man's boots hit against it in pulling himself up. It rained yesterday, and the back yard must have been soaking wet. There are footmarks just inside the back door into the house. They will be useful. I've taken down the measurements. Whoever did it knew the place, for he's cut out the bolt exactly. But I don't understand the dog being quiet. Didn't you hear him, Mr. Jarvis?"

"Heard nothing, knew nothing, until I came down. Tim's a good house-dog—would have been sure to bark unless he knew the step and liked the man."

"Unless he knew the step!" Sergeant Wynn caught him up briskly. "There you are! Some one who knows the dog and knew exactly where the bolt was, and has been able to take impressions of the keys. Do you suspect any one?"

"No," said Mr. Jarvis slowly. He thought a while, and then repeated, "No."

"Ah!" commented the sergeant, looking wise. "We've both got our thoughts, sir. I'll leave the constable here and look around. I must report to the superintendent when he comes in from Oxter."

Exactly at twelve o'clock Sandmouth received another shock. Sergeant Wynn walked down High Street with his hand on Charles Gower's shoulder! And they disappeared in the direction of the police station.

At two o'clock public opinion shook its head over Charles Gower. Things looked very black against him. Tim, the dog, was known to be very fond of him, and who could know better than he the exact position of the bolt or have greater facilities for taking impressions of the keys? A clever workman, too, always making something in the smithing line!

The only keys never in his possession were the keys of the safe, and the safe had not been tampered with. Three or four volunteers had come forward asserting that they saw him loitering in the lane behind the shop quite late at night. He had refused to say where he had been the previous evening, although the landlady of the little inn where he had put up for the night declared that he did not return until three in the morning.

And, most damning of all facts, the muddy footmarks discovered by the sergeant were found to fit his boots so exactly that no doubt at all could be entertained that they were his! Public opinion held that matters looked uncommonly black for Charles Gower.

Emily refused to believe that Charles was guilty. He was incapable of theft, she asserted; he was the truest, most honorable, man ever known by Sandmouth, or the rest of the world to boot. Mr. William Jarvis looked at her sadly, then gravely shook his head over the outburst. She had just heard the news of her lover's arrest—a fact hitherto withheld from her by the forethought of her father.

In the shop stood the superintendent of police, a thin, alert, military-looking man. Behind him was the sergeant.

"He was seen outside, at the back, late last night," Mr. Jarvis said slowly. "He returned to his room at three, and he refuses to account for his time except that he was up on the cliff—a likely story!"

"You are cruel, father!" Emily cried. Her head was thrown back, her eyes were defiant, more especially defiant of the superintendent, who smiled lazily. "He refused to account for his movements in order to shield me. There, it's out, and I don't care who knows it! He came here last night to see me. That was after twelve—at night. Let me speak, father. It's true.

"I waited until you were asleep, and crept down and opened the doors, the back door and the door into the lane. It was raining, and he stood just inside the door. He wanted me to elope with him. He knew that it was hopeless to get your consent. I knew that also. I stood out for some time. Then I consented."

Mr. William Jarvis shook his head again very sadly.

"The folly of girls bewitched by a good-looking scamp. She is trying to shield him, Mr. Andrews," he said, addressing the superintendent with a rising note in his voice, as if anger were beginning to whip him. "Did she go? She was going to elope; she didn't. Why? Because there is no truth in her tale."

"Because my door was locked. I was to steal out in an hour and meet him on the cliff. I had to put my things together in a bag—there was some of my mother's jewelry—I wanted that. When I came to open my door, it was locked."

"Yes," said Mr. Jarvis. "I locked it—I locked it at half past eleven, when I went to bed. The servant found it locked this morning. I saw Gower sneaking about the shop-door yesterday, so I locked you in to make sure. I told the sergeant so this morning. He can bear me out; the servant can bear me out."

"Oh, father, you are lying away my happiness!" Emily cried out. "It wasn't Charles; he couldn't do such a thing! I know he is innocent—and I'll marry him in spite of anything!"

"I wouldn't say anything more, miss," said the sergeant, in a fatherly manner; "it may hurt your young man."

Mr. Andrews, the superintendent, looked up and smiled.

"I'll just go over the house, Mr. Jarvis, although the case seems fairly clear," he said. "Neat steps, those of yours—for reaching the top shelves, I suppose?"

"Yes," growled Mr. Jarvis.

"Only used in the shop?"

"Only used in the shop," assented Mr. Jarvis. "Not strong enough for rough work."

Mr. Andrews was gone half an hour, during which, at his request, Mr. Jarvis remained in the shop "to look after his daughter," as the superintendent suggested. Emily sat staring before her, weeping quietly from time to time.

Both turned at the sound of the superintendent's entrance, both perhaps a little relieved. Mr. Andrews was still smiling softly.

"A careless man, the thief, Mr. Jar-

vis," he said—"a very careless man. I am glad you had nothing disturbed. It has made investigation very easy. The case is quite clear now."

"Quite clear?" repeated Mr. Jarvis, a little uncertainly.

"It is hardly a case of theft, but of paltry revenge," the superintendent continued.

"Revenge! The scamp had some reason for revenge, perhaps, but theft is theft, whatever the reason."

The superintendent nodded, and his smile deepened.

"Of course, the behavior of your dog gave the first clue."

"He was good to the dog, I admit that," said Mr. Jarvis.

"Then the knowledge of the exact position of the bolt——"

"Quite so," Mr. Jarvis agreed eagerly.

"Are you insured against burglary, Mr. Jarvis?"

"No—no. It's a dead loss to me. The rates are so high I never insure."

"Not a dead loss. I've found the missing articles."

"What!" screamed Mr. Jarvis. Then he mopped his forehead and stared at Mr. Andrews open-mouthed.

"At least, I know where to find them. They are in the box-room, up in your pent-roof."

Mr. Jarvis tried to speak, but failed.

"It was a paltry thing to do, Mr. Jarvis," said the superintendent severely.

"A mean, contemptible thing. If you had succeeded you would have had a man's ruin on your conscience. Thank God earnestly that you did not succeed."

"What—what do you mean?" Mr. Jarvis, suddenly looking very old, said lamely.

"Last night you were disturbed, and

coming down-stairs, found your daughter talking to Charles Gower. Instead of confronting them, you listened, and as you listened you hatched a horrible plot to ruin a young man.

"When your daughter returned to her room you locked her in. Then you came down-stairs and cut out that bolt with a chisel. There's a heap of chips inside—it is palpable that it was cut out from the inside, no doubt for the convenience of the light. But it was careless. You ought to have used a lantern. Then you took the steps from the shop outside into the lane, caught hold of the top of the wall, and scratched marks with your boots.

"There were mud-stains on the legs of the steps, and you must have knocked against the back door bringing them in, for there is a new scratch on the door and traces of paint on the top of the steps. Then you took the jewelry up to the box-room, which is, I discovered, rarely used.

"The dust has been newly disturbed on the short ladder going up to it, and the trap-door has been recently opened. A pair of goloshes, still damp, explained why your feet left no mud-stains. The worst of it, Mr. Jarvis, is that I do not see how I can arrest you for stealing your own property."

Mr. Jarvis struggled to his feet and glared wildly.

"So—so you've found out!" he cried. "Well, I'm—I'm not sorry. It was a sudden—a sudden temptation. And now—oh, God, I'm glad—I'm glad!"

At this point Mr. Jarvis collapsed in a fainting condition.

Mr. and Mrs. Charles Gower have now a prosperous business in Oxtor, and Mr. Jarvis is by no means the hard man he was.

THE BIRTH OF SPRING.

By Emma C. Dowd.

ALL night the sobbing wind kept pace
With the sad rain's unmeasured tramp;
All night on Nature's patient face
Gleamed lightning's weird and fitful lamp.

But sunbeams rent the clouds in twain;
A soft breeze kissed the expectant morn;
A bluebird sang a witching strain;
A crocus bloomed—and Spring was born.

CHASE OF THE GLADSTONE BAG.*

By Louis Joseph Vance.

Because of which an American in London gets himself entangled
in many adventures.

SYNOPSIS OF PREVIOUS CHAPTERS.

IN the dining-room of the Hotel Pless, London, Philip Kirkwood, San Franciscan, and now pauper because of the earthquake, becomes interested in a young girl at a table near by. He sees her escort receive a note from a woman. Much perturbed by this note, the man approaches Kirkwood, introduces himself as Mr. Calendar, and asks him to escort his daughter home; thereupon he disappears, and Kirkwood and Miss Calendar drive to a dismal house, where Kirkwood is dismissed with thanks.

Fearing for the girl's safety, he returns to the house, forces an entrance, has a struggle in the dark with a man whom he finally overcomes, finds Miss Calendar, and escapes with her. She, carrying a mysterious gladstone bag, wishes to be driven to a Mrs. Hallam's to meet her father. Learning she has never met Mrs. Hallam, Kirkwood suggests his going in to see if Calendar is there. He does so, leaving the girl in the cab. Mrs. Hallam, the woman with the note, tells him that Calendar is not there, and insists that Miss Calendar come in and wait. Kirkwood goes to get her, but the cab has disappeared.

Calendar, arriving shortly and suspecting that his "pal" Mulready has gone with Dorothy Calendar and the bag (the true object of solicitude), hurries with Kirkwood to a Thames landing, where he catches them about to be rowed out to the *Alethea*, evidently some ship. He joins them, and Kirkwood is deserted.

Kirkwood finds himself penniless, having lost his purse in the dismal house. Returning thither for it, he encounters the still unconscious man with whom he struggled. While trying to revive him, he is surprised by Mrs. Hallam. She claims the stunned man is her son; that the bag contains jewels, hers by inheritance, and that she is being robbed by Mulready and Calendar, who are crooks. Though Kirkwood doubts her integrity, he decides that Dorothy is in the hands of scoundrels and that he will assist her.

He at once goes to find the *Alethea*. After rowing around the shipping on the Thames, he takes a railway journey, wherein Mrs. Hallam is again encountered, but evaded. He gets a catboat surreptitiously, and, regardless of life, sets out to run down the *Alethea*. This he practically does, only to find the Calendar party not aboard of her, and after being robbed by her captain, is landed in Antwerp, without a cent.

He sees Mrs. Hallam arrive and take a cab, which he follows until it stops before a cheap water-front hotel. Mrs. Hallam watches patiently from the cab-window until Mulready and Calendar emerge from the hotel and make for the wharves. Kirkwood, losing interest in the lady, follows the men, and seeing them put out for the *Alethea*, which is anchored near by, does likewise. On the ship he watches them hide the gladstone bag, and then with the effrontery of a pirate enters the cabin, holds them up; locks them in a stateroom, and with the bag returns to shore and goes to the hotel where he surmises Dorothy is. He goes up to her room, and is met by Mrs. Hallam, who is persuading the girl to go with her, but finally, after threatening to expose the lady, succeeds in getting the girl to accompany him to England. They take a train for Brussels, only to find themselves dogged by Hobbs, mate of the *Alethea*.

CHAPTER XX (Continued).

TRAVELS WITH A CHAPERON.

WEARY and disheartened, Kirkwood helped the girl back into the coach, Ostend (the quicker route) being now out of the question.

Their simple breakfast, consumed

while the way train meandered languidly through the sunny, smiling Flemish countryside, revived somewhat their jaded spirits.

After all, they were young, the world was bright, the night had fled leaving naught but an evil memory; best of all, they were together; somehow, the future would take care of itself.

* Began December, 1906, *All-Story Magazine*. Single copies, 10 cents.

For a time they laughed and chatted, pretending that all was well with them. Then the girl, nestling her head in a corner of the dingy cushions, smiled drowsily upon Kirkwood through her drooping lashes, and slept, a soft color ebbing and flowing in her cheeks, the shadow of a sleepy smile quivering about the sensitive scarlet lips, the wind through the open window working wonders with the sunlit glory of her hair.

Dunkirk halted their progress, and they changed cars — the ubiquitous Hobbs a hateful shadow in the distance. Calais they reached in the middle of the forenoon, with a three-hour wait confronting them before the departure of the Dover packet.

An anxious time—doubly anxious to Kirkwood, both because of Hobbs the persistent and for that reason which he had kept secret from the girl, lest she should grieve needlessly. Time enough to agitate her on that head when he had reached the absolute limit of his resources.

Moreover, between Dunkirk and Calais they had decided upon a plan of action involving a temporary separation, with all its attendant perils. Neither could forget that Calendar might be in Calais; presuming that Hobbs had reached him by wire, he could readily have anticipated their arrival, whether by sea, in the brigantine, or by land—the direct route via Brussels and Lille. If they were unhappily to meet him—Neither cared to contemplate the possibilities involved in such a *dénouement*.

When they left the train at the Gare Centrale, Kirkwood's satchel held only a majority of the girl's belongings, which had been transferred from her own traveling-bag to make room for the gladstone. Further, he had armed her with one of the revolvers.

Disregarding the importunities of the cabmen, they passed through the depot and into the quiet streets of the seaport, Hobbs hovering anxiously in the offing; then, at a deserted corner, they separated, the girl turning quickly out of sight to make her way to the Terminus Hotel, Kirkwood swinging sharply to deal with the disturbed Mr. Hobbs.

When this maneuver was executed the mate was in the middle of the block. As

Kirkwood moved toward him purposefully he stopped short and initiated a swift flanking movement across-street. Kirkwood, hot with righteous wrath, proved too quick for the cockney; on reaching the farther sidewalk, Hobbs was disgusted to find their relative positions unchanged, save that possibly Kirkwood had drawn a little closer.

Abruptly the mate took to his heels. Kirkwood, satisfied, pursued until convinced that Hobbs could not pick up the trail again; then hailed a *fiacre* and had himself driven to the American Consulate.

Some time later, crimson and smarting with shame and humiliation, he made a quick exit from the consulate doors, leaving an amused official representative of his country's government with the impression of having been entertained to the point of boredom for half an hour by an exceptionally clumsy but persistent liar.

And Hobbs was strolling down the street, over the way, kicking up his heels and whistling an air maudlin with sentiment.

Kirkwood paid him no further heed whatsoever, hopelessly abandoning the attempt to shake him off, resigned to a future wherein the obnoxious little Londoner should form a component part of the landscape wherever one turned one's eye. Besides, grim care was now setting the pace for him in deadly earnest.

By noon the suspense had grown too great for endurance, and Kirkwood, throwing caution and their understanding to the winds, proceeded directly for the hotel at the Gare Maritime, and sent up his name to Miss Calendar.

The girl met him in the public lounge (bringing with her the traveling-bag), looking marvelously refreshed by her ninety minutes of complete repose and privacy. Kirkwood, on the contrary, was so fagged and distraught that at the sight of his care-worn countenance she hurried to him with a low, pitying cry.

"Oh, nothing new," he told her, with a sorry ghost of a grin; "only there are no signs of Mr. Calendar, and I knew you had to have something to eat."

They were lingering over *déjeuner à la fourchette* (and feeling somewhat

better), when word was brought to them that the steamer was on the point of sailing.

Outwardly composed but inwardly in a tremor, they boarded the packet, meeting with no misadventure whatsoever—if one excepts the circumstance that when the hotel and restaurant bills were settled and through tickets to London bought Kirkwood found himself in possession of precisely one franc and twenty centimes.

If only he had not been so anxious to give Calendar full value for his money!

As the boat drew out from the pier Mr. Hobbs was to be seen waving Mr. Kirkwood an ironic farewell and violently blowing kisses to Miss Calendar from the tips of his soiled fingers.

At the first blush, by turns indignant and relieved to see the last of him, Kirkwood fell subsequently a prey to prophetic terrors.

Hobbs's relinquishment of the chase could mean but one thing—that, far from having left danger behind them on the Continent, they were but flying to encounter it beneath the smoky pall of London.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE COILS TIGHTEN.

THE westering sun striking down through the drab exhalations of ten thousand sooty chimneypots tinted the atmosphere to the hue of copper.

One's gaze, wandering purposely out through the window, recoiled, repelled by the endless dreary vista of the Surrey Side's uncounted roofs; or, probing instantaneously the depths of some narrow thoroughfare, fleetingly disclosed as the evening boat-train swung on level with the eaves of Southwark's dwellings, was saddened by the knowledge that such squalor could obtain and flourish unrebuked.

For perhaps the tenth time, Kirkwood turned to the girl with the question ready-framed upon his lips.

"Are you *quite* sure——" he began, and then, conscious of the clear and penetrating perception of the brown eyes that smiled into his from beneath their level brows, stammered and left the sentence uncompleted.

Still regarding him steadily, smiling, the girl shook her head in laughing rebuke and denial.

"Do you know," she asked him, "that that is about the fifth repetition within the last quarter-hour of that question?"

"How do you know what I meant to say?" he demanded, momentarily diverted.

"I could see it in your eyes. Besides, you've talked of nothing else since we left the boat. Won't you believe me, please, when I tell you that I know absolutely not a soul in London to whom I could go and ask for shelter?"

"It's only a little way farther, Mr. Kirkwood, to Chiltern—an hour's ride; and the Pyrfords will be glad to have me. So, you see, by eight to-night you'll have off your hands the girl who has been nothing but a drag and a worry to you ever since——"

"Don't!" he pleaded. "Please!"
 "You know," he told her, with his heart in his eyes, "that it isn't that. I *don't* want you off my hands—that is to say, I—er——"

And he fell speechless, aghast at the enormity of his blunder.

"I mean," he said presently, controlling his voice, "that I should be glad to go on serving you howsoever I might until the end of time."

Here he came to a full stop.
 "Oh, Lord!" he groaned. "Worse and more of it! Why in thunder can't I say the right thing *right*?"

The problem absorbing him for the time, he hardly noticed that she made no answer. The train grinding and jolting to a halt before crossing the bridge presently roused him.

She was staring thoughtfully out of the window, out over a billowing sea of roofs and chimneys merging indefinitely into haze long ere it reached the horizon; and he could see the warm color pulsing in her throat and cheeks, while the glamour of the light that leaped and died in her eyes as the ruddy sunlight warmed them was a thing to live for and die for.

So she *had* understood!
 Suddenly she turned to him, sweet, troubled, serious.

"Dear Mr. Kirkwood," she said

gently, leaning forward to read his anxious countenance, "won't you tell me what it is that worries you so? Is it the fear of my father? Don't you know that he can do nothing, now that we are safe? All we have to do is to jump in a cab and drive over to Paddington Station."

"You don't want to underestimate the resource and ability of Mr. Calendar," he told her gloomily. "We've a chance, but no more. It wasn't——" He shut up suddenly.

"It wasn't that?" she caught him up. "Then what is it? You must tell me, you know, if it affects me."

"It affects us both," he said drearily. "I—I don't——"

And there again the wretched embarrassment of the confession struck him dumb; only his eyes appealed to hers, mutely piteous.

The train began to move.

"There's only a minute more," the girl told him. "Surely you can tell me."

"It's this," he broke out, exasperated; "I'm strapped. I haven't enough to pay cab-fare across town, to say nothing of taking us to Chiltern. I haven't enough money to buy you a glass of water if you were thirsty!"

Dismay flickered in her eyes—dismay and sympathy and all the emotions such a confession should naturally rouse in one who, like Dorothy Calendar, had never given money a thought, had never known the want of a penny.

"And," she added presently, in a breathless, awestruck tone, "I haven't a farthing in the world! I never even thought of it. Poor Mr. Kirkwood! I am so sorry! Let me see; what can I do? I can't consent to be a burden."

"But you're not. There's one thing we can do, of course." She glanced at him inquiringly. "Craven Street's just round the corner. We can walk there."

"Yes?"—wonderingly.

"To Mrs. Hallam's home, I mean. It's too late now—after five—else we could deposit the jewels in a bank. Since—since they're no longer yours, the only thing to do is to get them in safety, or to the rightful owner. If you place them in young Hallam's hands, yours will be clear. And—I never did such a thing in my life, Miss Calendar, but if he's got

a spark of gratitude in his make-up I ought to be able to—er—borrow a pound or two."

Thundering and panting, the train drew in beneath the vast dome of the great station. Kirkwood, lifting out the luggage, turned on the platform and gave the girl his hand.

She stepped quickly down to his side, and together they made their way with the pushing throng down the platform toward the ticket-wicket.

Here there was congestion, the passengers backing up before the wickets, waiting their turn. Over the serried array of silk hats and "bowlers" on the inner side of the fence Kirkwood could see its counterpart on the outside—outbound passengers awaiting their chance to enter, idle onlookers, people expecting friends. Was Calendar there?

No other way existed for their egress save through those revolving wickets. If Calendar were there, or Stryker, or Mulready, or all three, they could not escape seeing the girl in Kirkwood's company.

They ran the gauntlet of those hundreds of eyes in fear and trembling. The sensation of relief when at length they were without and none had approached them was exquisite. Yet it were unwise to linger.

"If you don't mind hurrying, Miss Calendar?"

She nodded brightly to him, her lips firm, eyes speculative, thoughts pre-empted with concern. In another moment they were outside the building, undergoing the cross-fire of the assembled cabbies.

It being the first time that he had ever left the station afoot, Kirkwood paused irresolutely, casting about him for the way to the Strand; and then abruptly caught the girl without ceremony by the arm and hurried her toward the step of a waiting hansom.

"Quick!" he told her in a single breath. "Your father! He hasn't seen us yet," glancing back over his shoulder. "Stryker's with him—getting out of a cab."

And, "Oh, the devil!" cried the panic-stricken young man to himself.

Already the girl, instant to grasp the situation, was seated in the hansom. Kirkwood was lifting the second valise

up to the floor and simultaneously keeping an eye on Calendar's cab—half the length of the station-front away.

The fat adventurer's foot was leaving the step as Stryker, the keen of vision, called to him.

Calendar turned, flushed with excitement and the knowledge that his quarry was at last in sight. Simultaneously he pointed out the cab into which Kirkwood was climbing, shouting to his own driver, and laboriously, made the more awkward by his haste, started to hoist his heavy carcass back into the hansom.

To that delay alone did they owe their temporary escape. Kirkwood, snapping the Craven Street address to the cabby with a plea for extreme haste, was hardly seated ere the hansom swung around the gate-posts into the Strand.

"That's the comfort of London," commented Kirkwood, cheerfully seating himself; "the cabbies are so quick when they expect a tip.

"Great Heavens!" as he caught the expression in the girl's eyes. "I never thought."

His face lengthened, and his eyebrows twisted themselves askew.

"Now we *are* in for it!" he said. "Well, it's trust to luck now and take what's coming to us."

But the girl said nothing.

Kirkwood turned in his seat, craning his neck to peer out of the small rear window.

"I don't see their cab," he said, "but of course it's after us. They must have been on watch at Cannon Street, and finding we didn't get off there—of course, Hobbs wired them—took cab for Charing Cross. Luckily for us. Or is it?" he added doubtfully.

The hansom turned down Craven Street. Mrs. Hallam's house stood near the Northumberland Avenue end. Long ere they had reached it, Kirkwood was poised upon the step, ready to jump. Once he looked back and saw another hansom break through the pedestrians at the Strand crossing and leap into rapid pursuit.

Yet as they neared Mrs. Hallam's residence the young man drew back with a short exclamation of dismay. The house was shut tight to the street—blinds drawn close at the windows, the

area-gate padlocked, an estate agent's board projecting from above the doorway, advertising the property "To be Let."

"Drive on!" Kirkwood shouted to the cabby. "As fast as you can."

"W'ere to, sir?"

"You see that cab behind? Don't let it catch up. Shake it off, lose it somehow, and it will be worth your while. Then I'll tell you where to go."

"Right-o!" cried the cabby, entering into the spirit of the game with grateful zest.

"Sha'n't let 'em catch yer, sir."

Glancing back and estimating the distance that separated the two vehicles, he lifted whip from socket and brought it down smartly around his horse's flanks. The hansom seemed to jump from the ground; it swung into Northumberland Avenue and whirled into the Embankment on a single wheel.

Kirkwood looked again. They had gained on the pursuer.

"Good!" he applauded beneath his breath.

"How," said the girl breathlessly—"how *do* you dare?"

"Dare?" echoed Kirkwood. In his veins the excitement was running like fire. "I'd dare a sight more than this for you, Dorothy!"

"And have dared," the girl amended softly; then added, with such hesitation as to seem almost timidly, "Philip."

The long lashes swept up from her cheeks, her brown eyes brave to encounter his.

But he was not looking. Manlike, rapt with the ardor of the chase, he was blind and deaf. And she saw that he had not even heard and did not realize that for the first time in their knowledge of each other they had broken through the rigid bounds of social convention.

She turned away, placing an elbow on the arm-rest, and flattening one small gloved hand against the frame, bracing herself against the jouncing of the vehicle as it swept beside the tawny breadth of the Thames. For the time there was silence between them, the while she forgot self and her present peril, surrendering her being to the lingering sweetness of her long, long thoughts.

"I've got a scheme," Kirkwood an-

nounced, so suddenly that she felt as if wrenched back to earth.

"There's the Pless; they know me there, and my credit's good. When we've shaken them off we can have the driver take us there. I'll register, and borrow from the management enough to take us out to Chiltern and pay for a cable to New York.

"I've a friend or two there that wouldn't let me suffer for the want of a few pounds. So you see," his face clearing, "we're at the end of our troubles already!"

She said something inaudible, her face averted. He bent forward, wondering.

"I didn't hear," he suggested.

Still looking away, "I said you were very good to me," she whispered, with a little quaver in her voice.

"Dorothy!"

Unconsciously his strong fingers fell and closed upon the little hand that lay beside him, as unconsciously as he used her name.

"What is the matter?"

He leaned still farther forward, peering into her face, till glance met glance at last, and his pulses tightened for sheer wonder at the humid glory in her eyes.

"Dorothy, child," he said gently, "don't worry so, dear. It's all working out—all working out."

Quietly she freed her fingers.

"I wasn't," she said shakily, in a tone between laughter and tears. "I was—you wouldn't understand. Don't be afraid I shall break down."

"There's no reason," he argued.

"The cabby knows his business."

He seemed to. The hansom, racing onward at the highest lawful rate of speed, swung from the Embankment past the Houses of Parliament, and with the Abbey on its left clattered over the cobbles of Old Palace Yard and Abingdon Street, turning suddenly into the maze of backways, great and mean, that twine and intertwine south of Victoria.

Doubling and twisting, now this way and now that, the cabby toiled them through the maze, leading the pursuers such a dance as Kirkwood thought calculated to lose them in two minutes. Yet always through the little window the following hansom kept visible, hanging doggedly in the rear—a hundred yards

behind, no more, no less, pelting after with indomitable determination.

Gradually the pair drew westward, through Pimlico and into Chelsea, once flashing briefly down Grosvenor Road, by the river-wall.

Children cheered them on, and bobbies turned to stare, wondering should they interfere. The minutes lengthened to tens, into an hour; and still they kept on, hunted and hunters, playing their game of hide-and-seek through the highways and byways of those staid old quarters.

The sun was low behind the houses on the Surrey Side when Kirkwood noticed that their horse was flagging; though not more so than the one behind. Within the past hour they seemed to have gained a hundred feet or so upon their persecutors.

Concerned, the young man lifted an arm, thrusting open the trap.

"You had better drive as directly as you can for the Hotel Pless, cabby," he said. "I'm afraid you can't keep this up much longer."

"I'm sure of it, sir," came the rough voice from above. "'E's a good 'oss, sir, but 'e can't keep goin' forever, you know, sir."

"I know," agreed Kirkwood. "You've done very well—you've done your best."

Two blocks farther on the speed had become so sensibly diminished that he became genuinely alarmed. And behind them the pursuing cabby was lashing his horse.

While, "It aren't no use me whippin' 'im, sir," came through the trap. "'E's doin' orl 'e can."

"I know."

Desperation tightened Kirkwood's lips and fired a glitter in his eye. He bent forward and lifted to his knees the girl's traveling-bag, in which the gladstone was concealed.

"What are you going to do?" asked the girl, voice atremble.

"Take a chance—the last chance. You'll stand by me?"

"You know," she told him.

"Then——" Kirkwood stood up.

They were traversing a street in Old Brompton—a quaint old street lined with houses curiously Old-Worldish even for

London; houses with sloping roofs, gables, old dormer-windows, their red brick façades trimmed with green shutters, and stoops of white stone scrubbed a shining white, each owning a trim doorway fenced off from the sidewalk.

Their numbers dropped past—shiny brass plates set in the door-panels.

"45"—"43"—"41." Now, Kirkwood was twenty-five years of age, as has been said.

"Cabby," he cried over the roof of the hansom, "put us down at number twenty-five, and wait—will you, please?"

"Very good, sir."

Kirkwood turned to meet the girl's wondering eyes.

"As soon as the cab stops, please," he said significantly.

She nodded blankly.

He waited, poised with a foot on the step. He wondered how insane he would consider this contemplated proceeding in a quieter moment.

The hansom pulled in sharply at the curb, its pursuer half a block away. Kirkwood jumped down (with the bag, be sure) and gave a hand to the girl, who leaped lightly to his side.

"Come!" he told her briefly, nodding to the cabman; and hurried her through the gate of number twenty-five and up the short flagged walk. Then, on the spotless white stoop, rang the bell, and emphasized his haste by pealing a thunderous summons on the knocker.

Behind their waiting hansom the second cab drew in, and Calendar could be seen lifting himself ponderously out of it.

Kirkwood's fingers itched for the knocker. He had lifted his hand, when the door opened, and on the threshold he beheld, not the butler or the smart white-capped maid that he had thought to see, but the figure of a man evidently the head of the house. At a glance, a tallish man, slender, with a thin, pink face, a white mustache and shrewd kindly eyes gleaming somewhat wistfully behind his glasses.

"I beg your pardon," volunteered Kirkwood hastily, as the inquiring gaze fell upon him; "but may I beg five minutes of your time—at once?"

The shadow of a smile appeared on the thin, straight lips; the keen eyes ranged from his face to the waiting cab,

to Calendar dropping hastily to the sidewalk, to the face of the girl at Kirkwood's side.

The thin lids drooped a trifle.

"Won't you come in?" said the householder.

Kirkwood stood aside, giving way to the girl, smiling a confidence into her eyes which (it must be confessed) he did not himself feel. Under its spell her momentary hesitation vanished; trusting, submissive, she bowed a little distant bow to the stranger and entered the hallway.

As Kirkwood followed her the householder stepped past him to the door-stoop. Calendar was at the gate, his fat fingers fumbling with the latch, his round red face dark with wrath.

"Do you wish to see me?" inquired the householder mildly, peering over his spectacles.

Calendar paused with his hand on the gate.

"I want my daughter," he vociferated loudly.

The stranger's gaze veered to Kirkwood's face, lingered momentarily on the young man's honest eyes, and returned to Calendar.

"My dear sir," he said, in the same mild tone, "will you be kind enough to take yourself off—to the devil if you like? Or shall I call in the police?"

The fat adventurer, thunderstruck, halted on the path, then swung and looked in the direction indicated by the householder's gestures.

A blue-coated limb of the law was at the instant advancing with measured stride from the nearer corner.

Calendar's mouth opened and closed. His moon-like countenance was still further eclipsed by the shadow of his disconcertment. Abruptly he turned and made off, banging the gate behind him.

The stranger watched him for a moment; then, with the least of smiles, turned and waved the overwhelmed American into his house.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE AMATEUR ADVENTURER.

DUMFOUNDED, Kirkwood preceded his host through the hall to a small, book-lined library in the rear of the house.

Here a fire burned, crackling happily in a grate both wide and deep, and a shaded reading-lamp diffused its pleasant homely glow upon the surface of a table littered with magazines and books. In the air there swam a fine aroma of good tobacco, the fumes from a half-consumed cigar drifting in thin blue reefs in the lamplight.

At the fireplace, one small foot on the brassy fender, Dorothy stood, looking down, the sensitive sweetness of her face illumined and enhanced by the rich ruddy glow upflung from the bedded coals.

One entered this room as into a haven of peace.

Beyond the threshold, as the girl looked up, Kirkwood turned to face his host; candidly, yet a trace nervously. Ere he could speak, however, the other gave him pause with a white and fragile hand, asking for attention.

"Sir," said the owner of the hand, somewhat austere, "permit me to put one question: Have you by any chance paid your cabby?"

The younger man blushed painfully. The other quietly laid his hand upon a bell-pull. A faint jingle was audible in the depths of the house.

"How much should you say you owe him?"

"I have not a penny in the world," said Kirkwood courageously, as his host, thrusting a hand into his pocket, withdrew it, filled with coin.

The shrewd eyes flickered amusement into his.

"Tut, tut!" with a chuckle. "Between gentlemen, my dear sir! How much did you say?"

"Ten shillings—or twelve would be nearer right," stammered Kirkwood wretchedly, divided between gratitude and profound amazement.

At this moment a short and paunchy butler appeared haughtily in the door.

His master quietly selected a half-sovereign and a half-crown from his hand and gave them to the servant. "For the cabby, Wotton."

"Yessir." The butler swung precisely on his heel.

"And, Wotton!"

"Yessir?"

"If any one should ask for me, I am not at home."

"Yessir."

The butler vanished; a moment later they heard him close the front door as he went out.

His host turned from Kirkwood, rubbing his hands.

"My dear," he said, addressing the girl—"I am old enough to call you my dear without offense, I trust—won't you take this chair and make yourself more comfortable?"

She rewarded him with a radiant smile. Whereupon their host strode to the fire, turned his back to it, and clasped his hands behind him, glowering at Kirkwood over his glasses.

"Ah!" he commented, in a tone of extreme personal satisfaction. "Romance! Romance!"

"Would you mind telling me how you knew I had not paid my cabby, sir?" inquired Kirkwood anxiously, as yet not half recovered from his stupefaction.

"Simply enough, my dear sir; I possess an imagination. From my bedroom window I behold two cabs racing down the street, the one madly pursuing the other. The foremost draws up at my carriage-block; alights therefrom a gentleman looking (if you'll pardon me) uncommonly seedy, followed by a young lady (if she will pardon me)," with a little bow, "uncommonly pretty.

"With these two old eyes I observe that the gentleman does not pay the cabby. On the other hand, he brings his traveling-bag to my door, which argues that he purposes making me a visit of some length; in which case he certainly should not keep a cabby waiting. Was I justified?"

"Unfortunately," assented Kirkwood, "you were."

And grinned, enchanted with the charming consideration shown them by their host.

"So, so!" assented the gentleman. "So the world wags to the old tune! And I, who in my youth pursued adventure without success, in my old age find myself dragged into a romance by my two ears, whether I will or no! eh? And now you are going to tell me all about it. There is a chair, Mr.—er?"

"My name is Kirkwood—Philip Kirkwood."

"Permit me to introduce myself as

Brentwick — Arthur Brentwick. And you, my dear?"

"I am Dorothy Calendar."

Mr. Brentwick removed his glasses, rubbed them, and blinked thoughtfully at the girl.

"My dear," he said suddenly, "you look remarkably like your mother. Tut! I should know; I was one of her most ardent admirers. But that can wait."

He replaced his glasses, waved Kirkwood peremptorily to a chair, and rubbed his hands.

"Now, my dear sir, for the adventure!"

"But how do you know——"

"How can it be otherwise?" with a trace of asperity. "Am I to be denied my adventure? I refuse, sir, unequivocally! Your very bearing breathes of romance. If there be no adventure forthcoming, I regret to say that my disappointment is so acute that I must show you the door."

"Sir!" cried Kirkwood, rising, on his dignity.

"Sit down!" barked Mr. Brentwick, so abruptly that the young man obeyed out of sheer astonishment. Upon which his host advanced and menaced him with a long white forefinger.

"Would you, sir," he demanded, "again expose this little lady to the machinations of that corpulent scoundrel whom I have just had the pleasure of shooing off my premises because you choose to resent an old man's raillery? For shame, Mr. Kirkwood!"

"I am sorry, sir," said the young man humbly.

"You are right to be. Sir, if the story's long, epitomize! We can have the details later if your case be extreme."

"Briefly, then," said Kirkwood, haltingly, "the man who followed us to your door is Miss Calendar's father."

"Ah!"

"He is pursuing us, Mr. Brentwick, with the intention of obtaining some property to which he has no right, and which we are trying to return to its owners."

"My dear!" said Mr. Brentwick gently, looking down at the girl's flushed and drooping head.

"I," continued Kirkwood, "am penniless to-day; I've spent my last farthing.

If I can cable to New York I can get a few pounds from my personal friends and repay you, Mr. Brentwick. I came to your door by accident—it might as well have been another; I ask your generosity, the shelter of your roof for a while, on Miss Calendar's behalf. It is necessary that she should reach Chiltern this evening, where she has friends who will receive her and protect her. Will you aid us?"

"Hmm," grumbled Mr. Brentwick meditatively.

"My faith!" he commented, his face brightening. "It's almost too good to be true! And I had been afraid the world was getting to be a humdrum place! My dear," to the girl, "what Mr. Kirkwood tells me is quite—er——"

The girl lifted her chin a trace resentfully.

"Whatever Mr. Kirkwood tells you, sir, could be nothing else," she returned simply. "But I'm sure you do not doubt——"

"Doubt! My faith, no, my dear! Doubt!" he snorted indignantly. "This is altogether too fine to be doubted. What is it, Wotton?"

The butler had appeared silently in the doorway. "Beg pardon, sir, the gentleman's valise, sir. Left in the cab, sir."

"You may put it down, Wotton. And, Wotton, don't you think you need a breath of air?"

"Yessir; thank you, sir," assented the man readily.

"Then you may change your coat, Wotton, and light your pipe and stroll out for a quarter of an hour. And if you should see a tall, thin gentleman with a seafaring air (you see, I have quick eyes, Mr. Kirkwood), or a short, stout gentleman with an air of mystery, taking an interest in these premises you might make a note of it, Wotton."

"Yessir."

"And if one of the gentlemen, or both, should annoy you with conversation, Wotton, you will be careful not to tell them anything in particular; although I authorize you to inform them that Mr. Brentwick lives here, if they ask."

"Yessir; thank you, sir."

"You may go, Wotton."

"Wotton," observed his master appreciatively, as the butler strutted away, "grows daily a more valuable servant."

"Miss Calendar, I am a widower of many years' standing; I am afraid that my house contains little that would be of service to a young lady. Yet a room is at your disposal; the parlor-maid will show you the way. And, Mr. Kirkwood, between you and me, I am of the opinion that hot water and cold steel would add to the attractiveness of your personal appearance. My man will show you to my room and shave you, sir."

"Dinner," continued the old gentleman, with anticipative relish, "will be served in precisely fifteen minutes. Later, we shall journey to Chiltern."

And again he laid his hand on the bell-pull. Simultaneously, Kirkwood and the girl rose.

"Mr. Brentwick," said Dorothy, "I don't——"

"My dear," said the old gentleman, "you can thank me best by continuing to resemble your mother more remarkably every minute."

"But I," faltered Kirkwood, overwhelmed.

"And you, my dear sir, can thank me best by permitting me to enjoy myself, which I am doing thoroughly at the present moment. My pleasure in being permitted to interfere in your young affairs is more keen than you can conceive of."

"Moreover," said Mr. Brentwick, "I have been so long an adventurer within these study-walls that I esteem it a privilege to be permitted thus to graduate to the ranks of the professionals."

He rubbed his hands, beaming upon them. "And," he added, as the maid appeared at the door, "I have already schemed me a scheme; which we will discuss at dinner while the bandits skulk in the outer darkness!"

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE UXBRIDGE ROAD.

"AND that," concluded Kirkwood, looking up from his savory meal, "is all."

"All," interrupted the girl warmly, from her seat on the opposite side of the table, "but what you haven't told."

"And that, my dear, is due wholly to a very creditable modesty," said Brentwick.

He leaned back in his chair, turning to listen to a communication murmured at his ear by the butler.

Kirkwood's eyes met the girl's across the breadth of shining linen; and he grinned whimsically, shaking his head in plaintive deprecation.

"Really, you mustn't," he told her in an undertone. "I don't deserve it."

But her gaze held his; and presently he looked down, abashed, strangely conscious of his unworthiness.

Coffee was set before them by Wotton the cat-footed, Brentwick refusing it with a little sigh.

"It is one of the things denied me by the physician who makes his life happy by making mine a desert waste," he said. "I am permitted but three luxuries—cigars, my books, and the privilege of imposing on my friends. The first I propose presently to enjoy; the second holds no attraction for me this night; the third I have just availed myself of."

He rested his head against the chair-back, glancing from face to face of the two young people at his board.

"Inspiration to do the which," he said, "came to me from the seafaring man (Stryker, did you say his name was?) via Wotton."

"While you were preparing for dinner my servant returned from his constitutional with the news that, leaving the corpulent person on duty at the corner, Mr. Stryker had temporarily vanished; but only to reappear in good time and a motor-car. It becomes evident that you have not overrated their determination; the fiasco of the cab-chase is not to be repeated."

The girl resolutely suppressed a little gasp of dismay; Kirkwood regarded his cup somberly.

"And so," continued Brentwick, "I bethought me of a counterstroke. It is my honor to own a friend who owns a touring-car. Accordingly, I telephoned him and borrowed it—mechanic and all. I am willing blindly to risk a few pence on the belief that it will prove considerably faster than the machine Captain Stryker was able to hire."

"I propose, then," he concluded, sit-

ting forward and lacing his long white fingers, "that we avoid the perils of cab and railway-carriage and proceed to Chiltern by motor. Miss Calendar, have you any objection?"

The girl looked to Kirkwood.

"I have none," she said quietly.

"And you, sir?"

"You are very thoughtful," said Kirkwood. "I can't think of anything better calculated to throw them off the trail than to distance them by motor. It would be always easy to trace our route by rail."

"Then," said their host, making as if to rise, "we had best go. If my ears—or Captain Stryker's car—does not deceive me, our fiery chariot is panting at the curb."

They rose, a little sobered from the gaiety with which they had dined. Brentwick's house had been to them a tower of refuge in time of stress. Now they were to go forth again, to dare the pitfalls of Calendar the ingenious and purposeful.

Not that either greatly feared the outcome; but there is always room for error in human calculations. Calendar's had already proved fallible. Within the bounds of possibility their turn to stumble might now be at hand.

When he dwelt upon it, their sheer impotency to stay Calendar by ordinary methods bade fair to madden Kirkwood. With any other man, it had been so simple a matter to put a period to his career by a word to a policeman, but in this case it was Dorothy's hands that had stolen the jewels; innocently though she had committed the larceny, a catspaw, a tool in the hands of an intelligence malign and unscrupulous, the law would not hold her guiltless were she once brought within its cognizance. Nor would the Hallams.

Upon their knowledge and fear of this Calendar was calculating; witness the boldness with which he was operating. His fear of the police was genuine enough, but he was never for a moment troubled by apprehensions of his daughter turning against him. She would not dare.

Before they left the house, Kirkwood reconnoitered from the drawing-room windows. At the carriage-block their motor-car rested, humming contentedly. At the corner a smaller car stood in wait-

ing, its lamps glaring balefully through the night.

Opposite the house a figure—Stryker's—lurked in the shadows. Otherwise, the street was deserted; not even the providential bobby of the early evening was in evidence.

Wotton, outwardly immobile and nerveless, let them out by the front door, shutting it so abruptly behind them as to give rise to the suspicion that beneath his icy exterior he feared desperately that the house might be stormed by the adventurers.

Kirkwood to the right, Brentwick to the left, of the girl, each carrying one of the valises, they hastened down the path, through the gate, and into the car. Brentwick taking the front seat by the mechanic—a dark shape in goggles and a touring-coat that shone like an oilskin—left the tonneau to Kirkwood and the girl.

A near-by street-lamp made all this clearly visible to the watcher across the way.

As Kirkwood slammed shut the tonneau-door and the car began to move Stryker whistled shrilly and the other car swept up the street, slowing down to let him jump aboard.

Then it fell in at the rear, attempting no greater speed than was necessary to keep the leading car in sight. Calendar's design to leave them no instant's freedom from observation was obvious. He purposed keeping forever at their elbow, waiting his chance, waiting the moment when, wearied, their vigilance should relax.

To some extent he had reckoned without his motor-car. As long as they were within the city limits, compelled to maintain a decorous pace in deference to the prejudices of the London City Council, it was an easy matter to trail the motor-car that bore the jewels.

But once they had swung north through Kensington to Shepherd's Bush and down the Uxbridge Road, paced by flying trams through Hammersmith to Southall, the complexion of the business was changed—for the worse, as Calendar viewed it.

The scattered lights of Southall dropping behind them, Brentwick spoke a low-toned word to the mechanic.

Silently the latter opened out the throttle; the motor lilted merrily into its song of the open road. Its deep and silken humming altered with startling suddenness to a resounding purr. A mile of highway had been flung behind almost ere they had time to catch their breath. And another and another, miles piling upon miles, the wide darkling countryside opening out before them, free and clean.

A lurch threw the girl against Kirkwood, and she caught at his arm to save herself. Very gently he took her hand, passed it beneath his arm, and closed his fingers over it. Perhaps the wildness of this dash through the night, the sonorous roar of the motor, the buffeting of the night-wind, violent in her face, rendered her a thought forgetful; she made no move as if to draw away.

When he looked down into the face so near to his she smiled contentedly up into his eyes; and the perilous sweetness of lips and eyes that were shown him by the light of the far shining stars tempted him almost beyond his strength.

Yet this was not the time; time enough when he had gone back to his place—or, rather, when he should have found it—in the ranks of the wage-earners, and so proved his right to happiness, to lay what he had to offer at her feet.

So he turned his face forward, half dreaming, half planning, against the struggle that was to make his future. Thus they rode, at length free, contented in the knowledge that safety lay before them, that they were with friends, that their persecutors labored unavailingly far behind them, striving to compass the impossible—the impossible, that is, barring the intervention of the unforeseen.

Half an hour of this, then Kirkwood began to be conscious that their speed was slackening. He could hear the mechanic's voice, grumbling, as he fussed with the driving-gear. He heard Brentwick fling him a sharp-toned query, get a reply as short.

And steadily the speed decreased, until at length they were moving scarcely faster than a cab had carried them, snail-like, to their former pace.

Brentwick leaned back over the tonneau.

"Trouble," he announced briefly. "I'm afraid we've blundered."

"What is it?" inquired the girl, bending forward.

"Petrol's giving out. Charles, here, says that the tank must have leaked. We'll do the best we can and stop at the first inn; a majority of the inns maintain stores of petrol for just such emergencies now."

"Are we—do you think——" Kirkwood put in.

"Oh, not a bit of it! They'll not catch up with us this night. That's a poor car they have—nothing to compare with this, my dear sir. We'll reach the Crown and Mitre, just ahead, tank up, and be off long before they make up half what they've lost."

Dorothy looked anxiously at Kirkwood, her lips forming the inaudible query, What did he think?

"Oh, we'll have no trouble," he assured her. "The chauffeur knows, undoubtedly."

Nevertheless, he stood up in the tonneau, the traveling-bag beneath his feet, conscious of the revolver weighing heavily in his pocket, and stared back along the road. There was absolutely nothing visible.

The car continued to crawl. Some five minutes elapsed. Gradually they drew abreast a roadside tavern standing a little back from the road, embowered in trees, the lights of its tap-room and parlor glowing invitingly between their trunks. A creaking sign on a post by the roadside informed all and sundry that here was the Crown and Mitre, ready to furnish entertainment for man and beast.

The car stopped.

Charles, the mechanic, jumped out and ran up the path toward the inn. Brentwick turned again, his eyes shining in the starlight, his brow quaintly furrowed, his voice apologetic.

"It may take a few moments," he said, plainly endeavoring to hide his concern. "My dear, if I have brought trouble to you I shall never earn my own forgiveness."

Kirkwood stood up again, watchful, listening.

"I hear nothing," he said.

"You will forgive me, won't you, my dear, for causing you these few anxious

moments?" pleaded the old gentleman, his tone tremulous.

"As if you could be blamed!" protested the girl. "You must not think of it that way. Fancy, what should we have done without you?"

"Mr. Kirkwood, do you hear anything?"

"Nothing as yet, sir," responded the young man.

"Perhaps," said Brentwick, "we had best alight and go up to the inn. It would be more comfortable there, especially if the petrol proves hard to procure and we have long to wait."

"I should like to very much," said the girl.

Kirkwood nodded approval and opened the door, stepping out to assist her. Then he picked up the bag and followed the pair.

Brentwick had gallantly offered his arm, and she had accepted it as readily.

Charles met them in the doorway, apparently vexed.

"No petrol to be had here, sir," he said, touching the vizard of his cap. "They are going to send a mile up the road for some. You will have to be patient, I'm afraid, sir."

Kirkwood paused again, listening attentively, before he entered. But the wind was blowing in the direction from which they had come, and he heard naught but the sighing of it in the trees and an echo of rustic laughter from the tap-room.

A red-cheeked landlady bowed and scraped before them until they had entered a private parlor, then departed in search of light refreshments ordered by Brentwick.

The girl seated herself upon a couch and made a palpable attempt to appear at ease. Brentwick stood by the window, tall figure bent, hands clasped behind his back, as he peered out into the night. Kirkwood dropped the valise beneath a chair and took to pacing the floor.

The minutes lagged sluggishly, ticked off by the pendulum of the tall grandfather's clock in the corner. The landlady did not reappear, for some reason unconscionably delayed. Brentwick remarked upon the fact querulously, then abruptly turned away from the window and drew a chair up by the table.

"We must not permit ourselves to be worried," he said, with a thin smile. "My dear, won't you sit here? And, Mr. Kirkwood, will you bring up your chair? I have something to show you that may perhaps engage your interest for a while."

To humor him and alleviate his apparent distress, they acceded, Kirkwood seating himself opposite the girl, with Brentwick between them. The latter, with some hesitation, thrust a hand into an inner coat-pocket and produced a small black-leather wallet. He seemed about to open it, then suddenly laid it upon the table, as steps approached the room.

Charles burst in, leaving the door wide.

"Mr. Brentwick, sir!" he panted.

"That car——"

Kirkwood leaped to his feet, tugging at the weapon in his pocket.

In another breath he had the revolver exposed. The girl uttered a little low cry, sitting very still. Brentwick, with a sharp exclamation, turned upon Kirkwood, and clamping strong, supple fingers upon the younger man's wrist, with the other hand laid hold of the revolver and by a single twist wrenched it away.

Kirkwood turned upon him furiously.

"So!" he cried, his voice vibrant.

"This is what your hospitality meant! I might have known——"

"My dear sir," retorted Mr. Brentwick, with a flash of impatience, "had I desired to betray you I would have asked no better opportunity than when you were in my own house!"

"But——" expostulated Kirkwood, trembling as heavy footsteps drummed the tempo of haste in the hallway.

"Would you have bullets flying when this young lady is about?" demanded Brentwick.

He slid the revolver hurriedly upon a shelf beneath the table-top.

"Sir!" he told Kirkwood with heat, "you are a young fool! I was once, too—and would to Heaven I were again! Take my advice and be calm—it's the only way to save your treasure!"

"Hang the jewels!" cried Kirkwood hotly.

"Sir, who said anything about the jewels?"—as indignantly.

At that moment Calendar appeared in the doorway, Stryker's weather-beaten countenance leering over his shoulder.

CHAPTER XXIV.

MR. CALENDAR AND CARE: POSITIVELY THEIR FAREWELL APPEARANCE.

THE fat adventurer hung momentarily on the threshold, quick eyes taking in the four within the Crown and Mitre parlor. A shade of satisfaction colored his expression. He smiled wickedly into the close, short thatch of his gray mustache and held his revolver poised for instant use.

But there was no necessity. Brentwick and Kirkwood had resumed their seats. The girl had not stirred from hers from the first alarm; she was leaning forward, elbows on table, hands tightly clasped, her face—a little blanched—turning toward the doorway. Her lips were set and white with courage, and the brown eyes met Calendar's in a level and unflinching glance. Beyond this she made no sign of recognition.

Charles, the mechanic, stood nearest the adventurers, rigid in frightened astonishment.

Calendar, advancing suddenly, poked at him with the revolver.

"Get back, Four-Eyes!" he snapped. "Get out of my way!"

And the mechanic jumped as if shot, then hastily retreated to the table, his features working beneath the goggle-mask that had excited Calendar's derision.

"Come in, cap'n," Calendar threw over his shoulder. "Come in, close the door, and lock it!"

The captain obeyed, grimacing mockingly at Kirkwood. Calendar advanced jauntily to within a yard of the table, then stopped, smiling complacently down upon the little party he had trapped and twirling his revolver airily.

"Good evening," he gave them blandly.

"Dorothy, my child," with assumed concern, "you are looking a trifle pale; I'm afraid you've been keeping late hours.

"Mr. Kirkwood, it's delightful to see you again! Permit me to remind you that

pistol-shots are apt to attract attention. It wouldn't be wise for you to bring the police about our ears. I believe those were your words to me in the cabin of the *Alethea*; were they not?

"And you, sir," staring hard at Brentwick; "you animated fossil, what d'ye mean by telling me to go to the devil? But let that pass; I forgive you. What might your name be?"

"Brentwick," said that gentleman placidly.

He seemed about to say something more, but held his tongue, smiling.

"Brentwick, eh? I'm charmed to meet you, I'm sure. But permit me to advise you not to come a second time between a father and his daughter; another man might not be so patient with you. There's a law in the land, Mr. Brentwick!"

"It *was* thoughtful of you not to go to law," observed Brentwick quietly.

Then, with a change of note: "Come, sir! you have unwarrantably invaded this room, which I have engaged. Get through with your business and be off with you!"

"Eh, what's that, my antediluvian friend? Oh, all in my good time. When I've concluded my business with you, I'll go—not before. But now we'll get down to it. Mr. Kirkwood, you have a revolver belonging to me. Kindly return it."

"It's under the table," interposed Brentwick suavely. "Shall I hand it to you?"

"By the muzzle, if you please. Be very careful—mine's loaded, too. Apt to go off at any moment."

Brentwick, to Kirkwood's intense disgust, quietly slipped a hand underneath the table, and placing the revolver on its top, gently shoved it over to the farther edge. Calendar, with a satisfied grunt, dropped the weapon in his pocket.

"Any more?" he demanded sharply, eyes flitting alertly from face to face. "Well, you wouldn't dare use them, anyway. And I'm about through with you. Dorothy, my child, it's high time you returned to your father's protection. Where is that gladstone bag?"

"In my traveling-bag," she told him in even, expressionless accents.

"Then bring it along. You may say good night to the gentlemen."

The girl did not move; her pallor grew slightly more intense. Her lips seemed a trace more straight and firm.

"Dorothy!" cried the adventurer sharply. "Do you hear me?"

"I hear you," she replied, a little wearily.

"Never mind, please, Mr. Kirkwood!" with a little appealing gesture. "Don't say anything. I am not going with this man."

Calendar's features worked nervously. He chewed at the corner of his mustache, eyeing the girl angrily.

"I presume," he said presently, controlling his emotion, "that you are aware that I, as your parent, am in a position to remove you forcibly if you refuse to return to me."

"I shall not go with you," iterated the girl calmly. "Whether by force or no, if I go to prison—with you—in penalty for resisting, I shall not go. Mr. Brentwick and Mr. Kirkwood are taking me to—some friends of mine, where I will be comfortable. That is all I have to say to you."

"Bravo, my dear!" Brentwick applauded in an aside which did not escape Calendar.

"Mind your own business, sir!" he thundered, his face purple with fury.

Then more steadily to his daughter: "You understand, of course, what this means. I offer you a home, and a good one. If you refuse it, you work for your living, my girl! You've forfeited the Burgoyne legacy."

"I know, I know," she said contemptuously. "I am content. Won't you please to leave me alone?"

For an instant Calendar glowered over her.

"I presume," he said acidly, "that all these heroics are inspired by this whipper-snapper, Kirkwood. Do you know that he hasn't a brass farthing to his name?"

"What has that——" cried the girl indignantly.

"Why, it's everything to do with it, my child. You can't marry on nothing a year. For I surmise that you propose to marry this Kirkwood, don't you?"

There followed a little interval of silence, while the hot blood flamed in the girl's face and the red lips quivered as

she faced her tormentor. Then, with a break in her voice that escaped her control:

"If Mr. Kirkwood asks me, I shall," she said very quietly.

"That," Kirkwood interposed, "is understood."

His gaze sought her face, but she would not look toward him.

Calendar loomed above them, trembling with anger.

"You don't seem to take into consideration the fact that I'm your father and you a minor," he told them bitingly. "I can refuse my consent."

"But you won't," said Kirkwood easily.

"No," agreed the adventurer, after an instant's hesitation.

"No, I sha'n't interfere. Take her, my boy, if you want her," he added ironically. "The Lord knows I've troubles enough—a father's lot is not an easy one." He paused, sardonic, sneering.

"But," he continued deliberately, "there's this little matter of the gladstone bag. I am ready to abandon my paternal authority, but my property——"

"It is not your property," interrupted the girl.

"It was your mother's, my child. It is now mine."

"I question that," Kirkwood put in.

"You may question what you like," Calendar told him, undisturbed. "The fact remains that I propose to remove my property when I go, whether you like it or not. Are you going to raise any serious objection, or may I count on your being sensible?"

"You may put up your revolver, if that's what you mean," said Kirkwood. "We shall certainly not oppose you with violence. But I warn you that Scotland Yard——"

"Oh, that be blowed!" snorted the adventurer, in disgust. "I can sail circles round any beak that ever blew out of Scotland Yard. You can give me an hour's start and you can do all the business you want to with—*Scotland Yard!*"

"Then you acknowledge," said Brentwick suavely—the old gentleman had been a quietly interested spectator through it all—"that you've no legal title to the jewels?"

"Look here, m' friend," chuckled the

adventurer complacently, "when you catch me acknowledging anything you make a note of it and tell a bobby. Just at present, I've got something better to do than go 'bout making acknowledgments. Stryker, hand me that bag of my dutiful daughter's."

"'Ere you are," said the captain, lifting the valise from beneath the chair and depositing it on the table before Kirkwood.

"We don't take anything that doesn't belong to us," laughed Calendar, fumbling with the catch; "not even when it's so small a matter as my own child's traveling-bag."

"A small, heavy, black gladstone bag," he added, opening the valise and plunging his hand in, "will just about do for me."

He drew the jewel-satchel out and set it on the table.

"Take this away, Stryker," he chuckled mirthfully, pushing the girl's valise aside. And stood, rumbling with stentorian laughter, beaming benignantly around at the assembled company.

"Why," he exclaimed, "this is worth all the trouble it has cost me! My children, I forgive you freely. Mr. Kirkwood, I congratulate you on having secured a most expensive wife for a starveling painter! Really, I don't know but what I ought to do something for you both."

He gurgled delightedly, rubbing his fat mottled palms together.

"I tell you what," he resumed, "no one yet ever accused Georgie Calendar of being mean. I'm just going to make you a handsome wedding-present."

"The good Lord knows," he mumbled, "that there's enough here for a fellow to throw a little something away and never miss it."

The thick red fingers tore at the catch nervously, and finally got the bag opened. These about the table bent forward, themselves a little warmed by excitement over the prospect of for the first time beholding that for which they had fought and suffered so long.

A heavy and luscious fragrance pervaded the atmosphere, exhaled from the open mouth of the gladstone bag.

A tense silence made itself felt by those in the room—a breathless pause

broken at length by a sharp snap of Calendar's white teeth.

"*M-m-m!*" he grunted heavily, and began to pant.

Abruptly his heavy hands began to dig into the contents of the bag as a terrier digs into the ground. The air seemed momentarily thick with flying objects.

Beneath Kirkwood's astonished eyes a towel fell upon the table—a towel bearing on its dingy hem the inscription, in poor chirography and indelible ink: "Hôtel du Commerce, Anvers."

A heavy earthenware tooth-mug dropped to the floor with a crash. A slimy soap-dish slid across the table-top and into Brentwick's lap.

A battered alarm-clock with not a tick left in its abused carcass rang vacuously as it fell beside the bag. The rest was oranges—a dozen or more small, round, golden globes of ripe fruit, perhaps a trifle overripe, and therefore the more aromatic.

Suddenly Calendar ripped out an oath.

"Mulready, by the living God!" he cried furiously. "Tricked by that infernal blackguard! Me—blind as a bat! That's why he bought those damned oranges, is it? That's why he was so bent on picking a fight with me on the boat, hey?"

"And that's why he was so knocked out he couldn't help me hunt you two blessed idiots down, eh? Well—by—the—Eternal! I'll camp on his trail for the rest of his natural-born days! I'll have his heart's blood for this!"

He swayed, gibbering in his rage, his face shockingly congested, his fat hands shaking as with ague on the rim of the gladstone bag.

And suddenly, while still their own astonishment held Kirkwood and the girl speechless, Charles, the mechanic, with a swift movement bent forward over the valise.

Kirkwood heard two metallic clicks, so close together that they sounded as one.

Calendar's ravings were shut off as if his tongue had become paralyzed. He dropped back a step, flabby jowls pale and shaking, heavy jaw-drooping on his breast, mouth wide and eyes protruding, as he clashed before him his thick fleshy wrists—securely handcuffed.

Instantly the mechanic whirled about, bounded across the floor, and caught Stryker at the door, his quick fingers twisting in the man's coat-collar as he yanked him back and threw him.

"Mr. Kirkwood!" cried the mechanic. "Here—one moment. Take that gun away from this man, will you?"

Kirkwood sprang to his assistance, and without difficulty or, indeed, encountering great resistance, wrested a revolver from the captain's limp, trembling fingers.

Roughly the mechanic shook the man, dragging him to his feet once more.

"Now," he said sternly, "you go over there in the corner and turn your face to the wall and be good! You can't get away, anyway. I've got men watching fer you outside."

Stryker, trembling like a whipped cur, meekly obeyed his instructions to the letter.

"Charles," turning away from him with a contemptuous laugh, strode back to Calendar, at the same time removing his goggles, and clapped a heavy hand upon the adventurer's quivering shoulders.

"Well!" he cried heartily. "Still sailing circles round Scotland Yard, Simmons, or Cartwright, or Bellows, or Sanderson, or Calendar, or Crumbstone—or whatever name you prefer to be known by?"

Calendar glared at him, aghast.

Then heaved a heavy sigh, shrugged his fat shoulders in resignation, and dropped his head in thought. Abruptly he looked up.

"You can't do it," he told the detective violently; "you've got not one atom of proof against me! What's there—a pile of oranges and a peck of trash? Besides, if you take me in you'll have to take that girl, too, for I swear she did the stealing! I'll not be trapped this way through her and let her go on her way rejoicing. If you take me—take her, d'ye hear."

"I think," put in the clear, bland voice of Mr. Brentwick, "that we can consider that matter settled.

"Here," he said, picking up the wallet in which he had asserted Kirkwood and the girl would find something to interest them, "here is a little matter that may

clear up any lingering doubts that you may entertain."

He extracted a slip of cardboard and gently shoved it across the table. Calendar, bewildered, bent over it for a moment, then straightened up, shook himself, laughed uneasily, and turned to the detective.

"It's come with you, I suppose?" he said.

"The Remsen warrant is still out for you," returned the man. "That'll be good enough to hold you on."

"Oh, all right. I'll come peaceably. I guess," said Mr. Calendar thoughtfully, jingling the manacles, "I'm a back number anyway. It's up to me to quit and live at the country's expense for the rest of my days when a half-grown girl, a half-baked artist, a flub like Mulready, and a club-footed snipe from Scotland Yard can put it all over me this way.

"Yep," he sighed, "time to quit. But I would like to get in one good lick at that blackguard Mulready!"

"Don't worry about him," advised the detective. "We got a wire from the Amsterdam police this afternoon saying that they'd picked up Mr. Mulready and a woman named Hallam on suspicion; they were opening negotiations for the sale of a lot of stones, and seemed in such a precious hurry that the diamond merchant's suspicions were aroused. There was a kid named Frederick Hallam at their hotel, and they've got him under surveillance, too."

"Amen!" grunted Calendar. "I'm blame glad to hear it. 'Twouldn't be a square deal, otherwise."

He turned, nodded uncertainly to the girl, Kirkwood, and Brentwick, then, with the detective's hand under his arm and accompanied by the thoroughly cowed Stryker, waddled awkwardly out of the room.

Kirkwood, following the trio to the door, shut it carefully and returned slowly to the table.

The girl had hardly moved, save to place elbows on the dark polished mahogany slab and cradle her cheeks between hands still clenched.

The color had returned to her face, with a little enhanced depth of hue, to be credited to her excitement. Her

cheeks were hot, her eyes starlike beneath the woven massy sunlight of her hair; and she stared steadfastly before her, temporarily unconscious of her surroundings, thoughts astray and sounding the iridescent depths of the dreamlike days to come.

Brentwick had slid forward in his chair, resting his white head on its back, and was smiling serenely up at the low yellow ceiling. Presently he roused, caught Kirkwood's eye, and smiled. The young man grinned.

"And you did all that!" he commented, amused.

Brentwick nodded, self-satisfied.

"I contrived it all," said he. "Rather neat, I call it, too." His eyes brightened youthfully with the light of pleasure.

"Inspiration!" he cried. "Inspiration pure and simple! I'd been nagging my brain for fully five minutes before Wotton told me about their engaging a motor-car, and then, in a flash, I had it. You see, I happened to know Charles—his name, by the way, is really Charles—and I telephoned Scotland Yard and arranged all the details with him."

He chuckled with delight.

"It's the instinct!" he told Kirkwood emphatically—"the instinct for adventure. I knew I had it, but never until this day did it have a chance to prove its existence.

"A born adventurer—that's what I am!" he crowed. "You see, we had to get them to believe that we were afraid and running away; then they'd run after us. I might have baited a dozen traps and failed to lure them into my house after that stout scoundrel knew you had had time to tell me the whole story. The minute you mentioned the name of Calendar, I began to understand. Odd!"

He lapsed suddenly into reverie, the wistful, whimsical look coming back into his eyes, replacing the glow of excitement. And he sighed faintly.

"What I don't understand," said Kirkwood, shaking his head, "is how you forced Calendar to withdraw his charge against Dorothy, here."

"Oh-h?" Mr. Brentwick elevated his fine white eyebrows, smiled again, and sat up.

"I can answer you best, perhaps," said he, "by asking you to scan what I sub-

mitted to his respectful consideration, my dear sir."

And he delicately thrust the slip of cardboard toward Kirkwood. It proved an ordinary oblong of cream-colored paper, engraved in fine script. Simply a visiting-card, something like the following:

MR. GEORGE BURGoyNE CALENDAR

25, Aspen Gardens, S. W.

"Oh!" said the young man blankly. "You——"

"I," assented "Mr. Brentwick," laconically.

Impulsively Kirkwood leaned across the table.

"Dorothy!" he said gently. And when the girl turned and her dreaming eyes met his, he quietly drew her attention to the card.

Then he rose hastily and went over and stood by the window, staring out into the night.

"My dear—my dear!" protested the old gentleman. "Positively, I don't deserve this! I don't. I——" The young-old voice quavered and broke into a happy laugh.

"You must understand"—more soberly—"that no consideration is due me whatsoever. I was too old for your mother when we married; but I believed that it didn't matter. It did. I went home—to America. I thought our difference would not last long, but your mother died before I could return.

"After that, I was in no hurry. Just before the old colonel's death I came to London to live and communicated with him, asking to be permitted to see you. He refused pointblank—told me that he would disinherit you if I did. He was very angry with me—justly, I admit.

"One must grow old before one can see how unforgivably one was wrong. So I settled down to a quiet old age, determined not to disturb you in your happiness. Mr. Kirkwood!"

Kirkwood swung about from the window. The old gentleman was standing with his arm around his daughter's shoulder.

"Come here, Mr. Kirkwood," he suggested pleasantly; "a word with you, sir."

Kirkwood obeyed slowly.

"Dorothy," said her father, "the word is really to you, not to Philip. My dear, you did a very brave thing a little while ago—a very brave, womanly, noble, and creditable action. And Philip's words were only second to yours. I do hope to goodness that you two young idiots are not going to let any addle-pated scruples stand between you and happiness!"

Abruptly he dropped his arm from about her shoulders and hopped nimbly to the door. "Really, I must see about that petrol!" he cried. "It's true that Charles lied, but we really *must* be getting on!"

And the door slammed.

The table was between them. Across it the girl stood, head erect, lips firm and sweet, moisture gleaming on the lashes of

the eyes with which she met his questioning gaze so fearlessly.

The silence deepened about them. Breathlessly, fascinated, Kirkwood bent toward her.

"You—*Dorothy!* You meant it?"

She laughed, a little, low, sobbing laugh. "I meant it, my dear—if you'll have a girl so bold and forward, who doesn't wait till she's asked, but throws herself at the head of the man she loves. I meant it all, Philip."

And as he came swiftly around the table she turned to meet him, arms upraised, scarlet lips atremble, the brown adorable lashes drooping over her divine and serenely childlike eyes.

After a while Kirkwood laughed aloud.

And there was that in his voice that caused the Shape of Care, which had for the past ten minutes been luffing and filling in the offing, and steadily diminishing and growing more emaciated and pale and indistinct—there was that in his laugh, I say, which caused the Shape of Care to utter a hollow croak of despair and incontinently vanish.

(The End.)

AFTER MIDNIGHT.

By William Hamilton Osbourne.

HOW love, when hunting for a disagreeable possibility, unearthed a happy actuality. ♣

J. G. W. OGLETHORPE, of Riverside Drive, took a firm hold on the coat-lapel of his friend Tommy Rogers and dragged him into one of the small private rooms in the Millionaires' Club, on the Avenue.

"Tommy," said old J. G. W. Oglethorpe, "I'm up against it, and you've got to help me out—just you and no one else. It's—it's about Annette."

"Measles?" queried Tommy Rogers.

"Measles!" snorted J. G. W.: "I guess you haven't seen Annette for about ten years. It's worse than measles.

"She's grown up into a young woman, Tommy, and——"

"A-ha!" responded Tommy; "and there's a man in the case. I see. A-ha!"

"You've hit the nail on the head, Tommy," answered the old millionaire; "it's almost a—man."

"Who is he?" queried J. G. W.'s old crony. The millionaire leaned forward and tapped Tommy's old and bony knee.

"That's what I want *you* to find out, lad," he said.

Rogers sat up.

"D-don't *she* know?" he asked.

"She knows all I know, though she thinks she knows a heap more. She knows his name. His name," he added,

"is John Thatcher Wing. He's a society lad—or something worse. I want to know. I've got to be shown.

"You know, I married one of An-

nette's sisters to the Count d'Angelo—a pig in a poke; and another to Whittingham, of London, a member of Parliament. You know about those chaps, and what they cost me, and their habits and proclivities are public property.

"Well, I've just about quit. This time it's up to me not to make mistakes, nor will I let Annette make any."

Tommy Rogers toddled out into the corridor and returned with a fat directory under his arm. But J. G. W. shook his head.

"He's a society boy, I tell you, Roger," he said, "and all you'll find in there will be his name and residence address. He lives at the Watkins Arms. That's all."

"On Forty-Third Street," assented Tommy Rogers.

"You look him up, Tommy, will you? You know why? I can't go to a detective agency, and I won't go to a mercantile reporter. If I do, it's bound to leak out somehow. I've got to trust to you.

"I don't care a hang how fancy the man is if he's decent and honest. If Annette wants him and he wants Annette, I don't care whether he's a butcher or a bricklayer. But he's got to be straight. He can be a Willie, if he wants to, but he can't be crooked. Not if he's to deal with me. You're on? Tommy, you find out. When you find out, it'll be terrapin and champagne on me."

Now, there was nothing that Tommy Rogers liked so much as a mission of this kind.

He was a man-about-town, was Tommy Rogers, with his little independent income and nothing to do; he had been the same old two-and-sixpence for thirty-seven years of his natty adult life.

He called next morning at the Watkins Arms and asked for Mr. John Thatcher Wing. He would not have known that gentleman had he seen him. But he was not likely to see him, either.

Mr. John Thatcher Wing, he was informed politely, never rose before 2 P.M., except on special occasions, when he arose at 1 P.M. Would Mr. Rogers leave his card? He would. He accordingly left the card of a Brooklyn man whom nobody knew, then strolled back to the club and reported.

"By George," said old J. G. W., "that fits in with what I've heard. This Wing will go to picnics, lectures, matinées—anything, so long as it's in the afternoon. Yet when he talks to me it's always about the money market—the details of it; you understand.

"Yet he's never on the Street—never. And there's not a broker down there knows him, either, that I've been able to find out. He gets up at two, eh? Well, what time does he go to bed?"

"I reserved that inquiry for tomorrow," answered Tommy Rogers, slow and sure. "I'll see an elevator-boy, with a bit of a tip."

The next day he found out. Mr. John Thatcher Wing went to bed at seven in the morning.

"Does he come home drunk?" he inquired.

"Sober as a judge," responded the well-tipped elevator-boy. For further information the elevator-boy referred Mr. Tommy Rogers to the clerk. The clerk had no information to give.

"Rules o' the house, you know," the clerk remarked.

"I'll tell you what you do," said J. G. W. to Rogers on the following day; "you come up to my place to-night. We'll have billiards, and some good cigars.

"It's dollars to doughnuts this Wing chap will be there. He and Annette seem to be traveling in converging lines. It's getting serious. When he leaves our place, you follow him, Tommy. What do you think of that?"

That suited Tommy.

He was on time that evening. And so was Wing. But the two men did not meet. Tommy caught a glimpse of him through the curtains.

"Looks all right," he said, "but you can never tell. If I'd had time I'd have brought a pair of sneakers, and a set o' nippers, and—and things."

"You're too old for a good detective, Tommy," said the old millionaire. "Besides, there's the front door closing. It's Wing. He's gone. Get into your duds and follow him at once."

Rogers followed him. Wing went, almost as the crow flies, down to his rooms in the Watkins Arms, and disappeared within. Old Rogers sneaked up in an

elevator and listened at Wing's door. There was a light within, but there were no voices.

Now and then he heard Wing humming a soft little song under his breath. So Tommy Rogers descended, and loitered about the hall and in the street until fifteen minutes to twelve; and then he left.

"To-night, evidently," thought Rogers, "he's playin' a straight game, I guess."

His views might have changed had he known that at five minutes to twelve o'clock Mr. John Thatcher Wing emerged from his rooms clad in a dark business suit, with a slouch-hat upon his head.

He did not know that Mr. Wing descended in the elevator and made his way through the rear of the building into an alleyway connecting Forty-Third with Forty-Second Street and disappeared.

As regular as clockwork, however, Mr. John Thatcher Wing reappeared at the Watkins Arms at 7 A.M. next day, nodded to the clerk and went to bed.

In the home of J. G. W. Oglethorpe a crisis was approaching.

Annette sobbed upon her father's shoulder.

"He wants to marry me," she protested; "and besides, I want to marry him."

The millionaire raised his eyebrows.

"Annette," he said, "would you marry a man like D'Angelo, to-day?"

"No," exclaimed the horrified Annette.

"Or—Whittingham?"

"No," repeated Annette.

"My dear," said the millionaire softly, "how much more do you know about this Wing than your sisters knew about the other two?"

"John Thatcher Wing's a gentleman," replied Annette loftily.

"What's his business?" queried her father. "Does he live on his money? Is he rich?"

"N-no," returned Annette, "he isn't rich, and he isn't poor."

"And—his business?"

"I don't know," returned Annette, "and I won't ask him. He's never told me. We don't talk *business*," she returned emphatically.

"You run away, Annette," said the old gentleman, "and when we find out we'll talk it over. If he's a gentleman, all right. If he isn't——"

"He *is*," exclaimed Annette.

"Tommy," said J. G. W. to his crony, that evening, "I don't like this night business. It seems certain that this chap stays up all night. Why? By George, Tommy, I'm old-fashioned, I am. And when I was young I had to be in by ten o'clock."

"If I wasn't, Mama Oglethorpe would be in my wool, all right, or Papa Oglethorpe would be busy—elsewhere—with a stick. And when I married Annette's mother she kept it up. I haven't ever been able to stay out all night. Why should he? Is he an hotel clerk? No. Because he makes too much money for an hotel clerk. He isn't a butcher, or a bricklayer—his hands show that."

"No, Tommy, it's deeds of darkness that are done in the night, I tell you. This chap Wing doesn't have any independent income. We know that. If he did, he'd come home woozy at seven in the morning. He makes his money between twelve at night and seven in the morning; he does it in a clear-headed way, too."

"There's only one thing left, Tommy. He's a gambler—a professional gambler. That's what he is. He lives on the pocketbooks of other men. He's a sharper, Tommy Rogers—a hawk, a night-hawk. Mark my words."

For a whole week Tommy Rogers watched. Three times he saw his man go up to his rooms in evening dress, come down in street dress, pass to the rear, and disappear.

"Confound it," thought the old millionaire, "I'm in for a scene of some kind. I hate scenes. If I turn this chap down Annette will keep me going for a year or more. If I ask him about himself he'll—he'll lie to me, as sure as guns. He's got to lie."

"Then I'll have to expose him. There's another scene. And if I track him down and find out for myself—there's another scene. And yet, that's the thing to do. I'll do it myself, and let Annette know for herself. I'll let her see with her own eyes. Then she'll understand."

His opportunity came sooner than he had expected. It came that evening. It was fully 11 P.M. when Annette called him into the parlor.

There was John Thatcher Wing.

"Mr. Oglethorpe," Wing began, and his voice trembled, "I am acting under the instructions of Annette, your—your daughter. She told me to—to ask you, right here, in her presence——" He stopped.

The millionaire waited patiently.

"Well, ask me," he said. "Why don't you ask me? I'm here."

"Oh, to be sure," answered the red-faced John Thatcher Wing. "I'll ask you—for Annette."

Then his face paled.

The millionaire cleared his throat.

"Sit down," he said. John Thatcher Wing sat down. But first he took his watch from his pocket and looked at it.

The millionaire sparred for time. He started in on a desultory conversation that began with the weather and threatened never to let up. At last John Thatcher Wing rose to his feet, once more drew forth his timepiece, and stammered:

"And—about Annette," he said.

"By George," he thought to himself, "I'll be late if I don't look out."

"Th-thursday," spluttered the millionaire, for an idea had occurred to him—"Th-thursday I'll give you my answer. G-good night, sir."

J. G. W. Oglethorpe stumbled over himself in leaving the room. But once in the billiard-room, he wasted no time. He called up his stable and ordered his motor-car around at once.

In the hall, John Thatcher Wing took a hasty but significant adieu of Annette and sped down the steps. "I'll have to get a cab," he told himself; "that old duffer kept me so long."

He did not know that the "old duffer" had directed his daughter to wrap up in her duds and to come on, now, no nonsense—he'd show her. Wing did not know that a motor-car was following his cab, up one street, down another.

"Oh, yes," thought the old millionaire, "I'll give him his answer before he knows it—and so will Annette."

Wing's cab trailed on in front.

"I won't have time to go home," he muttered to himself, so he stuck his head out and uttered a brief direction to his cabman, who nodded. Then he kept on, and swung his horse into Forty-Second Street.

John Thatcher Wing leaped out in front of an attractively lighted place—a place that at that hour seemed to beckon to all the midnight world—and disappeared within.

The motor-car pulled up behind him. The old millionaire saw nothing but the glitter of the lights.

"Now, girl," he said to Annette fiercely, for the recollection of D'Angelo and of Whittingham was fresh within him, "you come with me. I'll show you, no matter what the cost."

He pulled her—dragged her—behind him. Together they slowly ascended the steps of the glittering palace.

Inside, John Thatcher Wing stepped through swinging doors. Then he flung off his overcoat and looked at his watch.

"On time to the minute," he said. "It's just twelve. Now you can go, old chap."

The old chap looked up.

"Got your togs on, Wing. I see," he said.

He passed on out, brushing against an old man and a girl as he went. But the old man and the girl bustled in, nevertheless, one unwillingly, the other with determination.

John Thatcher Wing caught sight of them as they came along. He opened a little gate and invited them inside an enclosure.

"To what," he exclaimed with a smile—a businesslike smile, "do I owe the honor of this visit?"

J. G. W. Oglethorpe puffed himself up.

"I told you, young man," he said severely, "that I would give you your answer Thursday. Your answer, sir—or mine—is ready. Yes, sir. You can have her, sir. You can take her."

"I couldn't wait till Thursday to tell you. And neither could Annette. My answer, sir, is 'yes,' and good luck go with you."

He went back to the motor-car while John Thatcher Wing and Annette did the rest. But Annette was puzzled.

"What is this place?" she asked of Wing, "and why didn't you ever tell me?"

"I never told you, dear," said John Thatcher Wing, "because you never asked, and I suppose you never cared. But I'll tell you now. For the present I am the head cashier of the All-

Night Bank of New York City. Don't you see?"

When J. G. W. Oglethorpe and Tommy Rogers had that dinner the All-Night Bank of New York City was represented at it, too.

"My son-in-law, sir," said J. G. W. to Tommy—"my son-in-law—to be."

THE PACKING-CASE.

By Nowell Cay.

Hypocrisy, corralling Innocence, tries a disappearing game, but runs foul of the law.

A NOVEL—COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE.

CHAPTER I.

A GRUESOME JOKE.

THE clock of St. Luke's was chiming the second quarter after midnight when I turned into Tedworth Street.

It was the first night of my first play, and after the excitement of my "call," and the congratulations afterward, when everybody conspired to make me believe that I had done something very wonderful, I had welcomed the idea of a long walk home, and was only sorry that the distance between the theater and my chambers on Chelsea Embankment was not twice as great.

I knew that I should not sleep, when I had only to close my eyes to see again the serried rows of faces which had seemed to mass themselves into one vague white glare in the moment that I stood before the curtain, when my ears rang still with the deafening roar of applause that had greeted me.

I had consciously begun to loiter by the time I approached Tedworth Street, which is a mere double row of back gardens without a single house facing on it, for beyond it lay the Embankment and my chambers, and I did not want to go in yet.

Then as I turned into the street my steps arrested themselves altogether.

Some twenty or thirty yards down it, two men, showing dimly in the light of the street-lamps, appeared to be carrying an oblong wooden case from the door of one of the gardens to a hand-truck standing by the curb. Indistinct as the whole scene was, it was evident from the men's movements that their burden was one of considerable weight. The lamplight showed nothing clearly, except the white-wood case.

It was no doubt an ordinary packing-case, and but for the lateness of the hour and the dramatic tend of my own thoughts I do not suppose I should have found myself associating its dimensions with those of a coffin or, indeed, should have felt any curiosity over an incident that in the daytime would have appeared quite commonplace.

As the box was placed on the truck one of the men turned his face toward me, and it seemed to me that the sight of my approach made them hasten. Whether it was so or not, they certainly acted with a surprising celerity. By the time I had taken the few steps necessary to come abreast of them one man had reentered the garden, closing the door behind him, and the other had set off at a rapid pace down the street, wheeling the truck, with its burden, before him.

I was in two minds whether to follow him and see where he took it or to mind

my own business. I was standing now just where the men had been, but the tall brick garden wall, with its closed wooden door, made it impossible for me to see anything of the house from which they had come.

A real estate agent's board overhanging the wall announced that the place was to let, and my suspicion that the house was an empty one enabled me to find a somewhat sordid explanation of what I had seen. I had little doubt that the men were engaged in some unlawful enterprise, but at the worst it was probably that of the humble house-stripper who, lacking the enterprise and daring needed for burglary, devotes himself to the more arduous and less remunerative work of robbing empty houses of such trifles as window-fittings and lead piping.

This would account for the heaviness of their load, and I felt a little ashamed of the tragic suspicion with which I had let it fill my mind. I had allowed the cigarette I had been smoking as I turned into the street to go out. I now stopped to relight it.

As I struck a match, all my excitement returned with redoubled force. For the light from the match had shown me something glistening on the pavement just in front of me. In a moment I was bending down over it with another lighted match in my hand, to find that the glistening spot which had caught my eye was not alone.

From the gate in the wall to the curb where the hand-truck had stood ran a regular succession of them—great drops of wet blood.

All my indecision was at an end, and with a last look at the door in the wall to assure myself that I could recognize it again, I set off at a run in pursuit of the man with the truck.

He was just turning the corner in the direction of the Embankment, and he, too, must have begun to run, I think, as soon as the corner was turned, for by the time I reached the Embankment he was still some considerable distance in advance of me. But it was easy to gain on him when he had such a considerable weight to push before him, and I slackened my pace.

I do not think I am lacking in courage

or in public-spiritedness, but although I had no doubt that a crime had been committed, I did not see that I was called upon to try and capture the perpetrator single-handed, especially as I was quite unarmed and had a very special reason for wishing to be alive when the morning's papers were on sale.

So I followed the truck at a set distance until at the bottom of Tite Street, where the fortune I had prayed to favored me and I caught sight of a burly policeman coming down.

He had not seen the man with the truck passing, and I was quite conscious that he did not believe me when I panted out that a murder had been committed and I was following the murderer carrying away his victim's body, but when I got him out into the roadway under the trees the truck was still in sight, and a man wheeling a truck after midnight is always an object of suspicion, so Constable Smith, as I learned to call him later, consented to trot after it, with me, in pursuit.

The man in advance broke into a trot also, and put an end to my new ally's half-heartedness.

"He can't get far with that barrow to push," he panted, as we ran abreast, and I could tell from the tone that his heart was in the chase.

But with the best intentions in the world, an English policeman cannot run. His dress is against it, as much as his habit of perpetual strolling, and I had soon outstripped him. I was almost upon our quarry when, with another quick glance behind him, he flung down the handle of the truck, and leaving its grimly suggestive load to look after itself, ran on unimpeded.

I had been wondering why he had not done so before, when it was so evident that we were overtaking him, and I had already decided that it was the man we wanted. The packing-case could wait, and I passed it without pausing.

It was a race of man against man now, but it seemed to me that the fugitive was already exhausted, while I was just warming up to the chase. Before he could run another fifty yards, I was abreast of him, and caught at his arm, warily, for he was a big man, quite a head taller than myself, and broad in

proportion, and I was on the lookout for a knife or other weapon.

But the poor devil seemed past resistance.

He turned and faced me, panting painfully for breath. Instead of running straight forward, he had taken a diagonal course to the sidewalk nearest the river, and it was just under one of the Embankment lamps that we stood and faced each other for a moment in silence.

I was conscious of a surprise none the less great because it was, I suppose, quite uncalled for. I had taken it for granted that I was pursuing a low-class scoundrel, and the man who faced me was certainly not low-class.

He was dressed very quietly, but his serge suit had the unmistakable cut of a good tailor. His face, with its keen black eyes, aquiline nose, bushy black mustache, and prominent chin, struck me, in spite of the terror and distress it showed, as almost the typical face of the successful banker or lawyer. It seemed, indeed, vaguely familiar to me as a face I had come across in the illustrated journals.

He was the first to speak, and I was prepared to find his voice confirming my new impression of him. He was desperately short of breath, as I was, too, but the sight of the policeman trotting like an overfed poodle toward us stirred him to a desperate effort of bluff.

"Well! and what can I do for you?" he panted, and I was really taken aback by the admirably acted tone, which abruptly seemed to make me, and not himself, the person whose duty it was to explain his extraordinary conduct. His voice was that of a man accustomed to speak with authority.

"You can come back and show me what you have got in that packing-case," I said.

He hesitated for just one moment, and I could see that he was deciding whether to disown his connection with the packing-case altogether. The lie would have been too paltry, when I had not once lost sight of him since he abandoned the truck, and he no doubt realized the fact.

"Oh! the packing-case? That contains a lot of old books that I have purchased from a friend," he said, with admirable

effrontery. "I was wheeling it home for a wager, and as one of the conditions was that nobody should stop me or ask what I was doing, you can have the satisfaction of knowing that you have lost me a ten-pound note."

I nodded as though I believed him.

"And may I ask why your old books drip blood?" I demanded, and watched the last desperate hope forsake him.

He had been red in patches with his running, and beads of perspiration still stood on his forehead, but his face now became white all over. He uttered a groan—the groan of a man who is fainting—and I suppose the tight grip with which I had not ceased to hold him relaxed for a moment.

And in that moment, when I thought he would faint dead away, he wrenched his arm suddenly free and darted off with a suddenness and agility for which I was wholly unprepared. He was twenty yards away, running alongside the Embankment wall, before I recovered from my surprise to start in pursuit.

But he was already flagging. His feet stumbled uncertainly, and I did not exert myself to the utmost as I ran after him. I was sorry, afterward, that I was not quicker, because I might have reached him in time to avert the tragedy. I never anticipated it until I saw him begin to clamber awkwardly over the Embankment wall, and as it was, my hand was within a foot of his boot when he dropped over clumsily into the water.

The tide had passed the full and was running out rapidly to sea, and by the time I had managed to get a glimpse of him in the darkness he had been carried a dozen yards down the stream and farther out from the bank. He did not seem to be making any attempt to swim, and sank, for the second time, I suppose, almost as I caught sight of him.

It is not a pleasant thing to see a man drown, whatever he may be, and it turned me sick to think that with a little more quickness I might have prevented it. Then I remembered that there were life-buoys hung here and there along the Embankment ready for use, and I had turned excitedly to seek one, when I met Constable Smith trotting up breathlessly with a life-buoy already in his hand.

We satisfied our excitement by dangling it as nearly as we could above the place where I had seen the man disappear, but as we never got another glimpse of him, and I doubt very much whether we could have thrown the life-buoy to him if we had, it took little more than ten minutes to satisfy us that we were wasting our time and that he must be given up as dead.

It was with a strange mingling of morbid curiosity and humane concern that I remembered the packing-case which he had left at our mercy, and we made our way back to where it stood as the suicide had abandoned it.

The Embankment seemed to be wholly deserted. I had seen nobody there since my pursuit of the hand-truck began, except the policeman, and although conscious of a responsibility more weighty than he was accustomed to, he had blown his whistle more than once for reinforcements, the summons had not as yet brought even a curious night-bird to join in our deliberations.

I had taken it for granted that we should break open the case and satisfy our curiosity as to its contents at once, but I was disappointed to find that it did not agree with my companion's idea of police routine, even when I showed him an unmistakable stain of blood on the under side of the case, where it had evidently oozed out between two loosely fitting boards.

"For all we know, the body may have life in it still," I argued excitedly, when he protested that the opening of the case was too serious a matter for us to undertake on our own responsibility, and that we must wait till we reached the police station.

"And suppose it is not dead, are you a doctor?" he demanded, and I had to admit that I was not.

"Then I do not see what good you would do," he said. "And I don't know whether you have a chisel in your pocket, but I know I have nothing to prize the lid off with if I wanted to."

The second argument, at least, was effective, especially as I had not so much as a penknife in my pocket.

"Then, let us hurry up and get it to the station," I said, breathlessly. "We ought not to lose a minute."

But again I was opposed by the constable's desire to consider all proper formality.

"I should get a reprimand, or worse, if I left here without giving the river police notice of the drowning, so that they can start dragging for the body," he said, and blew his whistle again.

Fortunately, it was answered this time by one of his colleagues from Grosvenor Road, and after what seemed to me an interminable delay, while Smith explained the affair, pointed out the exact spot where the fugitive had jumped into the water, and arranged that he should inform the river men, we started for the police station, in King's Road.

I lent a hand to the work, and managed to keep my companion trotting most of the way.

I was consumed by a fever of impatience. Apart from my curiosity, I was still counting on the chance that instead of merely detecting a murder I might be the means of saving a life. The packing-case was too roughly put together to be anything like air-tight. If a body had been placed in it before death had actually occurred, it was possible that when the box was opened at the police station life might not be extinct, and although my stout companion was panting remonstrances all the way, I did not allow the pace to slacken until we were at our destination.

In Kings Road there were still a few people about, and we had a little crowd with us by the time we reached the station door.

There seemed another interminable delay while Constable Smith gave his report and I was put through some sort of examination; but at last the packing-case was on the flagged floor of the charge-room and tools were brought to unscrew the lid. Even then they seemed to me painfully deliberate; it was necessary to note everything, and to cause as little disturbance to the case as possible, since the slightest detail might be useful as evidence later on.

Besides myself there were half a dozen men in the room, all policemen, to whom, I suppose, tragedy was not the rare, strange thing that it was to me. But I believe they were all tensely interested as the lid was opened.

At the top was a layer of earth interspersed with old bricks, which two of the men took out carefully and deliberately, until, when the box was half empty, the man in command suggested, a little impatiently, that it should be placed on its side. Earth and bricks came rattling out together, and at the bottom of the case, where the stain of blood was visible, the body of a lean, half-starved cat with its throat cut appeared. There was nothing else in the box.

There was a moment's dead silence. The faces of the ordinary constables were terribly solemn, the more so because that of the chief was scarlet with anger.

"It is all a silly, practical joke, I suppose," he said sharply, and glared at me.

For an instant I had almost thought of it as one myself, until there flashed back to my mind a vivid remembrance of the terror and despair written on the face of the man facing me on the Embankment.

"If it is a practical joke," I said gravely, "it is a joke for which one man has been willing to give up his life."

CHAPTER II.

THE QUICK AND THE DEAD.

IN all my thoughts of the mystery of the packing-case, which the discovery of its contents had only made more baffling and exciting to me, I had more or less consciously looked forward to having my curiosity satisfied fully only when I returned to the house in Tedworth Street which, I felt, I had been too precipitate in considering uninhabited.

It would be when the police made inquiries there, I had told myself, that one would get some facts to work upon, and I had sufficient faith in my own deductive power to think that a few facts were all I needed to make an intelligible theory out of the strange happenings I had seen.

"If you made some inquiry at the house from which I saw the packing-case taken," I said, with every show of diffidence to the angry and suspicious police inspector, "perhaps it would enable us to understand why this apparently practical joke has been played."

The great man eyed me contemptuously.

"On what grounds can we make inquiries?" he asked. "A man has a perfect right to kill as many cats as he pleases, and cart them all over London if he chooses. It is not a matter for police investigation or interference unless the owners of the cats apply to us."

To my surprise, Constable Smith, who had scarcely ceased to pant and mop his perspiring face, came to my assistance.

"It will be necessary, won't it, sir," he suggested, "to call at the house to inform them of the deceased gentleman's suicide and establish his identity?"

The inspector grunted.

"That is a different matter, if you are sure that there has been a suicide."

I hastened to assure him that the suicide, at least, was genuine. I had seen the man sink without making any attempt to swim. It seemed to me absolutely impossible that he could have saved himself afterward while I was seeking the life-buoy.

The inspector was not so sure. He seemed to imagine that the desperate man I had faced on the Embankment had not only given himself a great deal of trouble and exertion in filling and wheeling the packing-case, but had also taken a midnight dive, fully dressed, into a dangerous current for the single purpose of making the police force ridiculous, and I believe he more than half suspected that I was an accomplice in the plot.

But Constable Smith was fortunately as emphatic as I was in declaring that the man was drowned, and the debate ended in his being told off to make inquiries at the house in Tedworth Street, in order to establish the identity of the suicide. It was necessary for me to accompany him, to point out the particular door from which I had seen the packing-case carried, and although I should have done so in any case, I was not sorry to have a sort of official right to take part in his investigations.

I felt a thrill of anticipation, not unconnected with the expectation of personal danger, as we stepped out again into the deserted streets. I had tried to persuade the inspector to give us another man, but he would not make even that much admission that there was anything more than an ordinary case of suicide to investigate.

"We can only deal with facts, not with theories, Mr. Herbert," he said to me, as though he were saying something sensible and dignified.

But it seemed to me that the theories he dismissed so contemptuously were of some importance to Constable Smith and myself, when they offered us the only means of guessing what reception we were going to receive in Tedworth Street.

I returned to them as soon as we had started on our quest.

"I never doubted for a moment—after the man ran away—that there was a murdered human being in that box. Did you, sir?" Smith was saying, as he suited his pace to that of easy and confidential conversation.

"Not for a moment," I said; "and what is more, I am perfectly certain that the fellow who was wheeling it never doubted that there was a murdered body in it. He has been fooled, in some way, by the people in the house we are going to. If there has not been a murder—and they may have had some reason of their own for keeping the body—at any rate there has been a conspiracy to murder, and it will take pretty skilful questioning to get anything out of them. How do you propose to set to work?"

Constable Smith had more imagination than I had at first given him credit for. The idea his chief seemed to have, that he had allowed himself to be made a fool of over the packing-case, when he had so patently done no more than his duty, rankled within him, and I found him as ready as I was to prove to his superior that he was treating the affair too lightly.

We discussed a plan of campaign as we walked, and were still engaged on it when we reached the scene of operations.

I had no difficulty in recognizing the door through which I had seen the box carried, and to make my recognition certain, the constable's lamp showed the dotted line of blood across the pavement.

The door was locked, and Smith pulled the bell-handle at the side only to find it broken.

He looked up at the notice-board.

"If I remember rightly, the house is an empty one—been empty for months," he said. "Let's go round to the front."

The front of the houses were in another street, and we counted the garden doors from the corner, to make sure of locating the one we wanted.

It was called Erdenshaw House, and in each of its blank uncurtained windows was a bill announcing that the place was to let. From its air of neglect, it might well have been unoccupied for the best part of a year, as Smith averred. But we went through the form of trying the door and sounding a summons on bell and knocker.

As the sounds died away unanswered we stood and looked at each other a little blankly.

"Well! I should like to have a glance at that back garden," I said. "I could manage to get over the wall, with your assistance."

So back we went to Tedworth Street, and in a few moments I was dropping down from the high wall into the darkness of the garden. The door was fortunately bolted—not locked—and I had no difficulty in opening it and admitting my companion.

His bull's-eye lantern played on an uncultivated waste that might once have been a garden, but showed no sign of vegetation now beyond a few clumps of rank grass and weeds. In one corner there had probably at some distant date been a rockery, and it was here, to all appearance, that the packing-case had been filled, for the heap of earth and bricks had been recently disturbed. We bent over the spot, examining it carefully, and came to the conclusion that the ballast for the box had been dug out by hand.

But it was really all that the garden had to tell us, carefully as we investigated every foot of it. The house was as well secured at the back as in front, and I doubted whether the conspirators had entered it at all, or had any connection with it.

My companion was copying down in his note-book the name and address of the real estate agent who had the letting of the house, but it seemed to me that the place had ceased to have any importance as a clue. I said so to the constable.

"Then we can only wait until the body is recovered from the river, sir?"

he questioned, with disappointment in his voice.

I, too, should have been disappointed if I had been compelled to take no further active part in the elucidation of the mystery.

"I should like to have a look at that truck at the station," I said. "I never thought of noticing whether there was a name on it."

Constable Smith had not thought of noticing, either, and his face brightened as he assured me that a hand-truck without the owner's name on it was quite a rarity.

Letting him out of the garden, I bolted the door again, and clambered up it and over the wall, as I have no doubt its last occupant had done.

We walked back to the station, building new hopes on the clue that the truck might give us. It might even discover for us the identity of the second man, which was of even more importance to us than that of the suicide.

But at the police station I found awaiting me a reception even more coldly suspicious than before. The inspector laughed aloud at our report. So we had actually discovered that some earth and old bricks might have been removed from the place where the packing-case was filled?

"We are not investigating the death of a cat, Mr. Herbert," he said severely to me, and he refused pointblank to let me inspect the truck.

"It is very kind of you to wish to assist us," he went on, in his tone of angry irony, "but we are quite capable of conducting our own business."

It seemed that the river police had been telephoning to ask whether there was any certainty that a man was drowned. They had found no sign of the body, and thought Constable Smith might have made a mistake. Partly as punishment, he was ordered to report himself at the floating station and give them any further details that they required, if indeed he had actually seen a man in the water.

This latter piece of information I received from Smith himself after I had been practically turned out of the place.

I had loitered about outside on the chance that he might join me, and met

him starting off on his errand. He had managed with difficulty to give a rapid examination to the truck, which now stood in the station-yard behind, but had found on it no name or distinctive marks at all, and it was apparent that he was feeling blue.

"The chief does not believe that there was a suicide at all," he said moodily. "He thinks the whole thing was a practical joke, and that if you were not in it you fancied a good deal more than happened and stuffed me up. And, of course, I can't say that I actually saw the man in the water. I only caught a glimpse of him climbing over the parapet."

"I am in the chief's black books till the body is found, and with the current running out strong like that it may not be found for weeks, or it may not be found at all. It is a bad lookout for me, unless you can follow up the clue from the packing-case, sir."

"There is not much chance of that, when they won't even let me see it again," I said.

I was feeling quite disheartened.

It was now between two and three o'clock, but if I had felt unprepared for sleep when I turned the corner of Tedworth Street at half past twelve I was still more wakeful now. I had reached that state of mental activity when only continuous action at high pressure seems satisfying, and abruptly I saw myself with nothing to do.

My part in the night's work was ended, and I shrank from the reaction that would come when I allowed myself to admit the fact. In fear of it, I even thought of accompanying the constable to his interview with the river police, but the journey lacked incentive, since I could tell them no more than Smith himself, and the chances of their finding the body that night seemed so remote.

So, very reluctantly, I bade my friend the policeman good night at a point on the Embankment not far from where we had first met and turned my face once more toward home.

There was no necessity, of course, for me to pass through Tedworth Street on my way, but I was reluctant to go in, and admit that the excitement of the

night was over, so far as I was concerned, and I made a *détour* to stroll once more through the quiet thoroughfare.

It had been quite silent and deserted when I visited it with Constable Smith, but now, as I turned the corner, I became aware that there were other footsteps than mine breaking the night-silence.

A man, like myself, in evening dress was strolling toward me on the opposite side of the street. The light of a lamp, as he passed it, showed me his white shirt-front, but little more, and instinctively I drew farther into the shadow of the wall to watch him.

The mere fact that he was in this particular street of all others at half past two in the morning made him interesting, and I waited observantly for him to pass the next lamp. The next lamp was almost opposite the garden door of Erdenshaw House. The stranger reached it, and I drew my breath quickly, for he had stopped and turned toward the fateful house. I altogether forgot to breathe, I believe, as he stretched out his arm and pushed at the door, as if expecting it to be unlocked. Finding it firmly secured, he stood a moment, then stepped out into the road, as if to try to obtain a view of the house. The house was not visible from the street, as I could have told him, and he strolled on again, crossing to my side of the way.

More or less instinctively, I had been trying to keep out of sight, but there was no doubt that he would see me when he passed, and realizing the fact, I walked onward openly to the next lamp-post and waited there, making a pretense of finding my matches and lighting a cigarette.

I watched the approaching figure keenly as I did so, and I think that I guessed the exact moment at which he became aware of my presence in the street.

His hand moved to his pocket, and reminded me again that I was quite unarmed.

He was advancing toward me slowly and, it seemed to me, warily, his hand still at his pocket, and already, indistinct as the tall, stalwart figure was in the darkness, it impressed me with a vague and disquieting feeling of famil-

ilarity, which increased as he came nearer. Then, as he reached the circle of light thrown by the street-lamp near which I had taken up my position, the cigarette I had been pretending to light fell from my lips and I had difficulty in restraining an exclamation.

For the keen black eyes that met mine, the aquiline nose, the bushy black mustache and resolute chin, were familiar.

It was the man whom less than two hours earlier I had seen throw himself desperately into the river and sink unresistingly in the swiftly ebbing tide.

He stared at me frankly with a questioning curiosity, but without the least sign of recognition, and I saw his face plainly and clearly.

It was not distorted now by the expression of terror and despair I had seen on the Embankment, but the features were too striking and characteristic, as was the figure, also, to allow any change of expression or of dress to leave me in a moment's doubt that it was the man whom I had been looking on as dead.

For a moment I thought he was going to address me, as his keen, searching eyes met mine; but the next he had passed on, and I stooped to recover my lost cigarette.

I took just as long as I wished to find and light it, and then turned to follow him.

I felt completely bewildered, and, I must admit, a little unnerved; sick with apprehension in the moment that I thought he was going to stop and speak. I dreaded to find myself at the mercy of a man who two hours before had been at mine and had all the agony of hopeless terror I had seen on his face to pay back.

It was useless for me to remind myself that the apparent suicide must have been a pretense, and, as a corollary, that the terror had been a pretense, too. I could not believe it. If the man I was slowly following had turned I believe I should have taken to my heels and run for my life.

But he continued to walk on at his slow, sauntering pace, and I followed him at a discreet distance, from Tedworth Street to the Embankment, where I had the satisfaction of seeing him turn into one of the big residential blocks

within a stone's throw of that in which my own chambers were situated.

The whole place was in darkness, and I waited anxiously to see whether a light would appear at any of the windows. When my patience was rewarded by seeing a room on the first floor illuminated, I felt safe in concluding that I had at last taken one small step toward elucidating the mystery of the packing-case.

I had discovered the address of the principal actor.

If my friend Constable Smith had been at hand to give me the support and protection of the law I should have been inclined to call on the man at once and cross-examine him. If he had not laid himself open to a charge of attempted suicide, we should at least be justified in asking him what he wished to be done with a hand-truck and a packing-case which he had left in our hands.

The idea of exacting a statement of any sort from one of the men actually concerned in the mystery was alluring, and I was not sorry to remember that I owed a duty to the river police.

It was not fair to let them go on dragging for a man, when I had the best reason for knowing that the man was not drowned. I must go to the floating station to report what I had seen and there, or on my way to it along the Embankment, I should see Constable Smith, and could consult with him as to our next move.

As a matter of fact, I met him just coming out. His face brightened at the sight of me.

"I have news for you," I said, speaking before he could. "After all, the man was not drowned. I have seen him—in Tedworth Street, again, and found out where he lives."

Constable Smith stared at me.

"I think you have made a mistake, sir," he said.

"A mistake? Why?"

"Because they have just found the body, sir. I was coming to see you about it. The inspector would like you to say whether it is the man we followed with the hand-truck. You see, sir, I never really saw his face, and it has become important. The body is at the station, here, if you will come in."

I did not stop to prove to him that it

could not be the body of the man we had seen. It would be enough to see it and say that it was not. So I followed him down the gangway, and in a few more minutes I had been introduced to the officials and ushered into the room where the body had been laid.

I believe I turned a little faint as I looked at it. I know that the inspector, who was standing at my side, put out his hand and held my arm as if to support me, and that I did not resent the action.

"Is that the man that you followed along the Embankment and whom you saw throw himself into the river?" he said, and I nodded.

"Yes, that is the man."

"You are quite sure?"

"Quite sure. I held him for a moment just before he jumped in, and I noticed his face particularly, as well as this serge suit he is wearing."

"It is very strange," said the inspector. "I do not know whether you have recognized who it really is—his name, I mean?"

I shook my head.

"You have heard of Sir Caleb Burnham, of course? I recognized him at once, and so did most of the men, and if we needed any confirmation the initials 'C. B.' on his clothing."

Sir Caleb Burnham? I could understand Smith saying that the case had become important. For Sir Caleb Burnham, the Christian company promoter, as he was called, was one of the most prominent figures of the day, and I knew now why his face had seemed so familiar to me from the first.

It was because I had so often seen his portrait in the religious journals, where he was held up as a proof that a financier can be a devout Christian, and while making great wealth for himself serve his fellows by promoting semi-philanthropic enterprises in which it was possible for the most religiously minded man to invest his savings with the utmost certainty that he was using his money for a good cause besides earning a perfectly safe seven per cent, guaranteed by the undoubted piety and honesty of the promoter.

"It is very strange," the inspector continued. "For Sir Caleb Burnham would seem the last man to wheel a

truck about at night and take his life to avoid being detected doing it. You are quite sure that this is the man you saw?"

"Quite sure," I said.

There was no possibility of doubt in my mind, in spite of the man so exactly like him whom I had left behind me in Sartor Mansions.

CHAPTER III.

IN SARTOR MANSIONS.

I WAS quite prepared to find that the police took very little interest in the account of my meeting with the dead man's "double" in Tedworth Street. A resemblance so exact has to be seen to be believed. When one is asked to believe in it on hearsay it is more easy to dismiss it as a mere hallucination.

My mind had been full of the suicide I had witnessed; in a dark street I passed a man of about the same height and size as the victim. What was more natural than that I should imagine a complete resemblance?

I knew quite well how my story would be received, and I should not have thought it worth while telling but for the fact that the stranger had actually stopped and tried the fateful door from which I had seen Sir Caleb Burnham start on his journey—to death.

And the fact only seemed to make the inspector at the floating station more certain that I had been allowing my imagination to run away with me. He was a very decent fellow, a pleasing contrast to his confrère of Kings Road, but despite his politeness, it was apparent to me that my story made no effect upon him at all.

I did not blame him, but I was disappointed in Constable Smith when I left the station with him. I was imagining that with him, as with me, the recovery of the body was a secondary affair. The mystery of the packing-case seemed to me our particular business.

It was easy to see that the police dismissed it as a minor incident—a very curious incident, no doubt, but one which the evidence at the inquest, the ordinary evidence of relatives and friends, would serve to explain.

My own view was that the suicide would never be explained until the mystery of the packing-case was solved, and I expected that Smith would agree with me and be as eager as I was to follow up our investigations from the end which his superiors seemed determined to ignore.

But I was disappointed to find that the ally on whom I had counted was stolidly and completely satisfied. The body was found, and his chief could no longer deny that there had been a suicide or pretend that he had done any more than his duty in taking to the station the property the dead man had left behind him.

He was completely justified, and it was all that he cared about. He was only anxious to get back with his report, and he was not interested in the man at Sartor Mansions, even when I could point out to him, in passing, that the light in his window was still showing.

Smith said that he did not see what the man had to do with the case, and I did not trouble to reiterate the point I kept clear in my own mind, that he had proved his connection with the mystery conclusively by trying the door in the garden of Erdenshaw House.

I bade the constable a second good night at the entrance to my own chambers, and went indoors to root out of a drawer a very serviceable revolver for which I had found very little use after I had settled down to the serious stay-at-home work of the novelist. The revolver was, however, still in good order, and I charged its six chambers hastily. I did not want the man in the next block to turn the light out in his room before I was ready to visit him, and I lost no time in getting back to the street.

But short as had been the time I spent on preparation for the interview, I found the light gone and the whole block wrapped once more in darkness.

I stood staring undecidedly. Having made up my mind to risk the impertinence and possible danger of calling on a man whose name I did not know at four o'clock in the morning with no excuse beyond my gratuitous belief that he would be interested to hear of Sir Caleb Burnham's death, I felt very loath to put off the visit.

But there are limits to the effrontery of which I am capable even under the spur of a maddening curiosity, and it stopped at the idea of rousing the stranger after he had retired. I had decided very reluctantly that the interview, on which I was counting for at least some satisfaction of my curiosity, must wait till the morning, when the door opened and out came the very man I wanted so much.

I was relieved, and at the same time I was a little startled, and—well, I clutched at the revolver in my pocket, as I imagined again, from his attitude, that the stranger was fingering his.

He must have given a good deal more observation to my movements than I had fondly imagined, for he walked straight to me.

"Who are you and what do you want?" he asked, in a sharp tone of nervously impatient demand.

The man who was dead had addressed me in very much the same tone, but the voices were very different. The one to which I listened now was, despite its owner's evident impatience, more gentle and refined than the other, and helped to encourage a theory which had been forming itself in my mind.

As a practised writer of detective stories, I should have been ashamed of myself if I had not evolved a theory which made the police ridiculous. They were puzzled to conjecture how a man of Sir Caleb Burnham's stamp could take his life, and why he should have abandoned his usual dignity so far as to wheel a truck along the Embankment before he did so.

My idea was that Sir Caleb Burnham would not think of doing either, that the drowned man was impersonating him for some reason, and that the real Sir Caleb was the gentleman to whom I had the honor of speaking. At any rate, the theory gave me my best excuse for forcing an interview.

"Sir Caleb Burnham, I believe?" I said, very formally and politely.

"Well! and if I am Sir Caleb Burnham?" he retorted, in the same tone of nervous impatience, making me quite confident that my theory was a true one.

"I thought it might interest you to know that you are drowned," I said.

"To be more explicit," I continued, as he stared at me, "the body of a man bearing a most remarkable resemblance to you has just been fished out of the river by the police and identified by them without a moment's hesitation as Sir Caleb Burnham. So, unless you take steps to prevent it, the news will be all over London to-morrow that you have committed suicide, Sir Caleb."

He regarded me with undisguised suspicion.

"I do not see your object in telling me this," he said, his tone full of distrust.

"I am surely justified in thinking that it is of interest to you," I replied easily, and he interrupted me with nervous impatience.

"It is confoundedly interesting if it is true. But who are you, and what is your object? If I believe you, what do you want me to do?"

I had ceased to think about my revolver, although I imagined that my companion was still keeping a ready finger on his, and I handed him my card.

"My ulterior object is to satisfy a very active curiosity," I said. "My connection with the affair is only that of an accidental observer. But what I have seen to-night has mystified me to the point of frenzy, and in exchange for my news I am hoping that you will be able to give me some, and that between us we shall get some solution of about the most bewildering series of events that has ever come under my notice."

He was watching my face as I spoke, too intent on trying to read from it whether I was speaking the truth to glance at the piece of cardboard I had handed him. He remembered it abruptly, and moved a step nearer the street-lamp by which we were standing to read my name. I could see the doubt and suspicion fade from his face.

"Not Mr. Selwyn Herbert the novelist?" he asked, his voice and manner suddenly amiable.

I should have been more pleased if he had said the playwright, but it was, of course, early days for that, and I was very glad that my tales, at least, were sufficiently well known to him to serve as an introduction.

My companion said some very pleasant things about my latest detective stories.

"If anybody can solve a mystery—and this one has been bewildering me for a month—I should think you can, Mr. Herbert," he said warmly. "If you really do not mind giving me the time, I should be awfully glad to have your ideas on it, especially as you seem to have seen something that probably has a bearing on it."

I smiled to myself at his idea that the writing of detective stories, in which one really begins with the solution and works back to the mystery, is any proof of actual detective ability, but I did not wish to lessen his pleasing faith in me, and in this case I felt pretty confident that his "mystery" would serve as the key to mine. I had a hundred questions to ask him.

"I shall be only too pleased," I said. "To begin with, were you aware that you had a 'double'? If you were, and know his name, we have, I think, established the identity of the man who drowned himself to-night."

He looked at me as if my question had for the moment bewildered him, and smiled faintly.

"If the police have identified him as Sir Caleb Burnham, and he is as much like me as you say, then I suppose it is—Sir Caleb Burnham," he said slowly. "And for some reasons I am not sorry to hear that he is dead."

I stared at him.

"Sir Caleb Burnham? Then who are you?"

"Oh! My name is Carton—Dudley Carton. But there is no need for us to stand talking in the street. Come up to my rooms."

He turned toward the door of the dark block before which we had been standing as he spoke. But I hesitated.

I am not a coward. But at the same time, I am not foolhardy. And it seemed to me that there would be something a little foolhardy in accepting the invitation from a man of whom I knew nothing except that he had been accused of a particularly ferocious and apparently motiveless murder and owed his acquittal to a happy chance.

Glancing back quickly, he saw my hesitation and shrugged his broad shoulders.

"We'll talk in the street, if you prefer

it," he said. "You recognize my name, I suppose? It is not the name I am living under now, but as I was going to tell you the whole story, it seemed silly to start with a deception. I forgot that it would have the same effect on you as on other people."

"But I think you might at least hear my account of the affair before fighting shy of me, like everybody else, just because of an old fisherman's mistake that he did not even stick to. I know it is asking a lot of you, but you might at least hear my side."

His humility was touching, and I had sufficient sense of justice to remember that the charge against him had been dismissed. If he had shown the least eagerness to persuade me to enter the house I should have refused, but as it was—well, I remembered, among other things, that I had a revolver.

"Of course, I will hear it, if it is part of your 'mystery,'" I said, "and it will be more comfortable to hear it indoors, thanks, if you will lead the way."

I followed him, not without the little thrill which adds to the pleasure of doing something a trifle daring, to the room on the first floor at which I had looked more than once with so much interest from the Embankment.

The interior, although comfortable enough, was too plainly suggestive of the "furnished apartment" to make me waste attention by looking around it for indications of my host's character or tastes.

My host solicitously pulled forward an armchair for me, then sat down on the other side of a center-table.

"This is awfully good of you," he said, pushing a cigar-box toward me. "And I feel it all the more because I am really a complete stranger in the country. I left England as a youngster, and never saw it again till a couple of months ago. And I must say that I have had a pretty rough time here, so far."

"They told me at Melbourne that I should find the old country slow, but, so far, I've found it pretty exciting. It does not fall to the lot of every visitor to your country to be accused of murder within a month of his landing, I suppose?"

I was searching my memory for the details of the affair.

"So far as I remember the newspaper report," I said, "you were accused of clubbing a man on the front parade at Broadstairs and throwing the body over the cliff. You were recognized as the assailant by somebody—a fisherman, wasn't it?—who witnessed the affair, but his evidence was upset by your lawyer, with the assistance of a lucky chance. I took a note of the affair at the time, as one of the few things one sees in the papers dramatic enough to do service in a play."

Carton threw out his hands in a gesture of expostulation.

"That is how everybody puts it, and it is not fair. They talk as though I got off by a lucky chance. The chance—and a damnably unlucky one—was that I was suspected at all. But let me tell you just what happened."

He spoke with strong feeling, and half rose from the chair; but my attitude reminded him, I suppose, that I was a little suspicious of him still, and he sank back, his arms hanging ostentatiously limp over the sides of his chair; his voice dropping again to the conversational note.

"I went to Broadstairs," he said, "just to see the house where Charles Dickens worked. I'd been to Gad's Hill and Yarmouth, and had visited practically every spot in London that he mentions in his books or that he has been connected with. I worship Charles Dickens."

"So do I," I said, and decided that I liked the man.

"It was really the chief thing I wanted to come home for. I left England, as I told you, when I was ten, and I have no personal interests here. But I always said that when I could afford it——"

I nodded impatiently.

"And the Dickens Pilgrimage took you naturally to Broadstairs, where the story begins?"

"Yes. I put up at the Albion Hotel, where I found myself the only visitor; had dinner, and walked out on the front. It was quite deserted, it being out of the season, you know, and as it was already dark, I went for a stiff walk, leaving Bleak House for the morning.

"When I got back, the place had changed. There was quite a crowd on the front, and they told me that a man had been murdered and thrown over the cliff. A fisherman had seen it all, and had run up in time to seize the murderer, but the man had proved too powerful for him. After a short struggle, he had knocked his would-be captor down and made good his escape.

"The fisherman had been too much dazed by his knock-down blow to know in what direction he had gone, and had hurried into the town with the news of what had happened. The crowd was watching some half-dozen boats paddling about near the foot of the cliff, looking for the victim's body, and I waited there, watching with them, until a wiry little man in a blue fisherman's jersey, who had just come on the scene with a policeman, made a sudden rush at me, yelling like a maniac:

"That's him—that's him! Seize him! Don't let him get away!"

"He had me by the throat, and the policeman grabbed my arm and prevented my knocking him off to answer for myself, and I believe every man in the crowd, and some of the women, got a grip of me somewhere or other.

"The policeman persuaded them not to throw me over the cliff, I believe; but by the time I had been dragged up to the station my coat was hanging in rags around me, and my collar and tie had gone altogether. And that, on my solemn word of honor, Mr. Herbert, is the only part I played in the Broadstairs Murder, as they call it."

He waited as if for an expression of opinion, but I gave none, and he continued:

"I was locked up in a cell for the night, and the next morning was brought up before the magistrates. I had managed to see a lawyer, but he seemed to think that I was sure to be committed, as the fisherman was so certain of his recognition. There was, of course, no other evidence against me except that I was a stranger, and therefore a natural object of suspicion.

"To make matters worse, the body of the murdered man had been found, and from papers in his pockets it appeared that he, too, had quite recently come

from Australia. The fact increased the suspicion against me, but the charge actually rested entirely on the fisherman's certainty that he recognized me. Unless that was shaken, my lawyer gave me to understand that he could not save me from being sent to trial.

"At the examination, therefore, he directed all his efforts to making the witness show some uncertainty. The fisherman was not to be moved. It was dark, but there was light enough for him to see the murderer plainly when he grappled with him. He could not say what the material of his clothes was, but he was sure of his height and build.

"And suppose you were told that at the time you were struggling with the murderer this gentleman was quietly dining at the Albion Hotel," asked my lawyer, who was preparing a feeble attempt at an alibi, "what should you say?"

"I should say it was a lie," said the witness, and won a murmur of approval from the crowded room.

"The lawyer who was so vainly trying to clear me looked round as if to deprecate it, and seemed for a moment to have forgotten his cross-examination.

"He was staring across the room at the crowd by the door, and I saw his face brighten suddenly.

"Sir Caleb Burnham," he said, raising his voice to speak across the room, "would you mind stepping forward a moment? Sir Caleb, don't go, please. I won't keep you a minute, if you will spare me it."

"There was a stir in the room, and Sir Caleb came up to the solicitor's table, with evident annoyance in his manner. It was the first time I had seen him, and even I noticed the resemblance he bore to me at once, although I suppose that one does not realize it so quickly as other people.

"The lawyer asked him to stand by the side of the pew where they had caged me, and turned to the fisherman again. But the witness did not wait for a question: 'Why, that's the man!' he shouted excitedly. 'I thought the other one had a bit too much color and too much brown on his face, but the white-faced one is him.'

"Everybody laughed, even the magis-

trates. The old man's sudden change of opinion after the certainty with which he had been swearing that he recognized me was very funny, and to make the joke complete, it seemed that everybody in the court knew Sir Caleb Burnham by name as an uncommonly good and pious sort of big-bug.

"My lawyer got another laugh by asking him whether he had committed the murder, and he replied, without going into the witness-box or being sworn, that he had only come down by the midnight train, and had not even heard of the murder till he looked in at the court through idle curiosity."

When my host had reached this point in his narrative I interrupted him.

"I read the case in the papers," I said, "but, so far as I remember, they did not mention Sir Caleb Burnham's name."

Carton shook his head.

"No, as far as I can make out, it never appeared in print. He seemed to me throughout very much annoyed by the position in which the lawyer's recognition had placed him, and I imagine that he paid to keep his name out of it as far as possible. There were, I believe, only a few local reporters present, and I suppose they could be bribed to speak of him as 'a well-known public man' instead of giving his name. But what does that prove?"

"Nothing, unless Sir Caleb actually murdered the man at Broadstairs and could not restrain his eagerness to know what evidence was given at your examination. What do you think?"

Carton threw out his hands in a gesture of exasperated impotence.

"Oh, I am sick of thinking. If he did commit the murder, it does not seem to explain in any way the strange things that happened afterward—the mystery that baffles me, and that I am hoping you will help me to solve, Mr. Herbert."

CHAPTER IV.

A GUEST OF SIR CALEB.

"I will do my best," I said; "but please go on."

"I will go straight on, if you don't mind," he said, "just as things happened, though I can't decide, of course,

what would seem important to you and what wouldn't.

"As you know, the charge against me was dismissed. My lawyer urged that there was now no evidence against me. The only evidence had been that of the fisherman, and he admitted emphatically that I was not the man he had struggled with. The murderer probably bore some slight resemblance to me, as also to the deeply respected gentleman who seemed almost to have been sent by a watchful Providence to clear me from a baseless suspicion. It would be as preposterous to send me for trial on the mere strength of that resemblance as it would be to send Sir Caleb himself.

"After a little discussion among themselves, the magistrates agreed that there was no case against me, and I was discharged. I have often wished since that I had been sent to trial and had the case absolutely thrashed out, but I took it for granted that the dismissal of the charge meant that I was cleared from suspicion.

"The whole business had seemed to me ridiculous, and instead of feeling thankful for my escape, as the lawyer seemed to expect, I was only thinking of the annoyance I had been put to.

"I soon found out that the annoyance had only begun. I went with my lawyer to his office, and waited there until he could get me a cab to take me back to my hotel at Broadstairs. The news of my acquittal had preceded me, and as I was running up to my room, feeling very anxious to get into a respectable dress again, the manager met me, barring my way.

"My luggage had been deposited at the police station, and he handed me my bill for the dinner I had had there. It was all the charge they wished to make, and I gathered from the manager's manner that even that charge would not be pressed if I would relieve the hotel of my presence instantly. I paid my bill, drove back to the police station for my luggage, and tried another hotel. But it was just the same. Very politely, but very firmly, they regretted that they could not give me a room.

"By this time there was a crowd following my cab and hooting me. Finally, I had to change my clothes at the police station and ask for an escort to see me

to the next train leaving the town. I took ticket to London, and left the whole population of Broadstairs congratulating itself, I believe, that a dangerous murderer had been driven from its midst.

"I still imagined that the feeling against me was purely local, and on reaching town I went back to the apartments I had occupied while I was following Charles Dickens about Fleet Street and the Temple. The landlady seemed glad to see me back, till the evening papers came out.

"Thanks to a scarcity of news or the touch of drama by which my acquittal had been secured, the journals had made a sensation of it, and when my landlady came to me with a scared face and pretended that she had made a mistake and that my rooms had really been let to somebody else who wanted to come into them at once, I realized for the first time that the thing was serious. After the publicity given to my name, I foresaw that the treatment I had received at Broadstairs was likely to be the treatment I should receive everywhere. You know yourself, Mr. Herbert, what effect it had on you. Even now you think that you are doing a rather daring thing in sitting here alone with me."

He spoke very seriously, and went on without giving me an opportunity to reply.

"And I have no doubt the news will go over to Melbourne and be made much of there. It will ruin the hopes I had of a political career when I go back, unless that unfortunate tragedy at Broadstairs is explained, and, so far, there seems no chance of its being cleared up.

"The man, Murgatroyd, who was killed had only been two days in England, and apparently had no connections here. They can't even discover why he went to Broadstairs or what he was doing there. But of course you have read all that the papers have had to say about him, and know as much about him as I do. I have set a private detective on the business, and I have stayed in London to keep in touch with him, but he has found out no more than the police, and charges me pretty heavily for that.

"I suggested to him yesterday, as you suggested to-night, that Sir Caleb Burnham might have actually been the mur-

derer, but he laughed at the idea. I don't believe in these private detectives, and that is why I am so awfully glad to put the facts before an acknowledged——"

And he said more pleasant things about my detective stories, which tended only to show that he confused the writer of them with the hero.

I moved my hand farther from my revolver-pocket as I deprecated his compliments.

"Have you had any reason to connect Burnham with the murder apart from the fisherman's imagined recognition?" I asked.

Carton shook his head.

"With the murder? No, none at all. It is his connection with me that I can't understand, and whether he killed the man at Broadstairs or not does not seem to me to make any explanation of it possible. But I will continue with an account of things as they happened, if I am not trying your patience."

I assured him that he was not.

"Well, I did not remonstrate with my landlady," he said, taking up the thread of his narrative. "I just cleared out to an hotel. But I put up there as 'William Dudley,' and I have not thought of using my own name since except to my fool of a detective and to you. The point is important to remember.

"It was at the hotel, a little place near the Strand, that I realized first that I was being shadowed. On reaching the London terminus from Broadstairs I had casually noticed a ferrety-looking little man with flaming red hair waiting on the platform, who seemed to glance at me with interest, and I thought it only a coincidence when I recognized him strolling past the house when I quitted my apartments. But when the next morning I caught sight of him outside my hotel I had no doubt that he was keeping watch on me, and I concluded wrongly that the police authorities wished to keep an eye on me pending any fresh development in the Broadstairs affair.

"I was not afraid of the police, but I objected to being watched, especially when I had decided to change my name and conceal my connection with the

Dudley Carton of the newspaper sensation. So when I again moved into chambers here I went to no end of trouble to make sure that I was not followed. And I thought I had succeeded."

Carton passed a fresh cigar and struck a match for me.

"Well, the next thing," he continued, "and this is where the mystery that baffles me really begins, I received an anonymous letter addressed to me here in my real name. It said that the writer had information of great personal importance to give me if I could arrange to meet her, alone, on the Victoria Bridge, between ten and eleven the same night.

"I found the letter in the rack in the hall, and thanked Providence that it had not been refused at the house, since no Dudley Carton was known there, and I took possession of it surreptitiously, when nobody was in the hall.

"After consideration I decided to keep the appointment, if only through curiosity to know how anybody had found out where I was living, for it seemed to me that nobody could have any news of importance to me, unless, perhaps, it had to do with the crime that had thrown a shadow over my life.

"So I put a revolver in my pocket, in case it might be some common robbing fraud, and was on the bridge at ten. I waited there for over the hour without the slightest sign of a woman, and was just deciding that the letter was a hoax of some sort, when a man, passing, stared at me, stopped, and held out his hand.

"'Mr. Carton, isn't it?' he said, before I recognized him. 'I have often wondered whether we should meet again, and hoped that we might. Are you living in this part of London?'

"It was Sir Caleb Burnham, and his friendly recognition pleased me all the more because I had been feeling like a pariah. He ran on talking without waiting for me to answer, telling me that he lived just over the bridge, at Battersea, had been delayed late at a board meeting in the City, and had failed to find a cab at Sloane Street to drive him home.

"He called it another intervention of Providence, since it had led to our meeting. The striking resemblance between us had interested him very much, he

said, and he had been anxious to make my acquaintance and find out whether there was not some relationship between us. A brother of his father's had emigrated to Australia some fifty years ago and been lost sight of. In any case, if there was any truth in the claims of the physiognomists we ought to find that we had a great many tastes in common. And he ended by asking whether I would walk home with him.

"I should not have hesitated for a moment, but for my fear of missing the writer of the anonymous letter and losing the chance on which I had counted of learning facts that might be of importance to me, and I explained the position to my new friend, showing him the letter. Sir Caleb read it through in the light of one of the bridge lamps, and quietly proceeded to tear the paper into small pieces.

"That is the only way to treat anonymous letters,' he said, as he let the scraps flutter over the bridge into the river. 'I receive hundreds of them, and treat them all alike. People who won't sign their names are always rogues and are trying to serve themselves, not to serve you. And it is a quarter past eleven now,' he added, glancing at his watch. 'You do not intend to wait here all night. I dare say it was merely the trick of some thief who picked on your name by chance, and when he got you here decided that you were a bit too sturdy-looking to attack.'

"I could have told Sir Caleb," Carton continued, giving me another of his diffident inquiring glances, as if to ask whether my patience was being exhausted by all these details—"I could have told Sir Caleb that his easy explanation of the letter was wrong, because no ordinary thief could be aware that Dudley Carton was living at my address, but I did not care to discuss it. I was feeling ashamed of the hopes I had allowed myself to build on the meeting, and since my anonymous correspondent had now plainly failed to keep the appointment, I allowed myself to be persuaded, and went on with my new friend.

"He had put his arm in mine, and chatted with the utmost amiability as we walked the little way to his house, an important-looking place facing on Bat-

tersea Park. Burnham opened the door with his latch-key and switched on the light in the hall. He did not believe in making slaves of his servants, he told me, and his household always retired at eleven, whether he was home or not. There was a comfortable fire, which seemed to have been very recently attended to, however, burning in his study, and a carefully shaded oil-lamp was alight.

"The baronet made a most genial host. He could not have laid himself out more to be agreeable if I had come to him with the best credentials on earth instead of owing my introduction to my arrest for murder, and I said something of the sort.

"I am sufficiently vain,' he replied, 'to think that no credentials could be better than your face. I feel as though I have found a twin brother, and I want to see as much of you as ever I can.'

"I do not think I felt any actual distrust of him, although the very excess of his friendliness gave to the whole meeting a sort of unreality that forbade me to take his protestations quite seriously. He was pressing me to visit him at his country-place in Kent and spend a week or two with him there, and when I said, with ordinary politeness, that I should be very much pleased he proceeded at once to make the invitation and my acceptance of it definite.

"He was going down in the morning, by the first train, for a few weeks' holiday. Why should not I accompany him? I pleaded that I could think of nothing at present but the clearing of my name, and that it was necessary for me to keep in touch with Clash, the private detective. But Sir Caleb brushed the objections away. My name did not need clearing, nobody but a fool could attach any suspicion to me, and in a month the whole affair would be forgotten. Clash was quite incompetent—an idea I was arriving at myself—and if I was really set on investigating he would introduce me to the best man in England for the job.

"Trickett was the man for me—a veritable Sherlock Holmes—and he would get him down to Sarbury, his country-place, while I was there, to talk it over with me. I had no actual objections left to offer against my host's plan, and I was too much bewildered by his effusive-

ness to resist him. After feeling myself such an outcast it was very pleasant to find my company so much desired, and by a man so rich and influential.

"He began to make arrangements for our meeting early in the morning, and made me glance at my watch. It was nearly midnight.

"That gives me only six hours,' I said, and rose reluctantly. The room was very cozy, and I was unconsciously sleepy. My host pushed me down again.

"Why turn out at all,' he said. 'I can easily give you a bed here. Do they go to bed early at your place?'

"As a matter of fact, they do not. The head porter never shuts the outside door till half past twelve at the earliest, and I have wondered since whether Burnham was acquainted with the fact.

"That's all right, then,' he said, when I told him. 'Just write the man a line and tell him you won't be back to-night; ask him to bundle all your things into your boxes and give them to the bearer. If you take your rooms by the week, you might as well settle up with the people. It is of no use paying for empty rooms while you are away. Write the letter, and I will send my secretary across with it to bring your traps back. Then we shall not stand any chance of missing each other in the morning.'

"He got out a sheet of note-paper for me as he spoke, and pushing a pen into my hand, actually dictated what I should say. Before I had really thought of deciding whether I wished to give up my rooms or not, I had informed the head porter that I was staying the night with a friend and going into the country for an indefinite time on the morrow, and requested him to make out my bill to the end of the week.

"I had no money with me to meet it. I had thought it prudent to leave my purse in my one portmanteau, which, as it happened, I kept packed and ready, in case I found it necessary to change my quarters at a moment's notice. But my host made light of lending me the money which would enable his secretary to settle up everything for me.

"But is not your secretary in bed?' I asked him, and he shook his head.

"No; Diplock always sits up, in case I bring work home with me. As

a matter of fact, I have some for him to do when he returns.'

"He took the letter and left the room, closing the door behind him. I stirred the fire, lighted another cigar, and leaned back in drowsiness, feeling a rather comfortable sense of satisfaction at being taken so entirely under an influential man's wing. But I had been so hurried along without a moment for thought that not till I was alone did I remember a somewhat important mistake I had made in my letter.

"As it happened, I had not had an occasion for telling Sir Caleb about my change of name, and I wrote the letter so completely under his influence that when he had said: 'Now your signature, Carton,' I had written my actual name. If the mistake was not remedied, the poor secretary would only reach Sartor Mansions to find that the head-porter did not know who D. Carton was.

"I opened the door quickly, to recall the letter.

"In the hall below I could hear the murmur of voices. Sir Caleb was evidently giving his secretary his directions and I hastened to join them. But before I was half way down the flight, I heard the hall-door close, and at the same moment the light below me was switched off, leaving me in darkness. Impelled by the thought that the secretary was leaving the house, I hurried on in the darkness, and groped my way to the door to open it. At the same moment Sir Caleb, whom I had passed in the complete darkness, switched on the light again to see what was happening.

"What on earth is the matter?' he asked, but I was already outside the house calling to the man who had just left it. He turned at once, and as I caught sight of him, I turned suddenly sick with apprehension.

"Sir Caleb Burnham's secretary was the ferrety little man with flaming red hair whom I had seen 'shadowing' me when I first reached town.

"I have wondered since," Carton continued, after waiting to see whether I was properly impressed by the sensationalism of the fact he had just given me, "I have wondered since why I took alarm so instantly, and felt all at once

that the house was a trap which I could not enter again at any price.

"Of course when you come to reason it out calmly, I was justified, I think, in feeling uneasy. If it was Burnham who had been having me shadowed, he must have had some greater object than the mere interest he pretended to take in me on account of our likeness, and after having taken the trouble to have me shadowed it was not likely that he would owe his meeting with me to chance. It was more probable that he had written me the anonymous letter with the sole purpose of getting me to his house without even his servants knowing that we had met.

"It looks suspicious all round when one considers it. But what surprises me now is that I should have jumped to all these deductions straight off without reasoning for a moment, and be in a terror to get clear of the place. Burnham had followed me out quickly and already had his arm in mine. The secretary stood between us and the street, staring, and really wondering, I believe, which of us was his employer, and I conquered the inclination to pull out my revolver and fight for my freedom. The shock had steadied me and made me quite cool and resourceful.

"What on earth is the matter?" Burnham was asking me again.

"Only that I was sending your secretary on a fool's errand," I said, and explained about my name.

"Burnham seemed relieved.

"Well! you can soon write the letter again," he said, and I reentered the hall with him. But as I reached the rack where my hat and overcoat were hanging, I stopped.

"I think after all I had better go myself," I said. "There are two or three things lying about that they might forget to pack, and I am sure to get a cab on the Embankment. It will save me troubling about breakfast and being wakened in the morning, if you don't mind my coming back to you to sleep."

"I believe I spoke quite easily, and left my friend satisfied that I should come back to him. But I did not go back.

"I wrote him a polite note instead, regretting that I had found a telegram

awaiting me which prevented my accepting his kind invitation. You see I was quite uncertain whether I had escaped a deep laid plot, or was making a fool of myself by distrusting the only man who had offered me any hospitality since I landed in England. I am not sure yet, and that is the great problem I want you to solve for me, Mr. Herbert."

Dudley Carton leaned back in his chair and waited as if I were an oracle for my answer.

"I should say," I answered, trying hard to be oracular, "especially after what I have seen to-night, that you did well to give Sir Caleb a wide berth. His evident effort to prepare the people here for your disappearance, and prevent them making inquiries about you if you never returned, looks very sinister. If you had spent the night in the house at Battersea there seems a fair possibility that it would have been your last."

"That is what I think," he said, quite pleased by my indorsement of his suspicion. "But why? Even given that he killed the man at Broadstairs, what could he possibly hope to do or gain by my death? That is what baffles me."

It baffled me too, but I did not care to say so.

"Please go on with your story," I said instead. "I should like to hear more—especially what happened to you to-night to take you to Tedworth Street, and make you try one of the garden doors there."

CHAPTER V.

THE CHRISTIAN COMPANY-PROMOTER.

"THE next day," said Dudley Carton, continuing his story, "I had a visit from Diplock, the secretary. He said that Sir Caleb had been disappointed when I did not return, but had congratulated himself afterward when he found that he too was unable to get away from town. He was hoping that I would let him know when I was free, and that we could still manage to get away together.

"I could see that he was very anxious to know whether my excuse was a pretended one, and I did not take any great pains to make it appear genuine, especially when he went on to say that

Sir Caleb was likely to be busy in the City late for the next few days, but would be glad if I could call in for a chat again when he was at home after eleven at night.

"I answered politely and indefinitely. I was very determined not to go near the house overlooking Battersea Park again, and I did not care whether Diplock and his master guessed the fact or not. But I was still quite uncertain whether I was making a fool of myself by feeling any queer sensations about my visit, and I did not want to lose Sir Caleb's friendship if it was a *bona fide* one. I was quite ready to meet any advances that he cared to make in an ordinary open manner. But I may say that he has made none.

"In the fortnight that has passed since our meeting on the Victoria bridge, he has never called on me, or written to me; he has never invited me to his house, except for an hour when the household would be asleep. He has never asked me to meet him in the City. And all the time I have had that man Diplock meeting me near here, as if by accident, and telling me how anxious Sir Caleb was to see me, and twice I have met Burnham himself in the same way at night, and he has tried hard to get me to go home with him.

"Now what do you make of it, Mr. Herbert? I confess that I can't think what it means, and it has got on my nerves. I have thought, of course, of leaving these apartments and changing my name again, but my curiosity won't let me. I want to avoid danger, but I want more to know whether there is any danger to avoid.

"That is why I said that for some things I should be glad to hear that Burnham is dead. If he has really committed suicide, I suppose my danger is at an end, but I should almost feel sorry, if it means that I am never to understand what he really wanted with me, especially if it interferes with my chance of ever clearing up the Broadstairs affair. I do not know whether you agree with me, but I feel as though that is finally at the bottom of it all. What do you think, Mr. Herbert?"

I did not offer an opinion. Although I would not have admitted it for worlds

to the man who was appealing to me with such pathetic dependence, I was simply bewildered by the strange story he had told me.

"You have not obtained any clue to the Broadstairs murder, which it would be worth the actual murderer's while to suppress?" I asked.

He shook his head.

"Not a scrap of a clue. I have not made any inquiries at all because I know it is not in my line. I have not any of your wonderful deductive powers, Mr. Herbert, and I have left it entirely in my detective's hands. If he has found out anything—and he seems a complete fool at the business—it would be Clash and not me that the murderer would want to silence. Now can you see why Burnham——"

I most decidedly could not see and I interrupted him.

"But about to-night?" I said, hoping that the affair would show some light when we got to the mystery of the packing-case, and were able to supplement Dudley Carton's story with mine.

"Oh! to-night," he said, "I had another letter from my anonymous friend by the last post, addressed to me this time in my assumed name, to make sure that I should receive it, I suppose. She began by apologizing for her failure to meet me on the bridge, and explained that she was in hiding from the police, and that they had made it impossible for her to leave her hiding-place or communicate with me till now.

"And she said outright that she knew I wanted to solve the mystery of the Broadstairs murder, and that she could give me the whole account of the affair for a five-pound note, if I would meet her with the money at a spot where she would be safe from the watchful eyes of the police, a spot temptingly close to me."

"In Tedworth Street?" I inquired, and he stared at me.

"How do you know?"

"I met you first there," I said, "paying particular attention to a certain house on the north side."

"The thirteenth," said Carton. "I was to go there at twelve o'clock precisely, knock twice at the garden door, and open it. My informant would be wait-

ing to discuss the Broadstairs affair. It was tempting, you know, fishy as it all sounded. I was strongly inclined to keep the appointment, as I had kept the appointment on the bridge. I have not the least certainty, you know, that Burnham had really anything to do with the first letter."

"He had with the second," I said with certainty. "But please go on. You did not keep the appointment?"

Carton reddened slightly as he shook his head.

"No, I got in a complete fright as the time drew near, and I dared not venture outside the house. I ought of course to have kept watch on the place, but—well—I turned coward, and I dared not go out for a couple of hours even to look at the place. It was then that I met you, and when I saw you follow me home I got a fit of the nerves again. It was not till I saw you pass again with a policeman in uniform that my curiosity got the upper hand and I made up my mind to see if you had anything to tell me. And here we are as a consequence. Now, what have you to tell me?"

"Only that if you had kept the appointment you would probably have been struck down and killed as you entered the garden," I said, "that your dead body would have been put in a packing-case and wheeled by Sir Caleb Burnham across the bridge to his house at Battersea, I suppose.

"As you did not turn up, his confederate filled the box with bricks to give it the weight required, put a little blood on it to persuade Sir Caleb that the crime was committed. Contrary to his expectation Sir Caleb was stopped on the way and, imagining that your dead body was in the case, jumped into the river to avoid arrest and was drowned."

And I told him my story to prove my hypothesis.

Dudley Carton heard me through in silence, and nodded his head when I had finished.

"That is clear enough. I have felt all along, of course, that Burnham never meant me to leave his house alive the night he got me there, and that is why he wanted my affairs to be settled up here so that the people of the house would not think of making inquiry about

me when I disappeared. He found that he could not get me to the house alive without anybody knowing I had gone there, so he schemed to take me there dead.

"But why, Mr. Herbert? That is what I want you to tell me. What on earth was it for? That is what I want you to tell me, as I suppose you can when you have such wonderful——" And he said kind and wholly mistaken things about my detective ability again.

They irritated me a little. Carton was regarding me with his pathetic air of perfect confidence, as if he had managed at last to get the penny in the slot and had only to open the drawer of my mind and take out the complete solution of all that had puzzled him.

And the solution was not there. I knew only what he knew, that there had been a very deliberate and cunning attempt on his life, but the reason for it, which he confidently expected me to tell him, simply because I have written a few ingenious detective stories, was as far from my understanding as his.

But I hated to say so, and I rose from my chair to pace the floor, as I always do when I have a knotty point in a story to work out. I had long ceased to think of the revolver in my pocket, and I gave "the Broadstairs Murderer," as I had called him in my mind when we entered the house, full opportunity to take me unawares if he wished.

But he only watched me with an almost reverential expectancy for the result of my thinking. I had stopped at the uncurtained window unconsciously, and from the Embankment below me came the sound of a rapidly driven cab which stopped at the house.

"Here's somebody stopping," I said. "Perhaps they have brought us the explanation."

Looking back at the affair afterward, it seems to me that it was the only thing I contributed in the whole affair to justify Dudley Carton's faith in me.

He had given his mind up to my leadership sufficiently to take the words quite seriously, and he hurried down to open the hall-door, while I followed for want of anything better to do, wondering how I should maintain my reputation when he discovered that it was only

one of the inmates of the house returning from a night out.

As a matter of fact it was a messenger from Charing Cross Hospital who wanted "Mr. William Dudley" or "Mr. Dudley Carton," whichever he cared to call himself, to accompany him post haste to satisfy the urgent wish of a dying man—a man called Diplock.

Diplock had made an attempt, the messenger explained, to board the tidal express for Dover and the Continent as it was leaving Charing Cross Station. He had made a frantic rush for the moving train, and, impeded by a heavy bag in his hand, had fallen and been drawn under the guard's van. He was terribly injured and there was no hope of his recovery, but now, after lying for four hours insensible in the hospital, he had awakened to full consciousness, and begged urgently that Mr. Carton might be sent for.

One would scarcely believe it, but Carton seemed uncertain whether to go to him. He had been driven into such a nervous state by the mysterious efforts of this man Diplock and his employer to get him into their power, that I believe he was still doubtful whether this was not only a trap set for him. He looked at me quite appealingly.

"You will come with me, won't you, Mr. Herbert?"

"What do you think?" I retorted. "Hurry up. He may be dead before we hear what he has to say."

I pushed him impatiently forward and in another moment we were all three crowded into the hansom, and the driver was urging his horse to its full speed again. We were too tightly packed—for Carton is a big man—for anything like easy conversation, but the messenger told us in answer to a query of mine that Diplock knew his back was broken—it was his most serious injury—and that there was no hope for him.

And he volunteered, on his own account, the information that the hand-bag, which was largely responsible for the accident, had flown open on the line and let out a shower of bank-notes and gold. More than ten thousand pounds had been counted by the railway officials who had gathered it up, and there was quite as much left in the bag. The messenger

had an idea, I think, that it had been stolen from Carton, and that Diplock, stopped in his intended flight of the Continent with it by the accident, was going to make confession to the man he had robbed. But he did not find us communicative, and we drove to the hospital practically in silence.

And at the hospital I was met by the most exasperating incident of a night that had not been without its trials of patience. I had taken it for granted that I should hear what Diplock had to say, if he was still able to say anything. Carton was anxious for me to accompany him to the accident ward, but it appeared I could not enter because of some stupid red-tape rule of the institution, against which I pitted my eagerness to hear Diplock's disclosures in vain.

I was not a relative of the injured man, and he had not asked to see me. I could not even pretend that he wished to see me. So the laws of the Medes and Persians had decided long ago that I must not step beyond the waiting-room, and there I remained for an hour that was as long as all the rest of the eventful night put together.

I believe that I paced up and down it the whole time till Carton appeared again, his face a little white and drawn; but with all the nervous restlessness that had characterized it gone.

"Well! that is all over," he said quietly.

"He is dead?"

"No, they think he may last an hour or two more, but all the danger and uncertainty that has been driving me silly is at an end now. He has told me the whole plot. He did not know that Sir Caleb Burnham was dead, and he said that he wanted to ease his mind by putting me on my guard against him. But on my soul I believe that he really told me because he was so proud of the plot and did not want its cleverness to be unrecognized.

"He was just as keen on making his confession when I told him that Burnham had committed suicide, and he wanted me to take possession of the thirty thousand pounds he had in his bag and keep half as a return for seeing that the other half got to a sister of his

in Edinburgh. Of course it will have to go back to Burnham's estate and help meet his liabilities. Diplock puts them at over a million.

"But I can tell you everything as we walk home. You don't mind walking? We can talk better and I have a lot to tell you. The fellow was perfectly conscious and clear, painfully so for a man who knows that he has not six hours at the utmost before him, and he seemed keen on unbosoming himself."

The hour's pause had enabled me to realize that I was physically about fagged out, but Carton seemed anxious to walk and I was ready, tired as I was, to do much more than that distance to Chelsea to hear the solution of the mystery.

London was already beginning to bestir itself as we stepped out into the street. It was dark still, but a passing milkman's cart served as the first reminder that it was no longer night, but the beginning of a new day.

"I think the Broadstairs crime will be cleared up sufficiently to clear my name and allow me to see Bleak House after all," Carton began as we linked arms and fell into step, and I did not blame him for thinking firstly how the disclosures he had heard would affect himself.

"What Diplock has told me is not evidence, I suppose, and I nearly choked him off altogether by suggesting to have somebody sent for to make it a sworn statement. But he says the facts are bound to come out, when Murgatroyd's brother in Australia hears of the affair. That is what made Sir Caleb in such a hurry to get things settled."

"Then it was Burnham who threw Murgatroyd over the cliff?" I asked impatiently.

"Yes, Sir Caleb Burnham, Baronet, appears to be about the most colossal hypocrite and impostor of the century, and it does not make me particularly comfortable to know that I have a face like his. But if it proved that I have his character latent in me, it would prove too that I'd got his brains, and it is a dead certainty that I haven't.

"His companies are all part of one big swindle, which each new one has helped to support, and he has gone on

blowing the bubble bigger and bigger till it was ready to burst. He was making preparations to save himself when the burst came, but Murgatroyd turned up before his preparations were complete. Murgatroyd and his brother had been partners with him in an undiscovered swindle in the beginning of his career, and had emigrated.

"They did badly and when they were on their beam ends it occurred to them that they might make money out of Burnham by threatening to show up the whole scandal. The one who was killed came across for the purpose and arrived at a moment when the bubble was near bursting, and it needed only a suspicion to bring about the catastrophe. Burnham pretended to treat with him, and made himself very agreeable, invited him down to his place in Kent and took him in his motor-car, with Diplock driving. He took him down to the coast deliberately and got him out there on the pretence that the motor had broken down and that they must find somebody to repair it.

"Then the quarrel came and Murgatroyd was thrown over the cliff, that being the easiest way to dispose of him. When Burnham got rid of the fisherman who tried to secure him, he ran back to the waiting motor, and they were in town again before midnight. But fancy the nerve of the fellow. He no sooner reported himself in town with a view to a possibly required alibi, than he caught the midnight train back to the neighborhood of the crime to get the first news if anything threatened to incriminate him.

"Diplock, who lent himself to every crime, seemed overwhelmed by admiration of his master's cleverness and audacity, and I believe he is dying happy because at the end he managed to go one better than his idol, and cheat the cheater.

"But you are wondering why they paid so much attention to me, Mr. Herbert. Well! Diplock says the idea was his, and I believe his pride in it made him tell me all about it. Sir Caleb's idea of meeting the cyclone which would gather round him when the bubble at last burst was to pretend suicide. He had managed to secure about one hundred

thousand pounds in cash and untraceable notes, and his idea was to leave a suicide's letter in his room and his hat and coat on the edge of the river to satisfy public opinion, while he disguised himself and commenced life anew somewhere under another identity.

"The weak point of the scheme was that it was too ostensible. The public he had gulled would want better evidence that he was really dead before they would relinquish their efforts to find and punish him. That is where I and my wonderful resemblance came in. When Sir Caleb hurried up to town with the news of my arrest and discharge, Diplock saw the possibilities at a glance, and he has never lost sight of me since. You see the idea, of course?"

"When the public which the 'Christian Company-Promoter' had hoodwinked for so long discovered how he had cheated them, nothing but the sight of his dead body would satisfy them that his pretended suicide was anything more than another of his tricks. I was to supply the dead body to make his escape complete. On the night that I was lured into his house without a soul beyond Burnham, Diplock, and myself knowing that we had ever met in London, the thing was to be done.

"As soon as Diplock had returned with my luggage and made sure that the people at Sartor Mansions would not make inquiries about me when I disappeared, I was to be offered Burnham's own rooms. As soon as I had undressed, he would come in to press a last drink on me, and that last drink would transform me from the living Dudley Carton into the dead body of Sir Caleb Burnham for the servants to discover in the morning.

"What difference there is in our faces, and I do flatter myself that I have a different expression at any rate—would be wiped out by death, and for the matter of that, who ever thinks of examining the face or body of a man found dead in his own bed to make sure that it is really he.

"Burnham would have had the rest of the night to write his farewell letter, appropriate my clothes and start off into the world with the hundred thousand pounds and a new identity. The original

idea had been for him to return to my rooms in my clothes, spend the rest of the night there, and settle up my bill as though he were myself in the morning. But the noticeable difference in our voices, as well as my readiness to agree to anything he proposed made him alter his design while he talked to me, fortunately for me.

"If he had not I should not be alive now. Well! they found out that my suspicions were aroused sufficiently to make me avoid Burnham's house, and every day the bursting of the bubble became more imminent. So they had to satisfy themselves with a plan more dangerous and clumsy. If I would not go to Burnham's house, they must dispose of me at some quiet spot where I would go, and make arrangements for getting my body to the house when I was dead.

"They selected the garden of an empty house belonging to Burnham, thinking it would be near enough to my own rooms to tempt me, and Diplock wrote another anonymous letter to get me there. Burnham was trying to throw the whole burden on his accomplice's shoulders. He kept his hold on Diplock by promising him a third of his haul after he had made his escape. But the little man did not want to be left in the lurch if anything went wrong. He was willing to wait for me in the dark garden and shoot me down with an air-pistol as I entered. He considers himself to be an unfailing shot. But Sir Caleb must take the risk of getting the corpse back to the house.

"Diplock would finish the long record of dirty work he had done for his master by committing a murder, but it was the last stroke he would do. After that he must think of saving himself, and for that he would want his money. Burnham had to accept the bargain. Diplock was to kill me and receive his thirty thousand pounds when he handed over my dead body, for the other man to dispose of at his own risk. And Diplock swears he meant to keep the bargain.

"It was not till he realized that I was not coming and an unfortunate cat got on his nerves by raising an unearthly caterwaul in the garden as if intent on

waking up everybody in the neighborhood, and made him shoot it, that it occurred to him to fool his confederate, and get his money at any cost.

"The packing-case had been carted into the garden two days earlier and lay waiting with the lid and screws all ready, and Diplock set to work like a maniac to fill it up with earth and stones, thinking every moment that Burnham would be on the spot to spoil his stratagem. But the last screw was in when he heard the truck approaching and met Burnham at the gate with the announcement that the affair had succeeded perfectly.

"Burnham was horribly nervous, although he had wheeled the truck all the way from his house without meeting a soul, and he got more nervous still when he saw the blood on the case. When he found how heavy it was, he wanted Diplock to help him, but Diplock had got his money and kept him to his bargain.

"They were disputing about it when you turned the corner of the street and put an end to their talk. As soon as you had passed on, Diplock hurried to Charing Cross Station with his thirty thousand pounds to try and catch the tidal express, and met with, what, I suppose, was just retribution. You will come in?"

To my surprise we were back already at Sartor Mansions, and around us on the Embankment lay the gray light of dawn.

(The End.)

"I rather think that it is time I was going to bed," I said, and he walked on with me to the door of my own chambers, thanking me again without the least suspicion of irony, I am sure, for the immense amount of help I had given him in solving the mystery.

When he left me, I found myself almost too tired and sleepy to get up to my room and undress, and I slept straight away for a solid twelve hours. I might probably have slept longer, but of the many callers whom my man turned away through the day, one, George Malcolm of the *Times*, considered himself sufficiently intimate to decide that twelve hours' sleep was enough for anybody.

I woke as he entered my bedroom bristling with newspapers.

"Look here, old man," he said, "haven't you looked at the papers yet?"

I sat up rubbing my eyes.

"What, have the papers got hold of it already?" I said, and Malcolm stared.

"Already?" he laughed. "Why every paper this morning had a glowing account of it and the 'evenings' are out now, following suit with, if possible, more enthusiasm. They all agree that it is a big success."

He was talking about my play.

Yet, although nobody will believe me, any more than Malcolm did, I had forgotten all about it.

THE CELESTIAL PERFUME.

By Richard F. Woods.

Author of "The Ringing of the Bell."

HOW a man, for cruelty and falsehood, was repaid a thousandfold in the wages of sin. ✽

It was after dinner, and the men were smoking in a small red room off the dining-room. They had been talking of a monstrous, inexplicable crime which had staggered humanity, and which had left its print on every

one's mind. The story had just been told with all its gruesome details, and the five men were digesting it with twisted faces, as after a bad draft.

Finally the youngest man spoke.

"There is an explanation to everything," he said. "Everything, no matter how strange or mysterious it be, has perhaps the simplest explanation."

He paused to relight his cigarette, and then lifted his eyes to the faces of the men around him.

"Perhaps the doctor does not agree

with you," one of the men suggested, noticing the thoughtful look on the man's face.

"Yes," the doctor returned, "I do. I believe that statement is true. I think almost everything has an explanation. I say almost, because once or twice things occur in the lives of men which seem so closely associated with the supernatural, so interwoven with mystery, that it appears impossible to account for them by natural means.

"You talk as if such a thing had occurred in your life," the first man said.

The doctor took a long pull at his cigar, then continued:

"I had an experience once that I could not unravel, and that has puzzled me to this day. It came near bringing me to the murderers' dock, and yet the explanation given at the time seemed to have satisfied all those who heard it. But to me it was insufficient; there was something lacking. If you wish, I will tell it to you."

Several of the men spoke at once.

"Do so by all means," they said.

After a short pause, the doctor began:

"It was some time ago, just after the Civil War, in 1867. I was then serving as a resident in the Pencoyd Hospital. At that time there were three of us, who lived in the hospital—Alfred Jordan, Francis Dalphine, and myself. Alfred Jordan this story does not concern. Francis Dalphine, however, I wish to describe to you, as he was one of the principals in the events I am about to relate.

"He was from New Orleans, and contained in his appearance that mixture of the French and Southern blood which is so characteristic.

"In person he was lean and long, with a swarthy, delicate face, a broad, rather bulging brow, and jet-black curling hair. A good-looking fellow enough, save for a peculiar leer about his mouth-corners. This man was to me particularly distasteful, and I never saw good qualities and bad ones so sadly mixed.

"His habits were loose and coarse to a degree, yet his desires were withheld with that modicum of prudence which keeps a man from inconvenient drunkenness or discovered theft. He wore an easy air of tolerance and self-assurance,

due, perhaps, to the consciousness of his own mental ability, which was marked; for his mind was fine and clear, though unclear.

"He had an especial turn for surgery, and his longing for knowledge in this branch of medicine burned with the same furious flame as his baser desires, and was only quenched when his object was secured. It was this desire—this attempt—to satisfy his surgical curiosity regardless of consequences that led to the tragedy I am about to relate.

"It seems that late one night, just after my arrival at the hospital, two Chinamen walked into the receiving ward; one was suffering from a bad cold, the other acted as interpreter. Dalphine had given the sick man some medicine or other, and was about to send him away, when he noticed a lump on his arm, large enough to be seen through the loose coat the Chinaman wore.

"He made the man disrobe, and found a tumor on the arm near the shoulder. Through the interpreter he insisted that the Chinaman spend the night in the hospital.

"In the morning, he asked me to examine the arm with him. I was surprised at the appearance of the Chinaman. He was evidently of the upper class, and not the low-caste coolie that I expected to see. His face was intelligent, his clothes were the finest quality of silk, and he had the long, uncut finger-nails which in that race denote luxury and freedom from work. A fine gold chain hung around his neck, and a massive gold ring of curious design adorned one of his fingers.

"He bared his arm, and I examined it carefully. The tumor was a large one, and seemed firmly attached. I thought it was a cancerous growth, and told Dalphine so, and asked him if he had suggested an operation.

"That is why I sent for you,' he explained. 'I need help to get his consent. You see, it's a good operation, and if I work it right I can do it myself.'

"But it's an amputation,' I said. 'Will Smith let you do it?'

"Now, mind you,' Dalphine returned, 'I am telling nothing to Smith. This is my case and I do it myself. You keep your mouth shut, do you see?'

"I was green and timid and awed by Dalphine's manner, so said nothing.

"Now, go ahead," said Dalphine, "and explain to them what has to be done. I have already told them, but I think you can clinch the matter."

"I turned to the interpreter, and told him at some length the dangerous condition the man was in—how an operation would have to be performed, and how death would ensue if it was refused.

"This was transmitted rapidly to the patient, who received it in silence. Finally he spoke shortly, and the interpreter turned to me.

"He wishes to know if he loses his arm."

"Dalphine heard the question; pulling me aside, he exchanged a sharp look.

"These heathens," he whispered, "have a belief that if their arms or legs are taken off before death they will appear in hell or heaven without them. Now, I want you to tell this man that we can take this tumor off without his arm. Of course, if anything happens at the operation that makes amputation necessary, we can tell him afterward."

"But it seems to me," I said sharply, "that this will be necessary. The tumor so involves the bone that I do not think it can be removed without the arm."

"You won't tell him that?" Dalphine said quickly.

"I can't honestly tell him anything else," I replied. "Besides that, you should let Smith see him."

"No, I will not," Dalphine returned. "Smith is a blundering old woman, and I intend doing this myself. If you are going to mix things up, you had better not tell the Chinaman anything."

"Very well," I said angrily. "Do as you please."

"And with that I left him.

"I did not find out till the next day what arrangements Dalphine had made. He sent for me to etherize, and I found the Chinaman and the interpreter in a small room off the operating-chamber. Before I began the Chinaman sent for Dalphine, who came with sleeves rolled up, a rubber apron on, and his hands covered with soap-suds.

"What is it?" Dalphine said, looking at me. I pointed to the interpreter, who spoke.

"He says you promised not to take off his arm; because, he says, he would rather die than lose his arm."

"All right," Dalphine said hurriedly, and turned to go.

"The sick man rose up in bed, caught Dalphine by the arm, and rattled a few sentences to the interpreter, who again spoke to Dalphine.

"He wishes you to promise on your God."

"All right," Dalphine said, looking at me with his peculiar leer. "I promise, on my God."

"This was told the Chinaman, who sank back, apparently satisfied.

"To say I was disgusted with the whole affair was but putting it mildly, and yet it was Dalphine's concern, and not mine. He was my senior, and to him I believed all the blame belonged. Since that time I have thought I should have interfered and told the Chinaman what would probably happen, but I did not.

"I had some trouble in getting the Chinaman to take the anesthetic, but his friend and I finally persuaded him. The smell of the ether was to me a relief, for the Chinaman had about him a peculiar musk-like perfume that permeated the room and was very unpleasant.

"The operation was done well. I have seldom seen one done with more despatch or more skilfully. When Dalphine found, by an incision, where the tumor went, spreading its ramifications into muscles and the very bone itself, he did not hesitate, but, looking at me, asked how the patient was doing. I answered that he was all right.

"Then," he said, "this arm comes off at the shoulder."

"I paled over the ether.

"Surely you cannot do this thing after your promise," I said. "Much better let him die."

"This arm comes off at the shoulder," he repeated, and that was all, while I continued to ply the ether, with repulsion in my heart for so vile a beast, knowing well that if I threw down the towel and refused to continue he would press the orderly into my place, with perhaps disastrous results.

"At last it was over. The severed

arm was slipped in a jar of alcohol, for Dalphine to examine at leisure, and the poor devil placed in his bed.

"Never shall I forget the Chinaman after the operation. He was heavy with ether all the afternoon, but toward night he became gradually conscious and anxious to know the result of the operation. I happened to be in the ward when his friend was asking Dalphine about it, and from a point of vantage by an alcove could take in the whole scene without being observed.

"The Chinaman, his green face immovable as a statue, had been propped up slightly with a pillow, and the quick glances from his rat-like eyes at Dalphine were the only evidence he gave of any agitation. Bluntly and cruelly Dalphine told how, at the operation, the arm had been taken off. I could hear his loud but rounded voice roll through the ward, and then, to make matters worse, he said that the growth was a cancer, and that the Chinaman would probably die.

"This was interpreted to the Chinaman and I watched his face as he received it. His expression did not change, but he gave the surgeon a look of such intense hatred and loathing as I have never seen, and which made Dalphine pale beneath his dusky skin.

"The evening of that day Dalphine was off duty, and Alfred Jordan having left the hospital on account of sickness, it fell to my lot to see the Chinaman. He seemed to be in good shape, and gave no evidence of the pain which he must have been suffering. He had not changed his position, and his face wore the same rigid, impenetrable expression.

"Before leaving the ward, as I was giving some directions to the nurse the man in the next bed called to me.

"'Doctor,' he said, 'can't you move that Chinaman out of here? He smells like a drug-store, and makes me sick.'

"'He is annoying all the patients,' the nurse said. 'They have complained continually since he has been in the ward of that offensive perfume. We could move him into the end room,' she suggested. 'There is no one there.'

"I agreed to her proposal, and left the ward for the night.

"Toward one o'clock I received a note

from the nurse saying that the Chinaman was doing badly, and would I see him. I hurriedly dressed and went to the ward.

"The nurse met me in the hall, outside of the end room. She told me that a short time before she had gone to the Chinaman's bed to give him some milk. He looked all right, perhaps a trifle paler, but his eyes seemed lifelike and his expression had not changed. It was only when she tried to rouse him that she discovered something was wrong; he was not breathing, and his pulse had disappeared.

"I went to the bed with her, and found, as she had surmised, that the Chinaman was dead. Lifting the bedclothes, I discovered that the mattress was soaked with blood. When I examined the man's shoulder I found that the bandages had all been pulled away and a ligature torn from the main artery.

"The Chinaman had worked the dressings off, loosened a ligature, and quietly bled to death. I gave some directions in regard to the removal of the body and started for bed. As I was leaving the ward I encountered Dalphine, who was evidently quite intoxicated.

"'How are things?' he asked me thickly, steadying himself against the door.

"'That Chinaman of yours is dead,' I answered shortly. 'I have just seen him.'

"He said nothing, but went staggering into the ward.

"As I was undressing I heard him come blundering down the hall and go to his room.

"Presently he called me:

"'Preston, come in here a moment.'

"He was sitting on a chair in front of the bureau when I entered, and as he faced me I saw that something had shaken him. The flush of the alcohol had left his face; he was as white as paper.

"'Preston,' he began, 'that damned Chinaman bit me.'

"'Bit you!' I cried, staring into his bloodshot eyes.

"'Yes, bit me,' he repeated.

"He clumsily unraveled a handkerchief about his hand and held it to my face. Two fingers were running blood.

"'You're a good diagnostician,' he mumbled. 'I went in to see him when I left you, and was examining the shoulder, when I knocked the candle over. While I was hunting for it in the dark I stuck my hand in his face, and he bit me like a dog.'

"'Nonsense!' I said; 'it isn't possible. The man is dead.'

"'You're right, Preston; he said stupidly. 'He is dead now, at any rate. I beat him over the head till he let go.'

"'Dalphine, you're drunk,' I remarked. 'You had better go to bed. You cut your hand on something.'

"'I know I'm drunk,' he muttered. 'But, Preston, he bit me; I know that, too.'

"He rubbed his hand over his mouth, and suddenly took it away and looked at it.

"'God! I smell like a sachet powder. Well, good night; here goes for bed.'

"He attempted to get up from the chair, slipped, and fell flat on the ground, where he lay, breathing heavily. I dragged him on to his bed, loosened his collar, and removed his shoes, but before leaving the room I untied his hand.

"On two fingers were deep and bleeding indentations of human teeth.

"The next day he was about his work as usual. I asked him how his hand was, and he replied that he had cut it on something the night before, but made no mention of the bite, nor did I attempt to question him further.

"No one came to claim the body of the Chinaman. His friend who acted as interpreter was never seen again, so he was buried in the Potter's Field.

"It chanced that one night, not long afterward, I went to the museum, where the specimens were preserved, to examine a thoracic aneurism which I had been dissecting.

"The museum, in those days, occupied the basement of an old house, which was apart from the hospital, in the midst of a clump of trees to one corner of the grounds. The upper part of this house had been used formerly to isolate contagious cases, but had long since been abandoned, on account of the dilapidated condition of the walls and the impossibility of heating the upper story.

"It was a fine frosty night in Decem-

ber, with a thin, bright moonlight and a sharp wind, which buffeted the small lantern I carried and had swept the brick pavements as clean as a ballroom floor. I entered the building, and turning, locked the door firmly behind me; for on other occasions I had had some street-prowlers vault the low fence around the grounds, open the door, and watch me with morbid curiosity.

"The museum was a large room, divided by a long case of shelves, which extended from ceiling to floor, across the center of the room, leaving just enough space at each end for passageways. This case was filled with specimens, as were the shelves lining the sides of the room. One of these shelves was protected with a hinged glass cover, fastened with a padlock, and was the only place where specimens were secure from the meddlesome medical students who studied there at times.

"After I had placed the lantern on the table at the end of the room and lighted a lamp I unlocked the shelf which held my specimen. There were eight or ten jars on this shelf, each containing some portion of the human anatomy, preserved in alcohol. Among them I recognized the arm of the Chinaman, which Dalphine had placed there for examination.

"The fingers, with their long nails, were curled up over the palm, and I noticed with surprise that the gold ring still encircled the swollen finger and glittered through the jar in the lamp-light.

"I brought out my specimen, placed it on the table, and started to work.

"I don't know why it was, but I was unsuccessful. I could not get my mind on the task. I had been there perhaps an hour, when I felt the room grow cold and a blast of chill air came sweeping around the case of shelves. Taking a lantern, I advanced from the table and discovered, to my amazement, that the door was wide open.

"You can judge of my surprise, for I was positive that I had locked it after me. When I entered this time, however, I closed it again, but did not lock it, as I had left my keys in the padlock of the specimen-case. As I turned from the door I was conscious of a peculiar

smell. Subtle at first, it became more pronounced as I returned to the table. Then suddenly I recognized it—the singular musk-like odor the Chinaman had borne before death.

"I was not easily frightened in those days, but I must confess I felt a creeping chill crawl through my bones and a weight of utterly causeless alarm grip me by the heart. I placed myself again at the table, attempted to work, and tried to banish the sensation of fear which was pervading me, but all to no purpose. This constant pungent smell made me uncomfortable, and, to add to it, I had an odd subjective sensation, accompanied by a sinking of the pulse, that there was somebody in the room with me.

"This idea became so firm, so convincing, that I felt sure that the thing, whatever it was, was behind the case, which threw its shadow blackly on the floor. It was as if something had gathered there—something I had great reason to fear, some peculiar thing that would harm me, how or why I could not tell.

"I endeavored to reason off my nervousness; I endeavored to believe that much, if not all, of what I felt was due to the oppressive influence of the gloomy room, the isolated building, and the hour of the night, but the more I struggled the more panic-stricken I became, and had to restrain myself by a strong force of will from grasping the lantern and rushing from the building. During this struggle against my fears I sat staring at the table with the sweat running down my face and neck, overpowered with horror, unaccountable, yet unendurable.

"The very fact that there was nothing tangible to frighten me, I think, added to my terror, for if I had seen or heard anything it would have relieved the tension.

"Finally I did hear something—a faint tinkle, a soft click of steel striking steel. I looked to where the sound came from and saw, as plainly as I see your faces, the keys in the locked case turning.

"The tension broke like a snapped wire, and I rushed to the case and pulled them from the lock. I imagined they were held from me by a soft force, as if some one had a finger in the key-ring

and was gently restraining me from taking them. I jammed them in my pocket, and taking the lamp, went around the case. The golden rays illuminated thoroughly the space beyond the case.

"There was nothing there, but I noticed that the smell here was stronger, and I had a sensation of nausea from it, as I had had the day of the operation. I blew out the lamp, and holding the lantern on high, fled from the building.

"The cold night-air settled me somewhat, but I could not shake off the sensation that the thing had followed me, and looked back time and again to reassure myself.

"That night I could not sleep for some time, but tossed about with a troubled mind while the hours waned away. I had received a shock that seemed entirely disproportionate to actual occurrences, and one that had shaken my nerves badly. The death of the Chinaman and the thought, which I know will seem foolish to you, that he was seeking his lost arm, kept running through my mind.

"Finally, toward morning, I fell into a disturbed sleep. Half asleep, I thought a figure entered my room. I called to it, thinking it was Dalphine, but received no answer. Again I smelled the musty odor and attempted to awaken myself, for the insidious perfume was choking me. The figure went to the table, and I heard the rattle of the keys as they were turned, as I imagined, in an effort to remove one from the ring. I awoke with a cry and found Dalphine standing by my bed.

"Dawn was making things plain in my room, and Dalphine, with blue shadows about his mouth, looked wan and ghastly in the faint light. Of the two of us, he looked the more frightened.

"'What's the matter with you?' he asked. 'Did you call? Did you see anything?'

"'No,' I said, collecting myself. 'I had a dream, that's all.'

"He went to the window and opened it.

"'It's awful close in here,' he said. 'What's that sickening smell?'

"I could smell it, too, as the fresh air from the window drove it toward me.

"'It was in my room last night,' he

said, turning from the window. 'And say, Preston,' he said irritably, before he left me, 'if you have any more dreams don't make so much noise about them.'

"After that night the ordinary procession of events in the hospital underwent a change—everything seemed to go wrong. Something strange was about, and I had a queer feeling of foreboding which I have heard precedes a calamity. We began to lose case after case without apparent cause, and if there was a chance for the most benign disease to become fatal it would certainly do it.

"Sometimes I thought I detected the peculiar odor in the ward. I don't know whether it was my imagination or not, but it seemed to always precede a death, and filled me with the same horror I had experienced in the museum. Once or twice-things were seen by patients, but I gave little credence to them.

"Dalphine and I at that time were living in rooms at the end of a long one-story ward of the hospital. All the patients had been removed from this wing temporarily, as the ward was being cleaned and plastered. It was a cold, cheerless place to live in. There was no heat, save from a broken-down stove, which stood in the hall and served for both rooms, but only partially counteracted the cold blasts which came through the ill-fitting window-sashes.

"That we were not the only occupants of this wing soon became evident. There was something that was always looking over my shoulder when I read, or was waiting in the shadow of my room at dusk, and when I walked down the long empty ward, which adjoined our rooms, to make my evening rounds it would follow me with light pattering footsteps. It was continually fumbling my keys, and after I had retired I could hear the bunch tinkle cautiously on the bureau.

"In my sleep, I imagined that the thing wished something it could not get, and was reproaching me with soft, blundering murmurs, which would at last awake me, and then go sighing down the corridor with the wind. Once I heard, or imagined I heard, it crying out in the hall, weeping like a woman, and I awoke with great pity in my heart.

"I was not the only one who thought something strange was going on.

"My dog, which was a large terrier and had always slept in my room at night, refused to remain there, preferring the cold outside to the strange visitor. Sometimes I could coax him in, but he was uneasy, and with hair uplifted on his back and muscles tense would watch the thing in the dark hall, growling, with his teeth bared under his lips.

"That Dalphine noticed something was wrong I have no doubt. He never spoke to me in this regard, but I noticed that he was greatly changed and went about as if some terrible weight was oppressing him. There were times, indeed, when I thought his unceasingly agitated mind was laboring with some oppressive secret, to divulge which he struggled for the necessary courage. He looked ghastly, and his heavy-skinned face was the color of cigar-ash and creased with deep lines.

"He began to drink harder, and time and time again I could hear him in the dead of night talking quickly, as if he was quarreling with some one.

"One morning early he awoke me and accused me of going through his pockets in search of the keys he had borrowed the night before.

"'Preston, I want you to keep out of my room at night,' he said.

"I told him I had not been in his room.

"'Well, some one has,' he continued. 'They are after those keys.'

"He slapped the bunch on the table.

"'And look here,' he added, drawing a revolver. 'Some one has been annoying me—some devilish joke or other—and the next time it happens I am going to put a bullet through him, whoever he is.'

"As I marked his trembling hand and startled face it was easy to see that his air of bravado was feigned, and that beneath it the man was mortally shaken—frightened almost beyond endurance.

"In the evening of that day he came to my room. He had got himself together somewhat, looked better, and was perfectly sober.

"'I am sorry I acted the ass this morning,' he said. 'I was in a bad funk—rum, I guess, and nerves and no sleep. I want to take those museum keys again.'

"As I handed them to him I noticed he had a small file in his hand; he saw the direction of my glance, and explained that he was going to file off the gold ring on the severed hand in the museum.

"'It is too valuable to be allowed to remain where it is,' he said, 'and I am going to have it in payment, you know, for the operation.'

"He bade me good night and left me. After he had gone I went to the gate-house and got my dog. Singularly enough, he seemed willing to come to my room, and instead of sniffing all around and nervously growling he contentedly curled himself up near my chair.

"At twelve o'clock—I marked the time exactly, for I remember setting my watch by the city clock, whose bell carried to me from the next square—I left my room with the dog, intending to take a walk about the grounds before turning in.

"It was a black winter's night, cold and raw, with no wind, but a dampness which felt like snow at any moment. The slight snow of the day before had drifted into small heaps on the grass and in corners, and was frozen into a thin crust on the pavement, which made walking hazardous. There were no noises of carts and pedestrians in the streets. The restless grumble of traffic seemed to have gone down with the wind. Sounds carried far and clear, and the closing of a shutter in the hospital rang out sharply in the night.

"My walk led me toward the museum, with my dog pattering at my heels. I don't know what prompted me, but as I came closer I paused in my walk before turning back and watched Dalphine, whom I could see plainly through the lighted window. He was bent over, and I judged, from the movement of his arm, that he was filing the ring.

"Suddenly he ceased working and lifted his head, as if he had heard something. He stood for a few seconds motionless, apparently listening, and then quickly turned, and lifting his hands in front of his face, as if to ward off something, staggered back against the table and sent it, with the lamp, crashing to the ground. That one instant, when I saw the horror of his face, will haunt me to my dying day.

"I stood rigid, as if paralyzed, looking with staring eyes at the black window; the next moment, a thin cry came from the museum. It went down my spine like ice and touched the marrow of my bones. A cry at first broken and muffled, like the sobbing of a child, which quickly swelled into one long, loud, inhuman screech and then abruptly ceased.

"I started on a run for the museum, and threw myself against the door. It was unlocked, and I burst suddenly in. A dense, disgusting, musklike odor greeted my nostrils.

"'Dalphine,' I shouted; there was no response from the blackness save the growling of my dog, which had followed me.

"I groped my way to the case and then around it, with hands stretched out to protect me from I knew not what, and stumbled and fell over something.

"Kneeling, I felt about, and placed my fingers on a human face, still warm, but quiet and lifeless. I shuddered, and drew back with repulsion, for I knew instinctively that the thing was dead. My hand went for the heart, and I found its pulsation gone, and then I felt for the neck, to unloosen the collar, when I touched an ice-cold hand, which grasped the dead man's throat.

"'Oh, God!' I cried, and 'Oh, God!' again, and staggered upright, when something came toward me that I could not see, but could feel with a deep-seated terror of the mind, something that gathered itself out of the blackness, and although I knew I was in danger, I could not move a muscle or utter a sound; and then, as I stood there, this thing enveloped me, and a hand seized me by the throat and bore me to the ground.

"I struggled and grasped its wet and slimy wrist and struck out with my feet for its body, but the thing which had me by the throat had no connection with a human frame, for my feet went through thin air.

"At that instant my dog sprang for my throat. I felt his jaws close on something fastened to my neck, and his hot breath in my face, but the cold clam-like fingers only pressed the tighter, while my head swam with retained blood and I felt my senses gradually leave me.

Then, indistinctly, I heard a voice and dimly perceived a light; the grasp relaxed, and I became unconscious for a moment.

"When I recovered myself I was lying on the floor in one corner. The room was lighted by a lantern, which had been placed near me by the watchman, who was bending over me, and who helped me to my feet.

"Wait a moment," I said, leaning against the wall, as he started to question me, "let me pull myself together."

"The watchman glanced about the room, and started back with a half-cry when he saw the body for the first time.

"It lay on its back, with one hand clenched and rigid at its throat. In its staring eyes and black and swollen face was written fear, such terror as no one can describe, which drove the color from the watchman's cheek as he peered into the dead man's face.

"My God! it's Doctor Dalphine," he said hoarsely, and then, noticing the black marks on the throat, cried out that he had been choked to death. I nodded my head and rubbed my neck, which was stiff and sore.

"The grumbling and growling of the dog, which was worrying something in the corner, attracted his attention. He took the lamp and went toward the dog, and seizing him by the neck, drove him off. The dog came to me whining.

"Look at what he's been at," the watchman said.

"I came over to him, still dazed, and saw him lift the severed arm; I righted the table and we placed the arm on it. The hand was torn and shredded by the dog's teeth.

"It's the arm he was dissecting," I mumbled, and shivered as with a chill.

"Morse, did you hear him cry?" I asked.

"Hear him?" he said; "I never heard the like. Aye, I heard him. I can hear him now. Oh, Lord, what a cry!"

"He wiped his handkerchief over his face, which was wet with sweat, although the room was cold as a vault.

"I was just coming out of the main building," he continued, "when I heard it, and turned and saw you running."

"Thank God for that," I said, coming more to myself.

"For what?" he questioned.

"That you saw me. Don't you see, man, it lifts murder from my soul. You find me here," I continued, "with a man choked to death, no one else about. What's to prevent you and every one thinking that I killed him? But you saw me running after he cried out—don't forget that, Morse—and you followed me in and found me unconscious and Dr. Dalphine dead. You'll have to tell that to the coroner."

"Why," the watchman said, "doctor, you don't suppose any one would think you killed him? Look there!" He pointed to a window at the end of the room which was wide open."

The doctor paused in his story; his voice was hoarse, and he drank eagerly from a glass of water on the table.

"And now comes the explanation," he continued.

"In those days, in the basement of the Pencoyd Hospital were a number of rooms where the insane were confined. That night, just before Dalphine was killed, Morse, the watchman, found that an insane patient, James Long, had broken open the door of his room and escaped. He was a dangerous lunatic, with homicidal mania.

"Morse was looking for him when he heard Dalphine's cry. He thought the madman had raised the window in the rear of the museum, entered quietly, and strangled Dalphine and attacked me. The solution seemed more than plausible, for on coming from the building after arranging Dalphine's body we found the lunatic crouching in the corner of the steps. We overpowered him with difficulty and again placed him in his room.

"Of course, there was great excitement the next day as the story of the murder leaked out. The coroner's jury, after an exhaustive inquiry, came to the conclusion that Dalphine had been killed by James Long, the lunatic. The statement of the watchman completely exonerated me, but I think that if he had not seen me running toward the museum after Dalphine cried out it might have been a nasty business.

"Strange as it may seem, the arm disappeared during the night. The coroner and police did not give any weight to this fact. I searched the museum and

the grounds about thoroughly, but could not find it; nor was it ever again seen in the hospital.

"As I said in the beginning, this explanation seemed satisfactory to all who heard it, and I have no doubt will seem so to you; but to me there was something else—something that only I, who had gone through such an experience, can appreciate.

"There is only one other thing connected with this singular occurrence, and then I am done.

"Three years ago it was decided to remove all tubercular cases from the city hospital. For this purpose a large plot of ground was purchased, in order to build a new hospital for them. I was one of the committee for the erection of this building. The spot chosen was a large pauper burying-ground on the outskirts of the city, which had been in disuse for some time.

"One day, while I was overlooking the work, I was standing near some workmen, where the excavation was taking place, watching them remove a coffin, the top of which suddenly gave way and exposed the skeleton within. I climbed down from where I was standing to get a clear view of the remains, which I found to be those of a Chinaman. From the naked skull was still attached a long jet-black queue.

"All the bodies that had been disinterred were placed in a shed awaiting transportation to another burying-

ground. After this coffin had been placed with the rest I went over alone and, lifting the cover, looked carefully within. The body had evidently been despoiled by those who buried it, for the bones lay naked in the wooden box.

"One of the arms was broken off clean, near the shoulder, as if the bone had been sawed through. I lifted the hand that was flexed on the forearm and straightened out the fingers, which were clenched in the palm. A large gold ring dropped from the bony finger to the bottom of the coffin.

"I picked it up; it was half filed through.

"Gentlemen, I gave you an explanation of the first part of my story.

"To this last, I give you none."

"But the ring," one of the men said—"what became of it?"

The doctor withdrew one end of his watch-chain from his pocket and unclasped the heavy gold ring.

"There it is," he said, placing it on the table.

The window in the room was open and a soft summer breeze was blowing the curtains.

The man near the window sniffed.

"Do you notice a peculiar smell coming through that window?" he asked.

The doctor smiled and said:

"My story has made a great impression; does it smell like musk?"

But presently he arose and closed the window quickly.

BURDOCKS AND BLUEBERRIES.

By George Allan England.

PROVING that in the many-ringed circus of life one gets tumbles as well as applause. ❁

THIS here blind side-track we run into last year," said Napoleon Burdock, proprietor of Burdock Brothers' Big Tent Shows, "all begins along of a hard

frost we encountered just outside the great New England Pie Belt."

Napoleon squintingly lighted the proffered cheroot at a hissing gasoline-flare, then sprangled down again at ease on one of his own reserved seats.

"Lemme ruminare a bit now, and drag a few details off the mental junk-heap, and I'll give it to you straight how us and our Dutch side-partner, Hermann, all got tangle-footed on the same stretch of adamantine luck."

"Our show was this kind of a show—a refined black-face vawdeveal, with mimical jollyisms and a wire act on the side. We had a little menagerie, too; there was a gray wolf, some coon-cats, dyed with anilin dyes and billed as Circassian tigrettes, and a Canady link. Which the link was that moth-eaten you couldn't have taken your oath whether it was a naturally bald beast with oases of fur or vicky-verky. We had a wall-eyed bear, too, named Miltiades—dyspeptic he was, and pessimistic on account of a bad cough. Besides all these, there was a dummy stuffed to represent a Pole Nihilist, Shawl-grots or Saw-grass, or some such name.

"For humans there was me and Eb (my brother), plus a couple of kids named McCarty, but billed as the Angelo Frères, plus 'Kid' Nagle, the six-handed bag-puncher, and a slim Paderewsky named Jefferson Figg, what tortured the fiddle and played the bass-drum-cymbal combination with his knees, plus Bill Macklin, who manipulated the horse-teeth of our vest-pocket melodeon.

"Bill was a curly-headed, good lookin' Britisher from Leeds. Which we called him the Leeds Duck because the organ-bellerses was that small he had to pump one hundred and twenty to the minute, like a sure-enough duck's paddle-wheels navigatin' a mill-pond.

"Add to the above 'Peg' Wilkins, which is our adipose advance agent, with a real genius for alcohol and with a mahogany leg, the same bein' as fine a piece of wood-turnin' as ever I see, and you have the toot ensimble of Burdock's Amalgamated Australian and Diamond Musée.

"We toured the Granite State, and for a while did a land-office biz, playin' on velvet to A1 houses. Unfortunately, it didn't last. Nope; when we crossed over into N. H. and tried to string up there, somethin' solid fell on us in the shape of an injunction bought and paid for by a sure-enough circus in the next county.

"You've got to have a thousand-dollar license to exhibit a circus in little old N. H., a slight detail we wasn't wise to. So, as per above, this here injunction drops on us like a pint of half-melted ice-cream down a fat man's osteopathy.

"Lawyers and sheriffs swarmed round the Amalgamated for a spell like a queen-bee's weddin'; but, though Hermann and us was handy with the jaw-tackle, we didn't really have a look-in at the game at all, bein' tied to the post as compared with the red-tape men when it come to a legal show-down.

"'It ain't a circus at all that we're exhibitin'!' is our contention. 'Without equine equilibration, how d' you make a circus out of us?'

"'You've got a 'reener, ain't you?' says the law-buzzards.

"'Um-m-m, yes; but what's that got to do with it?'

"'Makes it a circus, that's all a 'reener does. A 'reener's a 'reener, and you're a circus and we can prove it,' repeats the law-buzzards. 'Put up a thousand or quit the State.'

"So we quit.

"Well, first thing we done after travelin' away from them unsalubrious regions was take account of stock. What with salaries, transportation, and *et cetera*, we's up against three hundred of debt, and our cash assets is thirty-nine-sixty. The stock-takin' developed into a council of war, blue bein' the prevailin' color. Which it would have been far, far more of a frosty-phiz party if we'd been wise to the kind of jiu-jitsu package Fate had ribbed up to hand us before long.

"The decision we reached was this kind of a decision:

"Hermann was to hustle back to his home burg to try and raise the mazoom, and then execute a gyration over the map lookin' for a good all-summer proposition at some amusement park or other. 'Salt Harbor,' says he, 'is a likely place.'

"Me and Eb, meantime, is to keep on with the show, workin' south on credit. Biz don't bid fair to be so good as up among the turkey-necked plow-pushers, because, of course, the people is more human the farther away you get and the better run they'll want for their money. But still, we reckons some way we can pull along till Hermann finds a chance for us to recoop.

"Well, Hermann he takes nine dollars and moseys out, leavin' us with only thirty dollars and sixty cents in coin to grease the Wheels of Destiny. It takes more'n that when there's eleven people

and six animals and a mummy and freight and car-fare and advertisin'. So the Wheels squeaked. This whole story is just the echo of that there squeak. Which it made the band-wagon of our lives considerable noisy for quite a while.

II.

"PEG WILKINS, our advance agent, couldn't walk on the railroad track no way in this world, what with slumpin' into the cinders and jarrin' on the ties with that mahogany leg of his. So we had to ship him along southward to the next town with the Noah's Ark bunch. Freight and ticket evaps twelve plunks and leaves us only fourteen, after deductin' two-sixty for meat to feed the critters. It's about 8 P.M. on the 30th of June, and a Thursday, when the tail-lights of Peg's train fades from our view, leavin' us to economize by plain every-day foot-work.

"We pounds cinders and spruce pretty much all night, and next mornin' dopes into a wart on the map called Gilead. We blows a couple of dollars against some human fodder, which brings us down to twelve simoleons and puts us very low in our minds. Which we're lower shortly after tryin' to arrange for a show, there bein' a town regulation, due to some local Women's Anti-Everything League, which prohibits tent exhibitions. Therefore, it's hire a hall or hike. So me and Eb leaves our troupe reposin' round the freight-house and snipes ourselves over the burg in a hurry.

"Well, Mister Man, that must have been an off-day for luck in Gilead. The balm-market was sure dry. Not a place could we locate that wasn't occupied. The Grange had a meetin' on their date-book; there was a fair runnin'; and the Opera House was full of hay.

"We fine-tooth-combed the settlement fore an' aft, and at last by bull-luck run to earth a individual who's said to know somethin' about some place that's said to possibly be for hire. This individual's name is Walker Gallington Phipps, and he has a head on him like a long mackrimay-lacework of glowing whiskers glued to an ostrich-egg. The egg being lumpy, you understand. Besides, he's lean, with a bucking Adam's apple.

"'Hall?' says he, when we grapples him. 'Hall? F'r a circus? Nawp.'

"'Why not?' falters Eb, with a quaking diaphragm.

"'It's our Lodge Hall. Ain't ben let f'r a show sence two years ago last Jan-u-wary.'

"'Which the reason is?' says I.

"'Niggers. They had it. F'r minstrels and the like o' that. Took us three days to clean up. Now we ain't friendly to no such doin's.'

"'See here, mister,' says I, catchin' him by the front part of his clothes. 'We're on the narrow edge of the soup-kettle, and it all rests with you people which way we tumble—see? Our whole bunch, animals and humans, has only twelve dollars between us and the sheriff. If we's stranded here, Gilead's got to care for us, and you're a taxpayer—see?'

"Walker Gallington polished off his ivory-colored coco with his handkerchief, swallowed hard, and then said, said he:

"'If you won't take your critters in the hall, and promise to be careful of the furnishin's, and also give us eight dollars plus half the gate-money, I reckon you kin show here.'

"At that Eb and me orates some plenty, but W. G. is harder than a country-hotel bed, and our eloquence can't dent him. He takes refuge in behind his hirsute drop-curtain and refuses to budge.

"'What's more,' says he, 'I can't allow no regular charge to be made, this bein' our Lodge Hall; but folks can contribute whatever they sees fit. Otherwise the deal's all off.'

"Fresh bunches of consternation on our part—more rapid-fire expostulation, all wasted. It's a case of take it or leave it, and no more to be said, so we takes it; but we're sad, sad, and so's all the rest when we breaks the news to 'em. But the try of our lives has to be made, sadness or no sadness, so we prepares to give Gilead the broadest-gaged fusillade of folly we's capable of furnishin'.

"We attracts quite some attention teamin' our stuff down to the hall, and the street's full by the time our cages is displayed in the entryway. You never see such a bunch of Jaspers as buzzed out to observe us—regulation Yahoos.

But I talks to 'em just like they was human; if ever I opened the flood-gates of coruscatin' palaver it was then, or I'm no hot-air artist.

"About the time I've got 'em goin' we throws open the hall doors and there's a junk of melody drops out; them that's in line can see Jefferson Paderewsky Figg sawin' catgut harder than he ever sawed spruce at home (and hear him, too), can perceive Peg Wilkins agitatin' the bass-drum-cymbals-triangle machine with his two hands and his one real foot, which his mahogany one kept fine time, tap! tappety! tap-tap-tap! Can observe the Leeds Duck fightin' the hall piano like he's payin' old scores, both fists, all ten fingers spraddlin', tum-tum, trilleree, thump! bang! Woop 'er up, boy! Whackety-bang! Junks of melody, yessiree, Bob, and they averaged big, by jiminy bees-wax!

"Well, dodgin' of 'em on struts, Kid Nagle in his ring duds, his dukes encased in eight-ounce mitts, to where the punch-in'-bags is hung; and in he sails, sir, makin' them pigskins play a triple-jointed tattoo on the top board so fast they're just a blur, that's all.

"That makes the Gileadites snap their eye-winkers some. They stretches their gristly necks, begins to loosen up their laughter-valves, and bunches toward the entrance.

"'Here's the fishological moment!' thinks I. Right there in front of me I see W. G. Phipps, and he's got a six-quart tin pail. He nods to me and I nods back. 'I'll gather the harvest f'r you,' says he to me. 'Let 'em in.' With that I uncorks the best line of pill-prattle I ever did hand out to a mob of embattled farmers:

"'Ladies! Gents! Best show on top of the earth! You can't beat it, so don't try—and there's no charge for admission, but only a tin pail at the door, which you'll drop in anything your conscience and gratitood directs—half to go to the Lodge. It's a work of charity. step in, walk in! Skiddoo to care, ladies! Gents! Pass on the inside, on the in-side now! Hear the cross-fire quips that penetrate any laugh-proof armer ever made! See the peculiar pedalisms that make all other foot-workers fold up

and steal away! And don't forget the tin pail! The Big Show is now about to begin!

"Crowd? You bet! And, mister! the clatterty-rattle in that pail was sure the gladdest sound that ever tickled my tympanums. Love's old sweet song? Nah! Love can sing herself into bronchial spasms, but she can't travel in the same bunch with that plunkety-plunk-bing-bing!

"It's only when the show's over and the people all gone, the lamps beginnin' to flare and June-bugs beginnin' to buzz, that we wakes up. Which the cause is W. G. Phipps comin' up to the stage and dumpin' out the contents of the collection. It runs out kerjingle on the boards, with us all gathered round like starvation coyotes inspectin' a nest of juicy young jack-rabbits.

"Which there's a dozen tin tops from chow-chow bottles (picked up on a neighborin' dump)—they looks some like silver dollars when held skilful. There's a brass check good for one cup of coffee at a place called the Empire Spa, and a plugged Canady penny. Five green-cloth tobacco-sacks crumpled up so's they look like dollar bills—oh, yes.

"A baby's teething-ring, two quarts of nails, all sizes. Everything goes when held in the palm, and W. G. too polite to rubber. One railroad-spike, almost new; a sleeve-button, and a nut off an old monkey-wrench. Seven bolts, some round tin covers from the local corn-factory, half a rubber comb.

"A pint of pebbles, two human teeth (one with a small gold fillin'), a spectacle-glass, a half-used meal-ticket, nine iron washers, one glass eye, cracked. Nestlin' here and there through the heap there's some U. S. small-change, about two-nineteen of it, countin' a lead quarter. So we turns a light green and feels all-overish, like bein' dropped in a sudden elevator from the umfth story.

III.

"W. G. LOOKS blank, too, and his Adam's apple bobs four or five times; then all at once he dislocates his map into a laugh behind that aurora-bory-Alice of his.

"'You people,' says he, 'seems to have been worked for suckers, or the like o'

that. Now, it looks to me like you're about to the end of your rope, and I ain't goin' to be hard on you. 'Take the cash,' says he, 'and whatever of this here junk is any good to you, and I'll annex the reffage. What say we sort it?'

"With that he goes to winowin' the pay-dirt from the tailin's, and shoves the coin our way, along of the meal-ticket, the tooth, and the coffee-check.

"'Take the loocer,' says W. G., 'and make good use of it. I'll square things with the Lodge folks. But try to get out of here early in the mornin'. By the way, if you'll be careful and not do no damage, you can sleep here to-night; but no drinkin', and no disturbance—see? If there's any alkyhol brought in here, dead-weight or live, you'll hear from me, mind now.'

"And he vibrates a spavined fin at us. His words ended harsh, but still, considerin' what he'd done for us, better man never cultivated spinach on his neck.

"After he'd gone, Eb and the Duck and me collars Peg-leg, who's been showin' signs of dryness, and expounds some desperation plans to him.

"'Peg,' says I, takin' him by the shoulder—'Peg, things is all to the extremely worse, and it's now we put our last sumarchee against a final shake of the dice. Either we gets away from here and makes a strike in the next town, which is Bethel, or we goes broke right here and takes the count. Here's all the coin we've got, except two plunks. Take it. There's a train out of here, south-bound, at twelve-two. Take that, too.

"'You and your litho's make one quick exit, and bill us the limit in Bethel—see? BILL us! We and the animals will follow some way. One good haul and we'll sand the rail again; a failure—but there, that's too ghoulish for contemplation. Hump, now! And as you hope for salvation, no rum.'

"'My trunk,' whimpers Peg, 'with all m' worldly goods—two wigs, a shirt, and some burnt cork—if you go bust will you send it back to old Hoboken?'

"'Sure thing. Skip, now.'

"We steers him out past the cages and into the street, and he weeps a few as he receives our blessin'. Then he

fades into the night with his posters and our cash, headin' for the deepo.

"Not very long after that, in spite of there bein' such a hollowness in the place where we used to remember we had stomachs, and notwithstanding the uncertain outlook for the future, we folds ourselves up here and there on the stage and prepares for slumber. None of us has sand enough left to wash off the grease-paint and burnt cork; we just lays right down as we are, black-face and all.

"Eb, he blows out the lights; I tucks my blank-cartridge animal-trainin' pistol under my canvas-scenery pillow and composes my mind to rest. About the last thing I remembers hearin' is a faint, far-away 'Toot-Toot-Toot!' which I knows is the train for Bethel, and on that train is Peg-leg, bearin' away all our prospecks, worldly hopes, and the most of our cash.

"'Good old Peg,' thinks I, 'pikin' off ahead to help us. To-morrow somethin' will turn up, sure.' Then I listens to the bear coughin'; it gets farther an' farther away, the cough does, and a kind of warm rosy hope nestles down among the icebergs of our luck, till at last I drifts away into the arms of Murphy's.

"I guess it's about 3 A.M., and we's all pounding our ear luxurious, holding a sure-pop symphonic snore-fest, when there's a 'Knock-tap-thumpety-bump!' at the door, mingled up with the barkin' of colonel (colonel was the Angelo Frères's little fox-terrier) and complicated with sounds as of a human voice. All of which jars me back to a lame, chilly, hungry kind of flabbergasted consciousness.

"I sits up sudden in the dark and reaches for my pistol; it's harmless as a nursing-bot, but kind of good to bluff with. A prod in the laths from me starts Eb up, all frowsly.

"'What's that?' he whispers in a kind of a scared tell-me-quick-or-I'll-holler voice that sets my scalp-lock to elevatin'.

"'Sheriff, maybe!' I answers. 'Maybe tar-an'-feathers! Hear that?'

"There comes a rattlin', then the voice again, and somethin' paws at the door; then the bear coughs and the rattle comes again.

“ ‘Tryin’ to unlock it!’ exclaims Eb, and jumps up half dazed. He starts for the door; and you remember we’s in a strange place, darker’n Pharaoh’s pocket durin’ the tenth plague. Well, result is that Eb does a seven-league-boot stride off the edge of the platform, which it’s over a yard high. On the way down he takes a footlight with him, and there’s a frappé of glass, oil, and Eb on the carpet immediate.

“ ‘Hurt?’ says I, climbin’ down very cautious.

“ ‘Murdered!’ he bellows. ‘Strike a match! I’m dyin’!’

“As the light flares the others rouse up, and there’s a cloudburst of questions. By the time I gets a lamp lit and has Eb on his feet again, what with him limp’in’ round and the others a mixture of negligee and commiseration, we makes a study for a poet’s dream.

“The smashed lamp and oily carpet nearly distracts our minds from the original cause of the whole to-do, yet all this time there’s a rattlin’ at the door, a tappin’, and that peculiar voice, seemin’ly eloquent over and above most voices.

“ ‘Come on, now, boys, and see what’s doin’!’ says I when Eb gets pulled together a bit. ‘I’ll open the door, seein’ as I’ve got the pistol. But you all back me up, and don’t let ‘em rush us!’

“By this time we’s at the door, me in front with the artillery, Duck right behind me with the lamp, and the rest back of him.

“ ‘Look out, now,’ says I, as I snaps back the catch and pokes the little blank revolver through the crack.

“ ‘Who—w-w—who’s *there?*’ says I, expectin’ a rush of some sort; but nary rush comes. There’s not even anybody standin’ outside; and what to make of it I’m stumped if I know.’

“ ‘Hold that light here!’ says I, and the Duck obeys. Then the faint halo of a jag wafts in round the edge of the door. I peeks out, and there’s somethin’ human lyin’ on the porch, talkin’ to itself. The raw truth catches me.

“ ‘Peg-leg!’

“ ‘What?’ echoes my petrified minions. ‘Peg-leg?’

“ ‘Him!’ says I, and throws the door wide open.

“Lifeless (almost) but beautiful he lay, and no boiled owl was ever boilder than him; he was smilin’, smilin’ with his eyes shut, and prattlin’ like an innocent child, which the prattle and the wooden leg tappin’ the floor, and the large equator of him and the smile-you-couldn’t-file-off make a tablow vivong of rare beauty, more especial as he’s swimmin’-like with his hands and floppin’ his head from one side to the other.

“ ‘Fren’sh, kind, good fren’sh,’ says he, ‘couldn’t ‘bandon kind, lovin’ m’nagerie—left m’ trunk—all m’ worldly goods—ain’t hon’rable ‘bandon companions in trouble—hon’rable trunk—kind an’ lovin’——’

“He looked like somethin’ the cat brought in; and us in our play-actin’ costooms, with the grease-paint makin’ us blush outside of our sickenin’ misery under the smoky light of one lamp—the picture it made was a jeezly frost, now you can bet on that and carry money home.

“ ‘Come, fellers, in with him,’ says I, at last, and we drags him inside, where he passes away and begin to go prr-ouff in full chromatics, with oblongato variations. Then we hold another mask-ball-effeck council of war. What our emotions was I won’t try to tell you, ‘cause the words ain’t made yet to fit ‘em.

“First thing we done after Reason assumed her sway over Despair was search the cuss, hopin’ against hope he’s still got some change left after his merry-go-round of the speak-easies.

“Sixty-eight cents is now all that’s left, plus a yeller pawn-ticket, plus some pretzel-crumbs.

“ ‘This,’ says the Leeds Duck judicial, when the census is complete, ‘looks like the most complicated game I ever stacked into. We’d better explode this show right here and now—open the animal-cages—each of us run a different way, critters and all. They can’t catch more than a part of us, anyhow.’

“ ‘It certainly does look like starvation, sheriffs, and a shirt-tail scoot over the map for ours,’ says I, ‘one jump ahead of annihilation. Them that wants to quit can quit now; who goes?’

“ ‘Everybody looks at everybody else, but no one starts.’

“ ‘Well, now,’ says I, ‘if we’s goin’

to hang together, my say is that the quicker we mosey out of here the better it'll be. I ain't hankerin' none to meet W. G. in the mornin' when he sees the damage and hears of the doin's in this Lodge Hall. This here situation is a camel, and Peg's the final bunch of straw. Exit left, for ours. How much money in the gang?'

"Everybody digs up with both flippers, and we manages to corral three-twelve plus the meal ticket, the gold-filled tooth, and the lead quarter.

"'Hand it all over!' I commands, and takes possession of the wealth in the name of the common good.

"'Now, then,' says I, 'the only lay I see is to hike out rapid somewheres into the country, take up some land that's idle, and use it till we hears from Hermann. The farmer's life, they say, is the only reely independent one on earth.'

"'Me for it!' says Kid Nagle, enthusiastic. He'd been brought up in a gutter and believed potatoes grew on trees.

"'But the animals?' objected Jefferson P. Figg. 'What we goin' to do with a bear, or anilin cats, or a link, out farmin'? Can you hypnotize 'em into subsistin' on spruce-boughs?'

"'I read once of a man crossin' the Sahara,' answers I, 'which he has a little dog with him, and they runs out of grub. Well, this here man cuts the dog's tail off and makes soup of it—see?—and gives the bone to the dog, and they's both happy and pulls through. What man has done man can do, so don't you worry none.'

"'But Miltiades is a cinnamon bear, and cinnamon bears ain't got no tails.'

"'Aw, reverse for yours,' says I. 'You're a skeptic, and life's too short to waste arguin' with them what has no imagination.'

IV.

"RESULTIN' from the conference of war, I sends the Angelo McCarty Frères out in the gray of early mornin', one to the railroad deepo to see if there's any telegram yet from Hermann, while the other one rustles up a livery-stable and orders a big barge with two horses. The rest of us washes up and packs our stuff preparatory to migratin'.

"About the time Francesco de Mike Angelo returns with no news from the deepo, his brother Vincenzo Pat drives up with the barge, sittin' on the front seat along of the driver, which is a big red-mottled-faced gazebe, inclined to be graspin' as to coin.

"I dickers with this individual and arranges for three dollars' worth of transportation. In consideration of the dough he's to take us way out into the country and dump us in some likely place and say nothin'. Us humans and the dog and the bear is to go; the rest of the animals we leaves on the front steps of the hall, with a sign on one of the cages like this:

Left for Benefit of Kind Creditors.
We Can't Keep 'Em, so we Leave 'Em.
Feed 'Em Right and they'll Love You.

"This arranged, we stows our baggage on top of the barge, puts old Miltiades in his cage crossways of the vehicle in front, lays Peg-leg in the straw, and piles in. The driver cracks his whip, one or two fossilized citizens yawps at us, the horses stagger, the old barge creaks, wobbles, and makes a heave forward, and we're off!

"Few seen and none mourned our departure from that hospitable burg. Two or three times Eb and me tries to get the driver started on some nice-weather-we're-havin' talk, but he has a bad case of the fishy eye and answers with nothin' but an ice-wagon line of grunts, so we lets our gab-policies lapse.

"After that we drives in silence (broken only by old Miltiades's grumb-lin' and Peg's gradual wakin' up), very low in our minds, and all to the bad as to interior furnishin'. We ain't had a four-cornered feed in twenty-four hours, and you can't live on bananas and crackers and wear turned collars and feel human, that's a fact. We gets out of town pretty soon, into the real Yap Districts, where every farmhouse shells out gawpin' Reubes in the damp cold dawn.

"Well, we jolts and sags along the ruddy road for half an hour or more, till at last we comes to a kind of wooded point juttin' out into a lake—

Spot Pond, the driver says it is. We takes a vote, and it's Spot Pond for ours. So we stops and unloads ourselves, trunks, tents, and Miltiades.

"Gettin' the baggage down from on top of the barge Kid Nagle unfortunately puts a little of his weight on the side-bars and one of 'em buckles up, so the top slumps over and spills Peg-leg's trunk, which sort of explodes the shirt and wigs and burnt cork into the ditch. That sobers Peg in a minute; what between the shock of his loss and the vi'lent efforts to rescue his property, he plumb gets over his alcoholics.

"As for the driver, when he sees his barge cave in he grows vicious, but we quells him and sends him off home, wavin' his ham of a fist; and the language that floats back to us is some cayenne, or I ain't no judge of embroidered speechifyin'.

"It's maybe five hundred yards from the road to the far side of the wooded point, and by the time we totes our stuff and the bear-cage in there (leadin' Miltiades by his nose-ring) the polish is pretty well off our shaftin'. We're glad to strike such a haven of peace, you bet! The woods is on two sides of us; to the left is a marshy place, and dead ahead is the lake. Where we decides to camp, there's a clean beach. Take it all round, it's a boss and dandy location.

"First thing we does after we gets the tents set up and washes in the lake is to have a try for some fish. A few pins and alder poles, and some twine does for tackle; and there's plenty worms round the swamp. Not a quarter-hour from the time we're settled you c'd 'a' seen us stragglin' round the lake shore, Peg and all, though Peg he sinks in the beach pretty bad, his mahogany leg bein' smallish and round at the end.

"I finds him a good place on a log that sticks out of the water—a good likely lookin' place, with a muddy bottom, where pouts is apt to come.

"'Go in and win,' I tells him, and then walks along, castin' here and there, but not even gettin' so much as a sucker on my hook—and me a circus man, too!

"Well, I ain't gone but a hundred feet, or mebber two, when there's a gigantic *kerflop!* and a sort of yell cut in

two in the middle, and then a bubbly noise.

"'What—th—deuce?' thinks I, and starts back on the run.

"Say, d' you know, when I gets in sight of the log there ain't no Peg on it; but there's a kind of egg-beater effect in the water, with rile and mud and bubbles all sousled up together. Peg's fish-pole, too, is floatin', and his hat; and there's somethin' else—kind of a stick with a knob on it that's frothin' the water convulsive, like a churn-stick.

"'What—the——' I begins again; but all of a sudden a human boot projects out of the water, near the stick, and there's a leg in the boot—Peg's good leg! The leg and the stick pirouettes foamily a minute and then starts to go down; but I skips out along the log, grabs the stick, and hauls in.

"Peg he comes up blowin' like the father of all bellowses, drippin' ooze and mud.

"'I s-s-slipped on some tarn-n-nation moss!' he splutters, 'and my l-l-leg floated and my head s-s-stayed down and I'd 'a' been drowned in 'bout a m-m-minute if you hadn't got me! Pf-f-fui! *Whoosh!* You told me to g-g-go in and win, and I did! Look!'

"And he holds up the two-pound mud-pout that had pulled him off'n the slippery log. It's sure a strangle hold he's got on the pout as I helps him back along the log.

"By the time Peg's cleaned up and dressed in some gladiator togs of mine (they bein' the only spare things we've got with a big enough equator—stretchy cloth) the others straggle in with more or less fish and we lights a fire. Chowder's suggested; and what with a few hunks of dog-biscuit stolen plumb outright from Colonel and our catch, we makes up a good hot kettle of grub.

"Which after the tin plates is licked clean by Colonel and Miltiades, and we gets our pipes goin' round the fire, we votes it ain't so tarnation bad even if we are cross-hobbled by Fate and turned loose on a beach to scrabble up a livin' by unusual and irregular means, like a bunch of cats tryin' to catch mice in a sleepin'-car.

"Smokin', we argues what to do with Miltiades. We can't feed him, and we

can't let him starve. Eb suggests tryin' my Sahara methods on him, one paw at a time; Kid Nagle says to kill and eat him; while J. P. Figg wants to make him hibernate. The rest says to let him go, and as we's in the majority, go he has to. But he ain't at all eager for freedom; quite the contrary.

"It's only when we threatens to poke him with a hot iron trapeze-bar that he'll get up at all and climb down outa his cage. He won't leave the camp even then, but hangs round, sniffin' at the dishes, till we plumb has to drive him off. Finally, seein' as how we ain't goin' to be his meal-ticket no longer, he boos and snuffles and crashes off through the woods, more sad than mad, yet makin' little side-swipes at the bushes, too, for to show he ain't an angel, but just a plain, every-day, human kind of a bear, after all.

"'By-by,' says the Duck when the last of him (and he's very bob-ended at that) disappears in the undergrowth; and then we clots round the fire again to talk things over and hatch plans—plans bein' like eggs, which they hatch-es out best in a warm place.

"The plans end in a blueberry crusade. Blueberries, yes—acres of 'em all along the edges of the woods—big, juicy fellers, just the custard for the Agglomerated Tent Shows. We all goes at 'em that afternoon; takes tin dishes and goes to peckin' at the bushes like a bunch of hens punishin' hot mash.

"It ain't too bad, neither, what with the blue sky an' the white-cappy lake, the bumblybees workin' overtime for the Honey Trust, and maybe a big steely blue devil's darning-needle skyhootin' past with a Santos Dumont flicker of wings. Two or three of us shucks foot-leather and does the K-nipe-cure act.

"And you'd a envied us our appetites that evenin' when we comes in with thirty quarts of blueberries and gathers round the fire to eat a supper of more chowder and them same berries, with two quarts of milk that we borrowed from a farmer's cow over in a pasture beyond the swamp.

"And after supper we smokes again, and rags away at this, that, and the other thing, mostly speculatin' as to how Hermann's makin' it and when he'll

get on track of us again. Pretty soon the little new moon comes up over the woods like a muskmelon rind over a back fence, and then we gets out a couple of banjos and does stunts of warblin', while Eb and the Duck accompanies on the African harp.

"I've seen worse times in the show biz, you can bet your hand to the plasterin' on *that!*"

V.

ABOUT 2 A.M. that night there busts in on us a rumpus that's a blend of growls, squeals, barks, and just plain noise, like a menagerie turned loose in a slaughter-house. We comes to in a hurry, all buzzin' questions, and I grips my revolver like a miser holdin' on to a goldfish. Seems like the noise is sort of bearish; we sees somethin' lumberin' toward the cage, with Colonel orbitin' round, uncommon eloquent.

"'Shoat!' hollers Kid Nagle, of a sudden; and 'Save it!' echoes the Duck.

"In about one second there's a mix-up, the Agglomerated Tent Shows *versus* Miltiades, with one young pig as first prize.

"'Twas epic while it lasted, but we gets the pig eventual, though kind of tattered. A shame to do it—to rob the old boy when he's been retrievin'—but fact is, we needed the meat, and ain't that kind of excuse good for any sort of graft? By firelight we dresses the critter; Milt, he comes in (like a sure-enough proletariat) for what's left over.

"And about half-past ten next mornin', after havin' breakfasted in epicurean style on berries and shoat, you could 'a' seen Eb and J. P. and me hikin' to town with tin pails full of the fruit. Our idea was to sell 'em and lay in supplies, swap 'em for things, and also redeem the meal-ticket we'd got in the contribution for whatever it would fetch. We must have had twenty or twenty-five quarts, and we's calculatin' what a bunch of edibles they'll swap for, to say nothin' of cash.

"But our frenzied finance strikes a rock and busts wide open like a jellyfish hit by a baseball bat, just subsequent to our first try at the market.

"'Blueberries, ma'am?' says I, at the first house we strikes, when the lady comes to the door—she bein' the feather-

bolster kind with a string tied round; also she has one of them warts, the kind you always want to grab and yank off.

"She only stares, so again says I: 'Blueberries?'

"'Land sakes, no!' she answers. 'You're handlin' the wrong article.' Then she laughs, and her double chin suddenly adopts another roll of fat off her neck, so she's got three chins.

"'I snum,' says she, 'blueberries is the hardest thing to sell that there is, round here. Why, they even grows in people's back yards. This is preservin'-time, and I reckon everybody's supplied. You'd better try another line, such as apple-trees, or needles, or rat-pizen.'

"Then she shut the door.

"Take my oath, we never sold more than two quarts that whole mornin', but we collected quite a lot of grub by barter, especially from the Empire Spa, where J. P. Figg exchanged the meal-ticket for a big sackful of dry bread, all kinds.

"When we got back to camp and joined dividends we found a blueberry pie, some johnny-cake with blueberries in it, and a jar of fresh blueberry preserve. Seems like we wasn't cut out to forget the taste of blueberries, anyway. So we has dinner—pig garnished with berries—and renders thanks that we's still alive.

"That afternoon it sets in to rain a little, so we huddles into the tents and chews the rag. Miltiades lingers round; we can hear him, off and on, cracklin' the bushes. 'Long toward evenin' the rain lets up and we goes out prospectin' once more. This time Eb and me runs onto a potato-field t'other side of the woods, without any visible owner except the bugs, which is disportin' of themselves scandalious.

"'Potatoes!' says I. 'And why not?' says Ed, and then we goes at 'em.

"If it comes right down to starvation or coppin' grub, most of us will cop, any day. We takes care to pull the tubers out the side of the hills, so's not to disturb the plants any, and we puts the dirt back careful. In ten minutes we's hikin' back to camp, every pocket crammed. And better potatoes I never squdged tooth into—big white fellers, hot and mealy.

"But the reckonin', next day, wasn't so pleasant. Eb, you see, had left one hill open by mistake, and the farmer happened along with some bug-powder and seen it; and it was all off with us immediate.

"This here farmer was a Swede or Finn or somethin', about six feet six in his socks (only he didn't wear socks), and weathered-lookin', same as tanbark. He blows into camp while we're all away berryin', all except the Hibernian Angelo Frères, who's peelin' potatoes for dinner. When he sees 'em he lands a kick on Colonel that near petrifies him, and doubles up his hands and orates.

"'Har bane my potato?' says he. 'My potato, and y'u bane t'iefs and Ay pu y'u in lockup, and y'u haf big dog steal my y'ung pig!'

"'See the boss,' answers Mike Angelo. 'I can't spreken zee Dutch.'

"'Dutch? Y'u call me Dutch, and y'u t'ief my pig and potato? Ay get de law on y'u!'

"Then he cuffs Mike and cusses Vincento Pat de Angelo, and makes a quick exit. When he's gone the f'ol hollers for us, and we comes lopin' in to see what's up. Pretty soon it sounds like a crow-congress discussin' the tariff on corn in a tamarack. As a result of our deliberations we buries the hog-bones and potato-peelins' in a good, safe place where they won't never be found, and Eb and me pikes for town, hotfoot on the trail of Svensky Finn, to lock horns with the police force of Gilead.

"We finds the force hoein' his garden, just havin' given the Finn party a warrant for our arrest. It's somethin' of a supprise to him when he sees us, and it's more of a supprise when I comes out plump with a demand for a warrant on my own hook against said Scandinavian. It seems that W. G. Phipps is buzzin' on our trail, too, for damages to his Lodge Hall, so our stock is some depreciated with the police.

"'Why,' says he, 'my duty is t' arrest both of you this very minute and lock ye up, to say nothin' of givin' you a warrant.'

"'Hold no! Not so fast!' says Eb. 'Here's us campin' out in the country, tryin' to keep body an' soul from gettin' an absolute divorce, till our side-

partner turns up with money or a contract or somethin'. Now, then, before you take action you got to perduce some evidence, ain't you? We acknowledge the corn as regards the hall, but we left our menagerie to cover that.

"As for the pork an' potato racket, you come 'long with us, an' if you find any evidence we'll all go to jail for as long 's you say. If you don't, then we've got an action against that there Finn for malicious defrangification of character, also kickin' our prize dog, which it's a valuable one——"

"And the case will be took higher," I interrupts, 'us bein' backed by infloential people at home, to say nothin' of the expense your burg will be put to in maintainin' us if we're arrested.

"Plus the action that will be brought by the real owner of the show for detainin' of us."

"Hold on! Wait!" says the police force. 'Gilead ain't wantin' to git tangled in no spider-web of litigation. Wait here and I'll fix you up a paper, so's mebbe you can settle out of court and save the town expense.'

"And off he spraddles into the house. 'Bout five minutes later he comes out again, with a folded document.

"Here," says he. 'You see your man, now, and square things with him. This'll help. And you clear out of the town limits inside of twenty-four hours—see? Way out! If you don't, you'll hear from me pussonal.'

"Thanks," says I. 'We will.' But which it was we meant we left him to guess.

"Then we hipered back to camp, only stoppin' to exchange a nickel which we found layin' loose in the linin' of my coat for a big bunch of stale bread, that bein' cheaper than fresh, and filling-er.

VI.

"WHEN we arrives at the lake we finds there's trouble in the shape of a country constable with Svensky Finn's warrant, and Finn, he's there, too. The group-picture they made, and the cyclone arguments that was takin' place when we heaved in sight, was sure full of action. Seems like Finn's case ain't makin' much headway, 'cause there ain't no evidence, not a skrid of it anywheres, except his

say-so, which ain't no better than ours. But soon's we arrives we puts that to rights immediate.

"Sure," says I, 'we took the goods; our bear caught the shoat, which bein' hungry we ate it. Serve your warrant,' says I to the yap sheriff, 'and while you're servin' it serve this, too, such bein' your duty!'

"With which I presents our paper against Finn for assault an' battery an' umstification of character and *et cet.* When the officer and Finn sees that they both has frosty phiz almighty sudden and severe.

"What bane de trouble, meester?" asks Finn of the constable, runnin' his claws through his mop of tow.

"Why—er—step over this way, ef you please," answers the Reube, and they retires toward the woods for a conference. Off to the left I hears a cracklin', and knows Miltiades ain't far distant. And while we's standin' there very nervous to know whether Finn's goin' to settle out of court or push matters a figure comes lopin' 'cross-lots for us, the sun glints off a bunch of flamin' hirsuteness, and we all recognizes more trouble in the 'mediate future.

"W. G. Phipps, of course, and when he's near enough he hauls out a paper, too, and pokes it at me.

"I takes it, to spar for wind; and say; it's a bill for damages to the hall—ten dollars altogether, what with the busted footlight, burnt carpet, and general disorder, to say nothin' of Peg's fossilization. While I'm lookin' it over, with loud mental groans, back comes the sheriff and Finnsky.

"Here's how we've fixed it, gents," says the sheriff. 'Complainant says he's willin' to annul proceedin's if you do likewise.'

"With pleasure," says I, 'he apologizin' ample.'

"Well?" says the sheriff, to Old Viking.

"Vike gets red and hunts for a place where he can put his hands without steppin' on 'em; then he falls over his palate and stammers:

"Ay hope y'u excuse me tellin' y'u how y'u bane t'iefs, and Ay say now dat even dough y'u bane t'iefs y'u ain't bane t'iefs.'

" 'We accepts that apology,' says I, and shakes hands with Finn.

" 'Glad one case is settled,' remarks the sheriff, while Svensky backs away, still holdin' on to his hands, so's he won't trip over 'em. 'There's another, though—this here bill of Mr. Phipps's—ten dollars. Will you settle and move on, or shall we sue?'

" 'You're welcome to all I've got!' exclaims the Duck, 'though I tell you right here if you take it I have to walk away in a barrel.'

" 'Same here,' says I. Then a sudden hope busts in my think-tank.

" 'Do I understand,' I asks, 'that if this here bill is settled it'll square us with Gilead and we gets the menagerie back and are free to leave town. Is such the meanin' of the court?'

" 'It is,' says the sheriff.

" 'What's a big cinnamon bear worth to you?' I asks, 'bears bein' on a risin' market and shop-worn ones bringin' one hundred an' fifty or over?'

" There's a gleam of yellow in the sheriff's eye as he answers:

" 'Thirty dollars, said bear warranted sound and kind.'

" 'Make it fifty and our darlin' Miltiades is lost to us forever.'

" 'Forty.'

" 'Done,' says I. 'Gimme the thirty dollars change and he's yours.'

" 'Hold on!' says he. 'Hold on! Where's the bear?'

" 'Oh, off there in the woods. Hear him cough? Take him; he's yours.'

" I waved my hand eloquent.

" 'But—but you got to deliver the goods, ain't you?'

" 'That's right; come along, boys,' says I to my henchmen. 'Come an' we'll round up Milt.'

" Was it some dust blew into my eye, or just a plain every-day wink?

" 'Spread out,' says I, 'and circle round back of him. And you three,' I continues to the Gileadites, 'stay here by the edge of the woods and head him off when he runs out. He ain't been fed in some time, and his temper's all to the bad till he gets some inward baggage, but the minute you lay hands on him he's yours—see?'

" 'But—but——' protests the sheriff.

" 'That's all right,' I reassures him.

'We ain't tryin' to take no due honor away from you; and remember, a bear's nose is the tenderest place he's got. One good crack on the probosci puts the most husky bruin in the D. and O. for quite a while—not that you'll have occasion for violence with old Milt, but simply as a small crumb of useful information, easy to swaller and not liable to set up mental gripes—see? Let the expedition advance.'

" About then the Agglomerateds begins to proceed toward the bosky dells where old Milt is layin', and every step we takes the boys hesitates, peers round, listens, and shows the earmarks of a disposition to beat it over the top of the scenery at the first grumble.

" All this ain't lost none on our guests as we comes to the woods and plunges in. Professional dignity and human scaredness comes to close grips in the sheriff's heavin' boozum; and from all indications the p. d. is all to the worse.

" Finn, he ain't much better off; he says a few remarks in shorthand or some-thin', and shows desires to constitute the rear guard. As for Walker G., he just picks up a good stick and says nothin'. Such bein' the different ways of man; which man is a curious beast, half mind, three-quarters foolishness, and seven-eighths animal, after all, when it comes to a tight place.

" Well, we plunges in, as I've said, leavin' the three visitors on the outside of the woods, and beats up round old Milt with just the Hist!—there-he-is-now! air, as if the poor old dyspeptic cuss was a royal Ceylon man-eater.

" We finds him easy enough—he's layin' down in a kind of dingle, where he's made himself a wallow. When he sees us he whines friendly and nuzzles his paws.

" 'Look out! Careful!' shouts Eb. 'He's ripe for trouble.'

" 'Stand back, now, everybody,' I commands. 'Drive him out easy; don't hurry him. Careful!'

" Seems like there's remarks from the three men outside in the clearin', but it's too far to hear what they say, specially as Kid Nagle then gives Milt a short-rib poke with a club and Milt heaves to his feet and grumbles off toward the edge of the woods.

"Head him off, there! Look out! There he goes! Watch them claws! Turn him! Turn him!"

"Such is the verbiage that floats out to Phipps and the other two, who's neatly bunched to head off bruin. Ahead of us old Milt plows along through the underbrush, some vexed at our prods, and also at Colonel's barkin' round his heels.

"Then he comes to the edge of the woods, and we sets up a Comanche yell, rushes forward, and projects Milt in the direction of our guests. Milt he breaks into a lope; the day's hot, and he's pantin', trap hangin' out, long and drippy. Colonel yaps himself almost into dog-apoplexy.

"Head him! Turn him!" I screeches, and the others all plays up to me, full bellows-power, as we careens out of the timber.

"The sheriff, when he sees this here ursine panorama of wrath-to-come pirootin' for him head on, turns a lettuce-green, wobbles, makes noise, and scrabbles rearward. Finnsky and W. G. looks disposed to hit the high places, too; but Phipps manages to get sand on the rail, and Finn, he's more afraid of bein' afraid than he is of Milt, so he makes a stand, too.

"Head him off!" I yells again, and dog my cats if W. G. don't reely grip his club and advance, with old Vike in the rear. On comes Milt with a rush, surrounded by Colonel; on comes the pair of heroes. Now Milt's within twenty feet. Up goes the club. Milt sees it and doubles; W. G. closes in.

"Swish! Thud!" plumb on the bowsprit.

"Boo-oo!" Milt quivers from bilge to keelson, rares up, and makes an open-handed swipe at W. G., who turns just in time to catch the claws in the part of his pants he uses most when he's sittin' down.

"R-r-r-rip!"

"Boo-oo! Swipe!" and W. G.'s club flips thirty feet through the atmosphere. W. G. goes down in a simoom of dust, bear-claws, eloquence, and rags. As the hero falls he makes a grab, and gets both hands jiu-jitsued into Milt's fur.

"Help! Help!" comes a muffled screech.

"Vike, he ain't so slow, after all—he does a baseball slide and lands on Milt's quarter-deck, likewise tanglin' his talons in the thatch.

"Now, when a bear's s'prised he's scairt, and when he's scairt he runs, and when he runs he proceeds some rapid. And Milt was s'prised.

"Wherefore W. G., what ain't got sense enough left by now to let go, ricochets, and Vike, he ricochets, too, such of the time as he finds his knobby legs ain't up to the job of such zippy transportation.

"If you can figger out a fur-covered comet snakin' a couple of bouncin' satellites through space in a series of quick jumps, the whole biz enveloped in a whirl of yelpin' dog-star, maybe you get the idea, only you've got to add spatters of gravel, guggle-guggles through muddy places, rip-tearin' through black-berry-bushes, a sireen yammer from the comet, and also hashed language from the tangled and rearward-floppin' ker-flumoxed satellines.

"Old Milt's that stampeded with alarm he don't think of nothin' but his cage; and a bee-line's crooked as lightnin' beside his geometrical get-there.

"Whish, puff! That's the camp-fire!

"Blorp! Biff! Good dive, that!

"Right into the cage, boys, and curl up in the far corner, sore nose buried in paws—and the satellites, where? Scraped off, shaved clean off the comet—cage-door's pretty narrow—see? and Milt's big—kind of a muddle of things on the ground, half U. S., half Finn, but so tangled that you can't see your Finnish apart from the rest of it.

VII.

"Look! See there!" cries Mike de Angelo all of a sudden, and 'Hermann!' yells the Duck.

"Say, mister, you can shoot me for a toad if it wasn't! Fat and red and anxious-lookin', on the hotfoot pike through the berry-pasture round the edge of the woods, there come Hermann for sure. Talk about your dodgastricated teetotal surprises! Hermann, mind you! Ever see in them geography pictures where wolves is holdin' a reception round the snow-bound traveler on the back steppes of Rooshia? Ump-ah! Us and him.

“‘Ach, Gott!’ he pants, at last—
‘ach, such a beezness! Und I lost track
off you complete und you neffer got mein
telegraphism? Und a contract in Salt
Harbor vot’s overdue almost a week,
ain’dt it? Ach, der menagerie, I just re-
deem him in der knick off time or she
been for debt sold alretty. Oi, vat a
hunt I haf for you—but I haf found you,
anyvay—und how you gettin’ along,
yet?’

“‘Rotten,’ says I. ‘Strickly *auf dem
Schwein!* Can’t you see?’

“‘Looka that over there,’ says Kid
Nagle, pointin’ to the cage; ‘there’s a
sure-nuff specimen of our luck! As he
spoke, the human knot was untyin’ itself
and risin’ from the ground. Hermann
stares at the sunset lambrequins of W.
G., and at the six foot six of Scandina-
vian.

“‘No matter,’ says he, after pipin’
off this spectacle. ‘I got der stuff here
vat will straighten efferyding all right.
Mein farm I mortgage, und we shall der
contract take und make fifty, one hun-
dred a veek, chess! Look, see!’

“And he pulls out a wad of mazoom,

snaps off the rubber band, and flips big
bills back and forth under our entranced
snouts. Say! There was a dash of every-
thing, includin’ heliotrope, in the bou-
quet of that there roll.

“‘Come, you fellers, come along py
me,’ he calls to W. G. and Vike, who’s
now proceeding in our general direction.
‘Come along; put in your claims.
Come und get der best salve in der world
for bruised heads und wounded feelin’s!
Und come kvick, too, for to-morrow ve
all be far, far away in Salt Harbor, mak-
in’ good mit der contract!’

“‘Say, mister, th’ equator’ll freeze over
and you can cross on the ice before you’ll
hear a noisier noise than ululated from
the edge of them conifers about that
time.

“And if you’s lookin’ for a triple-ply,
sunk-riveted, chainless, twentieth-century
model of a benefactor to the race, along
with a juberous, exilerated, and blissified
bunch of benefactees, all strong with the
jaw-bone of grateful celebration,
you play Hermann and the Agglomerated
Tent Shows to win, for place, and to
show, and cop the coin all three ways!”

WITH THE REDS IN RUSSIA.

By Alexander McArthur

HEREIN American honor, de-
ceived by Slavic slyness, is
responsible for a catastrophe. ❀

I HAD just turned into the Nevsky,
and was enjoying that wondrous
scintillating night-scene of Rus-
sia’s winter city, when a hair in
my throat made me put up my hand to
my mouth and cough thrice.

It was a purely accidental and un-
premeditated occurrence, and I would
never have given the act a thought,
only that some two seconds later a tall
individual in a long fur cloak, the collar
well gathered about his chin, approached
me and said, in a mysterious whisper:

“Follow me.”

Newspaper training had made me
quick of thought and action, and even
as I asked myself “What the dickens
is this?” I turned on my heel and fol-
lowed him.

Matters in St. Péttersburg were, for
the moment, somewhat slow; my col-
leagues and myself were forced to rely
on our imaginations and trust to luck to
pull us through. Our editors in New
York paid us for news and insisted on
getting it; but as a matter of fact, in
spite of rumors here, there, and every-
where, nothing was happening, or affairs
were so secret that none of us could get
wind of them.

At the same time, we all agreed that it
was but the lull before the storm. The
country was in the throes of a mighty

discontent, and the wildest rumors as to what was coming were afloat.

Something was bound to explode, we told ourselves consolingly over our pipes in the back room of the little café where, not a stone's throw from the Kazan Cathedral, we gathered nightly.

As I followed the mysterious stranger I felt satisfied I was at last hot on the trail of this "something."

How lucky I had coughed three times; that, evidently, was the magic signal. I could not help cogitating on the triviality of incidents that so often make up the grave and tragic facts of life.

For months I had haunted the lowest cafés and tea-houses of the Vasily Ostroff. I had treated the students, listened to their raw debates, acquiesced in statements steeped in pessimism, and uttered sentiments—when I deemed it safe and prudent—that would have blown up the Czar's empire had they been bombs.

But I could never get the confidence of the Nihilists, nor ingratiate myself into their sympathies. Others told me my standing at the American embassy always proved my stumbling-block.

But at last here was something for my perseverance, and instinct told me it was Nihilism.

We had reached the Church of St. Catherine, on the Nevsky, and my leader turned in. I followed. In the corridor leading to the priests' apartments he turned and faced me.

"You are somewhat early," he said.

I nodded.

"The meeting," he began cautiously, "is not till one o'clock. You know that?"

Again I nodded.

He seemed annoyed, then he said quickly:

"How are they all in Geneva?"

This was a puzzler to me. Was it a password or a question, I queried of myself nervously.

I looked him straight in the eye; then I said tartly:

"My dear sir, I never talk. Silence is always prudent."

For a moment he seemed taken aback, even frightened, but after studying me intently he laughed as one who enjoys a huge joke.

Straightening himself, he said soberly:

"But this is not business. We must make our plans. The meeting is not till one o'clock, and it is now only eight, but I do not like to lose sight of you."

"I'm jiggered if I lose sight of you," was my instant reflection.

"I see you are in evening clothes. Have you some engagement?"

"Yes; the ball at the Gagarine's."

"Ah!" he cried, as he threw open his cloak, revealing his faultless attire, "then it is easy. I can wait for you in the antechamber."

"Well, all right," I replied, like a chump, falling into his snare.

Nihilism or no Nihilism, I did not want to miss the ball. The *salon* of the Princess Gagarine was the most delightful in St. Petersburg; the members of the various embassies were sure to be there—Prince Gagarine was Minister of Instruction—and commend me to the diplomatic corps for gossip. I always carried away a quiverful, enough to give me material for a dozen Sunday sheets.

"The name on your card is Banks, is it not?" he next inquired.

The name on my cards was John Everett Carrington.

"Banks, yes," I replied readily, wondering what I should say if he asked me to produce one.

He seemed relieved.

So was I.

"But how does it come that you got the invitation?" he asked eagerly.

"Oh," I laughed mysteriously, "that is my affair."

"Well," he went on, buttoning up his cloak, "suppose we go to the rooms of the society? I want to get some papers."

"As you like," I answered, as calmly as I could. What a story, if I could only once get there. Fate seemed too kind.

We left the building, and taking the first *iswootschik* without the formality of bargaining, my companion gave him the number of a house on the Nevsky near by.

"Hardly necessary to take a sleigh," I interposed.

"Walking is always dangerous," was the sententious response.

We stopped before a house facing the Anitchkoff Palace, the residence of the Czar when in St. Petersburg.

The *dvornik* allowed us to enter unchallenged; we passed into a hall, but instead of ascending, descending. We came to a narrow passage, which I estimated must be at least six or eight feet beneath the level of the street. All at once my companion kicked three times on the wooden floor. A moment later the boards moved back as if by magic. By the light of the electric lamp my friend carried I saw a long flight of steps, leading, apparently, into darkness.

"Come on," he said, seeing me peer below; "they are steep, but I will go ahead and count the number out to you."

I could hear a steady hammering and pounding, and the lower we went the more distinct this sound grew. There was the smell of earth—the damp moldiness that comes when it has not been disturbed for years, if ever before.

All at once it flashed across me. The Nihilists were burrowing under the Nevsky—it had been rumored they were so doing—burrowing to reach the Czar's palace. Reaching out to do what they had so often bombastically threatened:

"Blow the palace and all the royalties in it to Hades."

Something cold ran down my spine; I felt myself grow pale. It is easy to write and discuss and tell of things, but when it comes to facing them, that is another matter. I could feel myself tremble.

A charge of dynamite, and chaos! The Czar's immediate family destroyed at one blow!

The scheme was colossal!

I thanked God, as I had done daily since my arrival in Russia, that I was not the Czar, nor of his *entourage*.

We reached the end of the stairs, traversed a long passage, and entered a vast damp chamber, with lanterns strung from a beam above. A suave-voiced person came to greet us.

"Ah, Officer B.," he said, extending his hand.

My cicerone whispered something in his ear, whereupon he held out his hand to me.

I grasped it; my teeth were chattering with cold.

A little beyond, men were working with lanterns fastened to their caps—working with pickax and shovel. Some-

how, the place reminded me of a mine. It had all the dreariness and ugliness. The smell of the earth they were digging and of the wood they were using seemed the most penetrating odor that had ever greeted my nostrils.

Officer B. took a small square package from a desk. He put this in the lining of his cloak; then he embraced his friend as one who goes on a long journey—that is, lingeringly and tenderly. Tears were in the eyes of both. Tears in the tones of their voices.

I was wondering why, when Officer B. said, turning to me:

"We had better go, now."

Again he led the way; again I followed him. At the head of the stairs he pressed a spring, we emerged, reached the Nevsky, and stood on the sidewalk waiting for a sleigh.

My brain was in a whirl; only one thought was uppermost—how could I best manage to get to a cable office?

Get to it I was determined. I had a story that would startle New York and every city in Europe and America on the morrow. Before the police of St. Petersburg were awake the news would be flashed to every point of civilization on the globe. Not for an hour would I delay my triumph. I would certainly sacrifice anything to come.

When Officer B. told the *istvoitschik* to drive to Prince Gagarine's I halted him and said, as quietly as I could:

"No, let us go to the American Café, behind the Kazan Cathedral; we won't meet any one there at this hour, and if we get to the palace by ten o'clock it will be time enough."

My companion did not seem pleased, but he assented, and on our way down I asked him what he thought of certain of our American stocks.

He replied in a tone of indifference that he knew nothing about stocks.

I tried to interest him, and meanwhile laid my plan.

Arriving at the restaurant, I professed hunger and ordered a *rabchik*, against which no Russian appetite is proof; this, with a salad, was soon put on the table, and the waiter brought me the evening papers.

All at once, after glancing hurriedly over these, I said quickly:

"My friend, you must pardon me for a few minutes; I must write out a long cable to my stock-broker. Those stocks I spoke to you about, you know."

"Oh, you Americans," he said mournfully; "can you think of nothing but money?"

I waved my hand at him jubilantly. I knew I could get my story off.

Ten minutes later my cable was written. Officer B. read it, as I could see from across the table; but it was a meaningless jumble of words to all except two or three in the office to which I was sending it.

We finished our *rabchik* and salad; I paid the score, walked across to the telegraph office, sent off my cable, and entered the sleigh, my spirits rejoicing.

With Nihilism I had never any sympathy. I needed it in my business, I made use of it and money out of it whenever I could, but I loathed it as I loathed all bloodshed.

Sitting beside Officer B., I chuckled over my luck in being able to foil one of the most inhuman plots of which I had ever read or heard. I thought of the lives in that great palace—the kindly and gracious Czaritsa, the innocent little grand duke and grand duchesses playing in their nursery. I thought of what might have happened but for that cough of mine, and I shuddered so that Officer B. asked me if I was still cold.

We were at the palace before I knew it.

A crowd of sleighs hemmed us in; all around us soldiers and police were shouting out hoarse orders to the long-suffering *iswostschiks*.

Officer B. said hastily: "Now, you get the information you came for, and leave me to look after myself; I will be in the antechamber, as arranged."

We entered, and in the throng of people Officer B. slipped away. I got rid of my cloak, and after paying my respects to the hostess, the beautiful Princess Gagarine, I moved away to see who had come and who of my old friends were there.

As I was going from one room to another Marie Walewska touched me sharply on the shoulder with her fan.

"Ivan Petrowitch," she whispered imperatively, beckoning me with her head.

That was how they addressed me in Russia. "John the son of Peter."

My heart began pounding. Marie was adorable—the most beautiful girl in St. Petersburg; a poetess, an essayist, and the special correspondent of a Warsaw paper, therefore a brother in arms.

She knew my feeling for her far too well, and treated me with a coquetry that at times drove me wild and then again would send me to the seventh heaven of bliss. I had never known any one who could be so mercilessly cruel and so enchantingly kind. She had eyes that hypnotized or repelled at will, and a voice siren in its low musical timbre.

"I want to speak to you," she said quietly, and I saw that the lines about her rosy sensitive mouth were troubled.

I pressed her hand tenderly, but for the first time in our acquaintanceship she seemed to take no notice. I could not understand this. I glanced into her face anxiously.

"How do you happen to be with Michaelin?" she asked gravely.

"Michaelin? Michaelin?" I repeated stupidly. "Is that who it is?"

For a moment I could say nothing. I was too startled.

"Tell me—tell me," she said impatiently. "This is a matter of life and death!"

I first made sure we could not be overheard; then plunged into my story.

"You poor boy, they knew your passion for news, and they used you. Michaelin counted on your being blown to atoms," she said gently, and her soft little gloved hand touched me in a caressing fashion that well-nigh drove me delirious.

"He is not in the antechamber," she said suddenly. "He is among the guests; I saw him mount the staircase a moment ago."

All at once she grew rigid.

"Put on your things and await me at the entrance," she said, with the air of one accustomed to be obeyed.

"But why? Why?" I stammered.

"Ivan, if you love me," she whispered, in accents that sent a keen thrill of delight through my entire being.

"If you love me."

That request from her would have sent me to the Inferno.

She left me; I hurried to the ante-chamber. Officer B. was not there. I found my cloak, and mystified, but obedient, left the building. At the door I met her, anxious and distraught, and together we entered her sleigh.

She gave her order, and as we drove off she turned to me.

"Do you know what you have done?" she asked me in English, as her soft brown eyes sought mine in an anguish that terrified me.

A loud detonation in the direction of the Gagarine palace caused us both to rise simultaneously in our seats. The driver looked back, cracked his horses with an oath, then began to pray.

"A bomb! A bomb!" cried several terrified voices near us.

"And you, Ivan, you admitted the man that brought it," Marie said, with a shuddering sob of horror, as she hid her face on my shoulder.

All at once I understood. I remembered the searching glance given my companion by the policeman as we entered the courtyard; the look of relief as the officer, turning from my companion, recognized me.

The driver was still beating his horses. We were going like the wind. There was the dull glare of fire in the blue of the skies behind us.

For the first time in my life, my equilibrium was shaken beyond my control.

"I must go back. I must see what I can do. There is my paper, you know."

"You will get it all at the restaurant," she said disjointedly. "You must not go back. It is our lives now."

"Then I will leave you. You must not be seen with me," I cried, alive, at last, to my danger and the result of my ghastly mistake.

"No, I stay with you, Ivan Petrovitch, come what may."

The sleigh stopped before her door; two men were standing on the curbstone, as if awaiting us. In Russia, when two or three men are grouped together it is apt to mean police surveillance. I saw I had Marie in a trap. I knew she dared not and would not argue with me just then. I pressed her hand.

"*Mademoiselle*," I said formally, "I will telephone you in an hour or two

from the restaurant, and I will call to see you early to-morrow."

"Thank you very much, Ivan Petrovitch," she replied, as she got out of the sleigh. I did not follow her. I sat where I was, and when the *iswostschik* tucked the fur coverings about me, told him to drive back to the palace.

A cordon of police guarded the streets near by, but my card admitted me through the lines. To my intense relief, I found all of my colleagues safe and unharmed. The atmosphere was heavy with the suppressed excitement and nervousness of the moment. I learned that Prince Gagarine was but slightly hurt, that several unfortunate soldiers had been blown to atoms, and that the perpetrator of the outrage had stabbed himself after he had thrown the bomb.

Most of the windows in the palace were shattered, and owing to the explosion the electric wires were not in working order. Even as I was speaking to a syndicate man, a body was brought out on a stretcher. It was Officer B. His clothes showed the mauling he had received at the hands of the crowd. Bending, a tall, burly soldier spat in the dead face, and the sullen murmur of curses deep and bitter followed the body.

I waited and waited, wondering what was next.

Surely, I told myself, some one must have seen us together, Officer B. and I. The prefect of police came toward me; I felt that this was the beginning, but with a grave salutation he passed on.

After a while, when it was certain that there was nothing more to be learned, my colleagues and myself departed.

When we reached the restaurant one of the group teased me because of the pallor of my countenance.

"You are a new hand, Carrington," he said. "Wait till you see a few more of these sights and you will become callous."

I smiled a sickly smile. Two minutes later we were all busy with our pens.

"Any one know his name?" sang out a voice suddenly.

"Michaelin," I replied mechanically, and a moment later could have bitten out my tongue at the admission.

"Not *the* Michaelin?" asked some one.

"I really don't know," I replied.

"Well, we will let it go at that," said our dean.

A few minutes more of scratching and I rose. My cable was ready, and grabbing my hat, I rushed out.

When I returned to the restaurant the others had left. I got Marie on the telephone and gave her the details of the affair, until the other newspaper men returned, when I closed the conversation.

We journalists sat at our own table, smoking and eating caviar sandwiches, and listening to the older fellows as they regaled us with stories of intrigue and Nihilism that would make the flesh of an oyster creep.

It was dawn when we separated. I went back to my rooms at the Hôtel de l'Europe, and I did not feel safe even when I had locked and bolted my door.

Long before noon, next day, I was with Marie. She gave a great sigh of relief as she saw me.

"Has anything happened?" she queried eagerly.

"Nothing," I replied, "as yet."

She made me some tea; then in whispers we spoke of the events of the previous evening.

"But you—how did you know about Michaelin?" I asked, a dozen other ideas surging through my brain meanwhile.

"My friend, I am a Pole. I have ways and means of knowing things I cannot reveal, but it was from a Nihilist who loves me that I got the warning not to go to the palace last night."

"Yet you did go?"

"Yes, to pass it on to you."

"Marie! Marie!"

I was by her side in a moment.

"Then you do care a little? No—No—you care more," I whispered, in breathless content, as I put my arms about her.

"Marie, do you love me well enough to marry me?"

The immutable smile of the Polish women, that smile that dazzles and confounds at once, bathed my soul in ecstasy.

"Love," she whispered; "that is a big word." Then she added carelessly. "But I think I like you well enough to marry—perhaps."

The sorcery in her tone and in her manner played havoc with my feelings. I knelt at her feet and kissed her hands.

She bent and kissed me, Polish fashion, on the eyelids, then on the mouth.

When I came to my senses I was at the American consulate, in the *sanctum sanctorum* of that august personage, uttering a rambling, incoherent, and abominably disconnected statement of facts.

"For Heaven's sake, Jack Carrington, do stop blithering," was the impatient response that broke in on my overexcited wits, dragging me from the heavenly bliss of love to the reality of every-day business.

"I am ready and waiting to tie the knot. No explanations necessary. Where is the lady?"

As I stood beside my bride I was wondering how it all had happened. I remember urging the fact that at any moment I might be sent over the frontier. What really was worrying me was the fear that Marie might change her mind. So she had consented? She must have, or we would not be at the consulate.

We spent our honeymoon of a week in Moscow—a week that the very angels must have envied—then my consul summoned me to St. Petersburg.

I was wanted by the prefect of police. Before I left the consul I had told him the entire history of the evening.

He looked grave.

"Humph!" he said slowly; "this means banishment, if not worse. I will communicate with the embassy at once and head off these fellows."

The prefect received me as soon as I arrived.

"I am sorry, Mr. Carrington, to have to inform you that you will have to leave the country within forty-eight hours."

"What do you mean?" I asked indignantly. "What have you against me? What have I done?"

"Done?" he echoed, in his dignified basso. "Why, you sent that Anitchkoff palace story to America before we knew of it."

I burst out laughing.

"And so because I saved your Gzar's life you would banish me?"

He rose, dignified and stately.

"Mr. Carrington," he said slowly, "putting it in that light, I think perhaps

I can show you some leniency. But in future be less hasty."

I bowed, inwardly chuckling. Of the other affair he knew nothing, therefore, I was safe. In my haste to get home and give the news to Marie I stumbled over one of my colleagues in the entry.

His face wore a sour and sullen expression.

"Congratulations, old man. But about that Anitchkoff palace plot, you played us a dirty trick—keeping it to yourself."

"Oh, hang the Anitchkoff plot," I cried airily. "Ancient history; what of it? Tell the boys to come round to-

night to celebrate; I'll have another one by then."

A word to the consul to prevent complications there, and I was at last steering for home.

Marie met me, her eyes like two stars.

"I know—I know," she whispered; "I heard it from the prefect's office ten minutes ago."

I looked at her in amazement. In the room with the prefect and myself had been no one.

Then I kissed her and laughed. I did not take the trouble even to question her.

Such is Russia.

LOVE'S CROSSWAY.

By Raymond S. Spears.

IN which mountain Capulets and
Montagues fight and brawl
with rifles and epithets. ❀ ❀

TWO men rode down the steep banks of Muddy Run and met in midstream.

One was a brawny, bushy-whiskered man on a proud-stepping saddle-horse, while the other was a lank youth whose angles showed that he had not quite reached his full growth. The youth's horse was a shaggy, bony creature which seemed to have been often exposed to the weather. As the horses reached to drink, the man turned in his saddle and faced the youth fiercely.

"Ain't I tole you-all to keep away from my girl?" he demanded. "Po'r, apron-stringed, putterin', shiftless, no-account boy! What for you-uns think teh go with her, eh?"

"Because I 'low she loves me!" the youth drawled, facing the man squarely, but without displaying any emotion.

The man gasped.

"What's that!" he shouted.

Then he plunged at the youth and both fell from their horses into the run-

ning water, where they fought, rolled over and over by the current till they lodged on a gravel bar ten rods down stream. There the man came uppermost, and pounded his opponent's face to his heart's content.

When he ceased, the youth was limp and insensible.

"There, Clint Tazewell!" the man said, "I 'low nex' time Lon Campbell tells ye to keep clear of his, yo'll mind!"

With that he rode away on his horse, while the shaggy mare snuffled over the prostrate figure in the water, wondering what was the matter.

An hour later Tazewell began to recover consciousness. He tried to open his eyes, but found them painfully swollen. He could feel the water lapping against his clothes and, gradually, he remembered what had happened.

The rough clinch at the ford, the fall into the water, the struggle for foothold and fist-freedom were recalled little by little, and at last he sat up and held an eye open to look about him. There was his faithful mare, and up stream was the gash made by the bridle-path in the steep banks of the run.

"Law! Law!" he muttered. "That man done whupped me, he shore did! He beat me all up!"

He rose to his feet, painfully climbed to the saddle and clucked to the mare, telling her to go home, making a sorry figure as he rode along, clinging with both hands to the pommel, his face swollen and his clothes pulled and torn awry. Two of his neighbors saw him pass by, but made no attempt to stop or question him. They had seen Lon Campbell go down the road and they had divined what had happened. They were surprised that young Tazewell had escaped with only a "beating up."

Arriving at his home, Clint dismounted and turned his horse into the pasture. Then he felt his way to the little log house where his mother met him face to face at the door.

"My land, Clint, what has happened?" she cried.

"Campbell—Lon Campbell don hit!" he answered. "He beat me up!"

The mother led her son to a chair before the open fireplace and made him sit down. Then she killed a chicken and bandaged his face with the warm meat next to his skin, soothing him all the while as he choked back the sobs that came into his throat. At last, she had done every thing she could for him.

"Theh!" she said. "You'll soon be all right, Clinty."

"Jes' wait tell I can see!" he gasped suddenly. "Jes' wait tell I can see them sights!"

"Oh, Clint!" she said. "Don't! Don't! Le's don' have no shootin' up. He's her father. She'd never forgive ye."

He made no reply, and for days after sat in ominous silence while the swelling of the bruises gradually disappeared, leaving his face a ghastly yellow hue.

In a week's time he was working about the little place, shucking corn, cutting wood, and making things snug for the winter. Day by day his mother begged him not to arouse the wrath of the Campbells by killing their leader. Her one convincing argument was:

"His gal never will love you no more, if you kill him."

Nothing else appealed to Clint—much less fear of the numerous Campbells. He felt that there were not enough of them to satisfy his lust for revenge on the family which held itself so much

above the Tazewells that they frowned upon his courting pretty Laura. But, of course, he excepted her from the plans of vengeance which he was secretly laying in his heart. His mother convinced him that he must see Laura first.

The time came when he once more crossed the ridges to the Copper Bottoms, where he sat down in the orchard on the little knoll behind Lon Campbell's house. The shades were down, but a bright light was burning within. He mimicked the whippoorwill's song with a low whistle. It had never failed before, but there was no answer to it now. He repeated it several times, but without avail. The girl did not come. Nevertheless, it was evident that the call had been heard, for the light was quickly extinguished when his plaintive notes quavered in the night.

Clint waited long, but no sound came to warm his heart. As he sat there, he realized that he had lost the girl, unless he could "do something."

"That man's watching her like a hawk," he said to himself, "I'll shore have teh settle with him first. Yasseh!"

He turned homeward, wondering just what he had better do—wondering whether to go riding the bridle-paths rifle in hand to kill his sweetheart's father, or to "wait his chance." It was late when he climbed to his husk bed in the garret of his home. Next day his mother did not call him, for she knew he had been out late the night before.

The morning was just half gone when Lon Campbell rode up the bridle-path to the Widow Tazewell's little farm. She was at the spring-house drawing a bucket of water when he arrived within speaking distance.

Campbell was not unacquainted with Mrs. Tazewell. His errand that morning was not so much to seek Clint as it was to humble her pride. He remembered the time when the Clintons were set against him because he was poor and no-account, and, though he had afterward "married well," the memory had never lost its sting, especially now that he was a widower.

Lida Clinton's charms had never been entirely out of his mind, and now that she was the Widow Tazewell, he longed

to glory over her poverty and supposed distress.

He saw her before she caught sight of him, and had opportunity to notice that her carriage was not less graceful than it had been when she was a girl. As she turned at the sound of his horse's hoofs, he noted that there was still a saucy tilt to her nose and a poise to her head which had always stirred the anger in his heart, it was so proud and independent. Now the woman's pride almost pleased him, he was so sure that he could humble it by a threat.

"Look a hyar, Mrs. Tazewell," he began. "Whah's that son of yourn? I ain' got no hawd feelin's agin you-all, but I tell you naow, ef you don' keep that poh white-trash son of yourn to hum, I'll—I'll——"

"An' what'll you do, Lon Campbell?" the woman demanded with a toss of her head.

The question and the way it was put were so unexpected that Campbell was abashed. The next moment the accumulated wrath of years welled from his heart, and he cursed the family and the son of the woman whom he had loved in his youth.

"That patched an' gangling boy of yourn'll shore git hurt if he don' keep away from my gal!" he exclaimed. "I got betteh ideas than havin' her marryin' inteh side-hill pone-eaters, an' I tell ye naow, my gal's got a sweetheart as has money an' clothes an' sense, he shore has! An' you keep that Clint Tazewell home, I tell ye!"

The woman laughed in his face, as he jerked his horse around and drove away down the bridle-path at a gallop. The way to the woods was not far, fortunately for him. As he disappeared, Clint sprang through the doorway, rifle in hand, just too late to get a shot.

"Clint! Clint!" Mrs. Tazewell cried.

It was a long time before she could quiet him, nor did she succeed until she had explained the fact that Campbell had courted her in her youth, her ready wit divining the chief reason for Campbell's visit. She told her son that Campbell's daughter was being courted by some one else. Clint listened quietly enough, and then said:

"I 'low I'd betteh see that man. I

reckon I know him. He's Tip Calloway. He works in a store an' wears a white collar."

A few days later Clint met Tip on the road between Kyle's Ford and Copper Bottoms.

"Naow, see here, Mr. Tip Calloway," Clint drawled, shifting his repeater from the crook of his elbow, "I 'low they ain't no use of your comin' up this road no moh. You-all's rich, but we-uns shoots right smart, yasseh! We shoots right smart."

Tip's pale face twitched, but he was not the kind of youth to make a fight. Without a word he turned his horse around to gallop back to Kyle's Ford. There was much to dread from such a lank, red-looking mountaineer. Clint grinned over his easy victory. He had expected a harder fight.

The experience with Tip gave him confidence, for his struggle with Lon Campbell, who was a grown man, much feared by the timid souls of the region.

Campbell supposed that he had cowed Clint, till he heard that Tip Calloway had been "run out of the country," then his wrath was boundless.

First of all, he sent word to Clint by a neighbor that he was going to repeat the beating that had taken place in Muddy Run. Then he told his daughter what Clint had done, fancying that Clint's impudence would make her as wrathful as it had made him. Instead, it surprised and pleased her. She had willingly turned from Clint when she heard how he had been whipped by her father, not knowing that he had come to see her one night when she was visiting her aunt.

She knew now that Clint cared, and that he had courage that reached above a mere whipping. But the fact that her father had threatened to beat Clint again frightened her. She understood the Clinton Tazewell spirit better than her father did.

"Oh, pop!" she said, "what's the use of whipping him again? He's jest a boy—an' you're a big man. Besides—besides——"

"Huh!" the man answered, "I'll whip him twict as hard! I shore will!"

The girl made no answer, but fear came to her heart—the fear that her

lover would kill the man whose threats were scattered in all directions now. The neighbors talked of the "trouble," wondering what its next turn would be. There was only one question any one asked, and that was:

"What'll Clint do? Will he let that man beat him up again? He cayn't fight him with his fists!"

Most of them thought Clint would shrink from fighting the man, knowing how many relatives there were to take up the quarrel if Clint should "go to war"—use his rifle, that is. But some few, Laura among the rest, feared that Clint had just that courage—the courage that would not count the odds against him. One day her fears were shown to be justified. Mabel Green, her dearest friend, brought her some news.

"Clint's riding up an' down the roads a sight more'n he used to do," Mabel told her. "Mostly he has his rifle with him, but he ain't saying anything to anybody. Even his mother is plumb scar'rt up about what he's doing; he's that quiet an' don't say anything even to her."

Laura's heart fluttered at this news.

"He'll kill him! He'll kill him!" she cried to herself. "Pop's so hard headed! I mustn't let him do it! I mustn't!"

That night Laura did a strange thing for a Campbell to do.

She slipped out of her house and ran up among the ridges to beg for mercy from an enemy of her father. She came up the path to the Tazewell clearing and whistled—whistled like a mocking-bird—a sound which she knew Clint was not likely to ignore.

Clint was by the fireplace, cleaning his rifle. He started, but his mother had turned her face to listen, and so did not notice the motion.

"My land!" she said. "I never knowed a mocking-bird to sing like that this time of year before! Huh!"

"Hit's a young un, an' I 'low I'll go ketch hit!" Clint remarked, taking down his hat. As he passed through the doorway his mother's face lightened up.

"Lawse!" she said to herself. "Hit's some friend of hisn. I might of knowed!"

Even she didn't dream of a Campbell

coming at night to ask for what Laura was about to ask.

As the days had gone by, Campbell had made more threats. Instead of threatening to beat Clint, the fact that the youth was carrying a rifle caused him to carry his own—and he changed the threat from a whipping to shooting the youth. Only Laura had dared to interfere, and failing with her father, she came to his intended victim.

As Clint came to her in the bridle-path she threw her arms around his neck and began to cry. Clint could only gasp and stutter.

"Don't kill my father!" she cried. "Don't kill him! He's all I got! Mammy's dead, an' you'll kill him! Don't, Clint! Don't!"

"He's got a gun to kill me with, an' I 'low I'll shore shoot back!" Clint exclaimed. "I ain't never looked for trouble with any man. I'm peaceable, but they ain' no man can run me around like your dad 'lows to do. I'll shore shoot, if he draws down his gun, I shore will!"

The girl wept and begged, but Clint would not agree to do anything she said. He would not even go away for a little while till her father's wrath had died down. Weeping and sobbing, she pulled herself away from her lover and started down the road. He followed, trying to explain why he could not do as she wished, but she only wept the more. He would promise her anything, except what she asked.

Suddenly she seized him again.

"Oh, Clint, promise me—don't kill him—jes' hit him in the leg, or arm—don't kill him!"

Clint hesitated.

"I'll try not to!" he exclaimed, and then the girl ran down the path and disappeared before he thought to accompany her home.

For several days Clint did not stir abroad, for his heart was moved more by the girl's plea than he was willing to admit. He was a good shot, much better than Lon Campbell, for he depended on squirrels and quail and wild turkeys for most of his fresh meat, and killing game made him expert with his rifle.

He pleaded with himself that he was merely "practising" and not avoiding

a meeting, but in his heart he knew that he did not want to kill a man, much less the father of the girl he loved. What two or three friends whom he met told him did not quiet his apprehension. They said that Campbell vowed to shoot on sight.

But at last the meal was low in the box, and Clint had to ride over to the mill to have the grist ground. Taking down his rifle, he examined it carefully and then started away just as the sun lighted the trees on top of the Big Ridge.

His mother watched him go down the path.

When he was out of sight she turned to do the housework, but the dragging minutes were painful. Tragedy seemed to be hanging in the air. Her thoughts turned to Lon Campbell, of all persons in the world the one with whom she wished her son to be at peace. Till then the quarrel had not seemed real, or deadly, but the whole force of the danger was plain at last—the rumors, the fight in Muddy Run, the threats, and at last the careful handling of the rifle and testing of the trigger proved to her unwilling heart that it was only too true.

She had pleaded with her son "not to mind," but with as little avail as Laura's pleading with Campbell had been.

"I can't let them fight!" the woman cried in her heart. "Oh! what can I do? What can I do?"

Her son was obdurate, but, perhaps, she could prevail upon the man who had been her sweetheart. With that thought she seized a little red shawl and hurried down the short-cut path to Copper Bottoms. With swift, pattering feet, she passed the mountain laurels, crossed the little runs, scaled the ridge cliff, and ran down the long slope to the Campbell fields. Without stopping or pausing, she ran to the painted house and opened the door without knocking.

Laura was sitting before the fireplace, weeping and alone. The girl looked up, and the next minute they were in each other's arms.

"Pop's gone to the mill," Laura said. "He's be'n gone an hour, an' more."

In anguish the women stared at each other. They knew from long experience in the mountains that a tragedy was impending, and they were powerless to

avert it. Trembling, silent, with tears filling their eyes at intervals, they sat and waited.

The rustle of a chicken among the woodchips behind the house, the grunt of a hog beyond the fence, the shrill cry of some bird made them start with exclamations. The clock ticked slowly along, each tick bringing the mountain women closer to the saddest thing they have to bear. The rasping of wheels and cogs, the unlimbering of catches and levers suddenly broke the monotone, and the clock began to strike.

A minute later from up the Mill road they heard three faint sounds.

"Spat! Spat! Spat!"

"Oh! He's done hit! He's done hit! He's killed my po'h daddy!" the girl cried, springing to her feet in a paroxysm of agony.

"Mebbe he missed! Mebbe——" Mrs. Tazewell sobbed into the girl's ears, her own heart misgiving her. Then they wept together, louder than ever.

Clint had been the first to bring a toll to the mill that morning. Others soon followed, however, and Clint found himself among neighbors whose silence quickened his nervousness. They merely greeted him, but among themselves they gave significant glances toward the rifle he carried, and more than one watched the trail as though expecting some one. Clint was glad to ride away on his mare. The lonely bridle-path was more companionable than neighbors who wondered whether he would be murdered or a murderer.

As he rode along the trail his indignation began to grow. He asked himself what he had done that any man should want to take his life?

"I'm peaceable!" he exclaimed bitterly. "I neveh harmed any man! I ain' a bad, mean man. But that Lon Campbell, he allus has be'n troublesome. He killed a man! He whupped Ole Leedin! He whupped 'Lise Wheeler! He whupped me! We neveh done him no harm! He ain' no right to treat me so! Hit ain' no right, an' I ain't goin' to stand hit no moh! I'm goin' straight to him, an' have hit aout! Yassah! I'll drap my cohn at the Forks an' ride right down theh!"

At the forks in the trail Clint hung

the corn-meal on the limb of a tree and started down the path toward Copper Bottoms. As he rode his spirits rose. Heretofore, he had dreaded meeting his tormentor, but now he hurried his horse toward the man's home. He forgot the girl, for he was after vengeance now.

He passed the same houses whose occupants a few weeks before had seen him riding past, a wet, bruised, and dejected figure. The men, women, and children saw him now, and most of them understood the difference in his bearing.

"Clint's on the war-path!" Rance Wheeler exclaimed. "I knowed hit w'n't in a Tazewell or a Clinton to be undertrod an' stomped on. Hue! Theh'll be a difference teh the echo in this yeah fightin'!"

Eager as Clint was for the meeting, it came sooner than he expected.

As he rode down the bank at Muddy Run ford, Campbell came into sight on the far side of the stream, not thirty yards away. Instantly Campbell jerked his rifle from its saddle holster and started to throw it to his shoulder, while Clint, startled and surprised, merely stared. It was Campbell's opportunity, but he wasted it by firing without taking aim. The bullet tore through Clint's hat as he brought up his own rifle to take a quick, sure "turkey shot."

Campbell, seeing the rifle come true, realized that he was facing death. Then the sights dropped from the man's eye and disappeared in smoke. A blow like a sledge-hammer landed on his elbow, followed by another on his knee. His horse reared, threw the wounded man, and galloped into the brush. The next minute Clint was beside his victim.

"I didn't 'low teh kill ye, Mars Campbell!" Clint said. "I don' aim to kill

ary man, so I shot ye nice an' simple like. I don' want no hawd feelin's, bec'ase I'm goin' to marry that gal of your'n, yasseh! I'll shore do hit, even if I have to shoot the hull Campbell family easy!"

"I 'low I cayn't help hit, Clint," Campbell exclaimed. "You was plumb reasonable with me, yasseh! Thankee, lad, I'll ride yer mare home. They ain' no hawd feelin's no moh. Tell you' mah I asts her pawdon. I've be'n mighty onmannerly with her."

Steadying the man in the saddle, Clint helped him homeward. When they arrived at Campbell's house the two women were roused from their despair by a shout. They rushed to the door, and as they opened it Clint called out:

"Come an' he'p. Maw! You here!"

The three carried the wounded man to a bed, where they dressed his wounds. At last Laura and Clint slipped away.

"I jes' knowed you'd be light on my old daddy!" the girl exclaimed, hugging Clint spasmodically.

"Sh-h!" said Clint. "What's that?"

Both heard a gentle "smack" in the room where the man was lying.

"Old daddy allus did admiah yo mammy," the girl whispered with a little laugh. "Oh, Clint, they ain' no trouble no moh! Hue!"

"Hit's powerful sweet, little honey-bee!" Clint answered, drawing the girl closer to him.

Next day, when Rance Wheeler heard "the latest," he said to his wife:

"Didn't I tole they'd be a dif'rence in the echo? I wandeh will Clint marry his stepsister, er will his mother marry his father-in-law? Peahs lak thehs allus somethin' teh bother a man 'bout them Tazewells an' Campbells. You neveh can tell what they'll do next."

SPRING FEVER.

By T. N., in New York "Sun."

THE days are getting longer
And the birds are on the nest,
The shad are in the river,
The wind is in the west.

It's movin' day to-morrow,
Our team plays just the same;
Old woman's kinder grouty—
Guess I'll take in the game.

MRS. JONES'S SOUVENIR-PARTY.

By Charles Edward Rich.

WHETHER one takes a spoon
or a house and lot, a robbery's
a robbery for all of that.

"WILL not be a party to this business any longer. It's got to stop, as far as this family is concerned. What do you think my business associates would say if they knew that my wife and her friends went around nights sneak-thieving?"

Richard Jones, stock broker, moderate circumstances, short, fat, and forty, stamped up and down his dining-room, indignation shining in his usually mild blue eyes.

There were after-dinner coffee-cups in great variety, spoons, knives and forks, ash-trays, brass match-boxes, wine-glasses and salt and pepper bottles. To each article was tied a small card by a narrow ribbon. The cards were inscribed after this fashion:

THE WIMBLEDON, Oct. 6.

(Charley's Birthday.)

WOOD'S CAFE, Nov. 20.

(New Year's Eve.)

THE BEAULAC.

(Spring Handicap.)

And so they went on, with little, parenthetical references to remind one of some specially notable event, as boys and girls used to write in the corners of the pages of autograph albums—"blonde hair"—"apple dumplings"—

"band concert"—all Greek, except to the initiated.

"But Richard, it is not thieving," protested pretty Mrs. Jones, who was gathering from all parts of the house a curious collection of articles of brass, silver and china ware, and laying them out on the dining-table, until the room began to look like an antique shop. She had been gazing at the collection with pride and satisfaction until her husband had entered the room with his protest.

"Well, if it's not thieving, why don't you help yourselves to a dollar or two out of the till?" retorted Jones, with an answer-that-if-you-can sort of a grunt.

"Oh, but that's different. There are pleasant memories attached to these things."

"Humph. I dare say the proprietors of the restaurants have pleasant memories of them, but they are no longer attached to them. Anyway, so far as this household goes, it's got to stop and I am going to stop it. Think of my reputation as a business man. Suppose, on one of your souvenir nights when you are all gloating and making merry over your ill-gotten spoils, a detective should walk in and march us all off to the station-house, eh? How would that do for a pleasant memory? I tell you it is downright stealing."

"Now, Richard, you know we all spend a lot of money when we go out together for an evening."

"Yes, and then steal the restaurant man's profits. Something on the line of high finance, I will admit, but in this case the law may reach you one of these days."

Jones swept the table with a contemptuous glance and strode out of the house. On the way to his office an idea suddenly occurred to him. He stopped, smiled broadly and slapped his knee to emphasize his glee.

"I'll do it," he said half-aloud. "It will be a master-stroke. I'll bet it will break up these souvenir-nights, all right."

Chuckling to himself over his bright thought he started on again.

Jones himself had taken part in some of these festive raids, but as his house and those of his friends began to fill up with the spoils of the restaurants, he began to consider the matter seriously, and when the display of each one's season's plunder was made the occasion of a "party," he protested.

He stopped again. A policeman turned the corner ahead of him and walked hurriedly toward him. It was Sergeant Cahill, of the precinct, who was under obligations to Jones, through whose influence he had obtained his advancement from the ranks. The robust figure of the policeman fitted so nicely into his plans that Jones chuckled again.

"Just like an inspiration," he said, smiling, as Cahill reached him.

"Did a man pass you under full sail?" the sergeant asked as he shook hands with Jones. Cahill had been a sailor before he joined the force.

"What's that?" asked Jones.

"Scudding before the wind."

"You mean, Cahill, did I see a man running? Nope, no one passed me at an accelerated speed," and having fired this back at the sergeant he figured that he was about even.

"I wonder where he got to?" murmured Cahill.

"Where who got to?" asked Jones.

"'Slick Bill.' I sighted him dead ahead and clapped on all sail, but he has outfooted me, somehow. He's slick all right."

"Want to arrest him?"

"No; haven't got anything against him now, I want to run him out of my precinct. He is dangerous."

"Well now, Cahill, forget William for a minute as long as he hasn't done anything yet. I want your help in a little plan I have in mind."

"You know you can't ask too much of me if it's in my way to do it," said Cahill earnestly.

He was one of those peculiarly constituted persons who remember a favor after they have reaped the benefit of it.

"Now, this is the case, sergeant. My wife and a lot of her friends, all decent people, you know, have developed into souvenir fiends."

"Um," interrupted Cahill, "swiping the pewter, eh?"

"Yes, I guess that's it, only in most cases it is more valuable than pewter. Well, you see, they look at this as a harmless little pastime and when they get a good collection, after a busy season of dining out, they give a series of souvenir-parties—that's what they call 'em, Cahill, I give you my word—at one another's houses and display their booty for the edification of their guests. Now I want to stop it. There's a souvenir-night on at my house to-night."

"And what do you want me to do, Mr. Jones, pinch the bunch?"

"No, no," cried Jones in alarm, "that would be going too far. What I want you to do is to give them a scare, don't you know?"

"Um," said Cahill, very much as if he needed more light.

"This is the idea. I want you to come to my house to-night and demand to search it for stolen goods that you have been informed are secreted there. After indignant protests I will admit you and you will go to the dining-room, which will be ringing with the joyous sounds of mirth as my guests inspect the display of souvenirs and recall to one another the 'pleasant memories that are attached to them.' See?"

"Then you will denounce the assembled multitude, myself included, and tell them that it is with regret that you cannot arrest them all, but that your orders from the captain are simply to recover the goods, as the restaurant proprietors wish to be lenient this time—but the next—well, the next time will be different, and in the meantime they will all be under police surveillance wherever they go."

Jones's idea grew as he went along and he had to stop to chuckle as he thought of the consternation of his souvenir guests.

"And say, Cahill," he continued, letting out another seam in his idea, "in order that the thing shall have a stronger effect, you insist on taking all of our own silver from the sideboard."

"'Captain's orders'—very sternly—'you can come down to the house and straighten it out with the boss—if any of the stuff is yours.'

"Throw a lot of sarcasm into the last. I will go down to the police station in the morning and sort out our stuff and send the rest back, anonymously, to the restaurant keepers. I think that is about all, Cahill. Will you fix up the job for me?"

"Um," said the sergeant, "want to throw the gaff in hard, don't you?"

"I am not quite sure that I follow you, Cahill," said Jones, whose vocabulary of slang was as limited as his nautical knowledge, "but I want to give them a good, strong object-lesson."

"I am sorry, Mr. Jones, that I cannot do this for you myself, but I am on the desk to-night. I will send up one of the plain-clothes men, though, with a full tip on the play."

"Well, that will have to do then, but, of course, if you could do the thing yourself, I would have more confidence that it would be handled with skill. Say, Cahill"—another bright idea had blossomed in Jones's fertile brain—"send up the gruffest and most insolent man that you have on your staff. It will hit harder."

Cahill looked grieved.

"We don't have any insolent men on the force, Mr. Jones," he said in a tone of mild rebuke.

"Oh, I beg pardon; I mean one who can pretend to be insolent. It will do just as well."

"All right. I will send up a man who will turn the trick as well as I could, and I will give him a hunch on the gruff end of the game. You won't find him pleasant company."

"That's it," chuckled Jones, "you've caught my idea exactly. Send him up after ten o'clock; then they'll all be there to get their little lesson."

"By the way, I have forgotten the number of your house," said the sergeant, taking his note-book from his pocket.

"Number twenty-nine, West ——— Street." The sergeant made a note of the address.

The men parted, Cahill to take another look for "Slick Bill" while Jones,

highly elated at his scheme, waited for a car.

Jones was in his merriest mood.

He welcomed his guests with the warmest cordiality and no host could have been more eager to entertain them. He moved about the rooms, from one group to another, with a jolly twinkle in his eyes and a ready jest upon his tongue. Jones was surely at his best. One of the guests reported that he had seen him sneak out into the hall and chuckle to himself in a dark corner. Mrs. Jones marveled at the transformation from the severe moralist of the morning.

Only in one way did Jones violate the laws of hospitality. He glanced constantly at his watch, but, as he did it surreptitiously, it perhaps should not be recorded against him. Every time he looked his chuckle became more and more audible. Finally, the last guest arrived and all were seated at little tables in the parlor. It was a progressive euchre night and, as the bell at the head table sounded, the chatter ceased and the players gave themselves up to the serious task of fighting for the first prize.

Down at the end of the hall, on a side table in the dining-room, the souvenirs were displayed, where, before supper was served, the guests might laugh and joke over the "pleasant memories" they recalled.

The silence in the middle of the second hand was broken by a loud peal of the front-door bell. Jones looked up from his cards in surprise. It was no belated guest, for all were accounted for, or present. He looked at his watch. It was only half past nine. "Cahill has made a mistake in the hour," thought Jones as he listened anxiously as the maid's footsteps sounded on the stairs in going to the door.

Whoever it was lacked a spirit of patience, for the bell rang twice again before the girl could reach the door. With a common impulse every one stopped playing and listened for developments.

"Perhaps baby's been taken sick and they have sent for me," said one nervous woman in a whisper to her neighbor.

"I always feel creepy when our bell rings like that. It's nearly always bad news or a telegram. Those boys have no consideration for one's nerves." And another woman began to show signs of anxiety.

By this time the maid had opened the door.

"Is this the Jones joint?" a voice inquired gruffly.

Every one started at the coarseness of the tone and question—every one except Jones.

"Cahill is on time," he chuckled to himself behind his handkerchief. "Now the fun will begin."

"I don't know what you mean," replied the maid tartly.

"Oh, well, does Jones live here?"

"Mister Jones lives here," said the girl with proper emphasis on the "mister."

"Tell the boss I want to see him and don't keep the law waiting in the hall either, my pretty maid."

There were cries of astonishment from the guests and Jones rose from his chair with well-assumed amazement.

"The law," he gasped. "What can it mean?"

Jones was a good actor.

"My dear, I will see this person," he said, turning to his wife. "Do not be nervous; it is some mistake, of course. Please excuse me for a moment."

He bowed ceremoniously to his guests and left the room.

Just inside the hall-door stood a tall, heavily built man, with his coat-collar turned up around his neck and his slouch hat, which he did not remove, drawn down over his eyes. He carried a large market-basket on his arm.

"You may go, Bessie," said Jones to the girl, who seemed inclined to stay and see the play to its climax. As she turned away Jones winked merrily. The man returned the courtesy.

"Well, sir," said Jones, the comedian, in a pompous tone, "to what felicitous circumstance am I indebted for this visit?"

"Are you Jones?" The man winked again.

"I am Mr. Jones."

Another wink, and the signals having established them on an equal footing of

understanding the play moved rapidly on.

"Well, you'll do and if you are trying to ask me what I want I'll give it to you straight. I want them sooveneers you and your fine frens swiped—an' I want 'em quick, see?"

Jones heard gasps of fear and amazement from the parlor and he knew his lesson was sinking in. How he did want to laugh.

"But, my dear sir," he said with a fine show of perturbation, "I don't know who you are."

"Who I am? I'm Gallagher from the precinct station and de sergeant's orders are to bring back the stuff, or youse. You can shake dice to see which, but you've got to be quick about it."

"But, my dear sir——"

"None o' yer dear sirs, now, Jones. Get busy. I've got orders to search de house—an' wid de aid of a gun, too. Now run along, sonny, and put me next to de stuff or I'll pull in de whole caboodle of yer."

More gasps from the parlor.

"There has been some grave mistake," said Jones with dignity which was somewhat marred by another wink. "If you will step this way I will show you some trifles that my friends and myself have picked up during some jolly evenings around town, but I assure you they were all well paid for in the restaurant bills we had to settle."

Jones, with his head held high in the air, led the way, followed by the man, into the dining-room.

"I shall see my friend Sergeant Cahill in the morning and somebody will suffer for this outrage, I assure you, my dear sir."

"Aw, quit yer kiddin'—it was Cahill sent me."

They entered the dining-room and Jones turned up the gas.

"'Sooveneer blowout,' says Cahill, an' I guess he hit a four time winner," commented Gallagher as he glanced quickly around the room. He went straight to the side-table where the souvenirs were tastefully displayed and, quickly picking out the tableware, dumped it into the basket he carried.

"'Never mind the crockery,' says Cahill. 'Let 'em keep that!'"

Having cleaned off the table of everything except the cups and glasses Gallagher turned his attention to the sideboard with another wink at Jones, which was promptly returned, accompanied by a low chuckle.

By this time the guests, with Mrs. Jones in the van, quaking with fear and anxiety but drawn by a strange fascination to the scene, had flocked out of the parlor and gathered at the dining-room door. They were wondering how soon their own homes would be visited by this coarse detective who was so rough in his manners.

"Evenin', folks," said Gallagher, with a broad smile that encompassed the whole gathering. "Sorry to bust up yer little party, but law's law."

Again the guests trembled at that dreadful little word and Gallagher continued to toss the silverware from the sideboard into his basket. Then he opened the drawers and piled in handfuls of knives, forks, and spoons. By this time the basket was full and Mrs. Jones had recovered her speech.

"Richard," she cried hysterically, "you are not going to let him carry away our own silver?"

"Sorry, my dear, but those are his orders. Don't worry; I will straighten this all out in the morning with my friend Cahill."

"But some of those things he is taking are our wedding presents. You know that."

"You and Jones here, may know, ma'am, but how am I to know 'em from soovies. Down to the station they've got to go. Evenin'. I'll see you all later."

Gallagher eased the basket on his arm and marched triumphantly through the lane made by the guests, who drew back to let him pass. In another moment the front door opened and closed after Gallagher and the "soovies."

There was a long silence, during which the guests looked anxiously at one another and Jones choked an almost irresistible desire to laugh by a violent spell of coughing. After the departure of Gallagher Mrs. Jones had vainly tried to find her tongue again, but could only utter little gasps.

"It's retribution," said Jones, drawing

down the corners of his mouth. "This settles the souvenir habit for me."

There were responsive murmurs of "me too," while the nervous woman added the final touch to the situation by seizing her husband's coat-sleeve frantically and saying, in a stage-whisper:

"That horrid man said he would see us again, later. Do you suppose he is going to our house?"

Consternation spread itself thickly over the assemblage. There was a sudden scurrying for coats and wraps, and hurried and excited apologies to host and hostess.

"Really, we must be at home in case that awful man does come. He'll simply turn the house upside down if we are not there. And think of the servants. Oh, dear, dear, what a scandal."

Within ten minutes the last guest had departed and Jones sat down among the deserted card-tables and gave full license to his pent-up merriment. He laughed loudly and he laughed long while Mrs. Jones restrained threatening tears in amazement.

"Richard," she cried, "what can you find to laugh at in this terrible situation?"

"It's all right, my dear [another joyous outburst] it's all right. I did it. I said I would and I did. You know what they say about me in the street [another merry intermission] when Jones says he will do anything, why, it's just as good as done."

"I don't understand you, Richard. You did it? You did what?"

"Yes, I did it. Cahill and I fixed it up between us—Sergeant Cahill, you know him—the one I got promoted."

"And do you mean to tell me, Richard Jones, that this—this was all a farce?" demanded Mrs. Jones angrily.

"Yep," replied Jones jauntily. "I shall go down to the station house tomorrow, get our things and send the 'soovies' back where they belong."

Jones touched himself off again and was about to explode when a danger signal in his wife's voice caused him to snuff out the fuse.

"And do you mean to say, Mr. Jones, that that awful creature is going to continue this little play of yours at the houses of my friends?"

"Dunno—hope so. Doesn't he act the tough policeman well? That was a little thought of mine. In fact the whole scheme was mine. Clever, wasn't it?" Careless of the consequences and ignoring the icy stare in the eyes of Mrs. Jones he went off again into a burst of laughter.

The front door-bell rang again. Jones glanced at his watch. It was quarter past ten. Probably one of the guests in his hasty departure had forgotten something. He opened the door himself. A heavily built man with a slouch hat pulled over his eyes stood on the stoop. In many ways he resembled the previous caller and when he spoke the likeness was strongly emphasized.

"Does Jones live here?" he asked huskily, and in the dim light from the hall Jones could see him wink.

"Step right in," said Jones in amazement, mechanically returning the wink. "Is Cahill going to send up the whole station house?"

"Whole station house? What do you mean, Mr. Jones? You, of course, know what I am here for."

The new-comer had dropped his gruff tone.

"But Gallagher was here not half an hour ago and carried off the stuff."

"Gallagher?"

"One of your detectives."

"But we haven't any Gallagher on the staff."

"Eh, no Gallagher? Big man, looks something like you and wears a slouch hat same as you do, pulled down over his eyes."

"Not in our precinct."

"Would Cahill have selected a man from another precinct?"

"As this job is a joke, in which he is lending you the services of the police department, I don't think he would take that chance. And if he had, why should he send me? This is not a little practical joke of yours, Mr. Jones?" the detective added suspiciously.

"No, no," cried Jones excitedly. "This is getting away beyond the merry stage. Can I get Cahill on the telephone?"

"You can't, but I can. Where is your 'phone?"

"Right down the hall," and Jones

led the way in a wild dash for the instrument. The detective, after going through a mysterious formula, succeeded in getting the connection with the station house.

"Is that you, Sergeant? This is Morrison. I'm at Mr. Jones's house. Hold the wire, he wants to speak to you. Here you are, sir," and Morrison handed the receiver to the excited Jones, who opened up his batteries without delay. This is what Morrison heard of the conversation:

"That you, Cahill?"

"Got any more detectives on the way to my house?"

"What do I mean? Yes, I know I am excited."

"Get down to facts? That's what I am doing. You sent up Gallagher, who plays his part very successfully and carries off the stuff. Then Morrison appears. Is this a joke?"

"Who's Gallagher? That's what I want to know. Who is Gallagher?"

"Only sent Morrison? Then who in—who sent Gallagher?"

"No, never mentioned it to a soul."

"N-o, don't recollect seeing any one. Oh, yes, come to think of it, several minutes after you left me and while I was waiting for a car, a man left the hallway of the building in front of which we were talking."

"Couldn't tell you how he looked."

"Oh, Gallagher? Well, there wasn't much distinctive about him. Rather a tough-looking citizen, but that was in line with our plans. Oh, yes, there was something I noticed. He had a small mole on the end of his nose——"

"What's that? Don't swear, Cahill—they will cut us off."

"Police wire? Oh, all right."

"What's that? I've been robbed? Gallagher was 'Slick William,' and he was the man in the hall? Oh, Lord! Oh, Lord!"

"Morrison," said Jones, in a low and pleading tone as he turned away from the telephone, "there's a hundred dollars in it for you if you can get that stuff back before Mrs. Jones finds out what a fool I am."

"Mrs. Jones knows already," came a steely voice from the darkness of the parlor.

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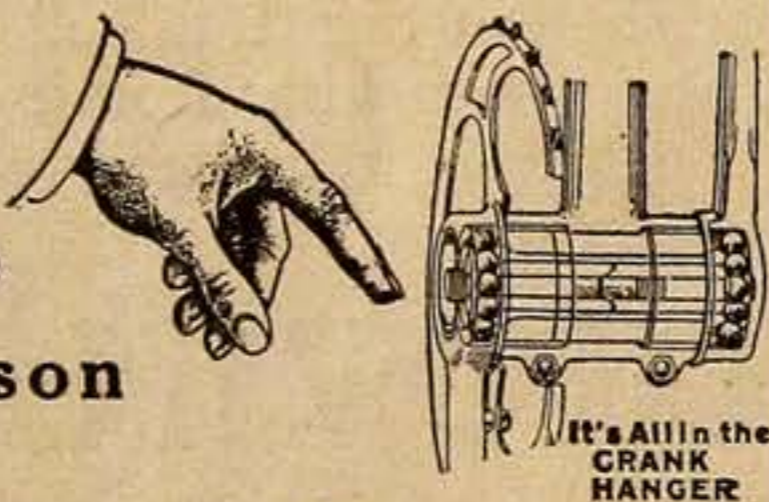
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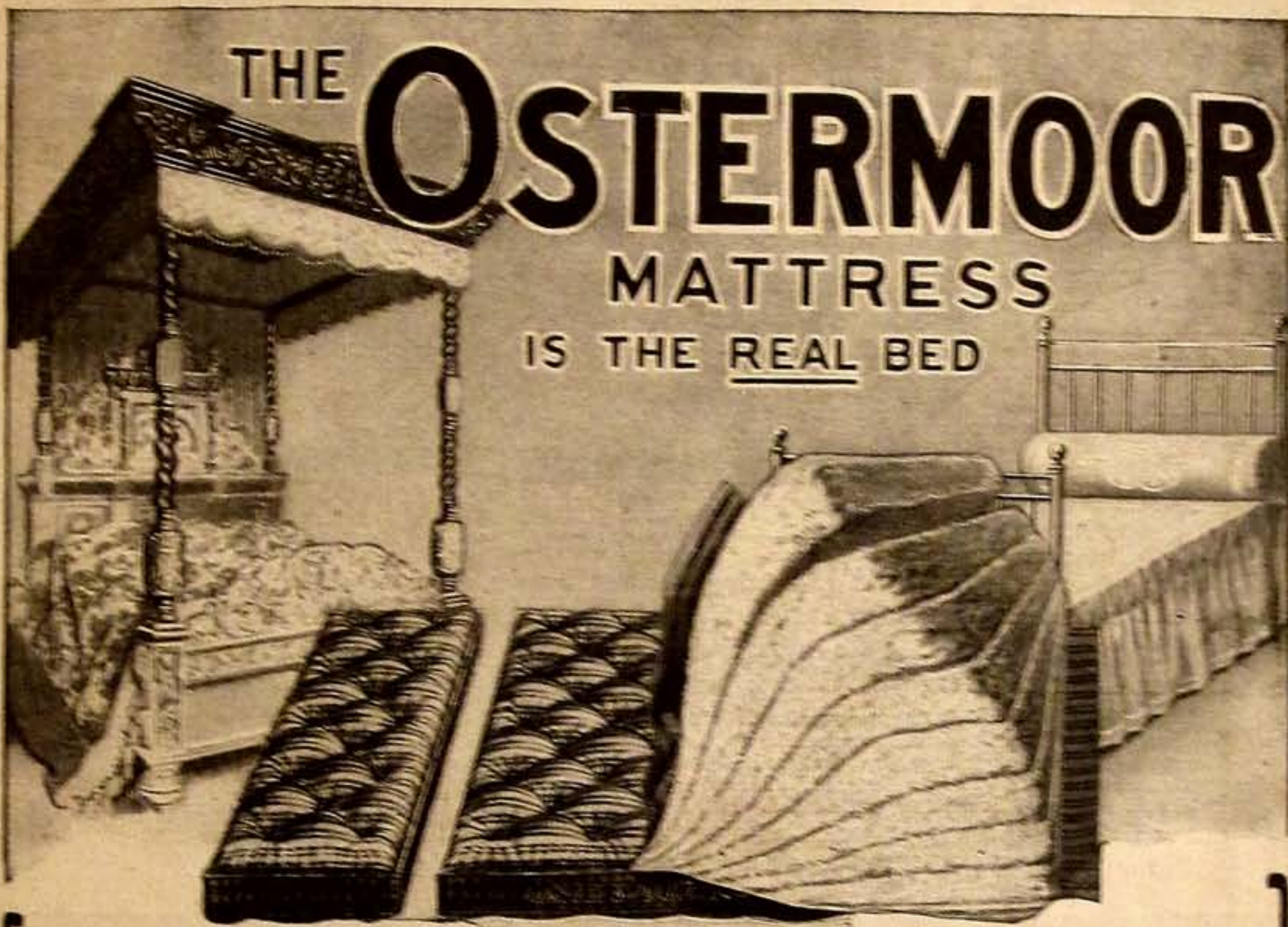
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For Men and Women

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Note the tiny single line on the Mount of Jupiter itself; that denotes Success.

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3-inch barrel, nickel-plated finish, 22 rim fire cartridge, 32-38 center fire cartridge . . . **\$5.50**

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"My Irish Rosie"

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New Edison Records for March On Sale February 27th

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- 9483 The Mountain King.....Stanley
- 9484 My Irish Rosie.....Ada Jones
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- 9486 We Have No One To Care For Us Now,
Byron G. Harlan
- 9487 Pedro, the Hand Organ Man.....Spencer
- 9488 I've Got a Vacant Room for You.....Roberts
- 9489 High School Cadets March, Edison Military Band
- 9490 In a Chimney Corner.....MacDonough
- 9491 Will There Be Any Stars In My Crown?
Anthony & Harrison
- 9492 All In, Down and Out.....Collins
- 9493 Not Because Your Hair is Curly (Medley)
Albert Benzler
- 9494 Good!Bye, Nellie Darling.....Thompson
- 9495 Flanagan's Troubles in a Restaurant.....Porter
- 9496 Waiting for a Certain Girl...Murray and Chorus
- 9497 Lalù, Me Lubly Queen....Edison Concert Band
- 9498 We'll Be Sweethearts to the End.....Myers
- 9499 Bake Dat Chicken Pie.....Collins and Harlan
- 9500 I Miss You in a Thousand Different Ways,
Gillette
- 9501 The Guardmount Patrol
Edison Symphony Orchestra
- 9502 Merry Whistling Darkey.....Dudley
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- 9504 Beauty's Eyes.....Edison Male Quartette
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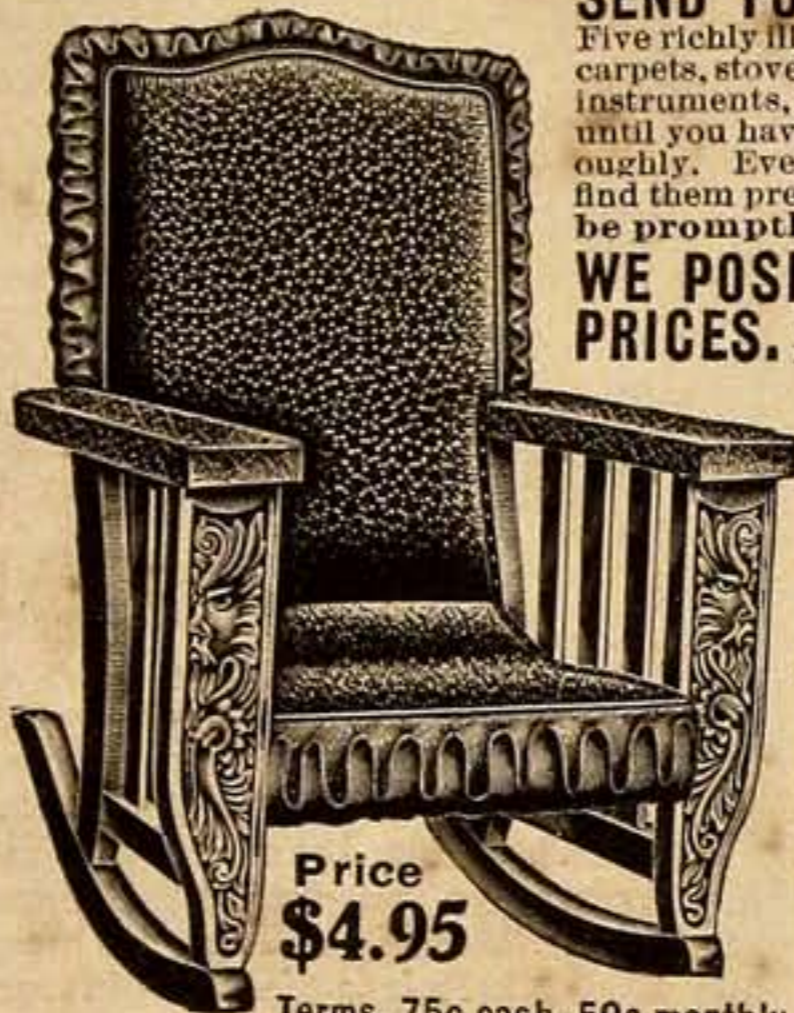
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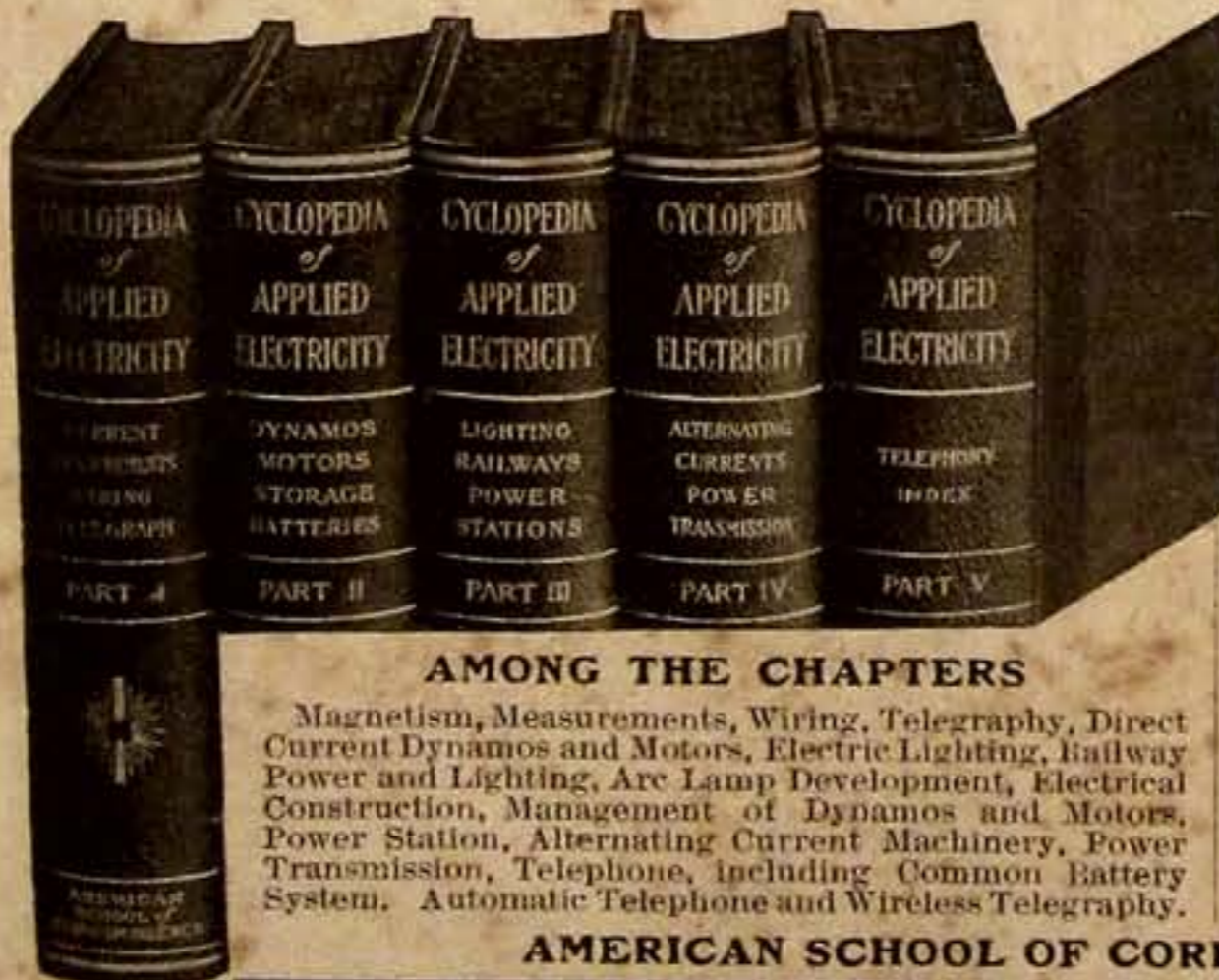
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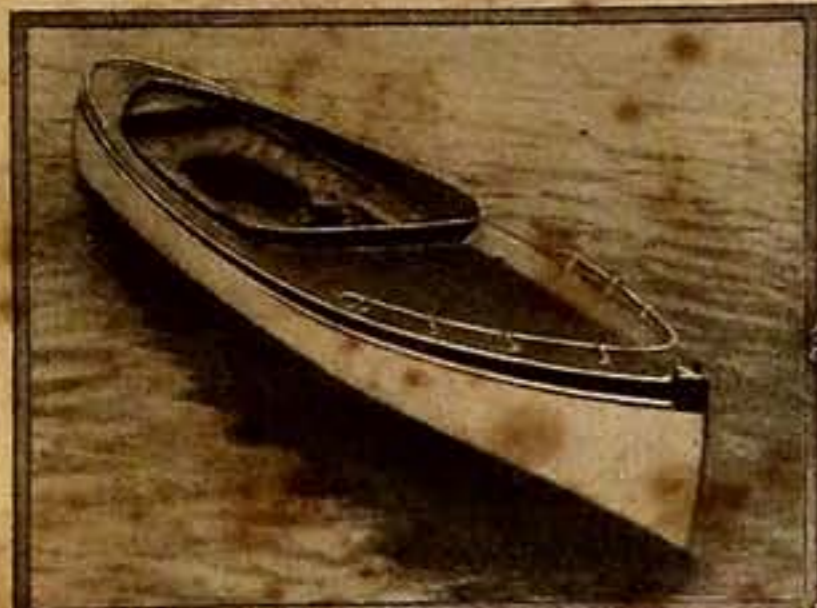
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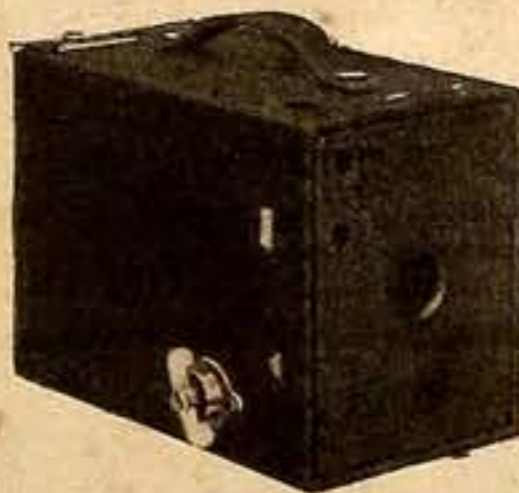
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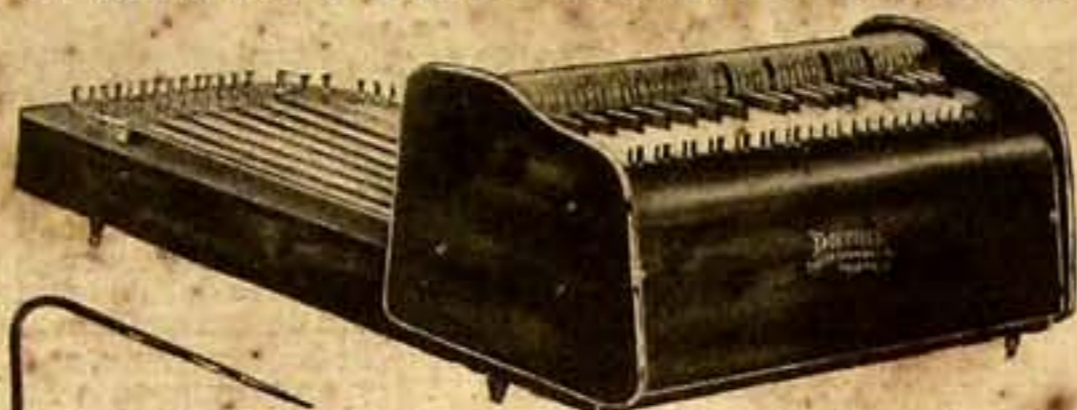
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