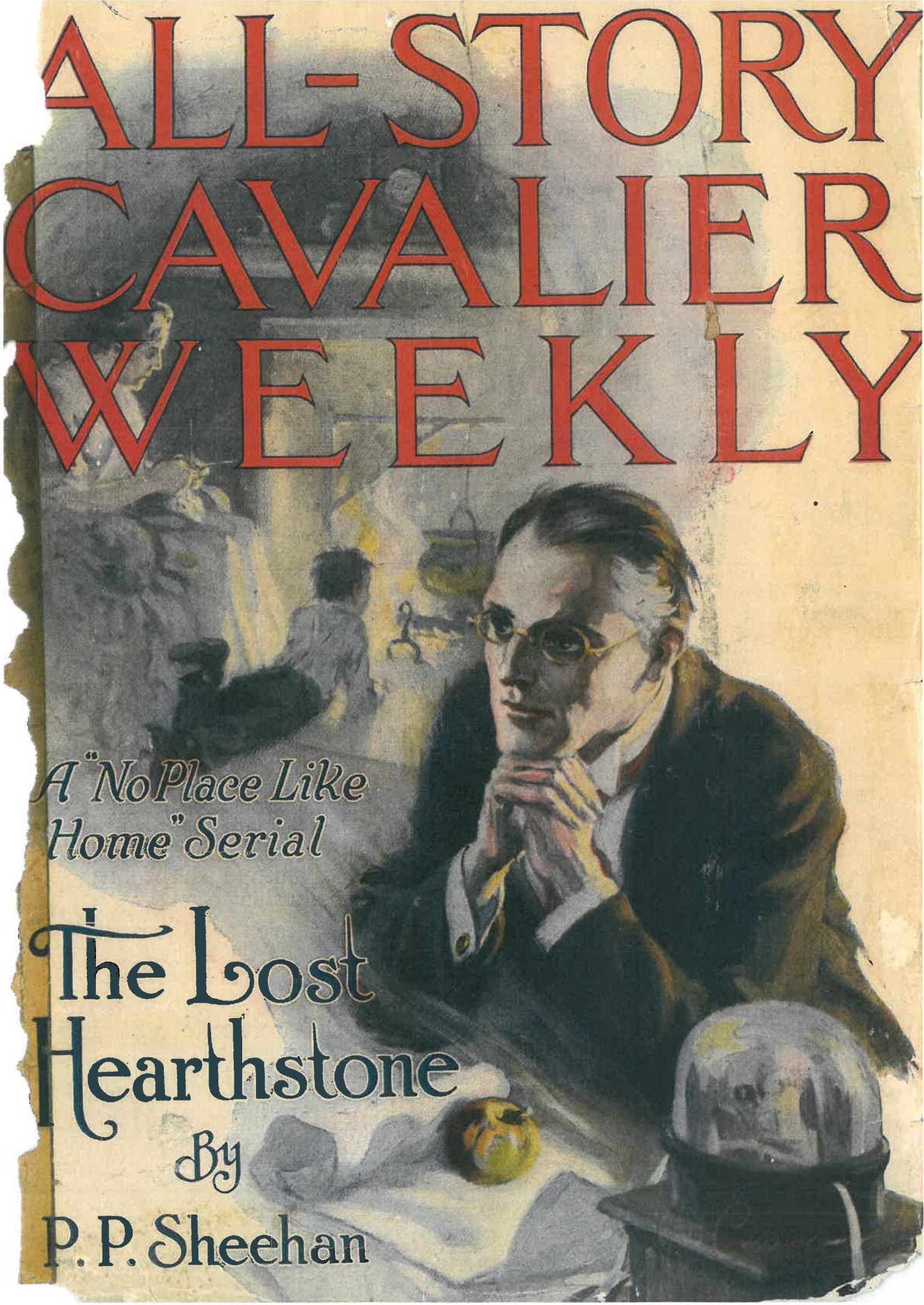
ALL-STORY CAVALIER WEEKLY



A "No Place Like Home" Serial

The Lost Hearthstone

By

P. P. Sheehan

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ALL-STORY CAVALIER WEEKLY

Vol. XXXIII CONTENTS FOR JUNE 27, 1914 No. 3

FOUR SERIAL STORIES

ONE NOVELETTE

SEVEN SHORT STORIES

POETRY

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ALL-STORY CAVALIER WEEKLY

Vol. XXXIII JUNE 27, 1914 No. 3

The Lost Hearthstone

By Perley Poore Sheehan

Author of "The Copper Princess," "The Woman of the Pyramid," "Kidnapers of Dark Entry," etc.

CHAPTER I.

A Breath from Afar.

THERE drifted in through the window of the almost churchlike office where Birkland sat a faint odor of wood smoke. Burning hickory or oak smelled like that—clean, pungent, faintly reminiscent of boyhood camp-fires.

A gang of pavers were busy in the street outside, warming their irons on blazing logs. Their voices, cheerful and rough, might have been the voices of farm-hands "shocking" corn.

Now and then the breeze stirred through the bare branches of the trees in Trinity's graveyard—a mere little lost sister to the big and gentle breezes of distant hills.

If Birkland noticed these things he gave no sign of it. He was busy, and his reputation for hard, unremitting work had become one of the traditions of Wall Street. Before him now on his big, flat desk lay reams of typewritten paper—the annual report of the railroad he had built up, "his road."

Still young, as Wall Street figures age, but with the gray temples and deep lines of hard battles fought and won, he looked more like a scholar than a business man, more like a preacher than a financier. His clean-shaven face was lean and grim, but the blue eyes back of his gold spectacles were imaginative.

At times they could even be kind.

Hardly a sound reached him from the outer offices. Even the noises of Broadway, apart from the occasional clang and screech of a street-car, were no more than the babble of a brown brook and the voices of farm-hands at work in a near-by field.

Birkland sighed, turned over the page he had been studying, prepared for a fresh plunge into the figures that followed, when the door clicked softly open and a young man came in.

"Some one to see you, sir—a gentleman by the name of Woods."

Harkness, who was one of the best private secretaries on earth, and drew a salary commensurate, looked at his employer with just the shade of a smile on his alert and respectful face.

"Card?"

"He had no card, sir; said that he was an old friend of yours—that you'd know who he was."

Birkland's eyes came back to the annual report, his mind still occupied with so many millions for new equipment, so many millions for gross earnings, the fractional per cent increase in the cost of operation.

"Woods—Woods," he mused, trying to remember.

He knew that Harkness was quite incapable of making a mistake, of bringing him the name of any one he shouldn't see. Yet he couldn't recollect the name of any particular friend of his by the name of Woods.

Was he getting old? He had been going a pretty swift pace of late. That fight over the P. N. and L. had taken about every ounce of strength he had in him.

"Oh, Woods of the Pennsylvania Company—"

Harkness shook his head. That first, faint trace of a smile had grown a trifle more evident.

"Mr. Woods, of the Century Club—"

"He seems to be from the country," Harkness explained. "Fine old gentleman with white whiskers; carries a basket; called me"—Harkness's smile escaped control and he colored slightly, like a girl—"called me 'bub.'"

Birkland leaned back in his chair and also smiled.

He welcomed this moment of relaxation. To-day there was something in the air—with sudden weariness and melancholy he got up and walked over to the open window.

He caught a whiff of wood smoke, saw the bare branches of the trees shake mysteriously, heard the voices of the pavers. Beyond the old church the sky-scrapers loomed hazily aloft like blue hills.

It was all like something that he had known before—but not here and not recently.

"And he said something about Ohio," came the voice of his secretary, softly, respectfully.

"Ohio!"

There was such a place. Now he knew—hills, trees, that smell of burning hickory and oak. And there had been an old gentleman—he had always been old—who called young men "bub."

But it was the wood smoke that was stirring something in the back of Birkland's brain more than anything else—something that he couldn't quite define, yet which left him wistful, gave him an odd sense of homesickness.

"Shall I tell him—" Harkness began.

"Bring him in," Birkland ordered.

And if Harkness had begun to entertain a disquieting doubt as to his own professional prowess, that doubt was set at rest a minute later when he witnessed his employer's reception of the newcomer. Harkness had an eye and an ear for fine distinctions.

When Henry R. Birkland's eyes lighted up like that, and his voice took on that particular little thrill, all in the midst of the busiest part of the day, it meant that the visitor was some one far out of the ordinary run.

"Eliphalet—Eliphalet Woods!"

"Howdy, Henry?"

They stood there looking at each other and shaking hands for a full thirty seconds like friends who meet, after a long separation, at the county fair.

It was the older man who spoke first. Harkness's brief description had done him bare justice. Fine-looking he was indeed—tall, massive, eyes bright, skin as pink as a baby's where the white hair and white beard didn't hide it.

"Not sick, Henry?"

"Feeling as great as you look, major," Birkland answered.

"Sort of worried me—they didn't appear to be certain out there that you were able to see folks to-day."

Birkland laughed, and shoved the typewritten sheets to one side.

"It's time, major; it's time that they're thinking about. I haven't got time to call my soul my own, and they know it."

"Time! Geewhilikins, Henry! Out home you have the reputation for being rich—'most as rich as John D."

Birkland smiled; made a despairing little gesture with one of his lean and nervous hands.

"And I find you sitting in here like a king," Major Eliphalet Woods went on; "mahogany furniture, Brussels carpet. Say, and all those people out there working for you! Well, I guess if you're so—"

"Sit down, major; sit down. Just let me look at you for a while. Tell me about the old place. Gad! You don't know how sick I get at times of all this perpetual rush, this grind. You were at Chickamauga. Well, here it's Chickamauga every day."

The major studied Birkland for a while with his clear, bright eyes, a touch of whimsical humor showing through his beard.

"And what for? Now, Chickamauga was fought for—"

"I mean that men are being broken and killed and all that sort of thing," said Birkland, waving a hand to indicate the whole financial district. "But let's forget big business, major, and talk about pleasanter things. Tell me, are pumpkins ripe?"

"Why, that reminds me," said the major. "Do you remember the day I caught you and the Millikin boy up an apple-tree?"

"*Do* I?"

"Well, those apples were Northern Spies, and I sort of thought as how you'd like—"

The major had brought to his knees the basket he was carrying as he came in. It was a brown basket, not very large, with the wicker cover tied down firmly with bits of string.

As carefully as though he were solving some problem in chess or mathematics, the major began to cut these strings with the finely ground blade of a large jack-knife. Even before the cover eased open there began to emerge from the basket an odor as of frost-nipped orchards.

Birkland looked on like an expectant boy. Time, annual reports, the unending Chickamauga of the Street—had suddenly melted out of existence like the phantasmagoria of a troubled dream.

The smell of apples, the smell of wood smoke, the breeze in bare branches, the babble like that of a woodland brook, the presence of the major himself, had all evoked another world — the real world — a world he had all but forgotten.

"Say, major," he queried, scarcely daring to trust his voice, "is our old place still standing?"

CHAPTER II.

Graven in Stone.

"NOW, just set your teeth in one of these," said the major, as he swung the cover of the basket open and admiringly displayed the ordered contents. "Northern Spies—grafted them myself onto the wild stock. You can talk about your pippins and your Ben Davises or your greenings, but for me—"

He hadn't heard the question that Birkland had asked. He shoved the open basket forward.

"Try one."

Birkland smiled fondly, but shook his head.

"I'm afraid my teeth wouldn't stand it, major. They look rather solid—and cold. Smell fine—"

"Teeth—why, those won't hurt your teeth," the major protested. "Why, Emmy and me, we eat them

every night before we go to bed. For that matter, I could bite into a hunk of ice—did it, too, at the last church festival. And you, why, Henry—you're nothing but a boy. You're only—let's see, Hayes was elected, and your daddy—"

"You remember my father, major?"

"Remember him! Why, we both courted your ma—"

"And my mother!"

"We both courted your ma—that was before I was going with Emmy—and he won out, and then I sold them the place Uncle Joshua left me, and that was where him and Sarah passed their honeymoon, and where you children were all born—"

Harkness, the private secretary, softly opened the door, looked at his employer with eyebrows slightly lifted.

"The directors—" he began.

"Have it put off—I can't be there."

Harkness waited, slightly surprised, respectfully insistent. This meeting was important. He wanted to ask certain questions, started to do so, but was again cut off by his chief.

"Major, are you going to take dinner with me to-night?"

"No, Emmy and I are leaving to-night. Been living pretty high. You know—at the Thomas House up in Seventh Street; rich food—same's we had on our wedding trip forty-five years ago."

"Shall I tell them?" began the impeccable Harkness.

"That I'm sick—anything; meeting to-morrow, day after to-morrow.

"And, major"—as Harkness once more disappeared—"did you say the old place was still standing?"

"Laws, no!" the major remarked, as he leaned back in a more comfortable position, the basket of apples once more forgotten on the floor at his side. "Laws, no! You see, after your daddy and your ma died—God bless 'em, as fine a couple as ever lived—and you children scattered, why, the old place sort of began to run down.

"Purvy owned it for a spell—you know Deacon Purvy; but Purvy never did pay his debts, and the place went at a sheriff's sale, and some Swedes moved in. Lots of Swedes coming in out there now.

"But these Swedes were the wrong sort. And then it was a tribe of these river-bottom Jewells—I don't call 'em a family; I call 'em a tribe; and the place kept on sinking.

"The last I saw of it—you see, Emmy and I moved into town about ten years ago, and I don't get out there as often as I used to—why, it was looking pretty run down—roof sagging, fence almost gone, lot of blue and red wash hung out to dry."

"And it was such a beautiful place once," Birkland murmured almost to himself.

"Yes—it was smart enough when Jo and Sarah had it," the old major went on. "Jo never made out of it what he ought to, but Sarah was a wonderful woman, Henry. You owe a lot to her. One of the prettiest girls in the valley once, and a great manager. I reckon, you recollect now how she used to keep the old place so trim."

"I recollect—the big fireplace, my mother and us children all around it. There's where we got our Saturday-night bath—Lordy! I can smell the Castile soap, can feel the clean flannels scratch."

"That's right. There was a fireplace."

"With a big, flat stone in front of it—where we kids used to play and fight. It was so smooth and warm, and we all carved our names on it—all, and I'm the only one left, major."

The major, his head tilted forward, was likewise living in the past.

"I remember; I remember," he said judiciously. "There was you and Lemuel and Bessie and— Why, I recollect one night especially, when I came over there with a jug of cider. What you just said brings it all back.

"And Lem caught you carving

something or other in a corner of the stone and was teasing you and you started a fight. And you cried, and your mammy gave you first drink at the cider. I can see her now—so pretty and gentle and—and—"

"Carving something on the corner of the stone," Birkland repeated softly. "And Lem made fun of me. Why, that was—that was—major, what ever became of Mary Harmon?"

There was an expression in Birkland's face as he asked the question that perhaps not even Harkness had ever seen.

"Harmon—the Harmons did have a little girl, didn't they? Why, the Harmons moved out to Iowa—died out there."

"And Mary?"

"Mary—Mary—'pears to me she turned school-teacher, or something like that. But she wasn't much more'n a baby."

The major didn't notice the railroad magnate's touch of color, his slight smile; or, if he did, attributed some other cause for it, no doubt. But it suggested a related line of thought.

"And you never married, Henry?"

"I've been too busy, major—have never had time for anything but work. That seems to have been about the only kind of romance I've had time for. Business! Business! Business! Keep putting everything off. Keep thinking that next year I'll take a bit of a vacation—a little rest."

"You get that from your mother," said the major, with his face sunk deeper than ever in his beard. "But there's another sort of romance, Henry—the only kind—the kind that sort of mellows your heart as the years come on."

"But I'm too old," said Birkland.

The major laughed in his beard, silently.

"Lord, Lord, look at me—and I was thinking just now—"

As his voice trailed off into nothing, there mounted up to them along with the hum and drone of the street the jangling strains of a mechanical piano, softened by distance and the infusion of other sound.

Either they had missed the opening bars altogether or the tune had been begun abruptly along toward the middle of it where it had been left off at the last passing of the tambourine.

They looked at each other almost guiltily—as though the thing had surprised their secret thoughts.

"Silver threads among the gold—"

While it lasted neither spoke. Then the major got slowly to his feet.

"No, Henry," he said, "you're not too old; but no man's got time to waste—even as young as you are. And as for that next year of yours—your mother kept looking forward to next year—next year for a little rest, next year for a visit to her kin—"

The major, unsmilingly, got to his feet, and as he grasped Birkland's hand in his there was a look of settled solemnity on his face—the expression of an old man in whose heart some deep and holy sentiment has been stirred.

"Well, Henry, I guess I'll be toddling along."

"Major, you don't know how I appreciate your visit, your bringing me the apples, your—your—"

"Oh, that's all right—bub."

The major's bright eyes had become a little misty.

Was he seeing the man of finance, or merely Sarah Birkland's little boy? He was still gripping Birkland's hand, seeking expression of something he still had it in his mind to say.

"And, Henry, Chickamauga even wasn't all there was to life. At last—those of them who were left—the boys went home again. Some of them were crippled. Some of them weren't quite so handsome as when they went away.

"But the old valley took them into her bosom again. North and South, the boys went home—to some good woman and Mother Earth—to some old hearthstone, 'smooth and warm,'

as you say, and carved with initials of the folks we loved.

"You've got it mighty fine here, Henry—mahogany furniture, Brussels carpet, pert young fellers, and pretty girls working to pile up more money for you. But, I don't know; it's kind of close.

"Carpet's soft, but so is the moss and the grass, Henry. A kitchin table's better than mahogany when your appetite's good. And laws, I'd rather hear Emmy rattling the china than a hundred girls rattling typewriters. And time—time and air—we've got them straight from the Almighty—sweet and plentiful. Come to see us."

For several minutes after the major had taken his leave Birkland sat at his desk staring vacantly at the papers of the annual report. His thoughts were elsewhere.

There stood the basket of apples on the floor, filling the room with their haunting fragrance. At times the breeze that stirred through the open window brought again that other fragrance—the faint tang of woodsmoke.

Both odors brought back, as the words of the old major had done, an overwhelming memory of the old home—all the more overwhelming because so long forgotten.

He saw again the old fireplace with its family group—apples that smelled like these, an occasional puff of smoke escaping into the room as the wind soughed through the bare branches of the trees outside.

Then, that name he had carved—had started to carve before Lem discovered him. He had gotten as far as the M and the first slant of the A. Where was she now? A schoolteacher, and he—

The Italian *padrone,* or whoever it was who selected the repertoire of the mechanical piano, had evidently discovered that sentiment pays.

With a curious enjoyment of his unwonted melancholy, Kirkland heard the opening bars of "Home, Sweet Home."

Harkness came in again—just back from escorting the major to the door, as became a person of the major's importance. It wasn't every one who could hold up the chief like that on a working day.

Said Harkness, with a shade of apology in his manner: "Mr. Howland is out there, sir."

Birkland came out of his reverie with a start.

"Howland—oh, send him in."

And that surprised Mr. Harkness, too, for there had been some pretty disquieting rumors afloat concerning Mr. Howland here of late.

CHAPTER III.

Fallen in Battle.

DURING that conversation of his with Major Eliphalet Woods there had come to life in the brain of Henry R. Birkland a strange, wild plan—half dream, half hope.

What was it? Not even he himself scarcely dared formulate it as yet. He was a man of quick and far-reaching decisions. But this thing was too vast, too nebulous.

Still, that such a decision was pending appeared, somehow, in the almost tremulous cordiality with which he greeted the man whom Harkness had just announced.

"Bruce, old man!"

Birkland's blue eyes were shining and sympathetic behind his gold-rimmed spectacles. His first glance had told him that the rumors were true. So did Howland's first words.

"Old man's what it is, Birk."

His answer, in spite of its implied lightness, carried an undertone of pain that couldn't be concealed.

Bruce Howland had long been considered as one of the handsomest men in lower Manhattan—slight, dark, always exquisitely groomed. Nor was there any falling off in this respect.

Birkland noticed again, with a sort of fond and hopeless envy, the perfect fit of his friend's dark-gray coat, the perfect grace of his heavy black tie—hair, eyebrows, mustache, all black and perfect, too; everything about him perfect from fleckless shoes to manicured fingertips.

But he was a man and a fighter—cool, deliberate eyes, straight nose, a strong chin.

In no one respect had Birkland discovered the telltale change. The effect conveyed by that first glance of his had been a general one—a general letting down. Howland had aged since yesterday.

"Old man Howland," said the visitor, repeating his bitter jest at his own expense. "Birk, I'm down and out."

"You're merely a little discouraged."

"Down and out, I tell you. The historic house of Howland & Co. is tottering to its fall. To-morrow—day after to-morrow at the longest—and we call in the receivers.

"A week ago Belknap withdrew his account. Curlieu followed. We were tied hand and foot in Mexico—loaded up with securities we can't at present convert.

"So they hamstrung us, Birk, and the wolves are howling. I've thrown them everything I have. It was merely enough to whet their appetites."

Howland's voice hadn't risen. It was as though he related some minor happening at the club.

"But, good God, Bruce, isn't there anything—let me help! I'm good for—good for—"

Howland checked his friend with a motion of one of his slender, well-kept hands.

"Nothing doing, Birk."

"But if you've stripped yourself—what are you going to do? You can't—can't go looking for a job."

"I've stripped myself, Birk—given everything I have—God knows—except a few clothes and things. At that, the liabilities are going to run a quarter of a million or so above the assets at present prices.

"Thank the Lord, we never made a specialty of small accounts. The failure won't entail any visible suffering, and after a year or so every one will be paid off—if Mexico begins to behave itself. As for myself—"

He completed the phrase with another slight wave of the hand—a matter of slight consequence. His nerve was perfect.

Birkland, suddenly immersed in thought, looked at his friend steadily. An echo of his conversation with that other friend wafted its ghostly way through his brain—Chickamauga—Chickamauga—the fallen in battle.

"As for your offer of help, H. R.—God bless you for it. I thank you for it. I shall never forget it. But it was not for that I came to see you. I merely wanted to get away from the howling wolves for a while. There are wolves in Wall Street. I wanted to get away from them, and—and—"

"Go on."

"To give you my fatherly advice. It sounds foolish of me—I on the brink to advise you on the summit—but sooner or later, old man, they'll be snapping at your heels. You can't keep on forever.

"A fortnight ago I believed myself at the zenith of my fighting strength. To-day they have me. You're at the zenith of your fighting strength, Birk—but a fortnight from now!"

Then the thing that Birkland had been mulling over in his mind began to force itself into speech—a little labored at first, for the thing was so improbable and wild.

"Bruce, you know my place in the Street. I've never been a gambler, within the real meaning of the term. I've taken some pretty tall chances, but these have never been in the way of trying to get something for nothing."

"Right."

"I won't go into the history of my connection with the Susquehanna Road—you know all about that. I've been

an administrator. I've forced out all the thieves from the financial end of the road. A grand road, with some grand men in the operative end of it.

"It makes money—a lot of it—thanks to geography and population. I've kept dividends where they should be, Bruce—have merely turned back earnings into upkeep and fair wages. You know all that. It was nothing much."

"A man's job, and you've made a man's enemies," said Howland softly.

"There were some pretty tough pulls," Birkland went on. "There's no denying that there'll be some pretty tough pulls ahead. That C. N. and L. crowd will come back. They've got to get what-for again, and maybe again after that, and then some. It's been a man's job, as you say, but it continues just as much a man's job now as it ever was. It requires a—"

"Henry R. Birkland."

"No. I've just been thinking, Bruce. I've watched you ever since I came to New York. You see, I've always been more or less of an outsider, with an outsider's opportunity of sizing up those who were in the ring. If the house of Howland & Co. is in trouble I know that the cause of it goes back before your day. I know that you've been honest—given it the finest management in the world—been the man and the gentleman."

Howland started to say something. His former lightness had disappeared. But Birkland checked him.

"There's no use making any bones about it, Bruce. I'm stating facts. It's also a fact that I direct the directors of the Susquehanna—for the good of the road. That's why I do it. But I'm stopping—I'm getting out— Hold on! Not because I'm frightened by those howling wolves of yours—"

"Birk, is it possible? Can I help?"

"Help! Yes, Bruce!" Birkland's voice was vibrant with increasing excitement. "Listen! I'm chucking it. I'm going home."

"Home! Why, this is—"

"Home, I tell you! Great God, man—don't you know what that means? There's a place of 'rocks and rills—woods—templed hills!' Birkland goes—retires on account of his health—anything. And to-morrow the historic house of Howland & Co. comes out as the financial agents of the Susquehanna—Bruce Howland elected to the vacated presidency!"

Bruce Howland was sitting perfectly still, upright, some of the color gone out of his dark face. His lips parted, but no word came for a second or two.

"Birk, what is it that—"

"Nothing, except that I've just had my eyes opened. I'm not mad; I'm not a fool. Inspiration, Bruce! I've always believed it in—in poetry, war, finance, life!

"I've heard the voice of the prophet. I retire. You become the president of the Susquehanna. Do you get that? I retire. You become the president of the Susquehanna."

CHAPTER IV.

Pages from the Past.

IN the absolute silence that fell between the two of them there swept in through the open window a soft and swift inrush of other impressions—the rumble of an elevated train, the clang of a street-car, the tremendous hum of voices and hurrying feet, the all but inaudible strains of a street-piano very far away strumming a sentimental song.

Harkness opened the door and glanced in deferentially. As he did so there entered from the outer offices the confused sounds of many people preparing to go home for the day.

"Harkness," said Birkland sharply—"quick! There is to be a meeting of the directors to-night at the Waldorf—eight-thirty. You be there. Imperative business."

Howland, as if by a mighty effort,

moved one of his feet an inch or so. It came into contact with the basket which Major Woods had left there on the floor.

There was a glistening moisture in his eye as he looked down.

"Apples!"

"Apples!" said Birkland. "I've heard their call—apples from home. Bruce, we'll settle everything to-night. To-morrow—"

He stopped and watched with sudden gusto his friend bite into the apple he had picked up—one way to cover emotion.

"My, my!" exclaimed the elegant Howland. "And to think that I had forgotten there were apples like these. Here I've been picking now and then at the kind you pay a quarter for and wondering what had happened to the apple-world since I was a boy—

"Why, Birk, old man, these apples are as big an improvement on the kind I've been trying to get used to as my feelings just now are an improvement on the kind I was trying to get used to when I—"

"Old-fashioned apples — old-fashioned ideas! You can't improve on them, Bruce. You can't improve on anything by merely raising the price, Broadway to the contrary, notwithstanding."

He himself had picked up an apple, was looking at it longingly.

Then he plucked up courage and bit into it. The tender skin parted as yieldingly as the skin on a cherry; the firm yet delicately celled "meat" within almost literally melted in his mouth, tickling palate and olfactories with a stimulating perfume.

"Oh! Oh! Oh!"

Wall Street had sounded "taps" for the day. The light began to fail. The trees in Trinity's graveyard shook mysteriously with some secret understanding.

"And what is this place you expect to return to, Birk?" asked Howland. The apples had mellowed him—like old wine.

"Milldale — a wonderful place," Birkland answered. "The whole Miami Valley is wonderful, Bruce. Rich bottoms where the corn grows higher—oh, as high as trees, almost; wooded hills—not mountains, hills!—just wild enough for squirrels and foxes and 'coons, for quail and rabbits; where there are two or three churches in every village and a schoolhouse on every pike; where the farmers have pianos and send their children to college—"

"Any fishing?"

"Fishing! Fishing, Bruce! Great guns, when I think of the fish we used to catch! It makes me laugh, now, every time I go past one of those sporting stores and see a lot of contraptions supposed to be necessary to a fisherman.

"Why, right back of Milldale, Bruce, was a branch of the Miami—Lord, there's a river for you!—a river right back of Milldale, with a covered bridge over it as long and dark as any tunnel on the Susquehanna; and when we weren't swimming we were fishing.

"I've gone there myself a thousand times with no bait, no pole, nothing but a string and a fish-hook. Lift up a flat rock and get a worm; cut off a willow sapling for a pole, a piece of dry wood for a float, and *bingo!* You should see us pull them out — game; darn near jerk the pole out of our hands."

"Trout, I suppose."

"Naw; there weren't any trout—catfish, sunfish, perch! And maybe they weren't good when they were fried! Mother always put a little corn-meal or something on them to make them good and brown. Talk about your *filet de sole!*

"The first thing I do when I get back is to order a plateful; have one of the kids go and catch me a mess fresh, or do it myself. That can't have changed, and I know every hole—"

"But Milldale—won't you find that changed?"

"*Milldale changed!* Milldale's an institution, Bruce — rich, old families in big, old houses, surrounded by great yards — they'd call them parks, here in the East. It's true that our old place has run down, or so Major Woods was telling me this afternoon; but I'm going to put it in repair again.

"A beautiful place — big, roomy, old-fashioned—the kind of fireplace you read about. It was only a story and a half high, but the ceilings were lofty—so lofty that you couldn't see them scarcely when the lamp was lit or we were sitting in front of the open fire.

"We were just talking about it this afternoon—a vast hearthstone, such as you wouldn't find to-day outside of a château or a museum or a library; and it was on this that we children used to play. There was room for all of us, and we carved our names on it, and I went further and started to carve the name of—"

"So there was a girl?"

"There was a girl, Bruce; a girl who was sweet and beautiful and lovely, even as girls of the Miami Valley go—blue eyes, modest, as graceful as a lily of the valley. I used to wait for her after church on Sunday nights, and we used to walk home together when the dew was on the ground and the mint along the road was smelling strong. Do you know, even to this day, I can't pass a church or smell mint without, somehow, saying 'Hello, there, Mary' — sort of seeing her again as she used to come out to where I was waiting in the dark."

"I always knew you were a sentimentalist, Birk."

"Yes, a blamed old sentimentalist; and yet, dog-gone it, Bruce, here I've been plugging along—plugging along for twenty years. No family. No wife. No children. No home. No memories, hardly.

"That's what *New York* will do to a man if it gets the chance. New York is full of men like me. Business men! God save the mark! Dollars for a family. An investment for a wife. Schemes instead of children. A hotel instead of a home. A ticker set up in 'memories' halls'!

"And, for all that, they're human. They pine for the old things. They know that the life they lead isn't sweet and natural — that it isn't life at all. For each and every mother's son of them there is a Milldale somewhere—a Butler County — a branch with its covered bridge, where they used to fish and swim—a Miami Valley—a girl named Mary."

They sat there for a while in silence, looking at each other through the twilight.

They were old friends. They had always liked each other and respected each other. But it was as though the approaching night had already cast its alchemy upon them so that each saw the other in a truer, intenser light than the light of day.

Birkland had always known that his friend was proud, brave, chivalrous, and true, under his veneer of exquisite manners and fastidious dress; but he saw now that he had also suffered; that he understood the deeper and more tragic verities of life.

Howland had always known that this man in front of him was as sound and trustworthy as old oak; but, in spite of what he had just said, he had never known before that Birkland was alive to the finer, subtler things.

"What are you going to do, Birk?" Howland asked softly—"look her up?"

"First, my old home," said Birkland, with a foolish little catch in his voice; "and then—and then—"

CHAPTER V.

'Awkins, Farewell!

"BUT you can't do it, man," said the senior member of the firm of Walters & Higginson, attorneys at law. He was middle-aged, thin, and

hard, was Mr. Walters, and not afraid of any one—least of all his old friend and client, Henry R. Birkland."

"I've been hearing that all evening," said Birkland; "and I tell you what I've told every one else—I can and I will. The matter of the road is settled. I'm clearing out, I tell you. And I won't have a string tied to me—not one!"

"Then give me a week."

"No—to-night!"

Mr. Walters looked at the ceiling of the big, richly furnished drawing-room where they sat, into the shadows to the right and left; then, with the air of one who has discovered no visible help, gazed once more at his friend, sadly, protestingly.

"You're a hard nut, Birkland."

"To-night," said Birkland with sudden gaiety. "We'll proceed now to cut the last strings. I'm going home, Walters. There's a train out at twelve twenty. Delay? You should have seen me beat the directors into shape. Do you suppose I'd have had you here at this time of night if I hadn't known, if I hadn't decided?"

As a matter of fact, both Birkland and the lawyer knew that the thing Birkland demanded was by no means impossible. Birkland had always been prepared for death.

And wasn't this death, in a way?—the passing from one life into another.

As he and the lawyer finally attacked the problems which remained to be solved, the contents of a safety-deposit box in front of them on the brass-bound, massive table, Birkland felt himself gradually invaded by an immense tenderness—a pity for those who could not share in his good fortune.

He was far from being "as rich as John D."—as the old major had put it—but he had no reason to complain.

He was still an important stockholder in the Susquehanna, and this, at the present rate of dividend, which was likely to continue—it was so low and sound—would bring him an annual income of ten or twelve thousand dollars.

Twenty thousand dollars in cash he had put into a draft and sent on to the Hambleton National Bank—Hambleton being "the city," so far as Milldale was concerned.

Then, in order to have his conscience clear, and to give expression to that growing tenderness in his heart for all things and all men, he gave the rest of his private holdings—various bonds, blocks of stock, and some real estate—to the Home for Orphans.

Unbeknown to his friends, he had been a benefactor of the institution for years.

"Poor little devils," he meditated, as he arranged the final details of this last benefaction; "think of the way they're brought up and the way I was brought up! Bet they wouldn't know the difference between a tadpole and a minnow!"

Free! No strings tied to him. And only forty-five!

Then he thought of Hawkins.

"Dear old 'Awkins," he mused with the touch of humor which invariably was aroused whenever he thought of that functionary.

It amused him that he had a servant at all; and for ten years Hawkins had served him so well; so well, indeed, that it had kept him from dismissing Hawkins a dozen times when the mood was on him to get along without a servant and to shift for himself, as an able-bodied man should.

Birkland had his bachelor quarters in a certain famous and exclusive hotel on Fifth Avenue.

His love of quiet and order, not of snobbery, had brought him there in the first place, and had kept him there ever since; and it was there that he had acquired 'Awkins. He had taken pity on the faithful creature when the nobleman, sir, to whom 'Awkins had theretofore been attached, was ejected from the hotel for debt—and other reasons, equally cogent.

Walters had given Birkland a sad good night, relieved only by his evident belief that Birkland would regret of his folly within a week or so, at the most, and would return again. Walters wasn't precisely of the emotional, inspirational sort.

But he had done the things which he had been set to do.

Then Birkland turned his attention to Hawkins. He could see that the old servant was stricken.

"Hawkins," said Birkland at last, while he fumbled at his tie and watched the old man covertly in the looking-glass, "didn't you tell me once that you had a home some place or other?"

"I may 'ave, sir," said Hawkins, with a touch of apology in his tone; "my family lives near Monmouth, sir, on the Wye."

"Family! I didn't know you were married!"

Hawkins was silently convulsed, to show that he knew his master intended the remark as a joke.

"Begging your pardon, sir; I meant my parents and my sister."

"Your parents must be getting old."

"They're getting on, sir; and my sister's a cripple like."

"Do—do you write to them?"

"Oh—yes, sir; I write quite regularly, sir."

"And send them money? They must be too old to work."

Hawkins was silent for a moment or two before he answered:

"They're getting on, sir; I—I send them sufficient for their needs, sir. Monmouth isn't expensive."

"Good place to live in?"

"Oh, a sweet place — sweet and clean! Our best families, sir, prefer it to the south of France, the climate is that mild. There are a number of noble places thereabouts; and every year there are visitors from London and Birmingham."

"How'd you like to go back there to live?"

"Go—back—to Monmouth, sir?"

"Sure; haven't you saved up enough?"

"I'm afraid—"

"Do you mean to say you haven't been laying something by?"

"There were doctors, sir; for my sister—but now—"

"They've cured her?"

"Decided it was no use. She's comfortable like, but—"

"And this house they live in?"

"A sweet place, sir; with a bit of a garden, roses over the door. My father was a gardener for Lord Evesham before he was incapacitated by age."

"Well"—Birkland was making his voice a little gruffer than was strictly necessary — "I'm not sure that I can find you another place, Hawkins; and I'm going to some place where I can't take you with me."

Birkland saw that the old man had turned and was busying himself over some imaginary task. The stooped shoulders were so eloquent of misery and long-suffering patience that he dropped the affected gruffness, suddenly turned.

"Hawkins," he said softly, "you're not working for me any longer. You and I are simply men."

Hawkins started to speak. Birkland interrupted him.

"Now, don't go on 'sirring' me. Call me Mr. Birkland if you must. Only brace up and listen a moment. I haven't any family. I'm not lucky like you. But I'm going home, and that's what I want you to do. I want you to buy that place where your old folks live. What will it cost?"

"All of two hundred pounds, sir."

Hawkins began to sniffle a little. He couldn't help it. Unbeknown to his employer, Hawkins had been under a good deal of a strain — this prospect of being thrown out of work and no other position in sight for one of his age.

"Well, I want you to buy that place, and I'm going to give you another two hundred pounds a year to live on. It's all arranged. Don't let your scruples

interfere. You've earned it, and I'll have plenty left for myself."

"Oh—but, sir, if something should go wrong; if—"

"Hawkins, old man, you don't know me. When I set out to do a thing I do it—even if I do say it myself. It was that way when I first came to New York. It's that way now that I'm going away. You and I have conquered a good many things in our day, haven't we? Well, that's what we're going to do now—conquer happiness."

Hawkins had braced up a trifle.

"You've been a good friend to me, Hawkins," Birkland went on. "I never did need you. I never wanted a servant any more than you really wanted some one to boss you around. But now we're free, you and I. You're to call on Mr. Walters to-morrow; not as my valet, mind you, but as a—what did you tell me once a gentleman was?"

"One who 'as sufficient means," Hawkins confessed brokenly.

"You're to go to Mr. Walters as a gentleman and sign the necessary papers. Then—me to my home, Hawkins; you to yours. Do you get me? Shake hands. Good luck! Good night!"

Hawkins, five minutes later in his little room at the top of the house, had dropped to his knees.

"O Lord—O Lord," he prayed, "may 'is sweet dreams come true as mine 'as!"

But, in spite of his petition, there still remained in the old servant's heart a ghost of uneasiness, a cold-fingered premonition of trouble ahead, and which he had sought to express a little while before.

He recalled his master as he had seen him last—Birkland, standing in the center of a large room, while, cast there by the shaded lamp, there hovered behind and over him a huge, nebulous black shadow. Was it, Hawkins wondered, a sign?

And, oddly enough, through Birkland's brain at that moment there crept a whisper like the voice of Fate repeating the words his lawyer had pronounced: "You can't do it! You can't do it!"

To conquer happiness, to revivify the old hearthstone, to go home!

Birkland squared his shoulders and spoke aloud:

"I *will!*"

CHAPTER VI.

To Help a Friend.

HALF past eleven, the room deserted save for himself and the silent, shaking, distorted shadow back of and over him; then the telephone-bell rang, and Birkland, wondering who would call him up at this time of night, yet welcoming the diversion, he scarcely knew why, went over to the alcove, where the instrument was once again vibrating its muffled appeal.

He was inclined to believe that there had been a mistake at first, for the voice was that of a woman, and a woman, moreover, who was excited. He caught the words "police," "night court," "bail." Ordinarily he would have hung up the receiver at that.

Then, unmistakably, came his name.

He answered softly, calmed the speaker at the other end of the line as well as he could, told her to get back from the transmitter, and not to speak so loud. The mild mood of earlier in the day hadn't left him.

He was no longer the business man at all, snapping out answers and questions. He was Henry R. Birkland, not of New York even, but of Milldale; and he was going home in the morning on the twelve-twenty.

He caught another name—Millspaugh. It was familiar, but there was certainly no woman—

"Oh, Mrs. Millspaugh—Mrs. Horace Millspaugh—"

"I was so afraid I'd— Oh, I'm so glad—"

Birkland was busy remembering Millspaugh.

"That's very kind of you. What can I—"

"It isn't very kind," came the decisive answer, "and I'm sorry I have to do it. Horace has been arrested—wants you to come down to the night court."

"Nothing serious—"

"No, I suppose not—for you men—but—"

"Where are you now, Mrs. Millspaugh?"

Birkland penciled down the address and, with a final word of consolation and promise, slipped the receiver back to its hook. A moment later he was putting on his overcoat.

As he did so he cast a quick glance of satisfaction about the place. Everything was in readiness—trunk and bag packed, money and ticket in his pocket. For even while he was meeting the directors that evening he had had an eye to these lesser but equally essential details.

He had plenty of time.

Again he was invaded by that feeling of charity toward all. Millspaugh had never been a particular friend of his—they had never had anything in common—although he liked him well enough.

"A fight in a restaurant," Mrs. Millspaugh explained succinctly when Birkland found her a little later in the lobby of the other hotel where she had been awaiting him.

She and Horace had come to town for some shopping, and he, as a matter of reaction against the rural quietude of Connecticut, had found his nervous energy too much for the slow and otherwise independent service of a Broadway chop-house.

"I had half an idea to leave him in jail all night," said Mrs. Millspaugh amiably. "All men are such fools!"

She was a large woman with a firm jaw, and the grim smile she accorded Birkland gave him to understand that he wasn't wholly exempt from the accusation himself.

A large woman—it was surprising the amount of room she took up in a taxicab, as Birkland discovered a little later as he followed her into the vehicle he had ordered and commanded the chauffeur to make all haste. The adventure hadn't bored him greatly as yet.

The day, the night, and the morrow were all too stupendous. Even Mrs. Millspaugh's continued reflections on the folly of men failed to jar him.

And it was still this theme which was uppermost in her mind, Birkland replying with consolatory monosyllables, as the chauffeur swung into Seventh Avenue and started north.

What followed was brilliantly enough presented to the perception of both of them, no doubt; but just how it happened was to remain forever afterward in the limbo of unexplained.

Mrs. Millspaugh let out the first half of a shriek.

Suddenly there was a mingled cacophony of gongs and sirens. It was as though they had run into a convention of all the noises of New York. Then they were caught up in this clamorous hurricane and hurled into space.

Just that huge explosion of sound, compared with which the succeeding shocks were as nothing, and Birkland found himself seated in the street with Mrs. Millspaugh in his arms.

He noticed briefly that the wrecked taxicab was askew a little farther on; then, it seemed, all the firemen in New York were piling off of an endless ladder-truck that had come to a stop half a block farther up the street.

So much, then Birkland was looking up into the face of a policeman, who, from where he sat, looked like Goliath.

"Are you or your wife hurted?" asked Goliath, not unkindly.

"This isn't my wife," Birkland answered impulsively.

"Another joy-ride," said the policeman, with a change of tone as he turned to a fire chief who came running up.

"Pinch 'em," said the chief, "before they beat it like the chauffeur done."

"It's the wife of a friend," Birkland completed his information, aware that his previous remark was open to misinterpretation.

The fireman laughed.

Mrs. Millspaugh, with sudden energy, grabbed the policeman's coat and clawed her way to her feet. He watched the operation without assisting her, yet with perfect good-nature.

"Where was you two going to?" the policeman queried, addressing the lady.

Mrs. Millspaugh evidently didn't like his tone and sought to freeze him.

"My husband was arrested—" she began icily; but the fireman broke in.

"Well, for the love of— Good-by, officer; I got to beat it. Company Twenty-Seven — I'm Chief Scanlon." And he was gone.

The policeman was looking at Mrs. Millspaugh with undisguised disapprobation.

"Your poor boob of a husband doing time, and you running around like this!"

Out of the deserted streets, from nowhere and everywhere, a crowd had begun to assemble. Another policeman appeared. The Goliath bethought himself of his duties.

"Well, come along," he said; "I've got to take youse over to the house."

A gentleman with a bad complexion and a fur-lined coat had in the mean time rather clumsily but with the best of good-will, aided Birkland to clamber to his feet.

"Officer," he began, "this lady and I have been the victims of an accident. Surely—"

The policeman looked at him without a smile.

"Tell that to the lieutenant. What you trying to do now, draw a crowd?"

"But, officer—"

"Come along!"

"All men are fools," said Mrs. Millspaugh, confronting him grimly.

Even while he was protesting, Birkland caught the drift of comment from the crowd.

"A couple of joy-riders," said a cynical youth who was aggressively chewing his gum. Then he paused long enough to laugh. He had evidently intended a veiled allusion to the age of the culprits.

"The gentleman says the lady isn't his wife," said a very old man in a meek effort to confirm what he had thus far heard.

The kind but unprepossessing stranger in the fur-lined coat brushed past the old man and on through the crowd without answer. Birkland saw him disappear into the night.

"All men are fools," said Mrs. Millspaugh, as she prepared to sail along with her new consort in blue.

Birkland looked at his watch. It was eleven forty-five.

CHAPTER VII.

Catching the Twelve-Thirty.

IT had happened several times before in Birkland's life that he had felt as he felt now the premonition of approaching conflict. There had been a suspicion of it a little while before. Fate generally gives some hint of its intentions.

Was he going to miss that train?

The mere thought of such a possibility set his heart to thumping, brought the blood to his throat, tightened the muscles of his jaw.

Still he was undaunted, even as he walked up the steps of the station-house. There were two things that he would have to do—he would do them quickly and get back to the hotel, then off to the station and the waiting train which was to carry him to freedom.

First of all, an explanation to the lieutenant; next, a hurry-call to Walters.

He was going to desert Mrs. Millspaugh and her husband without further delay. It might appear brutal. It probably was.

So much the worse for them. This was war—not the first time that he had taken part in it—and all was fair.

Once more that ghostly whisper reechoed through the halls of his brain: "You can't do it!"

The grim smile that was his answer to the defiance was still on his lips as he confronted the man behind the desk.

It surprised him, though, the amount of interest the affair seemed to cause among a number of young men who were at the station-house—reporters, he learned, drawn there by a murder that had been committed in the neighborhood. But, for a while, it looked as though the murder were forgotten.

In a vicarious sort of way, Birkland had known newspapermen all his life—had dictated statements for them, and, on one or two occasions, had submitted to be interviewed. He had never tried to deceive them, nor did he now.

He told them what he told the lieutenant, which was exactly all that he knew, except the lady's name.

That statement of hers that all men were fools had galled him a little, in spite of his deep-seated charity, and he was determined to show her that he wasn't in the class—not all the time, at any rate.

The lieutenant in charge of the station-house desk was a reasonable old man. All he insisted upon was that Birkland should call some one who could identify him.

"Why, certainly," said Birkland.

Walters, his lawyer, was his first guess, but Walters was neither at home nor at his club, according to all reports. "And I wonder what he is doing to-night," said Birkland to himself.

He finally got Higginson, the junior member of the firm.

"Oh, tell him to fly first and get poor Horace out of his difficulties," sighed Mrs. Millspaugh. "We can wait."

The poor lady, for all her strength of mind, was by way of becoming slightly hysterical.

Birkland pulled out his watch.

"Good Lord," he murmured. "It's past midnight."

He cast a quick, furtive glance about him. In spite of the interest of which he himself had just been the center, every one seemed momentarily occupied with other things—the old lieutenant, busy with his blotter; Goliath, scratching the head of the station-house dog; the assembled reporters politely urging Mrs. Millspaugh to be interviewed.

He hated to do it, but Higginson would soon be there. He was standing near the door. He put out his hand and almost as by magnetic attraction it swung open. A moment later he was outside in the cold night air, with the door shut behind him.

He took the steps to the street in a jump, seeing at the same time a black touring-car moving off at moderate speed, not more than twenty yards away.

He was after it like a flash, leaped to the running-board with the skill of inspiration.

If you want to make fifty dollars quick," he panted to the man, who turned to look at him, "get ahead as fast as you can!"

Without a word the other responded with a quick movement of his body, and as the machine lurched forward Birkland had to hold fast to keep from falling.

A moment later he was in the body of the car, with his old fighting courage back and a feeling of fresh exultation in his heart.

"Where to, bo?" the chauffeur queried, with a fine air of nonchalance.

Birkland gave the address of his hotel. Time! There was nothing but time from now on, in a car like this and fifteen minutes still ahead of him.

Even while the thought came to him, on the crest of a surge of gratitude, the car had dropped two more blocks behind them.

Then there came an interruption. It was as though Fate had once more stretched its hand in another desperate attempt to keep him back. They had run against the fire-lines blocking the street into which they had turned—perhaps the fire which had proved so nearly fatal to his plans once before.

But the chauffeur was evidently a man of resource. Without waiting for an order from his impromptu passenger, he had backed his machine and turned and once more took up the whirling way to the hotel.

Twelve minutes to spare, as three husky porters rushed Birkland's baggage down-stairs and dumped it into the car.

No more than two minutes would be required to get to the station. As a matter of bravado Birkland was tempted to invite this new friend-in-need in to have a stirrup-cup at the hotel bar. But he desisted.

One of the things that he had learned in his life was never to mock at Fate, even when he had the upper hand, as he did now. Besides, there would be time when nothing stood between him and that waiting train.

As though his life depended upon it, the chauffeur had once more crunched his machine into speed.

It was with a feeling of elation so intense that he almost let out a cheer that Birkland saw the station clock—twelve-thirteen! Seven minutes to the good!

Never before had he allowed himself so much time. He felt almost ashamed of himself.

After all, this was a special occasion. It was not every day that a man sailed away from New York for the blessed isles of his youth.

He had got down from the car, was looking at the chauffeur, seeking in his own mind for some suitable phrase to preface the donation that he had promised. He was interrupted by a negro porter who had hurried up.

"Gimme yo' ticket en I'll git this trunk checked, sah."

Birkland put a leisurely hand into his breast-pocket. He left it there while there sprang into his mental vision the figure of a man in a fur-lined overcoat who had disappeared into the night.

It was he who had helped him to his feet.

The fellow was a thief. The wallet with his ticket—not only his ticket, but all his available cash—was gone, stolen!

For only a second he stood there, face unchanged, but his brain working fast.

Now he understood the meaning of all those recurrent qualms of doubt and uneasiness he had experienced throughout the night.

He withdrew his hand empty.

"George," he said to the negro in even tones, "keep your eyes on these things. I'll be back directly."

There was still time —a rush to the hotel, a check cashed, then back again.

"It's a case of hurry this time," he said, with a sardonic smile, looking once more into the small and wizened face of the man who drove the car. "I've been touched."

Was it twelve-nineteen or was it twelve-twenty?

Birkland couldn't tell when, his errand finished, he again flung himself from the car in front of the station. He had paid the chauffeur — twenty-five dollars extra for good measure—and as he ran into the station he saw that, at any rate, the gate labeled with the name of the express he wanted to take was not yet closed.

A quick look around—plenty of porters, but not the one he was looking for.

He turned again in the direction of the gate and started to run. His heart gave a little emotional trip. It wasn't like this that he would have wanted to go, but at least he was going.

"Here yo' ah, sah!"

It was the porter.

Birkland took two steps in advance without turning.

The porter touched his arm.

"You ain't gwine to—you cain't—"

Birkland closed his eyes. He did it because, all at once, he felt dizzy and ill. Even as he closed his eyes he had a vision of the sign over the gate on which was printed in big numerals the hour of twelve-twenty, and then, of a blue-uniformed official who swung that gate shut.

CHAPTER VIII.

Through Another Gate.

"I'VE missed my train," were the simple words, simply spoken, which fell from Birkland's lips as he turned and stared vacantly at the porter.

That dignitary said "Yas'h."

"I wonder when I can get another?" Birkland continued.

"Local follers dat express in twenty minutes."

Said Birkland: "I'll take the local. Get my baggage ready."

But his brain was at grips with larger problems. His heart was filled with an emotion that he couldn't have expressed at all, save possibly by a shriek or an oath—to either of which he had never been addicted.

He had fought his way into this maelstrom of human endeavor.

It hadn't accepted him readily. New York and the world at large had said to him, as it says to all intruders: "Go back to the place you came from before it is too late."

But he had refused, as others have refused, and always will refuse. And now—now that he wanted to go back—

The great station, with its crowds and hurry, its relentless and stupendous artificiality, was typical enough of this world into which he had fought his way.

He discovered that there had crept into his broodings a hint of panic. He was enmeshed, trapped. He had felt this panic in his heart as he had said that he would take the local.

It was as though he were afraid that the thing, whatever it was, would discover therein his plan to escape.

The thing was New York—the huge ogre of the fairy tales, the colossal cannibal who daily devoured his thousands and slaked his thirst with their blood. Men, women, and children poured into the insatiable maw.

How many escaped?

Birkland trembled slightly. He would be one of those who escaped. He knew of a place of refuge. Any train would do.

But as he let his eyes drift beyond the curiously staring porter Birkland couldn't repress a start. The thing had heard. The ogre had sent his emissary.

Standing at the principal entrance from the street was the Goliath of the station-house—huge, red-faced, infinitely more belligerent than he had previously appeared.

The policeman had picked up his trail, was evidently there to take him back. He was talking to a man in civilian clothes whom Birkland knew instinctively to be a detective.

Instead of adding to his panic, though, the arrival of the policeman had sobered Birkland as a dash of cold water might have done.

"Not this time," he gritted to himself. And then aloud to the porter: "Wait here till I get my ticket."

He didn't turn to look back. He didn't have to. With those eyes which so many people carry in the back of their heads he saw as clearly as though he had been looking with his normal eyes the policeman start after him in pursuit.

The station was a place of magnificent distances, but there were enough people there to furnish cover of a shifting, temporary sort.

Birkland bet on the chance that the policeman wouldn't run. The policeman wouldn't be desirous of starting a commotion. He wasn't after a criminal.

He was out more to protect his own

reputation than to uphold the law. There was no warrant in the case.

Birkland's reasoning was apparently sound, for by the time that he reached one of the side galleries and risked his first look back, he saw the policeman following at a pace only slightly quicker than his own.

But once in the gallery and around a corner, Birkland found himself on a gentle incline leading down. He started to run. Any one can run in a station without attracting undue attention—unless he does have an officer at his heels.

Into a lower level he came, then drew up, short of breath.

The passageway opened before him an empty, diminishing vista; then at its farther end appeared another figure—the man who was dressed in civilian clothes.

There was no question of turning back the way he had come. To go ahead was the only thing to do. The decision had been debated and reached in less time than it requires to take a step.

There had been no pause, yet even in that infinitesimal time Birkland improved on his decision with a touch of art. When his foot came down it was with a limp.

The man at the other end of the passageway had paused. Birkland hurried on, limping faster and faster. In a few seconds now the policeman would again be on his heels.

Half-way down the length of the place was another passage, leading off at right angles. To gain this, and then—

The watcher in civilian clothes suddenly started forward at a run. Either the policeman had appeared and given him a signal or he had seen through Birkland's ruse.

Birkland also started forward at a run. He was out of training for such sport, but he had a good start.

As he swung into the other passageway, a good ten yards ahead of the man who had attempted to head him off, he bumped into a tall, thin man in clerical garb.

They grabbed each other in a mutual attempt to keep from falling. Then, as the other appeared, Birkland thrust his clerical friend into the newcomer's arms.

He didn't wait to see the result.

He had seen a narrow door only a few feet away, and, with an unspoken petition that he find it unlocked, he threw himself against it. It yielded. A moment later he was in darkness, with the door shut behind him.

The darkness wasn't absolute. There was a glimmer of light ahead.

The place was evidently some sort of a storeroom. It was clearly not intended for a public thoroughfare, at any rate. He stumbled over a hand-truck or two, coils of rope, and sacks apparently filled with cement.

Then he made a quick leap to one side as the door through which he had just come was once more opened.

Birkland found himself at the side of a wooden locker, something like an old-fashioned clothes-press. He edged around the corner of this—unseen, he thanked Heaven—recognizing the policeman and his ally in civilian attire.

"I got to get back to the station," said the policeman, who was still short of breath. "He's put me in Dutch already. Just give him a poke for me—black his eye—knock out a couple of teeth."

"Trust me, Eddy," said the other. "Between you and I, he ain't the feller you think he is, anyway. He's some crook, or he'd never have pulled that game-leg business on me."

"If me and you can put something on him at 'Quarters, why, that won't make me mad, neither," said Goliath. "Don't give him a chanct to make a monkey of you. I'll back you up, even if you got to get him with your gun."

Said Birkland to himself: "I'm in the castle of the ogre, all right."

But his brain was clear. His foot had come into contact with a lump of hard cement. Cautiously, while he

listened to the last of the dreadful conversation, he stooped and picked this up.

He had intended it for defense at first, but he had a better inspiration. He cast it far ahead of him into the darkness. It fell with a rattling thud.

"There he goes now!" the policeman and his friend exclaimed. No sooner were the words out of their mouths than they again started forward in the direction of the sound.

A moment later Birkland, with a throbbing heart and stifled breath, was again in the outer passageway, headed back the way he had come.

CHAPTER IX.

Dawn of Another Day.

THE night had turned bitterly cold. In a way it symbolized the drop in Birkland's enthusiasm. He no longer looked on the world with universal charity; the world no longer looked with charity on him. Not this part of it, anyway.

This was New York—the Thing. He had snatched the mask from it, he saw now that it was doing to him what it had done to so many men—had lured him on to give all that he had of youth and strength and ambition, then sunk its talons into his very heart, at the moment he sought to escape.

Night—on a night like this, out in Miami Valley, even when it was cold humanity was warm.

The yellow light of lamps and family fire-places were there, instead of the cold, bright glare of arc-lamps and incandescents. People looked at each other with a smile of charity, not the cold stare of mutual hate and suspicion.

Birkland suddenly noticed that people were staring at him in a peculiar way, and he knew that his recent flight for freedom had left him dishevelled.

He was feeling unspeakably unkempt, unwashed and soiled. A little while ago he had been perspiring, a fact recalled to him by the extraordinarily frigid blast that rushed dustily down upon him from the east.

His whole body felt sticky and feverish and yet he shivered.

The thought came to him also that he was without change of linen. At this hour of the night the stores were closed. All that he possessed by way of raiment was in his traveling-bag and trunk, which he feared as yet to reclaim.

No tramp in New York felt poorer or more friendless.

At least the hotel across the street presented a certain degree of hospitality.

He crossed over and made his way into the wash-room. The place was practically deserted. He looked at himself in one of the mirrors, while he washed his hands.

Henry R. Birkland—and this was he!

Perhaps it was due to his sickened imagination, that he saw in front of him an old man—"an old man with specs." His hair seemed more pronouncedly gray than ever. The wrinkles and seams in his face appeared to be deeper.

A passing porter paused for a second or two to look at him. Birkland felt the glance upon him like an accusation. Even here, in this public place, he was an intruder—a fugitive from justice.

New York still held him—still had its remorseless talons fastened in his breast.

Even when, as a result of long training, his mind brought the saving process of logic to bear upon the situation, he was not greatly relieved. What had he done to deserve this punishment?

He had merely sought sweetness, goodness and peace—had sought to share these things with others. But what had all the others who came to New York seeking these things—what had they done to suffer as they undoubtedly did suffer?

Yet for all of these people as for

himself there was another place—down south, out west, down east, up north; all as near and yet as distant, as hard and yet as easy to get to as heaven itself.

With his toilet arranged as well as possible Birkland proceeded to the office and there informed himself as to the hours of the next departing trains. There were not many in the fragment of the night that remained.

At five o'clock a local would be leaving for Poughkeepsie, and he finally fixed his choice upon this.

To escape from New York, that was the principal thing—to move even a few miles along the trail that lead toward home.

Home! The word brought back some of yesterday's spell. As he stood there in the lobby of the hotel, with the word echoing through his brain as it had echoed there on the preceding day when he came to his momentous decision, he once more smelt the perfume of apples, heard the hearty voice of old Major Woods—that voice which might have been his father's.

He saw the dim, radiant and beautiful-as-ever-before spirit portrait of Mary Harmon—"the girl named Mary," who exists somewhere, in some form for every man, wherever he may be on the face of the earth, whether the surrounding jungle be that of Africa or of teeming New York.

One more blow was in store for him.

Getting along toward morning, but still black night, the wind more bitter than ever—a shrieking protest at the victim's escape—Birkland finally left the hotel and started across the street toward the station.

He was going to take the local.

At Poughkeepsie he could at least rest in peace. The strain of the preceding day and the night through which he had passed was beginning to tell upon him terribly. At Poughkeepsie he would at least have one session with bath-tub and bed.

Express trains stop at Poughkeepsie.

One of these he would take at his leisure—out of reach of the thing this time—and go straight through to Cincinnati without a stop. Once at Cincinnati he would be in friendly territory. Even Cincinnati somehow had the stamp of home upon it, for his father and mother had taken him there several times when he was a little boy.

Then the blow fell—the morning papers just up from the other end of town. A bundle of them almost tripped him up. He cast a casual glance at the front page of one of them.

The first thing he saw was his own name in large letters, then a picture which he recognized as a portrait of himself.

"The statement of my retirement."

He moved nearer.

HENRY R. BIRKLAND ARRESTED!

He snatched details while picking up a half-dozen different papers, all of which displayed the news on the front page.

"Following his sensational retirement—late president of the Susquehanna—in company of an attractive young woman—wife of a friend—confused explanation—possible clue—hasty departure—"

Birkland felt the blood pounding at his temples. New York had changed her mind. Not only was she letting him go. She was kicking him out disgraced.

He recalled the strange way in which the clerk at his hotel had looked at him the night before when asked to cash that check. Birkland had asked for a paltry five hundred. Two hundred was all that he had been able to secure.

Then he was smitten by the thought that not even two hundred dollars would remain to his account unless the check was presented early in the day.

His accounts would be closed up

entirely. All that had remained to him of cash had been allotted to Hawkins. Yet this, at any rate, he could straighten out later—as soon as he reached Hambleton.

He looked about him.

It was a dismal crowd that filled the station at this early hour. There were a good many immigrants, a good many laborers already grimed and heavy as though no night of rest could ever again lift from their shoulders the heavy, earthen, hand of toil and weariness.

There were a good many dejected-looking women bearing in their arms or trailing in their wake disordered, discouraged, unhappy children. The plaint of one baby, especially, filled the big hall with a piercing note of ultimate misery.

"Good Lord!" Birkland exclaimed in his heart, "I feel as though I could cry like that."

To complete the picture a fat and dissipated though cheerful-looking minion of the law, dressed in disreputable-looking civilian attire, appeared just then with a prisoner.

This latter was one of the most extraordinary creatures that Birkland had ever seen—a one-legged man with an astonishingly hard and brilliant countenance, a rough diamond of a face with a number of serious flaws. The manacles on his wrists were bright and shiny.

So were the fellow's eyes.

He and his keeper were apparently on good terms, for they smiled at each other. As they passed him, Birkland heard the officer exclaim to the manacled cripple:

"Cheer up, cul, the worst is yet to come!"

The remark, banal as it was, sank into Birkland's consciousness. He had always been a man of quick intuitions—of intuitions as quick and far-reaching as his decisions.

Was the remark, he wondered, prophetic?

He had checked his baggage. With a heavy heart he joined the procession that was moving toward the gate.

CHAPTER X.

Monologue and Bullets.

"CHEER up; the worst is yet to come!"

Had he himself been on his way to Sing Sing he couldn't have been more alive to the sense of doom that hung over him. Innocent, but he was being made to suffer. For what?

All these people around him were innocent, for that matter, and they were being made to suffer, too. The crippled convict in front of him wasn't the only one who had been sentenced to hard labor by some final court.

The convict himself seemed to be deriving a degree of comfort from some similar vein of thought. He was in no wise distressed—not so far as anyone could see.

Only one leg, forced to walk with a crutch, and manacled besides, every movement of his agile body and every perk of his small, birdlike head bespoke a certain satisfied cockiness. He and his keeper paused just outside the gate and passed the rest of the parade in review, the manacled one leering back with an insolent smile at all who looked at him.

Birkland also hung back; and, as the officer and his prisoner took up their march again, he followed on behind them to the smoking-car.

There he read his papers through with an odd sense of detachment. It was almost as though he had died and that these were his obituaries. What did it all matter, anyway?

It would have mattered immensely, had he remained in New York. But he was going away—forever.

That big fact kept surging back upon him now like repeated waves of fresh air. New York could slander, snarl, and yelp to its heart's content. He was going back!

The train glided forward. Birkland sat still, breathless almost. The printed page blurred and disappeared in front of him, but he made no attempt to keep on reading. He had read enough.

He abandoned himself instead to the fine and subtle rush of sentiment that descended upon him.

After all, he was Henry R. Birkland, a man who had conquered the things he had set out to conquer as a boy; a man who had made his mark and his fortune, modest though they were; and, this above all, who was still young enough to have formed a new ideal and to have set out to conquer this as well.

It wasn't surprising that he had received some pretty stiff jabs at the very outset. It was always that way.

He was jarred back to his immediate surroundings by a burst of words and laughter from the prisoner and his guard. They had taken their places a couple of seats ahead—the prisoner in front, riding backward, with his face turned toward the back of the car.

As Birkland looked up, it seemed to him that the man had just exchanged looks with some one in the rear.

He turned and saw a group of men near the door who had just come in, but they scattered into various seats without speaking to each other. Again his attention came back to the convict.

Never had he seen a face so stamped with evil.

The fellow was still in a merry mood—birdlike, chipper and nervous, his small eyes scintillant, his thin-lipped mouth twisting with grins and laughter. As he caught Birkland's attention he lifted his voice to join him in his pleasantries.

"Old-home week," he said, "and they says I got to come; says every one else will be there and will feel disappointed if I stay away."

"Cheer up," said the officer as he rocked with mirth; "the worst is yet to come."

"Yes, says we'll have the same old cooking as we had when you was here the last time—cabbages and spuds and spuds and cabbages; plain and substantial; and the same old cook, they says, who's been with us now for eighteen years and still has seven—

"'But how do you manage to keep your cook so long?' the lady ast. 'Oh,' they says, 'it's a mere matter of his being attached to us. He tried to leave us twice,' they says; 'once by digging through the floor.'"

Birkland moved forward a seat. The patter of the fellow and the pitiful humor of it interested and touched him.

"'And we'll have a room ready for you,' they says," the convict went on with his crooked smile. "Says they're sorry I can't have my old room which is occupied by another guest, but says they've got another exactly like it and hope to keep me with them a long time. Says we can all play the same old games. I love those games—croquet. Oh, I used to play croquet all day—with a sledge-hammer and a—"

"Cheer up," the officer repeated with a loud laugh; "the worst is yet—"

Birkland didn't catch the remainder of the phrase. It was strange, but once again he had a fleeting impression that the monologuist had flicked one of his shining eyes as though to signal some one who sat in the rear of the car.

He turned spontaneously to look behind him.

As he did so he heard a thud and a grunt. Then, all in the same instant, there was an outburst of curses and shouts, a sudden rush of scrambling movement.

Birkland's first impression as he once more whirled in the direction of the convict was the terrible change that had come over the face of the man. The depths of evil violence had only been suggested there before; now they were in full evidence.

The small eyes were smaller still, were glinting as savagely as those of a snake; the thin-lipped, crooked mouth was twisted askew with an expression of the most frightful ferocity.

The guard had gripped him, but the convict had again lifted his crutch in his manacled hands, ready to repeat the blow which he had obviously already given him. At the same time the convict shrieked an imprecation and called for help.

It was as in a vision—fleeting, intense, tinged with red—that Birkland saw two other men hurl themselves into the struggle. Both carried revolvers.

Then, as one of the newcomers aimed a blow at the bare head of the guard with the butt of the weapon he carried, Birkland suddenly came to life.

He didn't have to stop to think. It was one of those moments when every shred of fighting wisdom a man has inherited from his ancestors springs to the fore.

With a single movement he had swept the heavy leather traveling-bag from the seat at his side, intercepted the blow, then shoved the bag itself forward into the face of the man who would have delivered it.

From then on his impressions were fragmentary. He was fighting. He was in danger. Yet he was as quick and inspired in his actions as any fighting savage might have been.

He was using his bag as shield and battering-ram.

He knew that the battle couldn't last long, yet he was constantly surprised that it had lasted so long already. Shouts and shots, people pressing in upon him, heat, breathlessness, an uppermost thought to kill if needs be, but not to be killed!

He had struck a dozen thrusting, half-swing blows, perhaps, with his strange weapon, knew in a general way that he had worked the two fresh assailants away from the guard and that the guard himself was dealing with the cripple, when he himself received his first direct blow.

It was a brutal, gouging descent on the top of his head.

"Aha!" he said to himself; "attacked from behind! I fear that all is up."

But he had stepped back into the space between the seats, swung his valise around at the newcomer, caught a glimpse of another savage and yet fear-blanched face.

The crippled convict was shrieking.

He and the guard were now wrestling. So quick had been developments that the guard was still trying to get his revolver from his pocket, the cripple to get in another and more effective blow with his crutch.

Two other impressions rushed in upon Birkland—that the car was empty save for themselves, that the train had come to a halt.

Then, as he aimed another blow at the man who had struck him from behind, he cast his eyes once more in the direction of the other two. What he saw was to remain one of the outstanding impressions of the whole affair—one that he was never to lose.

One of the bandits, dressed a good deal like a trainman—black cap drawn down to his ears, red handkerchief knotted about his neck, a black blouse under his rough coat — was staring craftily toward the front of the car, as though expecting some sort of an interruption from that quarter.

The other, a stout man with a two days' growth of stubble on his heavy, swinish face, was leaning toward Birkland, regarding him with a look of extraordinary interest.

In his right hand, held low, was his revolver, the muzzle of which was not more than three feet from Birkland's body.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK. Don't forget this magazine is issued weekly, and that you will get the continuation of this story without waiting a month.

A Silent Witness*

by R. Austin Freeman

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS

DR. HUMPHREY JARDINE, who tells the story, has just graduated. On his way home one night across Hampstead Heath, he finds the body of an elderly man. It is gone when he gets the police. He finds a gold locket containing a compass. Later he finds a queer palette knife and meets Sylvia Vyne, then helps certify the death of Septimus Maddock, a boarder with Mrs. Samway. He is decoyed into a disused cellar and nearly asphyxiated with carbonic acid gas. Dr. John Thorndyke, a doctor-detective, helps investigate. While they are in the building they find it afire.

CHAPTER VIII.

"It's an Ill Wind—"

JERVIS and I had dropped the now useless cylinder and were gazing in horror at the blazing mass that filled the corridor and cut off our only means of escape, when we were recalled by the voice of Thorndyke, speaking in his usual quiet and precise manner.

"We must get the full cylinders up as quickly as possible," said he; and, running down the steps, he made straight for the end cellar, whither we followed him. Picking up one of the cylinders, we carried it quickly to the top of the steps.

"Lay it down," said Thorndyke, "and fetch another."

Jervis and I ran back to the cellar, and taking up another cylinder, brought it along the passage.

As we were ascending the steps there suddenly arose a loud, penetrating hiss, and as we reached the top we saw Thorndyke disengaging the spanner from the cock of the cylinder, out of which a jet of liquid was issuing, mingled with a dense, snowy cloud.

An instantaneous glance, as we laid down the fresh cylinder, reassured me very considerably.

The icy, volatile liquid and the falling cloud of intensely cold carbonic acid snow had produced an immediate effect, as was evident in a blackened, smoldering patch in the midst of the blazing mass.

With reviving hope I followed Jervis once more down the steps and along the passage to the end cellar, from which we brought forth a third cylinder.

By this time the passage was so filled with smoke that it was difficult either to see or to breathe; and the bright light that had at first poured

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in through the open doorway had already dulled down so far that Thorndyke's figure, framed in the opening, loomed dim and shadowy amidst the smoke and against the dusky red background.

We found him, when we reached the top of the steps, holding the great gas bottle and directing the stream of snow and liquid onto those parts of the wood and straw from which flames still issued.

"It will be all right," he said in his calm, unemotional way; "the fire had not really got an effective start. The straw made a great show, but that is nearly all burned now, and all this carbonic acid gas will soon smother the burning wood. But we must be careful that it doesn't smother us, too. The steps will be the safest place for the present."

He opened the cock of the new cylinder and, having placed it so that it played on the most refractory part of the burning mass, backed to the steps where Jervis and I stood looking through the doorway.

The fire was, as he had said, rapidly dying down. The volumes of gas produced by the evaporation of the liquid and the melting snow cut off the supply of air, so that, in place of the flames that had, at first, looked so alarming, only a dense reek of smoke arose.

"Now," said Thorndyke, after we had waited on the steps a couple of minutes more, "I think we might make a sortie and put an end to it. If we can get the smoldering stuff off that wooden floor down onto the stone the danger will be over."

He led the way cautiously into the corridor, and, once more bringing his electric lamp into requisition, began to kick the smoldering cases and crates and the blackened masses of straw down the steps onto the stone floor of the passage, whither we followed them and scattered them with our feet until they were completely safe from any chance of reignition.

"There," said Jervis, giving a final kick at a small heap of smoking straw, "I should think that ought to do. There's no fear of that stuff lighting up again. And, if I may venture to make the remark, the sooner we are off these premises the happier I shall be. Our friend's methods of entertaining his visitors are a trifle too strenuous for my taste. He might try dynamite next."

"Yes," I agreed; "or he might take pot shots at us with a revolver from some dark corner."

"It is much more likely," said Thorndyke, "that he has cleared off in anticipation of the alarm of fire. Still, it is undeniable that we shall be safer outside. Shall I go first and show you a light?"

He piloted us along the corridor and up the cobbled yard, putting away his lamp as he unlocked the wicket.

There was no sign of any one about the premises, nor, when we had passed out of the gate, was there any one in sight in the street.

I looked about, expecting to see some sign of the fire, but there was no smoke visible, and only a slight smell of burning wood. The smoke must have drifted out at the back.

"Well," Thorndyke remarked, "it has been quite an exciting little episode. And a highly satisfactory finish, as things turned out; though it might easily have been very much the reverse. But for the fortunate chance of those gas-bottles being available, I don't think we should be alive."

"No," agreed Jervis. "We should be in much the same condition by this time as Batson's late patient, Mr. Maddock, or, at least, well on our way to that disembodied state. However, all's well that ends well. Are you coming our way, Jardine?"

"I will walk a little way with you," said I. "Then I must go back to Batson to settle up and fetch my traps."

I walked with them to Oxford Street, and we discussed our late adventure as we went.

"It was a pretty strong hint to clear out, wasn't it?" Jervis remarked.

"Yes," replied Thorndyke, "it didn't leave us much option. But the affair can't be left at this. I shall have a watch set on those premises, and I shall make some more particular inquiries about Mr. Gill.

"By the way, Jardine, I haven't your address. I'd better have it in case I want to communicate with you; and you'd better have my card in case anything turns up which you think I ought to know."

We accordingly exchanged cards, and I now took the opportunity to ask a question that had been on my lips more than once in the course of the evening.

"How did you happen, sir, to come to the factory at that very opportune moment?"

"By the merest chance," replied Thorndyke. "I had to call in at the hospital, and, having an hour to spare, it occurred to me to look in at Gatson's and see if you were getting on quite happily in your new command. As I had induced you to take charge, I felt some sort of responsibility in the matter."

"It was exceedingly kind of you, sir," said I.

"Not in the least," said Thorndyke. "It was just the ordinary solicitude of the teacher for a promising pupil. Well, when I arrived at the house, I found that excellent girl, Maggie, standing on the door-step, looking anxiously up and down the street. It seemed that, on reflection, she was still convinced that the works were untenanted, and the oddity of the whole set of circumstances had made her somewhat uneasy.

"I waited a few minutes and disposed of one or two patients, and then, as you did not return, after what seemed an unaccountably long absence, I very easily induced her to show me where the place was; and when we arrived there, the deserted aspect of the building and the notice board over the gate seemed rather to justify her anxiety.

"I rang the bell loudly, as I dare say you know, but I did not wait very long. When I failed to get any response I, too, became suspicious and proceeded, without delay, to pick the lock of the wicket—which fortunately had no bolt. You know the rest. When I shouted your name you must have tried to answer, for I caught a kind of muffled groan and the sound of tapping, which guided Maggie and me to your prison. But it was a near thing; for, when I opened the cellar door, you fell out quite unconscious and accompanied by a gush of carbon dioxid that was absolutely stifling."

I once more expressed my thankfulness to him, and to the powers that had guided him to my rescue, and, as we had now reached the corner of Oxford Street, I wished him and Jervis adieu and thoughtfully retraced my steps to Jacob Street.

London is a wonderful place.

From the urban grayness of Jacob Street to the borders of Hampstead Heath was, even in those days of the slow horse tram, but a matter of minutes—a good many minutes, perhaps, but still considerably under an hour.

Yet, in that brief and leisurely journey, one exchanged the grim sordidness of a most unlovely street for the solitude and sweet rusticity of open and charming country.

A day or two after my second adventure in the mineral water works, I was leaning on the parapet of the viaduct; the handsome, red brick viaduct with which some builder unknown to me had spanned the pond beyond the upper heath, apparently with purely decorative motive and in a spirit of sheer philanthropy.

For no road seemed to lead anywhere in particular over it, and there was no reason why any wayfarer should wish to cross the pond rather than walk round it; indeed, in those

days it was covered by a turfy expanse seldom trodden by any feet but those of the sheep that grazed in the meadows bordering the pond.

I leaned on the parapet, smoking my pipe with deep contentment, and looking down into the placid water.

Flags and rushes grew at its borders, water lilies spread their flat leaves on its surface, and a small party of urchins angled from the margin, with the keen joy of the juvenile sportsman who suspects that his proceedings are unlawful.

I had lounged on the parapet for several minutes when I became aware of a man approaching along the indistinct track that crossed the viaduct, and, as he drew near, I recognized him as the keeper whom I had met in Ken Wood on the morning after my discovery of the body in Millfield Lane.

I would have let him pass with a smile of recognition, but he had no intention of passing. Touching his hat politely, he halted, and, having wished me good morning, remarked.

"You didn't tell me, sir, what it was you were looking for that morning when I met you in the wood."

"No," I replied, "but apparently some one else has."

"Well, sir, you see," he said, "the sergeant came up the next day with a plain-clothes man to have a look round, and, as the sergeant is an old acquaintance of mine, he gave me the tip as to what they were after. I am sorry, sir, you didn't tell me what you were looking for."

"Why?" I asked.

"Well," he replied, "we might have found something if we had looked while the tracks were fresh. Unfortunately, there was a gale in the night that fetched down a lot of leaves, and blew up those that had already fallen, so that any foot-marks would have got hidden before the sergeant came."

"What did the police officers seem to think about it?" I asked.

"Why, to speak the truth," the keeper replied, "they seemed to think it was all bogy."

"Do you mean to say," I asked, "that they thought I had invented the whole story?"

"Oh, no, sir," he replied, "not that. They believed you had seen a man lying in the lane, but they didn't believe that he was a dead man, and they thought your imagination had misled you about the tracks."

"Then, I suppose they didn't find anything?" said I.

"No, they didn't, and I haven't been able to find anything myself, though I've had a good look round."

And then, after a brief pause:

"I wonder," he said, "if you would care to come up to the wood and have a look at the place yourself?"

I considered for a moment. I had nothing to do, for I was taking a day off, and the man's proposal sounded rather attractive.

Finally I accepted his offer and we turned back together toward the wood.

Hampstead — the Hampstead of those days—was singularly rustic and remote.

But within the wood, it was incredible that the town of London actually lay within the sound of a church bell or the flight of a bullet.

Along the shady paths, carpeted with moss and silvery lichen, overshadowed by the boughs of noble beeches; or in leafy hollows, with the humus of centuries under our feet, and the whispering silence of the woodland all around, we might have been treading the glades of some primeval forest.

Nor was the effect of this strange remoteness less, when, presently, emerging from the thicker portion of the wood, we came upon a moss-grown, half-ruinous boat-house on the sedgy margin of a lake, in which was drawn up a rustic-looking, and evidently little-used punt.

"It's wonderful quiet about here, sir," the keeper remarked, as a water

hen stole out from behind a clump of high rushes and scrambled over the leaves of the water lilies.

"And presumably," I remarked, "it's quieter still at night."

"You're right, sir," the keeper replied. "If that man had got as far as this, he'd have had mighty little trouble in putting the body where no one was ever likely to look for it."

"I suppose," said I, "that you had a good look at the edges of the lake?"

"Yes," he answered. "I went right round it, and so did the police, for that matter, and we had a good look at the punt, too. But, all the same, it wouldn't surprise me if, one fine day, that body came floating up among the lilies, always supposing, that is," he added, "that there really was a body."

"How far is it," I asked, "from the lake to the place where you met me that morning?"

"It's only a matter of two or three minutes," he answered. "We may as well walk that way and you can see for yourself."

Accordingly, we set forth together, and, coming presently upon one of the moss-grown paths, followed it past a large summer-house until we came in sight of the beech beyond which I had encountered him while I was searching for the tracks.

As we went, he plied me with questions as to what I had seen on the night in the lane, and I made no scruple of telling him all that I had told the police, seeing that they, on their side, had made no secret of the matter.

Of course, it was idle, after this long period—for it was now more than seven weeks since I had seen the body—to attempt anything in the nature of a search.

It certainly did look as if the man who had stolen into the wood that night had been bound for the solitary lake.

The punt, I had noticed, was only secured with a rope, so that the murderer—for such I assumed he must have been—could easily have carried his dreadful burden out into the middle, and there sunk it with weights, and so hidden it forever. It was a quick, simple and easy method of hiding the traces of his crime, and, if the police had not thought it worth while to search the water with drags, there was no reason why the buried secret should not remain buried for all time.

After we had walked for some time about the pleasant, shady wood, less shady now that the yellowing leaves were beginning to fall with the passing of autumn, the keeper conducted me to the exit by which I had left on the previous occasion.

As I was passing out of the wicket, my eye fell once more on the cottage which I had then noticed, and, recalling the remark that my fair acquaintance had let fall concerning the artist to whom the derelict knife was supposed to belong, I said:

"You mentioned, I think, that that house was let to an artist."

"It was," he replied, "but it's empty now. The artist has gone away."

"It must be a pleasant little house to live in," I said; "at any rate, in summer."

"Yes," he replied, "a country house within an hour's walk of the Bank of England. Would you like to have a look at it, sir? I've got the keys."

Now I certainly had no intention of offering myself as a tenant, but yet to an idle man, there is a certain attractiveness in an empty house of an eligible kind, a certain interest in roaming through the rooms and letting one's fancy furnish them with one's own household gods.

I accepted the man's invitation, and, opening the wide gate that admitted to the garden from a by-road, we walked up to the door of the house.

"It's quite a nice little place," the keeper remarked. "There isn't much

garden, you see, but then, you've got the heath all around, and there's a small stable and coach-house if you should be wanting to go into town."

"Did the last tenant keep any kind of carriage?" I asked.

"I don't think so," said the keeper, "but I fancy he used to hire a little cart sometimes when he had things to bring in from town; but I don't know very much about him or his habits."

We walked through the empty rooms together, looking out of the windows and commenting on the pleasant prospects that all of them commanded, and talking about the man who had last lived in the house.

"He was a queer sort of fellow," said the keeper. "He and his wife seem to have lived here all alone without any servant, and they seem often to have left the house to itself for a day or two at a time; but he could paint. I have stopped and had a look when he has been at work, and it was wonderful to see how he knocked off those pictures.

"He didn't seem to use brushes, but he had a lot of knives, like little trowels, and he used to shovel the paint on with them, and he always wore gloves when he was painting; didn't like to get the paint on his hands, I suppose."

"It sounds as if it would be very awkward," I said.

"Just what I should have thought," the keeper agreed. "But he didn't seem to find it so. This seems to be the place that he worked in."

Apparently the keeper was right. The room, which we had now entered, was evidently the late studio, and did not appear to have been cleaned up since the tenant left.

The floor was littered with scraps of paper on which a palette-knife had been cleaned, with empty paint-tubes and one or two broken and worn-out brushes; and, in a packing-case, which seemed to have served as a receptacle for rubbish, were one or two canvases that had been torn from their stretchers and thrown away.

I picked them out and glanced at them with some interest, remembering what my fair friend had said.

For the most part, they were mere experiments or failures, deliberately defaced with strokes or daubs of paint, but one of them was a quite spirited and attractive sketch, rough and unfinished, but skilfully executed and undefaced.

I stretched out the crumpled canvas and looked at it with considerable interest. It represented Millfield Lane, and showed the large elms and the posts and the high fence under which I had sheltered in the rain.

In fact, it appeared to have been taken from the exact spot on which the body had been lying, and from which I had made my own drawing; not that there was anything in the latter coincidence, for it was the only sketchable spot in the lane.

"It's really quite a nice sketch," I said. "It seems a pity to leave it here among the rubbish."

"It does, sir," the keeper agreed. "If you like it, you had better roll it up and put it in your pocket. You won't be robbing any one."

As it seemed that I was but rescuing it from a rubbish-heap, I ventured to follow the keeper's advice, and, rolling the canvas up, carefully stowed it in my pocket.

Shortly after, as I had now seen all that there was to see, which was mighty little, we left the house, and at the gate the keeper took leave of me with a touch of his hat.

I made my way slowly back toward my lodgings by way of the Spaniard's Road and Hampstead Lane, turning over in my mind as I went, the speculations suggested by my visit to the wood.

Of the existence of the lake I had not been previously aware. Now that I had seen it, I felt very little doubt that it was known to the mysterious murderer, who must have been lurk-

ing in the lane that night when I was sheltering under the lee of the fence.

The route that he had then taken appeared to be the direct route to the lake. That he was carrying the body I had no doubt whatever, and, seeing that he had carried it so far, it appeared probable that he had some definite hiding-place in view.

And what hiding-place could be so suitable as this remote piece of still water?

No digging, no troublesome and dangerous preparation would be necessary. There was the punt in readiness to bear him to the deep water in the middle; a silent, easily-handled conveyance.

A few stones or some heavy object from the boat-house, would be all that was needful, and in a moment he would be rid for ever of the dreadful witness of his crime.

Thus reflecting—not without dissatisfaction at the passive part that I had played in this sinister affair—I passed through the turnstile, or "kissing-gate," at the entrance to Millfield Lane.

Almost certainly, the murderer or the victim or both, had passed through that very gate on the night of the tragedy.

The thought came to me with added solemnity with the recollection of the silent wood and the dark, still water fresh in my mind, and caused me unconsciously to tread more softly and walk more sedately than usual.

The lane was little frequented at any time, and now, at mid-day, was almost as deserted as it would have been at midnight.

Very remote it seemed, too, and very quiet, with a silence that recalled the hush of the wood.

And yet the silence was not quite unbroken. From somewhere ahead, from one of the many windings of the tortuous lane, came the sound of hurried footsteps.

I stopped to listen. There were two persons, one treading lightly, the other more heavily; apparently a man and a woman.

And both were running,—running fast.

There was nothing remarkable in this, perhaps, but yet the sound smote on my ear with a certain note of alarm that made me quicken my pace and listen yet more intently.

And suddenly there came another sound; a muffled, whimpering cry like that of a frightened woman.

Instantly I gave an answering shout and sprang forward at a swift run.

I had turned one of the numerous corners and was racing down a straight stretch of the lane when a woman darted round the corner ahead, and ran towards me, holding out her hands.

I recognized her at a glance, though now she was dishevelled, pale, wild-eyed, breathless and nearly frantic with terror, and rage against her assailant spurred me on to greater speed.

But when I would have passed her to give chase to the wretch, she clutched my arm frantically with both hands and detained me.

"Let me go and catch the scoundrel!" I exclaimed, but she only clung the tighter.

"No," she panted, "don't leave me! I am terrified! Don't go away!"

I ground my teeth. Even as we stood, I could hear the ruffian's footsteps receding as rapidly as they had advanced.

In a few moments he would be beyond pursuit.

"Do let me go and stop that villain!" I implored. "You're quite safe now, and you can follow me and keep me in sight."

But she shook her head passionately, and, still clutching my sleeve with one hand, pressed the other to her heart.

"No, no, no!" she gasped, with a catch in her voice that was almost a sob, "I can't be alone! I am frightened. Oh, please don't go away from me!"

What could I do?

The poor girl was evidently beside herself with terror and exhausted by her frantic flight. It would have been cruel to leave her in that state.

But all the same, it was infuriating.

I had no idea what the man had done to terrify her in this way. But that was of no consequence.

The natural impulse of a healthy young man, when he learns that a woman has been ill-used, is to hammer the offender effectively in the first place, and then to inquire into the affair.

That was what I wanted to do; but it was not to be.

"Well," I said, by way of compromise, "let us walk back together. Perhaps we may be able to find out which way the man went."

To this she agreed

I drew her arm through mine—for she was still trembling and looked faint and weak—and we began to retrace her steps toward Highgate.

Of course, the man was nowhere to be seen, and by the time that we had turned the sharp corner where I had found the body, the man was not only out of sight, but his footsteps were no longer audible.

Still we went on for some distance in the hopes of meeting someone who could tell us which way the miscreant had gone. But we met nobody.

Only, some distance past the posts, we came in sight of a sketching-box and a camp-stool, lying by the side of the path.

"Surely those are your things?" I said.

"Yes," she answered. "I had forgotten all about them. I dropped them when I began to run."

I picked up the box and the stool and debated with myself whether it was worth while to go on any farther.

From where we stood, nothing was to be seen, for the lane was still enclosed on both sides by a seven-foot fence of oak boards.

But the chance of overtaking the fugitive was not to be considered; by this time he was probably out of the lane on the Heath or in the surrounding meadows; and, meanwhile, my companion, though calmer and less breathless, looked extremely pale and shaken.

"I don't know that it's any use," I said, "to tire you by going any farther. The man is evidently gone."

She seemed relieved at my decision, and it then occurred to me to suggest that she should sit down a while on the bank under the high fence to recover herself; and to this, too, she assented gladly.

"If it wouldn't distress you," I said, "would you mind telling me what had happened?"

She pondered for a few seconds and then answered:

"It doesn't sound much in the telling, and I expect you will think me very silly to be so much upset."

"I'm sure I shan't," I said, with perfect confidence in the correctness of my statement.

"Well," she said, "what happened was this, as nearly as I can remember: I was coming up the path from the ponds and I had to pass a man who was leaning against the fence by the stile. As I came near to him, he looked at me, at first, in quite an ordinary way, and then, he suddenly began to stare in a most singular and disturbing fashion, not at me, so much, as at this little scarab which I wear hung from my neck.

"As I passed through the turnstile, he spoke to me: 'Would you mind letting me look at that scarab?' he asked.

"It was a most astonishing piece of impertinence, and I was so taken aback that I hardly had the presence of mind to refuse. However, I did, and very decidedly, too.

"Then he came up to me, and, in a most threatening and alarming manner, said: 'You found that scarab. You picked it up somewhere near here. It's mine, and I'll ask you to let me have it, if you please.'

"Now this was perfectly untrue. The scarab was given to me by my father when I was quite a little child, and I have worn it ever since I have been grown up—ever since he died, in fact, six years ago.

"I told the man this, but he made no pretense of believing me, and was evidently about to renew his demand, when two laborers appeared, coming down the lane. I thought this a good opportunity to escape, and walked away quickly up the lane. It was very silly of me; I ought to have gone the other way."

"Of course, you ought," I agreed. "You ought to have got out into a public road at once."

"Yes, I see that now," she said. "It was very foolish of me. However, I walked on pretty quickly, for there was something in the man's face that had frightened me, and I was anxious to get home.

"I looked back, from time to time, and, when I saw no sign of the man, I began to recover myself; but just as I had got to the most solitary part of the lane, just about where we are now, shut in by these high fences, I heard quick footsteps behind me.

"I looked back and saw the man coming after me. Then, I suppose, I got in a sudden panic, for I dropped my sketching things and began to run. But as soon as I began to run, the man broke into a run, too. I raced for my life, and when I heard the man gaining on me, I suppose I must have called out.

"Then I heard your shout from the upper part of the lane and ran on faster than ever to gain your protection. That's all, and I suppose you think that I have been making a great fuss about nothing."

"I don't think anything of the kind," I said, "and neither would our absent friend if I could get hold of him. By the way, what sort of person was he? A tramp?"

"Oh, no, quite a respectable looking person; in fact, he would have passed under ordinary circumstances for a gentleman."

"Can you give any sort of description of him? Not that verbal descriptions are of much use except in the case of a hunchback or a Chinaman or other easily identifiable creature."

"No, they are not," she agreed, "and I don't think that I can tell you much about this man excepting that he was clean-shaven, about medium height, quite well dressed and wore a round hat and slate-colored suede gloves."

"I'm afraid we shan't get hold of him from that description," I said. "The only thing that you can do is to avoid solitary places for the present and not come through this lane again alone."

"Yes," she said. "I suppose I must; but it's very unfortunate. One cannot always take a companion when one goes sketching even if it were desirable, which it is not."

As to the desirability, in the case of a good-looking girl, of wandering about alone in solitary places, I had my own opinion; and very definite opinions they were. But I kept them to myself.

And so we sat silent for a while. She was still pale and agitated, and perhaps her recital of her misadventure had not been wholly beneficial.

At the moment that this idea occurred to me a crackling in my breast pocket reminded me of the forgotten canvas, and I bethought me that perhaps a change of subject might divert her mind from her very disagreeable experience.

Accordingly, I drew the canvas out of my pocket and, unrolling it, asked her what she thought of the sketch. In a moment she became quite animated.

"Why," she exclaimed, "this looks exactly like the work of that artist who was working on the Heath a little while ago."

"It is his," I replied, considerably impressed and rather astonished at her instantaneous recognition; "but I

didn't know you were so familiar with his work."

"I'm not very familiar with it," she replied; "but, as I told you, I sometimes managed to steal a glance or two when I passed him. You see, his technique is so peculiar that it's easily recognized, and it interested me very much. I should have liked to stop and watch him, and get a lesson."

"It is rather peculiar work," I said, looking at the canvas with new interest. "Very solid, and yet very smooth."

"Yes. It is typical knife-work, almost untouched with the brush. That was what interested me. The knife is a dangerous tool for a comparative tyro like myself, but yet one would like to learn how to use it. Did he give you this sketch?"

I smiled guiltily.

"The truth is," I admitted, "I stole it."

"How dreadful of you!" she said. "I suppose that you could not be bribed to steal another?"

"I would steal it for nothing if you asked me," I answered; "and, meanwhile, you had better take possession of this one. It will be of more use to you than to me."

She shook her head.

"No, I won't do that," she said; "though it is most kind of you. You paint, I think, don't you?"

"I'm only the merest amateur," I replied. "I annexed the sketch for the sake of the subject. I have rather an affection for this lane."

"So had I," said she, "until to-day. Now I hate it. But might I ask how you managed your theft?"

I told her about the empty cottage and the rejected canvases in the rubbish box.

"I'm afraid none of the others would be of any use to you, because he had drawn a brushful of paint across each of them."

"Oh, that wouldn't matter!" she said. "The brush-strokes would be on dry paint and could easily be scraped off. Besides, it is not the subject but the technique that interests me."

"Then I will get into the cottage somehow and purloin the remaining canvases for you."

"Oh, but I mustn't give you all this trouble!" she protested.

"It won't be any trouble," I said. "I shall quite enjoy a deliberate and determined robbery. But where shall I send the spoil?"

She produced her card-case and, selecting a card, handed it to me with a smile.

"It seems to me," she said, "that I am inciting you to robbery and acting as a receiver of stolen goods; but I suppose there's no harm in it, though I feel that I ought not to give you all this trouble."

I made the usual polite rejoinder as I took from her the little magical slip of pasteboard that in a moment transformed her from a stranger to an acquaintance, and gave her a local habitation and a name.

Before bestowing it in my pocket-book I glanced at the neat copper-plate and read the inscription: "Miss Sylvia Vyne, The Hawthorns. North End."

The effect of our conversation had answered my expectations. Her agitation had passed off; the color had come back to her cheeks; and, in fact, she seemed quite recovered.

Apparently she thought so herself; for she rose, saying that she now felt well enough to walk home, and held out her hand for the color-box and stool.

"I think," said I, "that if you won't consider me intrusive, I should like to see you safely out on to an inhabited road at least."

"I shall accept your escort gratefully," she replied, "as far as the end of the lane, and farther, if it is not taking you too much out of your way."

Needless to say, I would gladly have escorted so agreeable and winsome a protégée from John O'Groat's to Land's End, and found it not out of

my way at all; and when she passed out of the gate into Hampstead Lane I clung tenaciously to the box and stool, and turned toward "The Spaniards" as though no such thing as a dismissal had ever been contemplated.

In fact, with the reasonable excuse of carrying the impedimenta, I maintained my place by her side in the absence of a definite *congé;* and so we walked together, talking quite easily, principally about pictures and painting, until, in the pleasant little hamlet, she halted by a garden gate and, taking her possessions from me, held out a friendly hand.

"Good-by," she said. "I can't thank you enough for all your help and kindness. I hope I have not been very troublesome to you."

I assured her that she had been most amenable; and, when I had once more cautioned her to avoid solitary places, we exchanged a cordial handshake and parted, she to enter the pleasant, rustic-looking house, and I to betake myself back to my lodgings, lightening the way with much agreeable and self-congratulatory reflection.

CHAPTER IX.

Thorndyke Takes Up the Scent.

AT my lodgings, which I reached at an unconscionably late hour for lunch, I found a little surprise awaiting me; a short note from Dr. Thorndyke, asking me, if I should be at liberty early on the following afternoon, to show him the spot on which I had found the mysterious body.

Of course I answered by return, begging him to come straight on from the hospital to an early lunch, over which we could discuss the facts of the case before setting out.

Having despatched my letter, I called at the offices of the house agent, who had the letting of the cottage on the Heath, to see if he had duplicate keys. Fortunately he had, and was willing to entrust them to me on the understanding that they should be returned some time the next day.

I did not, however, go on to the cottage, for it occurred to me that Thorndyke would probably wish to visit the wood, and I could make my visit and purloin the canvases then.

A telegram on the following morning informed me that Thorndyke would be with me at twelve o'clock, and punctually to the minute he arrived.

"I hope you don't mind me swooping down on you in this fashion," he said as the servant showed him into the room.

I assured him, very truthfully, that I was delighted to be honored by a visit from him, and he then proceeded to explain.

"You may wonder, Jardine, why I am busying myself about this case which is really no business of mine, or at least appears to be none; but the fact is that, as a teacher and a practitioner of medical jurisprudence, I find it advisable to look into any unusual cases.

"Of course, there is always a considerable probability that I may be consulted concerning any out-of-the-way case; but apart from that, I have the ordinary specialist's interest in anything remarkable in my own specialty."

"I should think," said I, "that it would be well for me to give you all the facts before we start."

"Exactly, Jardine," he replied; "that is what I want. Tell me all you know about the affair, and then we shall be able to test our conclusions on the spot."

He produced a large scale ordnance map, and, folding it under my direction so that it showed only the region in which we were interested, he stood it up on the table against the water-bottle where we could both see it and marked on it with a pencil each spot as I described it.

It is not necessary for me to record our conversation. I told him the

whole story as I have already told it to the reader, pointing out on the map the exact locality where each event occurred.

"It's a most remarkable case, Jardine," was his thoughtful comment when I had finished; "most remarkable; curiously puzzling and inconsistent, too. For you see that, on the one hand, it looks like a casual or accidental crime, and yet, on the other, strongly suggests premeditation.

"No man, one would think, could have planned to commit a murder in what is, after all, a public thoroughfare; and yet, the long distance which the body seems to have been carried, and the apparently selected hiding-place, seem to suggest a previously considered plan."

"You think that there is no doubt that the man was really dead?" I asked.

"Had you any doubt at the time yourself?"

"None at all," I replied; "it was only the disappearance of the body, and perhaps the sergeant's suggestion, that made me think it possible that I might have been mistaken."

Thorndyke shook his head.

"No, Jardine," said he, "the man was dead. We are safe in assuming that, and on that assumption our investigations must be based. The next question is, how was the body taken away? Did you measure the fence?"

"No, but I should say it is about seven feet high."

"And what kind of fence is it? Are there any footholds?"

"I can show you exactly what the fence is like," I answered. "That sketch which I have pinned up on the wall was apparently painted from the exact spot on which the body lay. That fence on the right-hand side is the one under which I sheltered, and is exactly like the one over which the body seems to have been lifted."

Thorndyke rose and walked over to the sketch, which I had fixed to the wall with drawing-pins.

"Not a bad sketch, this, Jardine," he remarked; "very smartly put in, apparently mostly with the knife. Where did you get it?"

I had to confess that the canvas was unlawfully come by, and told him how I had obtained it.

"You don't know the artist's name?" said Thorndyke, looking closely at the sketch.

"No. In fact, I know nothing about him, excepting that he worked mostly with a small painting-knife and usually wore kid gloves."

"You don't mean that he worked in gloves?" said Thorndyke.

"So I am told," said I. "I never saw him."

"It's very odd," said Thorndyke. "I have heard of men wearing a glove on the palette-hand to keep off the midges, and many men paint in gloves in exceptionally cold weather. But this sketch seems to have been painted in the summer."

"I suppose," said I, "the midges don't confine their attentions to the palette-hand. And, after all, to a man who worked entirely with the knife a glove wouldn't be really in the way?"

"No," Thorndyke agreed, "that is true."

He looked closely at the sketch, and even took out his pocket lens to help his vision, which seemed almost unnecessary. It appeared that he was as much interested in the unknown artist's peculiar technique as was my friend, Miss Sylvia Vyne.

"By the way," said he, when he had resumed his seat at the table, "you were telling me about some kind of trinket that you had picked up at the foot of the fence. Shall we have a look at it?"

I fetched the little gold locket from the despatch-box in which I had locked it up and handed it to him. He turned it over in his fingers, read the devices that were engraved on it, and examined the little piece of silk cord that was attached to one ring.

"This is a very distinctive object,"

said he, "to any one who had seen it before, but it does not tell us very much. The dates and the worn condition of the metal are in agreement with the age of the man whose body you saw. The knot by which the silk cord is fastened to the ring appears to be a nautical knot, and the lizard may be a pictograph representing the headland of that name.

"On the other hand, Paris is hardly a seaport town, and, as to the little compass inside, one can only say that it is one a sailor would *not* use.

"The knot and the dates are the most suggestive parts of it; and if we choose to infer from the man's peculiar style of dress that he was a retired pilot—which is inferring a good deal, mind you—and that he adhered to the costume that he had been accustomed to wear, then we may say that the balance of probability is in favor of its having been his property.

"In that case it would seem to have been detached when the body was dragged over the fence, which might easily have happened, for you can see that the cord had been frayed nearly through before it broke."

"I suppose I ought to have shown it to the police," I said.

"I suppose you ought," he replied, "but as you haven't I think we had better say nothing about it now."

He handed it back to me, and I dropped it into my pocket, intending to return it presently to the despatch-box. A few minutes later we sallied forth on our journey of exploration.

It is not necessary to describe this journey in detail, since I have already taken the reader over the ground more than once.

We went, of course, to the place where I had found the body and walked right through to Hampstead Lane. Then we returned, and I reconstituted the circumstances of that eventful night, after which I conducted Thorndyke to the place where I assumed that the body had been lifted over the fence.

"I suppose," I said, "we must go round and pick up the track from the other side."

He looked up and down the lane and smiled.

"Would your quondam professor lose your respect forever, Jardine, if you saw him climb over a fence in a frock coat and a topper?"

"No," I answered, "but it might look a little quaint if any one else saw you."

"I think we will risk that," he said. "There is no one about, and I should rather like to try a little experiment. Would you mind if I hoisted you over the fence? You are something of an outsize; but then so am I, too, which balances the conditions."

Of course I had no objection; and, when we had looked up and down the lane and listened to make sure that we had no observers, Thorndyke picked me up with an ease that rather surprised me and hoisted me above the level of the fence.

"Is it all clear on the other side?" he asked.

"Yes," I answered, "there's no one in sight."

"Then I want you to be quite passive," he said, and with this he hoisted me up farther until I hung with my own weight across the top of the fence.

Leaving me hanging thus, he sprang up lightly, and, having got astride at the top, dropped down on the other side, when he once more took hold of me and drew me over.

"It wasn't so very difficult," he said. "Of course, it would have been more so to a shorter man; but, on the other hand, it is extremely unlikely that the body was anything like your size and weight."

We now followed the track up to the wood, which we entered by an opening in the fence, through which I assumed that the murderer had probably passed. I conducted Thorndyke by the nearest route to the boat-house, and, when he had thoroughly exam-

ined the place and made notes of the points that appeared to interest him, I showed him the way out by the turnstile.

It was here, when we came in sight of the cottage, that I bethought me of my promise to Miss Vyne, and somewhat sheepishly explained the matter to Thorndyke.

"It won't take me a minute to go in and sneak the things," I said apologetically, and was proposing that he should walk on slowly, when he interrupted me.

"I'll come in with you," said he. "There may be something else to filch. Besides, I am rather partial to empty houses. There is something quite interesting, I think, in looking over the traces of recent occupation and speculating on the personality and habits of the late occupiers. Don't you find it so?"

I said, "Yes," truthfully enough, for it was a feeling of this kind that had first led me to look over the cottage.

But my interest was nothing to Thorndyke's, for no sooner had I let him in at the front door than he began to browse about through the empty rooms and passages, for all the world like a cat that has just been taken to a new house.

"This was evidently the studio," he remarked as we entered the room from which I had taken the canvas. "He doesn't seem to have had much of an outfit, as he appears to have worked on his sketching-easel; you can see the indentations made by the toe-points, and there are no marks of the casters of a studio easel. You notice, too, that he sat on a camp stool to work."

It did not appear to me to matter very much what he had sat on, but I kept this opinion to myself and watched Thorndyke curiously as he picked up the empty paint-tubes and scrutinized them one after the other.

His inquisitiveness filled me with amused astonishment. He turned out the rubbish-box completely, and, having looked over every inch of the discarded canvases, began systematically to examine one by one the pieces of paper on which the late resident had wiped his palette-knife.

Having rolled up and pocketed the waste canvases, I expressed myself as ready to depart.

"If you're not in a hurry," said Thorndyke, "I should like to look over the rest of the premises."

He spoke as though we were inspecting some museum or exhibition; and, indeed, his interest and attention, as he wandered from room to room, were greater than that of the majority of visitors to a public gallery.

He even insisted on visiting the little stable and coach-house, and when he had explored them both ascended the rickety steps to the loft over the latter.

"I suppose," said I, "this was the lumber-room. Judging by the quantity of straw, it would seem as if some cases had been unpacked here."

"Probably," agreed Thorndyke; "in fact, you can see where the cases have been dragged along, and also, by that smooth, indented line, where some heavy metallic object has been slid along the floor. Perhaps if we look over the straw we may be able to judge what those cases contained."

It didn't seem to me to matter a brass farthing what they contained, but again I made no remark. Together we moved the great mass of straw, almost handful by handful, from one end of the loft to the other, while Thorndyke not only examined the straw but even closely scrutinized the floor on which it lay.

As far as I could see, all this minute and apparently purposeless searching was entirely without result until we were in the act of removing the last armful of straw from the corner.

Even then the object that came to light did not appear a very remarkable one under the circumstances, though Thorndyke seemed to find what appeared to me a most unreasonable interest in it.

The object was a pair of canvas-pliers, which Thorndyke picked up almost eagerly and examined with profound attention.

"What do you make of that, Jardine?" he asked at length, handing the implement to me.

"It's a pair of canvas-pliers," I replied.

"Obviously," he rejoined; "but what do you suppose they have been used for?"

I opined that they had been used for straining canvases, that being their manifest function.

"But," objected Thorndyke, "he would hardly have strained his canvases up here. Besides, you will notice that they have, in fact, been used for something else. You observe that the handles are slightly bent, as if something had been held with great force, and if you will look at the jaws you will see that that something was a metallic object about three-quarters of an inch wide with sharp corners. Now, what do you make of that?"

I looked at the pliers, inwardly reflecting that I didn't care twopence what the object was, and finally said that I would give it up.

"The problem does not interest you keenly," Thorndyke remarked with a smile; "and yet it ought to, you know. However, we may consider the matter on some future occasion. Meanwhile I shall follow your pernicious example and purloin the pliers."

His interest in this complete stranger appeared to me very singular, and it seemed for the moment to have displaced that in the mysterious case which was the object of his visit to me.

"A strange, vagabond sort of man that artist must have been," he remarked as we walked home across the Heath; "but I suppose he picked up vagabond habits in traveling about the world."

"Do you gather that he had traveled much, then?" I asked.

"He appears to have visited New York, Brussels, and Florence, which is a selection suggesting other travels."

I was wondering vaguely how Thorndyke had arrived at these facts, and was indeed about to ask him when he suddenly changed the subject by saying:

"I suppose, Jardine, you don't wander about this place alone at night?"

"I do sometimes," I replied.

"Then I shouldn't," he said. "You must remember that a very determined attempt has been made on your life, and it would be unreasonable to suppose that it was made without some purpose.

"But that purpose is still unaccomplished. You don't know who your enemy is, and consequently can take no precautions against him excepting by keeping away from solitary places. It is an uncomfortable thought, but at present you have to remember that any chance stranger may be an intending murderer; so be on your guard."

I promised to bear his warning in mind, though I must confess his language seemed to me rather exaggerated; and so we walked on, chatting about various matters until we arrived at my lodgings.

Thorndyke was easily persuaded to come in and have tea with me, and while we were waiting for its arrival he renewed his examination of the sketch upon the wall.

"Aren't you going to have this strained on a stretcher?" he asked.

I replied "Yes," and that I intended to take it with me the next time I went into town.

"Let me take it for you," said Thorndyke. "I should like to show it to Jervis to illustrate the route that we have marked on the map. Then I can have it left at any place that you like."

I mentioned the name of an art-supply store in the Hampstead Road, and, unpinning the canvas, handed it to him.

He took it from me and, rolling it

up methodically and carefully, bestowed it in his breast-pocket. Then he brought forth the map, and, as we drank our tea and talked over our investigations, he checked our route on it and marked the position of the cottage. Shortly after tea he took his leave, and then I occupied an agreeable half-hour in composing a letter to Miss Vyne to accompany the loot from the deserted house.

CHAPTER X.

The Unheeded Warning.

THORNDYKE'S warning, so emphatically expressed, ought to have been alike unnecessary and effective. As a matter of fact, it was neither.

I suppose that to a young man not naturally timorous the idea of a constantly lurking danger amid the prosaic conditions of modern civilization is one that is not readily accepted.

At any rate, the fact is that I continued to walk abroad by day and by night with as much unconcern as if nothing unusual had ever befallen me.

It was not that the recollection of those horrible hours in the poisoned cellar had in any way faded. The incident I could never forget. But I think that in the back of my mind there still lingered the idea of a homicidal lunatic, though that idea had been so scornfully rejected by Thorndyke.

But before I describe the amazing experience by which I once more came within a hair's breadth of sudden and violent death I must refer to another incident, not because it seemed to be connected with that alarming occurrence, but because it came first in the order of time and had its own significance later.

It was a couple of days after Thorndyke's visit that I walked down the Hampstead Road with the intention of fetching the sketch from the art-supply store.

The shop was within a few hundred yards of Jacob Street, and as I crossed the end of that street I was just considering whether I ought to look in on Batson when a lady bowed to me and made as if she would stop. It was Mrs. Samway.

Of course, I stopped and shook hands, and while I was making the usual polite inquiries I felt myself once more impressed with the unusualness of the woman. Even in her dress she was unlike other women, though not in the least eccentric or bizarre.

At present she was clothed from head to foot in black; but a scarlet bird's wing in the coquettish little velvet toque and a scarlet bow at her throat gave an effect of color that, unusual as it was, harmonized completely and naturally with her jet-black hair and her strange, un-English beauty.

"So you haven't started for Paris yet?" I remarked.

"No," she replied; "my husband has gone, and may, perhaps, come back. At any rate, I am staying in England for the present."

"Then I may possibly have the pleasure of seeing you again," I said; and she graciously replied that she hoped it might be so as we shook hands and parted.

A few minutes later, in the art supply shop, I had another chance meeting, and a more agreeable one. The proprietor had just produced the sketch, now greatly improved in appearance by being strained on a stretcher, when the glass door opened and a young lady entered the shop.

Imagine my surprise when that young lady turned out to be none other than Miss Vyne.

"Well," I exclaimed, as we mutually recognized each other, "what an extraordinary coincidence!"

"I don't see that it is very extraordinary," she replied. "Most of the Hampstead people come here because it's the nearest place where you can get proper artist's materials. Is that

the sketch you were telling me about?"

"Yes," I answered; "and it's the pick of the loot. But it isn't too late to alter your mind. Say the word and it's yours."

"Well," she replied, with a smile, "I am not going to say the word, but I want to thank you for rescuing those other treasures for me."

She had, as a matter of fact, already thanked me in a very pretty little note, but I was not averse to her mentioning the subject again. We stepped back to the door, and in the brighter light looked at the sketch together.

"It's a pity," she remarked, "that he handled it so carelessly before the paint was hard. Those finger-marks wouldn't matter a bit on a brush-painted surface, but on the smooth knife-surface they are rather a disfigurement."

She placed the sketch in my hand, and I backed nearer to the glass door to get a better light. Happening to glance up, I noticed that a sudden and very curious change had come over her—a look of haughty displeasure and even anger, apparently directed at somebody or something outside the shop.

For a few moments I took no notice; then, half-unconsciously, I looked round just as some person moved away from the door.

I looked once more at Miss Vyne. She was quite unmistakably angry. Her cheeks were flushed and there was a resentful light in her eyes that gave her an expression quite new to me.

I suppose she caught my inquiring glance, for she exclaimed:

"Did you see that woman? I never heard of such impertinence in my life."

"What did she do?" I asked.

"She came right up to the doorway and looked over your shoulder; and then stared at me in the most singular and insolent manner. I could have slapped her face."

"Not through the glass door," I suggested; on which her anger subsided in a ripple of laughter as quickly as it had arisen.

"What was this objectionable person like?" I asked. "Was she a charwoman or a slavey?"

"Oh, not at all," replied Miss Vyne. "Quite a ladylike-looking person, except for her manners. Rather tastefully dressed, too; a black and vermilion scheme of color."

The reply startled me a little.

"Had she a scarlet bird's wing in her hat?" I asked.

"Yes, and a scarlet bow at her throat. I hope you are not going to say that you know her."

It was a rather delicate situation. I could not actually disavow the acquaintance, but I did not feel inclined to have a black and scarlet fly introduced into the sweet-smelling ointment of my intercourse with the fair Sylvia; so I explained with great care the exact scope of the acquaintance.

On this Miss Vyne remarked that "she supposed that doctors could not be held responsible for the people they knew," and proceeded to make her purchases.

I did not take the sketch away with me after all, for it occurred to me that I might as well leave it to be framed. Instead I carried forth with me the parcel containing Miss Vyne's purchases. I had not far to carry it, for she was returning at once to Hampstead.

I was tempted to return, too, for the sake of enjoying a chat with her, but discreetly withstood the temptation; and, having escorted her to a tram, I turned my face south and walked away at a leisurely pace into the jaws of an all-unsuspected danger.

It was some hours, however, before anything remarkable happened.

My immediate objective was Lincoln's Inn Fields, where, at the College of Surgeons, a lecture on epidermic appendages was to be delivered by the Hunterian professor.

There in the college theater I spent a delightful hour while the genial professor took his hearers with him on a personally-conducted tour among structures that ranged from the plumage of the sun-bird to the dermal plates of the crocodile, from the silken locks of beauty to the quills of the porcupine or the mail of the armadillo.

When I came out the dusk was just closing in.

It was a slightly foggy evening. The last glow of the sunset in the western sky lighted up the haze into a rosy background, against which the shadowy buildings were relieved in shapes of cloudy gray. It was a lovely effect; an effect such as London alone can show, and fugitive as a breath on a mirror.

As I sauntered westward up the Strand I presently bethought me that, before the light should have faded completely, I would see how the effect looked by the riverside.

Walking quickly down Buckingham Street, I came out on to the Embankment and looked into the west. But the light was nearly gone, the shadows of evening were closing in fast, and the fog, creeping up the river, ushered in the night.

I leaned on the parapet and watched the last glimmer die away—watched the darkness deepen on the river and the faint lights on the barges moored on the southern shore at first twinkle pallidly and then fade out as the fog thickened. I lit my pipe and looked down at the dark water, and fell into a train of half-dreamy meditation.

Not for the first time since the occurrence my thoughts turned to Mrs. Samway.

Why had she stared at Miss Vyne in that singular manner—if indeed it was really Mrs. Samway, and if she really had stared in the manner alleged? It was an odd affair; but, after all, it did not very much matter.

And with this my thoughts rambled off in a new direction.

It was to the cottage on the heath that they wandered this time, and the picture of Thorndyke's catlike prowlings and pryings arose before me.

That was very queer, too. Was it possible that this learned and astute man habitually went about eagerly probing into the personal habits and trivial actions of chance strangers?

The apparently puerile inquisitiveness that he had displayed seemed totally out of character with all that I knew about the man; but then it often happens that the private life of public men develops personal traits that are surprising and disappointing to those who have only known them in connection with their public activities.

I had become so completely immersed in my thoughts as to be almost oblivious of what was happening around.

Indeed, there was mighty little happening. The gathering darkness and the thin fog limited my view to a few square yards. Now and again a muffled hoot from the lower river spoke of life and movement on the water, and at long intervals an occasional wayfarer would pass along the pavement behind me.

My reflections had reached the point recorded above when a person emerged from the obscurity near to the parapet and approached as if to pass close behind me. I only caught the dusky shape indistinctly with the tail of my eye, so indistinctly that I could not say certainly whether it was that of a man or a woman, for I was still gazing down at the dark water.

He or she approached quietly, swerving toward me across the wide pavement, and was in the act of passing quite close to me when the thing happened.

Of a sudden I felt my knees clasped in a powerful grip, and at the same moment I was lifted off my feet and thrust forward over the parapet.

Instinctively I clutched at the stonework, but its flat surface offered nothing for my fingers to grasp.

Then my assailant let go, and the next instant I plunged head first into the icy water.

CHAPTER XI.

A Chapter of Accidents.

IT was fortunate for me that the tide was nearly full, else must I, almost certainly, have broken my neck.

As it was, my head struck on the firm mud at the bottom with such force that for some moments I was half stunned.

Nevertheless, I must have struck out automatically, for when I began to recover my wits my head was above water and I was swimming as actively as my clinging garments would let me.

But apparently in those moments of dazed semiconsciousness I must have struck out toward the middle of the river, for now I was encompassed by a murky void in which nothing was visible save one or two reddish, luminous patches — presumably the lamps on the Embankment.

Toward one of these I turned and struck out vigorously. The water was desperately cold, and hampered as I was with my clothing, I felt that I should not be able to keep myself afloat very long, strong swimmer as I was.

The dim, red nebulæ of the unseen lamps moved past slowly, showing me that I was drifting down on the ebb-tide.

Before me, I knew, was the long, inhospitable wall of the Embankment. True, there were some steps, if I was not mistaken, by Cleopatra's Needle, but the question was whether I had not drifted past them already.

I had given one or two lusty shouts as soon as I had cleared my chest of the mouthful of water that I got in my first plunge, and I was now letting off another yell, when out of the darkness behind me came a prolonged hoot.

I looked round quickly in the direction whence the sound had come and then became aware of the churning of a propeller.

Almost at the same moment a dim, ruddy smudge of light broke through the darkness over the river, and began rapidly to brighten until it took the form of the twin masthead lights of a tug with a vessel in tow.

For a moment I hesitated. My first impulse was to avoid the danger of being run down; but suddenly I altered my mind.

For, as the tug bore down on me, with a roaring of water and loud clank of machinery, I saw that she was not absolutely end on, for her green starboard light, which had been for a moment visible, suddenly disappeared.

Of what happened during the next few moments I have but a confused recollection. A splashing and churning, with the loud wash of water, the throb of the engines, and a glare of light which blazed before my eyes for a moment, to vanish in an instant into pitchy darkness: a huge, black object, felt rather than seen to sweep past before me; and then my hand clutched a wooden projection, and I felt myself dragged violently through the water.

The projection that I had laid hold of was the leeboard of a sailing barge, as I discovered when the rush of the water banged me against it; and much ado I had to hold on, with the water dragging at me and spouting up over my head.

But with what strength was left to me I reached out with the other hand and clawed hold of the dwarf bulwark over which the water was lapping; and so, with a last violent effort, contrived to drag myself up on to the deck.

I essayed to stand up, and did, in fact, succeed; but as my sensations suggested those of a leaden statue with india-rubber legs, I sat down hastily on the hatch-cover to avoid going overboard. And there I sat for a minute or two, leaning against the lowered mast with my teeth chattering, and

seeming to grow more and more chilled and exhausted every moment.

Numb as my mind was by this time, my medical instincts told me that this would not do. Somehow I must get warmth and shelter, for I might as well have been drowned at once as die of exposure and cold.

I looked round lethargically. There was no sign of any one on board. Another barge was towing alongside, and the bows of two others were dimly visible astern.

On those rearmost barges there must certainly have been some one steering. But they were inaccessible to me, and I had not the energy to shout; nor could any one have got across to me if I had.

Suddenly my eyes fell on the little chimney that rose by the cabin scuttle. A thin stream of smoke issued from it and blew away astern. Perhaps then the crew were below, or, if not, at least there was a fire.

I crawled aft, holding on with my hands, and, pushing back the scuttle, backed cautiously down the ladder, closing the scuttle after me.

There seemed to be nobody below, and the cabin was in darkness, save for the glow of the fire that burned in the little grate. The air was probably warm, though to me it felt icy; but, at least, there was no wind to play on my wet clothes.

I sat down on the locker as near to the fire as I could, and rested my elbows on the little triangular table. Chilled to the marrow and utterly exhausted, I was sensible of a growing desire to sleep; a desire which I repressed, as I believed, with noble resolution.

But apparently my efforts in this respect were not so successful as I had supposed, for the next incident opened with suspicious suddenness.

A vigorous shake, which dislodged one of my elbows, introduced the episode.

I looked up, blinking sulkily, at a bright and most objectionably dazzling light, which further inspection showed to proceed from a hurricane-lamp held by a rather dirty hand.

"Here, wake up, mister!" said a hoarse voice. "This here ain't the Hotel Cecil, you know!"

I sat up and stared vaguely at the speaker—or, at least, the holder of the lamp—but could not think of anything appropriate to say. Then another voice emerged from nowhere in particular.

"'E's been overboard, that's what 'e's been."

"Any fool can see that," said the first man; "but the question is, who is he and what's he a doin' in my cabin? Who are yer, mister?"

Now, that would seem to be a perfectly simple and straightforward question. But it is not so simple as it seems.

To a complete stranger the bare mention of a name is unilluminating. Further explanations are needed, and at that moment I did not feel equal to explanations.

Besides, I was not so very clear on the subject myself. Consequently, I preserved a silence which perhaps was wooden rather than golden.

"D'ye 'ear?" persisted the first man. "I'm a arskin' you a question."

"What's the good of arksin' questions of a man what's been a rammin' 'is trumpet ag'inst the bottom of the river?" protested the other man.

"What d'ye mean?"

"Can't you see," retorted the other, "as 'e's took the ground 'ard? Look at 'is 'ead."

Here the first mariner—Lucifer, or lamp-bearer—wiped his hand over the top of my head and then examined the tip of his forefinger critically, as though it were the arming of a deep-sea lead.

"You're right, Abel," said he. "That's mud off the bottom, that is. He must have took a regular header. Sooicide perhaps, and altered his mind. Found it a bit damper 'n what he expected. Put the kittle on, Abe."

From this moment the two mariners treated me as if I had been a lay figure. Silently they peeled off my wet clothes and dried my skin with vigorous friction, as if it had been a wet deck.

They not only asked no further questions, but when I would have spoken they urged me to economize my wind. They inducted me into stiff and hairy garments of uncouth aspect, and finally Abe set before me on the table a large earthenware mug, the contents of which steamed and diffused through the cabin a strong odor of Dutch gin.

"You git outside that, mister," said the luminiferous mariner (who turned out subsequently to be the skipper), "and then you'd best turn in."

The treatment was not strictly orthodox, but I obeyed without demur. Most people would have done the same under the circumstances.

But the process of "getting outside" it took time, for the grog was boiling hot and had been brewed with a flexible wrist.

By the time that I had emptied the mug I was not only revived, but (so far as my memory serves) rather disposed to be garrulously explanatory and facetious. I even felt a slight inclination to sing.

But my friends would stand no nonsense. As soon as the mug was fairly empty they bundled me, neck and crop, into a sort of elongated cupboard and proceeded to pile on me untold quantities of textile fabrics, including a complete suit of oilskins.

Then they commanded me to go to sleep, which, I believe, I must have done almost the instant my head touched the hard pillow.

Awakening in a strange place is always a memorable experience, especially to the young, in whom the capacity for novel sensations has not yet been exhausted by repetition.

When I emerged somewhat gradually from the unconsciousness of sleep my first impressions concerned themselves with the unusual appearance of the bedroom wall and its remarkable proximity to my nose.

I further noticed that the bedstead had become inexplicably tilted, and that the house appeared to be swaying; and as I mused on these phenomena with the vagueness of the half awake a loud voice, proceeding apparently from the floor above, roared out the mystic words, "Lee O!" whereupon there ensued a sound like the shaking of colossal table-cloths and the loud clanking of chains, and my bedstead took a sharp tilt to the opposite side.

This roused me pretty completely, and, turning over in the bunk, I looked out into the barge's cabin.

It was broad daylight and evidently not early, for a square patch of sunlight crept to and fro on the little table, whence presently it slipped down to the floor and slithered about unsteadily, as if Phœbus had overdone his morning dram and could not drive his chariot straight.

I watched it lazily for some time, and then, becoming conscious of a vacancy within, crept out from under the mountain of bed-clothes and made my way to the ladder.

As I put my head through the companion-hatch a man who stood at the wheel regarded me stolidly.

"So you've woke up, have yer?" said he. "Thought you was going right round the clock. Abel, he's woke up! Tell young Ted to stand by with them heggs and that there 'addick."

Here Abel looked round from behind the luff of the mainsail, and, having verified the statement, conveyed the order to some invisible person in the forepeak.

Then he came aft with an obvious air of business. The time for explanations had arrived.

Accordingly, I proceeded to "pitch them my yarn," as they expressed it, to which they listened with polite attention and manifest disappointment,

clearly regarding the story as a fabrication from beginning to end.

And no wonder. The whole affair was utterly incredible even to me; to them it must have seemed sheer nonsense. Their own verdict of "sooicide" during very temporary insanity with sudden mental recovery under the influence of cold water was so much more rational.

Not that they obtruded their views. They listened patiently and said nothing, and nothing that they could have said could have been more expressive.

Meanwhile, I looked about me with no little surprise. Some miles away to the south lay a stretch of lowland, faint and gray, with a single salient object, apparently a church with two spires.

In every other direction was the unbroken sea horizon.

"You seem to have made a pretty good passage," I remarked.

"We've had sixteen hours to do it in," replied the skipper, "and spring tides and a nice bit of breeze. If it 'ud only hold—which I'm afraid it won't—we'd be in Folkestone Harbor this time to-morrow, or even sooner. Folkestone be much out of your way?"

I smiled at the artlessness of the question. It was undeniable that the route from Charing Cross to Hampstead by way of Folkestone was slightly indirect.

But there was no need to insist on the fact. My hospitable friends had acted for the best, and their prudence was justified by the result; for here I was, not a whit the worse for my ducking save that I badly wanted a bath.

"Folkestone will suit me quite well," I replied, "if there is enough money left in my pockets to pay my fare home."

"That's all right," said the skipper. "I cleared out your pockets myself. You'll find the things in a mug in the starboard locker. Better overhaul 'em when you go below and see if you've dropped anything. Here comes young Ted with your grub."

As he spoke the apprentice rose through the forehatch like a stage apparition—if one can imagine an apparition burdened with a tin teapot, two "heggs," and an "'addick"—and came grinning along the weather sidedeck, to vanish through the cabin hatchway.

I followed gleefully, and almost before young Ted had finished the somewhat informal table arrangements fell to on the food with voracious joy.

"If you want any more eggs or anythink," said the apprentice, "all you've got to do is just to touch the electric bell and the waiter 'll come and take your orders," and, having delivered this delicate shaft of irony, he presented me with an excellent back view of a pair of brown dreadnaughts as he retired up the ladder.

As I consumed the rough but excellent breakfast I reflected on the strange events that had placed me in my present odd situation.

For the first time I began fairly to realize that I was in some way involved in a tangle of circumstance that I did not in the least understand.

I had an enemy—a vindictive enemy, too—in whose eyes mere human life was a thing of no account. But who could he be?

I knew of no one on whom I had ever inflicted the smallest injury. I bore no man any grudge, and had never to my knowledge had unfriendly dealings with any human creature.

Was this inveterate enemy of mine any one whom I knew? Or was he some stranger whose path I had unwittingly crossed, and whom I should not recognize even if I saw him?

This last supposition was highly disquieting, especially as it seemed rather probable; for if my enemy was unknown to me, what precautions could I take?

Then again there was the question: "What was the occasion of this extraordinary vendetta?"

What had I done to this man that he should pursue me with such deadly purpose? As to Jervis's suggestion that I had seen something at the Samways' house that I was not wanted to see, there was nothing in it; for, as a matter of fact, I had seen nothing.

There was nothing to see. The man Maddock was certainly dead. As to what he died of, that was Batson's affair; but even in that there was no sign of anything suspicious.

The man himself had consulted Batson, and had thought so badly of himself that he had made his will in Batson's presence. The patient himself was fully aware of his serious condition; it was only Batson, with his eternal hurry and bustle and his defective eyesight who had missed observing it.

The only circumstance that supported Jervis's view was that the acts of violence seemed to be connected with the locality of Batson's house.

Of course there remained the mystery of the body that I had seen in the lane. But with that these attempts seemed to have no connection. Nor was there any reason why the murderer should pursue me.

I had seen the body, it is true; but nobody believed me, and no proceedings were being taken. Nor could I have identified the murderer if I had been confronted with him. Clearly, he had nothing to fear from me.

From the causes of my present predicament I passed to the immediate future. I should have to get back from Folkestone, and I ought to send a telegram to my landlady, Mrs. Blunt, who would probably be in a deuce of a twitter about me.

I raised the lid of the locker and, reaching out the big earthenware mug, emptied its contents on the table. All my portable property seemed to be there, including the little gold reliquary, which I had carelessly carried in my pocket ever since I had shown it to Thorndyke.

My available funds were some four or five pounds; amply sufficient to get me home and to discharge my liability to the skipper as well.

I swept the things back into the mug, which I returned to the locker, and having cut myself another thick slice of bread, proceeded with the largest breakfast that I have ever eaten.

The skipper's forebodings were justified by the course of events. When I came on deck the breeze had died down to a mere faint breath, hardly sufficient to keep the big red mainsail asleep — as the pretty, old nautical phrase has it. The skipper was still at the wheel and Abel was anxiously taking soundings with a hand-lead.

"You won't do it, Bill," said the latter, coiling up the lead-line with an air of finality; "this 'ere breeze is a petering right out."

The skipper said nothing, but stared gloomily at the land which was now right ahead and much nearer than when I had last looked; and from the land his eye traveled to a sand-bank from which rose a tall post, at the top of which was an inverted cone.

"Ought to 'a' gone about a bit sooner, Bill," pursued Abel; whereupon the skipper turned on him fiercely.

"What's the good o' saying that now?" he demanded. "If you'd 'a' told me the wind was going to drop I'd 'a' gone about sooner. What water is there?"

"Five fathom here," replied Abel. "That means one and a quarter on the Woolpack. You'd best shove her nose round now, Bill."

"Oh, all right!" retorted the skipper. "Lee O! This is going to be an all-night job, this is;" and with this gloomy prediction he spun the wheel round viciously and once more headed away from the land.

Prophecy appeared to be the skipper's specialty, and, like most prophets, he tended to view the future with an unfavorable eye. Gradually the breeze died away into a dead calm, so that we had presently to let go the anchor to

avoid drifting on to a great sand-bank which now lay between us and the land.

And here we remained not only for the rest of the day and the succeeding night, as the skipper had promised, but throughout the whole of the next day and following night.

I have already remarked on the incalculable chances by which the course of a man's life is determined.

Looking back now I see that the skipper's little miscalculation and his failure to cross the Woolpack Shoal into the inshore channel was an antecedent determining the most momentous consequences for me.

For had the barge been becalmed in the inshore channel I could, and should, have landed in the boat and returned home forthwith; and if I had certain events would not have happened, and my life might have run a very different course.

As it was, miles of sea and the great bank known as the Margate Sand lay between me and the shore; whence I was committed to the wanderings and dallyings of the barge as irrevocably as if we were crossing the Pacific.

We lay, then, in the Queen's Channel, outside Margate Sand, for two whole days and nights; during which time the skipper and Abel slept much and smoked more, and young Ted, having cleaned and dried my clothes, inducted me into the art of bottom-fishing.

On the third day a faint breath of breeze enabled us to crawl round the North Foreland, and the skipper, having elected to pass outside the Goodwin, managed to get becalmed again in the neighborhood of the East Goodwin Lightship.

A little breeze at night enabled us to move on a few miles farther; and so we continued to crawl along at intervals, mainly on the tide, until nine o'clock in the morning of the fifth day, when we finally crawled into Folkstone harbor.

As soon as the barge was brought up to a buoy, young Ted was detailed to put me ashore in the boat. The skipper and Abel had insisted on treating me as a guest, and I had perforce to accept the position.

But young Ted had no such pride; and when I ran up the wooden steps by the old fish-market I left him on the stage below, staring with an incredulous grin at a gold coin in his none too delicate palm.

I was not sorry to be landed in this unfashionable quarter of the town; for, in spite of young Ted's efforts, my turn-out left much to be desired, especially in the matter of shirt-cuffs and collar, and I was, moreover, hatless and somewhat imperfectly shaved.

Accordingly, I slunk inconspicuously past the market and the groups of lounging fishermen; and when I saw a well-dressed, ladylike woman preceding me into the little narrow street, known as the Stade, I slackened my pace so as not to overtake her.

She sauntered along with a leisurely air as if she were waiting for something or somebody, and this, and the fact that she carried a light canvas portmanteau and a rug, suggested to me that she was probably traveling by the cross-channel boat which was due to start presently.

Suddenly my attention was diverted from her by a loud clattering and a series of shouts. A small crowd of men and women ran excitedly past the end of the little street.

The clattering rapidly drew nearer; and then a horse with a light van swept round the corner and, passing under an archway, advanced at a furious gallop.

Evidently the horse had bolted, and now, mad with terror, dashed forward with trailing reins, zigzagging erratically and making the van sway to and fro, so that it took up the whole of the narrow street.

The few wayfarers darted into doorways and sheltered corners; and I was about to secure my own safety in a similar manner, when I noticed

she turned on me quickly and held out her hand.

"Good-by, Dr. Jardine," she said; "and thank you so very much for risking your life for a—for a wretched, giggling woman."

"Oh, you're not going to send me packing like this," I protested, "when we've hardly said good morning. Besides, you're not fit to be left. But you're not to begin laughing again," I added threateningly, for an ominous twitching of her mouth seemed to herald a relapse, "or I shall go back and get that black bottle."

She shook her head impatiently, but without looking at me.

"I would rather you went away, Dr. Jardine," she said in an agitated voice. "I would, really. I wish to be alone. Don't think me ungracious. I am really most grateful to you, but I would rather you left me now."

Of course, there was nothing more to be said. She was not really ill or in need of assistance, and probably her instinct was right. Hysteria is not one of those afflictions which waste their sweetness on the desert air.

I shook her hand cordially, and, advising her to keep out of the way of stray vans and horses, once more pursued my way toward the town, meditating, as I went, on the oddity of the whole affair

It was an astonishing coincidence that I should have run against this woman in this out-of-the-way place. I had left her but a few days since, apparently firmly rooted in the Hampstead Road; and now, behold, as I step ashore from the barge, she is almost the first person that I meet!

And yet the coincidence, which had evidently hit her as hard as it had me—like most coincidences—tended to disappear on closer inspection.

The only really odd feature was my own presence in Folkestone. As to Mrs. Samway, she had probably been sent for by her husband, and was crossing by the boat that was now due to start.

Her anxiety to get rid of me was more puzzling, until I suddenly remembered my bare head, my crumpled collar, and generally raffish and disreputable appearance.

The latter was, in fact, at this moment brought to my notice by a man with whom, in my preoccupation, I collided, who first uttered an impatient exclamation, and then, bestowing on me a stare of astonishment, muttered a hasty apology and hurried past.

The incident emphasized the necessity for some reform, and I mended my pace toward the region of shops in a very ferment of uncomfortable self-consciousness.

With the purchase of a new hat, a collar, a pair of cuffs, a necktie, a pair of gloves, and a stick, some faint glimmer of self-respect revived in me.

I was even conscious of a temptation to linger in Folkestone and spend a few hours by the sea; but a sense of duty, aided by a large, muddy stain on my coat, finally decided me to return to town at once.

Accordingly, having sent off a telegram to my landlady and ascertained that a train left for London in about twenty minutes, I betook myself to the station.

There were comparatively few people traveling by this particular train; in fact, when I had established myself with the morning paper in the off-side corner seat of a smoking compartment, I began, with an Englishman's proverbial unsociability, to congratulate myself on the prospect of having the compartment to myelf.

My hopes were dashed, however, by the entrance of an elderly man; who not only broke up my solitude, but aggravated the offense by quite unnecessarily seating himself opposite to me. I was almost tempted to move to another corner, for my length of leg gives an additional value to space, but it seemed a rude thing to do; and as the train moved off at this moment, I resigned myself to the trifling discomfort.

that the woman in front of me had apparently become petrified with terror, for she stood stock-still, gazing helplessly at the approaching horse.

It was no time for ceremony. The infuriated animal and the swaying van were thundering up the street like an insane Juggernaut.

With a hasty apology, I seized the woman from behind and half dragged, half carried her to the opening of a little yard beside a sail-loft.

And even then I was hardly quick enough; for as the van roared past, some projecting object struck me between the shoulders and sent me flying, face downward, on to a pile of tarred drift-nets.

I had had the presence of mind to let go as I was struck, so that my fair protégée was not involved in my downfall; but in a moment she was stooping over me and, with many expressions of concern, endeavoring to help me to rise.

Beyond a thump in the back, however, I was not hurt in the least, but picked myself up, grinning, and turned to reassure her.

And then I really did get a shock; for as I turned the woman gave a shriek and fell back on the steps of the sail-loft, gasping and staring at me with an expression of the utmost astonishment and terror.

I supposed the accident had upset her nerves; but, to be sure, my own received, as I have said, a pretty severe shock.

For the woman was Mrs. Samway.

We remained for a moment gazing at one another in mute astonishment. Then I recollected myself and advanced to shake hands; but to my discomfiture, she shrank away from me, and began to sob and laugh in an unmistakably hysterical fashion.

I must confess that I was somewhat surprised at these manifestations in so robust a woman as Mrs. Samway.

Unreasonably so, indeed, for all womankind are more or less prone to hysteria; but, whereas the normal woman tends to laugh and cry, the weaker vessels develop inexplicable diseases, with a tendency to social reform and emancipation.

I put on my best bedside manner, at once matter of fact and persuasive.

"You seem quite upset," I said, "and all about nothing; for the poor beggar of a horse must be half a mile away by now."

"Yes," she answered shakily; "it's ridiculous of me, but it was so sudden and so—" Here she laughed noisily; and as the laugh ended in a portentous sniff, I hastened to continue the conversation.

"Yes, it was a bit of a facer to see that beast coming up the street as if it was Tattenham Corner. Why on earth didn't you get out of the way?"

"I am sure I don't know," she answered. "I seemed to be paralyzed and idiotic and—" Here the laughter began again.

"Well," I interrupted cheerfully, "you didn't get rolled on those tarred nets, so that's something to be thankful for."

This was a rather unlucky shot, for the semblance of facetiousness started a most alarming train of giggles, interrupted by rather loud sobs.

At this point, however, a new curative influence made itself manifest. Two smack boys halted outside the opening and surveyed her with frank interest and pleased surprise. Simultaneously, an elderly mariner appeared at the door of the sail-loft, grasping a black bottle and a teacup, and rather shyly descending the steps, suggested that "perhaps a drop o' sperits might do the lady good."

Mrs. Samway bounced off the steps, her hitherto pale cheeks aflame with anger.

"I am making a fool of myself!" she exclaimed. "Let us go away from here."

She walked out into the street, and I, having thanked the old gentleman for his most efficacious remedy, followed. As soon as I caught her up

she turned on me quickly and held out her hand.

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My hopes were dashed, however, by the entrance of an elderly man; who not only broke up my solitude, but aggravated the offense by quite unnecessarily seating himself opposite to me. I was almost tempted to move to another corner, for my length of leg gives an additional value to space, but it seemed a rude thing to do; and as the train moved off at this moment, I resigned myself to the trifling discomfort.

The intruder was a well-dressed, spruce-looking man of about sixty, fresh complexioned, gray haired, with eyes of that bright blue which one frequently sees in Kent. He carried a good-sized attaché case, which he laid on the seat, and, having unlocked it, extracted a mass of papers, which he began rapidly to sort out.

There was in his manner something brisk and strenuous, suggesting a man of affairs; and the suggestion was borne out by a sheaf of prospectuses which he laid on the seat, and on which I was able to read the words, "International Home for Fishermen's Orphan Daughters."

For some time I watched him as he busily sorted and shuffled the mass of papers, wondering lazily what his connection might be with this admirable institution, and noting the curious mixture of the nautical and the clerical in his appearance.

At length he seemed to have got his papers arranged to his satisfaction, when, having replaced them in the case, he settled himself with a contemplative air, letting his gaze wander reflectively over the swiftly passing landscape.

As his eyes were no longer occupied with his documents, my observations had to be suspended, and my attention was now turned to my own affairs. Putting my hand in my coat pocket for my pipe and pouch, I became aware of a state of confusion in the said pocket which I had already noticed when making my purchases.

The fact is that I had nearly come away from the barge without my portable property. It was only at the last moment that the skipper, remembering the mug, had fetched it hurriedly from the locker and shot its contents bodily into my coat-pocket.

The present seemed a good opportunity for distributing the various articles among their proper receptacles. Accordingly I turned out the whole pocketful on the seat by my side, and a remarkably miscellaneous collection they formed, comprising knives, pencils, matchbox, keys, the minor implements of my craft, and various other objects, useful and useless, including the little gold locket.

My neighbor opposite was, I think, quite interested in my proceedings, though he kept up a dignified pretense of being unaware of my existence.

Only for a while, however. Suddenly he sat up, very wide awake, and slewing his head round, stared with undisguised intentness at my little collection.

I saw at once what it was that had attracted his attention, or, at least, believed I did, for his eyes appeared to be riveted on the locket; but by way of testing the matter, I picked up the other articles one by one and stowed them in my pockets until only the locket was left.

Lastly, I picked up this also, but at that point my friend resolved any possible doubt by remarking:

"That is a very interesting little object, sir."

"Is it?" said I.

"Yes," he replied. "If I am not mistaken, it is one of those old-fashioned locket-compasses that sailors used to carry when I was a boy. They're quite rare nowadays. I don't think I've seen one for many years. Might I be allowed to look at it?"

I handed it to him readily, thinking that he might perhaps be able to throw some light on its history, and watched him curiously as he examined it.

He turned it over with a sort of suppressed eagerness that rather surprised me, and finally, opening it, peered in inquisitively at the little faded photograph.

I was wondering if it was possible that he could have ever seen the locket before, when he closed it with some suddenness, and, handing it back to me abruptly, answered my unspoken question with another:

"This, I take it, is a sort of heirloom, for I notice that the dates on it are before your time?"

"No," I answered, "it isn't actually mine at all. I picked it up and am merely keeping it until I find the owner."

He pondered this statement with a degree of profundity that seemed rather out of proportion to its matter, and he continued to gaze reflectively at the floor, never once raising his eyes to mine.

At length, after a considerable pause and a most unnecessary amount of reflection, he asked:

"Might I venture to inquire, if you will pardon my curiosity, where you picked it up?"

I hesitated before replying. My first and natural impulse was to tell him exactly where and under what circumstances I had found the locket.

But it was perfectly clear from what he had said that he had no knowledge of this particular little piece of jetsam and could therefore give me no help in finding the owner; and the way in which my information had been received by the police had made me rather chary of offering confidences, to say nothing of the fact that I had half promised them not to talk about the affair.

And, after all, it was no business of this good gentleman's where I had found it. My answer was therefore not very explicit.

"I picked it up in a lane in Hampstead."

"At Hampstead," he repeated. "Really!"

And then, as if in explanation of his tone of surprise, he added:

"One would have thought a seaport town a more likely place."

For some time after this last remark nothing more was said, but I noticed that my friend continued to gaze at the floor with an air of deep abstraction. He appeared to be thinking hard, and I was quite curious to know what his next remark would be.

Judging from the mental activity implied by the set mouth and knitted brows, I expected something of interest and importance; but when at length he looked up quickly and gave birth to the product of his cogitations I was sensible of somewhat of an anti-climax.

"I am extremely interested in everything related to the sea," he remarked.

As the statement appeared to have no relevance to anything in particular, I could think of nothing to say in reply, and he continued:

"The sea, sir, and all those who go down to the sea in ships must be a matter of profound interest to all the members of our island community."

I agreed vaguely that that was no doubt so and wondered inwardly what the devil he was driving at.

"The calling of a mariner, sir," he went on after a brief pause, "is one which involves many hazards, hazards which are run in the interests of and in the service of humanity at large."

As he continued speaking his tone gradually changed from that of ordinary conversation to the familiar sing-song and rounded periods of the platform. As I listened, there arose before my mental vision a baize-covered table bearing a small desk and a water-bottle, and I found myself considering the correct phraseology of a vote of thanks.

"Those hazards," he proceeded, "should not pass unrecognized and unrewarded by those who benefit. The tragic misfortunes incidental to that hazardous calling should be mitigated by appreciative efforts of those on whom fortune has smiled. I am sure you agree with me, sir?"

And here, without waiting for a reply, he whisked open the attaché case and, snatching out a prospectus, thrust it under my nose.

"Now, here, sir," said he, "is a most excellent institution with which I have the honor to be connected and which seeks to make smooth the way of those whose lot is cast amid the perils of the deep. I will not ask you offhand to subscribe to our funds, but

merely to take this little paper to consider at your leisure, together with a little brochure which I have had prepared for the information of the charitable public."

Here he again had recourse to the attaché case, the contents of which he proceeded to scratch up feverishly, like a fowl on a midden. Having worked his way down to the bed-rock, he turned to me with an air of vexation.

"Most provoking! Most provoking!" he exclaimed. "I find I haven't a copy with me, after all. However, if you will give me your address, I shall have great pleasure in sending you the little book, merely for your information, you know. We are not beggars, but I should like you to see a statement of our case and perhaps even communicate it to your friends."

I gave him my address readily, only too thankful to reserve the brochure for some future occasion when I should be within reach of the waste-paper basket, and having pocketed the prospectus, endeavored to lead the conversation toward more general topics.

But the habit of public speech is fatal to the power of conversation, and it was a genuine relief to me when at Paddock Wood my friend bought a newspaper and underwent a total eclipse behind it.

As soon as the train started again I took up my own paper, and the very first glance at it gave me a shock of surprise that sent all other matters clean out of my mind.

It was an advertisement in the column headed "Personal" that attracted my attention; an advertisement that commenced with the word "Missing" in large type, and went on to offer two hundred pounds reward, thus:

MISSING! TWO HUNDRED POUNDS REWARD!

Whereas, on the 14th inst., Dr. Humphrey Jardine disappeared from his home and his usual places of resort: the above reward will be paid to any person who shall give information as to his whereabouts, if alive, or the whereabouts of his body if he is dead.

He was last seen at 12.20 P.M., on the above date, in the Hampstead Road, and was then walking toward Euston Road. The missing man is about twenty-six years of age; is somewhat over six feet in height; of medium complexion; has brown hair, gray eyes, straight nose, and a rather thin face, which is clean-shaved. He was wearing a dark tweed suit and soft felt hat.

Information should be given to Hector Brodribb, Esquire, 65 New Square, Lincoln's Inn, by whom the above reward will be paid.

Here was a pretty state of affairs! It seemed that while I was placidly taking events as they came, smoking the skipper's tobacco, and bottom-fishing with young Ted, my escapade had been producing somewhere a most almighty splash.

I read the advertisement again with a self-conscious grin, and out of it there arose one or two rather curious questions.

In the first place, who the deuce was Hector Brodribb? And what concern was I of his? And how came he to know that I was walking down Hampstead Road at 12.20 on the 14th inst.?

I felt very little doubt that it was actually Thorndyke who was tweaking the strings of the Brodribbian puppet. But even this left the mystery unsolved. For how did Thorndyke know?

This was only the fifth day after my disappearance, and it would seem that there had hardly been time for exhaustive inquiries.

Then another highly interesting fact emerged. The only person who had seen me walk away down Hampstead Road was Sylvia Vyne; whence it followed that Thorndyke, or the mysterious Brodribb, had in some way got into touch with her.

And reflecting on this, the mechanism of the inquiry came into view. The connecting link was, of course, the sketch. Thorndyke had himself left the canvas with Mr. Robinson, the art supplies man, and he must have called to inquire if I had collected it.

Then he would have been told of my meeting with Miss Vyne, and as she was a regular customer, Mr. Robinson would have been able to give him her address.

It was all perfectly simple, the only remarkable feature being the extraordinary promptitude with which the inquiry had been carried out. Which went to show how much more clearly Thorndyke had realized the danger that surrounded me than I had myself.

These various reflections gave me full occupation during the remainder of the journey, extending themselves into consideration of how I should act in the immediate future.

My first duty was obviously to report myself to Thorndyke without delay; after which, I persuaded myself, it would be highly necessary for me personally to reassure the fair and perhaps anxious Sylvia.

As to how this was to be managed I was not quite clear, and in spite of the most profound cogitation I had reached no conclusion when the train rumbled into Charing Cross Station.

As I stepped out on the platform with a valedictory bow to my nautical fellow passenger, my irresolution came to an end and my duty became clear.

I must, in common decency, report myself at once to Thorndyke, seeing that he had been at so much trouble on my account. His card, which he had given me, I had unfortunately—or perhaps fortunately, as it turned out—left on the mantelpiece at my lodgings; but I remembered that the address was King's Bench Walk, and assumed that I should have no difficulty in finding the house.

Nor had I; for, as I entered the Temple by the Tudor Street gate—having overshot my mark on the Embankment—I was almost immediately confronted by a fine brick doorway surmounted by a handsome pediment and bearing legibly painted on its jamb, "First pair, Dr. Thorndyke."

I ascended the "first pair" of stairs, which brought me to an open oak door, massive and iron-bound, and a closed inner door, on the brass knocker of which I executed a flourish that would have done credit to a Belgravian footman. Thereupon the door opened and a small man of sedate and clerical aspect regarded me with an air of mild inquiry.

"Is Dr. Thorndyke at home?" I asked.

"No, sir. He is at the hospital," the little man replied.

"Dr. Jervis?"

"Is watching a case in the Probate Court. Perhaps you would like to leave a message or write a note? A message in writing would be preferable."

"I don't know that it's necessary," said I. "My name is Jardine, and if you tell him that I called that will probably be enough."

The little man gave me a quick, birdlike glance of obviously heightened interest.

"If you are Dr. Humphrey Jardine," said he, "I think a few explanatory words would be acceptable. The doctor has been extremely uneasy about you. A short note and an appointment, either here or at the hospital, would be desirable."

With this he stepped back, holding the door invitingly open, and I entered, wondering who the deuce this prim little cathedral dean might be with his persuasive manners and his quaintly precise forms of speech.

He placed a chair for me at the table, and, having furnished me with writing materials, stood a little way off, unobtrusively examining me as I wrote. I had finished the short letter, closed it up and addressed it, and was rising to go, when, almost automatically, I took out my watch and glanced at it.

Of course it had stopped.

"Can you tell me the time?" I asked.

My acquaintance drew out his own watch and replied deliberately: "Sev-

enteen minutes and forty seconds past one."

He paused for a moment and then added: "I hope, sir, you have not got any water into your watch."

"I'm afraid I have," I replied, rather taken aback by the rapidity of his diagnosis. "But I'll just wind it up to make sure."

"Oh, don't do that, sir!" he exclaimed, reaching out his hand. "Allow me to examine it before you disturb the movement."

He whipped out of his pocket a watchmaker's eyeglass, which miraculously glued itself to his eye, and, having taken a brief glance at the opened watch, produced a minute pocket screwdriver and a sheet of paper; and, in the twinkling of an eye, as it seemed to me, the paper was covered with the dismembered structures which had in their totality formed my timepiece.

"It's quite a small matter, sir," was his report as he rose from his inspection and pocketed his eyeglass. "Just a speck or two of rust. If you will take my watch for the present, I will have your own in going order by the next time you call."

It seemed an odd transaction; but the little man's manner, though quiet, was so decisive that I took his proffered watch and, affixing it to my chain, thanked him for his kindness and departed, wondering if it was possible that this prim, clerical little person could possibly be the "tame mechanic" of whom Thorndyke had spoken.

Traveling in London was comparatively slow in those days—which, perhaps, was none the worse for a near and pleasant suburb like Hampstead; it had turned half-past two when I let myself into my lodgings with a rather rusty key, and almost literally fell into the arms of Mrs. Blunt.

I feared for a moment that she was going to kiss me. But that was a false alarm.

What she actually did was to seize both my hands and burst into tears with such violence as to cover me with confusion and cause the servant maid to rise like a domestic and highly inquisitive apparition from the kitchen stairs.

I pacified Mrs. Blunt as well as I could and shook hands heartily with the maid, who thereupon retired, much gratified, to the underworld, whence presently issued an odor suggestive of sacrificial rites, not entirely unconnected with fried onions, and accompanied by an agreeable hissing sound.

"But wherever have you been all this time?" Mrs. Blunt asked, as she preceded me up the stairs wiping her eyes, "and why didn't you send us a line just to say that you were all right?"

To this question I made a somewhat guarded answer in so far as the cause of my immersion in the river was concerned; otherwise I gave her a fairly correct account of my adventures.

"Well, well," was her comment. "I suppose it was all for the best, but I do think those sailors might have put you on shore somewhere. Dear me, what a time it has been! I couldn't sleep at night for thinking of you, and what Susan and I have eaten between us wouldn't have kept a sparrow alive. And Dr. Thorndyke, too, I'm sure he was very anxious and worried about you, though he is such a quiet, self-contained man that you can't tell what he is thinking of. And Lord! what a lot of questions he do ask, to be sure!"

"By the way, how did Dr. Thorndyke come to know that I was missing?" I asked.

"Why, I told him, of course. When you didn't come home that night—which Susan and me sat up for you until three in the morning—I thought there must be something wrong, you being so regular in your habits; so next day, the very first thing, I took his card from your mantelpiece and down I went to his office

and told him what had happened. He came up here that evening to see if you had come home; and he's been here every day since making inquiries about you."

"Has he really?"

"Yes. In a hansom cab. Every single day. And so has the young lady."

"The young lady!" I exclaimed. "What young lady?"

Mrs. Blunt regarded me with something as nearly approaching a wink as can be imagined in association with an elderly female of sedate aspect.

"Now," she protested slyly, "as if you didn't know! What young lady, indeed! Why, Miss Vyne, to be sure, and a very sweet young lady she is, and talked to me just as simple and friendly as if she'd been an ordinary young woman."

"And how do you know that she isn't just an ordinary young woman?" I asked.

Mrs. Blunt was shocked.

"Do you suppose, Mr. Jardine, sir," she demanded severely, "that I, who have been a head parlormaid in a county family where my poor husband was coachman, don't know a real gentlewoman when I meet one? You surprise me, sir."

I apologized hastily and suggested that, as so many kind inquiries had been made, the least I could do was to call and return thanks without delay.

"Certainly, sir," Mrs. Blunt agreed, "but not until you have had your lunch. It's a small porterhouse steak," she added alluringly, being evidently suspicious of my intentions.

The announcement, seconded by an appetizing whiff from below, reminded me that I was prodigiously sharp set, having tasted no food since I had come ashore at Folkstone, and put the grosser physiological needs of the body for the moment in the ascendent.

But even as I was devouring the steak with voracious gusto my mind occupied itself with plans for a strategic descent on the abode of the fair Sylvia and with speculations on the reception I should get; and the noise of water running into the bath formed a pleasing accompaniment to the final mouthfuls.

When I had bathed, shaved, and attired myself in carefully selected garments, I set forth, as smart and spruce as the frog that would a wooing go—saving the opera-hat, which would have been inappropriate to the occasion.

The distance to Sylvia's house was not great; and a pair of long and rapidly moving legs consumed it to such purpose that it was still quite reasonable calling-time when I opened the gate of "The Hawthorns" and gave a modest pull at the bell.

My summons was answered by a rather foolish-looking maid by whom I was informed that Miss Vyne was at home, and when I had given her my name—which she seemed disposed to confuse with that of a well-known edible fish—she ushered me down a passage to a room at the back of the house and, opening the door, announced me—correctly, I was glad to note; whereupon I assumed an ingratiating smile and entered.

Now, there is nothing more disconcerting than a total failure of agreement between anticipation and realization. Unconsciously I had pictured to myself the easy-mannered, genial Sylvia seated, perhaps, at an easel or table, working on one of her pictures, and had prepared myself for a reception quite simple, friendly, and unembarrassing.

Confidently and entirely at my ease, I walked in through the doorway, and there the pleasant vision faded, leaving me with the smile frozen on my face, staring in consternation at one of the most appalling old women that it has ever been my misfortune to encounter!

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK. Don't forget this magazine is issued weekly, and that you will get the continuation of this story without waiting a month.

The Frozen Beauty

By Stephen Chalmers

Author of "The Invisible Empire," "The Castle on the Crag," "On the Drop," etc.

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS

WHEN the Princess Demetra of Savrov is taken sick, the Grand Duke Feodor, her father, calls in Henri Colombel, an eminent American doctor, after Bashmetieff, a famous Russian physician, and Pelerin, of Paris, fail to cure her. Colombel promises to restore the princess to health within sixteen days if no one is permitted to enter the apartment set aside for her care. After the allotted time has passed, Colombel restores Demetra to her father, to everybody's amazement. When Feodor recovers from his emotion, Colombel has disappeared. Although all efforts to trace him fail, it is believed that he has gone to the United States. Bashmetieff, eager to discover his secret, departs for New York City, where he offers Allen Thurston, a private inquiry agent, ten thousand dollars to find Colombel. Thurston, wishing to locate the missing man, because he is convinced that Lora Hilliard and Mrs. Orville Guest, who have disappeared, are with him, accepts the commission. He learns from Hugo Jameson, a specialist, that Colombel came to the United States; but he is unable to get any further information. During this interview a sailor calls for some packing-cases addressed to Captain Kane, S. S. Esmeralda; and Thurston, with the belief that they belong to Colombel, tracks the man to a water-front saloon, where he learns from him that a person answering Colombel's description sailed for Para, Brazil, on the Esmeralda. Thurston immediately locates the vessel and begs Kane to take him and Bashmetieff to the island off Para, where he is sure Colombel has sought sanctuary. Kane agrees to do it for two thousand dollars. The following day Thurston is approached by Pelerin in disguise, who wishes him to find Colombel for him. While they are discussing terms, Bashmetieff enters and accuses Thurston of treachery. The agent finally arranges for them both to go, and the Esmeralda puts out to sea. Before the voyage is half over, mutiny breaks out aboard. It seems to have been instigated by the two scientists, who have made the crew drunk by giving them champagne.

CHAPTER VIII.

Elihu Kane, Tartar.

FOR the moment good fortune was with the captain. The very evil that had caused the trouble temporarily saved the situation.

Coming out of the stuffy forecastle into the breeze created by the ship's onrush, the men seemed to be attacked by a sudden dizziness. Furthermore, after the comparative blaze of their lighted quarters, the night seemed of a pitchy blackness, accentuated by the ship's lights.

"Look at them, the drunken swine!"

This story began in The All-Story Cavalier Weekly for June 20.

snarled Kane as the men tripped and tumbled over deck gear and collided with hatches. "But now's the time to handle them!"

He shoved the revolver into his pocket and dropped down into the waist of the ship. Approaching the nearest man, who was rubbing the fog out of his eyes and swaying on his heels, the captain deliberately felled him with his fist.

At that the rest of the men seemed to sober up for the moment. As their eyes grew used to the comparative darkness they took in the situation. They were ten to one. The wine was still in their veins and rousing red devils in their brains. An ominous muttering arose.

"Hey, there!" growled one of the men sullenly. "You can't knock a man to smash for nuthin'—like that!"

"Can't I?" replied Kane with a sinister drawl.

He rushed right into the group of recalcitrants and bowled over the man who had dared question his authority. Next minute there was a scrimmage, Elihu Kane the object and center of it.

But it must have been "the vi'lence o' his earlier days" that was upon the skipper. His long arms thrashed about like two flails. Two men dropped and lay still. A third staggered back with his hands to his face and blood trickling through his fingers. Then Kane went down with a half dozen on top of him.

Almost instantly three rapid shots came from the region of the bridge binnacle. Thurston had aimed high for obvious reasons; but the bullets, buzzing so closely overhead, had a momentary intimidating effect. The mutineers sprang up and looked around for the source of this new attack.

In an instant Kane had regained his feet, backed off from the men, and covered them with the mate's revolver, the use of which he had delayed until the last possible moment. A few seconds later he became aware of a quiet figure standing near him with a vicious-looking, blued-steel automatic suggestively poised.

Kane and his ally had the whip-hand.

"Now, then, ye tarriers," snarled the captain, "another move except as I order it and ye'll go plumb to judgment as quick as a pistol-crack!"

He waved the revolver in their faces, then singled out the men one by one.

"You, Slumgullion Jake! You're the soberest; therefore, the worst o' the lot. Up to the crow's nest with you. That'll cool your head, I reckon.

"You—Bill Rivers—to the forward lookout! Peterson and Baldy—dump them rats into the fo'c's'le! The rest o' ye turn to with buckets and swabs! This hooker wants cleanin' up! By—thunder! I'll teach ye to gamble an' drink an' smoke an' blaspheme on *my* ship! Lively now, ye swine!"

The men obeyed, perhaps because none had the temerity to make an individual protest. It would have been the signal for an individual shot. In their befogged condition, despite their fury, they were no match for the alert brain and itching rage of Captain Elihu Kane.

The man called Bill Rivers staggered forward to the bows; Peterson and Baldy stumbled over themselves as they dragged their two senseless mates to the forecastle companion.

The man whose countenance had been altered by Kane's terrific blow sat on the forward hatch, whimpering as the blood trickled through his fingers. The long, lank ruffian called Slumgullion Jake was leaning against the foremast, trying to collect his wits.

"Up with ye!" roared Kane. "If ye fall an' break your neck, so much riddance o' deep-sea vermin! Up with ye!"

Slumgullion Jake slowly obeyed. Thurston felt his scalp creep as he watched the man—soberer than the rest perhaps, but still befuddled with

champagne—climb the iron rungs of the foremast to the crow's nest.

Several times the man stopped and swung out at arms' length from the mast. Twice he swayed sidewise, so that it seemed his feet must skite off the rung. Only the instinct to grip hard with his hands saved him from falling backward and crashing to the deck.

At last he reached the crow's nest, into which he collapsed like a bag of loose bricks. There he remained between sea and sky in a drunken stupor until day broke.

When the captain and Thurston returned to the bridge they found that the mate had vanished. Apparently he had regained consciousness and crawled to some hiding-place where he might recover and possibly plan his revenge.

Kane said nothing, but his face grew harder in expression. He leaned over the rail and keenly watched the men in the waist. They were sullenly plying swabs. The lookout forward had fallen asleep, his body hanging half-way over the port bow. About the deck stood the sober men of the middle watch, who growled discontentedly when at eight bells (midnight) they were not relieved.

The whole atmosphere aboard the Esmeralda at that hour palpitated with resentment.

Thurston glanced sidewise at the captain. Kane was in a tense state of agitation, for which the investigator did not blame him in the least. At sea "red rum" is a fearful thing. Backward it spells "murder."

The captain was in a sorry dilemma; his mate drunk, his crew more than half mutinous, and no one to relieve the bridge. Obviously he only half trusted Thurston, despite the latter's temporary assistance.

"A bad business, captain," Thurston ventured.

"Aye!" sneered Kane. "I'd like plenty to know what *you* know about it."

"I know a great deal," said Thurston, unruffled, "and I propose to tell you some of it."

"Aye, just some of it, hey? How am I to know anything you tell me's true? Wasn't it you threw me all that guff about friends o' Dr. Colombel? Looks like genuwine friendship, don't it?—this ship being Dr. Colombel's charter!"

"Then you suspect that your passengers are at the back of this trouble?" said Thurston. "You're right. Of course, you didn't supply the champagne and organize the gambling club forrard."

"Well, talk up if you're such a blame good friend," the captain jeered. "But, mind you, I don't trust you a nickel's worth. You've got to make good first, young man."

"The situation as I see it is this," said Thurston, firmly declining to accept quarrel: "The two other passengers who are aboard have made an attempt to enlist your mate and your crew to their selfish interests.

"I am not aware, Captain Kane, of how much you know about Dr. Colombel and his work; but I personally am now convinced that no ship ever put to sea in search of a greater treasure than this same Esmeralda, or with a pair of more unscrupulous rascals aboard.

"Your Dr. Colombel, captain—in case you do not happen to know—has discovered, I believe, a scientific fact, the value of which is incomparable as relative values go.

"Unless you are aware of what a great medical discovery means—for instance, a perfected cure for bubonic plague or cancer—you will hardly appreciate that the stake at issue at the end of this voyage is something of vastly more importance than the Cullinan diamond or the surplus of the Bank of England.

"Perhaps it will be clear to you, however, if I say that the two other passengers aboard are neither Pavlovitch nor Perrier. They are Bashme-

tieff and Pelerin, two of the most eminent and unscrupulous scientists in the world. Their personal welfare and personal glory are endangered by Dr. Colombel's success.

"When I was engaged to find Dr. Colombel for these men," continued Thurston, speaking very gently, "I suspected some of this. I entered into the affair for various personal reasons —principally curiosity perhaps. I did not believe, however, that those men could ever so far forget their standing and professional dignity as to carry matters to mutiny and murder."

"Mutiny — and murder?" echoed Kane.

"Yes, mutiny and murder, which would indicate that they are after something more than a bottle of pain-killer. Possibly there is radium in it.

"Anyway, captain, they regard you as the principal stumbling-block between them and the acquisition of this great secret. They have also reason to believe that I will assist them in no crooked work. They have bribed the mate and, I suspect, half the crew into their service.

"They have plenty of money and will stop at nothing. This very night I heard them discussing plain murder."

"Who's to be the goat?" asked Kane, still with a slightly disbelieving sneer.

"Either Dr. Colombel, or you, or me—maybe all three of us. If they went as far as one discreet removal they would hardly stop at three.

"But there is no immediate danger," added Thurston. "You are safe, at least until you have navigated this ship to the island. I am safe until I have fulfilled my contract and brought them into Colombel's presence. Colombel is safe until they have his secret.

"But after this ship reaches that island, Captain Kane, look out for trouble—that is, of course, if you still purpose to continue the voyage to the island."

"If I still purpose— What d'y' mean?"

"You might put into Demerara, turn the crew and this precious pair over to the authorities for mutiny and inciting to mutiny, then engage another crew and proceed to the island."

The captain looked at Thurston with a glimmer of light in his eyes. Then the light died, and he walked restlessly about the bridge.

"I can't do that," said he at last, "much as I ought to and might want to. But I got some manner o' sense. I can't do it. It would bring this vessel under the eye of the authorities, and her comings and goings would be investigated.

"I tell you plain, Mr. Thurston, that I'm an honest man, and this ship is doing no crooked business. But it's engaged in secret business, and investigation would mean a dead give-away of the whereabouts of the doctor and his island, which I'm pledged to keep secret. I'm a man of my word, Mr. Thurston."

"I see. I understand," said Thurston with a growing respect for Captain Elihu Kane. "What, then, do you propose to do?"

"That's my business," said Kane curtly. "Maybe you'll see in the morning what I'm going to do, to begin with. But you can bet the family timepiece, Mr. Thurston, that they—and maybe you, too—have caught a Tartar in Elihu Ebenezer Kane.

"I'll take this ship to the island—you can bank on that—and I'll take every blame one of you there, too. Then if there's any fighting to be done, that'll be a nice, quiet place to blaze away and nobody to ask questions about who gets hurt.

"As you say, Mr. Man, when we get to Cabeza—that's the name of it, if you're dying to know—there'll be trouble. There'll be a scrap that will wipe Kilkenny off the map of disturbance. You can bet your ancestral clock on that!

"In the mean time," he added, "I'm going to sleep. I've got a morning's work ahead of me, and the great whale

knows what after that. I suppose I've got to trust you whether I like it or not. Keep a sharp lookout, and call me if anything shows up. Keep the course in your eye, and if that quartermaster nods or tries to leave the wheel, shove a gun in his face. Good night, sir. Treat me white, and maybe I'll wipe a few things off the slate on your account. Call me at daybreak!"

The captain turned and went into the cabin behind the wheelhouse. In the rear wall of the latter was a little window through which Kane could see and, if he chose, be seen by the quartermaster.

The investigator saw Kane strip off his coat and vest, dose himself with a tablespoonful of Dr. Blatch's Pain-Killer, and switch off the light.

Then Allen Longworth Thurston found himself in charge of the S. S. Esmeralda.

As long as he lived he never forgot that first watch aboard a ship. The hours dragged. He was filled with an awe-inspiring sense of responsibility. Yet he knew that he had little or none, except to summon the captain if a ship appeared or further trouble broke loose forward.

The ship forged onward through a phosphorescent sea. The masts pointed tapering fingers to the stars, and the steering-gear whined and creaked.

The strange silence of mid-ocean was accentuated by these little breaks in it. The men, seeing the captain had disappeared, slipped one by one down the forecastle companion. Even the few sober men who had been kept on deck after the middle watch took advantage of the situation and went below.

Once or twice Thurston heard the muffled "pop" of a bottle being carefully uncorked. But there was no singing or talking. The watcher on the bridge could imagine that the men were whispering together as they drank.

But there was nothing Thurston could do.

The man at the wheel seemed weary, but he did not complain. He seemed a decent fellow—Wilson was his name—and pulled himself together with an apologetic grin every time Thurston drew his attention to a deviation from the course.

Suddenly the investigator stopped in his quiet promenade. He was filled with the sense of being watched. He turned swiftly and discerned the head and shoulders of a man projecting above the bridge ladder.

"Where's *he?*" asked the intruder. The voice was thick and sullen.

By the dim light from the wheelhouse Thurston could see a face with bloodshot eyes and a badly discolored right cheek-bone. It was the mate, Terhune.

"He's turned in, Mr. Terhune," said Thurston evenly, but slipping a hand into his coat-pocket, "and as he left me in charge without instructions regarding you, I'd advise you to get down that ladder just as quietly as you came up it."

"Oh, we're in authority, are we?" jeered the mate. "But that's all right, Johnnie-boy. I'm keeping your count. Wait till I call tally on you."

He retreated down the ladder with a growl.

Three hours more dragged by. Nothing but stars arose on the horizon. The wind freshened somewhat, and whined among the gear. A slight swell came from the southwest, and the abandoned buckets rolled and clattered about the waist.

Shortly after five o'clock the dawn came and grayly lighted the deserted decks of the Esmeralda. With the exception of a crumpled sleeper in the bows and the invisible "lookout" in the crow's-nest, not a man was at his post above decks, except the haggard-eyed Wilson at the wheel.

But the day had come, bringing a sense of relief with its light, and presently Captain Kane emerged from his cabin. There was a cold fire in the man's eyes. He took the wheel from

the quartermaster's hands, and curtly bade him go find a man sober enough to take the "trick."

"And then, Mr. Thurston," said he, giving the wheel a spoke or two, "you'll have Jonquil send my breakfast up here, and get some for yourself and your precious acquaintances down-stairs. After that, bring 'em up on the bridge. By that time, I reckon, I'll have things arranged for a little showdown of all hands."

CHAPTER IX.

Trapped!

AS the sun rose on the morning of that sixth day of the Esmeralda's voyage there was still not a sign of life in the forward part of the steamer. The mutineers were evidently suffering a reaction from their excesses—the kind of reaction that makes nervous devils of ordinary brute-men, such as composed the forecastle company.

Wilson, the quartermaster, had been unable to find a man willing, if fit, to take the wheel. It was Kane himself who summoned Tommy Jenkins, the assistant engineer, to the bridge. Steering a ship was child's play to a man of Tommy's intelligence.

Also, Tommy was loyal to McClurg, his chief, and the Scotch engineer, while he continuously differed with the "old man" in times of peace, forgot all animosity when there was trouble aboard—a common situation between master and chief engineer, especially on a tramp steamer.

Captain Kane received his breakfast in the cabin behind the wheelhouse.

"Jonquil," said Kane between gulps of coffee, "have you any manner o' sense?"

"I has, cap'n," said Jonquil dreamily; "more'n a lot thinks. In my earlier days mother used to say to father, who was a rich tea-planter, he was—she used to say, 'That boy Jonquil is awful sensible'—"

"All right," the captain interrupted. "If you have any sense, you may have a chance to show it. There's trouble aboard, Jonquil."

"Yes—trouble," murmured Jonquil. "Loads of it—loads."

"Don't you mix in, Jonquil," said Kane, speaking very slowly and distinctly. "You just let 'em go on thinking you're a blame fool, which maybe you ain't such—hey, Jonquil?"

"That's right," said Jonquil, "which maybe I ain't such. A bit slow at times in my head, which come from bein' tommyhawked when I was young. Both my parints was massacreed an'—"

"All right, and I've always been a fair master to you, Jonquil?"

"Meanin' the kicks when you was vi'lent? Oh, them didn't hurt none, cap'n," said Jonquil, flattered by Kane's attention.

"Great whale!" muttered the captain as Jonquil withdrew. "To think I'd ever need *him* for anything. Elihu Ebenezer—you're in bad!"

After breakfast the captain marched up and down the bridge-deck, his hands behind him, his head bowed. He did not summon the men, or appear to question their absence. When he was ready, there would be no doubt of his intentions.

Once he looked at the wheelhouse and said to Tommy Jenkins:

"Does McClurg understand the idea?"

"He's on, s'r," said Tommy. He had a slight London accent.

"Are you fixed?" asked Kane.

"'Eeled, you mean, s'r. I should bally well think, s'r."

"Good!"

A little later M. Bashmetieff, M. Pelerin, and Thurston sat down to breakfast in the saloon. The scientists seemed anxious, but willing to be friendly. They exchanged courteous bows with each other and Thurston as they took their seats.

M. Pelerin tried to stir conversation on general topics, but his efforts fell

flat. Thurston refused to talk, but kept coldly surveying the two faces by turn. It was very disquieting to Bashmetieff and Pelerin.

At last desultory talk died to silence. After a prolonged pause, Thurston, buttering a piece of Jonquilized toast, remarked quite complacently:

"You certainly are a pretty pair of scoundrels."

Bashmetieff dropped a fork. Pelerin turned pale, and his eyes flamed at the insult. But before he could retaliate either with word or act, a sudden uproar took place.

The steamer's fog-whistle began to bray a long-drawn blast. The bridge-bell clanged a protracted alarm. At the same time the signaling apparatus vibrated in the bowels of the ship. The engines slowed, then stopped altogether.

Bashmetieff, Pelerin, and Thurston started to their feet and rushed to the saloon companion as a voice roared on deck:

"All hands—to stations!"

Every sound indicated a situation that only a fool at sea would disregard by remaining below. As Thurston reached the deck, he say men running toward the waist—seamen, stokers, the cook, and Jonquil. The investigator turned to the scientists.

"Come up on the bridge. We'll be out of the way there."

From the elevation of the bridge, they looked down on an odd picture. The mutineers had tumbled out of the forecastle—miserable red-eyed objects, twitching with nervousness or sullen under the after-influence of the insidious wine.

Foremost among them, as they gathered in a group facing the bridge, was the mate, Terhune. Apparently he had spent the better part of the night with the men forward.

Immediately below the bridge, facing forward and separated from the mutinous party by a space of ten or twelve yards, were the loyal members of the Esmeralda's company. There were two stokers (a third being on the mutineers' side), the cook (a lanky Swede, named Axel), Tommy Jenkins and Jonquil. The last-mentioned looked a picture of blank stupidity. From the point of numbers, he certainly did not seem to count.

Presently the loyal group was joined by a large, red-whiskered man, dressed in a suit of greasy overalls, and carrying a huge monkey wrench in a hairy right fist. This was Donald McClurg, the chief engineer.

Thurston did not comprehend what was coming for half a minute. Then he perceived that the captain had employed the general fire-signal to bring all hands on deck for that promised "show-down." His game had worked successfully so far. At that dread sea-alarm every man had scuttled from below like rats from a doomed ship.

After a short period of assembly there was a tense silence aboard the Esmeralda. The ship lost way and finally drifted. The sigh of the sea was a quiet overtone, and men's voices sounded harsh and painfully distinct.

In the center of the bridge stood Captain Kane, calmly gazing down at the mutinous men below. Behind him, in the house, the abandoned wheel whirled aimlessly back and forth as the steamer rolled slightly.

Bashmetieff and Pelerin whispered together at the starboard end of the bridge, while at the port end Thurston was engaged in the studious filling of a pipe.

"Well," cried the mate from the forward group, "what's the trouble? D'y' think anybody's feelin' up to fire-drill?"

"My man," said Kane as if he were addressing a common deck-hand, "as you seem to belong forward you will keep your mouth shut until you are at least spoken to."

The mate clenched his fist, but the captain went on imperturbably, although his nostrils twitched like a camel's—the only sign of the furies

raging within him: "Such of you men as feel you're in bad company may step aft and improve it. Lively now!"

There was shuffling of feet among the mutineers. Kane's eye singled out the quartermaster, Wilson, who seemed to have been awakened suddenly and swept along with the crowd.

"Step aft, Wilson. You're too good a man to mix with them tarriers," said Kane.

Wilson swallowed hard, hitched his pants, and crossed to the other party.

"Any more?" asked the captain. "You, there, Kling. You look fairly decent."

A young, fair-haired German shot a quick glance at his companions and started forward. He was not interfered with, but rather helped on the course to righteousness by a brutal kick from the mate.

The captain's jaws came together with a snap, but he still held himself in.

"Now, men," said he, "I am not asking where you got the cursed liquor nor the root of all evil. I know and will deal with the parties in my own time and in my own way."

Thurston observed that Kane never even glanced at Bashmetieff or Pelerin as he spoke of them. He was ignoring, or was unconscious of, their presence on the bridge.

But the mate, Terhune, looked up at the two scientists and deliberately winked, which seemed to annoy the conspirators excessively.

"But what I do mean to know," the captain went on, "is, what in thunder you expect to gain by this conduct, outside of jail for mutiny?"

"Lookee here, Kane!" began the mate insolently.

"Silence!" roared the master. "D'you men choose this fellow for your spokesman?"

"Aye, aye!" came a ready enough chorus, every man unwilling to be leader in an affair that might have serious consequences ashore.

"Very well. Go on, you—Terhune, isn't it? Only, address me as 'captain' or 'sir.'"

"A-all right, kyaptain," said the mate mockingly. "Well, kyaptain, this steamer has been on secret business with Cabeza Island the last few trips. You were pretty cagey about it, too, an' it might ha' paid you better if you'd re-posed some confidence in your mate.

"But I'm onto the game now—so's the lot of us—and I reckon we want a share of *that treasure* which belongs to them as first finds it—be he master or man."

"Treasure!" echoed the captain blankly, and he cast an involuntary side glance at Thurston, who was smiling broadly.

"Yes, kyaptain," said the mate, "and you can wink, and that fellow in the flannelettes wink back, but you can't fool us! We got information from an equally reliable source."

And again he winked up at Bashmetieff and Pelerin, who fairly squirmed with chagrin.

Thurston was now openly laughing.

The captain glared at him, feeling himself a stranger to this phase of the trouble and enraged thereat.

"Well, what've you got to say?" he asked the investigator savagely. "What do you know about this precious treasure?"

"You remember what I told you on this bridge during the night," said Thurston in an undertone. "That's the treasure, and much good it will do a pack of illiterate seamen. Tell them there's no treasure of the buried order and that they have been played for suckers—you know by whom."

"I see," said the captain slowly. He turned and glowered at Bashmetieff and Pelerin. Then he addressed the mate, while the loyal party below the bridge awaited developments.

"Mr. Ter-hune," drawled the captain with much sarcasm, "I am not surprised that a pack of ignorant 'longshore tarriers should fall for any kind

of a yarn, especially of the treasure sort, but that a man of your experience and holding a master's ticket should swallow it, sober or drunk, shows you for what you are.

"Mr. Ter-hune, you have been buncoed and played for a sucker. You are a lolli-eyed fool and your head is worse'n a wooden nutmeg!"

What happened after that speech it would be difficult to account for with any degree of exactitude. It was one of those instances where something unexpectedly serious is precipitated by a mere triviality, especially where one side of the quarrel is strained to a nervous tension.

Kane's uncomplimentary description had been couched in comparatively mild language—for Kane; but the words were no sooner out of his mouth than something—it may have been a twitch of pain in his bruised cheekbone or an access of the nervous fury of post-inebriation—broke loose in the mate.

A marline-spike appeared magically in his hand. Simultaneously it flashed brassily in the sunlight. Kane saw it coming and ducked, but in ducking he merely caused an ill shot to find its intended billet. The spike struck him on the side of the head, and the captain rolled over on the bridge deck without so much as a gasp.

And the immediate results of that comparative reference to "a wooden nutmeg" did not end there. As the captain dropped senseless, McClurg, the engineer, uttered a yell of Celtic fury and charged straight into the mutineers, brandishing his big monkey-wrench.

The whole thing was on in less than three seconds. The loyalists to a man followed McClurg into the *mêlée*. Revolvers and knives banged and flashed. Bullets flew, and the air was rent with yells and screams of rage and pain.

Thurston saw the Swedish cook, Axel, go down before a shot fired pointblank by the man called Peterson. This was just after Axel had leveled the man, Baldy, with a cut from a butcher's cleaver which he had carried concealed under his white apron. At the same time the voice of the mate was roaring:

"Back to the fo'c'sle, boys! Back to the fo'c'sle!"

It was a trick to draw on McClurg's men, but not even Thurston suspected it. He helped the rout forward with rapid shots from his automatic, aiming high, however, as he had no ambition to have blood on his hands, at least until the extremity of a just cause required it.

He suddenly remembered Bashmetieff and Pelerin. An instinct of danger threatening made him wheel about. M. Pelerin's hand was in his hip-pocket, but before he could withdraw it, Thurston had him covered.

"So," said the latter, "you have claws as well as cunning. Get below and take M. Bashmetieff with you, or I shall be compelled to cancel my contract in a very summary manner."

The coolness and precision of the speech impressed the Frenchman and the Russian. They went down the starboard bridge ladder with most undignified haste.

Again Thurston turned his attention forward. The victory seemed McClurg's. He and his men had driven the mutineers into the forecastle. At that moment the canny Scot was superintending the battening down of the hatch over the companion.

But an alarming thought had come to Thurston, something that, with all his greater knowledge of the ship's architecture, the engineer might have overlooked. The American dashed toward the bridge ladder, shouting:

"Come aft, men—quick!"

Even in that moment of excitement and action, out of a corner of his eye he caught a flash picture of Jonquil bending over the prostrate captain and tenderly wiping the blood from his tyrant's head.

The picture stuck in Thurston's mind even as he talked to McClurg.

"Isn't there another exit from the fo'c'sle? They went too readily. It's a move of some sort."

"Guid forgie me for a silly eediot!" gasped the engineer, clapping a hand to his brow. "There's a fo'c'sle door at the heid o' the starboard alley. Down ablow wi' ye lads! Haud that door till Ah can get a key an' lock 'um in!"

The men rushed below by the saloon companion, McClurg and Thurston with them.

But they were too late. The moment they reached the saloon, the mutineers leaped from both the starboard and the port alleys, and the *mêlée* was on again.

To make matters worse, the loyalists were trapped. Some one pattered along the deck overhead, slammed the companion door shut, and there was a snap of a key turned in a lock.

Furthermore, the mutineers had fought warily, as if by prearrangement. During the brief scuffle on deck and the swift retreat to the forecastle, they had lost but two men, Baldy, killed by Axel's last blow, and another man who might also be dead for all anybody had had time to ascertain.

McClurg, on the other side, shorthanded from the beginning, was now minus three good men. One of the stokers was missing. Axel lay dead, shot through the temple. The captain was senseless on the bridge.

They were trapped, and outnumbered.

It was all over in half-minute. The loyal stoker, the young German, Kling, and the quartermaster, Wilson, surrendered. McClurg was overpowered and borne, struggling, to the carpet. Tommy Jenkins, rushing to his chief's assistance, suddenly saw a blaze of stars followed by a complete eclipse of the sun, moon and other luminaries. Then he forgot things for a while.

Thurston felt a pistol muzzle pressed against the back of his head, and heard the mate's voice behind him.

"Sonny, you'd better get into your cabin. This is no place for perfect gentlemen. You might get your flannelettes soiled."

One minute later Allen Longworth Thurston found himself locked within the cabin where the reproduced *Sir Galahad* galloped on his white steed along the wall. The investigator decided that the picture had not the least appropriateness just then.

It ought to have been *Don Quixote* riding a weak-kneed *Rosinante,* and butting in where he had really no business, in search of a more or less imaginary maiden in distress.

CHAPTER X.

The Council of Terms.

IT was a surprise to Thurston when, after he had been locked in the cabin only ten minutes, the door was opened and he was gruffly told by the mate to come out again.

The investigator appeared in the saloon with his hand in his right coat-pocket. The mate had made no attempt to disarm him. Even now, Terhune did not ask for the automatic which he knew was gripped in that hidden right hand. Something about the set of Thurston's jaw and the cold expression of his gray eyes suggested that the pistol and the hand had no intention of parting company.

At the head of the saloon dining-table, at the captain's place, sat Donald McClurg, his red whiskers fairly bristling, his under lip dourly protruding, and his arms folded across his chest.

It struck Thurston that the engineer seemed master of the situation; that in some way he had managed to turn the tables, at least temporarily.

Sitting beside him was Tommy Jenkins, who was conscious but dazed. He had a bandanna handkerchief tied about his head.

Lined up with Tommy on one side of the table was the loyal stoker; Wilson, the quartermaster, and the young

German who had deserted from the side of the mutineers. There was a vacant seat next to Tommy, and into this McClurg urged Thurston with a jerk of his chin.

On the opposite side of the table sat a half-dozen mutineers. At the after end of the table the mate resumed a seat and glared at his *vis-à-vis,* the chief engineer.

Thurston observed that Bashmetieff and Pelerin were not present, but he had no doubt that the ventilator of the Frenchman's cabin was doing good service at that very moment. He had to admire the diplomacy that kept them, the sources of conspiracy, apparently out of the whole affair.

"Well," said the Scot, holding the lead which he had seemingly acquired, "now that we're all here again, we'll come down to brass castings. Ye've led a mutiny, Mr. Terhune," he went on grimly. "There's three men deid an' four or five mair or less damaged. That's serious business, Mr. Terhune, to say nothing o' a mate fellin' his own master wi' a marline-spike, an' it's your funeral hereafter, not mines nor theirs that stood by their duty."

"Cut out the guff, McClurg, an' come down to cases," growled the mate.

"Ah'm comin'," said the Scot coolly. "Now, as Ah understand it, ye havena a leg o' justification to stand on, except that ye're after buried treasure on this Cabeesa Island, an' needed a ship an' a free hand.

"That bein' so, ye canna put into any port. I expect your plan is to get the treasure, stow it aboard, an' hide it some other place. Then ye'll run the Esmeralda ashore — maybe on some man-forsaken bit o' South American coast — scatter, an' meet again somewhere else. Then a schooner, and heigh-ho for the loot. Does that hit the nail or ma thumb, Mr. Terhune?"

The mate stared, then grinned.

"Mebbe," said he.

"But the question is," said the engineer, lowering his bristling brows, "how are ye going to get the steamer to that island?"

"Shucks!" said the mate disgustedly. "I've been there before. Even if there weren't charts aboard, I could take her by dead reckoning from here. It's only five hundred miles southeast. We're not far from Trinidad now, if ye feel like taking a swim."

"Aye, aye," said McClurg dryly. "I wasna questionin' your abeelities as a navigator, Mr. Ter-hune. But ye've made one big oversight. If this were a sailin' ship—fine. But it's no. Maybe ye never read that thing o' Kiplin's aboot a man caa'd McAndrew:

"Lord, Thou hast made this world o' ours
the shadow o' a dream,
An', taught by time, I tak' it so, exceptin' always—steam!"

There was silence. It slowly dawned upon all what the engineer had in mind; but Terhune cried hoarsely:

"What d'y' mean?"

"Wha's to run the injins? Not me, nor Tommy Jenkins. We're honest men. Ye can drift till judgment cracks!"

Terhune deliberately produced a revolver he had picked up in or prior to the fray. He aimed it up the board at McClurg.

"Mr. McClurg," said the mate incisively, "you'll start the engines inside of ten minutes, or I'll blow your oatmeal head off."

The Scotsman's eyes did not even blink. But a slow grin expanded his dour mouth. He spoke to his assistant without looking at him.

"How about it, Thomas? If they do me up, will ye run the injins? Mind,—they'll be solely dependent on you."

"Oh, crickey, yes!" said the English assistant, jeeringly. "I'll run the bloomin' wheels all right—run 'em to smash in five minutes. Loosen a nut an' not even the makers could patch 'em up!"

"Ye needna bother aboot the nut,

Thomas," said McClurg, chuckling. "Ah brought yin up in ma pooch."

He faced the mate. "So there ye are, Mister Ter-hune. Ye can't proceed till me an' Tommy decide ye may. Supposin' we make terms! The men'll return forward where they belong. You'll take the bridge, subject to the captain's orders. He's not badly hurt. The steamer will proceed under steam to this Cabeesa place, and maybe if ye behave yourselves the old man'll let up on past performances, and ye might even get a share o' the treasure.

"I'll admit ye'd be fulish to yield uncondeetional, but injins is awfu' troublesome to handle if you're no used to 'm."

Terhune eyed the engineer keenly, and thought hard. But the suspicion and distrust that go hand in hand with a guilty conscience got the upper grip.

"Dy' think I'm a fool?" he snarled. "D'y' think we've gone this far to go back to where we were? No, sir-ee! We're in too deep an', by the howlin' hurricanes, I'm master of this ship from now on till I've no more use for it! What's more—you're engineer, and you're going to run them engines!"

The mate, his face wrought with savagery, suddenly rose to his feet, and pointed his revolver straight at Tommy Jenkins's bandaged head.

"Mr. Donald McClurg," said he, "I admit you're as nervy a man as I've met in a dog's age. I can't spare you—you know it—but by heaven, I can spare your assistant!

"McClurg—Jenkins's life is in your hands. My gun's dead on him. I give you one minute. Will you start the engines or will you explain to Tommy Jenkins's wife what happened to him and *how* it happened?"

The Scot was cornered. He loved Tommy as his own son. Also, he had stood godfather to Tommy's wife's baby. McClurg's face turned gray.

"Man," he whispered. "Ye wadna do a thing like that. It's no human. It's—it's—"

"One minute!" snapped Terhune.

The hand that had never left Thurston's pocket tightened over the butt of the automatic. But the mate was aware of it; a subconscious or telepathic flash told the investigator that. Even if he drew, could he get a shot in before the mate pulled the trigger on Jenkins?

But he was never called on to decide or act. An unexpected interruption occurred. It was almost melodramatically in keeping with the situation.

The door of a berth cabin leading into the saloon swung open, and an apparition appeared in the shape of Captain Elihu Kane.

He was pale as death. His head was bound around with blood-stained lint, and he leaned heavily on the shoulder of the faithful Jonquil.

"Mr. McClurg—Mr. Terhune—all of you," he said, quietly. "I am still captain and owner of this vessel, and these are my orders: Mr. Terhune will navigate the Esmeralda to Cabeza Island. I cannot prevent his doing so. Mr. McClurg, you and your assistant will take the mate's orders for the present. You will return to the engine-room at once, and obey his signals."

The captain reeled slightly, but recovered and said with a kind of prophetic solemnity:

"But mark what I say—you men who have been traitor to your duty—God's in His heaven, and the right will prevail!"

Next moment he had gone back into the berth-cabin as quietly as he had come, and Jonquil shut the door.

For a moment the men around the table stared at one another. Terhune seemed uneasy, but he recovered himself and looked triumphantly at the Scot.

"Well," said he, harshly, "how about it, McClurg? The man's got more sense 'n you. Are you going to start her up?"

McClurg touched Jenkins on the shoulder, and both rose to their feet.

"I am," said the engineer. "I obey captain's orders. But mark ye what the old man said there. I've seen the like before. It was second sight. He's fey!"

Two minutes later Thurston was again locked in his cabin. The men had scattered to their duties. Terhune had taken charge of the bridge, and McClurg, Jenkins, and the two stokers (one of the latter of the mutineer faction) were again below.

The engine-room bell rang brazenly, and the steel shafts began to plunge.

Presently the Esmeralda was again under way. A little later three figures, swathed in canvas and weighted with firebars, were shot overboard from a loading-port with little ceremony.

As to what was going on, however, Thurston knew nothing. For hours he sat on the edge of his berth, thinking over all that had transpired, and wondering what the upshot would be.

One thing was clear. Bashmetieff and Pelerin were at the root of the mischief. For the time being, the rivals were in alliance. They had told the mate, no doubt, of the fabulous "treasure" that was to be found on Cabeza Island. Perhaps Terhune had taken "treasure" literally, as had the men forward—just as it was intended they should. A case or two of champagne had done the rest.

Now they would reach the island and make a landing. Colombel, the captain, and their supporters would be powerless against odds, unless the captain had a card up his sleeve.

The price of Colombel's life would be his secret. The price might be paid, the secret conveyed for the sake of the other lives at stake, but would these lives—would Colombel's own life—be assured after that?

Bashmetieff, Pelerin, and the mutineers were in deep. They could afford no come-back. They might maroon Colombel, the captain and the rest, on Cabeza Island. The latter, being privately owned, was visited only by a vessel in the employ of the doctor. Even that would be unsafe for the mutineers. Sooner or later the maroons would find means of escaping to the Brazilian mainland. And then—

But would the world believe the story of the survivors? Would even Pelerin's and Bashmetieff's worst enemies credit such a charge against them, especially if made by the "mad" Colombel, whose appearances and disappearances were of common occurrence.

But no matter what steps the two unscrupulous scientists took to seal up every possible leak, how did they expect to settle accounts with the mutineers?

There was no treasure at least of the kind that in all sea-history has turned ignorant seamen into frenzied beasts. The treasure was a great scientific secret, of no more interest to a common sailor, or even an ordinary layman, than a bottle of codliver oil.

True, they might—as assuredly they would be—unable to find the "buried treasure." But then with Colombel's secret secretly secured, Pelerin and Bashmetieff could well afford to offset the disappointment of the crew with a liberal distribution of money.

Under the circumstance of failure and with the electric chair, the gallows or prison walls confronting them, the crew would be ready to grasp at straws.

For the rest, McClurg's outline of the stranding of the Esmeralda on a forsaken coast and the disappearance of her men, seemed the best solution of the difficulty in which they would find themselves.

But what of Lora—Lora Hilliard and Mrs. Guest, if they were indeed on that island, which Thurston felt sure they were?

He shivered slightly. For the moment he pictured Cabeza as an island Eden into which the serpent crept in the shape of a gang of licentious mutineers.

Once the men stepped on that island, all discipline—even their leader's—would go to pieces. Cabeza would be turned into a beautiful Hades.

At noon, Jonquil, escorted by a mutineer, who unlocked the door, brought Thurston some food. The mutineer stood by to see that nothing detrimental to his fellows' interests was said or done. Jonquil was about to retire when Thurston said:

"If there are any books aboard, I'd like one to read, Jonquil. It's dull counting time in here."

The mutineer saw no reason for refusing a book. Five minutes later Jonquil returned, and handed the prisoner a volume.

"That's a fine book—a fine book," murmured Jonquil. "Wouldn't be s'rprised if it kep' you awake all night."

Then he went away, and again the mutineer locked the door. Thurston laughed softly over Jonquil's choice of entertaining literature. The volume was entitled, "Reminiscences of My Earlier Days;" and was by some self-admiring gentleman of whose later days, even, Thurston had never heard tell. The book belonged, obviously, to the library of the Great Subsidized.

It did not occur to the cabin prisoner, until he had thrown aside the reminiscences in disgust, that there might have been something behind Jonquil's remark about the volume's keeping him awake.

"Possibly he's got more sense 'n a lot thinks!" chuckled Thurston.

Presently he stretched out in his berth. He slept until Jonquil and the mutineer appeared with supper. Then, having eaten, he slept again.

Awaking about ten o'clock he switched on the light, and again tried the reminisicences of somebody's earlier days. But they were hopeless. He smoked until he was compelled to open the port and let out the fumes.

As he did so he dimly heard ribald singing coming from the forward part of the ship.

"They ought to be getting low on the five cases by this time," Thurston reflected.

It was now past midnight. As he was listening to the discordant bawling forward, he also heard a slight creak as of one carefully turning a key in the lock of the cabin door.

Thurston drew his automatic and awaited the intruder. It was Jonquil—and alone.

"Come on!" whispered the simpleton. "The Porkypine an' the Parrakeet"—he evidently referred to the Frenchman and the Russian—"is up on the bridge with the Dummy. The Murderer gimme the master-key an' he wants to see you."

Thurston stole out of the cabin and into the saloon, which was deserted. Jonquil swiftly locked the cabin door after him, and sped across to the portal in which the captain had made his ghostly appearance.

This door Jonquil also unlocked and with the same master-key. He shoved Thurston inside, himself remaining outside, and quietly turning the key again.

The investigator was locked in with Captain Elihu Kane, who was lying on the settle and looking very ill.

"So there you are, Thurston," said Kane with a pathetic attempt at a smile. "A nice pickle you've brought me and my ship into with your rascally 'friends.' But I believe you're honest. I'm going to trust you, young man."

"I'm glad to hear you say that," said Thurston.

"I mean that you shall carry the warning to Dr. Colombel—somehow. More than that I cannot see that I—or you—can do at present."

"How am I to reach Colombel before they do?" asked Thurston.

"That depends on what happens in the mean time," said Kane. "I hope you can swim, by the way! If Jonquil—Well, wait. There is nothing to be said until he comes back. He has gone on a little errand for me."

The captain closed his eyes and seemed to fall into a doze. Thurston waited with nervous impatience. In a little while the key turned in the lock, and Jonquil slipped into the cabin. He carried a long paper roll under his arm.

The captain opened his eyes, and they glowed at sight of the paper roll. It was a chart of the estuary of the Amazon, and he unrolled it with eager hands.

Thurston caught a glimpse of the map over the other's shoulder. It was no ordinary chart. True, it was the usual imprinted map, but all around the river's mouth there were streaks, shapeless outlinings, and figures filled in by hand.

"Good!" said the captain, with a pleased glance at Jonquil. "You picked the right one. The mate has never seen it. Therefore, he'll never miss it."

Kane then shoved the chart under the settle, on which he was lying, and said to Thurston.

"Don't sleep to-morrow night either. Cabeza will be sighted about dusk. Before she drops an anchor there, something is going to happen."

The captain's eyes glowed with a light that was not altogether natural. He suddenly lowered his lids, and in a voice half-fierce, half-reverent, said:

"Oh, Lord, deliver us from our enemies. Visit them with a blindness of intoxication and succor the right. Amen. Good night, Mr. Thurston. Remember—*to-morrow night!*"

The investigator reached his own cabin undetected, and Jonquil locked him in with the master-key. Thurston slept till morning.

All next day the Esmeralda forged south-eastward. Late in the afternoon land dimly appeared on the horizon to starboard. About dusk numerous knobs of land appeared on the horizon ahead.

On deck the men were highly elated and more or less drunk. The champagne was exhausted, but they had broken into Captain Kane's medicine press, and were sampling drugs and Dr. Blatch's Pain-Killer to satisfy their unnatural cravings.

As the dusk deepened, the engines slowed, which was a bit of caution on Terhune's part. The mate could see Cabeza Island ahead—a wedge-like bit of land rising gradually from the level of the great estuary to where it culminated abruptly in the high, sheer headland from which the island got its name.

The mate was working the Esmeralda up to a cove on the lee side of the headland, piloting the vessel from a chart which he had spread open before him in the wheel-house.

But that chart, though only two years old, said nothing of the whims of the mighty Amazon in making and unmaking deposit islands.

It was about midnight when Thurston, smoking in his cabin, was thrown from his seat by a sullen shock. The ship came to a standstill, although the engines still pounded.

The prisoner in the cabin knew at once, by the ensuing list, what had happened to the Esmeralda.

She was aground!

CHAPTER XI.

The Message to Colombel.

IT was about two o'clock in the morning when Allen Longworth Thurston peered out from the head of the saloon companion. Satisfied that the listed deck was absolutely deserted, he slipped down into the comparative darkness of the waist amidship, and crouched in the shadow of an engine-room ventilator.

It was a hazardous feat that he had undertaken; at least so it seemed to him just then. The proposition was that he drop overboard and swim to a land that as yet he could not see.

But the captain had assured him that it was there. He had shown him the chart. If Kane was not mistaken

in the identity of the mud deposit upon which the Esmeralda had stuck, then Cabeza Island should be not more than a half mile to the south of it.

"Swim for it," the captain had said. "Find Colombel, and tell him everything. He may at least have time to destroy all evidences of his work."

So far, as he crouched in the shadow of the ventilator, Thurston had been unable to discern a sign of land. The night was dark, the stars clouded over. The Esmeralda lay slightly careened to port and toward the supposed island.

For an hour after she has struck, there had been a good deal of cursing among the mutineers, but now they had accepted the situation, and gone below for the night. They had learned from the mate that Cabeza was but a gunshot to port. They could lower the boats and land in the morning.

As for the steamer's plight, serious or otherwise, it would be time enough to think about that after they had found the treasure. So far was good enough. They had practically reached the island. Those who had visited it before said it was a pleasant place. That was enough for the irresponsible forecastle hands.

Gradually, as Thurston's eyes became used to the gloom, he made out a darker shadow off to port. It looked like a wedge-shaped cloud rising from the sea-level to a height that sheered down to the sea again.

That it was not a cloud, the investigator knew from the high-pitched chorus of nocturnal lizards, toads and crickets that traveled directly from it.

It was Cabeza Island without a doubt, and that sheer cliff was the "head" that gave the bit of land its name.

Thurston waited only long enough to let his eyes adjust themselves to the degree of light, only long enough to assure himself that he was not observed, only long enough to ascertain that Jonquil had performed the task allotted to him.

Jonquil had done his work. A rope, made fast to a stanchion, trailed over the gunwale. In another moment Thurston was over the side. The rope reached the water, and he lowered himself into the warm element without more than a ripple disturbing its surface.

In a few minutes he was well away from the ship's side, and swimming quietly toward that wedge-shaped shadow.

There was something fascinating about that shadow ahead. If it were Cabeza—and the captain had declared it Colombel's island—then Thurston was on the verge of many things.

He would stand face to face with the wizard physician whose genius had roused discussion the world over. He might obtain some idea of the mysterious thing which had resurrected the Princess Demetra, the amazing secret to obtain knowledge of which Pelerin and Bashmetieff had resorted to such extreme measures.

Also, he might again meet the woman whose face had so persistently haunted him and whose possible presence on that island had—more than anything, he now realized—drawn him into the adventure.

The cloud loomed blacker before the swimmer. He presently entered a belt of water that distinctly reflected the gloom of the land. As he swam easily and silently, he could hear the soft wash of ripples on a gravel beach.

Fatigued only to the extent of a slight heaviness of his limbs, Thurston soon found his depth, and stood up in four feet of water. Then he quietly waded ashore and proceeded to wring the water from his scanty clothing. The latter consisted of a pair of flannel trousers and an outing shirt. The automatic and a waterproof box of cartridges he carried in his hip-pockets.

The jungle grew almost to the high tide mark, and deepened the natural darkness of the night. Colombel's house, the captain had said, faced the

south side of the island and stood directly at the inner base of the headland, which sheltered it.

Inasmuch as he had landed on the north side and to the west of the headland, Thurston knew his course lay either around the *cabeza* or directly through the black jungle. The former course was impossible, as the headland dropped steeply into the sea.

Thurston, therefore, took the direct, jungle route. He regretted any action at all when, a few minutes later, he found himself completely turned around in a solid, jungle darkness that was made tortuous by writhing lianas and tangled undergrowth, and rendered hideous by the weird uproar of primitive, tropic night.

He could not go forward. He was as one stone-blind. Traveling by the line of least resistance he lost all sense of direction.

He tried to retrace his steps to the beach, and found himself more deeply involved in the labyrinth.

Finally convinced that he had not the slightest idea of where he was, or how he had got there, he felt for the ground. Finding it fairly dry, he sat down, and philosophically awaited the first streak of day.

A slight diffusion of light crept into that jungle about six o'clock. As it came from the left most clearly, Thurston pushed a few steps in that direction.

To his surprise, he found that he had been sitting for over three hours, not in the heart of the Cabeza jungle, as he had thought, but within ten yards of the beach where he had made his landing. He could see his own footprints in the dry sand that lay back of the gravel.

The circumstance, however, gave him a fresh start from a definite point and toward the inner base of the headland.

The light improved every moment as he proceeded through the luxuriant growth, ever traveling on a dead reckoning. As soon as he left the north shore behind, he could dimly hear the wash of the sea on the south side. He kept this sound to his right and traveled in an oblique line, bearing slightly toward the east.

Between the period of dark and day, the jungle had fallen silent. The nocturnal creatures had gone to sleep. Presently a parrot shrieked, and a whole flock of blue and green birds fluttered upward, settled some distance off, and set up a great chattering.

There were numerous monkeys of all varieties, and these scolded the adventurer from overhanging tree limbs, making furious protests, not unlike those of a squirrel challenging an intruder.

Then the first of a series of queer things happened. There was a sudden rustling of the branches overhead, and a rather large ape dropped lightly to the ground.

It did not make off at sight of the man, but seemed rather to have come from the tree-tops to intercept him.

To Thurston's astonishment, the ape advanced toward him, walking mincingly erect. It placed a hairy left hand upon the region of its stomach, bowed in a most ludicrous manner and actually extended its right hand.

"How d'y' do!" gasped Thurston, and he found himself shaking hands with a monkey.

"Somebody's trained this fellow," was his next thought, and he watched for what the ape would do next.

It bowed again, blinked at the investigator, and started to walk off. A short distance away it stopped, looked back at the adventurer and again placed a hand over its stomach as the preface to another polite bending.

Apparently the creature expected Thurston to follow it. He was not slow in doing so. Where that ape came from, he would probably find its trainer, who, he guessed readily, was no other than Dr. Henri Colombel.

The ape led the rest of the way through the jungle, pausing at intervals to assure Thurston by its peculiar

courtesy that it was entirely honored in his service.

Ten minutes later the ape emerged into a clearing, on the other side of which the headland sloped up to its abrupt, seaward precipice.

In the center of this clearing were several buildings of the low, broad-roofed, bungalow order. The largest was much superior to the others. Thurston judged this to be Colombel's residence and retreat, and that the others were store-houses or, possibly, servants' quarters.

What struck him forcibly at once, although he made allowance for the earliness of the hour, was that there was no sign of life about the buildings, with the exception of a thin, blue curl of smoke from what he supposed to be an outhouse kitchen.

The ape made straight for the superior bungalow, but Thurston approached the supposed kitchen. Looking in through an open door, he saw an old woman, apparently of Indian blood, stirring some mess in a pot.

He spoke to her. She made no answer, but went on stirring.

Unable to make her hear, Thurston at last touched the woman on the shoulder. She turned slowly and without any evidence of surprise, which told Thurston as plainly as words that she was stone deaf.

"Where is your master?" he asked, hoping she might read his lips.

The old woman merely smiled, shook her head, and placed a finger on her lips. She was apparently mute as well as deaf. Nevertheless, she seemed to understand Thurston's question, for she pointed in the direction of the bungalow under the headland.

At the same time a look of despair entered the woman's face. She turned up the whites of her eyes and lifted her hands, palms upward.

Without understanding, Thurston passed on to the next building, which stood between the kitchen and the main bungalow. It was a low, plain structure, with an unrailed board veranda in front.

Even before he entered by a wide-open door, Thurston observed a certain barnlike aspect about the place. It seemed devoid of all ornament, and appeared as one long room with many windows, and running the length of the entire building.

As he stood wondering at the empty silence of the place a living object came through the doorway.

It was another monkey—a little marmoset, which seemed to be ailing. It reeled, fell over, and regained its feet, staggered forward a few paces, then sat blinking in the light.

Thurston watched, fascinated. What was the matter with that marmoset? It paid not the slightest attention to the investigator, although he stood quite close to it.

All at once the marmoset shivered, shook off its stupor, and went slowly into the jungle.

"Let's see what's in here," said Thurston aloud. It somehow did him good to hear himself speak.

He boldly made for the open door. Just as he crossed the threshold he stopped short, completely arrested by wonder.

There was not a stick of furniture in the entire place. It was, as he had expected, a single, long room, and like a barn, except for its many windows and airiness.

But what took him aback was this:

There were dozens of monkeys in the place — monkeys of all sizes and varieties; and they all seemed asleep.

They were ranged along the walls in a single row, each animal being supported on each side by its fellows. They looked as if they had been packed like meal-sacks along the wall.

Their eyes were closed, and they were unnaturally still. There seemed a peculiar rigidness about their posture. The ensemble reminded Thurston of rows of mummies in a catacomb.

Curiosity impelled the investigator

forward. Quite near him was a mature ape, apparently sound asleep, with its back propped by the wooden wall. He bent over it and watched its breast. The animal was not breathing.

It was dead!

Thurston looked at the other monkeys. They were none of them breathing. They were all dead, and set up in a tragic row like so many Simian ancestors or dead kings.

To assure himself that he was not mistaken or dreaming, Thurston laid a hand upon the monkey nearest him. It was cold, not with the mere coldness of death, but as if it were a block of ice. He could feel the chill of the body's temperature even when he held his hand a few inches away!

Besides, there was a solid hardness of the body to the touch, as if the creature were indeed frozen solid.

Yet the air was warm, almost sultry. This was the tropics. On the captain's chart the equator line passed directly through Cabeza Island. The frigid condition of these monkeys was out of all reason: It was impossible, yet—it was so!

For a few minutes Allen Longworth Thurston stood within that doorway, staring unbelievingly at the strange sight before him. All at once he felt his blood chill indescribably and his scalp creep. The mature ape which he had singled out for examination when he first entered the chamber, stirred slightly!

A few minutes before it had been sitting rigidly, apparently in a trance or dead.

Now the ape stirred. Its eyelids flickered and lifted. It slowly stretched its limbs, then left the row of mummylike figures. It staggered toward the door, passed by the astonished Thurston, and sat for a moment blinking in the face of the sun that had just arisen.

The investigator cast one backward glance at the three sides of that room lined with inanimate monkeys; then noncomprehension momentarily getting the better of reasoning, he turned and walked into the open, his nerves drawn taut.

The ape, in the mean time, had approached the edge of the jungle and climbed a tree.

Thurston pulled himself together. After all, he had come to see Dr. Henri Colombel, to warn him of the danger that was near. He would investigate this other mystery later.

He faced toward the furthest bungalow, the superior structure that bore evidences of refined habitation.

The polite ape which he had met in the jungle was sitting on the veranda as if awaiting the visitor's pleasure.

"Hello, Beau Brummel," said Thurston, trying to shake off the depression that had fallen upon his spirits.

The ape bowed, and again insisted upon shaking hands. The investigator did not know that he had called the ape by the very name its trainer, Dr. Colombel, had given it years before.

The ape led the way into the bungalow. Thurston, distrusting Beau Brummel's ideas of convention, knocked on the door. He received no answer. Cabeza seemed to be an island of silence, save for the lazy sigh of the sea and the chattering of monkeys and parrots in the jungle.

Beau Brummel was eying the visitor in a significant sort of way. Thurston diffidently advanced into the room beyond the door.

No human being was there, but it showed every sign of more or less recent human habitation. There were books scattered on a table that also carried a reading-lamp. A raincoat hung carelessly over the back of a chair. There was a half-smoked pipe in an ash-tray; and a panama hat punctured with pinholes and trimmed with a broad, vari-colored, silk ribbon was lying on a lounge, as if it had been offhandedly cast there.

"Anybody at home?" cried Thurston.

There was no answer, no sound but

the wash of the sea and the noises of the jungle creatures.

Thurston advanced toward a door at the right end of the living-room, while Beau Brummel bowed at every step he made.

The door was closed. Getting no response when he knocked, the investigator cautiously opened it. Again he was in a chamber in which there was no human being.

It was a square chamber with a cement floor. At a glance it was a laboratory. Against the wall to the right stood a large, glazed press containing rows of bottles and much scientific apparatus.

In the wall directly opposite the door was a high window with a southern exposure. Through it the morning sun streamed upon a table which, from the objects scattered upon it, was at once a scientist's work-bench.

In the wall to the left was another door.

Again Thurston advanced and knocked. Again he received no response. He opened the door.

Then he stood perfectly still for half a minute before he could recover from amazement.

As he slowly passed into the room his lips, ashen in hue, moved, but no sound came from them.

He closed the door after him. Beau Brummel, the polite ape, was left outside, bowing like some mocking satyr.

In the mean time, Allen Longworth Thurston was confronted by the most amazing and incomprehensible sight he had ever seen or dreamed of in his entire life, asleep or awake.

CHAPTER XII.

In the Presence.

WHEN Thurston closed the door of that inner room behind him he found himself in what was literally the silence of death.

The room itself was cheerful, brightly furnished, and with several high windows admitting the morning sunlight. It had obviously been designed for some special object that called for plenty of light. Also, the windows were wide open.

But Thurston hardly noticed such minor details. He was too absorbed by the consciousness that there were four persons in the room — two men and two women.

Three of them sat in reclining chairs facing the windows. The fourth sat at a table behind them, his cheek resting in his right palm and his elbow crooked on the board.

Not one of the four moved at Thurston's entrance, or seemed to be in the least conscious of his presence.

"Pardon me. Do I intrude?" asked the investigator, addressing himself to the man at the table. There was no answer.

Then Thurston knew that at least a part of the phenomenon of the monkeys was being repeated here in the case of four human beings.

He approached the nearest person —a young man with an emaciated appearance. Like the two women, he sat facing the windows. His features were as pale and hard-set as cold marble.

His eyes were shut, his hands crossed in his lap. His facial expression, although so rigid, was of that calm peculiar to sleep rather than to death. Yet he was not breathing.

Thurston touched one of the young man's hands. It was cold—unnaturally cold. He tried to raise the hand. It did not respond, being fixed as in *rigor mortis*.

Hardly daring to trust his senses, Thurston passed on to the next chair. In it sat a middle-aged lady who might in life have been extremely handsome. At present her face was slightly lined and drawn with the expression one notes in cases of nervous trouble.

She, also, was in the same mysterious condition—cold, rigid, lifeless. When Thurston approached a hand close to her throat, he felt a distinct chill emanating from the body.

Dazed to the extent that he believed his mind temporarily disordered, Thurston passed stupidly to the third of the three facing the windows.

His heart gave a great leap, then sank like a lump of lead in cold water.

He recognized the third person at once. It was Lora Hilliard, the woman of his intermittent dream! And she, like the others, was dead!

Thurston stood before the reclining figure, upon the face of which a ray of sunlight streamed with a rosy tint. This hue of life so counterfeited nature's that the beautiful girl might well have been merely at the stage of waking dreams.

A faint smile hovered about her red lips. At any moment the smile might spread, the lips part and a low laugh escape from her slender, white throat.

She was fair-skinned and almost golden-haired. The lids that veiled her eyes seemed to catch an azure transparency from the blue that lay behind them. He remembered those eyes—their look of appeal mingled with inquiry. He recalled her one timid glance on that first memorable yet casual meeting.

And she, too, was cold and rigid. He knelt beside her and bent his ear close to her breast.

She was dead. It was the only thing that stood out as a fact. All the other circumstances seemed unreal. She had ceased to breathe, and instantly that which had been an occasional dream to Thurston for several months became a reality; a truth that raised its voice within him and cried for recognition.

He suddenly discovered that he loved this woman whom he had seen only once before in his life, and then only for a half minute. He loved her now, and would have given all that he held worth while in his own life to restore hers; to see those eyelids lift and the flowing blood tinge her cheeks; to hear her voice again—just once, as once before.

Yet there was something unreal, too, about this one apparent fact. If she were dead, what had killed her? What had killed those others? What sort of death was this that came so swiftly, so undisturbingly, that all four persons should be stricken equally or as sleep descends upon a tired household? And it was strange that one at least—the man at the table—should still be sitting there in an attitude of deep study.

Thurston tore himself away from contemplation of that sleeping beauty upon whose face the sunlight affectionately played; he turned his attention to the man at the table.

The investigator knew at one glance that this was Henri Colombel himself, and that some disaster had overtaken him and his experiments.

Like the others, Colombel, too, was cold, lifeless, and rigid—so rigid that death had frozen him in the attitude in which death had overtaken him. Apparently he had not had time to move or to prepare himself more appropriately for the end.

Lean, with slightly sloping but massive shoulders, eagle-beaked and with a pair of deep-set eyes half open and fixed in keen, glassy concentration, the figure might have been of some carved statue of a brooding thinker.

But again—what had happened?

Thurston recalled a tale he had once read of a pirate who had been frozen in the far north coming to life after a couple of hundred years. But even making no allowances for fiction, that phenomenon had had its stage setting in the everlasting frigidity of the Arctic. Cabeza Island was directly on the equator line and seldom even comfortably cool.

Thurston might not have been more than ordinarily surprised had he found Dr. Colombel alive and ministering to three persons who might be in a condition similar to that of the Princess Demetra, as the latter had been seen by Bashmetieff and two servants of the Grand Duke Feodor.

The princess had been restored to life. So might Lora be. So might the

other woman—presumably Mrs. Orville Guest—and the unknown young man. But some *accident* must have happened here to leave Colombel himself in this deadly condition, from which, no doubt, he alone knew how to cause recovery.

Thurston examined the doctor more closely. To all intents and purposes, he was as dead as the unqualifiable word implies.

He had apparently been stricken while at work. In his left hand, which lay idly on the table, was a hypodermic. In the little glass barrel of it there were a few drops of a brownish fluid.

Thurston wondered whether the contents of the hypodermic were responsible for at least Colombel's condition or if it were some antidote which the doctor had been trying too late to inject as a corrective.

He did not arrive at any conclusion just then.

Beside Colombel's crooked elbow was an open book. The first of its two exposed pages was covered with notes that read like more or less gibberish to the investigator. But down toward the bottom there were some names and phrases that were slightly intelligible.

WILLIAMS, HENRY, 23, no relations. Picked up at Para. Yellow fever. Feb. 1. Mils. 3, NBLN. Reduced 7 degrees Fahr. ANBLN, 14 days.

HILLIARD, LORA, 22. (History private). Incipient. Feb. 4, 2 mils., NBLN. Reduced 5 degrees Fahr. Natural indicated, but cannot risk. ANBLN, 16 days.

GUEST, MRS. EMILY, 39. (History private). Neurosis. First case. Complete anabiosis, Feb. 4, 1 mil., NBLN. Natural, 15 days.

The notes on the case of Mrs. Guest were the last entered in the book. They conveyed little to Thurston except that in each case there was indicated a certain number of days that must elapse between the administration of something called NBLN and the results of the treatment.

In the case of the emaciated young man, probably Henry Williams, fourteen days from the presumed administration on February 1 had elapsed—*and one week more!*

Fifteen and sixteen days respectively in the cases of Miss Hilliard and Mrs. Guest were overpast—two days more in the former case and three in the latter.

It was now February 22 by a marked calendar which hung on the wall.

Whatever had happened to Colombel, the fact was apparent that he had been in his present inanimate condition when the dates had one by one arrived when he should have administered some further treatment by the equally mysterious *A*NBLN!

Were the patients, then, really dead? The chances were much against their being alive, yet Thurston was confronted by one encouraging fact.

The four persons in that silent room seemed, true enough, to be beyond resuscitation. Yet this was the equator, and, in seeming defiance of that fact, the four persons remained unnaturally rigid and cold.

So long as this condition continued in the face of all known laws of mortality further phenomena were still possible.

His brain reacting from stupor and now awhirl with a thousand more or less mad fancies, Thurston again turned to the still form of the beautiful girl in the chair. Again he fell into a reverie—a kind of day-dream—as he looked down upon her classic, chiseled-marble features.

Her face in repose reminded him of St. Gaudens's "Amor Caritas," that remarkable expression of purity, nobility, sadness, tenderness, and wonder at sin.

She reclined in that easy chair like some summer girl who had come in from a stroll in the meadows or a sun-bath on the beach. He could almost imagine that it was she who had cast aside that pin-punctured Panama hat in the living-room ere she sank into

this chair and fell into this breathless sleep.

She was fully dressed in a white duck sailor-costume. Slim ankles defined by white silk stockings were visible between the hem of her skirt and her white canvas shoes.

"She is not dead," something cried in Thurston's heart—perhaps the wish fathering the thought. "She only sleeps. Presently she will open her eyes, and then—"

How would she look at him? Would she remember that one occasion? What would she say first? What story might she have to tell?

For quite a time he dreamed over her. Already he fancied her as his sleeping princess, himself some princeling from a romantic moon come to awaken her with a kiss or a whispered word.

His reverie was abruptly jarred by a sharp knocking at the outer door of the bungalow. The sound brought him back to practical matters.

The dawn was now several hours old. Whether the conspirators and the mutineers had discovered Thurston's escape from the Esmeralda the investigator felt sure that by this time the eager treasure-hunters must have landed on the island.

As a matter of fact, the persons at the outer door were Pelerin and Bashmetieff. They had come ashore with the first boat's crew.

For the present and pending negotiations with Colombel they had left the mate, Terhune, and his men pitching camp by a fresh-water spring near the other end of the island.

As they approached the bungalow, which they had had some difficulty in locating, the two scientists seemed in something of a hurry. Each apparently tried to outpace the other.

They arrived on the veranda and knocked on the door as one. While awaiting a response they eyed each other with looks that, far from being friendly, carried the vindictiveness that marked their earlier attitude toward one another—in the Savoy palace, for instance, and when they first met in Thurston's New York apartment.

After a short delay the bungalow door was opened by Allen Longworth Thurston, whose appearance on the island seemed a disconcerting surprise to the two Europeans.

They exchanged a meaning glance, then stared again at the man who they had supposed was locked up in a cabin aboard the Esmeralda at that very minute.

But their ill-suppressed excitement overcame minor suspicions almost at once, especially as Thurston showed no surprise at seeing these latest island arrivals. His face was pale and strained in expression as he beckoned them silently to follow him.

He led the way through the living-room and laboratory to that chamber of silence. Pushing open the door which he had reverently closed after him in coming out, he pointed within with a visibly trembling index-finger.

"My contract," said he, "was to bring you into the presence of Dr. Henri Colombel. The obligation is discharged. There is Dr. Colombel seated at that table. I hope he may be more communicative with you than he and his companions have been with me."

The Frenchman and Bashmetieff stood in that doorway, their mouths literally wide open.

"*Mon Dieu!*" they exclaimed simultaneously. Then, as if moved by one thought or one impulse, they rushed into the room.

If the conduct of these two men had been remarkable up to this time, it now became extraordinary. Looking back on it in the light of later knowledge, it was a climax to an insane jealousy that culminated in a swift and sudden tragedy.

Thurston, only half comprehending, stood aside and watched the two Europeans as they moved about the chamber of mystery.

Pelerin and Bashmetieff seemed at least to have the mutual advantage over the investigator of knowing what they had come for and how to look for and find it.

Almost jostling one another aside as they approached and examined the same objects, the two men were wildly excited. Their eyes bulged and their breath came fast as they peered at the persons seated in the reclining chairs. They touched the cold hands of the young man and raised his eyelids. They uttered little exclamations of triumph, surprise, and sometimes chagrin, and after each seeming discovery of conditions in detail they cast evil glances at each other.

Thurston felt uncomfortable. This pawing and clawing of a youth who might be dead, this cold-blooded interest that was probably more mercenary than purely professional, savored to him of desecration.

As Pelerin bent over Mrs. Guest and the heavy Russian with the brute face approached Miss Hilliard, the American's words rang out sharply in the comparative stillness:

"Keep your hands off these ladies! I won't stand for it!"

Pelerin looked up sharply, the Russian with a slow scowl. The Frenchman shrugged his shoulders.

"What of it?" he said, almost hysterical with a kind of joy. "I have found it. I knew—always!"

"Ah!" sneered the Russian, "you have not found all, my friend. Nor have I. But I suspect. It was as I believed."

Then the climax occurred. Bashmetieff, developing some hidden new thought, rushed out of the silent chamber into the middle room—the laboratory. Thurston could hear a press being opened and the chink of a bottle being withdrawn from shelves and rapidly replaced.

Pelerin, who had been momentarily distracted in his examination of Dr. Colombel, started up with a French exclamation and was about to follow on his rival's trail of investigation. But he suddenly stopped, his gaze riveted on that little hypodermic which Thurston had noticed in the inanimate scientist's hands.

The Frenchman's eyes protruded from his head as he bent closer and noted the fluid in the tube. His hands shook but worked carefully as they gently disengaged the needle instrument from Colombel's frozen grasp.

"*Ah!*" cried Pelerin, turning around in triumph, just as the Russian returned from what seemed a fruitless errand.

Bashmetieff saw that of which his rival had won possession. With a cry of rage he came forward, his hand outstretched.

Even in that moment common politeness did not altogether forsake him, although possibly his action had treachery in it.

"You have found it! Let me see!" he cried.

The Frenchman stepped back, trying to shield the apparently precious hypodermic behind his back.

Then the Russian lost all control of tactful discretion. He grappled with the Frenchman, while Thurston stood by in utter amazement, stupefied with a kind of horror at the unseemliness of the whole affair.

And the tragedy transpired in a minute. The Russian's big hand had closed over the Frenchman's that held the needle. Pelerin screamed and fought to retain possession of his prize.

Suddenly Bashmetieff started back, throwing up his hand as if he had been stung. He had had his wrist pierced with the hypodermic in the scuffle, whether it was Pelerin's act or simple accident.

The Frenchman took advantage of the check to get the table between himself and his adversary. For a moment the two men stood glaring at one another and breathing hard.

Then a change came over Bashmetieff's face. It flushed. The flush deepened to a purple hue. His facial

muscles twitched. He stared stupidly at the tiny puncture on his wrist, then threw both hands to his throat.

Next instant he was down on the floor, writhing in some sort of convulsion. It was a horrible thing to witness. Thurston's blood turned back in his veins. Even the Frenchman was momentarily shocked out of all hatred of his rival.

It was all over in a few seconds. The writhings ceased. The dark hue faded out of the prostrate Russian's face. His limbs relaxed, and his twitching head fell over and became still.

He was dead!

Compared with this aspect of death, Colombel, seated at the table with a rigid sneer of seeming retribution on his cold face, was as one who lived!

Into the terrible silence that ensued between the pallid Frenchman, the equally unnerved Thurston, and those still witnesses, there came the grotesque figure of the trained ape from the laboratory.

It came forward, walking half-erect, paused over the motionless, crumpled figure on the floor, and bowed with a gravity that struck the American as a hideous thing in that moment.

CHAPTER XIII.

Terms and a Tangle.

THE appearance of the polite ape, Beau Brummel, had a worse effect upon the Frenchman than on Thurston even. It seemed as if M. Pelerin must scream or do something equally as eloquent of overstrained nerves.

But comprehension of so many things that were purely physiopathologic came more readily to the European. It was the very appearance of the ape that, at first striking him with added horror, supplied the material fact upon which to rehook his anchor of reasoning.

"Ah!" said he, with relief and some interest. "An ape? So this was the island where he carried out his biological experiments years ago? This was the retreat of many disappearances!"

Thurston was still staring at the dead Russian.

"What happened?" he asked dazedly.

"An accident, due to his own jealous impetuousness," said the Frenchman, becoming more at ease, more satisfied with the turn of events as they affected his plans and ambitions.

"It's awful!" said Thurston, more shocked on account of Pelerin's increasing indifference. "What are you going to do?"

Pelerin was carefully wrapping the hypodermic in a handkerchief. He then placed his prize—which seemed to be the root of all the evil—in an inner pocket.

"What can I, or you, for that matter, do? He is dead. Colombel also is dead. And those—" He waved a hand significantly toward the other silent figures and shrugged his shoulders.

"Are you quite sure of that?—I mean that Colombel and those others are dead?"

"I say they are dead," said Pelerin irritably. "I am a physician. Is it not enough?"

"No," said Thurston, pale now from slow anger more than shock. "Furthermore, I think your game now is as crooked as it ever was. I do not pretend to understand all that has happened, or, rather, how it has come to happen; but something tells me that something can be done about it—and by you. You *know*, M. Pelerin," he added, "and I purpose that you shall tell *me!*"

"I will be pleased to answer any questions, M. Thurston," said the Frenchman, with a shrewd smile.

"I am not in a position to ask any questions," said Thurston sternly. "I would not know how to formulate

one in a matter so beyond my experiences. But I am going to state what I believe to be a few facts, M. Pelerin. In the first place—"

He broke off and glanced at the silent figures in the chamber. Again a sense of the unfitness of any scene in that place crept over him.

"Let us go into the living-room," he said abruptly.

Arrived there, the tension of their nerves was somewhat relaxed.

"In the first place, M. Pelerin," Thurston resumed, "you and Bashmetieff attempted to use me as a cats-paw and each other as a means to a selfish end. But you overlooked the Russian's desperate nature, he your unscrupulous daring, and both of you, if I may be permitted to say so, underrated my intelligence. You both came here to steal. I came principally out of curiosity, and perhaps that I might see fair play.

"You and Bashmetieff incited a ship's crew to mutiny and murder, lied to them about a non-existent treasure on this island, in order that you might have a force behind you against an honest sea-captain and those who were loyal to him, and against Dr. Colombel, whose secret is the real treasure—a treasure that is of no more interest or value to those ignorant mutineers than a tallow candle.

"Now, then, M. Pelerin, that is the situation to date. Let me point out your present situation and the future dilemma in which you will probably find yourself. The steamer is aground. She may never get off. You are among a pack of ignorant ruffians who will tear you to pieces in their rage, when they learn that you have played them for fools and as tools to your selfish ends.

"This must follow, unless, as may be the case—and I suspect it is—the mate Terhune is in your whole confidence, and will help keep the men in their fool's paradise until you and he find some means of escaping with Dr. Colombel's secret.

"Even should you succeed in that, you will have a dangerous and merciless blackmailer in Terhune. He will bleed you as you are now bleeding the men whom he led on your behalf."

The Frenchman had taken a seat as Thurston was talking. He pretended amusement at first, but gradually terror—born of the truths that the American was uttering—crept into his facial expression.

In that moment he regretted that Bashmetieff was dead. He was badly in need of an ally, even were it a rival with whom he might have to share the secret which he believed he was on the brink of acquiring.

But his Gallic wit did not desert him. He sat still and did not answer Thurston at once. He was thinking hard, reviewing the other side of his situation.

After all, what had happened? Nothing save that Bashmetieff was dead. So much the better if he could extricate himself from the dilemma alone and victoriously! Sooner or later Bashmetieff must have proved the stumbling-block, an enemy whose jealousy would have defeated the future aim of both—which was toward fortune and fame.

True, the ship was aground. Well, there was no real reason to believe that she could not get off. He would take up that matter with the mate as soon as possible. The safety of the ship—the means of retreat—must be seen to at once.

Nothing, after all, had really happened to endanger his ends any more than they had been imperiled in the dangerous game he was playing.

On the other hand, much had happened to his advantage. Bashmetieff was out of the way. Colombel was powerless. In his own pocket, wrapped in a handkerchief, was, he felt sure, the clue to a great scientific secret that would bring to him—to him alone!—Professor Pierre Pelerin of Paris!—a vast fortune, an undying fame, and

the gratitude of the world for all time!

All he needed was time, with a little privacy—time to investigate without interference—just a few days. Perhaps a few hours in that laboratory would suffice—while Colombel sat rigidly helpless.

Who was there to oppose, to prevent? No one but this American, Thurston, who was apparently no longer his agent, but his enemy. Terhune was bought and paid for. The men were Terhune's. The captain was ill aboard the Esmeralda. There were enough men on the steamer to hold it against the few loyal hands who had been left aboard under guard.

"Well?" said the Frenchman at last. He was quite himself again. "Is there anything further, M. Thurston?"

"Much more," said the American imperturbably. "The meat of the matter is to come."

"That is interesting—the meat," said Pelerin, with the smile of one who feels sure that he hold the best cards.

"It is the very meat you are after, my friend, and I suspect you are only within smelling distance of it. I believe," continued Thurston, "that I know as much as you do about the nature of the brown fluid contained in the little tube in your pocket. It is even possible, M. Pelerin, that I know more.

"Possibly I know the name of it and for what the stuff is used. Possibly I could explain to you why that which happened to Bashmetieff did not happen to Colombel, and why Colombel is no more dead than you or I, which Bashmetieff undoubtedly is.

"You should remember, dear professor, that I have the mind of a reasoning detective. You are merely a physician. You deal with theories, mostly medical. I deal with, and infer directly from, evident facts.

"I acquired knowledge of a number of facts during the hour I spent in this bungalow before you and Bashmetieff arrived.

"On the whole, you had perhaps better listen to my terms, M. Pelerin. If you do not, I will make all kinds of trouble for you right here on this island. I could, for instance, smash every bottle and instrument in that laboratory, and then stroll down into the woods and tell your precious crew what a precious liar you are. Even if they didn't believe me, it wouldn't take them a day to suspect the truth. They'd expect to find the treasure in five minutes, you see, as soon as you told them where to dig."

Pelerin writhed under Thurston's almost playful manner. He felt the claws beneath the paws. But he answered smoothly:

"Possibly you might do all this, M. Thurston, and therefore it might be advisable to listen to your terms. If they do not suit me, I can refuse them. But you seem to overlook who holds the balance of power on this island at this particular minute. Suppose—just for instance, suppose—you were to collide with the little needle, M. Thurston?"

"Or with a chunk of propelled lead?" chuckled Thurston, enjoying himself greatly.

"Very well," said the Frenchman, shrugging indifferently. "What are your terms? I admit I need a little help. There are some details of Colombel's studies that I would like to learn—to compare with my own, you understand. But they are of minor importance.

"You must remember, M. Thurston, that my late colleague, M. Bashmetieff, and I have labored for years along the same lines of research as Colombel. The latter, perhaps you are not aware, stole the original secret of a cure for all germ diseases from Bashmetieff, and Bashmetieff stole it from me."

"We will take all that as so much fiction read and cast aside," Thurston

said dryly. "I will tell you the truth about you and Bashmetieff. You worked toward the same results for years. You and Bashmetieff failed. Colombel succeeded. Witness the case of the Princess Demetra. You were able to produce the phenomenon that is to be seen in that room, but beyond that your efforts failed. They resulted only in the death of many of your patients—"

"That is false!" cried Pelerin hotly. "You have been misinformed, or are merely guessing at what you know nothing about."

"Precisely. I was never informed, but I am apparently a good guesser. I will guess some more.

"You and Bashmetieff stole the first half of the secret from Colombel. (Please don't interrupt. I'm only guessing!) Colombel's later secrecy at Recamier, in the palace of the Savrov, and the necessity for his taking refuge on this island, are eloquent of his fear that you two aimed to steal the other and more important half of the secret.

"Now, as you are apparently very ignorant on the subject of this discovery, especially for a man who has been studying it for years, I will help you out. It is necessary that you be instructed in the elements of Colombel's science if you are to prove to be of any use to me in what I want done.

"There is a drug—or call it what you please, M. Pelerin—which, when administered to a patient, reduces life to a state of suspension.

"Professor Colombel, its discoverer, called it NBLN."

"There is another drug, or compound, which, when administered after a carefully gaged period, restores the patient to life and normal health, certain agents destructive to germs, but not to human life, having been at work in the body in the mean time.

"The name of this second and more important discovery of Dr. Colombel—the same that you have in your pocket at this moment—is ANBLN."

"The antidote!" Pelerin cried, springing to his feet, his face alight with genuine professional enthusiasm. "Ah! Let us be friends. I need you!"

Thurston smiled dryly.

"I thought I could get you to admit your ignorance and your motive in coming here," said he.

"I do admit it—now," said Pelerin feverishly. "It is what I sought. But I must know more! You have given me the clue, *monsieur!*

"Do you not see?" he went on. "They are not chemical formulas; merely abbreviations. The first two letters, NB, probably mean *anab.* ANB is probably the anti-*anab.* An anabiotic, *monsieur*—an anti-anabiotic. The rest of the letters do not matter at present."

A sudden inspiration of memory came to Thurston.

"Exactly," said he. "The first condition is known as *anabiosis.*"

He had seen the word in Colombel's notes without knowing its meaning.

"Yes!" exclaimed the Frenchman. "It is anabiosis. The princess was made anabiotic, as were those within—lifeless, but still capable of living—of being restored—like live fish and frogs frozen solid in ice for many months. Ah, my friend, we will solve this together!"

"Yes," said Thurston almost humorously; "but not just the same thing in the same way. You're out to steal. I'm out to save a few lives. That brings me to the terms.

"You are a great physician, M. Pelerin. That you are also a rascal does not alter the fact. I do not believe any more than you do that those people are dead. I suggest that you employ your medical skill, with the aid of the facts you have gained through me, *to restore Dr. Colombel to consciousness.*"

The Frenchman, who had been fair-

ly vibrating with hope and enthusiasm, instantly underwent a change. It was as if he had been struck upon a smiling mouth.

"Restore — Colombel?" he echoed.

"That is what I said."

"But, *monsieur*, that is impossible —I mean, it is unreasonable. It is—"

"In short, you'd rather raise the devil himself than resurrect Colombel —under the circumstances?"

"Ah, you misjudge!" protested Pelerin, although he winced. "It is not that. Professor Colombel is dead," he went on, while Thurston smiled in his face. "I can assure you of that. Did you not see what was in his hand? Did you not see what happened to Bashmetieff? A mere touch of the needle—and death!

"The antidote, M. Thurston, is apparently a deadly poison, unless it destroys itself while it destroys—the NBLN.

"Then, too, I do not know—I am not familiar with the dosage of — of Professor Colombel's form of antidote. It may, in some respects, differ from my own. I might kill Colombel, if indeed he is not dead now—the great Henri Colombel! Let it be one of the others, *monsieur!*"

"That would suit you admirably, Pelerin," said the American. "It would never do to revive Colombel, would it?

"But about the antidote—it wouldn't be like Bashmetieff, and you know it. If I were to make a guess about what happened to Colombel, it would be this:

"Colombel never touched himself with the stuff—the deadly ANBLN. He had an accident while experimenting with the NBLN, the stuff that reduces people to anabiosis. Possibly he was killing time by trying it on himself. Doctors do that, you know, sometimes.

"He prepared the antidote, and—I think he made a miscalculation, and the NBLN caught him before he could apply the needle.

"Probably ANBLN is all he needs now.

"As for the others, you will not lay a hand on one of them while I'm alive. Now, Colombel is nothing to me," continued Thurston. "If you killed him, it is reasonable to suppose your blundering would have killed the others. On the other hand, if you luckily restored Colombel, we would have, alive and mentally competent, the only person fit and able to restore the lives of the other three.

"That is all, M. Pelerin. Take your choice. Restore Colombel and throw yourself on his mercy. Otherwise, look out for squalls in the region of Cabeza and me.

"You may deliberately kill him, of course; I cannot prevent your doing that; but remember that I'm watching you, and any false move on your part will enter into the reckoning hereafter.

"In the meantime, there is a book of notes by Dr. Colombel. I learned something from them myself. To a trained physician they ought to be more intelligible.

"Shall I place it in your hands, Dr. Pelerin? It apparently contains his secret. But Colombel must be restored. Then you and he can resume your personal battle, he having the advantage of being alive, you the advantage of having his secret.

"What do you say?"

The Frenchman was standing up, and was much agitated. He was as one cornered. He saw everything he had gained slipping out of his grasp with the resurrection of Colombel. But there was one ray of hope. Did he succeed, he might with justice say to Colombel:

"I gave you life. Will you in return share your secret and your fame?"

"And if, accidentally perchance, he killed him—

"I accept the condition, *monsieur,*" he said hoarsely. "Where are the notes?"

Thurston got up, intending to get the book from under Colombel's elbow. But he was halted by a sudden mad hallooing from the jungle beyond the clearing outside. Momentarily alarmed, the American and the Frenchman hurried to the veranda. They saw nearly a dozen men emerging from the woods and headed by the mate, Terhune.

From their actions, it was apparent that something had happened to disturb the mutineers. Their oncoming more than disturbed Thurston. Here was the very thing he had feared. They had discovered the splendid bungalow and the outhouses, sufficient to house them all in comfort during their lawless sojourn on Cabeza Island.

And in the midst of this ribald throng would be Lora Hilliard, pitifully unconscious, pathetically helpless.

"The notes — before they come!" the Frenchman whispered.

"They must not enter that room," said Thurston quickly. "It would be nothing short of desecration."

"You cannot prevent it, unless—Ah, I know!" and Pelerin's face lighted with cunning. "To the room, *monsieur,* and get the notes while I hold them.

"Better still; let them come to the door of that room and *see.* I'll do the rest!"

Thurston, seeing some bright idea plainly printed on Pelerin's face, yielded. Followed by the Frenchman, he darted through the laboratory into the chamber of silence.

"Quick! The notes!" Pelerin cried, himself standing in the doorway, facing that other portal through which the mutineers presently noisily surged.

"Well, by thunder, it's at least a decent hole to live in!" cried the leader, Terhune. "Hey, Mussoo!"—catching sight of Pelerin—"ye've fixed yourself up pretty snug, but—"

He stopped short and his mouth opened. He and the curious men behind him had seen into the room beyond the Frenchman. They were staring at the still figures ranged about, the rigid student at the table, and the huddled figure of the Russian —so recently alive — lying, face upward, on the floor.

"What in blazes!" gasped the mate.

"Men—go back!" said the Frenchman, his strained voice and pallid face in keeping with his agitation. "Go back! *It is the plague!*"

The mate's face blanched under its ruddiness. The men at his back edged toward the outer door.

"The plague — bubonic!" whispered Terhune in a shiver. "Then may the Lord help us, for *the steamer's gone!*"

"Gone!" Pelerin screamed. Between one thing and another, his nerves were on edge.

Terhune merely repeated his assertion, then turned and followed his men.

"Out of this, boys — quick!" he cried, physical fear in his utterance.

In a few moments the place was as silent as it had been five minutes before, save for the distant sounds of retreat into the jungle. The horror of the black death—that grim fantom of the tropics—was upon the men, driving them as nothing else would even have impressed them.

Pelerin turned a gray face upon Thurston, who was standing just within the doorway with a most inexplicable look on his puzzled countenance.

"*Mon Dieu!*" gasped the Frenchman. "The ship is gone!"

"So are Colombel's notes," said Thurston simply. "I don't know who took them. You didn't. I didn't. Bashmetieff couldn't.

"All I know is — they've vanished."

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK. Don't forget this magazine is issued weekly, and that you will get the conclusion of this story without waiting a month.

The Eagle of the Empire

By

Cyrus Townsend Brady

Author of "The Blue Ocean's Daughter," "The Patriots," "The Sword Hand of Napoleon," etc.

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS

IN 1815. France. Napoleon, all but crushed by allied forces, is inspired by the indestructible confidence of Jean Marteau, one of his youngest officers, whom he sends with Bullet-Stopper, an old grenadier, to ascertain the position of the enemy. They capture two Russians and put on their uniforms, then separate. Jean goes first to his father's house in Aumenier, where he finds his sister dead and his father dying, the victims of a marauding band of Cossacks. With his last breath Jean's father begs him to save the Countess Laure, at the château. Though desperate with grief, Jean dashes to the Château d'Aumenier, finding it filled with ruffians, and Laure a prisoner. Jean enters boldly, and by a ruse traps the men in the wine-cellar, then frees the Countess Laure. Napoleon saves Jean and the countess. Recognizing Laure as a member of a loyalist family who had taken refuge in England upon his accession, the emperor creates Jean Comte d'Aumenier, telling him that the estates are no longer Laure's, but his. Jean loves Laure, and intercedes in her behalf with Napoleon, but without avail. Laure is strongly attracted by Jean, but he is of the peasant class, while she is of the nobility. Napoleon considers Jean quite Laure's equal, and urges him to marry her. Then Napoleon is defeated by the allies, and Louis XVIII is restored to the throne of France. Still loyal to his emperor, Jean refuses allegiance to the king. Furthermore, he refuses to surrender the eagle, the famous standard of his regiment, though the king demands it. Knowing the danger of his position, the Countess Laure shows her love for Jean, though her fiancé, the English captain, is a guest under her roof.

At a secret meeting of the emperor's still loyal officers, Jean displays the eagle. Discovered by an officer of the king, Jean escapes with the eagle, hiding it in the château that night. Unfortunately, he blunders into Laure's bedroom, where, realizing that he has been detected already, he saves her reputation by firing her revolver and surrendering. The countess has promised Jean secrecy, but her heart is breaking, for he is seized and sentenced to death. The marquis himself and the other officers cannot believe his confession, and are full of admiration for him. Laure begs her uncle for an opportunity to talk with Jean.

CHAPTER XXV.

Not Even Love Can Find a Way.

HER color coming to her cheek, her eyes shining brilliantly with excitement and emotion, she looked as fresh and as beautiful as the springtime.

It was her right hand that rested on the table, and as Marteau approached her left instinctively sought her heart. In his emotion he looked at her with steady, concentrated glance, so keen, so piercing, as if he sought to penetrate to the very depths of her heart, that she could scarcely sustain his gaze.

This story began in the All-Story Cavalier Weekly for May 30.

He, too, had forgotten cares and anxieties, anticipations, hopes, dreams, in his excitement and surprise; everything had gone from him but her presence. Here was the woman he loved, looking at him in such a way, with such an air and such a bearing, her hand upon her heart—was that heart beating for him? Was she trying to still it, to control it, because—

His approach was slow, almost terribly deliberate. At another time she might have shrunk back faltering, but now in the presence of death itself, as it were, she stood steady, waiting for him. Enjoying the luxury of looking upon him unrestrained, her heart going out to him as he drew nearer, nearer, nearer, she found herself tremblingly longing for his actual touch.

Now his arms went out to her, she felt them slowly fold around her, and then, like a whirlwind released, he crushed her against his breast, and as she hung there, her throbbing heart making answer to the beating of his own, he kissed her again, again, again. Her heart almost stopped its beating. Beneath the fire of his lips her face burned. Her head drooped at last, her tense body gave way, she leaned upon him heavily, glad for the support of his strong arms.

"Laure," he whispered, "my little Laure, you love me? Oh, my God, you love me. It was true, then. I did not dream it. My ears did not mock me."

"Yes, yes," said the woman at last. "Whoever you are, whatever you are, wherever you go, I love you."

"And was it to tell me this that you came?"

"Yes. But not for this alone."

"What else?"

"I would have you live."

"For you?"

"For me."

"As your husband?"

"And if that were possible would you—"

"Yes, yes, would I what?"

"Give up the eagle?"

"My God!" said the man, loosing his clasp of her a little and holding her a little away that he might look at her. "Does your love tempt me to dishonor?"

"I do not know," said the woman piteously. "I am confused. I can not think aright. Oh, Marteau, Jean, with whom I played as a child, think of me! I cannot bear to see you dead outside there. I cannot look upon a soldier without thinking of it. The rattling of the carts in the streets sounds in my ear like shots. Don't, don't die! You must not!"

"And if I lived, would you love me?"

"So long as the good God gives me the breath of life."

"With the love of youth and the love of age?"

"Aye, for eternity."

"And would you be my wife?"

"Your wife?" said the woman, her face changing. "It would be joy beyond all, but I could not."

"Why not?"

"I—you know I am promised to another," she went on desperately, "and but that I might see you I repeated the promise. Otherwise my uncle would never have permitted me this blessed privilege. I told him that I would marry anybody if he would only let me see you—alone—for a moment even. What difference so long as I could not be yours? I came to tell you that I loved you, and because of that to beg you to live, to give up that eagle. What is it, a mere casting of metal, valueless. Don't look at me with that hard, set face. Let me kiss the line of your lips into softness again. I can not be your wife, but at least you will live. I will know that somewhere you think of me."

"And would death make a difference? High in the highest heaven, should I be so fortunate to achieve it, I would think of you, and if I were to be sent to the lowest hell, I could forget it all in thinking of you."

"Yes, yes, I know, because—"

"Because why?"

"I won't hesitate now. It may be unmaidenly, but I know because I, too—"

"Laure!" cried the man, sweeping her to him again.

"I think I loved you when we were boy and girl together," said the woman, throwing everything to the winds in making her great confession. "I know I loved you that night in the château, although I would not admit it and I treated you so cruelly. And when they told me you were dead, then, then my heart broke. And when you came here and I saw you two men together— Oh, I had made the contrast in my imagination—but last night I saw and now I see. Oh, you will live, live. What is honor compared to a woman's heart? See, I am at your feet. You will not break me. You will live. Something may happen. I am not married yet. The emperor may come back."

"The boy, Pierre, said last night that it was rumored—"

"Yes, he gave me a message. I almost forgot it." She held out the violet crushed in her fevered palm. "He said to tell you that the violet has bloomed."

"Does he mean—"

"I know not what he means."

"It is but an assurance begot of hope," said Marteau.

"And if it were so?"

"He comes too late. Rise, my lady. It is not meet for you to kneel. Let me lift you up, up to my heart. I cannot give up the eagle. That I have won your love is the most wonderful thing in all the world. It passes my understanding, the understanding of man, but I should forfeit it if I should permit myself this shame."

"Then I will do it, I will betray you," said the little countess desperately. "I alone know where that eagle is. I will get it. I will bargain with my uncle for your life. Marteau, listen. Do you wish to condemn me to death? I will not. I cannot survive you. I will not be thrust into that other's arms. I did not know, I did not realize what it was—before. But since I have been here, since you have held me to your heart, since you have kissed me—no, I cannot. It would be desecration—horror. Let me go! I will tell!"

"Dearest Laure," said the man, holding her tighter, "think, be calm, listen. It needs not that I assure you of my love. I have proved it. I lie here with the stigma of shame, the basest of accusations in the hearts of those who know of our meeting at night, to save you from suspicion even."

"Not my uncle, not the marquis. He says there is something back of it all. He knows you are not a thief."

"It takes a D'Aumenier to understand a Marteau," said the young man proudly.

"And I am a D'Aumenier, too," said the woman.

"Then strive to understand my point of view."

"I can, I will, but—"

"What binds you to that Englishman?"

"My word, my uncle's word."

"Exactly. And what binds you to keep my secret?"

The woman stared at him.

"Oh, do not urge that against me," she pleaded. "I must."

"I have your word. That eagle must remain hidden there until the emperor comes back. Then you must give it to him, and say that I died that you might place it in his hand."

"There must be a way and there shall be a way," said the agonized woman. "I love you. I cannot have you die. I cannot, I cannot."

Her voice rose almost to a scream in mad and passionate protest.

"Why," said the man soothingly, "I am the more ready to die now that I know that you love me. Few men have ever won so much in life as that assurance gives me. That I, peasant-born, beneath you, should have won

your heart, that I should have been permitted to hold you to my breast, to feel that heart beat against my own, to drink of the treasures of your lips, to kiss your eyes that shine upon me—Oh, my God, what have I done to deserve it all? And it is better, far better, having had thus much and being estopped from anything further, that I should go to my grave in this sweet recollection. Could I live to think of you as his wife?"

"If you will only live, I will die myself."

"And could I purchase life at that price? No. We have duties to perform, hard, harsh words in a woman's ear, common, accustomed phrase to a soldier. I have to die for my honor, and you have to marry for yours."

"Monsieur," broke in the sharp, somewhat high, thin voice of the old marquis standing by the door, "the court-martial brands you as a traitor. Captain Yeovil and those who were with me last night think you a thief and worse. But, by St. Louis," continued the old noble, fingering his cross as was his wont in moments in which he was deeply moved, "I know that you are a soldier and a gentleman."

"A soldier, yes, but a gentleman? Only almost, my lord."

"Not almost, but altogether. There is not another man in France who could stand such a plea from such a woman."

"You heard!" exclaimed Marteau.

"Only the last words. I heard her beg you to live because she loved you."

"And you did not hear—"

"I heard nothing else," said the marquis firmly. "Would I listen? I spoke almost as soon as I came in. Laure, these Marteaus have lived long enough by the side of the d'Aumeniers to have become ennobled in the contact. I now know the young man as I know myself. It is useless for you to plead longer. I come to take you away."

"Oh, not yet, not yet!"

"Go," said the young officer. "Indeed, I cannot endure this longer, and I must summon my fortitude for to-morrow."

"As for that," said the marquis, "there must be a postponement of the execution."

"I ask it not, *monsieur*. It is no favor to me—"

"Thank God! Thank God!" cried the woman. "Every hour means—"

"And I am not postponing it because of you," continued the marquis. "But he who must not be named—"

"The emperor."

"So you call him—has landed."

"Yes, yes; for God's sake tell me more!"

"I have no objection to telling you all. He is on the march toward Grenoble. He will be here to-morrow night. Troops have been sent for and will assemble here. He will be met in the gap in the road a few miles below the town. He will be taken. If he resists, he will be shot."

"Yes, the violets have bloomed again."

"And they shall draw red nourishment from the soil of France," was the prophetic answer.

"The emperor!" cried the young man in an exultant dream, "in France again—the emperor!"

"And so your execution will be deferred until we come back. The emperor may take warning from it when he witnesses it," continued the imperturbable old royalist.

"I shall see him again."

"As a prisoner."

Marteau started to speak, checked himself.

"For the last time," said the girl, "I beg—"

"It is useless."

"Let me speak again. My uncle has a kind heart under that hard exterior. He—"

"A kind heart indeed," said the old man, smiling grimly as Marteau shook his head at the girl he loved so. "And to prove it, here."

He extended a sealed paper. Marteau made no effort to take it. He recognized it at once. For a moment there flashed into the woman's mind that it was a pardon. But the old man undeceived her.

"Do you give it to him, Laure," he said. "It is that patent of nobility that he gave up. Acting for my king who will, I am sure, approve of what I have done, I return it to him. As he dies with the spirit and soul of a gentleman, so also shall he die with the title. M. le Comte d'Aumenier, I, the head of the house, welcome you into it. I salute you. Farewell.

"And now," the old man drew out his snuff-box, tendered it to the young man with all the grace of the ancient régime. "No?" he said, as Marteau stared in bewilderment; "the young generation has forgotten how, it seems. Very well." He took a pinch himself gracefully, closed the box, tapped it gently with his long fingers as was his wont. "*Monsieur* will forgive my back," he said, turning abruptly and calling over his shoulder, "and in a moment we must go."

Ah, he could be, he was, a gentleman of the ancient school, indeed. It seemed but a second to youth, although it was a long time to age before he tore them apart and led the half fainting girl away.

CHAPTER XXVI.

They Meet a Lion in the Way.

MORNING in the spring-time, the 6th of March, 1815, bright and sunny, the air fresh. The parade-ground was filled with troops. There were the veterans of the old Seventh-of-the-Line under the young Colonel Labédoyère. Here were the close-ranked lines of the Fifth regiment, Major Lestoype astride his big horse at the head of the first battalion.

Grenier, Drehon, Suraif, and the others officers with their companies, the men in heavy marching order, their white cockades shining in the white sunlight in their caps. The artillery was drawn up on the walls, the little squadron of household cavalry was in attendance upon the marquis. His lean, spare figure looked well upon a horse. He rode with all the grace and ease of a boy.

Yes, there were the colors, too; the white flag of France with the golden lily in the place of the Eagle on the staff at the head of the column. With ruffling of drums and presenting of arms the flag had been escorted to its place, and from the little group of cavalry had come the words not heard till recently for so many years in France:

"*Vive le Roi.*"

The troops had assembled silently, somewhat sullenly. They stood undemonstrative now. What they would do no one could tell. The couriers, who had dashed into the town yesterday night, had told the story to the marquis. Napoleon had landed five days before. He was within a day's march of Grenoble.

His following consisted of eleven hundred French infantry, eighty Polish horsemen, and a few guns, troops of the line and the grenadiers of the Elba guard. The peasants had been apathetic. He had carefully avoided garrisoned towns, choosing the unfrequented and difficult route over the maritime Alps of Southern France.

He was marching straight into the heart of the country to conquer or to die with this little band. The messenger's news had been for the governor's ears alone, but it had got out. Indeed, the tidings spread everywhere. Every wind that swept over the mountains seemed to be laden with the story. The whole city knew that the foot of the idol was once more upon the soil of France. They saw no feet of clay to that idol then.

The news had reached Paris via Marseilles almost before it was known in Grenoble. The terror-stricken government yet acted promptly. Troops were put in motion, fast-riding ex-

presses and couriers warned garrisons and transmitted orders to capture or kill without mercy. By a singular freak of fate, most of these orders were perforce given to the old companions in arms of the emperor.

Most of these were openly disaffected toward the king and eager to welcome Napoleon. A few were indifferent or inimical to the prospective appeal of their former captain. Still fewer swore to capture him, and one to "bring him back in an iron cage!" Only here and there a royalist pure and simple held high command as the marquis at Grenoble.

The old noble acted with great promptitude and decision. As the governor of Dauphiné, he had an extensive command. Grenoble was the most important town in the southeast. Within its walls was a great arsenal. It was strongly fortified, and adequately garrisoned. No better place to resist the emperor if his initial force had grown sufficiently to make it formidable, could be found.

Rumor magnified that force immensely. The marquis gave the order for the concentration of all the troops in the province to the number of six thousand. He sent out scouting detachments, and companies of engineers to break down bridges and block up roads — none of which, by the way, obeyed their orders. In short, he did everything that experience, skill, and devotion could suggest to stop the emperor and terminate the great adventure then and there.

The ruffling of the drums in the square ceased. The old marquis detached himself from his staff and the cavalry and rode out between the regiments. He lifted his hand. There was an intensity of silence on every hand. Even the people of the town had left their places of business and were crowded close to the lines to hear and see what was to be done.

"Bonaparte," said the marquis, that high, thin, somewhat cracked old voice carrying with astonishing clearness in every direction—"landed from Elba in the Gulf of Juan a few days ago. This usurper has broken every oath, disregarded every treaty. He is coming to Grenoble. He will be here to-day. As loyal subjects of our gracious and most catholic Majesty, King Louis XVIII, whom God preserve," continued the old man, taking off his hat, "it becomes our duty to seize and, if he resists, to kill this treacherous monster who had plunged Europe into a sea of blood and well nigh ruined France."

The old man did not mince words, it appeared. "You, gentlemen and comrades, have all sworn oaths before God and man to be faithful to the king whose bread you eat and whose uniform you wear. It has been said to me that there is disaffection among you. I can not believe that a soldier of France can be false to his oaths and to his flag. The fifth regiment of the line will march with me to meet the Corsican. The cavalry and my personal escort will keep the gates.

"If, by any chance we should be beaten, which I can not think possible with such brave men and gallant officers, the town must be held. Colonel Labédoyère, to you I commit the charge. Have your men line the walls. Dispose the troops, which are soon now arriving, advantageously. See that the guns are double shotted. If by any chance I do not return, hold the place to the last. Troops are marching to your aid from all over France. Major Lestoype, move your regiment. *Vive de Roi,*" ended the old man.

Again the cry was echoed, but not by many. The household cavalry, one or two of the newer companies of the brigade, some of the citizens. The marquis noticed it, everybody noticed it. Well, what difference did it make to the old man. They might cry or they might not cry.

Fight they must and fight they should! He had something of the old Roman spirit in him, the Marquis d'Aumenier. Upon him had devolved

the conduct of the critical issue. If he could stop Napoleon then and there, his venture would be a mere escapade and a sorry one. If he could not, then Gold help France and the world!

From the window of his prison, which overlooked the parade, Marteau had seen and heard all. The emperor was coming, and he would not be there to extend him a welcome. He forgot that if Napoleon had been a day later it would have made no difference to Marteau if he never came. He would have given years of his life, if it had been possible, to have marched with the column.

Orders had been published that morning postponing his execution until the return of the regiment. Just what was in the marquis's mind no one could absolutely say, but he was shrewd enough to recognize the possibility of an outbreak or an attempted mutiny among the troops when the sentence of execution was being carried out.

He did not want any difficulties of that kind then. Not because he feared them or felt unequal to them, but because such an outbreak would make the regiment more difficult to control in the greater emergency, and he knew he needed all the influence and moral power and force he could exercise to keep it in line for the graver duty and more tremendous responsibility it must now face.

And because he did not wish to leave it with Marteau in Grenoble he took the regiment with him. If he could force it to do its duty and arrest Napoleon, he could deal with Marteau at his leisure. The emperor was the greater issue and Marteau benefited by that fact.

So, with drums beating and flags flying, the fifth of the line marched down the road. With the colonel and his staff rode Sir Gervaise Yeovil and his son. They had asked permission, and it had been accorded them. Indeed, the staff was scanty. Young St. Laurent and an orderly, besides the two Englishmen, alone accompanied the old man.

Realizing how critical the situation was, and how important it was that the town should be held, he had left every officer and man upon whom he could count with the cavalry, and with instructions to watch Labédoyère particularly and check any disloyalty if possible. If the marquis could not effect his purpose with the regiment alone, no staff officer could aid him.

He was a lonely old man, and hard, that morning. The odds against him were tremendous, and his weapons were flawed and breaking in his hand. That only made him the more firmly resolute. He knew how, sometimes, one man could enforce his will on unwilling thousands. Was he that man that day? He would see.

Some miles south of the town the winding road ran along the side of a high and rocky hill. On the side opposite to the hill was a deep morass. The marquis, who had apparently thought of everything, had reconnoitered the country, and had decided upon the defensibleness of a place like this in the case of such an emergency as he was about to face, for along that hillside ran the main highway to the coast of France.

The troops reached it about noontime. The road was high up on the hillside, The marquis, riding in advance of his regiment, saw far down the long road and across a little river a moving column of men. Above them floated the tricolor flag, the blue and the red vividly distinct in the bright sun, which seemed to be reflected, as it were, from a crown of glory at the top of the staff.

There were perhaps twelve hundred soldiers on foot and a few score on horseback. They were coming steadily along the road. The distance was too great to distinguish men, but one rode at the head. The soldiers could see with their minds and hearts better than their eyes, and they recognized that gray-coated figure on that

white horse. They could hear the beating of drums faintly. The bridges had not been broken. The fords were not guarded. His advance parties had failed. Presage of disaster!

The marquis congratulated himself that he was in time to repair the disobedience of orders, which he promised himself to punish at the first opportunity. Instantly he directed Major Lestoype to deploy the men from column into line so that they filled the road, which was here very broad and spacious. On a sloping hillside he placed flanking companies.

The command was given to load, and the ramrods soon rang in the gun-barrels. Major Lestoype's voice shook as he gave the commands, which were repeated hoarsely, brokenly, nervously, by the company and the platoon officers. The dispositions of the men were soon concluded.

The place of the marquis was behind the line, but he rode to the right of it in a little depression cut out by the rains of winter in the side of the hill, underneath a great tree which was just beginning to show its leaves in the soft spring air and sunshine. From there he could command every part of the line with his glance, or move to the front or rear as the occasion might warrant. There he could see and be seen.

He was always pale, his old face seamed and drawn; but to his friends, the Englishmen, he seemed paler and older than ever as he sat quietly calming his nervous horse. And Sir Geryaise Yeovil was pale, too. Not that he had any bodily fear, but the incident as so fraught with consequences which a man as experienced as he could so easily foresee and dread, that its possibilities oppressed his heart.

Young Frank Yeovil was all excitement, however. Napoleon had been buried in Elba, but none mentioned his name then in any country in Europe without a thrill. Few do it now without a thrill, for that matter. The young man, modestly in the background, as was proper, leaned forward in his saddle, and stared at the approaching men and the figure to the fore. So this was the great Bonaparte? He longed earnestly for a nearer view.

"Think you, my lord," whispered the baronet to the old marquis, his great anxiety showing in his voice, "that your men are to be depended upon? That they will—"

The marquis shook his head, stared down the ranks at the men standing grim and tensely silent at parade rest.

"They look steady," he replied, shrugging his shoulders. "They have taken an oath to the king and—God only knows."

"What shall you do?"

"The best I can with the means at hand," was the indomitable answer.

"And if—"

"There are no 'ifs,' *monsieur!*"

Recognizing that he had said enough, and, indeed, pitying the old man so alone, the baronet drew back a little.

"By Heaven," whispered young Frank Yeovil to his father, "I wouldn't be elsewhere for a thousand pounds!"

"It may cost you that before you get away and more," said the old man grimly. "It will cost England millions unless—"

"M. le Commandant," said old Major Lestoype, riding up to the group and saluting respectfully.

"Major Lestoype."

"The command is formed and ready, sir."

"Very good. Take your place and be prepared."

"Will M. le Marquis permit me?" asked the old soldier, who had acquired a genuine respect for the old noble.

"Permit you what?"

"To return his advice," was the not unexpected reply.

"The thought of me which is evidently back of your words, sir, inclines me to overlook their obvious

meaning and its impropriety. Know, sir, that I am always ready," was the grim comment of the ancient soldier.

"Indeed, sir," began the soldier; but the marquis cut him short with an imperious gesture and a word.

"Retire!"

The major saluted, resumed his place in the line. No one spoke. The approaching soldiers were nearer now. They were coming. The fifth of the line sensed rather than heard a command down the road. They saw the guns of that little army come from their shoulders to a slanting position across the breast—arms-a-port!

There was something ominous in the slow movements of the men—picked men they were, the grenadiers of the Elba Guard especially being of great size, their huge bearskins towering above them. They were marching in columns of four, but the road was wide; another sharp command, and the men with slow yet beautiful precision deployed into a close column of companies at half distance—the very formation for a charge *en masse!*

The brass drums were rolling a famous march, "La Grenadière," the grenadier's march. The hearts of the fifth of the line were keeping time to the beating of those drums. Ah, they were splendid soldiers, that regiment of infantry! Even the youths got something from the veterans. They stood still, quiet, at parade rest, staring. The distance was growing shorter, shorter and shorter.

Some of the officers looked toward the marquis. Even his nervous horse seemed to have caught the spirit of the moment, for he was at last still. The old man sat there, immobile, his lips pressed, his eyes fixed on the approaching troops and shining like sword-blades in the sunlight—horse and man carved, as it were, out of the rock of the mountains. Presently that high, thin, sharp voice rang out. Men heard it above the rolling of the drums.

"Attention!" he cried. The men straightened up, swung the heavy muskets to their sides. "Carry arms!" As one man, the battalion lifted its weapons. "Make ready!" With a little crash the guns were dropped into the outstretched hands.

The approaching men were nearer now. Still they came on with arms-a-port. Still the drums ruffled and rolled at their head. They were not going to make any response apparently to the fire of the fifth of the line. Were they indeed to come to death's grapple at the bayonet's point with that irresistible guard? But no; there was a sudden movement, a change in the approaching ranks.

"Secure arms!" cried old Cambronne, and with their guns comfortably under their arms the old soldiers came on.

The battle was to be a moral one, evidently.

"Aim!" cried the sharp voice of the marquis, and the guns came up to the shoulders of the long line as they bent their heads and mechanically squinted along the barrels.

The moment had come! Out in the front had ridden the familiar figure on the white horse. They could see the details of his person now. His pale face was flushed under the familiar black, three-cornered hat with its tricolor cockade; his gray redingote was buttoned across his breast. He suddenly raised his hand. The drums stopped beating; the moving grenadiers halted. Ah, at last!

The emperor sprang from his horse, not heavily as of late, but with some of the alertness of a boy. He nodded to the ranks. Old General Cambronne, in command of the guard, stepped forward. He took from the port-aigle the eagle. Four grenadiers of the color guard closed about him—one of them was Bullet-Stopper.

In rear, and a little to the right of the emperor, he moved, holding up the flag and the eagle. A deep breath, almost a sob, ran down the line of the regiment. Guns wavered. Napoleon stepped forward. He threw back his

gray overcoat, disclosing the familiar green uniform of the Chasseurs of the Guard which he affected. The cross of the Legion of Honor glittered on his breast, a shining mark at which to aim.

The flush on his ivory face died as quickly as it had come. He was apparently as composed and as steady as if he had been cut out of granite. But tiny beads of sweat bedewed his brow, shaded by that familiar cocked hat. What would the next moment disclose? Would he be a prisoner, the laughing-stock, the jest of Europe?

Or would he lie dead in the road, a French bullet in his heart? He had faced the guns of every people in Europe, but he had never faced French guns before. Would any finger in that line press a trigger? Only God knew that. Better death than exile, without wife, child, friend, or France. On the hazard of the moment he staked all. Yet, he who could have looked into that broad breast could have seen that heart beating as never before.

CHAPTER XXVII.

Comrade, General, Emperor.

"BEHOLD him!" shouted the marquis, his emotion lending depth to that thin voice. "Fire, soldiers!"

No finger pressed a trigger. The silence was ghastly.

Ah! A thrill of hope in the breast of the greater captain, of despair in the heart of the lesser.

"By God!" muttered Yeovil, "he has lost them."

The marquis spurred his horse forward.

"Your oath! For France! The king! Fire!" he shouted.

And now a greater voice broke the silence.

"Comrades! Do you not know me?" said the emperor. Was there a tremble in his clear, magnificent voice? He paused; his speech stopped. "Behold your general," he resumed. He waited a few seconds again, and then finally, desperately: "Let any one among you who wishes to kill his emperor fire—now."

He raised his voice tremendously with that last word. It almost came with the force and clearness of a battle-cry. The marquis sat stupefied, his face ghastly pale.

"There is yet time!" he cried. "Is there none here faithful to his king? Fire!"

But the gun-barrels were coming down. "*Comrade! General! Emperor!*" Who could be indifferent to that appeal? Disregarding the old marquis absolutely as if he were not on the earth, the emperor came nearer smiling. He was irresistible to these soldiers when he smiled.

"Well," he said, his hands outstretched and open, "soldiers of the fifth who were with me in Italy, how are you all? I am come back to see you again, *mes enfants*," he went on genially. "Is there any one of you who wishes to kill me?"

"No, no, sire! Certainly not!" came the cry.

"Escape," whispered the marquis to the Englishman, "while there is yet time to take my niece away. To you I commit her. St. Laurent, to the town with the tidings!"

"By God, no!" growled Yeovil as St. Laurent saluted, and galloped rapidly down the road, none stopping him. "I am going to see the end of this. The damned cravens!" he muttered, looking at the soldiers.

"And yet," continued Napoleon to the troops, "you presented your guns at me."

"Sire," cried one of the veterans, dropping his musket and running his ramrod down the barrel, "it is not loaded. We only went through the motions."

The emperor laughed. He was nearer.

"Lestoype," he said, "is it thou, old comrade, and Grenier and Drehon?"

It was astonishing that he should

remember them, but so he did. He went down the line, speaking to the men, inspecting them just as of old. The officers could not keep them in line. They crowded about their old leader. Shouts of *"Vive l'empereur!"* rent the air. Men took off their caps, tore out the hated white cockades, trampled them under foot, and from pockets, where they had concealed them for this very moment, they replaced them with the tricolor.

In his movements the emperor at last confronted the marquis.

"And whom have we here?" asked Napoleon, staring up at him curiously.

The marquis's heart was broken. It was not in the human power of any servant of the king to have dominated that scene. A greater personality than his was there. The emperor had shown himself as of yore and exhibited his mastery. But no greater ideal possessed any man than that in the heart of the old noble.

He hated, he loathed, he abominated the man who looked up at him. He saw in the action of the soldiery a picture of the action of France, the downfall of the king. Well, it flashed into his mind that he at least, and perhaps he alone, might put a stop to it. From his holster he whipped out a pistol and leveled it at the emperor.

Lestoype, riding near, struck up his hand, the bullet sped harmlessly, the emperor stood unharmed. A roar of rage burst from the soldiers who came running. Dropping the weapon and reining his startled horse violently back so as to give himself a certain present and temporary freedom of action, the marquis drew his other pistol. Lestoype spurred his horse in front of the emperor, but Napoleon was not menaced.

"Have no fear," said the marquis almost gently. "I have failed my king. The bullet goes into a truer heart—my own," he added proudly.

Before any one could stop him, there was a flash, a muffled report; the spare figure reeled and fell forward on the saddle. He, at least, after the manner of his house, would not survive a failure which, although he could not prevent it, must inevitably be charged against him.

"A brave man," said the emperor coolly, staring at him with his hard, bright gray eyes. "See that his body is cared for in accordance with his rank and his courage. But who is this?" he asked, remounting his horse and facing the two Englishmen who had dismounted and received the body of the marquis, stone dead instantly.

"As I live, it is the man of law," he said, his marvelous memory serving him well again, "who was at the Château d'Aumenier. It only needs Marteau—"

"He is alive, your majesty," interposed Lestoype eagerly. "He brought back our eagle, and is—"

"Where is it, and why is he not with you?"

"The eagle is in hiding somewhere in Grenoble. Marteau is in prison. He hid it; and because he would not tell where, the marquis, yonder, condemned him to death."

"He has not yet been shot?"

"Not yet, sire. He waits the return of the regiment."

"Good," said the emperor. "We will surprise him. Face the men about. We shall go on to Grenoble and see what welcome awaits us there."

He was in high spirits. In his first clash with the troops of King Louis, he found that he exercised the old influence over them, and from the army, at least, he now realized that he had nothing to fear.

One of the men who had stood nearest the emperor, back of Cambronne, was an old grenadier. He had recognized the Marquis d'Aumenier; he had heard the emperor's conversation and the name of Marteau; and a thrill went through the heart of old Bal-Arrêt when he learned that his beloved officer and friend was yet alive.

The body of the old marquis, covered with his cloak and the now discarded royal standard, for which nobody cared since he was dead, over his heart, was placed on a farm wagon and escorted by some of the officers of the regiment and two companies with reversed arms.

He was watched over by the two Englishmen, whom Napoleon freely permitted to follow their own pleasure in their movements, being desirous of not adding fuel to any animosity, and of showing every respect possible to every Frenchman, whatever his predilection.

With the fifth of the line in the lead, the army moved forward after a halt for noonday meal. The greatly relieved, happy, and confident emperor, riding now with the old regiment of Italy in the van, and now with the grenadiers in the rear, approached Grenoble late in the afternoon. The short March day was drawing to a close when they came in sight of the heavily manned walls of the town.

Labédoyère had obeyed orders in some particulars. The ramparts had been manned, the cannon were loaded, torches were blazing on the walls, and the town was awake and seething with excitement. He had declared for the emperor, and after a sharp little conflict, had disarmed the royalist cavalry and himself held the gates.

Every regiment that had come in had cast its lot with Napoleon. As the soldiers in the town heard in the twilight the beating of the drums—"La Grenadière," the old march again!—the colonel of the seventh, having seized and disarmed the few royalists, opened the gate, marched out at the head of the troops to receive the emperor with arms, yes, but with open arms.

Amid the shouts of the citizens and the delirious joy of the soldiery, the emperor entered the city; in his train, first fruits of the war, was the body of the old servant of the king.

It was Pierre who burst into the apartment of the countess with the news.

"The emperor is here, *mademoiselle,*" he cried enthusiastically. "The soldiers are bringing him to the palace."

"And Marteau?"

"He will be free."

"Thank God!" cried the girl, and then she remembered her uncle. "And the marquis?" she asked.

"My dearest Laure," said the kindly sympathetic voice of Captain Frank Yeovil, stepping out of the twilight of the hall into the bright light of the little drawing-room where last night she had bade farewell to Marteau, "prepare yourself for dreadful—"

"Yes, yes, I know," she interrupted. "The emperor is here."

"The troops went over to him."

"And my uncle?"

"He—"

"Speak, *monsieur.* What has happened? Did the emperor—"

"No one harmed him. He could not survive the disgrace, *mademoiselle.* Prepare yourself."

"Oh, for God's sake, delay not your tidings."

"He died like a soldier of France on the field by his own hand rather than survive what he wrongfully thought his shame."

It was the policy of the emperor to be merciful; it was his wish to be clement. If possible, he wanted peace. If mercy and gentleness could get it, he could have it. He gave free permission to Sir Gervaise Yeovil and his son to return to England. He made no objection to their taking with them the Countess Laure, now the last of the line.

He himself was present at the funeral of the marquis, who was buried with all the military honors of his rank and station. There were generous hearts among those Frenchmen. As the representative of the king they hated him, but when he had died so gallantly rather than survive what his nice sensibility believed to be

his dishonor, his failure at any rate, they honored him. If he had been a marshal of France they could have done no more.

Marteau, restored to his position as aid to the emperor, had but a few moments with the grief-stricken woman.

"No," she said sadly, "it makes no difference. You know my heart. No words that I can utter could add anything more to the testimony I have given you. But I had promised my uncle, and now that he is dead the promise is doubly sacred. I must go. Thank your emperor for me for all he has done for—his enemy and for my friends, and for what he has done for you. Tell him the story of the eagle and the little part in it that I played, and—you will not forget me as I will not forget you."

"God grant," said the young soldier, "that I may die for France on some battle-field."

"And if that should befall you, and I have a moment for thought before I die, that thought will be for you. Would to God I could look forward to such a fate," she said broken-heartedly, turning away.

There were great doings next morning. The eagle was brought out; the emperor once more presented it to the regiment.

He did more than that. He signalized the action of the fifth of the line, the news of which had been sent broadcast by couriers and which struck a key-note for the army to follow by incorporating it as a supplementary fifth regiment of Grenadiers of the Guard.

He promised them a new flag and new shakos. He promoted Lestoype to be a colonel, Labédoyère to be a general, and promised every veteran officer his old rank or higher in the new army that was to be formed.

The men were promised bounties and rewards, and, with high hopes and glorious anticipations, the march for Paris was begun.

So by the wayside and in the fields around this little army in that springtime the violets bloomed again.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

At the Stamp of the Emperor's Foot.

THE manifold genius of Napoleon, which had been so clearly manifested in so many ways during his varied career, was never exhibited to better advantage than in the three months after his return from Elba.

During that period he reorganized the government, recreated and re-equipped an army. The veterans flocked to his standards, and within the time mentioned he had actually two hundred and fifty thousand men under arms.

With the better moiety of this force, the best armed, the best equipped, the best officered contingents, he took the field early in the month of June. The emperor did not want war any more than France did. He began his new reign with the most pacific of proclamations which probably reflected absolutely the whole desire of his heart.

But the patience of Europe had been exhausted, and the beliefs of rulers and peoples in the honesty of his professions, declarations, or retentions had been hopelessly shattered.

His arrival effected an immediate resurrection of the almost moribund Congress of Vienna. The squabbling, arguing, trifling plenipotentiaries of the powers had burst into gigantic laughter—literally actual merriment, albeit of a somewhat grim character!—when they received the news of Napoleon's return.

They were not laughing at Napoleon, but at themselves. They had been dividing the lion's skin in high-flown phrases which meant nothing, endeavoring to incorporate the Decalogue and the Sermon on the Mount in their protocols and treaties, when they suddenly discovered that Napoleon was still to be reckoned with.

Differences were instantly laid aside

and forgotten. Russia, Prussia, and Austria immediately agreed to put in the field two hundred and fifty thousand men each. The smaller powers—Sweden, Spain, the Low Countries—promised contingents. England once more assumed the familiar rôle of paymaster by immediately placing a vast subsidy at the disposal of the allies. She gave them also what was of more value than a subsidy—a soldier of the first rank to command the armies in the field.

The Duke of Wellington had never crossed swords with the greatest captain of his day and perhaps of all time. But he had measured himself with the ablest and most famous of Napoleon's marshals. With greatly inferior forces through four years of desperate fighting he had defeated the marshals and armies of France.

The dashing and gallant Junot had been routed at Vimeiro; Victor had been overwhelmed at Talavera; wily old Massena, with all his ability, could look back to the disaster of the blood-stained hill of Busaco; Marmont, the dainty tactician, had been smashed at Salamanca; stubborn Jourdan had been at last decisively defeated at Victoria; finally the brilliant Soult had been hurled out of the Pyrenees and had met his master at Toulouse.

Still, great as were these soldiers, and highly trained as they had been in the best of schools, not one of them was a Napoleon; all of them together were not, for that matter. Would the luster of Wellington's fame, which extended from the Ganges to the Ebro, be tarnished when he met the emperor?

It was a foregone conclusion, of course, that Schwarzenberg would command the Austrians; Blücher, the hussar general, the hard-fighting, downright old "Marshal Vorwärts," the Prussians; with the Emperor Alexander and his experienced captains the Russians.

To arm, equip, and move two hundred and fifty thousand men is a great task even for a rich and populous country flushed with victory and in the enjoyment of an abundance of time and unlimited means. The organizing—it almost might be said the creating—ability of Napoleon was not shared by his opponents.

Try as they would, June found their preparations still wofully incomplete. The Austrians had scarcely moved at all. The slower Russians, who were farther away and were to constitute the reserve army, could be discounted from any present calculation of their importance.

The English and their smaller allies from the Low Countries, and the Prussians, whose hatred of France and the emperor was greater than that of any other nation, were quicker to move.

Two hundred and fifteen thousand men, half of them Prussians, a third of the other moiety English, the remaining two-thirds being Belgians, Hollanders, and other miscellaneous nationalities, had assembled on the northwestern frontier of France. One-half of this joint assemblage was commanded by Blücher and the other half by Wellington.

Leaving the weaker half to his own great army to complete its equipment, and placing strong detachments in fortress and at strategic points to oppose the Austrians should they advance, the emperor, as has been said, with one hundred and twenty-five thousand men, took the field.

Naturally, inevitably, Belgium and the great English-Prussian army, was his objective. He saw clearly the dangers that encompassed him, the conditions he must meet and overcome.

It was by no means certain even if he defeated decisively his enemies in Belgium and occupied Brussels that his trouble would be over. There would still be left a possible five hundred thousand men with whom he would have to deal, under rulers and generals the inveteracy of whose hatreds he could well understand.

But at least his position would be greatly improved by success—any success, in short, to say nothing of so great a one. If he could show himself once more the inimitable captain, the thunderbolt of war, the organizer of victory, the effect upon France at least would be electrical.

The emperor had to admit that save in the army there had not been much response from tired-out, exhausted France to the appeals of the once irresistible Napoleon. But the spirit of the army was that of devotion itself. There was a kind of blind madness in it of which men spoke afterward as a phenomenon that could only be recognized, that could never be explained or understood.

They could not account for it. Yet it was a powerful factor, the most powerful indeed that enabled the emperor to accomplish so much and fall short of complete triumph by so narrow a margin.

It was not the burning love of liberty which had animated the armies of the early republic and turned its tatterdemalion legions into paladins; it was not the heroic consecration of the veterans of later years of France to their native land.

It was a strange, mysterious obsession, a personal attachment to Napoleon, the individual—an unlimited, unbounded tribute to his fascination, to his own unique personality. It has not died out and seems destined to live—even in death Napoleon, after a century, exercises the same fascination!

No personal attachment, however deep, however ardent, however complete, can take the place as the inspiration of heroic deeds, of that deeper passion of love of country. Nor can any personal devotion to a mere man produce such a steadfastness of character as is brought about by adherence not so much to the greatest man as to a great cause or a great land.

For one thing, the feet of clay upon which the idol stands have only to be recognized to dissipate the ardor and fervor of the worshipers, while a great passion like the love of a people for a great country is eternal.

Nevertheless, this was probably the most formidable army in the quality of its units that had ever been mustered on the globe. There was not a man in it who was not a veteran. Some of them were veterans of fifteen years of soldiering with Napoleon. This that came was to be the sixtieth pitched battle in which some of them had participated.

Even the younger men had gone through more than one campaign and taken part in much hard fighting. Back from the prisons where they had been confined and the great fortresses they had held until the emperor's abdication, had come the veterans. The old guard had been reconstituted. As a reward for its action at Grenoble the fifth of the line had been incorporated in it as a supplementary regiment, a second fifth regiment of grenadiers.

The ranks of the guard had been most carefully culled, the unserviceable had been weeded out, their places taken by men well fitted by their record, their physical prowess, and their personal appearance to belong to that famous corps.

Not the Immortals of Xerxes, the Spartan Band of Leonidas, the Companion Cavalry of Alexander, the Carthaginians of Hannibal, or the Tenth Legion of Cæsar had surpassed the record of these Pretorians of Imperial France.

The same weeding out process had been carried out in the army. The flower of French cavalry, the matchless French artillery, and the famous infantry which had trampled down the world were ranged under the eagles. Other corps had been drained for equipment. In but few particulars did the army differ from the armies of the past.

With two exceptions, the great marshals were not there. Murat, king of horsemen and swordsmen, was a

prisoner in his ignoble Neapolitan realm awaiting trial and execution. Marmont and Mortier dared not present themselves before the emperor they had betrayed.

Massena, the wisest and ablest of them all, was old and in retirement. MacDonald, the incorruptible, was with the fat-bodied, fat-witted Bourbon king in Ghent. Berthier, with his marvelous mastery of detail and his almost uncanny ability to translate the emperor's thoughts, even into orders, had not rejoined the eagles.

There were but two of the marshals of old with Napoleon. Soult, in some respects the acutest strategist and finest tactician, was chief of staff. He tried his best to fill Berthier's position, and did it acceptably if not with the success of that master.

The other marshal was preeminently the battle leader, red-headed Michael Ney, the fighter of fighters, a man whose personality was worth an army corps, whose reputation and influence with the soldiers was of the very highest.

The rest of the officers, while veterans, were younger men and less known men. Drouet d'Erlon commanded one of the corps, Reille another, Grouchy another; Druot was the leader of the guard; Kellerman, Milhaud, Gérard, and Maurice, the cavalry. It was an army of veterans, officered by young men, commanded by the greatest of soldiers.

But the army had not yet "found itself." It had no natural coherence and there had been no time to acquire any. It had not been welded together. Officers, men, regiments, brigades, divisions, were all new and strange to one another. There was a vast deal of suspicion in the ranks.

The discipline was rather because of past habit than present practise. That army needed a few victories, and badly needed them. A welding process was required. Given time and victory to shake it together, and it might laugh at the world.

Would it get time and win victory? That was the question. And if it got neither, what then? How would it stand up under the strain? Would the tie that bound hold in defeat? Could the rest of the army live up to the guard, for instance? Yes, that was the grave, the all-important question.

The disparity between the French army—or it would better be called Napoleon's army—and that of the allies he purposed to attack was enormous. The allies were to the French in the ratio of about two to one. Whatever else was lacking, Napoleon had not lost his audacity, nor, when his intentions are disclosed by a study of his plans, can it be claimed that his strategetic intention was lacking in brilliancy.

He determined with his smaller but compact and manageable army to thrust himself between the two wings of the enemy under its divided command; to hold off one while he smashed the other, and then to concentrate upon the surviving half and mete out to it the same hard fortune.

In other words, trusting to his ability, he deliberately placed his own army between two others, each of which practically equaled his own. He thrust himself within the jaws of a trap, to use a homely simile, intending to hold one arm of the trap open while he broke up the other. He intended to burst through the allied line, in other words, and smash up each half in succession.

Of course, there was always the danger that he could not burst through that line, or that he could not hold back one half while he fought the other, or that, holding back one half, he could not beat the other, or, having beaten one half, he would be too weak to fall on the other.

There was always the danger that the trap would be sprung, that he would be caught in its jaws; or, to change the metaphor, that he would be like the wheat between the upper and the nether millstone. Still, he did

not think so, and he did not go into the undertaking blindly.

As he had said, in his own case, "War was not a conjectural art"; and he had most carefully counted the cost, estimated the probabilities. In short, he looked well before he leaped—yet a man may look well and leap wrong after all!

On these considerations he based his grand strategy: The army of the Prussians had approached the French frontier from the west; the army of the Engish and allies from the northwest; Napoleon had a complete knowledge of one of the captains opposing him. He knew and accurately estimated Blücher. He did not know, and he did not accurately estimate, Wellington.

He viewed the latter with contempt; the former with a certain amount of disdainful approbation, for, while Blücher was no strategist and less of a tactician, he was a fighter, and a fighter is always dangerous and to be dreaded. Gneisenau, a much more finished soldier, was Blücher's second in command, but he was a negligible factor in the emperor's mind.

The fact that Wellington had beaten all of Napoleon's marshals with whom he had come in contact had intensified the emperor's hatred. Instead of begetting caution in dealing with him, Napoleon's antagonism had blinded him as to Wellington's ability.

He also rated the Prussians higher than the English as fighters, and when his officers, who had felt the power of the thin red line, which had so often wrecked the French column, explained to him that there were no better defensive fighters on earth than the English, not even the Russians, he had laughed them to scorn, attributing their cautions to the fact that they had been beaten in Spain and had grown timid. The emperor did not purpose to be beaten in France or Belgium by the stolid English.

In more detail, his plan was to confuse Wellington—and he did outwit him at first!—who held the right of the allied line, fall upon him before he had time to concentrate—and he did that, too—and beat him or contain him with one of his lieutenants, Ney, of course, while the emperor in person put Blücher to rout—which also he accomplished.

He reasoned that if he could beat Blücher and threaten his communications, what was left of the Prussian army, which Napoleon hoped would not be much, would immediately retreat westward, and that, when Blücher had been thrown out of the game for the present, he could turn on Wellington and his English and allies and make short work of him.

It did not occur to him that even if he beat Blücher and he beat Wellington, provided the defeats did not end in utter routs, and they both retreated, that they might withdraw on parellel lines and effect a junction later, when even after the double defeat they would so greatly outnumber him that his chances of success would be faint.

The possibility of their pursuing any other course than that he had forecasted for them never entered his mind. His own conception of their action was, in fact, an obsession with him. Yet that which he thought they would do, they did not; and that which he was confident they would not do, they did!

CHAPTER XXIX.

Waterloo.

IN a romance like this, in which campaigns and marches, maneuvers and battles, however decisive they may be in history, are only incidental to the careers of the characters herein presented to the reader, it is not necessary for the chronicler to turn himself into a military historian, much as he would like it. Therefore, in great restraint he presses on, promising only so much history as may serve to show forth the somber background.

In this setting of the scene of the great drama to be played, young Marteau has been necessarily somewhat lost sight of. He was very much in evidence during that hundred days of feverish and frantic activity. Napoleon had distinguished him highly. He had given him the star of a general of brigade, but he had still retained him on his staff.

Good and experienced staff officers were rare, and the emperor needed all he could get. And as Marteau was one of those who was attached to the emperor by double motive of love of the man and love of his country, believing as he did that the destiny of the two could not be severed, he had served the emperor most efficiently, with that blind, passionate devotion to duty by which men give to a cause the best that is in them, and which sometimes leads them to almost inconceivable heights of achievement.

Suffice is it to say that the great strategetic conception of Napoleon was carried out with further striking success in the first three days of the campaign. The emperor crossing the Sambre interposed himself between Wellington and Blücher, completely deceived the Englishman, who thought his extreme right was threatened, detached Ney to seize the village of Quatre Bras, where Wellington had at last decided to concentrate, and with eighty thousand men fell on the Prussians at Ligny.

Ney did not seize Quartre Bras; Wellington got there ahead of him and stubbornly held the position. Although Ney had twice the number of troops at the beginning of the battle that the English field marshal could muster, they were not well handled, and no adequate use was made of the French preponderance.

Napoleon, on the far right of Ney at Ligny, on the contrary, fought the Prussians with his old-time skill and brilliance. The contending forces there were about equal, the Prussians having the advantage, but victory finally declared for the emperor. It was the last victory, not the least brilliant and not the least desperately fought, of his long career. The importance and quality of the battle has been lost sight of in the greater struggle of Waterloo which took place two days after, but it was a great battle nevertheless.

One of the crude ways in which to estimate a battle is by what is called the "butcher's bill," and eighteen thousand dead and wounded Prussians and twelve thousand Frenchmen tells its tale. But it was not the decisive battle that Napoleon had planned to make it.

The Prussians retreated. They had to. But they retreated in good order. Blücher having been unhorsed and temporarily incapacitated in a charge, the command and direction of the retreat devolved upon Gneisenau. His chief claim to military distinction lies in the fact that he did not do what Napoleon expected and what Blücher would have done. He retreated to the north instead of the west!

One reason why the victory of Ligny and the drawn battle at Quatre Bras were not decisive was because of a strange lack of generalship and a strange confusion of orders for which Napoleon and Ney are both responsible. Ney was constructively a victor at Quatre Bras finally.

That is, the English retreated at nightfall and abandoned the field to him; but they retreated not because they were beaten, but because Wellington, finding his position could be bettered by retirement and concentration, decided upon withdrawal. But Ney could have been the victor in every sense in spite of his indifferent tactics if it had not been for the same blunder that the emperor committed.

D'Erlon, at the head of perhaps the finest corps in the army, numbering twenty thousand men, through the long hours of that hot June day marched from the vicinity of Quatre Bras to Ligny, whence he could actually see the battle raging, only to

be summoned back from Ligny to Quatre Bras by orders from Ney!

Retracing his course, therefore, he marched back over the route he had just traversed, arriving at Quatre Bras too late to be of any service to Ney! Like the famous king of France who, with twenty thousand men, marched up the hill and then marched down again, this splendid corps, which, thrown into either battle, would have turned the Prussian retreat into a rout on the one hand, or have utterly cut to pieces Wellington on the other, did nothing.

The principal fault was Napoleon's. He saw D'Erlon's corps approaching, but he sent no order and took no steps to put it into the battle.

In spite of the fact that the energies of D'Erlon had been spent in marching instead of fighting, the emperor was a happy man that night. He had got himself safely placed between the two armies, and he had certainly severely if not decisively beaten one of them.

Strategically his operations had been characterized by unusual brilliancy. If things went as he confidently expected, all would be well. He was absolutely sure that Blücher was retiring to the west toward Namur. He despatched Grouchy with thirty-five thousand of his best men to pursue him in the direction which he supposed he had gone.

Napoleon's orders were positive, and he was accustomed to implicit obedience from his subordinates. He had a habit of discouraging independent action in the sternest of ways, and for the elimination of this great force from the subsequent battle the emperor himself must accept the larger responsibility.

But all this does not excuse Grouchy. He carried out his orders faithfully, to be sure, but a more enterprising and more independent commander would have sooner discovered that he was pursuing stragglers, and would earlier have taken the right course to regain his touch with his chief and to harry the Prussian field marshal. He did turn to the north at last, but when the great battle was joined he was miles away and no more use than if he had been in Egypt.

His attack on the Prussian rear guard at Wavre, while it brought about a smart little battle with much hard and gallant fighting, really amounted to nothing and had absolutely no bearing on the settlement of the main issue elsewhere. He did not disobey orders, but many a man has gained immortality and fame by that very thing. Grouchy had his chance and failed to improve it. He was a veteran and a successful soldier, too.

Comes the day of Waterloo. Blücher had retreated north to Wavre and was within supporting distance of Wellington. His army had been beaten but not crushed; its spirit was not abated. The old Prussian marshal, badly bruised and shaken from being unhorsed and ridden over in a cavalry charge in which he had joined like a common trooper, but himself again, promised in a famous interview between the two to come to the support of the young English marshal should he be attacked, with his whole army.

Wellington had retreated as far as he intended to. He established his headquarters on a hill called Mont St. Jean back of a ridge near a village called Waterloo, where his army commanded the junction point of the high roads to the south and west. He drew up his lines, his red-coated countrymen and his blue-coated allies, on the long ridge in front of Mont St. Jean facing south, overlooking a gently sloping valley which was bounded by other parallel ridges about a mile away.

On the right center of Wellington's lines a short distance below the crest of the ridge, embowered in trees, lay a series of stone buildings, in extent and importance between a château and a farmhouse, called Hougmont. These were surrounded by a stone wall, and the place was impregnable against

everything but artillery if it were properly manned and resolutely held.

Both those conditions were met that day. Opposite the left center of the duke's line was another strong place, a farmhouse consisting of a series of stone buildings on three sides of a square, the fourth closed by a wall, called La Haye Sainte. These outposts were of the utmost value, rightly used.

The duke had sixty-seven thousand men and two hundred and sixty guns. His right had been strengthened at the expense of his left because he expected Napoleon to attack the right, and he counted on Blücher's arrival to support his left.

To meet him Napoleon had seventy-five thousand men and two hundred and sixty guns. Off to the northwest lay Blücher at Wavre with nearly eighty thousand more men and two hundred guns, and wandering around in the outer darkness was Grouchy with thirty-five thousand.

The valley was highly cultivated. The ripening grain still stood in the fallow fields separated by low hedges. Broad roads ran through the valley in different directions. The weather was horrible. It rained torrents during the night and the earlier part of the morning. The fields were turned into quagmires, the roads into morasses.

It was hot and close. The humidity was great. Little air was stirring. Throughout the day the mist hung heavy over the valley and the ridges which bordered it. But the rain ceased in the morning, and Napoleon made no attack until afternoon, waiting for the ground to dry out somewhat. It was more important to him that his soldiers should have good footing than to the English; the offensive, the attack, the charge, fell to him.

Wellington determined to fight strictly on the defensive. Nevertheless, precious hours were wasted. Every passing moment brought some accession to the allied army, and every passing hour brought Blücher nearer. With all the impetuosity of his soul, the old man was urging his soldiers forward over the horrible roads.

"Boys," he said in his rough, homely way to some bitterly complaining artillerymen, who had stalked in the mud, "I promised. You would not have me break my word, would you?"

Grouchy meanwhile had at last determined that the Prussians had gone the other way. He had learned that they were at Wavre, and he had swung about and was coming north. Of course he should have marched toward the sound of the cannon — generally the safest guide for a soldier—but at any rate he was trying to get into touch with the enemy. No one can question his personal courage or his loyalty to his cause.

Napoleon, when he should have been on the alert, was very drowsy and dull that day at Waterloo. He had showed himself a miracle of physical strength and endurance in that wonderful four days of campaigning and fighting, but the soldiers passing by the farmhouse of La Belle Alliance — singular name which referred so prophetically to the enemy—sometimes saw him sitting on a chair by a table outside the house, his feet resting on a bundle of straw to keep them from the wet ground, nodding, asleep!

And no wonder. It is doubtful if he had enjoyed as much as eight hours of sleep since he crossed the Sambre, and those not consecutive! Still, if ever he should have kept awake that eighteenth of June was the day of days!

So far as one can discern his intention, his battle plan had been to feint at Hougmont in the right center, cause the Duke of Wellington to weaken his line to support the château, and then to break through the left center and crush him by one of those massed attacks under artillery fire for which he had become famous. The line once broken, the end, of course, would be more or less certain.

The difference in the temperaments

of the two great captains was well illustrated before the battle was joined. The duke mainly concealed his men behind the ridge. All that the French saw when they came on the field were guns, officers, and a few men. The English army was making no parade. What the English saw was very different.

The emperor displayed his full hand. The French, who appeared not to have been disorganized at all by the hard fighting at Ligny and Quatre Bras, came into view in most splendid style; bands playing, drums rolling, swords waving, bayonets shining even in the dull air of the wretched morning.

They came on the field in solid columns, deployed, and took their positions, out of cannon-shot range, of course, in the most deliberate manner. The uniforms of the army were brand new, and it was the fashion to fight in one's best in those days. They presented a magnificent spectacle.

Presently the duke, his staff, the gunners and the others who were on the top of the ridge and watching, saw a body of horsemen gallop rapidly along the French lines. One gray-coated figure riding a white horse was in advance of the rest. The cheers, the almost delirious shouts and cries, told the watchers that it was the emperor. It was his last grand review, his last moment of triumph.

It was after one o'clock before the actual battle began. More books have been written about that battle than any other that was ever fought. One is tempted to say, almost than all others that were ever fought. And the closest reasoners arrive at different conclusions, and disagree as to many vital and important details.

The Duke of Wellington himself left two accounts, one in his despatches and one in notes written long afterward, which were irreconcilable, but some things are certain, upon some things all historians are agreed.

The battle began with an attack on the Hougmont château, and the conflict actually raged around that château for over six hours, or until the French were in retreat. Macdonell, Home, and Saltoun, Scotchmen all, with their regiments of the Household Guard, held that château, although it was assailed over and over again, finally by the whole of Reille's corps.

They held that château, although it burned over their heads, although the French actually broke into it on occasion. They held it although every other man in it was shot down and scarcely a survivor was without a wound. It was assaulted with a fury and a resolution which was matched only by the fury and resolution of its defense.

Why it was not battered to pieces with artillery no one knows. At any rate, it occupied practically the whole of Reille's corps during the whole long afternoon of fighting.

The space between Hougmont and the La Haye Sainte was about a thousand yards. La Haye Sainte was assaulted also, but to anticipate events, it held out until about five o'clock in the evening, when after another wonderful defense, it was carried. The French established themselves in it eighty yards from Wellington's line.

Meanwhile, the French had not confined their efforts to the isolated forts, if they may be so called, on Wellington's center and left center. After a tremendous artillery duel, D'Erlon's men had been formed up for that massed attack for which the emperor was famous, and with which it was expected the English would be pierced and the issue decided.

The emperor, as has been noted, had intended the attack on the Hougmont as a mere feint, hoping to induce the Duke of Wellington to reenforce his threatened right and thereby to weaken his left center. It was no part of the emperor's plan that an attempt to capture Hougmont should become the main battle on his own left that it had, nor could he be sure that even the tremendous attack upon it had produced

the effect at which he aimed. Nevertheless, the movement of D'Erlon had to be tried.

It must be remembered that Napoleon had never passed through the intermediate army grades. He had been jumped from a regimental officer to a general. He had never handled a regiment, a brigade, a division, a corps—only an army, or armies.

Perhaps that was one reason why he was accustomed to leaving details and the execution of his plans to subordinates. He was the greatest of strategists and the ablest of tacticians, but minor tactics did not interest him, and the arrangement of this grand attack he left to the corps and commander.

Giving orders to Ney and D'Erlon therefore, the emperor at last launched the charge. One hundred and twenty guns were concentrated on that part of the English left beyond the westernmost of the two outlying positions, through which it was determined to force a way.

Under cover of the smoke which all day hung thick and heavy in the valley and clung to the ridges, D'Erlon's splendid corps, which had been so wasted between Quatre Bras and Ligny, and which was burning to achieve something, was formed in four huge parallel columns, slightly echeloned, under Douzelot, Marcognet, Durutte, and Allix.

With greatly mistaken judgment these four columns were crowded close together. The disposition was a very bad one. In the first place their freedom of movement was so impaired by lack of proper distance as to render deployment almost impossible. Unless the columns could preserve their solid formation until the very point of contact, the charge would be a fruitless one.

In the second place they made an enormous target impossible to miss. The attack was supported by light batteries of artillery and cavalry on the flanks.

Other things being equal, the quality of soldiers being the same, the column is at an obvious disadvantage when attacking the line. It was so in this instance. Although it was magnificently led by Ney and D'Erlon in person, and although it comprised troops of the highest order, the division commanders being men of superb courage and resolution, no valor, no determination could make up for these disadvantages.

The tremendous artillery fire of the French, which did great execution among the English, kept them down until the dark columns of French infantry mounting the ridge got in the way of the French guns which, of course, ceased to fire.

The drums were rolling madly, the Frenchmen were cheering loudly when the ridge was suddenly covered with long red lines. There were not many blue-coated allies left. As a matter of fact, not liking the appearance of the French, most of the allies fled to the rear.

They did not leave the field. They were formed up again in the rear and might be considered a reserve. But the English did not intend to flee. They were not accustomed to it, and they saw no reason for doing it now.

Wellington moved the heavy cavalry over to support the threatened point of the line, and bade his soldiers restrain their fire. There was something ominous in the silent, steady, rocklike red wall. It was much more threatening to the mercurial Gallic spirit than the shouting of the French was to the unemotional English disposition. Still, they came on.

Ney and D'Erlon had determined to break the English line with the bayonet. Suddenly when the French came within point blank range, the English awoke to action. The English guns poured shot into the close-ranked masses, each discharge doing frightful execution. Ney's horse was shot from under him at the first fire. But the unwounded marshal scrambled to his

feet, and mounting another horse, pressed on.

The snow-moving ranks were nearer. The English infantrymen now opened fire. Shattering discharges were poured upon the French. The fronts of the divisions were obliterated. The men in advance, who survived, would have given back, but the pressure of the masses in their rear forced them to go on.

The divisions actually broke into a run. Again and again the British battalions spoke, the black muskets in the hands of the red-coats were tipped with redder flame. It was not in human flesh and blood to sustain very long such a fire.

It was a magnificent charge, gloriously delivered; and such was its momentum that it almost came in touch with the English line. It did not quite. That momentum was spent at last. The French deployed as well as they could in the crowded space, and at half pistol-shot distance began to return the English fire. The French guns joined in the infernal tumult.

The advance had been stopped, but it had not been driven back. The French cavalry were now coming up. Before they arrived that issue had to be decided. The critical moment was at hand, and Wellington's superb judgment determined the action. He let loose on them the heavy cavalry led by the Scots Grays on their big horses.

As the ranks of the infantry opened to give them room, the men of the Ninety-Second Highlanders, mad with the enthusiasm of the moment, caught the stirrup-straps of the Horse, and half running, half dragged, joined in the charge.

The splendid body of heavy cavalry fell on the flank of the halted columns. There was no time for the French to form squares; nay, more, there was no room. In an instant, however, they faced about and delivered a volley which did great execution, but nothing could stop the maddened rush of the gigantic horsemen.

Back on the heights of Rossomme, Napoleon aroused from his lethargy, stood staring at the great attack.

"My God!" he exclaimed as he saw the tremendous onfall of the cavalrymen upon his helpless infantry. "How terrible are those gray horsemen!"

Yes, they were more terrible to the men at the point of contact than they were to those back of La Belle Alliance. No infantry that ever lived in the position in which the French found themselves could have stood up against such a charge as that. Trampling, hacking, slashing, thrusting, the horses biting and fighting like the men, the heavy cavalry broke up two of the columns.

The second and third began to retreat under an awful fire. But the dash of the British troopers was spent. They had become separated, disorganized. They had lost coherence. The French cavalry now arrived on the scent. Admirably handled, they were thrown on the scattered English. There was nothing for the latter to do but retire.

Retire they did, having accomplished all that any one could expect of cavalry, fighting every step of the way. Just as soon as they opened the fronts of the regiments in line the infantry and artillery began again, and then the French cavalry got their punishment in turn.

It takes but moments to tell of this charge; and, indeed, in the battlefield, doubtless, it seemed but a few moments. But the French did not give way until after long, hard fighting. From the beginning of the preliminary artillery duel to the repulse of the charge, an hour and a half elapsed.

Indeed, they did not give way altogether either, for Donzelot and Allix, who commanded the left divisions, were the men who finally succeeded in capturing La Haye Sainte. And both sides suffered furiously before the French gave back.

There was plenty of fight left in the French yet. Ney, whatever his

strategy and tactics, showed himself as of yore the bravest of the brave. It is quite safe to say that the hero of the retreat from Russia, the last of the grand army, the star of many a hotly contested battle, surpassed even his own glorious record for personal courage on that day.

Maddened by the repulse, he gathered up all the cavalry, twelve thousand in number, and with Kellerman, greatest of cavalrymen, to second him, and with division leaders like Milhan and Maurice, he hurled himself upon the English line between Hougmont and La Haye Sainte.

But the English made no tactical mistakes like that of Ney and D'Erlon. The artillery stood to their guns until the torrent of French horsemen was about to break upon them, then they ran back to the safety of the nearest English squares.

The English had been put in such formation that the squares lay checkerwise. Each side was four men deep. The front rank knelt, the second rank bent over at a charge bayonets, the third and the fourth ranks stood erect and fired. The French horsemen might have endured the tempest of bullets, but they could not ride down the *chevaux de frise,* the fringe of steel.

They tried it. No one could find fault with that army. It was doing its best; it was fighting and dying for its emperor. Over and over they sought to break those stubborn British squares. One or two of them were actually penetrated, but unavailingly.

Men mad with battle lust threw themselves and their horses upon the bayonets. The guns were captured and recaptured. The horsemen overran the ridge, they got behind the squares, they countercharged over their own tracks, they rode until the breasts of the horses touched the guns. They fired pistols in the face of the English. One such charge is enough to immortalize its makers, but during that afternoon they made twelve!

Ney, raging over the field, had five horses killed under him. The British suffered horribly. If the horsemen did draw off to take breath, and reform for another effort, the French batteries, the English squares presenting easy targets, sent ball after ball through them. And nobody stopped fighting to watch the cavalry.

Far and wide the battle raged. Toward the close of the day some of the English squares had become so torn to pieces that regiments, brigades and divisions had to be combined to keep from being overwhelmed.

Still the fight raged around Hougmont. Now from a source of strength La Haye Sainte had become a menace. There the English attacked and the French held. Off to the northwest the country was black with advancing masses of men. No, it was not Grouchy and his thirty-five thousand, who, if they had been there at the beginning, might have decided the day. It was the Prussians.

They, at last, had marched to the sound of the cannon. Grouchy was off at Wavre. He at last got in touch with one of Blücher's rear corps, and he was fighting a smart little battle ten miles from the place where the main issue was to be decided. As a diversion, his efforts were negligible, for without that corps the allies now outnumbered the French two to one.

Telling the troops that the oncoming soldiers were their comrades of Grouchy's command who would decide the battle, Napoleon detached the gallant Lobau, who had stood like a stone wall at Aspern, with the young guard to seize the village of Planchenoit, and to hold the Prussians back; for if they broke in the end would be as certain as it was swift.

And well did Lobau with the young guard perform that task. Bulow commanding the leading corps hurled himself again and again upon the French line. His heavy columns fared exactly as the Franch had fared when they assaulted the English.

But it was not within the power of ten thousand men to hold off thirty thousand forever and there were soon that number of Prussians at the point of contact. Frantic messages from Lobau caused the emperor to send one of the divisions of the old guard, the last reserve, to his support.

It was now after six o'clock, the declining sun was already low on the horizon, the long June day was drawing to a close. The main force of the Prussians had not yet come up to the hill and ridge of Mont St. Jean. Wellington, in great anxiety, was clinging desperately to the ridge with his shattered lines, wondering how long he could hold them, whether he could sustain another of those awful attacks.

His reserves, except two divisions of light cavalry, Vivian's and Vandeleur's, and Maitland's, and Adams' brigades headed by Colborne's famous Fifty-Second Foot, among his troops the de luxe veterans of the Peninsula, had all been expended.

Lobau was still holding back the Prussians by the most prodigious and astounding efforts. If Napoleon succeeded in his last titanic effort to break that English line, Blücher would be too late. Unless night or Blücher came quickly, and if Napoleon made that attack and it were not driven back, victory in this struggle of the war gods must finally go to the French.

Hougmont still held out. The stubborn defense of it was Wellington's salvation. While it stood, his right was more or less protected. But La Haye Sainte offered a convenient point of attack upon him. If Napoleon brought up his remaining troops behind it they would only have a short distance to go before they were at death's grapple, hand to hand, with the defenders of the ridge.

Long and earnestly, one from the heights of Mont St. Jean, the other from those of Rossomme, the two great captains scanned the opposing lines. Napoleon seemed to have recovered from his indisposition, but added to his fatigue, he was ill. He could not sleep and the nature of the illness was such that it was agony for him to mount a horse.

This condition had been aggravated by the awful exertion, physical and mental, he had made and the strain of that long afternoon of desperate fighting. Nor had he eaten anything the livelong day. Yet at about half after six that night he did get into the saddle again. Conquering his anguish, he rode down to the fifteen battalions of the guard still held in reserve at La Belle Alliance, all that was left intact of that proud and gallant army.

"My children," he said, hoarsely in last appeal, "I must sleep at Brussels to-night. There is the enemy. Go and break the English line for me!"

Cambronne, to whom nature and education alike had denied every attribute of grace or greatness except unbounded devotion and stubborn courage, mustered the guard.

Ney, *le terrible Rougeaud,* the soldiers' idol, his torn uniform covered with dust, one of his epaulets slashed from his shoulder, his coat open, his shirt likewise, his bared breast black with powder, his face red-streaked with blood, for many bullets had grazed him, his hair matted with sweat—the weather had grown frightfully hot, the air was terribly humid—his eyes blazing, flecks of foam about his mouth, placed himself in the lead. Every staff officer left joined the great marshal.

With the brass drums beating "La Grenadière," that famous grenadier quick-step, the great guard moved out. Here, again, in the excitement of the conflict, an opportunity was overlooked.

They could have gone up in rear of La Haye Sainte with practically no danger, but they went straight out into the open between farm and château. Up the road, over the fields of bloody grain, through torn hedges, trampling over the bodies of their comrades, the last hope advanced to meet the enemy.

All over the field the tide of battle ebbed and flowed. The armies came together for the last try. Off to the right Lobau still held his appointed station, but now the Prussians in great masses were swarming on the field about Planchenoit. Division after division, avoiding Lobau meanwhile mounted the ridge to join the English line. It had almost been broken by D'Erlon at La Haye Sainte.

Mouffling, Wellington's Prussian aid, had galloped over to Ziethen in command of the advance with the news that unless the English were reenforced heavily at once their line would be broken and they would be routed. On to the field opposite La Haye Sainte came the Prussians.

Still also raged the battle around Hougmont and the English right, but the eyes of every spectator not engaged in fighting for his life were concentrated on the advance of the guard.

Napoleon had ridden down from Rossomme to La Belle Alliance. He sat his horse within easy cannon shot of the English as the devoted guard passed by in its last review. His physical pain was forgot in the great anxiety with which he watched them. The battle was practically lost.

This was the last desperate throw of the gambler, the last stake he could place upon the board. He knew it; everybody knew it; perhaps even the more experienced grenadiers, like old Bullet-Stopper, of the guard, knew it. That did not matter to them. They were his men and at his word for him they were going to conquer or die.

Tramp, tramp, tramp, keeping time to the long continuous rolling of the drums, whose notes were heard even above the roar of the cannon and the tumult of the battle, the guard, from whose lips came one continuous cry of *"Vive l'empereur,"* marched forward.

Covered as usual by the fire of one of those grand batteries so conspicuous in Napoleonic tactics, through the smoke and the mist and the shadows of the evening they passed on. Napoleon himself with three battalions in reserve followed a little distance behind them.

Now they were mounting the hill, now they were abreast of La Haye Sainte; now the ridge in front of them was topped with English. Away off could be heard the thunder of the oncoming Prussian horsemen, the roar of the Prussian guns. Back of the ridge the brigades of light cavalry stood ready.

The infantry reserve with brave Colborne and the Fifty-Second, thirteen hundred strong, in the lead, were quivering with excitement. Even the stolid British phlegm had vanished. This was the last supreme moment. Throbbed wildly the usually steady hearts of the cool islanders. If they could stop this grand advance, the battle would be gained. The hill would be held. Could they do it? And if not—

Out of the smoke and mist opposite the English soldiers of the royal guard came their imperial enemies. The waiting British saw the black bearskins of the tall guard, the imperial insignia on cross belts and uniforms. They were so near that they could see the grim faces of the old soldiers, their mustaches working, their lips drawn back over their teeth, snarling, sputtering like savage beasts.

Here and there mouths were tight shut in a firm line. Here and there men came silently, but mostly they were yelling. And they came up, arms-a-port, after the precept and example of Dorsenne, *le beau Dorsenne,* alas, no longer with them, as if to try conclusions for the last time with the soldiers' white weapon, the bayonet, cold steel! Would the English wait for that?

"Fire!" cried an English voice just when the suspense had become unbearable.

The heavens were shattered by the discharge. Ney pitched from his horse, the sixth that day to be shot

under him. He was up in a moment, his sword out. He advanced on foot at the head of the guard. It was his last charge. He was to face muskets again, but in Paris in the hands of a firing squad with his back to the wall.

He was not given the coveted privilege of dying on that stricken field though he sought for it wildly everywhere, but when he did die, it was as he had lived, undaunted. Now his great voice uplifted, he led forward the devoted and immortal band. His sword was shot out of his hand. Seizing a gun and a bayonet from a falling grenadier he fought in the ranks as in Russia.

Again, the tactics were faulty, as had D'Erlon's men, the guard came in solid columns. Right in front of the rapid firing English, the muskets and cannon in one continuous roar now, they sought to deploy and return that terrible withering fire. The Prussian infantry panting like dogs now gained the crest of the ridge and animated by more than human hatred, fell into disorderly, but determined lines and opened fire.

Harsh German oaths and exclamations mingled with hearty English curses and cheers. The guards were firing rapidly now. Straight into the faces of the English. And still the columns came on. Like a great wave which rushes forward at first swiftly and then goes slower and slower and slower as it rolls up the beach, it advanced.

"Come," said Ney frantic with battle fever. "Come. See how a marshal of France can die."

Now was the crucial moment. The Iron Duke saw it. The two armies were face to face firing into each other. To which side would the victory incline? He spoke to Maitland, to Adams, to Colborne. That gallant soldier threw his men on the exposed flank of the column which had obliqued, bent to the right. Before they could face about out of the smoke came the yelling English!

Vivian and Vandeleur, daring light horsemen, were now thrown on the devoted division. At it they ran. On it they fell. Still it stood. It was incredible. It was almost surrounded now. The attack had failed. To advance was impossible, to retreat was dishonor. They would stand!

Their case was hopeless. Appeals were made for the survivors to lay down their arms and surrender. Into the faces of the assailants, vulgar but heroic Cambronne hurled a disgusting but graphic word. No, nobody said so, but the guard would not surrender. It would die.

Back of his guard, the emperor having stopped not far from the château, watched them die. He was paler than ever, sweat poured from his face, his eyes and lips twitched nervously and spasms of physical pain added their torture to the mental agony of the moment. He muttered again and again.

"*Mon Dieu! Mais ils sont melée ensemble.*"

Now the Prussian horsemen, the Deathshead Hussars, added their weight to Vandeleur's and Vivian's swordsmen and lancers. Other regiments supplemented the withering fire of the advancing Fifty-Second and the reserve brigades. Now, at last, the guard began to give back. Slowly, reluctantly, clinging to their positions, fighting, firing, savage, mad—but they began to give way.

"*Tout est perdu,*" whispered Napoleon.

"The guard retreats!" cried someone near the emperor.

"*La Garde recule!*" rose here and there from the battlefield. "*La Garde recule!*" Men caught up the cry in wonder and despair. Could it be true? Yes. Back they came out of the smoke. Now was the supreme opportunity for the allies. The duke recklessly exposing himself on the crest of the hill, bullets flying about him, yet leading apparently a charmed life, closed his glass and turned to the red line that had made good its defense.

"Up!" he cried, waving his hand and not finishing his sentence.

They needed no other signal. Their time to attack had come. Down the hill they rushed yelling. La Haye Sainte was recaptured in the twinkling of an eye. The shattered broken remains of the guard were driven in headlong rout. The assailers of Hougmont were themselves assaulted. At last numbers had overwhelmed Lobau. The survivors of an army of one hundred and thirty thousand, flushed with victory, fell on the survivors of an army of seventy thousand already defeated.

At half past seven the battle was lost. At eight the withdrawal became a retreat, the retreat a rout. At set of sun, lost was the emperor, lost was the empire. Ended was the age-long struggle which began with the fall of the Bastile more than a score of years before. Once again from France had been snatched, with the downfall of Napoleon, the hegemony of the world.

There was no reserve. There was nothing to cover a retreat. Some one raised the wild cry not often heard on battlefields overlooked by Napoleon, and it was echoed everywhere:

"Sauve qui Peut."

The army, as an army, was gone. Thousands of men in mad terror fled in every direction. Still, there were left a few battalions of the guard which had not been in action. They formed three squares to receive the English and Prussians. Into the nearest square Napoleon, bewildered, overwhelmed, stricken by the catastrophe, was led on his horse.

His sword was out. He would fain have died on that field. Doubtless many a bullet marked him, but none struck him. For a little while these squares of the guard, Napoleon in the center one, another square on either side of the center one, stayed the British and Prussian advance, but it was not to be. "The stars in their courses fought against Sisera!" The emperor gave no order. Bertrand and Soult turned his horse about and the squares retreated.

It was night. They were the sole organized body left. Well they upheld their ancient fame and glorious reputation and untarnished honor. Through the calm and moonlit night pursuers and pursued could hear the rolling of the brass drums far and wide over the countryside, as the guard marched away from that field back to stricken France to that famous grenadier march, "La Grenadière."

Again and again they stopped to beat off the furious attack of the cavalry. Again and again the Prussian pursuers hurled themselves unavailingly on those quadrangles of steel, worked up to a terrible pitch of excitement by the possibility that they might seize the emperor at whose behest and for whose purpose fifty thousand men lay dead or wounded on that fatal hill, in that dreadful valley.

Happy the fate of those who were dead! Horrible the condition of those who were wounded! English, Prussians, Germans, Bavarians, Hollanders, French, trampled together in indistinguishable masses! Horses, guns, wagons, equipment—everything in hopeless confusion! Every horror, every anguish, every agony, rising from the reeking earth, incense burned about the altar of one devouring ambition!

CHAPTER XXX.

At Last the Eagle and the Woman.

NEAREST the crest of the hill immortalized by the great conflict, in advance of but in touch with the regular dead-line of the guard, a little group, friend and foe, lay intermingled. There was a young officer of the Fifty-Second Infantry, one of Colborne's. He was conscious but suffering frightfully from mortal wounds.

One side of his face where he had been thrown into the mud was cover-

ed with a red compound of earth and blood; his bright head was dabbled with the same hideous mixture. Blood frothed out of his mouth as he breathed. He murmured from time to time a woman's name.

His left hand clutched uneasily at his breast where his torn uniform showed a gaping wound. But his right hand was still. The arm was broken, paralyzed, but the fingers of his right hand were tightly closed around a broken blue staff and next to his cheek, the blood-stained one, and cold against it, was a French eagle. From the staff depended a tattered silk banner, red like the blood that abounded everywhere.

At the feet of the English officer lay a French officer wearing the insignia of a general of brigade. He was covered with wounds, bayonet thrusts, a saber slash, a musket bullet, and was delirious. Although helpless he was really in much better case than the young Englishman. He, too, in his delirium muttered a woman's name.

They spoke different tongues, these two. They were born in different lands. They were children of the same God, although one might have doubted it, but no one could mistake the woman's name. For there Frank Yeovil and Jean Marteau, incapable of doing each other any further harm, each thought on the same woman.

Did Laure d'Aumenier back in England waiting anxiously for news of battle, fearing for one of those men, hear those piteous, broken murmurs of a woman's name—her own?

Around these two were piled the dead. Marteau had seized the eagle. Yes, he and a few brave men had stayed on the field when the great Ney, raging like a madman and seeking in vain the happy fortune of a bullet or sword thrust, had been swept away, and on him had fallen Yeovil with another group of resolute English, and together they had fought their little battle for the eagle.

And Marteau had proved the Englishman's master. He had beaten him down. He had shortened his sword to strike when he recognized him. Well, the battle was over; the eagle was lost; the emperor was a fugitive; hope had died with the retreating guard; the empire was ended. Marteau might have killed Yeovil, but to what end?

"For your wife's safe," he cried, lowering his sword, and the next minute he paid for his mercy, for the other English threw themselves upon him.

But Frank Yeovil did not get off scot free. There was one lad who had followed Marteau, who had marched with the guard, who had no compunctions of conscience whatever, and with his last pistol Pierre gave the reeling Englishman the fatal shot. Yes, Pierre paid, too. They would certainly have spared him since he was only a boy, but, maddened by the death of their officer, a half a dozen bayonets were plunged into his breast.

Thither the next day came Sir Gervaise Yeovil, who had been with the duke at the Duchess of Richmond's famous ball in Brussels. Young Frank had left that ball at four o'clock in the morning according to order, only to find that later orders had directed the army to march at two and that his baggage had gone. He had fought that day in pumps and silk stockings, which he had worn at the ball; dabbled, gory, muddy, they were now.

Sir Gervaise Yeovil was an old friend of the Duke of Wellington. The Iron Duke, as they called him, was, nevertheless, very tender-hearted that morning. He told the baronet that his son was somewhere on the field. Colonel Colborne of the Fifty-Second had marked him in the charge, but that was all. Neither Vivian or Vandeleur could throw any light on the situation. There were twenty thousand of the allied armies on that field and thirty thousand French.

"My God!" said Sir Gervaise, staring along the line of the French

retreat. "What is so terrible as a defeat?"

"Nothing," said the duke gravely. Then, looking at the nearer hillside, he added those tremendous words which epitomized war in a way in which no one, save a great modern captain, has ever epitomized it. "Nothing," he said slowly, "unless it be a victory."

They found the guard. That was easy. There they lay in lines where they had fallen; the tall bear-skins on their heads, the muskets still clasped in their hands. There, too, at last, they found young Yeovil. They revived him. Some one sought to take the eagle from him, but with a sudden accession of strength he protested against it.

"Father," he whispered to the old man bending over him, his red face pale and working, "mine."

"True," said the duke. "He captured it. Let him keep it!"

"Oh God!" broke out the baronet. "Frank! Can nothing be done?"

"Nothing. Stop." His lips moved, his father bent nearer. "Laure—" he whispered.

"Yes, yes, what of her?"

"That Frenchman she loved—"

"Marteau?"

The young Englishman closed his eyes in assent.

"He could have killed me, but spared—for her—he—is there," he faltered presently.

"There is life in this Frenchman yet," said one of the surgeons, looking up at the moment.

"My lord," said old Sir Gervaise Yeovil starting up, choking down a sob and endeavoring to keep his voice steady, "my boy yonder—"

"Yes," said the duke, "a brave lad."

"He's—it is all up with him. You will let me take him back to England, and—the Frenchman and the eagle?"

"Certainly. I wish to God it had never happened, Yeovil," went on the soldier. "But it had to be. Bonaparte had to be put down, the world freed. And somebody had to pay."

"I thank God," said the old man, "that my boy died for his king and his country and for human liberty."

"Nor shall he die in vain," said the soldier.

Frank Yeovil died on the vessel Sir Gervaise chartered to carry him and Marteau and some other wounded officers of his acquaintance back to England. They did not bury him at sea. At his earnest request, they took him back to his own land to be laid with his ancestors, none of whom had spent themselves more gloriously or for a greater cause than he.

Marteau, frightfully weak, heartbroken and helpless, was taken by Sir Gervaise Yeovil's command to the baronet's own house.

"I did my best," he said brokenly from the bed on which he lay, as Laure d'Aumenier bent over him, Sir Gervaise standing grim and silent with folded arms in the background.

"For France and the emperor," whispered the woman.

"Yes, that, but for your husband as well. He fell upon me. I was trying to rally the guard—the eagle—he was beaten down—but I recognized him. I would not have harmed him."

"He told me," said the baronet, "what you said. 'For your wife's sake,'" he quoted in his deep voice, looking curiously at the girl.

"Sir Gervaise," said the countess, looking up at him entreatingly, "I am alone in this world, but for you. I was to have been your daughter. May I speak?"

"I wish it."

"Marteau — Jean," she said softly, "I was not his wife. Perhaps now that he is dead, it would have been better if I had been, but—"

"And you are free?"

Again the countess looked at the Englishman. Bluff, rough though he was, he showed the qualities of his birth and rank.

"*Mademoiselle,*" he began. He

looked a long time at her. "Little Laure," he continued, taking her slender hand in his own great one, "I had hoped that you might some day call me father, but that hope is gone—since Waterloo. If I were your real father now, I should say—"

"*Monsieur!*" whispered the woman, her eyes brightening, her hand tightening in the clasp of the other.

"And I think the old marquis would say now, that it is the will of God, now—" He bit his lip. It was all so different from what he imagined.

"Go on if you please," whispered Marteau. "I am ill. I can not bear—"

"If she be guided by me, she will be your wife, sir," said Sir Gervaise decisively.

He dropped the woman's hand. He turned and walked heavily out of the room without a backward glance. He could do no more.

"And will you stoop to me?" pleaded Marteau.

For answer the woman knelt by his bed, and slipped her arm tenderly under his head. She bent and kissed him.

"When you are stronger," she replied, "you shall raise me up to your own high level of courage and devotion and self-sacrifice, but, meanwhile, it is upon my bosom that your head must lie."

"Alas!" said Marteau, after a little, "the emperor is taken, the empire is lost! My poor France!"

"I will go back with you, and we will help to build it up again," said the woman.

That was the best medicine that could be given to the young man. His recovery was slow, but it was sure; and it was the more rapid because of the gracious care of the woman he loved, who lavished upon him all the pent up passion of her fond, adoring heart.

Sir Gervaise Yeovil, whose interest at court was great, exerted himself to secure a reconfirmation of Marteau's patent of nobility and to see that no difficulties were placed in the way of the young couple in regaining their estates.

So that once more there should be a D'Aumenier and perhaps a renewal of the ancient house in the old château in Champagne. This was easier since Marteau had never taken oath to King Louis, and, therefore, had broken no faith.

At the quiet wedding that took place as soon as Marteau recovered his strength a little, Sir Gervaise continued to act the father's part to the girl. After the ceremony he delighted the heart of the soldier by giving to him, that which he loved after the woman, the eagle which had been Frank Yeovil's prize.

"You will think of the lad sometimes," said the old baronet to the girl. "He was not lucky enough to win you, but he loved you and he died with your name on his lips."

"I shall remember him always," said the new-made wife.

"His name shall be held in highest honor in my house, as a brave soldier, a true lover and a most gallant gentleman," added Marteau.

Marteau would never forget the picture of the emperor sitting on his horse at La Belle Alliance that June evening, stern, terrific, almost sublime, watching the guard go by to death. He was glad he had not seen him in the retreat, of which he afterward heard from old Bal-Arrêt.

But that was not the last picture of the emperor that he had. Although he was scarcely strong enough to be moved, he insisted on being taken to Portsmouth with his young wife. Sir Gervaise went with him. He had no other object in life it seemed but to provide happiness for these young people. He could scarcely bear them out of his sight.

One day, a bright and sunny morning late in July, they put the convalescing soldier into a boat with his wife and the old baronet, and the three were rowed out into the harbor, as near as the cordon of guard boats al-

lowed them to approach to the stern of a great English ship-of-the-line, across the stern of which in gold letters they read the name, "Bellerophon."

"Bonaparte gener'ly comes out in the quarter-gal'ry of the ship 'bout this hour in the mornin'," said one of the boatmen. "An' if he does we can see him quite plain from yere."

There were other boats there whose occupants were moved by curiosity and various emotions, but when the figure of the little man with the three-cornered, cocked hat on his head, still wearing the green uniform of the chasseurs of the guard, stepped out on the quarter-gallery, his eyes, as it were instinctively, sought that particular boat.

"Help me up," said Marteau, brokenly.

The boat was a large one, and moving carefully they got the young officer to his feet. He was wearing his own battle-stained uniform. He lifted his trembling hand to his head in salute. The emperor bent over the rail, and stared hard at the trio. Did he recognize Marteau? Ah, yes! He straightened up presently, his own hand returned the salute, and then he took off that same cocked hat and bared his brow, and bent his head low and, with a gesture of farewell, he turned and reentered his cabin—Prometheus on the way to his chains at St. Helena!

Old Bullet-Stopper, who had joined himself to the surviving battalion of the guard, with another bullet in him by the way, was never tired of hearing of that incident in the long days at Aumenier, where he with some of his comrades from the village enjoyed rest and ease and comfort after their long wars.

And old Bullet-Stopper for one, until the news came that the Emperor was dead on the lonely islet in the South Atlantic, never failed to cherish and often to express the hope to his comrades in arms who guarded the eagle, that Napoleon would once again return and once more muster his legions on the field of battle.

(The end.)

THE UNDERTOW

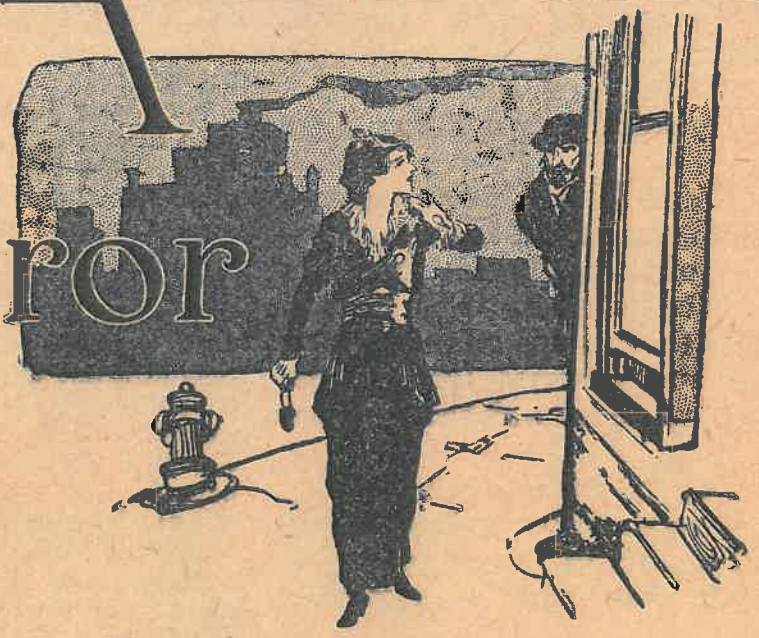
By Jane Burr

Dear Mother:

I've wanted to write to you. (Where is that list I made?) Somehow there's always so much to do. (Lemons and putz-pomade.) William is working a bit too hard, looks just a trifle pale. (Butter, and pepper, a pound of lard, soda and ginger-ale.) Baby has gotten another tooth. (Wonder who's at the door), just a bit worried to tell the truth. (Johnny get off the floor.) Something is burning—oh! Maaa-aaa-ryyy, look at the oven quick! Smells like the ginger cake. (Goodness me, isn't that girl a stick!) Aren't the tailor-mades great this year? I got a heliotrope. (Mary, the beggar-man's at the rear—buy just a cake of soap.) Mother, I've stolen this hour to write; seldom that I'm alone; windows down-town are a lovely sight. (There goes the telephone.) Wish you could come up this fall and stay—lots of congenial souls—weather is beautiful every day. (Bread and a dozen rolls.) Playtime is over; I've got to work. (Mary, please baste the hen.) Sometimes I'm selfish and simply shirk. Love from the children.

Gwen.

An Ambushed Terror



By J. U. Giesy

Author of "The Blue Bomb," "All for His Country," etc.

CHAPTER I.

La Mano Nera.

GAETANO ALBINI came bustling into his little "banco" a trifle before ten, nodded a smiling "Good morning" to his employees, and strode importantly to the rear.

Puffing at his cigar, he unlocked the door of his private office, passed within, and rang for his mail.

This was the routine of Albini's life, and there was nothing, this sunshiny morning, to indicate that it was to be disturbed.

Albini was prosperous, healthy, and would probably have known he was happy had he given the matter a thought. His name, lettered on the windows of his little East Side bank, had drawn a good patronage from his fellow countrymen for years.

Years before he had come to New York and settled among the Italians as a matter of course.

Unlike most of them, however, he was a man of considerable education. As a result, he grew to be a power in a small way. His less learned compatriots came to him for counsel and advice, to have a letter written back home, for help in sending back money.

He became a *padrone* and, to his credit, dealt fairly with the affairs put into his hands. He grew in estate. He took his wife and daughter from a tenement to a home in a better part of the city.

Their house in Astoria was the equal of most, the superior of some of its neighbors.

He had given his daughter a liberal education. There was a chance of her making a mark with her voice. All around, Gaetano was a man of local importance. There was every reason why he should puff his cigar in satisfaction as he began opening his mail.

He had made himself, and considered it a rather good job.

In appearance, he was not likely to impress one as Italian. That was because h was from Tuscany, in the north, and partook of the type of that section rather than of the more swarthy cast of the south. He was short and florid, with blue-gray eyes and brown hair, and a thick, stubby mustache bristling over a rather large mouth.

Though heavily set, his movements were quick and his most Latin mannerism a way of shrugging his shoulders at times. The quickness of his manual movements showed this morning as he drew out and skimmed through the first letter, while he whistled a native air.

By and by the whistle died.

From a very cheap envelope he had extracted a sheet of the cheapest possible paper, close lined in a careless script.

With the first word his entire expression underwent a remarkable change. His hands trembled as he took his cigar from his lips. His color faded swiftly.

The pupils of his eyes went large with horror and surprise. As he finished its reading he flung down the sheet with a gesture of repulsion and loathing and bowed his face in his hands.

For Albini, life and the sunshine of the morning had grown gray. Such things had happened to others, he knew. Himself they had passed by. Perchance he had fancied that he was to be spared, in as much as his life had been one of fairness to his kind.

A rose in his lapel sent its sweetness to his bent nostrils.

He raised his head. Francesca had pinned it on his coat when she kissed him good-by that morning. Its fresh fragrance seemed, in a way, to steady him after the first stunning shock.

Francesca was his daughter—like him, gray-eyed with auburn hair.

To Albini she was the one main reason why he now worked. Not that he loved his wife less, but that they both loved their girl more, and desired her to have all of the good things of life. His own eyes grew hard with a sort of steely glitter as he picked up the letter from where it now lay on the floor.

SIGNORE:

We have long watched your progress with interest. Permit us a congratulatory word. We believe you in a position to give something to those who ask. We hope that in this you agree. If you do, we have but to request.

We wish ten thousand dollars at once.

We ask it of you. We trust the suggestion alone will prove amply sufficient. Should it not we will, of course, take steps to prove our need great. Others who failed in the past to give heed to our asking have regretted it, we believe—or perhaps in some cases have passed to a place where doubtless they ceased to care.

We call their experience to your mind.

Should you elect to be wiser than they, leave your bank just at noon, walk down Baxter Street on the east side. When you arrive at the small park, with which you are doubtless familiar, stand on the Baxter Street corner, remove your hat, and wipe your forehead of the moisture we fancy will bead it.

Wipe it three times.

That is all. Though exceedingly simple, a great deal will depend upon it. For this you must take our word. We have arranged that your signal will be seen. If you agree, word will then be sent you how the money may be placed in the way to do you the most good.

Should you disregard our request, or show this letter to the police, your fate then will be on your head. Therefore consider it well.

Permit us to assure you once more of our deepest esteem, most honorable signore and to sign ourselves for the first time to you:

LA MANO NERA.

As Albini read the blood came back to his face in a flood.

His large mouth grew firm. His mustache bristled more fiercely. He trembled now not at all.

He bent and sniffed again at the rose. There was Francesca. Should a lot of blackmailers take the money she was to have when he was gone? This was but a beginning.

That much he knew. If it were

merely ten thousand — well, perhaps. But there would be no end if he yielded. They would demand more and more. Who was he, anyway, to be walking the street wiping his forehead as a sign of surrender?

No! He would fight.

"Do It Now," said a card pinned over his desk. He smiled somewhat grimly. He squared his shoulders and began to prepare for the struggle. The buzzer set into his desk sounded an impatient demand for his secretary to appear.

"Bring me my box of private papers," he directed when the man arrived.

First in his plans was to set his house in order—make all shipshape if anything *should* happen. Unblinded to his peril, he knew very well that it might. Again he bent and sniffed at the rose.

At least his loved ones should find all as it should be, provided the blow should fall.

Giuseppe Piccolo came back with the box of papers and set them upon the desk. Albini glanced up at the man, while his fingers groped with the catch of the box.

"Giuseppe," said he, "how far may a man trust to your faith?"

"But you — utterly, *signor.*" The man spread his hands wide.

"You would abide by a promise given to me or mine?"

"Yes. Have I not proven worthy? Are you not a second father to me "

"True, Giusepp'. I have tried to help you along since that day you asked me for help. Sit down, then, and listen to me.

"In this box are all the papers I have of value. This morning I put them in order for the last time, perhaps. Also, there is here my will. Should it chance that something shall happen to me not so far in the future, promise me now that you will look after this box; promise me that you will with your own hands deliver it safely to no one save my wife or daughter; promise me to guard it with your life."

"But, *signor*—" Giuseppe started backward, his face one of amaze.

"Promise."

"*Si, padrone;* I promise."

"That is well, my Giusepp'. You may go."

Albini opened the box and made careful survey of its contents. There were deeds to valuable real estate, stocks, some bonds, and numerous mortgages, both real estate and chattel.

Also, there were personal notes—proof of his goodness of heart, which at times induced him to take chances in order to help one in trouble, rather than of shrewd business acumen.

Over these latter he sighed as he considered how many might be worth a per cent of their face. And there was his will, which left all to his wife and daughter, with a request for a few benefactions to old employees of the bank. That was all, save some life-insurance.

All was in its usual methodical order.

Albini shoved them back into the box and rang for Giuseppe again.

"You may put now the box away," he said.

"But, *padrone,*" the secretary faltered, "is it that you are not well? Permit that I inquire."

"It is nothing," replied his employer. "I am feeling well, Giusepp'."

"But this talk of dying — of death?"

"All men die, Giuseppe. Take thou the box away."

He took up his hat and went out to the front.

It was warm out there. For a moment he stood on the steps, gazing into the glare of the sunshine. What if it were to be blotted out for him? He shivered beyond his volition, ran down the steps, and turned south.

And he watched as he walked. Men met and spoke to him, and took but a passing nod. His eyes roved constant-

ly about him, yet saw nothing suspicious. In the end he approached Mulberry Square, with its little park, and paused upon the corner.

So far he had followed the instructions of the letter.

He realized it with a start. He would go no farther. He stiffened his determination, even while in his soul he recognized that he had really little hope. He knew the parasitical organization of his countrymen too well—the methods by which they worked.

A peculiar tingling began in his spine and spread to his shoulders. Almost he fancied he could feel the impact and plunge of the knife, with which the sun would go out.

With an impatient gesture he flung it off and swept the park with his eyes. A hand fell upon his shoulder. He started with a wrench in his heart. "Was this death?" No. He knew the voice which was speaking. He turned to gaze not on a foe, but a friend.

"*Hola*, Saverio Fiore!" he cried out in quick relief.

CHAPTER II.

A Sign.

DR. FIORE grinned before making reply. "You jumped as though I were the devil. Really, Gaetano, I must be giving you something for your nerves."

"I was thinking of something else when your hand fell," said Albini. "Hence you startled me, my friend."

The physician gave him a scrutinizing glance. "Nevertheless, you look badly, Albini. I am for lunch at this hour. Will you not join me, perhaps?"

The banker made a sudden resolve. "Will you be my confessor as well as my doctor?" he asked.

"But gladly," said Fiore, laughing. "Perhaps that will explain your condition. What is it—the dreadful confession?"

"Let us find a secluded table then, somewheres," suggested Albini. "Laugh not my friend. I have much of importance to tell you. When thou hearest, thou wilt laugh no longer. Saverio, I have fear for my life."

Once more Fiore swept him a serious glance. "By all means," he assented. "Your trouble is not of the flesh, I assume. Come, then, and quickly."

Turning, he led toward a little café, swinging in through its doors as one of long custom and picking his way to a table far back in a corner. "You look, though, as if you might have a bad touch of liver. Better try a little Ferrannisett'."

Albini shook his head in negation.

"I want only a cognac and a salad. My trouble is not of the liver. It is not for your potions. You can help with advice, perhaps."

He sank into a chair and rested his chin on his hands; his eyes dropped down to the table.

Fiore bit his full lips with white teeth, pulled off his gloves, and took the opposite seat. "Shall I order?" he suggested as a waiter shuffled up.

"If you will. Anything light."

The physician gave the order. The waiter shuffled away. When he was once more out of hearing, Fiore leaned forward and again addressed his friend. "And now, Gaetano, tell me."

"Saverio, I am marked for death."

The other nodded, not in surprise exactly, yet with a contracting of the muscles around his eyes. "So you have indicated already. Explain."

His companion needed no further urging. At once he plunged into his tale. While he talked Fiore gave close attention. Now and then he lifted a very white hand to stroke his closely trimmed imperial beard.

He was Albini's opposite in every possible way; slight of build, dark to an extreme, with eyes brown to blackness, black hair and mustache; yet a peculiar dead whiteness of skin which sometimes goes with his type. His

features were narrow, his nose aquiline, and under his well-trimmed mustache his lips were red, full, and pouting.

His temperament was saturninely nervous in a very marked degree.

Even while he listened to the banker's story his long, supple hands were rarely quiet. He picked a crumb from the table, drew down a corner of the cover, stroked at his beard, pinched up his lips between finger and thumb.

After a bit he drew out and lighted a cigarette, from which as he smoked he continually flicked the ash.

Yet his oval-shaped eyes rarely strayed from Albini's face. Almost it seemed that his mind sat impassive back of those eyes, while the body, from habits long formed, did the thing grown accustomed through years.

Once or twice, when Francesca was mentioned, the black brows, which interlaced above his sharply bridged nose, drew a trifle closer in a frown.

"And so"—Albini reached an ending—"I have decided that I shall ignore this threatening note. I shall wait. I have put all my affairs in order and exacted a promise from Giuseppe to guard my box of papers with his life. Giuseppe I can trust."

"But you have placed them in some spot of safety?" Fiore spoke with suggestion.

"In the vault of my own bank."

The waiter came back, arranged their table, and departed before Dr. Fiore replied.

"You are a brave man, Gaetano," he rejoined then, with a shrug. "Me, I should not care to defy 'La Mano.' I have seen somewhat of its working. Myself I like the sunshine, the sound of voices, and the good wine."

He lifted a glass of Chianti and drank slowly, looking over the rim at his friend: "Such as this."

Albini shook his head slowly. "I admit what you say is most true. But look you, Fiore—what use to live and become poor. They will never have all they will ask."

"They would hardly destroy wholly their golden goose," Fiore responded, again frowning.

"But I have worked for years to give to my loved ones comfort. Am I to sit down now and be picked?"

"Better your pockets than your skin." Fiore set down his wine.

"Then you would advise?" Albini lifted his cognac.

"That you yield, my friend. Come. The world is good, and the love of thine own ones sweet. What are a few dollars? Are you tired of life?"

"Not so," said Albini, slowly. "But I like not this yielding to threats. Am I a child to be frightened by words?"

His companion sighed, and regarded him in a steady-eyed silence. At length he replied:

"Gaetano, I admit I admire your courage. To commend your present decision is a wholly different thing. How, may I ask, do you intend to fight this unseen power? Others have tried it. Where are they?" He threw up a hand, snapping finger and thumb in graphic expression. "Gone, my friend—gone! And they come again—not ever."

Albini lighted a cigar.

"True," he began. "But I have thought, Saverio, this morning. I have planned. First I have thought that my house must be carefully guarded. I must feel that my dear ones are safe, and I must be able to sleep.

"I shall, therefore, get me some watchmen. Also I will double the guard at the bank. Also I will caution my daughter and wife about going about. For myself, I will get me a good revolver. If attacked, I shall most surely account for myself."

Saverio smiled. "So far so good. And while you are guarding the outside of your house, what of the inside, my friend? May not a confederate of thy foes, lurk within as well as without?"

"Within?" From Albini's face it was plainly a phase of the matter to

which he had given no thought. "How within, when I know all my people so well?"

"But at your house?" Fiore persisted in his own suggestion.

Gaetano spread deprecating hands. A faint smile grew in his eyes. "But there is none there but the maid, Marrietta. Surely you would not sus—"

Fiore's reply was a shrug. "One never knows whom to suspect."

"But Marrietta—"

"See you—" The physician leaned forward on the table. "You I would help if I could. You are doing a foolhardy thing. Still I would hate to see you seriously hurt.

"If your house and the bank are well guarded, and you go constantly armed, what more likely for those of their craft, than to strike you within your own house? A wise general keeps only known troops in the inner citadel, Gaetano. Now I know a woman, by name a Maria Carlino. She's been proven in just such a fight. I can find her for you, if you like."

"You mean dismiss Marrietta and engage this girl in her stead?"

"Precisely."

"But Marrietta is grown like one of the family, my friend."

Fiore poured out another glass of wine. "As you will."

Albini threw out an arresting hand as he lifted the glass to his lips.

"Nay—nay, Saverio, say not that. I shall do as you suggest. Turn not away, my friend. I shall need friends, badly I fear, in this. Myself, I am worried. I confess to you that I fear."

Fiore drained his glass. At its end, he nodded.

"I think you do well. To-night then, should I be so lucky as to find her, I will send this woman to you." He signed to their waiter, settled the score, and led the way from the café.

Outside he turned up Baxter with Albini.

"I am going to the office. If you like I shall walk along with you. So far I think you are not in danger. They will send more communications, more warnings, before they strike.

"Perhaps on the morrow there will be more to talk of. If I can render you any assistance do not wait to call upon me. I am far more sorry to see you drawn into this, Gaetano, than I can ever tell. I still think your best course is to yield. Think it over again, my friend."

Albini shook his head.

The two men parted. The banker went slowly up the steps of his bank to begin his work of defense. He sent Giuseppe out, to find trustworthy friends of his own, for whose good faith he could vouch.

These he engaged to watch at his house and his bank. For the latter, indeed, he engaged Giuseppe's own brother. Giuseppe owed his patron a heavy moral debt, in that the banker had kept him from going to the dogs. He felt now that Giuseppe's brother would surely guard well the bank.

Leaving at four, he went out and purchased a black automatic.

He thrust it into his pocket, and went out to the street head up and shoulders back. On the ferry he stood in the bow of the boat as it crept across the river, and once or twice, with his fingers locked fast on the weapon, he whistled the bars of a song.

That evening the new maid arrived to take the place of Marrietta.

The latter departed in tears, not stopped by a liberal advance payment. It was a parting which gave pain on both sides. But for Gaetano's explanation of its reason, it would not have been possible at all. The new servant was neat, cleanly of dress, efficient. She said Fiore had explained at the time he sent her up.

As night fell the watchmen appeared, and Albini saw them posted.

Yet the night passed in quiet. The day watchmen came to their duty. Albini departed for work. Francesca pinned the rose to his coat and kissed him good-by. Francesca admired his resolve to fight.

She was American at heart.

Yet Albini knew that the flimsy envelope held another message so soon as he saw it among his mail. He caught his breath sharply, but read it with slow consideration, and laid it down with a hand perfectly steady.

It was too late now to go back.

SIGNORE:

It is with regret that we learn of your decision. We had thought better of your judgment. To guard your bank—your house—will avail you less than nothing. You see we know all you have done. Believe, if we wished, these guards would offer no obstacle to our actions.

The gun in your pocket could not defend your life.

Now we shall give you a sign. What it shall be we do not care to say. But within the next two weeks you shall certainly see. You had your chance, which you chose to ignore. As we said then, the penalty is of your own inviting. It shall inevitably come.

When this happens, do not complain, but prepare yourself to listen more kindly in the future when we speak. Already the web is weaving which shall ensnare you in unutterable wo. There is no going back in the path of time or the decrees of,

LA MANO NERA.

Albini stared out of the window. What fiendish cunning the thing displayed. Two weeks! And any time the blow might fall. What more calculated to rob a man of his powers of intelligent resistance than this note.

He shook himself together with a shrug. He must keep cool if he was to fight. Yet what was he to fight?

He could see nothing to do. He could only wait the weaving of that already forming web. And that was what they wanted. They knew that would wear down his resistance as nothing else could do.

They were clever, with the cleverness of fiends. And there was no going back. Then one must go ahead. He attacked the rest of his mail.

Yet the two weeks was a torment. The sun shone. The days were warm, the nights quiet. Life's routine went on with a placid surface.

He went to his business and returned. But his walk had lost all of its spring. He attended to matters, of course, but in a merely routine way. What did it matter, when it was all to end so soon?

So passed a week, ten days.

Ten grew to eleven, eleven to twelve. "Surely," cried Albini in his soul, "the blow will fall to-morrow." The thirteenth came. He kissed Francesca. Her lips seemed hot to his mouth.

He asked her if she felt well, and she laughed as she pointed out that there was but one day more.

Noon came, and with it his fears redoubled.

He did not go out for lunch. One o'clock struck and two and three. As on each day since the second note came, he sat and waited for his fate to strike. At four o'clock the telephone rang. He picked it up and answered as a matter of habit. It was Fiore who called.

"Is that you, Gaetano? Do not be alarmed, but your wife has just asked me to come to your house. Miss Francesca is not feeling well. Gaetano—you remember what I told you about a blow coming from within your house? I—I am afraid, Gaetano. Come home so soon as you may."

The receiver crashed to the desk from Albini's hand.

He left it unnoticed where it lay. He sprang from his chair, and springing he screamed aloud. All restraint, all control vanished, swept down by his fear. "La Mano Nera! The sign!" he shrieked in the horror of his position. He tore open the door, dashed from his office, and fled hatless from the bank.

CHAPTER III.

Jimmy Gordon of the Globe.

JIMMY GORDON was having an off day.

There was nothing to do. He sat grumpily about the local room of the

Globe and consumed a cigar and considerable time. His round, boyish face, wore an expression of dissatisfaction with things in a general sense.

He ran a hand through his straw colored hair, and puckered the lids of his china blue eyes. To quote him exactly: "Things were on the bunk." Without any object of malediction he swore in a languid fashion.

Then fate or whatever power rules the destinies of newspaper men, took Jimmy Gordon in hand.

It passed him out a "hunch." In other words it came over him all of a sudden, that somewheres outside the four walls which shut him in, a story, and one greatly to be desired, was even then being played out.

He slapped at an inquisitive fly, and looked out of the opposite side of the street. It looked hot. Jimmy debated whether it was really a good brand of "hunch" or not.

But something seemed calling him into the great outside. He sighed, got up, slapped on his hat, and went out. He ran down stairs and emerged into the sunshine and heat of Park Row.

He stood for a time looking up and down, and presently the "hunch" took him firmly in hand, and led him along the street.

He didn't know where he was going, but even before this, he had let himself be guided among the teeming life of the city, and eventually arrived at the pot at the foot of the rainbow, in the shape of something to write. Now he went meekly in the grip of a subconscious prompting, his sharp eyes darting hither and yon among the life of the sidewalks.

He went up the Row to Baxter, up that to Park Street, and nodded. "Human interest," said Jimmy to Jimmy. "I'm a bear at that." He was beginning to suspect that the "hunch" was taking him into the mass of human sediment of the slums.

He went on up to Mulberry Square.

Maybe his story was sitting there on a bench. But the loiterers were few, and the urging pull led on. He crossed over to the continuation of Baxter, and stopped. All at once the "hunch" quit cold, and left him standing there in the sun.

He frowned, and reached for a match to light another cigar. His hand paused half way to his pocket, arrested by a shouting in his ears.

He swung around at the sound. A heavy set man came rushing along the pavement, crying out at the top of his voice. In a moment the flying figure was upon him, and past. Without pause it turned off toward Broadway, still keeping up its cries.

Jimmy decided the "hunch" had been good.

He fled after the one who ran. Others joined in the chase, but Jimmy led the van. So they raced along White, across Centre and Elm, to find abrupt ending, as a taxi came tacking slowly down the street, its flag at the disengage.

The heavy set man saw it first, and leaving the sidewalk in a plunging leap, dashed toward it, crying its driver to stop.

The cab slowed. The short man flung himself forward in a panting finish, wrenched open a door, and half fell, half climbed in, with a gasping direction: "Ninety-Second Street Ferry! Go quick!"

So much Jimmy heard.

He saw the chauffeur let in his clutch. All the news sense he ever possessed came over him in a rush. Was he to lose the fruits of his "hunch" and the sweating effort of the pursuit like this? Decidedly not!

As the taxi moved off, he sprang for the step, made it with one foot, and tugged open the door. Then panting harshly from his unaccustomed sprint, he dropped into the seat opposite the short, and now red faced man.

For some moments the two sat eying each other in silence, while they recovered their breath. Then Jimmy began to grin. "You can run like the deuce," he remarked.

"Get out. Go away," panted the other.

Gordon shook his head. "Wait till I get back my breath a bit, won't you?"

His opposite gave him a stare. "Who are you?" he demanded. "By what right do you enter my cab like this?"

"Why bother about that," said Jimmy, still grinning. "You see I'm a newspaperman."

"A reporter?"

"So called."

"But why enter my cab?"

"To see where you were going in such a great hurry—and why?"

"In what way should that concern you, young man?"

"Everything concerns me," Gordon made sententious reply. "Why, see here. My being here's the most natural thing in the world. Why shouldn't it concern me. I'm after news. When a man runs three or four blocks, without a hat, yelling about the Black Hand, and a 'sign' at every jump, and falls into the first taxi he meets, you'd imagine something was up, now wouldn't you, eh?"

The stout man put a hand to his head. "True, I forgot my hat. I was in a hurry."

"I gathered that much at the start." Jimmy's grin resumed operation.

"See here: I'm Gordon of the *Globe*. I am a newspaperman, really. I fancied there was a story back of such actions in a man of your apparent character and build. We reporters have a scent for news, you know. So I followed along. Come on now, and give me an idea of what's gone wrong? Men of your stamp don't run around on a red hot day, without cause, Mr—"

"Albini," said the man.

"Albini?" Jimmy pursed his lips. His eyes sparkled. "You're Italian?" "Yes. I'm Albini, the banker."

Jimmy's whole face lighted. "Hah! What has the Black Hand been putting over on you?" he inquired in a quiver of excitement.

"Nothing," said Albini. "I do not know. Go away. I do not wish to talk about it. I have nothing to say."

Gordon reached for his note-book and pencil. "See here, Mr. Albini, just suppose you tell me about this."

Albini half rose. "You would print it," he cried. "Go away now, young man. See! Great as is my haste, I shall stop the cab, and you shall get out."

He seemed about to signal the chauffeur.

There was something of the bulldog about Jimmy Gordon for all the youthful ingenuousness of his face. One could never tell just how much he was hearing or seeing or of what he was thinking to judge from his expression; or if he was thinking of anything at all.

Yet there was an air of engaging frankness about him, which rather won one's regard. Now he interposed:

"Don't do that! You surely can't suppose your running around is going to pass unnoticed. Why probably half the papers will have something about it, and they'll mention the things you yelled. Now, why not give the thing to me straight.

"It's bound to come out. Something's happened to you all right. Well, tell it to me, and I'll fix it so it looks right. I suppose you've been threatened by the Black Hand, and then something turns up, and you go up in the air. Well, I don't blame you. They're a fierce bunch. But you want to get back your grip and look the thing in the face. You ought to talk to some one, to relieve your feelings. Well—go on and talk to me."

Albini wiped a damp forehead, and gazed into the face of this man who refused to take no for an answer. "If I told you, she might not get well—she might die then," he faltered, and paused as he saw what he had said.

"She?" exclaimed Jimmy. "Say! Now you've tipped over the beans. Who do you mean, Albini? Who's the woman you're afraid for?"

"My daughter," said the banker hoarsely, barely above a whisper.

"Is she sick? Good Lord, is that what's the matter? And I was thinking— But see here; why then were you yelling about the Black Hand?"

"She was made sick, perhaps," said Albini through quivering lips.

"Made sick?" Gordon's eyes spread open. He leaned forward and laid a hand on the banker's knee. "Say, Mr. Albini," his tone was tense with his professional interest. "You don't mean they did it — the Black Hand?"

"Young *signore,*" expostulated Albini, "you are importunate."

In turn he leaned toward Jimmy, sinking his tone. "You have a good face. I should be inclined to trust you in anything else. But I fear greatly to talk about this. People who talk of the 'Hand' come to grief. Should you say in your paper I told you, my daughter would certainly die. But now I learned she was sick. I have sent for a doctor. I am hastening home."

"You mean they would kill your daughter if they knew you had spoken to me? How? This may all be just some sudden sickness. Do you know what's the matter with her?"

Albini shook his head.

Jimmy knit his brows. After a bit he nodded. "But you think that this sickness is some sort of a 'sign.' You were yelling something about that I remember. You think they made her sick to scare you, eh? I don't want to get anybody hurt or in trouble, but you've simply got to tell me more than this now. I want to know why you acted like you did."

Albini buried his face in his hands. "I cannot," he groaned. "For myself, I care nothing—but Francesca—my little one."

Gordon laid a hand on his arm. "Look here. I fancy you've got in bad. You need help. Now buck up and listen. Have you told the police?"

"But no, *signore.* I did not dare."

Jimmy nodded.

"That's it, eh? Well, they *have* made a lot of hash of these Black Hand cases. As a rule, while they talk, the others get in their work." Of a sudden a meager light awoke in his good-natured face.

"Say, friend, maybe I could help you. I'd like to. This using women to break their men folks don't make a big hit with me. And you've got to talk to somebody pretty soon, Albini, or you'll start in singing nursery rhymes to yourself, to judge by your looks.

"Ill make you a proposition right now. You tell me your trouble. I'll fix it with the office, and get in and work with you. Whad'je say. I'd like a chance to give these robbers a little run for their money. I'll fix it not to print a thing till the wind up, and then the big noise. Are you on, Albini; what?"

The Italian sat watching the eager, boyish face.

Perhaps he understood what was verbally said, and gathered yet more from the tone; for his eyes lit with awakening interest and something faintly like hope. Had he, he wondered, been sent a friend and helper in so strange a way?

When Gordon paused he was ready with an answer: "Is it that you would help me, young *signore?* Do you really mean what you say?"

"Surest thing you know! I'd like to show these dagoes my fine Italian hand. I'd—" Abruptly Jimmy stopped talking and a flush swept into his face. "Say, I beg your pardon. I—I didn't mean any—"

Albini nodded quickly.

"I am in great need of help," he began. "Young man, I shall take you at your word. If you betray me, you will have woman's blood on your hands. I must speak quickly for we draw near the ferry, and I must hasten to cross."

He went on into a hurried narration

of all which had happened, during the past fifteen days. Jimmy drank it all in to the end.

"I don't wonder you got rattled," he said then. "Looking at it from your viewpoint, this sickness of your daughter might be their 'sign.' Now what doctor have you called?"

"Dr. Saverio Fiore."

"An Italian," said Jimmy. "Is that wise? Do you know him well?"

"I have known him for years. We are friends."

For a moment Gordon said nothing, and the cab began to slow down before he spoke. "Well, I'm in this to the finish, Albini. Now see here. You go home, and see your daughter and the doctor, and find out what he has to say. To-morrow I want to talk to you alone. You can tell me all you know then, and in the mean time I'll see what I can find out. Where can I get you alone to-morrow?"

"I will come to the bank, unless Francesca is too sick." Albini prepared to get out.

"All right. I'll call there then, to-morrow morning. You got a house phone?"

"Yes. Number—"

"I'll look it up in the book if I want it. Your boat's due," said Gordon.

Albini climbed down, paid his driver and trotted away.

Jimmy directed the chauffeur to take him back down-town. At a corner drug-store, he changed his mind, however, dismissed the cab, and went to a public phone. Giving a number, he waited for the connection, got it, chatted for several minutes, hung up and went out, to take a car going north.

CHAPTER IV.

The Murder at the Banco.

DR. FRANK CONLON had an office and apartment on Seventy-Ninth in the neighborhood of Lexington Avenue.

Also he had an unbounded faith in his newly accredited ability to combat disease. On a certain hot afternoon, he lay sprawled in his office chair, smoking a somewhat gloomy pipe, and pondering on the discouraging lack of business.

The telephone rang. Conlon put out a hand and dragged the instrument to him. A hope woke in his breast that now someone was going to test his skill. He answered: "Hello!"

The next instant he frowned in disappointment.

But the frown disappeared in a grin, induced by the voice he heard. "Sure?" he agreed. "Come on up. Why not? I haven't a thing to do. I might as well waste an hour on you as to sit here grouching. Right now I'd be glad to see the devil come in with a third degree burn. Say, Jim! If you want to talk come up here. My arms tired holding the phone. All right. 'By."

He hung up, leaned back in his chair and picked up his discarded pipe. After relighting it, he took up a current medical journal and skimmed idly through its pages. But it was too hot to read. He cast it down. His mind seemed reluctant to make any definite effort. He sat pulling at the pipe.

A rap fell on the office door.

Whoever was seeking admittance most evidently scorned the bell. Without turning his head, Conlon invited the knocker to enter, and Gordon thrust into the room. "Hello, old sawbones," he remarked as he crossed toward his host. "Here I expected to be kept waiting my turn for an hour, and I get in number one. What's wrong with the medical game?"

Conlon waved his hand toward a chair.

"Shut up and sit down," he retorted. "Cheap comedy's out of your line. The medical game, thank you, is rotten. I was just sitting here trying to figure it out, whether dad would consider it cheaper to keep me at home, or help me support myself."

"Cheer up, Cuthbert," said Jimmy. "I appear to have come just in time. If everything goes as I think, I shall probably give you a call."

"I told you you smoked too much. What's the matter? Wind bad? Got a pain in your heart?" Conlon paused with a grin.

"It ain't me, you croaker," rejoined Gordon in ungrammatical fashion. "Say, Frank, would you call on a dago girl?"

"Has she any loose change? If so I'd call on any—"

"Papa has, you mercenary social peril. On the level now, Frank, I'm hot on the trail of a rather big thing—or I think I am. How'd you like to mix in with this Black Hand bunch?"

"As the hand or the handed?" said Conlon. "They must have learned about dad. They couldn't get anything out of me, and you know it. Am I to be kidnaped, and when?"

"Oh, can that stuff," snapped Gordon. "I'm serious, doc. Cut out the minstrel biz a minute, and come down to tacks. I plumped into a pretty funny thing this afternoon, I tell you. Now listen to me."

Forthwith he plunged into his story, and told it from first to last.

As he talked, the grin faded from Conlon's face. His brown eyes lighted with curious interest. Once or twice he ran a hand through his heavy mop of brown hair.

Now and then he interrupted with an incisive question. For the most part, however, he listened patiently to the reporter's graphic recitation of facts. He nodded at the end.

"Saverio's an odd chap," he observed in comment. "He has an immense Italian practise, and some little American following as well. If I remember rightly, he has an office somewhere around Webster and Elm.

"It's up-stairs over some shop. He had some cases in the hospital while I was interne, and I met him once or twice. He's this Albini's doctor, you say?"

"Albini said," corrected Jimmy.

"And of course," Conlon went on, "like all pencil pushers, you've an idea about all this up your sleeve?"

Jimmy nodded at once. "Sure. I thought you might go see that girl."

"How? Why? When? and what for?"

"She's sick, ain't she? You're supposed to be a doctor."

Frank chuckled.

"See here, Jimmy, your ideas of the ethics of my profession appear to be measurably vague. The mere fact that a person is sick does not give the entire profession a right to rush in. Medicine is not a football game or a dog fight. It's an art."

"Art for art's sake," mused Jimmy, his eyes on the ceiling.

Conlon snorted.

"Anyway," Gordon went on. "I know all about the bally rules of your so called art. I intend to fix up that end, of course. What I wanted to know was if you'd go if I called you?"

Frank commenced filling his pipe.

"How do you know you will need me? Albini don't really know the Black Hand is back of the other thing at all Maybe the girl's illness is from perfectly natural causes, and her dad was just scared. You may find you're a bit premature, my son."

"Well, Fiore told Albini he thought so, too, and Fiore's a dago. He ought to have a line on his fellow ginneys—"

Conlon frowned.

"Yes," he admitted; "that's true. Fiore might perhaps be a better judge of course. But—great heavens, Jim! Do you suppose they would really give that girl something to make her sick or kill her in order to break her old man? Why, it's hellish! It's damnable, old chap."

"Uhuh," agreed Jimmy, helping himself to tobacco and rolling a cigarette. "They are, and you never know what they will do. Now I've doped it out that when the old man passed up their modest request for a touch, they

decided he'd come across quicker if they hit at the girl.

"I don't pretend to know how they did it. What I've said is just a skeleton you see, but I've got a feeling I'm right. To-morrow I'll see Albini, and suggest that he call you in. Couldn't we pull off a consultation with this Fiore?"

"I suppose we could, if Albini asked, and Fiore didn't object."

"Well, why should he object?"

"I don't know that he would," said Frank. "He most likely has never heard of me. Few people have."

"Then here's where I give you a chance for fame," declared Jimmy, puffing out smoke.

"If your melodramatic theory is correct, you're more apt to give me a chance for a stiletto under my shoulder blade, I imagine, my friend."

"Not if we won out. If there should be something shady in this business and you found it, you'd be the doctor in the case."

"Why I more than Fiore?" queried Conlon. "Jim, I can't see what possible good there would be in mixing into this thing, and I don't know that I'm crazy about it. If you're right you're likely to get hurt mussing around, and if you're wrong, what's the use?"

"But that girl's life is in danger. And we know it. Are we going to lie down while they pull it off. You can if you want to, but I—

"Eh? Oh, good Lord!" Conlon exclaimed.

"Exactly," Jimmy nodded. "Look different to you now?"

"Well, if I really thought that was so—" Conlon paused frowning.

Jimmy got up.

"Thought I'd get under your conservative skin," he remarked. "You think it over, old top. All I've got yet is a hunch. I don't hardly know why I came up here, in fact, except that I smelled something rotten, and I wanted to know if you'd help. I knew you'd be able to find it if there was something funny about this skirt's sickness. Now I'll be getting along."

Conlon rose also. "Your confidence is mighty flattering, Jimmy. I only wish it was shared by other folks. I'll have to help you, I guess, just to show my appreciation. And if you are right—if they really have struck at the girl, God knows I'd be less than a man if I wasn't ready and anxious. Just the same, you want to remember that these Latins are rather excitable people, and not put too much credence in this Albini's story. See if your city editor doesn't agree with me."

"You'll be singing a different tune," Jimmy flung back as he moved to the door. "Go on and read up on poisons and diseases conveyable by clothing or food. Maybe you'll find that you need 'em. If I want you, I'll call you up."

Outside, though, he shook his head. Conlon's skeptical scouting of his notions had given him serious thought. He had a great respect for the young physician. During the two years he had been an interne at Bellevue, he had frequently talked to Gordon, when the latter had been detailed to write up some hospital case.

A frown grew on Jimmy's face, as he awaited a down-town car.

What if events proved him wrong—if his story proved to be no story at all. "Anyway," he decided as he sat in a seat in the car, "I'll put it straight up to Kelly, and see what it makes him think." From this one may gather that Kelly was city editor of the *Globe* and in so much Jimmy's boss.

Dusk had deepened into darkness when Gordon appeared before him, where he sat in the circle of light from a shaded drop electric. He glanced up at Jimmy's approach and snapped into terse interrogation: "Well, how've you been wasting your time?"

Unabashed, Gordon threw a leg over a corner of Kelly's desk and dropped to a half-sitting position. "That's what I want you to decide," he re-

turned, and went straight on with his story.

At first Kelly continued to revise copy, and make vicious stabs with a pencil. By and by he laid the pencil down and pushed the green shade up from his eyes. "What makes you so sure of this thing?" he inquired.

"I feel it," said Jimmy.

Kelly nodded. He could understand the answer. "Well?" he paused.

"I want you to let me get out and see what I can dig up," Gordon answered the question. "Keep the thing dark and wait for the wind up."

Kelly smiled. "If there is one. You've done some pretty good work for us, Gordon. How far are you betting on this?"

"My reportorial judgment," said Jimmy with a grin.

The telephone on Kelly's desk buzzed. He took it up and answered. As he talked, surprise awoke in his sensitive face, and was followed by a quizzical sort of expression. "Stay where you are," he directed. "I'll send Gordon over."

He hung up and lifted his gaze to Jimmy.

"And it seems to be justified at that," he observed. "That was Johnston over at the Bend Station. He says somethings "broke" over at this Albini's bank. Somebody dead, so far as he gathered. Bulls going up there now. Get on it and stay there till you get it. Now get out."

Gordon went down-stairs three at a time.

Albini had given him the bank's location. He lost small time in reaching his destination. Already a morbid crowd was gathered in front of the place. He pushed through them and ran up the steps to tap on the glass in the door.

A patrolman let him in. He knew him by name and nodded as he entered. "Howdy, Cahan," he greeted. "Am I late?"

The man smiled grimly. "There's one or two before you, Gordon, but you're in plenty of time. Th' ginney they croaked is back there in th' vault. Slide along; I'm watchin' th' door."

A cluster of men at the door of the vaults in the rear showed plainly the scene of the crime. Jimmy went rapidly toward them and paused to gaze into the strong room, where a man's body lay on the cement.

Beside it was kneeling another, who raised a tear-stained visage as Gordon came up.

"Dead—he is dead. My brother, Giuseppe," he made grief-stricken plea in a sort of monotonous singsong. One of three dark quiet men in plain clothes bent down, tapped him on the shoulder, and plunged into rapid interrogation, couched in his native tongue.

While the reporters from several papers besides the *Globe* stood by and waited, the two conversed in rapid fire question and answer.

At the end the detective turned back to the reporters and began to translate the tale. Meanwhile an inspector got down, and began to examine the dead man's body with care.

"I'll give you boys, all we got yet ourselves," the detective began, and paused while pencils and notebooks flashed out. "This fellow here, says his name's Giovanni Piccolo. He says the dead man was his brother. Two weeks ago, Albini, who runs this bank, told Giuseppe, who was his secretary an' is dead now, to have a special eye on a certain safety box full of papers, an' he told him to guard it with his life.

"Made him promise to do it—an' guess he did it all right from the looks of this. Albini got Giuseppe to hang about the bank each evening until Giovanni here, who was hired to stand a trick with the regular watchman, should come on.

"He says Albini didn't put either of them wise to what was doing, but Giuseppe knew somethin' was mighty wrong, an' Albini was pretty much worked up. Nothin' happened, though, till to-night.

"Then when Giovanni and the regular night man come on they finds the door of the bank unlocked and Giuseppe nowhere in sight. They gave the place the once over an' finds Giuseppe done for an' th' box—or anyway, just one box—gone. That's all."

"How did they get the box?" Jimmy asked.

"Busted the lock, of course," said the detective.

"And how was Giuseppe killed?"

"With this," said the inspector from beside the body, before the detective could reply. He held up an oddly shaped knife, which he had just drawn from the dead man's back. "See here, Milano, what sort of a knife is this?"

While the news scouts pressed forward the detective who had been talking to them, went over and examined the weapon. He shrugged.

"It is the work of my people," he admitted shortly. "But I felt sure of that from the start. I think we'd better get Albini right down here, and see what is missing, or if they took only the box. I'll go get him on the phone. Shall I ring up the coroner, too?"

The inspector nodded, and Milano turned away.

In a rush the reporters surged after, to get their reports into type. As he ran out Gordon saw Milano standing at a phone in the main room of the bank. And Jimmy formed a plan.

Instead of going back to the *Globe* he made for the Mulberry Station. There he got Johnston, the regular policeman, and gave him the facts of the case. Bidding him get them to Kelly without the least sort of delay, he turned back and set off for the bank, for a talk with Milano himself.

CHAPTER V.

Another Letter.

HE ascended the steps and pushed open the door. Inside a dim light still shone in the vault, and two men, the inspector and Milano, stood beside the body talking. Gordon knew them both.

He went on back.

They looked up as he approached. He followed his plan at once. "I came back to tell you two something," he began. "You know me, I reckon. I'm Gordon of the *Globe*. I saw this Albini this afternoon and he was all up in the air. Said his daughter was sick and he was going home. You're head of the Italian squad, Milano, and I thought I'd better put you wise."

Milano eyed him closely. "You know Albini?" he inquired.

"Never saw him till this afternoon," said Jimmy. "Say, Milano, is the Black Hand mixed up in this deal?"

Milano shrugged. "You boys always ask that," he returned.

"Well, you ask Albini," grinned Jimmy. "Is he coming down here tonight?"

Milano gave signs of an increasing interest. "Just why do you think the Black Hand may be mixed up in this?" he demanded.

Jimmy lighted a cigarette.

"Now, you see here," he returned, "I'm in on this thing and I'm going to stay. I met Albini in a rather funny manner and he told me some funny things.

"As for why I'm so sure about this being a bit of La Mano Nera, how about that funny shaped knife you were flashing around here a bit ago? And where, if you don't mind, is the other night watchman? I reckon he ran away."

"Giovanni says he went home," explained Milano.

"Cold feet, eh?" said Gordon. "'Fraid even to stick around, after he found Giuseppe's body?"

Milano drew a kerchief and wiped his forehead.

"I reckon you're wise, Mr. Gordon. Anyway, you talk like you was. In my country such knives as they used on Giuseppe are used without any

exceptions by a society called the Camorra. It's the American branch of that bunch that is commonly called the Black Hand."

The coroner came while he spoke and viewed the remains, pronounced it wilful murder and ordered the body away.

Giovanni came back from the front where he had waited in red-eyed brooding, listened and swore soft oaths of vengeance against those who had stricken his brother down.

The inspector departed, taking Giovanni with him.

By and by a cab rattled up outside. Albini came slowly up the steps. His face was worn, and drawn, and lined. Gordon found it hard to believe this shuffling figure that of the man he had seen during the afternoon.

Jimmy and Milano went forward to meet him.

For a moment his eyes seemed to question the reporter in a momentary surprise at his presence, then fell back into the apathy induced by the series of crushing mental blows he had been dealt. He paused and stood waiting for Milano to speak.

But Gordon broke in to answer that first surprised glance, and clear his presence of suspicion. "I came for my paper, when we heard of Giuseppe's death, Mr. Albini. Do you care if I stick around?"

Albini shook his head slowly.

Milano spoke. "I want to talk this over as quick as we can, Albini. Can we go somewhere where we'll be alone?"

"Come into my office," the banker said dully, and led the way to its door.

He unlocked it and switched on the light and they entered.

Gordon shot a glance about the place. Something oblong and white attracted his attention. It lay on the floor, as though it might have been thrust in through the one window.

He walked over and looked at the window even before he picked up the thing from the floor.

The catch was thrust back, but the sash itself was closed. If it had been used for getting the thing into the room, it had been raised and then lowered again. That was quite possible, of course.

Stooping he caught up the object and found it a plain unmarked envelope, addressed in a scrawl to Albini. He was scanning the writing when Milano spoke:

"What you got there, Gordon?"

"Something for Albini," said Jimmy, turning round and held it out.

Albini put out his hand to take it. If possible his face grew more ghastly than before. His fingers shook so that he nearly dropped the unexpected message. "No doubt it will explain," he said with dry lips, as he tore it raggedly open.

Fumbling within, he drew out a sheet of flimsy paper and spread it on his desk. "There is no longer use in concealment. You may as well read it," he went on after a first survey of its lines.

Both Jimmy and the detective leaned over his shoulders to read:

SIGNORE:

You have once more acted the fool. You compel our acts. It is to be regretted that you also compelled the death of one so faithful as Giuseppe. We regret to end so brave a man's career. It was our intention merely to obtain your box.

First, in a measure, to rob you of means of resistance, and make its redemption for ten thousand a matter of policy with you. Second, to show you how useless your precautions for guarding it were. It was our intention to overpower Piccolo merely.

Unfortunately in his zeal he uncovered the face of an agent. As a matter of course, he died.

This means that the police will be drawn into the matter. We relieve you, therefore, of the necessity of silence. But permit us to caution you against a feeling of security in this. We have carried out our decrees with as much ease in the face of the police as behind their back.

So long as they are either so stupid or as corruptible as they are, we shall continue to do so. This but means that we must act more quickly than we intended.

Allow us to advise you to show this to the police, and caution them to look out for themselves while they seek in any way to interfere with the workings of

LA MANO.

Albini took it and handed it to Milano. "Take it, *signore,* and tell me if you will meekly accept the insult it contains," he said in a voice which quivered with ill-suppressed rage.

Milano, rather red of face, stuffed it inside a pocket. "We won't lie down long on it, Albini. But we've got to get something to go on to begin with. Take a look around, will you, and see what besides the box is gone."

The banker shook his head. "There will be nothing else gone," he declared. "They say that the box was the thing they were after, and they always tell the truth, it seems to me."

Milano motioned his companions to seats and took one himself. "Then let's look at the fact," he began. "You've been threatened?"

"Yes. Two weeks ago the first time, in a note." Albini informed him.

"Got the note?"

"It was in the box which was stolen."

Milano shrugged and lighted a cigar. "Tell me the whole thing," he directed.

Albini complied, in a flat, mechanical way. When he was done, Jimmy cut in and rapidly told of his meeting with the banker. "Now let me ask some questions?" he said.

Milano assented: "Go ahead."

"Mr. Albini, how is your daughter to-night?" Gordon began.

Albini winced. "She seems very sick, Mr. Gordon—oh, very sick, indeed."

"The doctor saw her, of course. What did he think was the trouble?"

The lines in Albini's face deepened. "Almost at once, Mr. Gordon, he said that he was puzzled; that he did not just know what it was as yet."

"Puzzled?" Jimmy repeated. "How puzzled?"

"I do not know. He says her symptoms are confusing—that he has never seen just such a condition before."

"And what is he doing for her?"

"He gave her some medicine," the banker responded slowly. "But—Mr. Gordon—he—Fiore tells me, Francesca will die."

His voice broke and he wrung his heavy hands.

"Die! See here; he tells you that, and says at the same time that he don't know what ails her. Say, Albini, how does he know she will die?"

Jimmy got out of his chair and stood facing the banker.

"How should I know, *signore?* I am no doctor." The man dropped his face in his hands.

Jimmy shot Milano a glance. "Well, what do you know about that? Why should he be so dead sure of her death if he can't put a name to her trouble?"

"She might be so sick that he can't see a chance," Milano offered in explanation.

"Uhuh." Gordan turned back to the father. "Albini, you'll have to excuse me for butting in, but why don't you have another doctor see her?"

Albini's head came up quickly at the question. "I had not thought of it, Mr. Gordon. I have very great faith in Fiore. I believed what he said."

"That wouldn't stop his making a mistake. If I'd get you a mighty good doctor, would you let him see the girl?"

Milano added a word of support. "Sure! You ought to try that, Albini. Have a consultation at least."

"But Fiore?" Albini questioned. "Perhaps he might object."

"Let him object and be hanged," exploded Gordon. "If I had a sick girl I wouldn't care a cuss how many doctors who didn't diagnose her malady might object."

"That's right," Milano agreed.

"But he is my friend. He was present at Francesca's birth. Would

he not do all that he could for the child —all that any one could?"

"How, if he don't know what's the matter?" Jimmy came back with some heat.

Albini spread out his hands.

"I do not know," he made piteous reply. "I am beside myself with trouble. *Signori,* I cannot see clearly. I am heart-sick, broken—crushed."

Jimmy swung from his twitching face and once more addressed Milano.

"Try and persuade him to get in another physician. If the girl is really as sick as he says, and Fiore don't size up her condition, why, minutes may be worth a lot. I know a man I can trust. Saw him this afternoon. He'll go if I want him.

"If there's anything crooked he'd find it, and we might get a line on who pulled it off. Fiore hasn't any mortgage on the case. Let him like it or lump it. What we want is quick action in this. We don't even know if Fiore is giving it straight. Maybe he's in on—"

"No!" Albini half rose from his chair. "*Signore,* Fiore is my friend."

Milano lifted a hand.

"Just the same, Gordon's right in his plan, Albini," he said. "I think you ought to have somebody else see your daughter. If Gordon don't take his friend out to your house I'll insist on taking some one myself. Fiore can't kick on a consultation."

Again Albini made a gesture of resignation. "I am in your hands," he gave weary assent. "I should like something done for Francesca, if anything can be."

The detective turned with a question to Jimmy.

"How soon could you connect with this friend of yours?"

"Any time you want him. He hangs out on Lexington near Seventy-Ninth."

Milano nodded. "You can take a cab and get to Albini's pretty quick from there. Suppose Albini goes home and calls me at the station when he gets there. You get your friend and let me know if he'll go. Then I'll have Albini ring up Fiore, and tell him they want him to come over at once, that the girl's worse.

"Then I'll give you the sign, and you start out at once. When Fiore arrives he'll find your friend. Albini can tell him he tried to get him a couple of times and failed, and got scared and called somebody else, before they could raise him.

"He can't very well refuse to talk the case over in a situation like that, and it will be a lot less suspicious than asking for a consultation direct. If things are all right your friend backs out and no harm is done. If it isn't we get wise. How's that?"

"Great dope!" declared Gordon, in an evident satisfaction. "Fiore gets his hand forced without being aware of the fact, and Frank gets a chance to examine the patient alone if we all get a move on. That right?"

Milano nodded.

Jimmy turned toward the door of the office. "I'll stop and wise Kelly up first. If any one follows me out of here that will look natural, too. After I see Kelly I'll go pull Frank out of bed. Well, then, Milano, I'll ring you up at the station."

Leaving the bank, he set off for the *Globe* with a haste approaching a trot.

CHAPTER VI.

Conlon's Clever Plan.

THE persistent ringing of his doorbell roused Conlon from his first sleep. As the shrill clangor kept up he muttered an imprecation, crawled out from the covers, and made his way into his office, rubbing the sleep from his eyes.

Through the front windows he could see the lights of a cab at the curb, and, wondering who could be seeking him at this time of night with a taxi, he unlocked the door and swung it wide to meet Gordon's grinning face.

He reached out a pajama-clad arm and yanked the disturber inside. "Darn you!" he remarked in a not entirely assumed annoyance; "what brings you back here now?"

"Awfully sorry to bother you, dear old chap," said Jimmy. "But I wanted to use your phone."

Frank eyed him in pure disgust.

"You wanted to use my phone?" he repeated at length. "Well, you fellows have an awful nerve, all right. Why didn't you hunt up a public station instead of pulling me out of bed?"

"Because I wanted you to hear my conversation." Jimmy picked up the phone and gave his number. Then he grinned at Conlon again.

"Cheer up, doc! You— Hello! Bend Station — Milano there — hello, Milano! Gordon speaking. I'm up here at the doc's, and he'll go when you give us the 'high sign.' Everything working all right? Good-by!"

He jammed the receiver back on the hook and swung round to Frank. "Get into your clothes," he said.

"To whom were you talking?" questioned Frank.

"Milano, of the 'Bend' plain-clothes squad. Hurry up and get dressed, old man. I got a cab outside."

"Don't let me keep you from it," prompted Conlon with a yawn.

"Oh, wake up! You're going along," said Jimmy, leaning upon the desk. "Listen! The case I told you about has come to a head. They croaked a man in Albini's bank tonight, and Fiore says that girl is going to die. Milano and I've fixed it for you to go over. Now, go on and get dressed."

Conlon started and began to unfasten the frogs of his pajamas.

"Come into my room and help me," he directed, turning away with an arm already withdrawn from a sleeve. "We'll go over there, and if I find anything rotten somebody's going to dance. Rummage around in my closet and find me an old suit, some old shoes, and a hat while I duck my head."

He ran into a bath-room, from which the splash of running water marked the passing of all sleep from his eyes. A moment later he showed at the door with a towel in his hands. "Get that old blue serge suit and the worst shoes you can find."

Jimmy was lost in an avalanche of shoes and clothing, which he produced from the closet. He emerged with the suit and a half-worn pair of tan Oxfords, which he flung upon the bed.

While he worked Conlon had donned a none too clean shirt, and was poking about among his collars and ties, to select at last a decrepit specimen of linen with edges badly frayed.

"Look sort of played out?" he suggested, holding it up.

From a seat on the bed Gordon nodded with mouth agape. "Looks like attempted suicide to wear it," he retorted. "What—"

Conlon nodded, slipped a mussed and somewhat worn tie into the fold of the collar, put both on, and knotted the tie in a negligent haste.

Then he slipped into the trousers of the suit, fastened them with a belt, and sat down to put on the shoes. "Did you get the hat?" he inquired without looking at Jimmy. "Say, how do I look?"

"Like a rummage sale," said Jimmy, ducking back into the closet. "What I want to know is why?"

"Because," explained the physician, "I desire to look like what I am not. Found the hat?"

"Found one to go with the rest of your get-up," growled Jimmy. He emerged with a wide-brimmed straw. "Model of 1897."

"Bring it along then," Conlon told him, "and help me make up my face."

"Do what?" Jimmy trailed after, a picture of baffled surprise. "Say, are you bughouse or what? This isn't a bally masquerade."

"It is to me," said Conlon. "Come along. Bring my shaving-glass from the dresser there, will you, and get a wiggle on."

Jimmy sighed as he complied.

Once in the office, he placed hat and glass on the desk and watched while Conlon found and mixed together some collodion and carmine in a shallow porcelain dish. Seating himself at the desk, the physician propped up the mirror and proceeded to draw an irregular line down one cheek with a camel's-hair brush, dipped in the stuff he had mixed.

"Come here and blow on my cheek, Jim," he requested, laying down the brush. "Steady now, and not too hard. I want it to dry smooth."

Under the drying influence of Jimmy's wondering breath the collodion 'set,' drawing up the flesh of Conlon's face into a crooked, angry-looking red line, for all the world like a badly healed scar.

When it was dry Frank nodded in total satisfaction. "I look like I'd been handed one, don't I? A little collodion will do great things used right."

Jimmy dropped back in his chair. "Are you just plain crazy or what?" he wanted to know.

"Not exactly." Conlon went to a cabinet by the wall and removed a black bag from inside. "Wait till I get my things ready and I'll attempt to explain."

He set the bag open upon the desk and began to collect a mass of various paraphernalia from several parts of the room. When he had all he wanted he dumped them in the bag. Next he put on his coat, laid the old straw hat beside the bag, and resumed his chair.

"Now that we're ready for anything which may develop, I'll outline my plan to you, James, while we wait for the 'go ahead' from that dago sleuth of yours.

"To begin with, it appears to me that you are right in your suspicions, and that in going over there we are actually coming to grips with the Black Hand. Now I have seen this Fiore once or twice, and talked with him a minute or two.

"I told you he'd had cases in the hospital while I was intern. It was while there that I met him. In the present instance I would prefer that he did not recognize me, and though he has probably forgotten all about me, I prefer to use a disguise. Besides, I wish to appear in his eyes as a poor devil, so anxious to get a call that he'll take anything he can get.

"Fiore may not be pleased to see me. Particularly will that be so if there is really something crooked and he should know of the fact. He may even be suspicious, I fancy. But if I look and act like one overawed by the successful Fiore; if I agree with all that he says, while keeping my eyes and ears open, and let anything he says pass as impossible of objection by poor little me, Mr. Fiore will probably swallow any explanation of my presence which is plausible enough to cover the situation."

In a few rapid words Gordon outlined the plan Milano had suggested.

Conlon nodded agreement.

"Plausible," said he. "Now, when I get there I'm going to examine that girl quick. When Fiore shows up I'll be as stupid as an ass. I'll agree to all that he says, apologize for coming, pocket my fee, and leave. But you can bet your last dollar I'll bring away a pretty fair notion of what's going on over there."

Conlon gave a rather rueful grin at his reflection in the glass. "I only hope all this trouble is justified by events."

"You mean you hope that girl's sick?" said Jimmy.

"No, you boob!" Conlon lighted a cigar.

They sat silently smoking, each busy with his thoughts, pondering the outcome of this venture, they were entering upon—a venture, perhaps, of life and death itself. Each from his own viewpoint felt a keen interest in the final results. Both united in the common hope that they might by their efforts bring to naught the vile scheme of some criminal brain, which they

now subtly felt back of the whole affair.

A distant clock chimed faintly—one—two. The phone beside Gordon's elbow began to ring.

Though both were expecting and waiting for its signal, yet both actually started sharply at the shrilling crack of sound. Jimmy caught up the standard and answered in a voice which trembled with impatience. "Hello, Milano! That you? Yes, this is Gordon. All ready? Right! We're off!"

He set down the phone, rose and jammed on his hat. Followed by Conlon with his black satchel, he turned and ran out of the room.

CHAPTER VII.

How the Plan Works.

TOGETHER they reached Jimmy's cab at the curb. They piled in. The chauffeur, already instructed by Gordon, let in his clutch. They moved off east and south to Second Avenue and the long approach to a bridge.

After a time the cool breeze from the river struck into their faces through the open windows of the cab, and the river itself came into sight, to the sound of hollow rumblings under the wheels. Far below, like jewels on the river's bosom, showed the lights on Blackwell's Island and on some slowly moving boats.

But Jimmy gazed straight ahead. He had an insane desire to urge his chauffeur to a still greater speed. Controlling the impulse, he sat and stared into the night.

They sped on over the bridge and down its eastern approach.

And now they turned north with twistings and turnings through the night-shrouded district. Slowing at last, the driver began searching the passing numbers, and presently stopped the machine in front of a house with a light.

Conlon rose, lifting his bag. "Stay in the cab," he suggested to Gordon. "Let me handle this alone. Lie down and keep out of sight. If Fiore comes let him think this is just a public taxi I have called."

He stepped down and went up to the house, where he found and rang the bell. An instant later the door opened to frame Albini's figure in its oblong. So much Gordon saw, and sank back with a sigh of satisfaction as the door closed Conlon in.

He leaned back and closed his eyes, drawing himself down out of chance observation from the windows. He sighed again and relaxed for a period of rest after a most strenuous day.

He could hear the river traffic calling through the darkness and the hum of a rapidly driven motor somewhere far away. By degrees his eyes closed and he began to nod.

Meanwhile Conlon had begun to play his part.

As soon as he was inside he turned on the man who had given him entrance, and introduced himself under mask of a fictitious name. "I am Mr. Gordon's friend, Dr. Franklin. I presume you are the father of the young lady I am to see?"

The other nodded. "Yes. I am Albini."

"And Dr. Fiore is coming?"

"Yes. He told me he would do so. That was twenty minutes ago, about."

"Then we have no time to lose," prompted Conlon. "Take me in to your daughter at once. You know what to say to Fiore when he comes?"

Albini nodded once more. "Yes. Come with me."

He turned directly up a stairway, leading the physician toward a front room on the second floor of the house. At the door he paused, swung it open, motioned Conlon inside and followed.

The room was of good size and well furnished.

Midway of one wall was a low bed of brass, and stretched on it, beneath a light cover, was a woman, whose

face seemed to Conlon almost if not quite as white as the sheath of the pillow beneath her head.

One small waxen hand lay limp on the counterpane above her. On its pallid surface the veins stood out swollen and blue.

And even as his professional eye swept up these details, Frank Conlon caught his breath. For an instant he stood staring into the woman's face.

Lying upon the pillow, its great blue-gray eyes looking mutely upon him, framed in a wonderful mass of loosened auburn hair, it was beautiful to him. A strange sense of familiar presence reached out and engulfed the physician's brain.

Somewhere, some place, it seemed through that first moment to him he had known this woman before—known her, and— But Albini was speaking:

"Francesca, my child, this is the Signor Doctor Franklin, who has come to see you, my dear."

Francesca Albini smiled. To Conlon's whirling senses it seemed like a personal welcome. "I am glad to see Dr. Franklin. I have been waiting for him," she said.

Shaking himself forcibly out of the strange spell of her presence, Conlon dropped into a chair by the side of the bed and took up the white hand from the cover. At the touch all the odd emanation of personal knowledge which at first she had seemed to throw round him came back with a redoubled strength.

He awoke to the fact that he was merely sitting there holding her hand and thrilling with its holding.

He forced himself back from his bewitchment and smiled frankly into her eyes. "Miss Albini," he began in a voice so unlike his own usual accents that it seemed to himself a disguise, "I must speak to you quickly. Try and answer my questions as promptly. I understand that you were taken ill about twelve hours ago. Will you tell me just how you feel?"

He became conscious of her eyes upon his face. Even as she spoke in reply they rested steadily upon him, and he fancied a light in their depths he had not seen at the first when he took his seat at the bed.

"I have really not felt well for a couple of days, Dr. Franklin. Last night I did not sleep except in dozes. To-day I had a chill, and my temperature seemed to come up. I have aching pains, worse in my head and my limbs. I am somewhat sick at the stomach, and I have an insatiable thirst. I feel weak, and as though an effort to rise would be likely to cause me to faint. My feet seem a trifle swollen, and there has been some bleeding of the nose this afternoon."

Exultation gripped Conlon at her words.

Here was no ordinary girl of the east side class. Italian she might be, but Gordon's denomination of her as a dago was a slander, nothing less. There was reason for the depth of brain-pan under that glorious crown of auburn hair.

She was educated, sweet, refined—a woman of his own class—a woman to wonder at and dream about, and lo— He caught him back from the thought.

Retreating behind his professional mask, he drew his thermometer out and slipped it between her pallid lips under her tongue. Even her tongue was pallid as he saw. With fingers on her pulse he sat and counted, waiting for a minute to drag by.

The slender artery under his fingers throbbed fast, yet it thrilled him through his whole physical being, so that he faltered in his count of its rhythm, and had to begin again. At the end of the second minute he laid it down gently, and took the thermometer back. A glance at its scale quickened his fears.

Francesca's fever was high.

A queer little quiver shook the muscles of his throat. Without volition he frowned. With a most un-

professional feeling he rose and walked toward a little white dressing-table, which stood on his side of the bed. Making a pretense of a more careful scrutiny of the thermometer's reading, he stood there and fought to choke back the strange grip in his throat.

He put down a hand and rested it on the top of the little table, and the motion served to push back an edge of the drawn work-scarf, so that the enameled wood was bared for a little space. Staring down he became aware of a tiny black spot in the whiteness, which seemed to draw and center all his attention upon itself.

Very slowly he put out a finger to touch it. At the contact it moved. With a finger and thumb he picked it up and lifted it for inspection—a tiny dead insect it showed—a small dead fly or gnat.

Yet as he gazed upon it Conlon caught his breath.

All at once he grew quiet and cool. Turning the dead insect slowly, he studied it with a breathless attention. In the end he drew out a pad of printed prescription papers, tore out a leaf, and wrapped up the tiny fly.

Satisfying himself of its safety in a leather pocket-folder, he turned on his bag in haste. For now he knew what he must do, and the time was growing short.

Wrenching the bag open, he set forth the things he needed, and turned again to the bed. "Miss Albini," he declared as he did so, "I must have a small specimen of your blood. Do you mind?"

The girl moved her head on the pillow. "Not if you think best," she assented, and even essayed a smile.

With some alcohol-moistened cotton, the physician approached the bed. Pushing back the thick copper hair, he sponged gently the lobe of an ear.

"Your pardon. I'll try not to hurt you," he said when he was done. Yet the hand with which he lifted a needle trembled beyond his control as he pressed it ever so slightly against her pallid skin.

A tiny drop of crimson stained the whiteness of her flesh. Conlon received it upon some little slides of glass. He laid them aside to dry and took up a little pipette.

He filled it in turn with blood and heaved a sigh of relief. On the lobe of Francesca's ear a small rubylike drop still clung. He flamed off a platinum loop and caught it up in its circle, plunged it into a test tube of yellow brown fluid, and deftly washed it free.

"Did I hurt very much?" he questioned.

He felt her reply was important. He found himself anxiously waiting for it, hoping for what it would be.

Franscesa shook her head, affording him relief.

He gathered his instruments up and placed them back in his bag, then resumed his seat by the bed.

"I suppose you know Dr. Fiore is coming here soon," he began. "When he comes, please show no surprise at what I may say to him. And say nothing to him yourself about anything I have done. It may seem like a strange request, but I really have a good reason. I am asking you to believe that, and give me your confidence and trust."

Francesca turned her head slowly toward him as he spoke. Her eyes searched his face, and she smiled.

"I trust you already, doctor," she said softly as he paused, and he thrilled at the words and the soft, mellow tones of her voice. "When you came through the door with my father I felt I could trust you at once in all ways—even with my life.

"It is strange, but we women are creatures of impulse, you know. In the same way, I do not like Dr. Fiore, even though he has been our physician for years and passes for my father's friend."

Conlon nodded.

A glow of elation awoke in his

heart at her words. "I have one question further to ask you," he resumed again as she ceased. "Try and remember carefully, please, Miss Albini. Have you at any time you recall during the last fifteen days been bitten or stung by some insect?"

The girl knit her brows in an effort at recollection.

In the end her eyes lighted, as though she had found what she sought. "Yes. I recollect now; it was the morning after father received a certain letter. I woke up that morning to find my windows closed, though I knew I had left them open, as I always do when I retire.

"The thing which woke me was a stinging on my cheek, something like the bite of a mosquito. I thought that was what it was at first, and turned to see if the screens on my windows might have come open or fallen out. That was when I noticed that the windows were shut."

"And did you find out who shut them?" Conlon leaned forward in eager interest.

"It was our new maid. I asked her, and she told me she had come in after I was asleep and put them down because there was a high wind."

"Was there a wind that night, Miss Albini?"

"Really, doctor, I don't know. I slept soundly. I never even heard Maria come in."

"But did you see the thing which had bitten your cheek?"

"I hardly know," said Francesca. "At first when I looked I saw nothing. Then I laid down and fell into a doze, and I was bitten again. I slapped at my face and found nothing; but a minute later I noticed a very small fly crawling across the counterpane as though half stunned. It was a little bit of a fly, not much bigger than a gnat. It hardly seemed as if it could have given me such a big bite."

She smiled faintly.

"Was it?" said Conlon. "No—never mind. That was your door-bell, I think. Now, Miss Francesca, please remember what I asked. Tell Fiore you are better since I came, and don't be surprised at anything I say."

"But," protested the girl, "what do you think? What has a fly to do with my sickness? Isn't Fiore doing what is right? I feel bewildered."

"And I haven't time to explain," Frank told her. "Trust me—with your life. Will you—trust me?"

"Yes." Her blue-gray eyes met his as she answered.

"If you do I will save you," he whispered. "S-s-s-h, now—quiet. Here they come."

Footsteps mounted the stairs. Conlon rose and picked up his bag and hat. He seemed as one on the verge of departing.

The door was opened and showed Dr. Fiore, his face disfigured by a questioning scowl.

Conlon spoke first: "Good evening, Dr. Fiore. I am Dr. Franklin. Mr. Albini has told you how I came to be called, I guess. The young lady was feeling a little bit faint, and I gave her some strychnin. I was just going when I heard you coming up."

Fiore extended his hand with a condescending smile at the other's somewhat breathless outburst: "Glad to meet you, doctor, and to hear you could help this little girl. I have been telling Albini that I can't understand why my telephone failed to ring. You gave her strychnin, you say? Very well, a stimulant could not hurt her. Feeling better now, Miss Francesca?" to the girl.

"Oh, yes, doctor — much better, thank you."

"We have a pretty sick patient." Fiore again addressed Conlon. "*Anemia Perniciosa* is what I think we may call it. What do you think, doctor?"

His eyes darted a rapierlike interrogation into the vacuously smiling face of the younger physician as he made his low-voiced comment.

"Exactly my own opinion," Frank hurried to acquiesce. "Of course," he

made apologetic addition, "I haven't been in practise very long, doctor; but that is what I thought it was when I came up here. Anyway, that's what I would have said had it been my case. I mean that, speaking from my own limited experience, I—"

Fiore's smile became unreservedly friendly. "My dear fellow," he interrupted, "pray do not try to explain. There is no reason why you should not have responded to this call. Really, I thank you for coming so quickly to my patient's relief."

"That's awfully good of you," Conlon accepted. "When I got here I thought it wouldn't be out of the way to give her what relief I could."

"Quite right," Fiore agreed. "You're new to the city, I think. Come to see me some day and leave me your address. Sometimes, perhaps, I can put something in your way."

"You're awfully kind," beamed Conlon in acceptance. "And I guess I had better be going—"

Fiore nodded. "Then thank you again for coming. Good night."

Frank turned away. Albini asked for and paid his fee. At the end he again faced the bed. "Good night, Miss Francesca," he mumbled. "I am sure you are utterly safe now, and I'm sure I am awfully glad."

For a moment her face was turned toward him, her eyes met fully his own.

Then he was out of the room, with Albini leading the way. But his heart was beating quickly and his spirit was leaping high. In that silent message of eyes he had read that she understood the double entendre enwrapped in the words he said.

CHAPTER VIII.

Peruvian Flies.

GORDON still dozed on the cushions of the cab, and the east was pink and blue, with a broadening line of yellow, as Conlon ran down Albini's steps and approached his waiting taxi.

He climbed in and slid gently to a seat beside the sleeping reporter as the driver climbed down to start his engine.

At the first roar of the motor Jimmy opened startled eyes and made an attempt to rise. "Keep down," Frank muttered a caution, pressing him back, while their car got under way.

As they turned Gordon caught sight of another high-powered machine drawn up close beside the curb.

"Fiore's," said Frank, noting his inquisitive glance. "I don't want his driver to see you. He might mention the fact. Fiore believes me alone."

Back on Van Alst, running south, Gordon, released, sat up. The question of his eyes found words. "What did you find?" he burst forth.

Conlon frowned. "A very intelligent person, a very sick woman, a wonderfully beautiful girl, and a very dead fly."

He drew out and a bit a cigar.

Jimmy favored him with a long and quizzical glance. After a time he nodded. "Fallen in love with your patient?" he said.

Frank blew out a streamer of smoke and watched its slow drift from the window. And then he gave Jim a surprise: "Exactly."

"A dago! A wop!" Gordon gasped in consternation.

Conlon sat up with a suddenness wholly arresting.

"Gordon," he snapped, "that's enough! Don't ever say that again! She's a wonderfully beautiful woman—a woman with soul and brains. I shall save her life if I'm able, and marry her if she will. Why"—abruptly he abandoned his vehemence of expression and retreated behind a facetious remark—"she told me she trusted me wholly, in spite of the get-up I wore."

"Is she seriously sick?" Gordon questioned, his manner suppressed.

"Dangerously sick, but I think I

have mastered her trouble. I took a sample of blood, and when we get back to the office I'll find out as far as I can. Jim, if my notion is right, that girl is the victim of one of the most dastardly clever plots you or I ever heard about."

"You met the Fiore chap?"

"Yes, I met him. He and I had a very polite conversation in which I appeared to no advantage at all. In the end I might add that we agreed perfectly as to our diagnosis of the case."

"You agreed?" Jimmy sat up in excitement.

"Perfectly—as to the trouble. We didn't mention the cause. As to that, I am morally certain that the slides I prepared will show an unusual picture when I get them under a glass. Fiore says she has pernicious anemia. The question is where she got it, what gave it to her?"

"Well, do you know what did?"

"Yes—flies—or a fly."

"Flies?" faltered Gordon in puzzled repetition. "What sort of flies?"

"Peruvian flies."

Gordon groaned. "All right, go on and talk like the board of health, if you want to; but tell me this: is there funny business in this case?"

"I think so," Conlon responded. "Jim, I believe Francesca was made sick by having her bitten by a certain variety of blood-sucking gnat found only in Peru. Now do you understand?"

Jimmy opened his eyes and blew a long-drawn whistle. "God! How was it worked? Where did they get the flies?"

"I don't know how they got them," said Conlon; "but it's certain they were put into her room by some one, for they won't live in this climate under ordinary conditions at all. They are found only in certain limited zones in Peru itself, one being along the line of the Oraya railway.

"During the time of its building so many of the laborers died of this disease that a bridge is actually named for the malady—the Verruca Bridge. The disease starts from the bite of the fly, or gnat, and is called *Verruca Peruana.*

"It is characterized by great weakness, great pallor, a peculiar blood condition, consisting in a change of the percentage between the corpuscle cells; a high fever, and frequently death as the end."

"And you think she has this disease?"

"Jim"—Conlon sank his voice till Gordon could barely hear him above the taxi's drum—"I found one of those flies in her room, and she has all the symptoms I have named."

"You found one of the flies?" Suddenly Jimmy's round face grew actually savage. "Frank, do you think Fiore could have put it in her room?"

"Fiore?" said Frank. "Not in a thousand years. What I want to know worst is if he knows who did, or whether he really thinks Francesca has what he says."

Gordon's clenched hand fell crashing on the window-ledge of the cab.

"Frank," he exclaimed, "I tell you he knows. He *knows.* I feel it. It's a hunch. If he didn't put those flies in her room he knows who did, and I'll bet you he got them for whoever took them. Didn't he get Albini to fire their old servant and send up a new woman? Why— Look at it, man!"

The taxi swung into Seventy-Ninth as he subsided from his outburst. Frank merely nodded without making any reply. Still in silence, the two men descended from the cab, and after paying the driver they immediately went inside.

"Lie down and finish your nap," the physician suggested. "I've got an hour's work."

Gordon declined. "I'll sit down and watch you. When I know what you find I want to lay hands on Milano. I'm going to smash up this game yet to-day."

"How?" Conlon inquired as he unlocked a case and drew out a microscope.

"I don't know till you see what you find. I'll know after that." Jimmy sat down and yawned.

Conlon went over and lighted a burner beneath a cubical box of tin. Next he took the tube of yellowish liquid from his satchel and placed it inside the box in a rack.

"If I'm right, a few hours' incubation will show animal life in that," he predicted as he closed a door in the side of the box and came back to his microscope. "Now I'll examine my slides."

Seating himself, he adjusted the lenses, stained a slide with a drop of solution, slipped it upon the instruments stage, and applied his eye to the tube. For a moment his fingers toyed with the adjustment of focus; then into the oblivion of concentrated work.

At length he lifted his head.

"Come here," he said, slipping out of his chair and motioning Gordon to his place. "Put your eye to the tube. Do you see those little rodlike objects in the field? Those are what are called the 'X' bodies. We call 'em that because we are not just sure what they are. But they always show up in this disease. Now let me look at the different blood-cells."

Reseating himself, he ran over the various slides. At the end of some minutes he spoke:

"This settles the diagnosis. Francesca has what I thought. Some one has given her this disease for a purpose, and I reckon we know what it was. Now I want to go down-town.

"There's a chap over at the Rockerfeller I want to see to-day. If there's a way to save that girl, I've an idea he will know it. We'll go get something to eat, and then you can find Milano and get busy on your end of this thing, while I attend to mine."

Jimmy nodded at the incubator-box as he picked up his hat. "When will your baking be done?"

"Not for hours," said Frank. "Come on down-town with me. You see," he went on when they stood waiting for a car, "I'm beginning to share all your suspicions myself.

"When I was intern this Fiore had a couple of cases sent in, and pernicious anemia was the diagnosis in each case. They both died. They were both Italians, and I remember that one chap by the name of Pietro Marini made a mighty game fight for his life.

"I examined some of his blood in the laboratory one day, and I found these little X bodies which you saw just now. I had never seen them before, nor had any of the other fellows, either; and up to a few months ago I personally didn't know of this disease.

"Well, Marini, I know now, had what Francesca has. There was another case, too, but I didn't see it. One of the other internes told me, though, that he found the bodies in the blood. Now, Fiore had that case, too. Why, then, did he tell Albini at first that he didn't recognize the condition and then make a bluff at his diagnosis of anemia when he came and found me there?"

Jimmy's china-blue eyes were snapping as Conlon ceased to speak.

"Now you're on the right trail," he exclaimed in excited approval. "What we want to do is to find out if either of those cases was threatened by the Black Hand before they got sick. You go hunt breakfast if you want to, and then see your man. I'm going to hunt Milano. What did you say that wop's name was? Pete Marini? I'm going to grab a taxi and beat it out of here."

Conlon put a hand on his arm.

"By Jove," he returned, "Jimmy, I guess you've hit it! But see here, you wild man, you've got to be fed. If you're right, we've an exciting day ahead. We must start it right. Here comes our car."

Against Gordon's protests, he dragged him to the steps and forced him aboard a trolley, where both hung to straps; and Jimmy growled in dis-

gust until Frank cut him short: "Oh, shut up! You're getting down-town, aren't you? Do you think I'm not in a hurry to find something to help Francesca?"

Whereupon Jimmy grinned voiceless answer in his face. For the rest of the ride he refused to talk, beyond saying he was thinking; but so soon as they were seated at a small table in an all-night café he leaned across.

"I've been going over all Albini told me," he began, "and I believe I've doped it out. Fiore gave the flies to the girl he sent up to Albini's, and she put them into the room. Now, what does that mean?"

He paused and looked quickly about as though fearing he might be heard. "It means that Mr. Fiore is one of the gang himself."

Conlon started. "You mean of the Black Hand?"

"Sure."

"It would explain a lot," Frank admitted.

"It would explain the whole works," said Jim. "He advises Albini to yield, and when he won't he has to help to make him. That's why he said he didn't know what ailed Francesca until you went up there and made him throw a bluff at least.

"Oh—" He pushed back his plate and made a grab for his hat. "Frank, it's a cinch! Come on! I've got to see Milano right away."

CHAPTER IX.

A Trap for Fiore.

DESPITE Conlon's expostulations, Gordon insisted on his going as far as Mulberry Bend Station.

"I want you to tell Milano about those hospital cases," he explained. "It's early yet, and you can't see your man at the Rockerfeller Institute for an hour at least. Come along."

Inquiry at the station elited the information that Milano had a room close by. Thither Jimmy again dragged his companion at an almost running walk.

They mounted a flight of stairs, passed down a hall, found the number of a room the sergeant at the desk had given Gordon, and rapped on the door. After a second and louder summons, a voice inquired what they wanted in a manner none too sweet.

"Come alive!" called Jimmy. "This is Gordon; I want you, Milano."

A moment later the door opened slightly and the head of Milano appeared. Satisfied by his inspection, he held the door wide.

The two men slipped through, and Jimmy presented Frank.

"We've been out to Albini's, and Frank's found out what's the matter with that girl," he announced. "Now we've got a job cut out for you. If you find out what I think you will about it, we'll be just about ready to make 'em sit up, I guess."

Milano motioned them to chairs and himself sat down on his bed. "Tell me what you have discovered," he suggested.

Jimmy did so briefly.

The detective listened closely until he had finished and while Conlon added some details of his own. Toward the end he rose and began dressing, and as Frank finished he walked across to the box of a phone on the wall.

"I'll call Bellevue up and find out the name of that other patient," he decided. "You say he died about eight months ago?"

Conlon nodded. "Yes. I think about that."

Milano got his number and spoke briefly, turned back, and resumed his dressing. "They'll look it up and let me know in a few minutes. No doubt you got that much, though, from my chinning. When I get their report I'll guarantee to find out if the Hand was mixed up in either of those cases."

"And don't forget that girl," Jimmy reminded. "I want a life chart of Maria Carlino, too, Milano. If I'm right, she's an agent at least."

"Then you think Fiore is wise to the game?" the detective addressed him in turn. "I thought he posed as Albini's friend?"

"And I think posed is the right word to use," Jimmy retorted. "I admit I've a bull-headed prejudice against the man, Milano; but I'd like to get inside his office for about ten minutes and see just what I could find. It might help a lot on this case."

The Italian glanced up quickly. "And that might not be such a bad idea, either," he replied in a tone of deep consideration.

Jimmy chuckled. "If it could be properly worked."

Milano frowned into his mirror while he knotted his tie. After that he extracted a short black cigar from a case and set it alight. He sat down on the tumbled bed.

"Why not turn in a fake call on Fiore and make use of his absence?" he said.

Gordon's face glowed. Abruptly he slapped his knee.

"Fine!" he exclaimed. "But say! Wait. That gave me an idea, too. It's a dandy! I'll work it up and let you know. A phony call, eh? Would he fall for it, do you think?"

"Why not?" he detective rejoined. "He expects to be called any time. Hello! There goes the phone."

He sprang up and answered the call, listened closely for a minute, thanked the invisible speaker, and put the receiver carefully back on the hook.

"The other man's name was Raffaele Baroni," he announced as he turned from the phone. "Now I'm going to start out at once. Meet me about three o'clock at the station. If what you suspect should prove right, we'll frame up a call and get into Fiore's office. He stays there till four, anyway, so we'll have time enough after three."

"Then I'm going to the office," said Jimmy. "And Frank's going to the Rockefeller Institute to see a savant. Where can I get you if I want you, doc?" He rose.

"I'll be at my office about three," replied Conlon. "You can get me on the phone."

They left the room together, Milano going his way, and leaving Conlon and Jimmy to stroll on until Gordon turned off toward the office of the *Globe*.

Swinging in from the street, he almost collided with a man coming down the stairs. As he avoided the collision he recognized Edgar, one of the best men on the paper when he could let the bottle alone.

To-day his face showed plainly that he had failed in the attempt. It was drawn and haggard, with flabby lips and pouches under the eyes. He was stumbling down with lowered head when he nearly bumped into Jimmy. He grunted a wordless greeting as he started to push by.

Gordon seized him by the arm. "Hold on! Where you goin'? What's the matter with you, anyway?" he questioned.

"I'm fired. Losh my job," said Edgar thickly. "Kelly jus' give me th' bounce. I'm goin' get nuther job, Jimmy. Leggo!"

"You look more like you ought to get a doctor," Gordon began and paused in the midst of his sentence. "Gad! A doctor!" he went on in a sudden tone of elation. "Why, look here; you're the very man I am looking for."

Edgar eyed him with suspicion. "Ish tha' so?" he mumbled. "Shay, Jimmy; wha's matter wish you? You been hittin' it, too?"

"No, you muddle-headed lollop!" said Gordon, tightening his hold on the other's arm. "I heard you were on a toot. Come back up-stairs till I get your job back for you."

Edgar shook a mournful head.

"No ush, Jimmy," he declared sadly. "Kelly talked it all over wish me. This is lasht time, Kelly says. Kelly's right, m'son; drink ish terrible thing."

He stumbled and mumbled as Gordon dragged him along, and finally

collapsed in tears and a chair at a desk in the local room.

Jimmy shrugged. "That's right. Weep some of it out of you," he directed and sought out Kelly himself.

The latter nodded as he came in. "Any progress?" he demanded.

"Lots." Gordon told him what had developed during the night, and rapidly outlined his new theories. At the end he brought up the matter of Edgar.

And Kelly shook his head. "No, Jimmy; it's thirty for that stew. I told him how it would be if he fell off again. I fired him not ten minutes ago."

"I know you did," said Gordon. "That's why I brought him back. Hire him again, Kelly."

"*You* brought him back?" Kelly was plainly surprised.

"Yes. He's out in the room, weeping remorseful and bibulous tears. But you see I need him."

"Take him," said Kelly. "I don't mind. But whad'je mean?"

"Look here!" Jimmy leaned an arm on the editor's desk and bent nearer. "Suppose he jumps in and helps me clear up this business. Would you take the poor zob back? Honest, I need a sick man this afternoon and evening, and Ed sure does look sick."

"You need a sick man?" repeated Kelly. "On the level? Put me wise."

"Sure. If we find out what we think about those hospital cases, we've got to get into this Fiore's office. I want a sick man to send the doctor to see, somewhere around four o'clock. Grab it?"

Kelly nodded. He considered.

"Go call him in," he decided, and when Edgar shuffled to a chair he swung on him in rapid speech. Briefly he turned him over to Gordon's direction. If he made good he could come back to work.

Gordon seized his man by the arm, cut short his attempts at thanks, and ran him to a lunch counter to fill him up with black coffee. "Get it into you," he admonished. "You've got to get sober enough to understand what I say."

Near the end of the second cup Edgar began to brighten up to an extent. He turned to Jimmy and smiled faintly. "Just what is the game now, old horse? What have I got to do?"

"Play sick, for one thing," said Jimmy.

"I *am* sick. If that's all, my job is a cinch." Edgar drank more coffee.

For a moment Jimmy knit his brows.

"You're going over to Brooklyn," he instructed at length. "Get a room—any sort of a room, so long as you get it in a house with a phone. And don't fall down on this, Ed. It means a lot. It may mean life and death to a girl, and maybe to several men." Sinking his voice, he gave a hurried outline of the matter. "You can see why I want you now, I guess," he said.

Edgar nodded, signaled a waiter, and ordered some soft-boiled eggs. "I'll need 'em to go to bed on," he explained. "When I'm drinking I don't eat much, so I'm empty. I get this room, and then what do I do?"

"Phone me the address and the telephone number and get into bed. About three thirty I'll call you. If I say 'Go ahead,' you phone a call to this Fiore. If he says he'll come over, call me up at the Bend Station and let me know. When he gets there hold him as long as you can, and that's all, I guess."

Edgar nodded understandingly. "I'm hep. All right, I'll be decoy. I sure want my job again."

Jimmy assented with a grin.

The waiter brought the eggs, and Edgar ate them. When they were gone he slipped from the stool and stood up.

"Now," he announced, "I shall go get me a room and lie down. When I get it I'll phone you. Where will you be?"

"At the office," said Jimmy. "I'll

hang on and off till you get me. Come on, now. I'll put you on a car."

CHAPTER X.

The Last Link.

AT three o'clock Gordon walked into the station in Mulberry Bend and found Milano chatting with the officer on the desk.

The two men found chairs.

"Your hunch was all right," the detective announced. "Both Marini and Baroni were men who had been asked for money, and both of them had refused the demands. Marini was told to give up or take the consequences, and he told the police.

"He was sent to Bellevue by Fiore and died. I had more trouble with the Baroni matter, but I found out at last that he, too, had been blackmailed until he grew frantic and rebelled. He, also, died in Fiore's hands.

"I got a line on the Carlino woman as well. She worked in Marini's family for some time before he was taken sick. So there you are. We'd better plan to get into Fiore's office. You said you had an idea on that matter. How about it?"

"I've still got it," said Jimmy. "It's name is Edgar, and he's a sick man, all right. He's planted in a room over in Brooklyn right now. If I call him up he'll ask Fiore to see him and let us know the results. What do you think?"

"Good stuff!" exclaimed Milano. "A real case is better than a plant. Go tell him to get busy right away."

Gordon walked to the desk and called the Brooklyn number which Edgar, true to promise, had phoned him at the *Globe*. When he was answered he asked to have Edgar summoned, and waited until his lieutenant replied.

"It's go ahead," he advised when he was sure that Edgar was speaking. "Let me know here at the station as soon as you find out." Ringing off, he tried to get Conlon's office, but could obtain no reply.

He came back to his seat by Milano, his round face lighted with the scent of the coming adventure. "We'll know pretty soon if it works," he remarked as he resumed his chair.

While they waited, the plain-clothes man outlined his plans still further.

"You remember the brother of the man who was killed at the bank last night? He's worked as a telephone lineman off and on for a couple of years. I had him brought in and sent him out to a few electrical shops to get a few little things.

"We may not find out what we expect in Fiore's office, so I thought up another way of getting at him. I had one of my boys look up the building where the office is. The suite over the office is empty, and I rented it at once.

"It can be reached by either the stairs in front or by a fire-escape from the alley. I gave Giovanni the key. He's going up there after four o'clock, get into the rooms, and fix a trap for our man. In that way one of our men can watch him all the time he's in the office, if we don't get what we want to-day. Giovanni will get himself up like a telephone installer and pretend he's come up to set a phone if anybody asks his business—"

"Gordon," bawled the sergeant from his station, "phone!"

Jimmy jumped for his call and fairly jammed the receiver to his ear. For a moment he listened intently and then gave vent to a chuckle. "Hold him as long as you can," he said quickly, in reply. "Thanks awfully, Ed. Good-by."

"Fiore is leaving for Brooklyn at a quarter past four," he announced as he came back to Milano.

"And your friend Conlon is coming in at the door," the detective replied.

Gordon turned in surprise to find that he was right. Frank had entered the station and now stood glancing anxiously about. In a moment he

spied the two he sought and came rapidly back to where they were sitting. Jimmy saw that his eyes were snapping, and he seemed in haste.

Taking a chair, he drew it close.

"I didn't wait for you to call me," he explained to Jimmy. "I thought I'd better come down here and see you before I went up to Albini's—"

"Albini's?" Jimmy interrupted. "What are you going over there for? We're going into Fiore's office. Come along."

Frank shook his head. "No." His voice held a suppressed excitement.

"You fellows go ahead, and I hope you find out what you are after. I've got to go Francesca. Of course I want you to get these fellows if you can; but whether you do or not, I'm not going to delay longer in doing what I can for that little girl.

"You see, we've found the cause of the disease since I left you. You don't know anything about it, but this disease has been a puzzle to the profession for some time. The chap I went over to see this morning went right back to the office with me and we went to work.

"We found out. Of course, some one must have known it before and kept still. Fiore probably knew it, all right. But we proved the case on this fly as the cause. The real cause, though, is what is called spirillum, something like that which causes the relapsing fever of western Russia.

"The fly is the carrier merely. Being caused by a spirillum, which we found in my incubator-tube, it should be cured by the same sort of drugs which affect the Russian disease.

"I've just bought a supply and I'm going up and give it to Francesca. I telephoned Albini I was coming and told him to keep it still. And here's something funny. Albini told me that their new maid, this Maria, got a telephone message to-day.

"She said some of her people were sick and she left. He phoned Fiore about it, and he advised them to get back their old girl Marrietta. Now go catch your criminals if you can. I'm going to save that girl's life."

He thrust a hand into his pocket and drew out a glass ampoule filled with a golden yellow powder. "See! The discovery of Erlich. The famous 914."

Milano nodded and glanced at the clock. "They're going to act to-night," he decided. "That's why they got Maria out of the way. All right, maybe we'll do a little acting, too. When are you going up there?"

"Now." Conlon rose and picked up a small black bag from the floor.

"When you get there," Milano went on, "tell Albini to appear to yield to anything they demand from now on. Unless I'm mistaken they'll act quick now. I don't believe they really meant to kill the girl.

"I think they just meant to throw a scare into Albini and then let Fiore give her this same stuff you've got. Your action may be premature, but I guess we've got to risk it.

"Better the girl's life than a pinch. Still, if we can keep them guessing a few hours, we'll land. You stick around up there and keep dark till you hear from us. Run along now and good luck."

"All right," Conlon accepted. "I'll tell Albini, and you can bet I'll stick around." He went rapidly toward the street.

Milano glanced back again at the clock. "Five minutes past four," he remarked. "Suppose we walk up the street and see if Fiore sets out."

Gordon and he left the station and went up to the corner of Elm.

From there they witnessed the departure of the physician, driving his high-powered car. As it lost itself in the traffic, Milano again got into motion. The two men went directly to the stairs which led up to Fiore's office and mounted to the second floor.

The detective tried the door.

It was locked. With a glance about to see if he was observed, he drew

out a ring filled with keys and began a deft attempt to gain an entrance. The third key thrust back the old-fashioned ward and the door swung before him.

"Come on," he whispered to Jimmy, and led the way inside.

There was nothing of suspicion to be seen. The place was merely a reception-room, not more than ordinarily well furnished, beyond which an open door gave a glimpse of a private office.

Milano carefully closed the door they had opened and went straight into the inner office. At once he attacked a roll-top desk, using his skeleton keys on its drawers and mouthing short exclamations of disgust as he got them open and found nothing to reward his trouble.

Still he persisted to the end, running through the contents of each in a businesslike haste. In the end he put everything back and made all fast with his keys.

Meanwhile Jimmy had himself been poking about.

Almost at the first he had been attracted by a series of letter-file boxes ranged on the top of an ordinary safe. While Milano ransacked the drawers he took these down one by one and began a hasty examination of their contents.

Badly handicapped as he was by his scanty knowledge of Italian, he still persisted until toward the last he found one written in Spanish, and dated: "Lima, Peru."

His sudden exclamation straightened Milano from the drawers, which he was even then relocking. Jimmy extended the letter toward him, and he took it in his hand.

A moment later he lifted a face of positive exultation to Gordon. "It's in Spanish, but I can read it," he explained. "Italian and Spanish are a good deal alike. Now listen to this:

"ESTEEMED SENORE:

"I am sending more of the flies. Sorry the last arrived in poor condition. Recently I find that I can in a measure offset climatic effects upon them by keeping them under bell glasses from which a very little air has been exhausted.

"These must be frequently changed. Should you prove your interesting theory in regard to this disease, no doubt the discovery of Erlich will have at least a beneficial effect upon this human scourge in our several departments. Myself I shall try it on the next case I need to attend.

"Permit me to again assure you of my great interest in your work and my desire to cooperate in any possible way. *Senor adios.*

"PASQUELE MADURO,
"Lima Hospitale General."

The two men looked at each other. "That's enough," said Milano, as he thrust the letter back into the file and carefully noted its listing. "Well, put this back where we found it and—"

Fiore's phone began to ring.

Both men started. Very slowly the detective replaced the file on the safe, and stood waiting till the ringing was repeated. Of a sudden his face set into firm lines of determination.

With a quick step he returned to the desk where the instrument sat, picked it up, and answered the call.

The rumble of a bass voice came faintly to Gordon's ears. Across Milano's face flitted an odd change of expressions, verging from unbelieving surprise to amazed comprehension and ultimate understanding. At the last he thrust his mouth close to the phone and replied shortly as one under the need of caution.

He set down the phone.

He whirled on the waiting reporter. "Luck! Unbelievable luck!" he cried. "Some one just phoned to Fiore that Giorgio would be up here at ten to close up the 'case of the flies.' Now, then, what would that be, unless the Albini affair?

"Now we know they'll do something to-night. And we know Fiore is in on the deal. I disguised my voice and told them that I understood, but couldn't talk now. And I think my

answer got by. Now let's get upstairs and see if Giovanni is through. We will want what he's fixing to-night. There's no longer any doubt."

Strangely elated, they slipped from the office, relocked its door, and went on up the stairs to the floor above. There Milano tapped on a door, corresponding to that of the office below.

It was opened by Giovanni in person, rigged out with a belt from which hung various pliers and tweezers and a loop of insulated wire.

The room itself was dusty and utterly bare. In its center a board was sawed through to form a narrow opening in the floor. Peering through it Gordon could see that Piccolo had cut out a couple of lath from the ceiling over the office, chipped away some of the plaster, and placed a small bit of apparatus in the socket he had made.

It rested almost on the paper of the ceiling of Fiore's private office.

From it some wires, equipped with receivers, led up and lay upon the floor. Giovanni noticed their eager inspection of his work and reassured them with a smile. "It is finished, *signori*. Me, I could hear. In the office you talk, but now. The telephone rang below. Am I right?"

"You're right. Good work, Giovanni," nodded Milano. "To-night, then, we'll hear what they say. We'll get in after dark, by the back way. I'll have two men stationed across the street.

"At a sign from an electric torch they'll take Fiore's place from in front, while we drop down from here. Now let's get out. We've been here about an hour, and that's as long as is safe.

"If Giorgio keeps his date, we'll gather him in all right. It's between five and six now. Meet me at the station at eight. When Fiore gets back I'll have to phone him that message. We want him here to-night."

Taking the key from Giovanni, Milano locked the door and they passed down to the street.

There the two Italians left Gordon, and he went back to report his adventures to Kelly. Still later he went out to a little café, and had a bite to eat.

But all through the meal his thoughts were busy with what was about to happen, with now and then a question as to how far Frank had been able to benefit the girl.

CHAPTER XI.

Shots in the Dark.

BY eight he was back at the station, to find Milano waiting, and Giovanni with him, his dark face drawn and tense.

For a good half-hour they waited while the twilight deepened into darkness. In fact, eight thirty had passed before they at last set out.

Back of the building they sought was a rubbish-littered alley, into which they turned. Creeping along it they hugged close in its shadow till Giovanni, in the lead, pointed up to the rungs of a fire-escape directly over their heads.

In a leap he went up, caught the lower rung and swung himself catlike to a foothold, disappearing upward along the face of the wall.

Jimmy gave Milano a lift, and saw him begin to climb. Flexing his legs, he sprang upward twice before his fingers succeeded in grasping the iron. With a struggle he finally drew himself up on the ladder and followed the other two.

He found them waiting before an open window on the third floor. Motioning him to remove his shoes, Milano rose and climbed slowly through the window into the hall.

For a time they stood listening acutely for any sign that their movements had been detected, then treading warily in the darkness, they crept down the hall toward the front.

Very slowly Milano unlocked the door of their room, pushed it open ar

held it from swinging, while his companions slipped through; then closed it again.

Fairly creeping, they stole to the opening in the floor and crouched down. Jimmy groped for the receivers, found one and lifted it to his ear.

Milano imitated his actions, after lowering himself to the floor. Giovanni, armed with an electric flash, went over and waited by the window to give the agreed upon signal at a word.

Followed the tension of waiting.

Once Jimmy heard the sound of restless pacing of the floor below; once the sound of running water came up to his ears. That was all, but it told him that some one waited the unknown Giorgio's coming in the room beneath that where they sat.

By and by Milano drew his watch and flashed his own torch upon it. Gordon saw that it lacked but a scant five minutes of ten.

Still sitting crouched in the darkness, they listened with growing intentness, which found its reward at last. Abruptly, it seemed, a door opened below them. "*Buono notte,* Giorgio," spoke Fiore's voice.

"Good evening, doctor," some one replied.

"There has been a blunder," the last speaker went on. "What know you of it, *signore?*"

"A blunder!" exclaimed Fiore. "But surely you are mistaken. I know of no blunder. Explain what you mean."

"I mean what I say," said the other, "and I am never mistaken, Fiore. I cannot afford to be. If there has not been some error, how then does it come that a man answering the description of this Dr. Franklin went to Albini's house this afternoon; is there even now?"

"At Albini's? But that is impossible, Giorgio. As you ordered I sent Maria away this afternoon 'tis true, but I spoke to Albini not an hour later than six this evening and he said nothing, save that the girl was the same."

"Nothing is impossible," said the other. "Though I sent Maria away I had the house watched. Perhaps Albini mistrusts you. At least I know what I know. For a moment I was minded not to come here. I sent a note to Albini but now. I offered him the cure of his daughter and the return of his papers for a price—what we asked.

"If he accepts he will go to his bank at eleven, and get the money. He will take it to a place I mentioned and place it on a table in a room.

"He will drive to a different place, and there he will find the box of papers and the name of the drug on a table in another room. But I fear we are overplayed in this, Fiore.

"Our man saw this Franklin enter Albini's with a medical bag in his hand. But now the messenger who took the note saw our agent, and he says the doctor has not left. Albini does not mention his presence to you.

"Albini suspects your good faith. Yet further, I have had a search made for this Franklin, and find no physician of his name and description in town. How now, Fiore, do you say?"

"At first I admit I was suspicious of him," said Fiore. "In the end he seemed a very mediocre chap. *Dios!* He may even be an agent of the police."

"Exactly. One cannot be too suspicious in our business, Saverio. How was the girl when last you saw her?"

"Bad, Giorgio. Come, if we must fail, at least let me save her life. I was present at her birth, and I love her."

"Fail," cried the other. "Thou fool, do you think we shall fail? This Albini shall yield. He must. 'Tis the one way to save the girl's life, as I mentioned in my note, unless— Stay! Do you fancy this Franklin could know her disease and the cure? Was he really a physician? Did he seem to possess medical knowledge at all?"

"No. Rather he agreed at once with everything I said. I laid that to his inexperience and a certain embarrassment in my presence, however—"

"The devil!" an exclamation cut into his remarks. "Fiore, your conceit may prove your undoing some day. Now that would have made me suspicious."

"Not if you had seen the fellow, Giorgio."

"Enough," Giorgio returned. "Peppo will be here at eleven to get the box of papers. You have it?"

"In my safe yonder."

"We will wait and see then," said Giorgio. "If Albini leaves his house for his bank, he will be watched. If he goes to the bank, Peppo will come. I was in luck to get you when I phoned you just after four. I feared you might be gone."

"After four? It was nearer to seven," Fiore corrected.

"See here," said the other shortly, "do you think I know nothing of my actions? Am I so unmethodical as that? I say I called you between four and five, because I was engaged until then and unable to reach you sooner."

"But *Dios!* I was not here. I was in Brooklyn with a patient." Excitement and something like fear spoke in the physician's tone. "When I returned a little before seven, some one called and told me to expect you at ten."

"You speak the truth?" Giorgio demanded.

"On my honor."

"Then are we fools. We sit inside of a trap. Be quick, Saverio, and get the papers. I cannot remain here longer. In some way we are betrayed. Wait till I find out by whom, and some one shall most surely die."

The sound of a chair pushed aside came up from below and was followed by rapid steps.

Milano sprang to his feet, with a low word to Giovanni. The ray of a flashlight darted into the night three times. Milano broke into low toned instruction. "Piccolo, go back to the rear. Go down the fire escape and guard the second floor window. You, Gordon, come with me."

He tore open the door and dashed into the hall.

At the head of the stairs, Jimmy was at his heels. They raced down. A sound of running feet came to them from the street. The outer door of Fiore's office was closed. Milano flung his shoulder crashing against it.

It splintered from the lock, and they dashed inside. In a rush they crossed the outer office, reached the second door and wrenched it open. On the near side of Fiore's desk they paused. Milano's hand came up, holding a short black weapon.

"*Signori,*" he cried, "you are under arrest. Put up your hands, quickly, or I shall fire! We listened from the room above and heard all you said."

Two men appeared before the doctor's safe, the door of which swung wide. Fiore himself was kneeling, his hand thrust into the interior of the safe. Beside him stood a taller and larger man.

Even as Milano spoke, the latter's hand came swiftly around, and appeared to emit a spitting stab of flame. The next instant his other hand had darted toward a switch by the safe on the wall, and the glowing electrics died.

Gordon leaped forward. In that second before darkness came down he had fixed the position of the men by the safe.

Despite a second spurt of fire from their direction, he now hurled himself toward where Fiore knelt. Groping with outstretched hands, he found a slender, wire-taut body, clutched it, and clung, searching for its throat.

Milano had answered the first shot, firing blindly at the spot where he had seen the taller of the two men standing. A second later he was hurled aside by the flying impact of a body, clutched frantically at it, and staggered dizzily back.

Whirling, he ran for the outer room, only to see the man he pursued leap before him into the hall.

There arose from without a sound of shouting, then again the report of a shot. Flinging himself toward the door of the office, the detective arrived in time to see his quarry half-way down the hall, pistol raised, confronting the two patrolmen who had run up from the street.

Even as he took in the situation and raised his own weapon to chance a shot, the man fired.

One of the officers spun dizzily and fell. Turning, the man ran down the hall to the rear. Though Milano and the remaining officer fired after, he reached the window apparently unhit and leaped through to the fire-escape.

At once came the sound of a struggle, of a low-toned exclamation, of blows, and a groan trailing off into silence—then a laugh.

A figure reappeared at the open window. It bore another body in its arms. This it flung inward, to fall on the floor of the passage, and drew back again into the darkness.

And out of that darkness floated a strident, triumphant laugh.

Milano turned on his men. "Fools! Incompetents!" he fumed. "Why did you not seize him? But for your blundering slowness we would have had that man."

"He hit us before we knew he was coming," said the unwounded one of the two. The other contented himself with sitting on the floor and nursing his shattered arm. The detective turned from them in disgust. "Go see to the man on the floor," he ordered, indicating Giovanni's body. Without further words he turned back into Fiore's rooms.

Contrary to Jimmy's expectations, the man he had seized after a first involuntary resistance made no further effort at escape.

Instead he stood passive, while the sounds from the hall told of the battle and escape. As Milano's rage-filled accents reached them from the hall, he chuckled slightly and spoke. "If you will permit me, *signore,* I shall put back on the light."

"I've a gun, and I'll shoot if you try to get funny," Gordon cautioned, releasing his hold.

"I really shall attempt nothing," the other promised, reached up, and turned the switch.

The light flooded the room and showed Jimmy with gun in hand to Milano, just reaching the door. "At least," the detective remarked to Fiore, "we've managed to lay hands on you."

The doctor bowed slightly and smiled. "But not for long, let us hope."

"That," said Milano, sneering, "depends upon the judge."

"You seem certain of conviction?" Again the doctor smiled.

"Why not?" The detective half leaned on the desk. "We can prove that you had the flies."

"Ah!" Fiore's long lids narrowed. "And how, if one may inquire?"

"By that letter-file on your safe. The one marked 'M Private.'" This time Milano smiled.

"You seem to have an intimate acquaintance with my office," said Fiore.

"And," the plain-clothes man continued, "we know you had the Carlino woman take them up to Albini's house."

"Then," Fiore made comment, "she will doubtless be arrested, too?"

"We'll get her if we want her."

Fiore bowed. "Doubtless. You are so clever. But suppose we sit down. Now, do you think you will be able to convict on that evidence alone?"

Milano nodded. "Sure we'll convict."

"But, no, *signore,*" Fiore contradicted. "See: I admit I had some little insects sent me from Peru. How does that concern this Albini?"

"You sent 'em up there so that Miss Albini would take a disease from their bite."

"I sent them? But how do you expect to prove that, *signore?*"

"By the Carlino woman."

"Has she said so? Have you asked her, *signore?* Are you really not premature?"

"She'll say it, all right, before we get done with her, Fiore," the detective growled.

"But she has not done so yet then, *signore?*" Again Fiore smiled.

Milano turned to Gordon. "You keep him covered, damn him, while I send out an alarm for that girl. Fiore, I'll use your own phone."

Fiore held up a hand. "Wait! Some one is at the door," he said.

CHAPTER XII.

All's Well That Ends Well.

SOME one *was* rapping on the office door. Milano crossed to answer and confronted the unwounded of the two officers in company with a small, wizened-faced boy.

"Th' kid's askin' for you, sir," said the policeman.

Milano eyed the lad sharply. "What do you want?" he inquired.

Without words the urchin extended a hand, clutching a folded paper, waited until the detective took it, turned with a quick, writhing motion, and ran like a shadow back into the hall.

Milano frowned slightly, shook his head at the officer's motion to follow, and came back after closing the door. He held up the note and addressed Fiore directly: "Do you know what this thing is?"

A half-contemptuous smile twitched the physician's saturnine face. "How should I, *signore?* Yet, in a way, I might hazard a guess perhaps."

Milano scowled darkly, drew a chair somewhat nearer the light, and sat down.

He unfolded the note. Still without comment he began to read. And as he read the scowl on his features deepened and his hand clenched down on the paper until it was drawn out of shape. At the end he threw it to Jimmy and sat back in his chair with a curse.

His eyes came up and narrowed as they met Fiore's smile. "Clever—oh, devilish clever!" he rasped. "Fiore, the devil is said to take care of his own, and you're one of his favorite sons, to judge by the looks of this."

"A thousand thanks," responded the physician. "Your words, in a measure, relieve my sense of suspense."

Meanwhile, Jimmy was reading the note, while his eyes fairly popped from his head.

SIGNORE:

A pawn for a pawn. In other words, a fair exchange of prisoners of war. Permit me to congratulate you upon almost performing a clever bit of work, which inspires a certain sense of admiration for the brain which brought it about. On second thought, you had best give the major credit to the young reporter who told you where to find what you sought. Some day I shall hope to meet him. I admire a good brain, and one which can deduce facts from small leadings.

Now, signore, to business.

You hold Fiore, and will no doubt try to take the Carlino girl. Also, if you listened to my conversation with Fiore, you know the location of the safety box. Signore, release Saverio and trouble not the woman, while you keep the box.

In return we will declare a truce on the Albini affair, and all parties concerned in the same. Allow me to advise you to be satisfied with having forced "La Mano" to suggest a compromise.

If you should not then accept my assurance, then all parties concerned on your side shall die. There is but one reason why we make this proposal to you, and that is that we always seek to protect our loyal servants as surely as we punish a disloyalty in them.

Give my regards to Mr. James Gordon. Thanks to him you almost had me, but—an inch of a miss—doubtless you know the rest.

If Fiore telephones me within the hour that he is free, I shall keep my promise to the letter, and Albini and his shall be permanently exempt from me. If you accept this will be his authority for surrendering the box of papers and giving such advi-

as will save the life of the girl. If not—to the death, signore—to the death.

GIORGIO,
Capo, d' La Mano Nera.

Gordon flipped the paper to Fiore, and for the first time in hours he grinned.

"Checkmate!" said he, with a chuckle. "Fiore, I agree with Milano that the thing is actually clever. I've sure got to hand it to George for a speedy actor. It takes some going to knock out four men, make a getaway, concoct this note and get it back here in something like thirty minutes. I've a profound respect for Georgie's think box, and that goes as it lays. I won't renege even if he is one of the blackest scoundrels yet unhung. And you can tell him I said so, too."

Fiore bowed gravely.

"I shall do so, Signor Gordon. Your words will afford him genuine pleasure. He admires greatly a clever mind, as he says."

Milano cut in. "Well, then you win, as you always do, it seems. But at least, Fiore, it was a mighty near thing." He looked at his watch. "May I use your phone and see if Albini has gone to his bank?"

"But with pleasure," Fiore assented, and turned to Gordon with a question. "*Signore,* tell me, is this friend of yours, this so styled Franklin a member of my profession or not?"

"He's a doctor all right," said Jimmy with a grin. "You didn't fool him for a holy minute, Fiore. But he slipped one over on you."

"I admit it," said the Italian, bowing. "Yet bear with me farther a moment. Did he, perhaps, do something for Francesca's benefit to-day?"

"He gave her Erlich's 914 to-day, if that's what you mean," Jimmy replied.

"Thank God!" Fiore's voice vibrated with actual feeling. The expression of his face underwent a change.

"You may think it most strange to hear me say that, Mr. Gordon, but between man and man, this has been the hardest service I ever rendered La Mano. At heart, I have ever been Albini's friend.

"Francesca I have known since a child. Hence no matter what I have done, I rejoice that she now may grow well. My sole excuse for my acts is, that when ordered to perform, we of La Mano obey—or failing in that we die." He lay back in his chair. His chest rose and fell in a sign of one who had run and is tired.

Milano hung up the phone. "He's gone," he announced. "Come on Gordon. We'll go over there and tell him all bets are off." He rose.

Fiore also left his chair. "In telling, will it be necessary to mention my name, Milano? Now that the feud is dead, may I not hope to remain his friend?"

"You may hope; I will tell him the truth," Milano replied with a snarl.

For the last time Fiore bowed. "No matter," he said. "This, of course, means my leaving the city. *Signori,* good night."

"An' that box of papers goes with me," said Milano, and strode toward the safe. Removing the safety deposit box, he tucked it under his coat. Leaving Fiore still standing, he jerked his head to Jimmy and went out.

The unwounded officer still stood on guard. His fellow and Giovanni, who had recovered from his stunning, were waiting to be removed. Milano spoke shortly to them, and turned down the stairs to the street.

At the bank they found Albini faithful to his orders to yield any demand, packing bundles of bills in a satchel. They told him the matter was ended, and received his tearful thanks.

"That's all right," said Jimmy, cutting into his expostulations of undying gratitude. "What I want now is your phone. I want to call up Conlon. I suppose he's still up at your house?"

"But yes, *signore.* He is with my dear daughter. Wait, and I shall unlock my private room."

"And how is Miss Francesca?"

Jimmy inquired as he sat down at the phone on Albini's desk.

"Better, the good God be praised," smiled Albini. "The good saints bless you for your assistance, and that of your friend, the *signore* doctor."

"Forget it. It's part of the day's work in my line," said Gordon, as he called Albini's number into the phone. When he got it he asked for Conlon, and waited until Frank's voice called: "Hello."

"Hello, yourself!" growled Jimmy. "You can pack up and get out now. The game's called off, and we're giving out rain checks. How's the patient?"

"Fine!" Conlon told him in a voice of immense elation. "She stood the injection fine, and is rallying superbly. She's a woman in a thousand. She'll get well. And say Jim, old boy, you can congratulate me. If you want to."

"Sure do," Jimmy barked back. "It was mighty speedy work."

"Yes, wasn't it?" laughed his distant friend on the wire. "I only saw her last night, and to-night she's my promised wife. I—"

"Your what!" gasped Gordon. "Say! Hold on! I thought you were talking about your handling of the case. Why, you blessed old Romeo, you. Wait till I can mitt you and I'll pull a wing off. Oh, Lord!"

He jammed up the receiver and swung round on Albini. "Say, mister man, did you know that crazy man I brought over to your place was going to marry your daughter?"

Albini smiled broadly and nodded. "*Si signore*—that is to say—yes. You see they love each other. They—"

"Oh don't apologize," said Jimmy. "But—Lord! Things sure have moved this last day. I think I'll go over and see if the *Globe* is still where I left it, about eight o'clock."

"And so," he remarked as he laid his copy on Kelly's desk around two o'clock, "that's all there is to it. Fiore's going to jump town, and, of course the Carlino woman will be got out of the way, too. In a way we raised quite a rough house with Georgie's plans. In fact, we came blamed near getting Georgie's goat. Some day—oh, well, maybe some day we will get his goat—who knows?"

"That reminds me," said Kelly. "About twelve o'clock a messenger brought a package and a note up here for you. Where is it? Oh, yes, there on the end of the desk."

Gordon picked up a little square parcel and a letter, and in silence opened the first. It proved to be a diminutive box.

Then, as the cover came off, he whistled softly in surprise. Nestled down in a soft filler of cotton, was a tiny golden hand. Out of its palm, there blazed in fiery brilliance, the flashing of a pure red stone.

He turned for explanation to the note, ripped it rapidly open and read:

SIGNORE GORDON.

SIR: Permit me to send a memento of a somewhat exciting game. As they say in chess, of which you appear to know something, You played a very good gambit, even though circumstances did produce what you yourself described as a "checkmate."

Signore, I always admire one who fights well, and loses with a laugh. Also, I enjoy a foeman worthy of my steel. Such things add zest to life. The little pendant is something I give only to those who serve me greatly or furnish me a major pleasure. You necessarily come in the latter class.

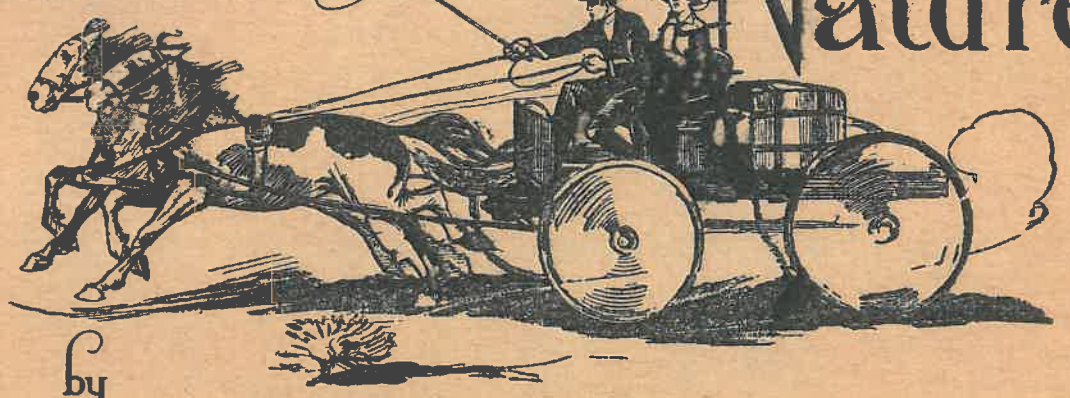
Perhaps we shall some day become engaged again. You do not impress me as one to lie down in a game. Should such a thing be as our crossing swords again it will add interest to the episode for me. Doubtless you feel the same. Till then, *signore,* accept my sincere expressions of respect.

GIORGIO.

Gordon slapped it down on the desk. His round, youthful face stretched into an unrestrained grin. His china blue eyes began to sparkle. "Read it," said he. "It's a challenge, Kelly—a challenge. But it'll have to wait. Just now I'm going to bed."

(The end.)

One Touch of Nature



by May Belleville Brown

EVELYN WHITNEY stretched her weary body on the springless bed, and longed for her little cell-like chamber in the Settlement House.

Was it three days or three years ago that she had fared away on her Great Adventure—the quest which was to end out where the continent, on its upward sweep from the Mississippi Valley to the Rocky Mountains, had flung the Great Plains toward the burning sun?

Tired she was, in body and mind, for as a climax to the three days of railroad travel there had been a long ride in a creaking buckboard, behind a span of leaping, plunging mustangs.

Too tired, almost, to greet Garth Garrett, her missionary lover, to realize that her months of longing for his physical presence were over and that she once more felt the touch of his hungry arms and lips, and heard his tender voice, or to care when he told her that their marriage must be delayed for several days, pending the delayed arrival of a brother missionary from the South.

She had a dizzy memory of being led into a farm house kitchen, of shaking hands with a sunburnt family, of mounting a ladder-like stairway to a cubby-hole under the eaves, where she was left with a candle so dim that it served but to accentuate the darkness, as with trembling hands she disrobed for the night.

Below her she heard for a time the creaking of floors and clumping of feet. Then the only sounds were the horses stamping outside, and the buzzing and sawing of myriads of unknown insects.

She missed the countless voices of the city, and the deep silence seemed to speak of impending calamity. A lump rose in her throat, and her smarting eyelids told her that tears were coming—and then she was wide awake, and a voice downstairs was calling:

"'S five o'clock. Git up!"

The light was coming dimly through the little window in the peak of the roof, and she looked about her. A home-made bedstead, equipped, so her aching bones told her, with a straw-stuffed mattress, and a wooden chair which served as a candle stand were the only pieces of furniture; two pine boxes, evidently used for storage, and several garments hanging from the rafters comprised the furnishing and adornment of the room.

Not even a wash bowl or mirror was in sight.

Evelyn had worked among the poor of a great city and knew every phase of extreme poverty and squalor, yet she had for her own use the conveniences possible in a great city. It was her first attempt at making her toilet without water or a mirror, but she finally succeeded.

Then, feeling very grubby, with her unwashed hands and face, she crept carefully down the narrow tunnel of stairs.

The kitchen, which was also living and dining room, was empty, except for a plump woman standing over the stove. The table, covered with a red and white cloth, was set in a haphazard way, each white plate turned upside down over its own steel knife and fork. A plate heaped with thick slices of bread, and another with a mountain of softening butter, was in sight.

The woman shoved the skillet back on the stove and came forward.

"Good mornin', Miss Whitney," she said, holding out her hand. In spite of her sunburnt hair and skin and her faded wrapper, she was pleasant to look upon because of her friendliness. "I'm Mrs. Stoner. I suppose you were so beat out last night you couldn't remember any of us. How'd you sleep?"

"Very well, thank you," answered Evelyn, forcing a pale little smile. "I was too tired to do otherwise."

"You'll want to wash, I reckon," volunteered her hostess. "You'll find everything on the bench outside the door."

The well, with windlass and high curb, was close to the door, while just beyond it was a watering trough, hewn out of a log. The ground surrounding the well was roughly paved with stone, where many tiny pools had formed from the splashing buckets.

Here several chickens in the pinfeather stage were drinking, and a small black pig grunted to himself as he nosed about in the water, but scampered off with a frightened "oof!" when Evelyn stepped out.

Beside the door she found on a bench a pail of water, a dipper and tin wash basin, what looked like a chunk of granite, but was homemade soap, and, above, a towel made of half a grain sack, neatly hemmed and washed white and soft.

The family gathered for breakfast from their morning chores, Mr. Stoner, a tired, silent man, with a grown son, came from the barnyard, with brimming pails of milk; a barefooted boy wandered in from the pig pens, and a daughter, in her early teens, came from the garden with a basket of potatoes.

A platter of salt pork and a plate of fried eggs, with a pot of what proved to be bran coffee, had been added to the table equipment.

It was hard for Evelyn, whose breakfast was usually fresh fruit, delicately browned toast, and coffee of the finest, to swallow anything, but the Stoner family ate heartily, the younger members furtively watching their guest and Mrs. Stoner running freely to conversation.

Evelyn learned through this medium of information that the Stoners' was the only shingled roof in the neighborhood, the rest being thatched with prairie sod; that there were twenty children in the Pulpit Rock District and that they had five months of school when they could get a teacher; that all the new lands in that section of the country had been taken some years before by a colony from Indiana and Illinois, so that a number of the settlers were related, or old acquaintances, and that everybody in the valley loved Garth Garrett.

"Blessed man! He's so much better'n any of us, yet he acts common as an old shoe!" exclaimed Mrs. Stoner. "He's cheered up the old folks, put some go into us middle-agers, and some pride into the young people. And wherever he goes, there's little children hangin' onto his hands. Best

thing he's done for this valley, though, is to get into that crowd down at Happy Corners—all of them sort o' outlaws— and start to makin' men and women out of 'em."

The praise was sweet to Evelyn. This was the Garth Garrett she knew —the stalwart, militant young preacher who had come to the Settlement House from the Biblical institute near by, and, with the touch of fire on his lips and in his eyes, had won the "Berry Street Gang" from enmity to friendship.

This was the man for whom she had crossed half a continent.

"We're awful glad you've come," Mrs. Stoner assured her. "A man who works as hard as Mr. Garrett does needs a home, and some one to make him comfortable. I reckon we'll all be glad on our own account, Miss Whitney," she continued, with an approving look at the girl and her modish garb, "for you can bring us a little of back east.

"It makes a place seem awful far off when it takes days on the train and fifty miles of drivin' to hear from it. I hope you brought some new crochet and knittin' patterns. We are all put to it for something new to do when we do have a few spare minutes. We've traded 'round—Mrs. Andrews' fan edgin', Mrs. Skinner's shell pattern, my braided shams and and Mrs. Nelson's palm leaf tidy—until we all have the same things.

"And we need cookin' receipts, too. Of course, we've only got dry groceries and eggs and milk, and salt pork, but if we could get some new things to do with 'em, it wouldn't be so tiresome to cook and eat."

"I don't know much about such things," faltered Evelyn, "but I am sure I could get you some patterns and recipes. I've been so busy at the Settlement—you see, it's a neighborhood of very poor people, and we had classes and clubs, and tried to keep the children out of mischief and the men away from the saloons—"

"My, it must be awful to be poor in a city," commented Mrs. Stoner. "Well, you won't find our children in mischief here, they's too much to do. Nor our men in saloons, for they ain't none, and our men ain't that kind. But I guess you'll find enough to do to keep busy."

After the family had scattered to the day's work, Mrs. Stoner said:

"And now, I s'pose you want to see your new house. Mr. Garrett'll be up here soon, but it'd be nice for you to go down and surprise him. He's worked so hard buildin' it—helped quarry and haul the rock, as well as lay it up."

"Oh, yes, he has written about it, but I did not get a very good idea of it!" exclaimed Evelyn. "I know, though, that it must be a dear little cottage."

"You may not think it much of a house," warned Mrs. Stoner, "but it's as good as any in this new country, and I want to tell you that anywhere Mr. Garrett lives is plenty good enough for any one. Here, I'll show you."

She pulled the girl out on the step and pointed toward the river, which wound across the valley, a mile away.

"There, you go straight down that road, and it's a little stone house clost to the river. You can't see it from here, on account of sunflowers, but he built it down there so's you can have shade, while the rest of us sets out here in the boiling sun. They's a big cottonwood right over it, and a wide door stone, big enough for you both to set on, and back is a fine well—he had them dig below the river bed for that —and a little cave, to keep your butter and milk cool—but I'll not tell you any more."

Evelyn could not tell the woman that she had never walked a mile off paved streets in her life, and that the very solitude of that mile of road, hedged by sunflowers, was a terror to her, so she started blindly. Once out of sight she broke into a halting run.

She had heard and read of the

prairie, but even Garth's descriptive letters had given her no comprehension of the vastness of this billowy plain, dotted here and there with little houses and checkered with fields.

The August drought had turned the landscape to varying shades of brown, except where the narrow green ribbon of trees, which followed the river, threaded its way down the valley. A vast plain of silence, over which the sky fitted down to the horizon line like a great turquoise bowl—so deep and dense and cloudless a blue that her eyes, used to the short vistas of city streets, shrank from looking into it.

There were rustlings and chirpings in the weeds which terrified her, and once a great yellow grasshopper shot through the air with a whir, and almost struck her cheek.

Garth Garrett, choring about his little place to put it in final order for Evelyn's first visit, saw her coming down the road, stumbling, disheveled and panting, and ran to meet her.

"My little girl!" His arms were around her.

"I am so tired—and frightened," she sobbed, "and it was so far!"

"You should not have done it!" he reproached her tenderly. "I was coming up to see you in a few minutes. Mrs. Stoner did not realize that you cannot do these things yet."

He picked her up, and carrying her to the shade, seated her on the great door stone, where, with his arms still around her, he soothed and petted her until she was quiet and rested.

"But I want you to see your new home, dearest," he finally reminded her. "A thought of you went into every stroke of its building."

Evelyn rose and turned about to view the house—and her heart sank.

Was *this* the cottage of her dreams? A squat, one-story structure of native brown sandstone, with flat, sod-thatched roof and small, deep windows. Bare and unadorned, with not even a shade over the door, except for the gigantic cottonwood tree, and with short, crackling buffalo grass surrounding it!

"Next year we will shingle the roof," he assured her, fondly, "but this is snug and tight for the present."

Evelyn faltered an assent, and he drew her within doors.

Inside there were two rooms, both roughly plastered on the stone wall and white-washed. One was for kitchen and living room, much like that in the Stoner house. A stove, table, cupboard and three or four wooden chairs occupied one end of this, while the other end of the room held two rocking chairs, a bookcase and a small writing table.

A print of the Sistine Madonna hung over the book shelves, which supported a nickel alarm clock and Evelyn's photograph.

"Mrs. Wright, back in the hills, is weaving some rag rugs for both the rooms, and Mrs. Stoner is making me some muslin curtains," he informed her, with pride in his voice. "Then it will be complete."

The second room contained an iron bed, with mattress and springs, and a cottage bureau with small attached mirror, while the washstand held a plain white toilet set.

"I had the furniture hauled from Coyote Falls," he announced. "It is the most sumptuous bedroom between here and there, and every woman around here has looked longingly at it."

The life of service which Evelyn had planned to live after her marriage was from a pattern found in current fiction.

She had imagined Garth, his face illumined, his voice ringing with purpose, holding in his spell an audience of untamed, picturesque cowboys, or at least a congregation well sprinkled with educated exiles from the East. She felt that in this isolated country she would yet be surrounded by evidences of culture in her own home, with a pick of friends who might be unconventional, but yet would be worth

knowing—wealthy ranch owners, perhaps, or mining officials.

And through this throng, accompanied by applause, she would walk a Lady Bountiful, or an Angel of Mercy, to handsome and athletic humanity.

The romance which she had built was dropping away, and the city-bred girl was appalled at the bare and sordid life which stretched before her. She turned to tell Garth that she could not go on with it, and met his eyes—which could flash like steel-blue sword points, but now melted and softened as they rested upon her.

She could not parade her fears before the happiness in his face.

Three or four days went by, days in which she rode about with Garth, or, at the waiting home, gave herself up to the happiness of being with him; but always at the back of her brain her feeling of repulsion at the life that was being thrust upon her beat in her thoughts.

When for meals and at night she went to the Stoner home, she was more than ever repelled by the barrenness of pioneer life, and became convinced that it was her duty to persuade Garth to go back to civilization.

It would be hard, she knew, but he loved her, and of what use were melting brown eyes and appealing lips if they could not help out her reasoning powers and win her point?

One hot day, when the wind whirled the dust down the road and roared in the cottonwood above the roof—it was the day before they expected the traveling minister who was to marry them—Evelyn's reserve broke down.

They had been down to the edge of the narrow, deep-banked stream, called by courtesy a river, and as they climbed back to the house, and the hot wind seared their faces, it came over her that she could not bear it a moment longer—with Garth planning next year's garden, more room for the house, and some flower boxes, if the drought held off. His every fond word hung a new fetter on her limbs.

As they reached the door stone she turned and faced him.

"Garth! Oh, Garth!" she pleaded. "Give it up!"

"Give it up? Give up what?" He regarded her with troubled eyes.

"Your work—here!" with a sweeping wave of her hand. "Come back to the settlement, or take a church in the East. There is work for both of us there."

He regarded her for a moment.

"Yes, there is work there, plenty of it, in a smug, self-satisfied church, or in the festering slum. But you know there are hundreds who are ready to work there, within reach of personal comforts and within sound of applause, where there is one who will come here.

"Fifty miles each way, and never a church, or a soul to help these people. Sturdy, self-reliant stock settled these prairies, taking them in the raw from the hand of the Indian, and impossible as it may seem now, they will win, and will make of this valley a garden spot. Then there will be plenty to serve them, but just now they need some one to stand hard by and keep them from losing sight of their ideals.

"Back in the city, where the spawn from Old World gutters is cast into the stream of American life, you bolster men up, and then you have to keep them bolstered up; you try to build on youth, and you have a thousand chances against you. Here, on this broad, free prairie, with such stock as we have—come drought or famine—we cannot fail.

"Why, dear, the West must save the East. Out here is where *men* are born!"

Evelyn shook her head miserably. He had made her feel small and unworthy, but he had not weakened her resolution.

"I cannot help being weak and cowardly, Garth, because of this loneliness, the barrenness, these gaunt men and women, walking like tired horses, the awful distances, the privations—

"Oh, I can work! I have proven that in my years at the Good Shepherd Settlement. But there I had things for my comfort when my work was done. Here I would have to live with these other women and be like them—in the kitchen all the time, and perhaps I would have to fry salt pork.

"I cannot make companions of them. Why, they even expected me to have crochet patterns, and cooking recipes! I could do good to the poor in the city, but I did not have to take them into my life. Here—"

"Here!"

Garth's voice cut like a steel blade across her breathless defense. The sword points flashed in his eyes now.

"Here you find women who, though poor, hold up their heads and look you squarely in the eyes, who know no standard except of character! None of your whining, fawning pauperism of the slums! Do you suppose they live in the kitchen and eat salt pork from choice? They, too, would enjoy your city luxuries.

"*You* work for the poor? You have only stirred about in the misery of the city with a silver spoon! Get down and live with the poor, if you would help them, and learn of them! Did Christ spend his days with the fishermen and then slip away to feast on the dainties and sleep on the couches of the rich?"

Suddenly the fire went out of his voice. When he spoke again, it was in a tone coldly polite.

"I beg your pardon, Evelyn, for presuming to judge you. I am only sorry that you took this long and wearisome journey for nothing, but let us be glad for the delay which gave you the opportunity to find out your real sentiments in time. I am sure that, if you look over the letters that I have written you, you will find that while I have been over-enthusiastic, perhaps, I have not misrepresented any phase of my life here."

"No, no, Garth," the girl assured him, chilled by his change of demeanor. "I think I mixed your letters up with other things I had read. But I want you to know that I love you, and could be so happy with you—anywhere else."

He made no reply to this advance of hers, but turned away to the post where the team was tied.

"It is past sundown," he reminded her quietly, "and I will take you to Mr. Stoner's. Of course, you will return east at once. I have a funeral service at Happy Corners in the morning, but I believe I can be back by noon, and that will give us time to drive to Coyote Falls before the Limited tomorrow night. Your trunks will have arrived by then and you can take them back with you.

"And say nothing of this to Mrs. Stoner. She—well, she is a partizan of mine, and she might criticise you. I will explain afterward."

Storms, protestations, pleadings, Evelyn had expected, but not this impersonal and polite regard for detail. With drooping head she allowed Garth to help her to the wagon seat, and passed over the road for the last time. He parted from her with a brief word.

Morning found her drooping and heavy-eyed. Garth himself, still impersonally polite, looked as though he had passed through great suffering when he came for her the next day.

They evaded Mrs. Stoner, so no good-byes were said.

Having helped Evelyn into the buckboard he shook the reins, and the ponies bounded forward.

Mile after mile passed in silence. The man's apparent indifference benumbed the girl. He had been an impetuous lover, and his present attitude almost terrified her. She knew that if he begged her to stay she would not have the courage to refuse, yet in her heart she was glad he did not.

Settlers were far apart, but finally, as they neared a tiny house beside the trail, a young man ran out and beckoned them frantically to stop. Handing the girl the reins, Garth followed the man into the cabin.

When he came out, his face was troubled, but his strained manner was gone—lost in his absorption in another's trouble.

"It is Jerry Nichols," he told her. "I married him last year, when I first came, to Nellie Bishop—both of them almost children. Nellie is sick—there is a child coming—earlier than they expected. Her mother is to be here in a day or two, but they are alone now, and both of them are very much frightened. You—I know they taught nursing at the settlement—"

"I only studied a short time," she replied, recoiling from the situation before her. "It was distasteful to me. You see my work has been entirely along social lines, and I know nothing about such things."

She drew the reins over the horses and handed them toward him, as she said, with an air of finality.

"We'll just have to go on, and send some one back to help them."

Taking the reins, he guided the team to the column of rock which served as a hitching post and tied the horses.

His face was grim and set as he came back to her side.

"It is ten miles to help, the woman is suffering, and the child will not wait. You have worked for society heretofore. To-night, you will work for a life, as your parting gift to the prairies. They are inexperienced and uneducated, we are inexperienced and educated. I don't know who has the best of it, but we will put what we know together and fight it out."

She let him help her to the ground, wondering that she did not rebel. Yet something told her that she was facing one of the great moments of her life, and her spirit rose to meet it.

Afterward what happened in that dim hut became to her as a swiftly moving dream. Some things she knew intuitively, some had been stored in her subconsciousness since her few lessons in nursing; other things she did because Garth suggested them.

They forgot themselves, and each other; they were no longer man and woman, they were service.

They were fighting for two lives, and their equipment was so pitifully meager that, more than once, it seemed they must lose.

And then, miraculously, the night of terror was over, the sun was coming up on a new day, and the young father and mother clung weakly together over the little child who, so short a time before was not, and marveled wordlessly upon the miracle of life which comes from love and under the shadow of death.

They came out of the house to greet the dawn, both white from the strain of the past hours, he shaken, almost to palsy.

"It is well that you decided to go." His voice was hoarse, and he moistened his dry lips. "I would have made you go after this, anyway. No woman shall come to this hour through me."

White as he, she did not falter as she bent the starry brightness of her glance upon him.

"But I am not going," she declared breathlessly. "I am going to stay here on the plains with you and live out life—all of it—at your side. Do you think that after this night with these people, so pitifully poor, yet so splendid and brave and loving, I could run away from life—and you?"

"But—but I cannot accept it," he stammered; "this sacrifice which you offer in a moment of self-immolation. Do not ask me—I love you so—every atom of me calls for you so—that I am afraid I cannot resist. But you must not! You shall not!" with sudden resolution. "I shall go back alone—"

"Of course you will go back alone," put in Evelyn, laughing through tears, "for I am going to stay with Nellie and the baby until her mother comes. But first I want to write a note for this week's stage. I must have some lace patterns from

Miss Clipper, and her brown-bread recipe. And as soon as possible send for my trunks. I have some things there I can use for the baby — why, Garth!"

He had turned away and was leaning against the wall of the house, his head within the crook of his arm, his shoulders heaving.

She laid compelling hands upon him and turned him about, holding his trembling hands upon her shoulders with her own palms, while she smiled bravely into eyes where there were no swords' points now, but only a dawning of the wonder and the glory of coming days.

"Of course I am going to stay and help you," she reiterated.

And then, quoting his assertion of the previous day:

"You know, the West must save the East. It is out here on the plains that *men* are born!"

Equality Isle

By J. Brant

THERE was something profoundly portentous about that speech of Lady Gladys Neilson. Portentous and prophetic.

But at the time I heard it I did not notice it. It seemed bombastic, and I was terribly bored.

Lady Gladys Neilson and Miss Hollyhock Sprague, the former from London and the latter from Boston, delegates to the National Suffrage Convention at San Francisco, were prominent among the passengers on board the good ship Tantic of the New York-Pacific Line.

I myself was not prominent at all. I was on my way to study some newly discovered caves of an ancient tribe of Californian cliff-dwellers, and divided my time between my books and enjoying the novelty of the trip, thankful to be ignored by the celebrities about me.

The second night out the suffragettes gave a rally.

I had never been to a suffragette rally, and went out of curiosity. Lady Gladys was the youngest and by far the most attractive speaker, and received the most applause.

She said in part:

"Darwin's theory of the evolution of human life from the minute nerve-cell of the ameba is no less wonderful than the evolution of the character of woman from the stone age. First looked upon by man as a beast of burden, she has passed through the stages of chattel, servant, pet, plaything, treasure, and finally as companion in pleasure.

"To-day she seeks recognition as companion in intellect as well. Can it be denied to her? Her march forward and upward has been as steady and resistless as the tide.

"To-day she becomes the equal of man, and to-morrow—

"The index finger of time points but one way. Were all the advantages of civilization to be suddenly lost, and another stone age brought about by miracle, who think you now would be the beast of burden?"

The captain and I left the rally together.

"Poppycock!" said the captain.

I shook his hand feelingly and went to bed.

Twenty-four hours after we had passed through the Panama Canal an explosion in the boiler-room disabled the engines.

Nothing could be found out from the ship's officers as to the seriousness of the accident, and there was a silly rumor circulated that it was the work of the English militants. Personally I had no fear for our safety, and after the first half-hour the passengers became comparatively calm and went about seeking diversion much the same as usual.

Then came such a storm as I have often read about but never believed possible. The steamer was dwarfed by the size of the waves that piled hungrily down upon us. The strength and fury of the wind drove the disabled ship helplessly before it.

In the commotion the work of repairing the engines could go on but slowly. One could read anxiety or fear on every face.

All day long it blew, and night brought no relief. Some of the passengers became frantic and refused to be kept below.

In desperation a limited portion of the deck was allowed them, with the strict understanding that they occupied it at their own risk.

At first I was satisfied to remain in my cabin. But about one o'clock in the morning I could no longer stand the sensation that any moment I might be drowned like a rat in a hole, and staggered up to the reserved deck-space.

Not many of the passengers were there at that time. Most of them had begun their watches early and gradually become worn out and gone below. A few still remained, huddled here and there in silent, fearful groups, their eyes straining into the darkness, looking for they knew not what.

Two women stood near me, and because I wanted company I edged my way along the rail toward them. By the glare of a distress rocket I recognized Lady Gladys Neilson and Miss Hollyhock Sprague.

Lady Gladys Neilson belonged to the feminine type of the British militant. Her hair was a moonlight yellow and there was lots of it, and she was young and willowy and good to look upon in every way.

Hunger strikes behind prison bars had left no mark on Lady Gladys.

There was nothing willowy about Miss Hollyhock Sprague of Boston. Quite the contrary. Even her features ran to angles.

She was tall, big-boned, and broad, but not stout—the kind of woman who climbs mountains for the pleasure of it.

Severe was the adjective that best describes her—severe from her small, mannish hat to the tips of her square-toed shoes, if such shoes could be said to have tips.

She was as well equipped to be a leader of women as Lady Gladys was to be a misleader of men.

Even in the darkness and horror of the night the contrast between the two women was most marked. For a moment I could not but think with wonder and awe of the intensity of feeling for a cause that was able to bring together and make friends of two such totally different types.

I was near them now, so near that I could have touched them. I shouted a word of greeting, and they shouted something in reply. I could not hear because of the storm, which snatched the words and drowned them as they left their lips.

Then we fell together and clutched each other in horror and fear. The whole deck began to slide with a grating, rasping sound that could be heard even above the storm.

There came a splintering roar. We were lifted high in the air, and from under us burst a torrent of flame like the discharge from an immense gun at night.

For a moment the part of the deck we were on was suspended in the air. Then the top of a wave caught it and pulled it down, and we felt the under side of it squattering along the water like a lighting duck.

The water rushed in upon us and covered us, and I knew that we were being drawn to the bottom of the sea.

I let go of the rail and tried to grab both ladies. I was only half successful, for but one of them rose to the surface with me. And it happened to be Miss Sprague!

Something bumped my shoulder as I came up, and I clutched at it. My hand slid along the canvas-covered buoys of a life-raft and caught on a rope.

There was no one else on the raft which had so opportunely bumped into me, and I climbed aboard and pulled the lady after me.

Miss Hollyhock Sprague showed great presence of mind by lying flat on her face on the raft and hanging on to the life-ropes with both hands. To make doubly sure that no passing wave would wash her off I passed two other ropes around her ankles, and then turned my attention to shouting and feeling cautiously over the black water in the vain hope that we might run into the other member of our party.

The night was so dark and the little that I could do was so very little that I soon gave up trying, and placed myself in a position similar to that of my companion. This gave a feeling of almost security that was very pleasing.

Twice while searching for our missing friend I had been washed completely off the raft, and only saved myself from losing it forever by the tight hold which I kept to one of the life-lines.

The motion was unpleasant, to say the least, and soon I forgot all about the wreck and my companion because of more personal matters. I am usually a good sailor, but had experienced similar sensations while fishing for scup from a small boat anchored in a rip between tide and wind.

It seemed weeks that I lay there and suffered. Day came at last, and I cared not. The wind and storm left us, the sun came out bright and warm, and finally hot, and gradually the sea quieted.

Little by little my strength and interest in life returned, and I remembered that I was not alone. I sat up and looked at my companion.

Miss Sprague looked wet. This was because the raft leaked badly from the side, a habit rafts have when disturbed by waves, and not at all a sign that they are sinking. Her hair had been twisted into a tight, slick pug on the back of her head, and although it was quite warm, there was something in her manner that suggested freezing.

She was looking at me, and she continued to look at me steadily and appraisingly. I felt that I should say

something, but her attitude embarrassed me and I kept silent.

"I hope," she said at last, "that you are a gentleman."

"I hope so," I answered. I did not want to give the impression of being conceited.

"In that case," she continued, "I trust that you will not take advantage of my helpless condition and try to kiss me."

I assured her, somewhat profusely I am afraid, that nothing could be farther from my intentions. I even apologized for any undue roughness that I might have resorted to in pulling her upon the raft the night before.

"You see," I explained, "it was so very dark, and there was so much confusion, and I thought all the time that you were some one else."

This was perfectly true. At the time I thought vaguely that it was the light-haired one I was saving.

My efforts to please were not without effect, and her manner toward me became almost confidential.

"I trust you," she said, "although we have not been formally introduced. My name is Miss Sprague—Miss Hollyhock Sprague, of Boston."

"I thank you," I replied, and tried to look surprised.

I was wondering whether it would be best for me to give my real name under the circumstances. I have always been afraid of publicity, and the thought that the affair might get into the papers and that medals for bravery would be publicly forced upon me was terrifying.

Still I decided to risk it. I am a single man, and there could be no great harm in telling my real name.

"My name is Martin—Professor Wallace V. Martin, of New York. I'm pleased to meet you, Miss Sprague."

From this we drifted, figuratively and actually, to the subject of the weather. All signs of the ship had disappeared, and there was nothing else in sight to talk about.

This lasted for some time. Then in desperation I mentioned that I recognized her as one of the delegates to the Suffrage Convention.

The topic thus opened was sufficient to last the rest of the cruise. I was forced to stay on the raft, and the opportunity was too good for a practical woman like Miss Sprague to miss.

We were drifting before a light breeze, and just as the sun was setting we came in sight of land. It was pretty deserted-looking land; there were no sky-scrapers or smoking factory chimneys sticking out of it.

It was merely a mountain surrounded by a small island.

But I was exceedingly glad to see that it lay directly in our course. It looked green and cool, and there was probably drinking-water on it. Talking to Miss Sprague all day in the hot sun was thirsty work.

We landed some time in the night. It was not a very dignified landing, for the waves got a lot higher after the sun set, and in passing over the shoals that surrounded the island we were almost upset several times.

Miss Sprague showed remarkable tenacity, and when I mentioned the possibility of sharks in those waters she required very little assistance in sticking on. She said she just couldn't stand sharks.

We finally landed on a coral beach and tied the raft to a palm tree that happened to be growing conveniently near. Near the tree we discovered a brook of fresh water, and after drinking all we could we sat down on its bank to rest.

I had intended to keep watch while Miss Sprague slept. That is the usual custom for the man under similar circumstances.

But I was very tired, and it wasn't long before I was dreaming of Lady Gladys with the yellow hair. And then I opened my eyes, and there she was!

It was a rather embarrassing situation. Sleep had come upon me so

suddenly that I had not noticed where I was sitting. I had merely closed my eyes and leaned back, and now I found that it was broad daylight and my head was resting in Miss Sprague's lap.

Miss Sprague was blissfully unconscious of that fact, for she was still asleep with her head against the trunk of a palm tree.

I hastily removed my head, and Miss Sprague was good enough not to awake, which was very fortunate.

"Good morning," I said, feeling that I was turning very red. "I—I hope you slept well?"

Later, Lady Gladys told us her story. She had had the good sense to secure a life-preserver before going on deck the night of the wreck, and must have reached the surface even before us.

There she struggled until she came in contact with a mass of wrecking held together with tangled ropes, on top of which she spent the night. As she was accustomed to sailing a great deal in small boats and understood the use of wind, she had rigged a sail with a couple of loose spars and a skirt as soon as it became light and reached the island before sunset.

It did not take long to assure us that the island was uninhabited and that we were the only survivors from the Tantic who had arrived. Nothing remained but to see what we could do for our own comfort and make the best of it.

Life on a "desert isle" is apt to be degenerating, although that island be two miles square with a mountain in the middle, full of all kinds of tropical fruit and surrounded with bird and fish life.

This is so even when one has two such charming and intellectual companions as Lady Neilson and Miss Hollyhock Sprague.

We were the products of the most advanced civilization of the age. Each one of us had been accustomed to limousines and electric lights and nine-course dinners since we could remember. Never before had any one of us experienced what real roughing it was like. Never since childhood had we attempted to eat an orange without a whole array of spoons and knives and plates.

And now the only eating utensil among us, as well as the only tool for construction and weapon for defense, was my small, pearl-handled pocket-knife.

At first our principal source of nutrition was shell-fish gathered on the beach. Later we found flint, and after a day of experimenting with the knife-blade we succeeded in learning to light fires. A hollowed stone kettle was the result of a week's work.

After much practise with rude bows and arrows, we were able to obtain the flesh of some of the tamer varieties of birds. Strands of the rope from the life-raft and bone fish-hooks brought a quantity of strange fish from the lagoon, some of which were very good eating.

The mountain was an extinct volcano, and in a bluff near the stream we discovered a cave admirably suited for a shelter from the elements. This we turned into a general lounging-room and sleeping quarters for the ladies.

For myself I built a rough house of mud and cane at the foot of the steep path leading to the cave, and with the help of the two ladies managed to make it quite comfortable and homelike.

The fortitude with which my two tenderly raised companions adapted themselves to the inevitable soon won my profoundest admiration. No two men could have showed more courage or acted more practically in the overcoming of difficulties.

The slight formality which had sprung up between Lady Gladys and myself because of the absurd position of my head when she discovered us soon wore off, and we all became the best of good fellows.

I need not add that the equality, if not the supremacy, of woman was early brought up and passed without a dissenting vote.

This equality idea bothered me for a while. All my notions of a man shipwrecked on a desert island with rescued maidens had to be changed.

At first I was permitted to do the heavy work and they were polite enough to consult me on important matters.

But there wasn't much heavy work to do after we got nicely started, and there was a lot of time for conversation.

No matter what we started to talk about, we always came round to the topic of woman's rights.

Equality Isle was the name we had given our little piece of land. And all the speeches that were to have regaled the national convention and a lot more were poured out in front of our metaphorical camp-fire. As there was no contradiction, conviction ran riot with the two leaders of women. I began to feel a little convinced myself.

Gradually I began to notice a change in the status of the one man of Equality Isle. In the beginning I had developed a keen interest in the hunt, which was a surprise even to myself. I enjoyed the excitement of creeping up behind a rock in order to get within six feet of an unsuspecting penguin, which was the fatal distance with my stone-headed arrow provided I had the good luck to hit the bird.

I would carry my game home and hand it over with a masterly air for the women to clean and cook.

Miss Sprague was the first to take up practise with my bow and arrow. When she brought in two fine ducks, a variety I had found to be particularly elusive, nothing would do but that Lady Gladys should try her hand.

Archery is a common lady's pastime in England, and Lady Gladys was even more fortunate than Miss Sprague.

The meat of the duck is far superior to the meat of the penguin, no matter how skilful the cook. The result was that I found myself voted out of the game-providing class and relegated to the kitchen squad when we were to have meat for dinner.

Fishing was not much better. Try as I would I could not equal the success—I prefer to call it luck—of my two fair companions. But at cleaning the fish I was vastly their superior, and so I found that noxious job constantly thrust upon me.

I was even becoming a tolerable cook because of forced practise. What else could I do?

Hunting and fishing took up a great deal of time. I could not remain idle while I was thus being provided for. I took the little jobs—gathering salt from the dried-up pools among the rocks, picking up dried sticks for the fire, and weaving the fibers of tough grasses into mats and cloth.

And at length these little jobs became duties and habits. I was sinking rapidly.

There was another change slowly coming over us, which interested me immensely. It has always been a pet theory of mine that if we were removed from the conventions and conveniences of civilization we would gradually degenerate and become like the savage tribes.

And here I was able to see the proof of my theory expounded under my very eyes.

Naturally our table manners were the first to suffer. Eating hot bird with the fingers had at first been a rather dainty and amusing performance, a joke because of the novelty of the necessity. In six months it had changed to a businesslike and very effective system.

It was no longer dainty.

The eating of soup was becoming a most noisy function. The smacking of lips over extra palatable morsels could be heard for a long distance. Discussions of intellectual subjects at meals became infrequent.

In fact, when there was an abundance of good food on the table conversation ceased entirely.

Pride in personal appearance became supplanted by pride in personal achievement and physical development. As our original clothes became too ragged for wear they were renewed with cloth of woven fibers, with little regard to looks provided they furnished sufficient covering.

The little niceties of hair-fixing were gradually discarded, the only reason for tying it up at all being to keep it from interfering with the vision. The tanning of the skin and the development and hardening of the muscles of the arm were watched with interest and jealousy.

Competitions in strength became fashionable.

In the last I am sorry to say that I made but a poor showing. I am not a very big man, and have always preferred books to athletics. It was a relief to me when I was left out of them altogether.

At first we were in daily hope of being rescued, and kept a petticoat flag flying from the highest point of the mountain as a signal of distress for passing vessels.

But there were no passing vessels. After a year had elapsed we gave up looking anxiously along the horizon for a sail or smoke-stack, and at the end of two years we even ceased to hope.

Two years is a long time, even in New York. To three people on a desert island it is an eternity.

Still, for two years we managed to retain some of the precepts of civilization. But from the very first our degeneration had begun, and the speed of our fall accelerated by geometric progression.

My position was decidedly not flattering to the male sex. I found all the little household cares of cave life thrust upon me, and I attended to them all, instinctively feeling that it, somehow, was my inherited lot. I wove cloth, cooked, and washed the coconut dishes, while my more capable companions were engaged in supplying the table from the woods and sea.

But when Miss Sprague and Lady Gladys began to try to rival each other in winning my admiration I found the situation decidedly embarrassing.

At the same time I experienced a sensation not altogether unpleasant. There was no doubt in my own mind that I preferred the society of the willowy Lady Gladys to the angular Miss Sprague. Yet it seemed natural that I should divide my favors with a cunning malice.

Secretly I enjoyed the discomfort of one when I chose to sing half-forgotten college songs into the attentive ear of the other on the moonlit beach. And if I praised the skill of Lady Gladys with the bow and arrow, I was wearing the beautiful orchid given me by Miss Sprague in my tangled hair.

Toward the end of the third year of our imprisonment I found it no longer possible to deceive myself as to the nature of the attentions paid me by the two ladies.

They were both in love with me!

Three years before this phenomenon, beside being beyond the range of probability, would have worried me into a trip to Europe. But under the circumstances I felt no desire to escape.

In fact, I actually enjoyed the sensations which were produced by this knowledge, and sighed because there were not more ladies on Equality Isle to fall before my charms.

Charms? Yes. I, Professor Wallace V. Martin, famous in anthropological circles in two continents, holder of honorary degrees from seven universities, but who had never known a woman to look at me twice, suddenly found that I had charms.

And I felt an irresistible impulse to make the most of those charms.

I wove myself clothes of gay color and intricate pattern. I made orn-

ments of bright shells and wore them in a necklace. I fashioned earrings from two large shells and pinched them on my ears, and was pleased when the ladies complimented my appearance. I caught myself wondering vaguely if a ring in my nose would not be an improvement.

This bit of savagery brought me to my senses, and I smashed my earrings and threw away my necklace. But the germ of vanity remained and I craved adornment, and in a month I had made others. But I did not again think of a ring for my nose.

To Lady Gladys and Miss Sprague I became more coy than ever. I played upon their feelings as I did upon my primitive home-made guitar, touching the strings in turn. And instead of being disgusted with me for my fickleness they doubled their attentions. So eager did each become for my society and indignant at interruptions of *tête-à-têtes* by the other that it was with difficulty that I kept peace and a semblance of friendship between them.

In a thousand ways they wooed me, and I enjoyed them all. And because I enjoyed them I ever refrained from giving any conclusive sign of preference.

Affairs finally reached a stage where the two ladies were barely polite to each other.

What would be the outcome of this little comedy of love and hate? I felt that something must happen soon—something vaguely horrible. This thought thrilled me delightfully.

Lady Gladys began it. She had started out on an early hunt with Miss Sprague, and I did not expect them back until noon.

I was sitting on the ledge in front of the cave engaged in some household duty, I forget just what it was, when a shadow fell across my work.

I looked up, and there stood Lady Gladys.

She meant business this time. I could tell by the look in her eyes. I knew that the moment had come for me to make one of the important decisions of my life.

Her method was somewhat abrupt. After looking at me for a few minutes with infinite longing, she bent over and threw both arms about me and drew me to her.

I attempted to hold her away, but not very strenuously. The next minute she was raining kisses all over my face, while I was conscious that I was blushing furiously.

Yet I cannot say that I did not enjoy it. Soon I ceased to resist entirely. If there had been any doubt in my mind before, there was none now.

Lady Gladys was the girl for me!

She sat down holding me in her arms, and we began to discuss plans for the future. She had discovered another cave on the other side of the island, a perfect beauty, and we would marry and live over there. She took it for granted that everything was settled, which rather nettled me.

"Lady Gladys," I asked, "what made you so sure that I would say yes? And you haven't really asked me yet! Suppose I should refuse?"

"You dear!" she said, giving me an extra hug. "Of course you will say yes! And it doesn't make any difference what you say. I have made up my mind to have you anyway."

She took from her belt a stone hatchet and a coil of fiber rope and placed them significantly in front of me.

I knew them. And the knowledge, instead of making me angry, sent a surge of tenderness through me for Lady Gladys.

If I had refused she would have overpowered and tied me and carried me off on her shoulders.

I began to reciprocate Lady Gladys's manifestations of affection.

At this point Miss Sprague came along and interrupted. And in her hand was a stone hatchet and a coil of rope similar to those of Lady Gladys.

The funny part of the interruption

was that there were no words spoken. We just looked up, and there she stood.

I felt the muscles in Lady Gladys's arm quiver as she released me, and she rose cautiously to her feet, keeping her eyes fixed on Miss Sprague.

I had a desire to scream, but restrained it. Instead I crept to the far side of the ledge and sat down, watching.

It was a good fight and lasted a long time. At the beginning they both used their stone hatchets, but they were broken or knocked out of their hands without doing much damage. There was a good deal of blood, coming as near as I could judge from a cut over Miss Sprague's eye, and it got all over everything.

They struck and scratched and tore, rolling over and over on the ground, and I watched them fascinated.

And at last it ended.

They had rolled perilously near the edge of the cliff, and it looked as if both might fall over and be killed, and I would be left on Equality Isle all alone.

Then with a wonderful effort Miss Sprague broke away from the grip of Lady Gladys, and with a well-placed kick sent her whirling out into space.

For a moment I sat there gasping with horror. Then I got up and ran as fast as I could up the mountain.

I could hear Miss Sprague coming after me. I thought she could catch me, but I kept on.

Then as the footsteps came no nearer I knew I was holding my own. Miss Sprague was weak from the fight and it looked as if I would get away.

Not so. There was a whizzing in the air behind me, something struck me on the head, and I went down in a heap. Miss Sprague had thrown her stone hatchet!

When at last I recovered enough to open my eyes she was bending over me.

"Professor Martin," she said, "will you do me the honor of becoming my husband?"

"Certainly, Miss Sprague," I answered. "With pleasure."

As she took me by the hand and led me back to the cave I felt a great joy and pride rise within me, for I knew I had found at last a fitting mate.

A CAMP-FIRE

By Alice Lindsey Webb

THE lake moves gently, and the mists are gray
That veil the outlines of a distant shore
Where blue hills change to purple; the last ray
Of sunshine fades to opal; day is o'er.
Our fire leaps up against the leafy mass
Of branches, still and black against the sky,
And sports strange shadows in the dew-wet grass—
Weird shapes that creep and flit, now low, now high.
We sit and listen to the crooning tales
Of frogs and night birds, and the rippling wake
Of dream-ships passing yonder with slow sails;
Then, singing, homeward drift across the lake.

You, friend, will not forget, in years to be,
The camp-fire and the summer night—and me!

Cotton Puts One Over

By Alex Shell Briscoe

IT was like a dare, that sign, and Cotton Bley, hobo sign-painter, being young, did not like to take dares. So, as he sat on the station-platform at Timpas, diligently carving his monniker in a post, he looked up often to study the boldly lettered warning:

> **NOTICE!**
>
> **Tramps, Hoboes, Pedlers, Beggars, and Grafters of all kinds**
>
> **STAY OUT OF THIS TOWN!**
>
> **A Rock Pile Has Been Provided for the Entertainment of Pests of This Sort Who Disregard This Warning.**

Timpas was a new town which had sprung up around the railroad repair shops where the trains paused before tackling the sinuous right of way through cañons and tunnels and up steep grades over the spine of the continent. Its main street was a flaunting row of false second-story fronts, and its architectural pride was the new stone jail.

At that particular period it was suffering from an aggravated attack of civic righteousness of the variety which always come, like a morning-after headache, following the joyous open-house days of a town-site boom, when a town begins to cherish aspirations toward the achievement of law and order and of becoming the county seat.

Cotton had not intended including Timpas in his itinerary — it being a place generally avoided by tourists of the sort who pay no tribute to railroads—but a two-fisted brakeman had insisted on his stopping there, and now, with the warning sign facing him, he debated as to whether he would favor the business section with a visit.

Meantime he carved his monniker in a conspicuous place.

The symbol consisted of the initials "C. B." and an arrow, the latter indicating that he was headed west when he passed that point.

As he worked he noted the conspicuous absence of similar marks about the station, while at any other town there would have been scores or hundreds.

Cotton was tall and slim, but his slenderness was that of steel springs and wire; and in his eyes of grayish green was a recklessness matching the assurance of his manner.

One look at him and you knew why

the sign had the same general effect upon him a red rag is supposed to have on a bull; and you would not have been surprised to observe that when he had finished his task of decorating the post he dropped from the platform and headed straight for the town.

Under an arm were overalls and jumper, the two tucked neatly inside one leg of the former garment in the manner known as a "hobo roll." Also, he carried the tools of his trade in a small flat box which he strapped under his jumper while riding the rods or bumpers or the roof of a train, as best suited his fancy or existing exigencies, while going from place to place.

Half-way down the first block Cotton stopped before a restaurant, glancing at a rudely lettered sign on the window.

"I'll just naturally have to fix up that man's window for him," he commented to himself and started inside to open negotiations. Then a hand fell on his shoulder and he turned to face a stocky man in a slouch-hat and double-breasted blue coat.

"When did you get in?" asked the man.

"Hour ago," Cotton replied briefly.

He knew he had encountered a constable or city marshal. Newly elected city official was written all over the other.

"Sign painter?"

"Yes."

The man jerked a thumb toward the station.

"See the sign down there?" he asked.

"Yes," Cotton retorted, "but it didn't say anything about sign painters."

The other grinned unpleasantly.

"The last one of your tribe to drop in put up that sign while earning his board down at the calaboose. Come along," and with a twist of a thick arm he started the youth down the street.

On the way to the low stone structure which looked the part of a jail, even without the heavy bars on the narrow windows, Cotton attempted to argue with his captor, but he found it futile.

The other did not even reply to his protests.

Not until the youth was locked in a cell did the man speak again.

"You're another of the kind who think that sign down by the station is a bluff," he said. "Well, we'll keep you a couple of weeks and then send you out to do missionary work among the rest of the hoboes."

And with that he tramped away, leaving Cotton to pace his narrow quarters and indulge in wrathful thoughts regarding the town, the jail, and his own general foolishness in having butted into trouble.

Out in the jail-yard he could hear the steady clink and pound of hammers on stone, and knew this came from the rock-pile mentioned in the warning sign.

Near dark a door leading into the yard opened and a second man in a blue coat herded in a half-dozen dust-covered individuals.

Cotton looked them over curiously as they were locked up.

Four obviously were of the genus tramp, species bum, but the others were different.

One was a tall man, bowed in the legs and with the tan of life in the open on his cheeks. There was courage in the close-set eyes, but they were shifty and inspired distrust.

The other man was heavy, with a scarred face and powerful shoulders. His hair was red and bristly and there was something repellent in his piglike eyes.

Cotton sized up the former as a cow-puncher, the latter as a "yegg," and the tramp who had been thrust into his cell later told him he had guessed rightly.

Clark, the tall man, was under indictment for being careless in the use of a branding-iron. Kerry, the yegg

had been caught crawling into the window of the post-office, and was awaiting an opportunity to tell his side of the matter in court.

The tramps merely were misguided individuals like Cotton who had rushed in where the rushing was bad for men of their ilk.

How the night passed is a matter of small importance, except to Cotton, who was kept decidedly busy by certain other inhabitants of the bunk in which he tried to sleep; but finally morning came and with it the two men in blue coats.

Cotton meantime had learned much regarding the general undesirability of the lot of prisoners in the Timpas jail. The man who had arrested him was Evans, the city marshal, he was told. The other man was Babbit, the deputy marshal and jailer—a short, muscular individual with cold eyes and a brutal mouth.

"Look out for Babbit," Cotton was warned by his cellmate. "He's square with you if you work, but he's the meanest white man in the West when he's sore on any one. Don't get gay with him or you'll sure get yours."

When the prisoners had been served with breakfast—Cotton used harsher terms in describing the meal—they were ordered out to work in the jail-yard.

The others complied without hesitation, but Cotton demurred.

"Where does that come in for me?" he asked. "I haven't been convicted of anything; I haven't even been up in court."

Evans, the marshal, glanced at him grimly. "Here's one we've got to convince," he remarked to Babbit.

Cotton had thought, of course, he would be taken before a police judge or justice of the peace, and had resolved to break the bill he kept tucked in the waistband of his trousers for just such emergencies and pay whatever fine was imposed on him.

It was Babbit, the jailer, who made things plain to him.

"We've got no time to fool w. you," he said harshly. "Judge Ke per is out of town, and won't be ba for a couple of weeks. Meantime y earn your board."

Cotton thought differently, and the others did not waste time in argument. Evans backed to the door which led to the jail-yard, and Babbit turned toward where a fire-hose, already attached to a plug, hung in folds from a patent rack.

He made no comment, but none was necessary.

Cotton stepped from his cell with commendable promptness and took his place with the others ready to go to work.

It was a long and weary day of labor for Cotton.

For ten hours, except for a brief interval for what was called dinner, he pounded away at rocks with a sledge-hammer, breaking the larger chunks into pieces which the others, using smaller hammers, reduced to fragments suitable for road building.

The man who wielded the sledge had the least desirable part of the work, since he had to stay on his feet while the others could sit down, and Cotton learned this would be his task until some new arrival took his place, it being the rule that the last man to be locked up should swing the sledge.

There was no chance for escape, the walls around the jail-yard being high and Babbit ever remaining on watch.

It was the jailer's habit to send a stone whizzing at a man who loafed on the job, and, since his throwing had the accuracy of long practise, the seven men kept busy.

Night found Cotton sore in body and spirit, with hands blistered from the handle of the heavy hammer, and a painful bruise on a shoulder which was testimony to the excellence of Babbit's target practise when the youth once had paused too long to rest.

Next day brought the same weary routine, and the next and the days following, while Cotton's palms grew

wer as the blisters broke, and his oughts more bitter.

He kept doggedly at work, however, or from others he had learned of what happened to unruly prisoners.

Use of the fire-hose was Babbit's usual method of cooling down a rebellious inmate of the jail, and it was a remarkably effective one.

The water system of the town came from a dam high in the mountains, and the pressure in the pipes was something to make a New York fireman green with envy.

When he had seen the jail hose in action when the concrete floor was cleaned, Cotton came to a full realization of what he had escaped through his decision to work that first day.

As he watched the sweep of the powerful stream back and forth across the floor an idea came to him —an idea over which he indulged in a grim chuckle.

"I'd like to turn that hose on old Babbit just about a minute," he remarked to Clark, the cattle rustler, who occupied the next cell, when the jailer had gone.

The other made no reply, but into his eyes there leaped a speculative gleam, and late that night Cotton awoke to discover Clark and Kerry, the yegg, in earnest, whispered conference.

The prisoners' quarters in the Timpas jail consisted of a long, narrow cage, divided by cross partitions of heavy bars into a half dozen cells.

Kerry occupied No. 1, which was at the end nearest the hose-rack. Clark and one of the tramps were in No. 2, while Cotton and another were in the next one.

It was Babbit's custom to lock up the prisoners during the noon-hour while he went for his own meal, first handing each man the chunk of bread and section of bologna, which was the regular jail fare, and on the day following Cotton's casual remark about the hose things began to happen a minute after the guard departed.

From a leg of his trousers Kerry drew a doubled length of wire he had picked up in the jail yard, and swiftly fashioned a loop in one end. The other he bent into a hook, with which it was easy to pull the hose from the rack and drag it within reach.

Immediately Kerry passed the nozzle through the bars to the rustler in the next cell and began to experiment with the loop of wire and the handle controlling the plug.

After a moment he gave a grunt of satisfaction and nodded to Clark.

Cotton had been watching these preparations out of the corner of an eye.

At first he smiled when he divined the meaning of what was going on, but there came a sobering thought as he noted the look on the faces of Kerry and Clark, and his grin faded.

The tramps watched the movements of the two men furtively, but made no comment.

Twenty minutes passed, and it was time for the guard to return. Clark picked up the nozzle of the hose, thrust it deep into a drain-hole in the corner of his cell, and nodded to Kerry. The looped wire came into play, and a series of sharp jerks at the handle of the plug turned the water on full force.

The hose stiffened and swelled, writhing like a huge snake across the floor as the kinks straightened out, and there came a booming sound of water rushing into the drain.

Clark had pulled a length of the hose inside of the cage in order to obtain free play to handle the nozzle, and it spread in a coil, one side of which lay next to the partition, dividing the rustler's cell from that of Cotton's.

There was a long five minutes of waiting, then the door opened and Babbit stepped in. The sound of the water reached his ears.

He stopped, but it was too late. The stream caught him in the face as he turned, and he went down.

Babbit was game, whatever else might be said against him; and he rolled over, trying to gain his feet, only to be knocked back and fairly washed along the floor.

Head down, he tried to crawl to the door, grimly fighting his way against the pitiless rush of water; but flesh and blood could not withstand the tremendous power of the stream.

He weakened, and was swept back until he lay in a huddle against the wall.

Then Clark turned the stream aside and shouted:

"Toss your keys over this way, you! Be quick about it!"

"Get a move on!" echoed Kerry's hoarse voice. "We want them keys."

Slowly Babbit lifted his head and arose to his knees. Clark swung the stream a trifle closer. The guard's hand was creeping toward a hip-pocket.

Suddenly he sprang to his feet, a revolver in his hand; but again the full force of the water struck him in the face, and he was smashed back against the wall.

The pistol fell from his hand, and Clark washed it out of his reach.

Then he turned his attention and the stream back to the guard, and it was a full minute before he let up.

This time Babbit hardly was able to stagger to his feet.

The rustler's eyes were slitlike as again demanded the keys. Kerry was raging in his cell, shaking the bars like a caged gorilla as he bellowed threats and commands.

Gasping, half drowned, dazed, Babbit tried to make a reply; but the rush of water rendered his words inaudible. Clark turned the hose toward the roof; there was a crash, and fragments of glass from a shattered skylight rained down in the cells.

"Hand over those keys," the rustler called, "or we'll drown you!"

Babbit coughed and rubbed a dripping sleeve across his eyes.

"Like hell!" he shouted, and ag made for the door.

The attempt was as futile as fore, the torrent from the two-in nozzle sweeping him into a corn like a chip.

Clark was implacable as he held the stream on the guard, turning it aside at intervals to again demand the keys, each time meeting a gasp of refusal from Babbit.

Cotton realized it was death for the guard if he did not give up the keys, and that the man would die before he would yield.

The jail stood two blocks from the main street, and there was small chance of any one coming to Babbit's aid.

Sickened by the torture inflicted on the other, shaken with horror, the youth turned his face away as Clark continued to hold the stream on the half-drowned huddle in the corner.

A long sliver of glass lying on his bunk caught his eyes, and he snatched it up. It had come from the broken skylight.

Cotton glanced around. Every one else was watching Babbit, and the youth dropped to his knees at the side of the cell, reaching through the bars and sawing savagely at the hose.

Slowly the tough fabric parted. The few moments he worked seemed like hours. His fear was that one of the others would turn before he finished his task.

In that event he knew what would happen. He would get a dose of the same treatment that was now being given Babbit.

Then the hose seemed to explode in his face, the pressure rending it apart where he had weakened it, and he tumbled back, drenched and choking, as the stream from the nozzle lost its power.

There came a hoarse bellow of rage from Kerry, and Clark turned with an oath. For a moment he stared at the cut from which the water was spurting, then tossed the nozzle aside.

Babbit, dripping, dazed, slowly ;uggled to his feet and moved with steady steps toward the door. Clark atched silently until the guard had staggered outside, then turned on Cotton.

"You certainly handed us one fine double cross," he said, "and I'd like just one crack at you."

Evans, the marshal, arrived on the run a few minutes later and shut off the water. He made no comment, but his look as he surveyed the men in the cages caused the cow-puncher to swear softly and stirred a rumbling growl in Kerry's throat.

The tramps shuffled uneasily in their cells. It was hard to estimate to what lengths Babbit's desire for vengeance would lead him.

Any lingering doubts as to the form his reprisal would take were cleared away near dusk when Babbit arrived and with a malevolent glance at the prisoners set about repairing the broken hose, wrapping it in burlap and binding it with adhesive tape, while Evans sat watching.

When the guard had finished the task to his satisfaction he swept the row of cells with his eyes, his glance coming to rest on one of the tramps —a cringing being whose retreating chin and faded, spiritless eyes told of weakness.

"Bring him out," he said to Evans, and the tramp was led to the office of the jail.

Five minutes of questioning put the guard and marshal in possession of all facts regarding the outbreak, and the tramp was led back to his cage.

Then Babbit swung open the door of Cotton's cell.

"Come out," he commanded, and the youth stepped into the corridor.

"You cut that hose?" Babbit demanded.

Cotton nodded, and the guard motioned toward the open door. "Git," he said.

There was a harsh laugh from the cattle rustler and a bellow of fury from the yegg.

"That's it!" yelled the latter. "Turn him loose. Hand it to us, but let the little mutt who put us up to it get away. Yah-h-h!"

Babbit turned on Cotton. "Get that?" he asked savagely.

The youth met his glance stolidly. "I did suggest a dose of the hose would do you good," he admitted, "but I didn't figure on the escape stuff, and—"

"So!" Babbit interrupted. "Well, I said you could go, and you can; but I think a bath would do you good, too," and he caught up the nozzle of the hose.

Cotton dived for the door, but Evans blocked the way and hurled him back.

The hose was coughing and writhing over the floor as the pressure of the water straightened out the kinks, and the youth stood waiting, helpless, for Babbit to swing the stream toward him.

Then, like a geyser, the hose broke at the point where it had been repaired, knocking Babbit backward and deluging the cells. Evans darted from his post to shut off the water, leaving the door unguarded.

When he turned Cotton was gone.

An hour later Cotton, lurking in the shadows near the station, waiting for a train, thought of the sign. An idea came to him and he made his way to it.

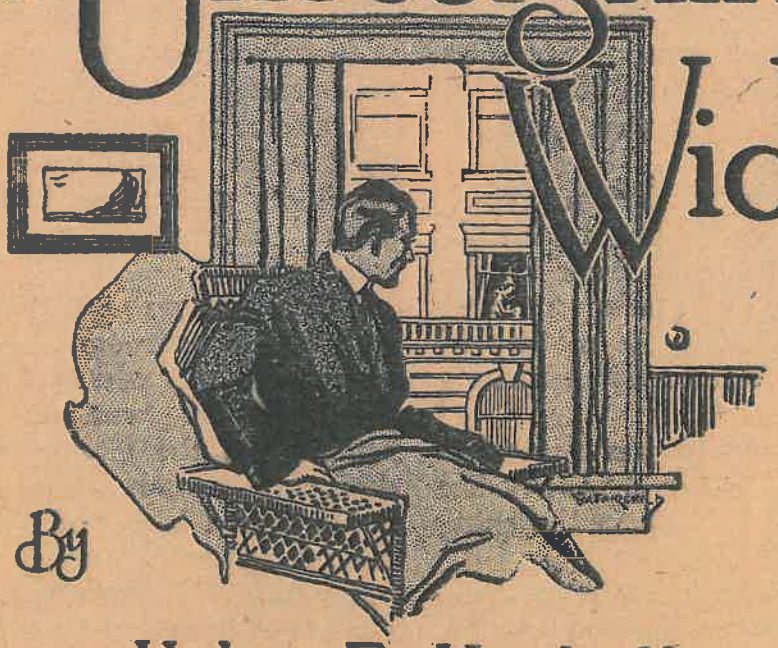
In his coat was a heavy pencil he used in blocking out signs, and with it he worked industriously for ten minutes. Then a freight train pulled up at the station.

When it departed, Cotton swung on a ladder of a box car with a last backward glance toward the warning sign, which now bore the indorsement in large letters:

THIS GOES

(Signed) Cotton Bley

An Undesigning Widow



By Helen E. Haskell

EVER since Potiphar Williamson had achieved manhood and a New York job that commanded a comfortable income he had been shying the designing woman. At thirty-five he considered his armor of anti-sentimentalism impregnable.

And then Potiphar was taken sick. For three weeks he was confined to his brass bed.

At the end of that time his general man—a neat Jap who had looked after Potiphar for years—moved him into the front room of the bachelor apartment, propped him up in his easy chair in front of the window, and left him with the latest magazines and a pitcher of ice-water.

Potiphar read the magazines and drank the ice-water, after which, feeling very tired, he leaned his head back luxuriously and dreamily studied the yellow front of the apartment-building across the street.

It was then, for the first time, that he saw her!

She was playing "Patty-cake, patty-cake, baker's man," with the little boy.

Her hair was brazenly golden and her face was nicely whitewashed with round, pink spots for cheeks. Every now and then she paused in the game to cast sheep's eyes in Potiphar's direction.

Potiphar was annoyed, and if, at the moment, he had not heard the front door close softly on the back of Haru, his Japanese servant, he would have returned to the four blank walls and two blank windows that bounded his bedroom.

But Haru having set out upon his daily morning visit to the market, Potiphar was left a prisoner in his armchair.

To shut out the view of the flirtatious siren across the way he picked up his magazine and tried to interest himself in an article on socialism. But it was tedious. The book felt heavy. His eyes ached.

He laid the magazine down with a

h and leaned his head back among e cushions.

He detested blondes, and little boys ho were constantly demanding musement were an abomination. This child across the street—the brat was as brazen as his mother. He was waving a wabbly hand at Potiphar, his mother holding his fat wrist and deliberately grinning.

Potiphar turned his face away.

It was unheard of that an invalid could not convalesce in front of his own window without being annoyed by designing widows—the mother of the brat wore indecorous mourning with elbow sleeves.

Her black bracelets were calculatingly coquettish. No doubt the bodice of her frock had a V shaped opening at the throat. It had.

Potiphar despised himself for having taken the pains to find out, for the bold little boy immediately wafted a kiss toward him.

Potiphar fumed and again took up the magazine.

Somewhere in the street below a hurdy-gurdy began playing a rag-time tune. The shameless woman and the shameless boy began to dance to the jerky measures—one of the hideous, graceless dances of the minute. And how they were enjoying it!

Potiphar sighed in disgust. When he was a small boy his mother had never whirled him around like that; Potiphar could not recall that she had ever caught him up in her arms and kissed him rapturously, as the woman over there was doing at this moment.

Potiphar could see her through his eyelashes quite plainly.

Bah! What sort of a mourning bonnet was that? Potiphar sat up, looked casually up and down the street, allowing his eyes to rest for a moment or two on that open window.

The widow was tying a perky little bonnet under her chin. It was frankly intended to be bewitchingly becoming to a yellow-haired woman with a pink and white complexion. The very sedateness of its narrowly pointed brim was coquettish.

Potiphar thought of the poor cuss under the sod, whose passing out was the excuse for these attractive habiliments.

Just then his mind was distracted by the opening of the front door and the appearance of Haru, a market basket filled with provisions on his arm. Again he glanced at the window opposite. The widow and the little boy were gone.

There was no need now for his return to his bedroom and the contemplation of the whitewashed walls of the court. He was safe for the time being from the blandishments of the designing woman across the way.

He leaned back and closed his eyes. He felt suddenly lonely. He wished—but what sentimentality! They were all alike under the skins, even the woman of his romantic dreams with the gentle voice and the softly waving bands of brown hair.

It was at five o'clock that Haru brought the great package into the room and, undoing it, revealed a brass cage. In it, hopping from perch to perch, was a yellow canary.

Potiphar, with an exclamation of surprise, reached for a small envelope attached to the top of the cage.

Opening it he pulled out a card, both sides of which were covered with fine handwriting as easily decipherable as print.

I am sending my canary to keep you company during your convalescence. He is a lively little chap. His name is Dick. Yes, I have read "Molly Make Believe," else I should never have thought of doing this, as I am not at all original. If Dick is not welcome, return him to Apartment 21, the Dresden.

"The brazen hussy," said Potiphar Williamson under his breath. "I'll send the thing back. She must think me a boob. Haru," he went on, turning to the Jap, who had thrust his finger through the wires of the cage, and was grinning delightedly as the

bird pecked at it, "take this canary across the street and leave it with the elevator boy. Tell him it is for Apartment 21. It was left here by mistake."

Haru acquiesced silently. From the window Potiphar saw him presently enter the house across the way. But what effect the return of the canary had upon the yellow-haired widow Potiphar could not determine.

The shades in her apartment had been pulled down. Through the cracks between them and the window casings the light gleamed warmly, as if from red-shaded lamps.

Very early the following morning Potiphar was again ensconced in the easy chair by the window. But it was almost ten o'clock when the widow pulled up her shades, threw open her window, leaned out to look toward the river and then, straightening up, began to go through some deep breathing exercises.

Her hair was rolled up in tight little wads all around her face, and she wore a pale blue kimono. She did not deign to so much as glance in the direction of Potiphar Williamson.

"Her dander is up," muttered Potiphar, mightily amused at her pretended indifference.

Having finished her deep-breathing exercises the widow disappeared, and Potiphar, although he watched for her until three o'clock, when weariness compelled him to return to his bed, saw no more of her that day.

But at six o'clock a letter in a square white envelope with a deep mourning border was thrust under his door.

Haru brought it to him, and he immediately recognized the hand-writing as the same that had appeared on the card the day before. He tore open the envelope nervously and pulled out a closely written correspondence card. He read:

My Neighbor:

You are even less human than I supposed. I believed that the lively companionship of my little bird would help you pass the tedious hours of your convalescence. It is evident that you misunderstood my motive in sending Dick to you. He seems glad to be back. He doubtless likes crotchety old bachelors no better than does his mistress.

Your Dresden Neighbor.

December 2, 1913.

"Of all the uncalled for impertinence," exclaimed Potiphar, tossing the letter to the table. "A crotchety old bachelor, am I? Ha, ha! Crotchety, no doubt, because I did not yield to her transparent wiles."

Potiphar chuckled, then leaned back among his cushions. The loudness of the clock's ticking made the room seem lonely. He reread the widow's impertinent note. This time, as he finished it, he laughed aloud.

"I'll bet the lady could have dispensed with the rouge pot, while she was penning this. There's ginger and red blood in every line. Less human than she thought, am I? Her frankness is only equaled by her effrontery. Some day I'll tell her so." Which indicates that Potiphar did not consider the incident closed.

Several times during a night of broken sleep he caught himself thinking of the widow and her little boy. It irked him. He longed for morning. Would it never come?

It did at last, and Potiphar insisted on getting up for breakfast; that is, having it served to him in the front window, where he established himself in the big easy chair. But the widow's window shades remained down.

It was not until almost noon that they were raised, and the widow, in her distractingly becoming weeds, was seen drawing on her gloves while she leaned out to look at the sky, which threatened rain. Twice she glanced casually in Potiphar's direction, and the second time Potiphar was certain that she smiled.

Quite accidentally he smiled back, which seemed to frighten her, for she pulled down her veil and turned away at once, taking with her the little boy who had suddenly appeared from the

k of the apartment, hatted and ted, ready for the street.

By craning his neck, Potiphar could them a few minutes later as they ft the apartment house and started toward the subway.

The widow carried a tightly rolled umbrella, but she wore very thin and absurdly high heeled pumps. As nearly as Potiphar could make out they were made of black satin. She would catch her death of cold in case it rained or turned suddenly cold.

The woman certainly needed somebody to look after her—going about in pumps in December. It was suicidal!

He leaned back in his chair with a sigh. He wished— Before his mental vision flashed the face of the woman of his dreams, for all men have dreams, even crotchety old bachelors!

It was a gentle face, framed in dark hair and lighted with a pair of tender brown eyes, as deep and soft as velvet. The kind of a face one sees sometimes in old-fashioned prints and daguerreotypes, its expression broodingly maternal.

Potiphar passed his hand across his brows. No. He could never become reconciled to the thought of a pink and white complexion and brazenly golden hair behind his coffee-urn.

And yet—he had smiled encouragement to that bold creature across the street. The recollection annoyed him.

He pulled the letter in the black-bordered envelope from the pocket of his dressing gown. Then he rang for Haru.

"Bring me my portfolio, please," he said shortly. The boy brought it, and Potiphar immediately began a letter.

Once he paused to look across at the deserted apartment.

"I shall leave nothing to the lady's imagination," he chuckled. "A crotchety old bachelor, am I? Less human than she thought. I'll be equally frank with my neighbor."

When at last the letter was finished and despatched to Apartment 21, the Dresden, Potiphar settled himself back among his pillows, utterly spent and weak.

The effort had been almost too much for his strength, and when Haru returned from posting the letter he insisted upon putting his master to bed at once and sending for the doctor. Potiphar consented to the change feebly.

The letter would not be delivered before morning. He would be strong enough by that time to thoroughly enjoy the widow's chagrin.

It was over his gruel, the following morning, that Potiphar came to the conclusion that the widow's designs were past understanding.

He had expected that she would appear in her most ensnaring habiliments after receiving his letter. Instead, the raised window-shades disclosed her wrapped round in a mannish-looking bath-robe of ugly drab wool, with a bandage around her throat.

Her hair was twisted into a tight knot on the top of her head, and every now and then she buried her small nose in a huge square of white linen.

She sat down in a rocking-chair by the window, sneezed twice, and then drew a letter from somewhere inside the bath-robe, unfolded it, and began to read.

Potiphar blushed, for the square of blue paper had a familiar look. The widow studied it; then transferred the big piece of white linen from her nose to her eyes, jabbing at them spasmodically.

Then she called the little boy, and, with her cheek against the top of his curly head, read the letter aloud to him, folded it up, pressed it against her cheek, and again thrust it into the bosom of the bath-robe without even a sidelong glance in Potiphar's direction.

As the letter was returned to its hiding-place, Potiphar blushed again. He was annoyed, and yet—the wile

of the widow were getting under his skin.

She might have gone on for weeks using the ordinary feminine devices to attract Potiphar, and his pulse would have remained normal. But the ugly bath-robe, the bandage around her throat, the big handkerchief, the cherishing of that disagreeable letter—all combined to throw him off his guard.

He regretted the brutal sarcasm that had brought tears. He was tempted to write an apology. He rang for Haru and ordered his portfolio, but before he had made the first scratch with his fountain pen he discovered that the widow herself was writing a letter, working her pen with her right hand and her handkerchief with her left.

Once she paused and looked out of the window dreamily and straight at Potiphar, who had raised himself on his elbow to get a better view of her. He started and slunk back into his pillows.

Almost immediately the widow went on with her letter.

It was delivered to Potiphar in the late afternoon mail, together with a square package neatly tied with red twine. The letter read:

I am more sorry for you than ever, my neighbor. At first I pitied you because you seemed so very weak and lonely. Since I have discovered your state of mind I am alarmed for you. I am sorry that you dislike birds and little boys and yellow hair. Perhaps you object to sunshine, too, but I am sure you will like the pictures in the scrap-book I am sending to you with this. They are Kirby's and very human. I have the "effrontery" to send them to you because you are melancholic and ennuied with your own disagreeable companionship.

Your frankly disapproving,
DRESDEN NEIGHBOR.

Apartment 21.
December 3.

The shades across the street were already drawn when Potiphar received the letter. If the widow was curious about the reception of her communication, she disguised it well.

Potiphar read the thing twice, stuck it under his pillow, and turned to the scrap-book. Of all New York's newspaper artists, Kirby was his favorite.

In some respects the widow's tastes ran parallel with his own. He half wished he had not returned the bird. The golden cage would have been effective against his sage-green wall-paper and—yes, a golden head would be attractive outlined against the sage-green of the fireplace chair.

He closed his eyes. A yellow mist obscured the face of the woman of his dreams.

Gradually it took form, assuming the shape of the designing widow. But was she designing? Or merely sympathetic?

Surely there was no artful lure in her make-up this morning. He turned another page of the scrap-book, then sat up, reached for his portfolio, took his fountain pen, and began to write.

He said:

Thank you, my neighbor, I appreciate your kindness in lending the scrap-book. I also apologize for my letter of yesterday. I am sending this by my man, together with an excellent prescription for influenza. It will break up a cold in a few hours.

Sincerely and anxiously yours,
POTIPHAR WILLIAMSON.

Potiphar hesitated for some time before setting down his signature. If she really was a designing harpy, it might put him in her power. The thought of her chin as it rested on the little boy's head decided him. So fond a mother could not be altogether mischievous.

The next morning, early, he sent Haru out for a cloth elephant, which he despatched to Apartment 21 with his card, and then waited impatiently for the shades across the way to be raised.

They remained down until very late, and when they at last went up it was only to reveal a stout colored woman in a blue dress and white apron.

For two days neither the widow nor the little boy were visible. Potiphar

worked himself into quite a fever of anxiety. They were doubtless ill. Finally he despatched a note of inquiry to their apartment.

He wrote:

MY DEAR NEIGHBOR:
I am yours to command if there is anything I can do for you.

and signed himself, "Devotedly yours."

Almost immediately came a note in reply. It read:

DEAR MR. WILLIAMSON;
Thank you for the influenza prescription.
Your sending it indicates a marked improvement in your condition. I shall have it filled at once.
Amusedly yours,
M. B.

As Potiphar finished the note he looked up and into the widow's smiling face. She was in her full warpaint. Her hair was more golden than ever. Her face was neatly whitewashed and decorated with the round pink cheeks.

On her head was perched the piquant mourning bonnet. Her wrists were circled with black ribbon bracelets tied in coquettish bows. She was slowly drawing on her gloves. The little boy snuggled against her, wafting kisses in Potiphar's direction.

Alas, poor Potiphar! His heart pounded like an engine with its exhaust open. He felt the blood mounting hot to his temples. He knew that he had been bowled over, enticed, ensnared, and he was glad of it.

He smiled straight into the widow's eyes, then waved a gay salute to the little boy. As they turned from the window he settled back among his pillows.

How pleasant it would be to have a little boy to "rough house" at the end of the day. What an appetite a fellow could work up for dinner. And then—Again he pictured the widow's golden head against the sage-green back of his fireside chair.

He set his lips in a determined line, reached for his portfolio, and started a letter. It was formal enough to have suited the most fastidious of Grundies, but it was insistent, too. It demanded a personal interview.

Several days passed before an answer came, and then it put him off. The widow sent belated thanks for the elephant, and said she had stood the beast on the mantel. But she could not allow Potiphar to call.

There were conventions that must be observed, especially in a city like New York. She was glad that he was feeling so much better, and she closed with a good-by that sounded final.

But Potiphar saw through the widow. She felt a sentimental regard for him, else why had she stood the elephant on the mantel instead of giving it to the little boy to play with.

He would not be put off by the hackneyed excuse about conventions. Had not the widow broken them all when she first wrote to him? He despatched another letter filled with mingled sarcasm and pleading.

He was able to be up and about by this time, and to throw the widow off her guard spent less time in the chair by the window. He managed to keep in touch with all that went on in the apartment across the way, however, by watching it from a vantage-point in a dusky corner of the hall.

It amused him to note that preparations were being made for a visit from somebody of importance. Windows were washed, pictures taken down and dusted, sofa pillows pounded.

Even a stupid man would have interpreted the motive behind this midwinter house-cleaning. And Potiphar was not stupid. The widow was getting ready for him.

He waited three days and then, when the apartment had been thoroughly refurbished, sent another note containing the single word,

"When?"

"Wednesday evening at eight o'clock," came the answer.

Wednesday. Two days away. Potiphar could hardly wait. He walked for miles merely pacing the length of his apartment. He lost his appetite and some flesh, which alarmed his physician. He slept badly, in fact he worked himself up into such a nervous state that by Wednesday night he was more fit for the hospital than for a call upon the widow.

When the time at last came to dress he ruined three neckties before he tied a bow that suited him, and he muttered imprecations over the fit of his swallow-tail.

Between the hours of six and eight he made many trips to the front windows to discover how the prospective visit was affecting the widow. But the shades were drawn. There was not even a glint of light to indicate her presence in the apartment across the way.

Potiphar concluded that she was prinking. He smiled at his mental picture of her before the mirror in her bedroom, busy with whitewash and rouge.

What a bomb he would drop into her preconceived notions of his taste in women, when he told her how much more attractive he had thought her that morning in the negligee of her woolly bath-robe than she had ever seemed to him in the full glory of her war paint.

Before presenting himself at The Dresden, Potiphar visited a florist's shop and a confectioner's, and loaded himself with yellow chrysanthemums for the widow, and a papier mâché Brownie filled with gum drops for the little boy.

Then he strode boldly into The Dresden, and sent his name to Apartment 21.

A few minutes later a neat maid was ushering him into the widow's parlor and— But the widow was nowhere in sight. Instead, a trim woman with soft dark hair and amused eyes was coming toward him, her hand outstretched. She was dressed very simply in black with narrow bands of white at throat and sleeves.

"Welcome, neighbor," she said. Her voice was low and gentle.

Potiphar took the outstretched hand and, in the confusion of the moment, pumped it up and down. Meantime his eyes were roving. Where was the widow, and where was the little boy? Also where was the red-shaded lamp, with which he was familiar, the red wall paper and—

"I— I beg your pardon, madam. I—I seem to have made a mistake," he stammered, his eyes resting on first one unfamiliar object of furniture and then another. "I was looking for—" The sentence went unfinished. His gaze fastened itself on a cloth elephant standing on the mantel. He felt the blood mount to his temples. He looked questioningly from the elephant to the strange woman.

"I have named the beast, Potiphar," she laughed.

Then she reached out her hands and took the great bunch of golden chrysanthemums.

"Are they for me?" she asked, removing their paper covering.

"Yes—yes," acquiesced Potiphar, vainly trying to stuff the fat Brownie filled with gum drops into his coat-tail pocket. During the operation the Brownie's head came off, and the gum drops rolled over the floor. "I brought them for the little boy," began Potiphar, bending to pick up the candies.

"The little boy?" questioned his hostess.

"Yes, your little boy," replied Potiphar, very red, and then, plunging on apologetically, as he saw the surprised look in the woman's face, "I thought you were somebody else. I owe you a thousand apologies. I'm sure I don't know what you must think of me, writing you as I did, and sending you things. I—"

In his confusion Potiphar broke down. The whole thing certainly was a devil of a mess.

The woman laughed.

"Do not apologize. Your letters were deliciously amusing. I read between the lines that you thought me some artful minx who had set her cap for you. That is why I consented to letting you call. I thought it would be well for you to see that your interested neighbor was only a plain, middle-aged woman whose heart went out to the young man across the street who seemed so very ill and lonely. I lost a dear one a few months ago. He died among strangers. It was for his sake that I wrote you as I did and sent Dick to keep you company."

She sighed, and as Potiphar met her soft brown eyes he realized that they were like the eyes of his dream woman whom the widow had superseded.

A silence fell between them which was finally broken by Potiphar, whose mind had worked back to the influenza cure.

"I still feel that I have many things to explain. There was the prescription—"

A dimple flashed into the cheek of his hostess.

"You see I thought you were the lady with the little boy—the blonde one—the widow—"

"Oh, you put me in specific form, then. Now, I wonder who you thought I was."

Potiphar went to the window and looked out.

Across the way he could see the windows of his own apartment, but they were on a lower level than those of hers.

"I took you to be the widow who lives just below you—exactly opposite me."

"Mrs. Le Mar!" exclaimed his hostess. "But she is not a widow. Her husband is in vaudeville. I know her through her little boy, who told me that his papa was coming back today."

Potiphar opened his mouth to speak, but closed it again, weakly. For two weeks he had been thinking of the widow's golden head resting against the green background of his fireplace chair. And now—

He felt that that he had been jilted, humiliated. Every word of his hostess was like a knife thrust in his heart.

He rose. Held out his hand, awkwardly.

"I must be going," he said. "I find I am not as strong as I thought."

His hostess looked at him anxiously.

"Let me bring you a glass of wine," she said.

"I thank you, no," said Potiphar, edging toward the door. "Good night."

"Good night." There was the suggestion of disappointment in the woman's voice. But Potiphar did not heed it.

He rushed to the elevator, rang the bell furiously, then leaned weakly against the grilled shaft. His mind was in chaos. He had been duped. His affections had been trifled with. He had fallen into the snare set by a designing widow. But she was not a widow. Her husband was in vaudeville.

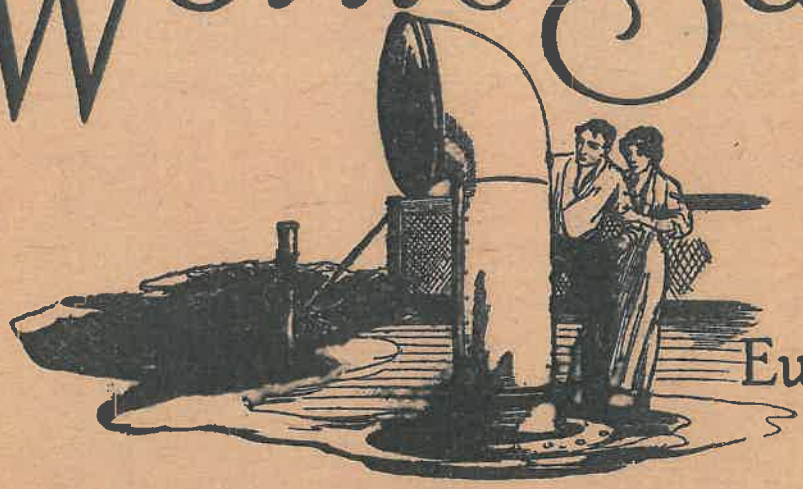
The elevator whisked him to the street floor. He plunged through the door and then out into the night. Was ever before a man in such a predicament?

Having refitted his ideals to the pattern of that blond woman across the street, whose character he had thought revealed by certain gifts and certain letters, he found that the readjustment in his tastes, arrived at with such difficulty, had been a waste of effort.

He had fallen in love, head over heels in love, and—with the wrong woman!

He made his way to his own apartment. Force of habit took him at once to the window. Across the way three figures were silhouetted against a soft background of red light. The widow's husband had returned. She and the little boy flaunted their happiness before Potiphar's tortured eyes. Bah!

Worth Saving



by Eugene Jones

THERE were two reasons why Jack Homer and his pretty young wife sat huddled between the ponderous smoke-stack and the forward ventilator.

First, it was the only spot on the helpless ship that the big yellow seas left untouched as they mounted over her windward rail and spilled aft.

Second, Homer felt that the end was near, and he wished to be alone with the girl he had just won and was so soon to lose.

In the shelter of the main cabin-house a few of the more determined passengers were attempting to launch the last life-boat, but to their inexperienced and frenzied hands the blocks and falls tangled hopelessly. The frail craft would have been dashed to pieces a dozen times had not one of their number—"the Gentleman of Mystery," as he had been dubbed by his fellow travelers—taken command.

In quick, short sentences of perfect English he directed operations, but at a safe distance from the ever-advancing water.

When the vessel had struck, some little time previous, most of the crew had promptly manned three life-crafts and gallantly put off, while the men, women and children aboard the doomed liner had screamed and cursed in an agony of despair. Now it was an open question whether or not another soul left the ship before she broke up.

The young couple on the hurricane-deck were in ignorance of the attempt to launch the last life-boat. They sat braced against the stack with the salt spray flying over them and the wind whipping through their water-soaked clothing.

He held her safe as the vessel was lifted by one foamy mass after another and hurled back, torn and helpless upon the knifelike corral reef, with a mighty rendering crash.

His young face reflected the misery running in his brain. It seemed unjust, unfair—this terrible ending to their honeymoon.

He looked up with a defiant, appealing glance at the gray, hurrying sky and drew his arm a trifle closer around the slight girlish figure that lay so still.

"It'll come out all right, dear," he whispered over and over. "It'll come out all right—I know it will!"

Her brown eyes wandered to his face; she snuggled closer and he kissed her reassuringly.

Far off, just sharpening the horizon-line, lay a faint pencil-mark—the southern coast of Florida—and many miles to the northward the steel skele-

ton of Fowery Rocks lighthouse climbed up out of the white smother of the reef. Beyond the light was quiet water; beyond that, Biscayne Bay, Miami and safety!

Just then a huge sea lifted the ship on its soapy yellow crest and dropped her from a dizzy height back on the jagged, torn reef.

With a face as white as the tails of the thunder-heads skimming low above him Homer waited for the deck-plates to buckle, but they did not. Then he glanced toward the stern and the open ocean desperately hoping for a rescue vessel, but the wide expanse was unbroken save where the whitecaps relieved the sullen gray of the waves.

The Arsenica, a small passenger and freight steamer, bound for one of the South American ports, had become unmanageable some hours earlier when she had crashed head-on into a half-submerged derelict, her propeller and rudder had been torn away and several of the crew thrown overboard by the shock.

At the time of the accident she was running due south—about forty miles off the coast of Florida.

The captain and first officer had been swept to their death while attempting to learn the extent of the damage, and helpless the ship had drifted onto the great Florida reef, where a big sea was now reducing her to scrap-iron at alarming speed.

Homer shifted his position slightly to better brace himself to the motion of the ship, and in so doing caught sight of the Gentleman of Mystery.

He was making his way cautiously along the hurricane-deck toward them, and because of the constant roll and pitch of the vessel he was compelled to halt often and hang on to the rail for his life. It was a hazardous task, and Homer wondered what his object could be in attempting it.

Five minutes later he rested against the stack and wiped the salt from his eyes and nose.

"I say, friends, I thought I'd run over and let you know that our fellow passengers have a neat little plan to put off in the last life-boat—I sort of remembered seeing you two start in this direction."

He spoke with an ease and unconcern strangely out of place on the heaving deck. His manner suggested a gentleman announcing the next dance. Louise Homer looked up at him fearfully.

"Don't be alarmed, madam," he continued; "there is time enough if you hurry, but the ship cannot withstand this hammering much longer."

He squeezed a few drops of water from his bedraggled, handsomely cut coat and smoothed down his hair on the narrow intellectual head. Then he pointed off to port.

"You can probably make out the opening in the reef, where the sea isn't breaking, if the boat reaches that she'll be all right."

Homer helped his wife to her feet and steadied her until the stranger took his place on her other side.

"There is a faint chance," he said, "that one of the steamers we signaled by wireless will come along in time. I doubt it, though. We're too far from the beaten track!"

Together they supported the girl along the slippery deck, holding fast to everything that looked secure. The Arsenica lay at such an angle that the seas rose with ease over her battered bow and rushed aft, ripping up deck fittings, swashing by the companion-way steps and roaring off the stern like a giant waterfall. They carried with them sometimes a portion of the rail; sometimes a screaming passenger.

Homer and the stranger had all they could do to keep the girl from being swept overboard, but they reached the shelter of the stern cabin in safety.

There in the lee of the vessel rode a life-boat, packed, jammed with cursing, screaming, fighting human freight. One man had climbed to the bow and was holding fast to the ship with a boat-hook—a thing impossible to