

SATURDAY

JULY 25

TEN CENTS

ALL-STORY CAVALIER WEEKLY

The "In-Bac
Man

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ALL-STORY CAVALIER WEEKLY

Vol. XXXIV

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THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY, 175 Fifth Avenue, New York, and Temple House, Temple Avenue, E. C., London

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

Single copies, 10 cents. By the year, \$4.00 in United States, its dependencies, Mexico and Cuba; \$6.00 to Canada, and \$8.00 to Foreign Countries. Remittances should be made by check, express money order or postal money order. Currency should not be sent unless registered

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FORTY-FOUR BIG NOVELS

—APPEARED IN THE—

ALL-STORY CAVALIER WEEKLY

DURING THE LAST TWO YEARS
HERE THEY ARE:

- | | | |
|--|---|---|
| Hugo
By Arnold Bennett | As He Was Born
By Tom Gallon | The Devil's Admiral
By Frederick Ferdinand Moore |
| The Sword Hand of Napoleon
By Cyrus Townsend Brady | Under Handicap
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THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY

175 FIFTH AVENUE, NEW YORK

ALL-STORY CAVALIER WEEKLY

Vol. XXXIV

JULY 25, 1914

No. 3

The "In-Bad" Man by Lee Robinet

Author of "The Second Man."

CHAPTER I.

Dawn Fire.

EVEN on the coolest of the decks the heat of that last night coming down the Red Sea had been almost insufferable. Shortly before morning the liner slipped out through the Straits of Babel-Mandeb.

The same dead July calm prevailed in the Gulf of Aden; but the passengers were at last relieved by the coolness which precedes the tropical dawn. Nearly all took advantage of the respite to sink into the restful slumber of less torrid regions.

The occupant of the most luxurious stateroom aboard the great P. and O. steamer had slept while most of her fellow passengers lay tossing in restless torment.

She now rose and made a hasty toilet without calling her maid. Though the languor in her dark eyes suggested southern Europe, her aristocratic hands were deft and all her graceful movements purposeful.

She reached the rail of the promenade deck in time to witness the ever-marvellous splendor of the tropical dawn. The sky was a blue-black dome

studded with diamonds; but as she gazed forward over the port bow of the liner the velvety darkness in the east glowed with a golden light that paled the stars above the ocean horizon.

Swiftly the gold became tinged with a pink, deepening to a rose shot with beams of scarlet—a soft effulgence that lent a delicious blush to the creamy whiteness of the girl's oval face.

Then, like a fairy overture swelling into a triumphal march, the scarlet beams flared out in a riot of magnificent red flames that leaped up at the zenith as if to devour the last fleeing star. Close upon these warlike fore-runners the royal sun leaped up above the horizon and searched out every nook and corner of his domains with the white glare of his wrathful gaze.

The girl at the rail sighed with more than esthetic satisfaction as for a moment she looked straight into the disk of white fire.

Dazzled, she half-lowered her silken lashes and looked down. On the deck below her she saw blurred shapes moving, and she heard a mutter of hoarse voices. As her vision cleared

she perceived that the shapes were two men bearing another between them by the legs and shoulders.

All three were stripped to the waist.

Their hair was clotted with sweat-dampened ashes, and their faces and bodies were covered with a layer of smut and ashes and coal-dust, down which ran whitish sweat-streaks. On their hands and arms were the marks of numerous burns, some of them fresh, others scarred over.

The girl recognized the grimy trio as stokers.

She shuddered at the hairy bodies of the two carriers and drew back to shut off the repulsive sight. But a glimpse of the gray-white face of the third man impelled her to pause and linger in half-fearful fascination. The man seemed to be dead. He hung inert in the grasp of the others.

Beside the rail, where the slight breeze of the liner's headway could be felt, the man in the rear released his hold and turned back. The other man lowered the head and shoulders of the victim of heat and overwork with a gentleness that brought a glow of sympathetic tenderness into the curious, half-disdainful eyes of the shrinking spectator on the deck above.

As the man stepped clear his companion came back with a bucket of water and dashed the contents upon the forebody and into the face of the prostrate man.

Brutal as appeared the remedy, it served the purpose. The swooning stoker gasped, stirred a little, and opened his eyes. At once his face lost its repulsiveness. His eyes were the clear, bright blue of cornflowers.

With them as keynote, the half-washed-off smudge of sweat and grime failed to divert attention from the shapely nose and mouth, the broad forehead, and firm chin.

The cheeks, though thin and hollow from exhaustion, showed none of the creases of age or dissipation. Most of the ashes had been cleansed from the well-trimmed hair by the violent

splurge of water. There was no sign of gray in the sandy locks.

For a moment the man's eyes stared vacantly upward.

Then their half-dazed gaze was caught and fixed by the vision of loveliness that was peering over the rail above. His mates were hurrying down to the stokehold.

Suddenly conscious that the man perceived her, the girl started back, her eyes flashing with vexation. She went over to the opposite rail and gazed out across the head of the gulf toward the distant coast of Africa.

But soon the disdainful curve of her scarlet lips began to relax. There had been nothing offensive in the fellow's look. After the drenching and with his eyes open, he did not appear such a vulgar sort.

They were oddly pleasant eyes. She was alone on this deck, and the man's mates had left him alone down there. Might there not be need to notify some one that he required aid?

Womanly pity, feminine curiosity, maidenly fancy—who may fathom the springs of a young lady's conduct?

When she again peered down at him his eyes were closed. But he had slipped an arm under his head, and there were a tinge of color in his cheeks. She gazed at him as one views a beautiful animal.

Though he was not a large man either in height or girth, his narrow hips and magnificently developed forebody might have been cast from the mold of a Greek statue.

She had viewed many of the galleries and museums of Europe. His eyes were closed. Why should she not admire this sleeping Adonis, wearied with his toil at the forge of Vulcan?

The blue eyes opened wide and looked up at her.

This time they were not dazed or bewildered. As they met her gaze they shone radiantly and smiled a recognition that held no trace of disrespect, but only a surprised and reverent adoration.

His lips parted to utter a clear, low-pitched murmur: "Then it *was* you. I thought it a vision—a heavenly vision of you, my lady."

Even one of her station could not take offense at so inoffensive a remark. She blushed a little and smiled uncertainly, yet lingered, unable to break the spell of the odd situation.

Somehow it seemed quite natural that he should be speaking to her. He was different from other men. This was not alone because his intonation proved him, to be an American.

Yet that counted not a little. To have shown the slightest condescension to an Englishman of the lower orders would, in the circumstances, have been quite impossible.

"My lady!" he repeated, and, smiling up at her, he began to quote:

"This, then, O Flowers, I sing;
God, when he made ye,
Made yet a fairer thing
Making my lady;
Fashioned her tenderly,
Giving all weal to her.
Girdle ye slenderly,
Go to her, kneel to her,

"Saying, 'He sendeth us,
He the most dutiful,
Meetly he endeth us,
Maiden most beautiful!
Let us get rest of you,
Sweet, in your breast;
Die, being pressed of you,
Die, being blessed.'"

Unconsciously the girl's hand had been lifted, to press against her bosom. She drew in a tremulous sigh of wonder and delight.

"You—you know Austin Dobson—you, a stoker?" she murmured. "Who are you? What is—"

She stopped abruptly and drew back as if startled. From behind her came a hail in a mellow English voice: "Ah-ha, *Senhorita Vasca!* I knew I should find you here."

The florid young Englishman was no Greek Adonis.

Yet he was both handsome and aristocratic, and his usually cold gray eyes

were aglow as he hastened toward the girl. Her vexation vanished at sight of his eagerness. She gave him a gracious smile and started across to the starboard rail.

"Out for a morning whiff at the odors of Araby the Blest?" he inquired.

"I wish it were the orange blossoms of Mozambique, Mr. Decies."

"To be sure. Orange blossoms—deuced pleasant associations!" he observed, his eyes ardent.

She parried the attack: "Do you wonder, when all my childhood and many years since were spent on the east coast—Mozambique, Natal, Delagoa Bay, Biera? In England I am an exotic."

He smiled amusedly. "You say that—the daughter of Sir Hallam Searle."

"Africander," she rejoined.

"But he was born in England, I hear; and as an associate of Cecil Rhodes—"

"I, at least, am a real Africander, Mr. Decies. You have heard that my mother was the daughter of a governor-general of Mozambique."

"Indeed, yes; a Portuguese lady—"

"And I was born at Port Mozambique. So you see I am very *un-English* in reality. Do you wonder that I regard Africa as my motherland—that I am glad to be going home?"

She gazed across the gulf at the desolate shore of Africa, fast receding in the distance.

"Must say I fail to get you—quite," he replied. "Africa is well enough for rubber and big game and all that, you know. But home is home even to colonials."

"Wait until you've met them in their native lairs," she rallied. "When in England we may be so weak or so tactful as to agree with the insular majority, who know no better. We endure the fog and chill—yet in our hearts we long for our sun and blue skies."

"And fever and torrid heat," he added.

"At least you will find the shooting better," she countered.

"There you have me," he admitted. "Lucky fluke for me that the plantation is in a big game country. If Sir Hallam had not told me of the shooting I wouldn't have taken the post of assistant manager, and so I might never have met you."

"There was once a large tribe of Makuas on that part of the coast," Vasca hastened to explain. "Years ago the slavers killed or carried away most of them, and more recently the country has been laid waste and depopulated by the ferocious Maviti. That is why my father was able to obtain so large a concession for the company and why he has to send to Gaza Land for contract laborers."

"Not half bad all round," remarked Decies. "The depopulating, I take it, is the cause of the country becoming so well stocked with game. Gives us the exclusive shooting, and no natives to poach on our preserves. There'll be no end of good sport."

"You know the Frenchman's statement of the customary English greeting," rallied the girl. "'Lovely morning.' 'Ah, yes, glorious! Let's go out and kill something.'"

"You would prefer to breakfast, would you not?" he inquired.

She smiled at his clever parry and permitted him to escort her down to the saloon.

CHAPTER II.

James Douglas Lochinvar.

WHEN the steamer put in at Aden, Sir Hallam Searle and his party went ashore. Soon afterward a boat came alongside to transfer the party's luggage to a small East Coast steamer that lay at anchor down the harbor.

A stoker off duty passed one of the boat's crew a cigarette and began to chat with him. Before the boat shoved

off he had learned that she belonged to the Ourebi, which had been chartered in England to carry supplies for the Mozambique Rubber Shamba Company.

He also learned that Sir Hallam Searle was manager of the company, and that the Ourebi was waiting to take the baronet and his party down the East Coast to the company's concession in northern Mozambique.

Shortly before the liner left Aden a man of pronounced tourist appearance emerged from the forecabin and drifted unobtrusively aft to the gangway.

He was dressed in an immaculate though creased white linen suit, high collar, pith helmet, and chalked canvas shoes. Cotton gloves shielded his hands from sunburn, and his eyes were protected from the tropical glare by large green goggles.

His close-shaven chin had a vigorous, youthful look that was belied by the slackness of his mouth, the hunch of his shoulders, and the aldermanic prominence of his waist-line.

He went ashore with rather a shambling step and headed for the nearest bazaar. For a time he strolled idly along, gaping into the open-fronted booths of the Arab merchants. Soon he had a ragged escort of beggars whining for bakshish.

As if annoyed by their clamorous importuning, he went back to the water-front and hired a Somali boatman to take him out to the Ourebi.

The skipper of the little East Coast steamer had gone ashore to bring off Sir Hallam and his party. When the man with the green goggles came alongside, the mate was sipping hot tea under the double awning of the quarter-deck.

He welcomed the visitor with gruff hospitality, serving him tea and insisting that he should remain until Sir Hallam came aboard.

The visitor confessed to a strong curiosity with regard to the East Coast and settled down beside the mate. He

was still asking questions when, late in the afternoon, the mate perceived his skipper putting out with a number of passengers.

"Sorry to chop off, mister," he said. "But there they come. You can land in one of these Somali boats that're hanging round us. I'll hail one."

"Hold on," replied the visitor. "I believe I'll wait and see if I can arrange with Sir Hallam for a passage down the coast."

"Better not try it. He's as like as not to have you chucked overboard, regardless of sharks."

"I'll chance it," insisted the visitor with a sudden straightening of his stooped shoulders.

The mate looked at him in surprise, shook his head, and hastened down to make himself presentable for receiving aboard the great man and his party.

The visitor continued to loll at ease under the awning until the boat was alongside and the passengers came up the gangway ladder. The party consisted of Sir Hallam and his daughter, the Hon. Bertram Decies, and Vasca's elderly Portuguese maid.

Sir Hallam was the first to reach the quarter-deck. At sight of the visitor, who rose and advanced to meet him, he frowned. The visitor smiled and bowed with cool self-possession, and held out his hand.

"Permit me to present my card, Sir Hallam," he said.

Though the massive face of the baronet did not lighten, he took the tastefully engraved bit of cardboard.

"Mr. James Douglas Lochinvar," he read, and he turned to Decies, who had just handed Vasca up the deck ladder. "Here, Bertie! How about this? Know any Lochinvars?"

"Can't say I know this—er—person," replied Decies.

"Nobody would with these sun-shades on," replied the visitor.

He removed the green goggles and brought to view a pair of very bright eyes, which sparkled with delight and amusement when he turned them upon

Vasca. They were of a clear cornflower blue.

"Oh!" exclaimed the girl in bewildered astonishment.

Her tone brought a sharp look from her father and a glance of polite inquiry from Decies. She blushed, hesitated, and said a trifle confusedly: "Pardon me. I—it seemed to me that I had met Mr.—Mr. Lochinvar before."

"I have never had the honor of an introduction to the lady," disclaimed the visitor.

"You're not one of the Scotch Lochinvars," stated Decies. "I should say you are American."

Sir Hallam spoke in his most brusque tone: "What can I do for you, Mr. Lochinvar?"

"You are chairman and manager of the Mozambique Rubber Shamba Company."

"Yes," curtly admitted the baronet.

"I hear there is big game shooting down on your concession."

"Quite right, sir," put in Decies, his look of displeased reserve softening. "The shooting is very good."

"That settles it. I'll take a run down that way," decided the visitor.

He drew off his cotton gloves and offered Sir Hallam a cigar of excellent brand. Seeing the other's gaze fixed upon his clean but scarred hand, he turned the calloused palm upward, and added:

"I've been knocking about a bit, you see. At present I'm looking for a job. The cigar is a bribe to win your favor. Anything will do—either headwork or handwork."

"Um-m," considered Sir Hallam, studying the happy go lucky face of the applicant. "Wanderlust—not a beach-comber, however."

"You're a pretty good judge of men."

Sir Hallam accepted the cigar, but frowned. "It does not follow that I have any use for you."

"That's for me to show you. Mr. Decies will be more set on the shoot-

ing than myself. Anyway, you'll need a practical man."

"We have one."

"Overseer for your contract laborers, already on the job, I understand. How about your machinery?"

"All oil engines of the latest type. A child can run them."

"And a Kafir can run them into the ground. Of course that's your lookout. But how about setting up your pumping plant?"

Sir Hallam's eyes lowered to the young man's bulging waist-line. The job-hunter grinned.

"That's all right. I can crawl through any hole big enough for my shoulders," he assured. "It's only my ditty-bag. Had to part with my box."

"Ditty-bag?" questioned Decies.

"My portmanteau—very handy one, both in the way of portability and portliness. But now, as Sir Hallam is looking for an expert machinist, rather than an assistant manager or alderman—"

He completed the remark by loosening the lower part of his expansive waistcoat and pulling out a waterproof bag that had been smoothly packed to fit the slim waist behind it.

The real belt-line appeared when he reached around under his coat and fastened the buckle-strap of the waistcoat. As he looked up he caught Vasca's half amused, half uncertain smile. His eyes twinkled.

Decies was neither amused nor uncertain. He stepped nearer to the American and inquired sharply: "May I ask your reason for disguising yourself?"

"That's what a lawyer would call a leading question and what I'd call a personal one," replied Lochinvar with careless irony.

"A needless question, Bertie," added Sir Hallam. He nodded to the American. "You are welcome to a try at the hydraulic machinery. That, however, is all I can promise you."

"If the job is worth my passage, I'll chance proving myself too useful to

lose. You don't ask for my qualifications. Here are some things I have done: steam-shovel engineer on the Panama Canal, motor-race driver, foreman of construction on a railroad, mate of a black-bird in the Solomons, and aeroplane demonstrator."

"You certainly are a Yankee," observed Decies, taking his opportunity to repay the other's irony in kind.

"Can't prove it on me. I was stating facts, not touting my wares, and I do not come from New England," good-humoredly rejoined Lochinvar. "I'm a Wyoming man—first white child born in my section of the State."

"Wyoming? Ah—that is in the far West—Indian country."

"No—sheep. I'm the goat they turned out into the wilderness."

The Hon. Vasca Searle laughed softly. Decies twisted the end of his English military mustache.

Though the American had spoken with blandest innocence of look and tone, the girl had seen fit to find the remark amusing. The insolence of the fellow deserved punishment.

"Pardon me, my man, but did you say goat? I was under the impression that the present custom is to turn off the black sheep."

Lochinvar deliberated on this. "Well, I suppose the State will have to come to it. We have a large flock of them—from England."

"I rather thought you'd be had, Bertie," said Sir Hallam, with a half smile. He looked at the American's bag.

"We sail early to-morrow, as soon as certain supplies are brought aboard. The skipper will land you this evening, if you wish to go ashore to complete your outfit."

"Thanks, no. I'm traveling light—just the necessities."

"But your guns?" asked Decies.

"That's all right. If there are none in the outfit I can borrow, I guess I can worry along and mind the housework while you supply the meat."

"You intimated that you were a sportsman."

"No, pot-hunter. There's only one kind of game I'm crazy over," replied Lochinvar. He opened his bag and took out a pudgy, padded thing the size of a dinner plate. "How's that for a catcher's mitt?"

"What?"

"Catcher's mitt—for baseball, you know. I've also got two gloves, a mask, and half a dozen balls. I never travel without the necessary tools for a game. They're worth their weight in gold—outside the countries that have learned the future world-game."

"Baseball!" pityingly remarked Decies. "You should learn cricket."

"Wait and see," challenged Lochinvar.

"I'll speak to the skipper about a berth for you," cut in Sir Hallam in his abrupt manner.

Vasca and Decies followed him below. Anita, the Portuguese maid, had already gone down to arrange the stateroom of her mistress.

CHAPTER III.

The Tiger Shark.

UNTIL dusk the American was left alone on the quarter-deck. He lolled at ease in a steamer-chair with the catlike relaxation of one who is satisfied with his prospects and who has perfect confidence in himself.

When at last he was called below, he found himself assigned to the mess of the mates and engineers. The other passengers had already dined.

The Britons took it as a matter of course that only the skipper was of sufficiently unhumble station to sit at table with the "toffs." Lochinvar, though somewhat reserved, was pleasant spoken to them; but they were puzzled by the discrepancy between his scarred and calloused hands and his well-bred manners.

He left them to discuss him and went up on to the quarter-deck.

In the light of the single lamp at the head of the steps he made out the Portuguese maid reclining upon a mat. She was crooning a weird East African chant. He had learned at supper that she had been reared at Port Mozambique, and had been Vasca's nurse before she became her maid.

He sauntered across to the port rail, attracted by the lights of Aden.

Though the crescent moon was very brilliant, the deck was dark in the shadow of the awning, away from the lamp. As he rounded the curve of the stern he made out two persons in steamer-chairs that faced across the gulf, away from the city.

The couple were conversing in confidential murmurs. Sir Hallam was not with them. Lochinvar turned back, kicked himself with quiet vigor, and went below to turn into the berth assigned him in the engineer's cabin.

Dawn and Vasca found him on deck.

His face was turned to the east with the rapt look of a Mussulman or a sun-worshiper. He did not glance about even when the girl came across from the companionway and leaned upon the rail not a foot from his elbow. The glories of the dawn held him transfixed as they held her.

Not until the sun appeared did they look at one another. A flash of sympathetic delight passed between their eyes. She drew in a deep breath that was almost a sigh.

"Then you, too!" she murmured.

"I, too, my lady," he whispered.

The long lashes veiled her dark eyes. She spoke hurriedly: "What poem best describes it? You must know."

"There is none. It is beyond words no less than it is beyond the brush of the painter."

"You realize it. I should have known you would."

"If only life were all dawn-gazing!" he murmured.

Her half averted gaze glimpsed a figure issuing from the companionway. At once she recovered her British reserve.

Decies advanced upon them with a resilient step, his florid face shining from a vigorous application of soap and bathbrush. But his gray eyes regarded the couple with cold disapproval.

"You were to have turned out for the sunrise," chided Vasca.

"Told the steward to rouse me early. The beggar forgot. Couldn't forego my tub, you know."

"Had mine over the side, an hour ago," remarked Lochinvar.

"Indeed? Sir Hallam warned me against taking a dip outboard. Said one is apt to get nipped by a shark."

"Man-eaters do cruise into the harbor here—sometimes," admitted Lochinvar. "It's as well to keep a lookout for them. But the natives go in. Two to one, those boatmen coming off to us are Somali divers, who want you to toss coppers for them."

"They are bringing the supplies of fresh food," differed Decies.

"Mr. Lochinvar means the two boats this way," explained Vasca. "Neither is loaded."

Four of the approaching boats rowed directly toward the group of earlier arrivals from which fruit and other supplies were being taken aboard ship.

The two empty boats veered away from them and came in under the steamer's quarter. Their yellow-skinned crews, stripped to loincloths and amulets, began calling in broken English for bakshish to be flung into the water.

Lochinvar thrust a hand into his pocket. It came out with two shillings, a sixpence and a few pennies. He returned the silver and tossed a copper well out from the boats.

One of the Somali boys dived after it like a streak of saffron. In a moment he bobbed up with the coin in his triumphantly flourished hand.

The next copper Lochinvar did not toss but flirted down in a way that sent it glinting into the water edgewise. Another Somali sprang to retrieve it.

After several moments he came up without the prize.

At once four of his fellows dived deep to look for the coin on the sandy bottom of the harbor. When they shot up to the surface one of them displayed it to the thrower.

"I say, that's not half bad," commended Decies.

"Fair to middling," said Lochinvar. "For real swimming you should see a Kanaka boy. Even the Florida spongers can beat this."

"Upon my word, I do not see how it could be better done. It is quite good enough for silver."

"They will do as much for pennies," said Vasca as Decies drew out a sixpence.

"But not if you bid up the market," added Lochinvar.

"I have sufficient silver to keep them occupied for a time," stated Decies as he tossed the sixpence.

Vasca had been mistaken. At sight of the differently colored coin, four Somalis plunged in together. After that there was no question of one of them awaiting his turn.

Each silver coin caused at least half a dozen eager divers to flash down into the still water, in desperate endeavor to grasp the prize.

In the midst of the sport a loose-slipped Arab merchant came up the poop ladder, followed by a servant with a basketful of Oriental swords and knives. These the merchant silently proceeded to lay out in glittering display on a mat beside the Englishman.

Decies had two coins left in his hand, a sixpence and a shilling. He tossed the smaller coin between the boats, and immediately flung the shilling as far as he could throw it. In their eagerness to follow the course of the sixpence, none of the Somalis appeared to notice the throwing of the shilling.

Piqued by the seeming failure of his double play, Decies turned about to examine the tempting wares of the

sword merchant. Lochinvar, more experienced in the ways of the Orient, noticed that one of the divers lingered until his fellows had leaped, and then sprang from his boat in the direction of the falling shilling.

He saw the crafty native bob up to mark the spot where the coin shot into the water and promptly strike out for it at top speed.

A quiet exclamation of admiration from Decies caused the American to look around. From the midst of the more showy modern weapons the Englishman had at once picked out a genuine old-Damascus blade. Part of its length had been broken off, possibly centuries ago on the armor of a crusader.

But the end had been so skilfully repointed as to turn it into a well balanced and effective sword-knife. Its bluish steel shimmered like watered silk. The hilt was inset with silver arabesques almost obliterated by centuries of hand grippings.

Decies's lips were parting to inquire the price of the rare blade when a wild burst of yells came up the ship's side. Vasca uttered a quick cry and leaned out over the rail.

"Oh!—they're scrambling into their boats. It must be—yes, there—look!"

"Shark!" cried Decies, springing around beside the girl. "My word, what a monster! Must be thirty-five or forty feet long!"

"The swimmer—out there!" gasped Vasca.

"Gad! The brute's driving straight at him. If I had my cordite rifle now!"

The Somali, who had so slyly gone out to dive for the shilling, was swimming for the boat with all the speed of deathly terror. He had need of utmost haste. From off the steamer's beam a huge triangular fin was angling down upon him at arrowy speed. The gigantic body of the man-eater was plainly visible, shooting along under the still surface before the thrust of the mighty tail.

"The boy can't make it," coolly observed Lochinvar. He had slipped out of his linen coat and was pulling off his shoes. "I'll take that knife, Mr. Decies."

"What? You can't mean—You're mad!" exclaimed Decies. "I'll not permit you."

In a flash Lochinvar gripped his wrist and twisted the sword-knife from him. A moment later he had swung over the rail and was poised for a dive. There was little time to spare if the Somali was to be saved.

The shark was not less than ten yards away from the frantic swimmer and coming with the speed of a torpedo boat.

The sailors at the bulwark forward and the men in the fruit boats, as well as the Somali divers, were all shrieking and yelling in a futile attempt to stop the sea tiger.

Above the clamor rose Vasca's terrified scream: "No, no, Lochinvar! don't!"

"It's all right," he replied. "I've been there before."

Too late Decies clutched out to grasp him. The American had leaped from the rail in a headlong dive, the Damascus blade pointed in front of his joined hands. He cleft the water within fifteen feet of the shark with the smoothness of an expert swimmer.

As he shot beneath the surface the voracious sea tiger drove upward and flung himself on his side to seize his prey.

His monstrous gaping maw easily could have taken in the Somali lengthwise; the great triangular, saw-edged teeth, three inches long, were fully capable of slicing the native in two, as a man would snip a radish.

The warning shrieks of his fellows caused the Somali to dive sideways away from the jaws of death. His foot found leverage against the rough snout of the gigantic fish.

In the same moment that the jaws clashed together something shot lengthwise of the creature's huge,

tapering body, followed by a glint as of steel under water. A cloudy jet gushed out along the half-upturned expanse of the shark's belly. The monster "sounded" like a harpooned whale. In the upswirl of his violent plunge the foam had a reddish tinge.

As he went down, Lochinvar came up a few yards to the rear and on one side.

In his right hand was the Damascus sword-knife. He stood erect, treading water, while he glanced alertly around in search of his terrible opponent. The Somali broke the surface with a loud splash and struck out for the nearest boat in a frantic flurry.

Lochinvar flattened out on the water to peer below the surface. Looking from above, Decies saw the dark bulk of the man-eater slanting up through the green water toward the Somali. He shouted in a clear, ringing voice: "Left, Lochinvar, left!—headed this way!"

But Lochinvar was already striking out. He flung himself directly between the shark and the fear-exhausted Somali. The shark's fin cut above the surface.

He charged straight at the interferer, who waited, ready to dodge or dive. For all his voracity, the sea tiger was not lacking in wariness. He sheered off from the silent, white-clad figure that barred his way.

As he slowed and circled about, Lochinvar noiselessly maintained his position between him and the Somali. Of a sudden the other Somalis, roused from the paralysis of their fright, shoved out to clutch their frantic fellow and jerk him into one of their boats.

"Now's your chance, man!" shouted Decies. "Make for the near boat."

Lochinvar waved his hand and swam straight at the shark. The sea tiger was looping back toward him. The excited spectators in the boats and above at the steamer's rail fell silent and stood rigid with suspense.

The shark went down.

Lochinvar put his face below the surface. Suddenly he leaped half out of the water and dived sideways with the swiftness of an otter. As his stockinged feet went under they were grazed by the up-shooting snout of the man-eater.

The terrible jaws seemed to snap shut on one of the feet, but the loud clash of the teeth told that there was nothing between them. Vasca uttered a faint shriek, and again lapsed into the silence of horrified suspense.

Instead of diving, as before, the ferocious fish had started to swirl around in the narrowest circle possible for his great length.

There could be no doubt that he was making a furious attempt to overtake and seize his audacious human assailant. Round and round he spun, lashing the water into foam with tremendous strokes of his tail.

At the side of the enraged monster and half under him appeared something white—a waving streamer attached to one of his pectoral fins.

The foam and the cloudy streaks that showed red on the surface obscured the outlines of the white object until, in one of his wild rolls, the sea tiger surged up with his belly half out of the water. Lochinvar appeared, gripped fast to the pectoral fin with one hand and arm, and driving the sword-knife into the shark's underbody with lightning strokes.

The great drafts of air that he gulped into his lungs seemed to redouble his vigor. He aimed a blow that plunged the blade into the very hilt. The shark went down like a stone—and Lochinvar went with him, tugging to free the blade.

"By Jove!" roared a voice within a foot of Vasca's ear. "That's pluck!"

For the first time the girl became aware that her father was standing between her and Decies. But she did not glance aside at him. Her gaze was fixed upon the foam-flecked water in an agonized stare.

"He went down," rasped Decies in a choking voice—"went down, the beggar! Why didn't he sheer off? Could have made the nearest boat."

"Wait," said Sir Hallam.

They could do nothing else than wait.

But it was not easy. Second after second dragged by without a sign of Lochinvar or his huge enemy. That he could remain below so long and not perish seemed impossible. What could be taking place down there in the green depths under the ship's keel?

Had the man-eater at last succeeded in shaking off and seizing him?

Forward, near the gangway, a white form was shooting up to the surface. The sandy head of the shark-fighter bobbed out, followed by half his body. He flung himself upon his back and lay gasping and blowing.

The skipper bellowed to him to swim for the gangway. Three or four native boats thrust out to his aid. With the man-eater out of sight, the boatmen had recovered from their panic. But Lochinvar waved them off.

"Rope!" he called.

A line was flung to him. He caught the end, and shouted: "Pay out—eight—ten fathoms!"

The wondering sailors obeyed. By the time thirty or forty feet of line had slipped down into the water, Lochinvar had recovered his breath. He turned over and dived. The coils of slack line straightened.

A full quarter-minute passed. The perplexed spectators were again becoming keyed to tense anxiety.

Lochinvar rose to the surface. When he had filled his lungs, he swam leisurely toward the gangway.

"Haul away," he called.

CHAPTER IV.

His Sword.

THE sailors began to haul in on the line. Lochinvar grasped the gangway and swung himself up on the

lower grating. At the same time the great tail of the shark appeared at the end of the taut line.

Vasca's convulsive clutch on the quarter-deck rail relaxed. She drew back and sank into a chair, with a profound sigh of relief. Her father was first to speak: "It will take a pretty good derrick to land that herring."

"Oh, I say, Sir Hallam," said Decies, "did you see him do it? What luck!"

"Nothing of the kind, Bertie. He knew what he was about. I've seen it done, near Singapore, by one of those web-fingered Straits Settlements boys. Hulloo, forward there! Send Mr. Lochinvar here at once."

The dripping hero stepped inboard from the gangway and started aft in response to the information that Sir Hallam wished to see him. When he came up the quarter-deck ladder he stopped with his head just above the level of the deck, to hold out the Damascus sword-knife.

"Here's the sticker," he said. "Tell the sheik it's the best one I ever used. I'm hardly presentable. If you'll excuse me, I'll go and borrow a change."

"Come up under the awning," commanded Sir Hallam.

"Boss's orders," replied Lochinvar, and he stepped up on the deck. To all appearances, he was utterly unconscious that he had done anything remarkable. "If Miss Searle will excuse my looking like a drowned rat," he apologized.

"Indeed, but I shall never forgive you for being so rash," declared the girl. "It was dreadful to do such a thing."

"I couldn't let that poor devil of a Somali get snapped up, could I?"

"You could have escaped into the boat when he did."

"And let pig off with a scratch."

"Pig?"

"That's what the Florida spongers call the sweet critter. It was when working as a sponger that I learned the gentle art of pig-sticking."

"You've fought sharks that way before?" queried Decies.

Lochinvar nodded carelessly. "It's not much of a stunt after you've learned the knack."

"But such a monstrous brute!" exclaimed Vasca, her eyes aglow.

"The big ones can't turn so quickly as the small ones, and with a knife like this—"

He turned to the Arab merchant, who had shrieked and gesticulated no less wildly than the Somalis during the fight, but now was as calm and dignified as a sheik sitting in state. "*Bismillah!* This is a pretty carving-knife, Abou-ben-Adhem. What's owing for the use of it?"

The Arab put out his hand in a deprecating gesture and answered: "The *sayid* owes nothing. He has shown the excellency of the sword."

"What price do you ask for it?" inquired Decies a trifle too eagerly.

"Allah bear witness, the sword is a priceless blade—a real Damascus sword. In ancient days the hilt was jeweled."

"Set a price," ordered Sir Hallam. "There is no time to bargain. We are about to weigh anchor."

The merchant studied Decies's face with greedy cunning. "Fifty pounds is half the price at which I could sell the blade to a sheik."

Lochinvar whistled and drew the two shillings and sixpence from the soggy pocket of his trousers.

"Go," Sir Hallam commanded the Arab. "The sword is worth no more than ten pounds. I warned you we cannot stop to haggle."

The Arab signed to his servant to gather up the outspread swords and knives. He salaamed as if to go, but paused in the act.

"A real Damascus blade is priceless, as the *sayid* knows. The young *sayid* has saved the life of a true believer. I offer him the sword as a gift—at fifteen pounds."

Lochinvar smiled and displayed his three pieces of silver.

The Arab looked at his calloused palm, salaamed, and turned away.

"Wait," said Decies. "I agree to the price you name."

"The price to you is fifty pounds," replied the merchant. He had sheathed the sword in its shagreen scabbard. He now thrust it haughtily into his shawl sash.

"This is insolence," said Decies.

"Not at all," contradicted Sir Hallam. "The man is not a draper's clerk." He nodded to the Arab. "I will pay the fifteen pounds, that the young man may have the gift."

"Hold on!" expostulated Lochinvar. "That's nearly seventy-five dollars. I can't let you do it, Sir Hallam. The blade may be worth the price and more, but an ordinary knife would do me as well."

The baronet had drawn out his purse. He paid the Arab in English sovereigns, took the sheathed sword-knife, and handed it to the still dripping American.

"We'll call it a reward for life-saving," he said.

Lochinvar flushed. "I didn't do it for pay. It was only a Somali."

"We shall all regard the gift as a kind of medal," said Vasca.

"Oh, if you really feel that way—" he replied, and he laughed shamefacedly. "I was about to put my foot in it by offering to repay your father out of my future wages. Mr. Decies, you seem to fancy the thing. Suppose I pass it on to you?"

Decies did not respond to the generous offer. "You heard the man. The price to me would be fifty pounds. That is more than I wish to pay. Very good of you to give me the chance. By the by, you'll need a shift of clothes. Tell the steward to give you one of my suits."

"Thanks, no," declined the American, his voice mild, though his eyes had narrowed. "The mate's will fit me better."

He picked up his coat and shoes and started toward the gangway.

"One moment," said Sir Hallam. "You spoke of your wages. Nothing has been said as to what they shall be."

"That's all right. You'll do the square thing," replied Lochinvar, without pausing or glancing back.

The three he left beside the rail followed with their gaze his erect, supple form. The shapely muscles rippled under the clinging wet garments.

"Looks as if he might be able to box," remarked Decies, as the disheveled sandy head disappeared down the companionway. "Quite a pity he has the hands of a navvy."

The expression of Sir Hallam's face did not change, but his deep-set eyes glinted.

He had won his title by his services to the empire, and though the second son of Lord Brayton was the last person to whom he would have wished to emphasize the fact, this did not obscure his memory of the time when his own thick-fingered, capable hands had been rough from the toil of a colonial settler. He turned to his daughter.

"My dear, I hear that the young man's table manners are quite correct, and he is an American. If you have no objections, we may as well benefit by his company down the coast. It's a tedious trip at best."

Vasca cast a demure glance at Decies. "You may think it odd, but I fancy that Mr. Lochinvar knows more about poetry than any of us."

"Never went in for literature myself," said Decies. "The question is, will the fellow know enough to keep his place?"

"Shipboard arrangement, Bertie," replied Sir Hallam in a tone that left no room for argument. "I like the way he behaved over the shark. He earned the sword. Men have been given the Victoria Cross for less daring exploits. But not one in a hundred could have taken this affair in such a matter-of-course manner. No posing; no trace of Yankee brag.

There's the breakfast-bell. I'll tell the steward to notify him to join us."

Aside from his hands, the American appeared quite as much in place at the skipper's table as Decies or Sir Hallam. Immediately after Decies had opened his soft-boiled egg in the English style he topped his own no less neatly, and ate it out of the shell without in any manner betraying that it was the first time he had ever performed the feat.

His conversation was quiet, good-humored, and intelligent.

By the time the party left the table the Ourebi had weighed anchor and run out of the harbor. When they went up on deck to get the benefit of the breeze, the steamer was heading obliquely down across the gulf toward Cape Guardafui.

Decies strolled forward to where part of the lascar crew were cutting up the shark. It measured only a few inches short of forty feet. When he returned aft his manner toward Lochinvar was decidedly less supercilious than it had been.

Before mid-afternoon Sir Hallam had started calling the newcomer "Jimmy." His tone was somewhat different from that in which he addressed Decies—a shade more bluff and less familiar, but it was quite as friendly.

That evening when Vasca sat in the shadow of the awning, looking out over the moonlit gulf toward Africa, there was a young man at each side of her.

CHAPTER V.

An Opportunity Embraced.

THE next day the Ourebi drew closer to the African coast, here a desolate stretch of yellow sands, backed by the bare ledges of a precipitous mountain-chain. Lochinvar declared that sea and land and climate all reminded him of the hottest part of the Gulf of California.

Sir Hallam smiled grimly and remarked that he would soon see a difference. The assertion was smilingly confirmed by Vasca, though neither barometer nor sky, sea nor land gave any indication of a change.

Early in the afternoon the sailors began to make all fast on deck.

The boats were lashed to their davits, everything loose was stowed below or secured to eyebolts, hatches were battened down, ports closed, rigging and funnel stays tautened. In the cabins and galley the cook and his helper, the steward and the cabin-boy were busily at work securing pots, pans, dishes, and glass in the storm-racks.

The Ourebi was now fast approaching the grand precipice of Guardafui, which towered up sheer out of the sea to a height of four hundred feet.

The gulf still lay glassy and stagnant in the dead July calm, and the iron hull of the steamer radiated with the furnacelike heat of the burning sunrays, which were tempered only in slight degree by the light breeze of her advance. But ahead, off to the left of the cape, the whitish, dancing water-horizon of the open ocean foretold what was to be expected outside the mouth of the gulf.

The steward served tiffin on the quarter-deck, for the air down in the closed cabin was stifling. In the midst of the meal the steamer began to draw in under the great headland. Sailors came aft to remove the awnings. Sir Hallam rose.

"We'll soon be wet enough without any more tea," he predicted. "Better all come below. I'm going to wedge myself in my berth. Only way to be comfortable when we strike it."

Vasca and her elderly maid followed him down into the close, over-hot cabin. Decies looked inquiringly at Lochinvar.

"Bit fresh outside, I take it," he remarked.

"Southwest monsoon," replied the American. "Worst time of year to

round Guardafui, I guess. Look out yonder—pretty high sea running. Sir Hallam is right. We'll soon be wet enough."

"Jolly good change from this," said Decies, his back to the slanting but still burning rays of the late afternoon sun.

A welcome shadow swept across the deck.

The Ourebi was edging in so close that the high cliffs shut off the glare of direct sunlight. The steward took below his tea table and all the chairs. The young men lounged against the starboard rail, watching the turn of the great headland.

Presently Vasca came up the companionway alone. Her eyes were bright with anticipation. She had changed to a yachting costume, and her coils of dark hair were hidden under a bathing cap.

"All ready, you see," she said as the young men started forward to meet her.

"Rather heavy outside," remarked Decies. "Would it not be better for you to remain below?"

"Indeed, no. I'd not miss it for worlds. Last time I stayed below with Anita, and almost smothered. It will be quite safe, will it not, Mr. Lochinvar?" She turned to that young man for confirmation.

"Does your father know you've come up?"

"Yes."

"There's apt to be more than a bucketful come aboard."

"How jolly and cool!"

Lochinvar smiled at Decies. "That settles it. We've nothing to do but stand by and see she isn't carried overboard."

Urged on by the second mate, the lascar sailors had cut loose the lashings of the awnings and were hurrying forward with the folds of canvas. The mate lingered to turn an uneasy glance upon Vasca.

He touched his cap respectfully, and spoke to her in a tone of urgent con-

cern: "Better go below, miss. It will be rough, soon as we clear the cape."

"Thank you, but I know," she replied.

He shook his head doubtfully, and went to close the door at the head of the companionway steps. When he had made sure that the skylight shutters were fast, he hurried forward after the Lascars.

The Ourebi was now rocking on the swell deflected from the tumultuous sea out beyond the lee of the headland.

"We'll soon be pounding into it now," remarked Lochinvar.

He took a position at the rail rather close to Vasca. She and Decies were alternately gazing up at the lofty cliffs that shadowed the steamer and ahead at the huge waves that raced past the turn of the headland, creamy with foam.

The Ourebi, stripped for the fray, glided steadily on, aslant the increasing swell, to plunge into the storm welter. It was almost eery to sweep along under the precipice, still in the dead calm of the Gulf, and to see so near ahead the mountainous waves lashed by the savage blast of the monsoon.

Rapidly the steamer approached the turn of the sheltering cape. A puff of cool air eddied around the precipitous rock ledges. The swell became heavier. Other and stronger eddying puffs struck the ship with their refreshing breath.

The rocking of the steamer became more pronounced. The puffs of air were now squall-like blasts. In less than two minutes the Ourebi had left the calm of the Gulf and was clearing the lee of the headland.

"Here we are. Hold hard," said Lochinvar.

Tossed up on the shoreward edge of a huge wave, the steamer drove forward into the midst of the storm. The gale struck her with its full sweep, as if to wrench her about and drive her with the fleeing billows up into the head of the Arabian Sea.

Every shroud and stay hummed like a giant harpstring. The vessel pitched and tossed on the huge seas, which smote and overwhelmed her bows, seeking to drive her down and backward. The monsoon current seized hold of her to aid the waves.

The gale pressed with all its power on her upper surfaces. But, headed almost in the teeth of the storm, she fought her way out past Guardafui and its fellow headland, on a long off-shore slant.

Not many minutes passed before the combers that broke over the bows began to sweep the decks farther and farther aft.

Flying spray had already drenched Vasca and the two young men on the poop. The ship dipped her head and tossed it so high that hundreds of tons of water rushed aft and splurged up knee-deep over the quarter-deck.

Vasca clung to the rail and cried out in delight.

Decies looked troubled. He bent close to her ear to warn her: "We shall have worse than that. You should go down, Miss Searle."

"It is delightful!" she exclaimed. "There's still an hour before night-fall. I shall stay as long as I can see. If you find it unpleasant—"

"To be sure not," he answered. "You know I yacht. My concern is for your safety."

"There can be no real danger."

"Perhaps not if we hold to this course. Still, we might be swept off, if we should run under a bit deeper."

"She rides too well for that," disagreed Lochinvar. "There is no danger unless she shift cargo or falls off into the trough."

"You see!" cried Vasca, her eyes aglow. "I would smother in the cabin. This is glorious! I am not named in vain. Vasco de Gama was one of my ancestors. You may remember that he sailed all around Africa and up through these waters, in his little cockleshell ship."

"While on your father's side," add-

ed Lochinvar, "I venture to say you had viking ancestors—

"Dauntless Northmen, who rode free
The foam-maned horses of the sea.

"Those old fellows certainly were sailors. Think of facing the like of this in an open boat!"

He pointed out at the heaving tumult of white-crested, wildly racing masses of water.

"The Arab dhows run up from the south before the monsoon," said Vasca. "They used to go all the way to India."

"Must have held off from here," laughed Lochinvar as the cap that he had borrowed from the mate went whirling over the stern in a tempest blast of the gale. "It's worse than Hatteras."

"Ware water!" shouted Decies.

An unusually tremendous comber had broken over the steamer's bows. The entire forepart of the vessel was buried under the deluge. From stem to stern she quivered with the shock. Something must have gone wrong with the steering-gear or the helmsman. The ship yawed to port. As the bows struggled up under their enormous load, the watery masses came aft in a torrent.

At the same time another comber struck obliquely along her starboard side and broke over the quarter-rail. It came so unexpectedly that Vasca and Decies were caught off their guard. Both were looking at the rush of water from the bows that would have covered the quarter-deck not more than knee-deep. Suddenly the comber rose alongside and hurled down upon them in a Niagara.

Lochinvar, quicker than the others, barely managed to fling his arms about Vasca and clutch the rail with both hands, as the foaming mountain fell upon them.

Decies' one-handed hold was wrenched loose, and he was swept away aslant the deck toward the port bend of the taffrail. Struck no less

violently by the torrent, Lochinvar was beaten down, and at the same time his feet were swirled from under him.

The ship heeled over to port under the impact of wind and water. The in-pouring comber straightened him out like a pennant in a stiff wind. Over and around him it rushed, striving to beat the breath out of him, tugging to wrench loose his hold and swirl him away across the deck and overboard.

But he held on with desperate strength until the ship staggered up out of the welter and the starboard rail emerged above the flood.

The steamer was swinging back out of the trough, to head again close into the wind; the water that had come aboard was pouring off to port.

This Lochinvar sensed, though he gave it no conscious thought. He was actively aware only of Vasca. The girl's arms were locked about his neck in a terrified clasp. Her bosom quivered against his chest as she clung to him, gasping for breath.

The torrent had carried away her bathing cap, and the wet strands of her dark hair whipped about his face in the spray-laden gale.

"Lady—my lady!" he cried. "It's over. Don't fear. We're coming up into the wind again."

"I'm—frightened!" she panted. "Hold me. I—" She cast a terrified glance aside and over his shoulder. "Where—Mr. Decies—I don't see him!"

"Good God!" shouted Lochinvar. "He must have— No, across, aft there, against the rail."

Decies was crouched with his back to them, still clutching the rail as if he feared another deluge. The moment Vasca saw him, she freed her arms from about Lochinvar's neck and drew back, her face scarlet.

"I'm safe now," she said. "I think I—should go below."

"If you wish it," he instantly agreed, and he turned his gaze away from her blushing face.

"But first," she faltered, "I—I wish to thank you."

"Don't, please!" he begged. "Here comes a big one over the bows. Be ready when it passes."

He kept her enclosed between his arms and the rail until the torrent had swept over the quarter-deck. As it gushed outboard he caught her arm and steadied her across the dizzily heaving deck to the companionway.

A splurge of the water with which the deck was still awash followed them through the door. He quickly closed it and helped the girl down into the little saloon.

The air below was stagnant and suffocatingly hot. There was not a single port or hatch or skylight open anywhere. The ship was pitching so violently that Vasca could have reached her stateroom only by creeping, had not Lochinvar put his arm about her shoulders. He saw her safe in through the open doorway.

Anita, the Portuguese woman, braced in a corner, was muttering over her rosary.

Vasca grasped hold of a rail to steady herself, and looked up into Lochinvar's face with a glance of frank pleasure. "You'll at least allow me to say that it has been most kind of you—Jimmy."

He smiled his gratification. "You're all right now, are you? I'll have to go up. Don't quite like the way Mr. Decies was acting."

He hastened up on deck just in time to be caught by a torrent and hurled aft to the rail. He brought up a few feet from Decies. The Englishman looked at him as if just recovering from a dream. Suddenly his gray eyes widened with consternation.

"Gad!" he cried. "Where's Miss Searle?"

"Safe below," answered Lochinvar. "What's the matter? You've been sitting here— Must have struck your head."

"Yes; I remember now. Devilish hard crack." Decies reached up his

hand and felt the side of his head. "Must have dazed me."

"Lucky it didn't keep you from holding on. Better let me help you down to your stateroom."

"Thanks, no. I'm not hurt," Decies curtly refused the offer.

He pulled himself up and followed the rail around to the starboard quarter. Lochinvar rose and slipped along after him within arm's reach. They stood facing the gale for over half an hour.

At last a sudden gloom darkened the wild sea. The sun had set and night was coming down upon the gale-lashed billows.

Decies decided to go below. He had fully recovered from the effects of the blow on his head, and crossed to the companionway without difficulty.

Lochinvar followed him, but did not stop in the cabin. He made his way on down into the engine room.

CHAPTER VI.

The Slave Ship.

THE light of another day found the Ourebi still pitching through heavy seas on her long slant off coast.

But she had gained enough offing to be out of the strongest sweep of the monsoon current, and the gale had lessened. Combers still broke aboard, but not so heavily as off Guardafui.

In the afternoon Vasca again found courage to venture up on deck, accompanied by Decies and Lochinvar.

Her father, though a good sailor, did not choose to leave his berth until the next morning, when the Ourebi had reached the eddy current, four hundred miles off shore, that ran counter to the monsoon coast current. The gale had abated to a stiff breeze, and the waves no longer ran mountain-high.

Though the steamer still pitched and rolled, there were no more combers to break aboard and flood her decks.

The passengers could move about

dry-shod and examine the results of the storm. All the ironwork was red with rust. The funnels were covered with a thick coating of salt.

One of the boats had been carried away.

Two of the copper ventilators had been dented and battered like stiff hats at a Donnybrook Fair. But awnings were again stretched, and the crew set at work with scrapers and paint brushes.

Aided by the off coast return current, the Ourebi was running toward Madagascar at a very good rate despite the head wind, when, soon after mid-day, a small sail was sighted a few points off the port bow.

As this was the first craft seen since the steamer had left the Gulf of Aden, it attracted an unusual amount of attention. The general interest was not lessened when the stronger binoculars disclosed that the great lateen sail of the craft was torn and that there was an inverted ensign flying at the peak.

"Dhow in distress," said Sir Hallam.

"We're already veering to run down to her," remarked Decies. "Pretty rough sea for boating, I should say."

"I've seen fishermen put off in their dories, on the Newfoundland Banks, in heavier weather," remarked Lochinvar.

"Were you not in one of the dories?" inquired Vasca.

"These lascars are not always good boatmen," broke in her father.

"I've a fancy to board a dhow," said Decies. "There's a surf-boat forward—non-sinkable self-bailer. I shall offer my services to the skipper as stroke oarsman."

"Very good," said Sir Hallam. "Slip this into your pocket. You may need it."

He held out an automatic pistol. Decies took it, tipped his cap to Vasca, and hastened forward to ascend the bridge, where the skipper stood gazing at the dhow through his binoculars.

Lochinvar looked inquiringly at Sir Hallam. "Has Mr. Decies had any experience in this line?"

"Boated in the Channel. Member of the Royal Yacht Club," tersely answered the baronet.

"That's good. You gave him the pistol. You think there is need to go armed?"

"Yes. These dhow sailors are often a hard lot, and they always carry knives. May try to use them if the dhow is in a bad way and they get into a panic."

Lochinvar nodded understandingly. "If you'll excuse me, Miss Searle, I believe I'll lay forward and see what's in the wind."

He ran to the companionway.

When he came out of the cabin on the main deck he was fastening the scabbard of his Damascus sword-knife to his belt. Sir Hallam glanced from him to Decies, who had climbed upon the bridge, and commented approvingly:

"Right spirit—both lads. You noticed how Bertie belittled the risk, and Jimmy did not even say he intended to volunteer. When we reach the shamba we can rely upon both if that rascally Abdul bin Djabir stirs up the Maviti against us, as it was reported he had threatened."

"Abdul," remarked Vasca — "that is the Arab ex-slaver who, you said, has set himself up as a sultan over the natives south of the Rovuma River."

"Yes. Inland the company's concession overlaps the territory he claims as his own. He is too cunning to attack the shamba himself, but he may set the Maviti on us. Rather hope he does."

The eyes of the grizzled empire-builder glinted.

"The sooner we break up that murderous tribe the better. You see now why I sent to Gaza Land for laborers instead of employing Makuas. All our boys are more or less of Zulu stock."

Vasca's cheeks flushed and her eyes

sparkled. "Yes, now I see. The company is merely a step—a foothold. Sooner or later you will open up the country all the way across to Lake Nyassa."

"It is important to keep the Germans from gaining commercial control south of the Rovuma," said Sir Hallam. "The flag follows trade. There goes Bertie forward. They are making ready to lower away a boat. We are nearing the dhow. Give me a look, my dear."

He took the glasses and leaned out from the rail to gaze at the dhow. The clumsy craft was now less than half a mile ahead, scurrying down the wind like a broken-winged water-bird. One moment her dark hull was heaved upon the crest of a wave, the next it dipped far down in the trough. Vasca watched it a short time, and then shifted her gaze to the forward deck.

Decies had just reached the group beside the boat. He spoke condescendingly to the second mate, who was in charge: "Skipper plans to slacken speed and put them under our lee when they are alongside. If they are near enough to catch a line there will be no need of the boat."

"Mr. Lochinvar says you want stroke-oar. He takes bow. Man the boat."

The boat's crew took their positions; the men told off to the falls stood by, ready to lower away. Swiftly steamer and tossing dhow approached each other. Now they were less than half a cable's length apart, rushing together almost stem to stem.

The Ourebi reversed her engines. The dhow was signaled to pass on her port bow and round to. The dhow obeyed, and the steamer, with rapidly lessening headway, swung to port.

As the dhow shot past under her bow a line was cast down upon the high poop of the sailing craft; but it slipped overboard before any of the yelling, gesticulating crew could grasp it. The dhow's steersman sought to bring her around into the wind, and

succeeded only in laying her in the trough as the overlapping bows of the Ourebi blanketed the wind out of her split sail.

Shrieks of despair arose from the wallowing craft. Had she not been under the lee of the steamer she must have been flung on her beam ends.

But already the boat had been lowered and cast off as the ship rolled to port. The oarsmen pushed clear and began to pull for the dhow with the steady stroke set by Decies. He and Lochinvar and the mate were all good boatmen, and the lascars were willing fellows. Sheltered by the steamer, they had little difficulty in covering the distance to the dhow.

The difficulty was to get their line aboard the clumsy vessel. Her black-and-tan crew were scrambling about in wild confusion in their efforts to lower the spar of the huge lateen sail before mast and all could be rolled out of her.

Decies looked at the height of the dhow's side and spoke coolly to the mate: "Give me a few yards of slack, and back in. I'll jump it."

The mate brought the boat stern-on to the dhow and gave the order to back water. Lochinvar saw Decies draw in his oar, and divined what he was planning to do.

"Hold on, Mr. Decies," he called. "Better let me try it."

Decies gave no heed. He stepped into the stern beside the mate and stood balanced, with the end of the line in his hand, waiting for the boat to back close to the side of the dhow.

Now they were only a few feet apart. Together boat and dhow sagged down the slope of a wave. Decies poised and sprang in a splendid leap that carried him clean over the dhow's bulwark.

"Give way," ordered the mate, and he cast the last coils of the line clear of the boat.

The lascars dipped their oars and pulled the boat clear as she was about to strike her stern.

"He can't manage it alone," shouted Lochinvar, and before the mate could forbid him, he went overboard. In three strokes he was alongside the dhow and gripping the line, which Decies was making fast. Decies gave him a hand over the gunwale.

Seeing him safe aboard, the mate drew off two or three boat-lengths and waited. Lochinvar and Decies turned to look about them.

The yelling crew now had the huge seventy-foot boom lowered and the sail partly furled. A dozen or more at once swarmed about the white men, jabbering in Swahili and pointing down their throats.

"Must be short of food or water, though they look all right," said Lochinvar. He signed to the half-naked, wild-eyed fellows to carry the line forward and haul in on it.

"There's an Arab on the poop hailing us," observed Decies. "I'll go and see what's up."

Lochinvar pointed aft, under the sagging folds of the sail, to where a string of men were passing up buckets out of a well. "She's sprung a leak."

"*Paugh!*" ejaculated Decies, turning his aristocratic nose outboard. "What a stench! Vilest bilge water I ever smelled."

"Worse than a pearler," agreed Lochinvar. "But it can't be only bilge water."

He ducked under the sail and bent over a closed hatch in the middle of the deck. There was a shrill cry from the poop, and a big ferocious-faced native with teeth filed to points sprang to shove the white man away.

Lochinvar reeled before the unexpected thrust, but recovered his balance like a cat.

He came back at the black ruffian with a straight left to the jaw, followed by a right hook that sent the savage rolling into the scuppers unconscious. Before any others of the crew could interfere, he tore off the hatch and peered down into the shallow hold.

"Good God!" he cried. "Look here, Decies."

The Englishman stooped under the sail and bent over the open hatchway. In under the deck he saw a solid mass of naked black human forms—seated men, packed in breast to breast, under the most horrible unsanitary conditions.

All were emaciated; several were dead.

The agonized faces of the living were turned about and upraised toward the open hatch, their mouths agape and their tongues black and swollen from lack of water. Decies stared, astounded.

"Slaves!" he gasped. "Slave-ship! But this—it is the twentieth century!"

"Watch out," warned Lochinvar. "The scoundrels look ugly."

Decies glanced up.

Several of the villainous half-caste crew were gathering about the white men. Lochinvar had his eye on the two nearest men, whose hands were clutched on the hilts of their crooked Arab daggers.

His own hand was near the hilt of his Damascus sword-knife. Decies calmly pulled out the automatic pistol given him by Sir Hallam.

"Be off!" he ordered. "Lochinvar, draw your sword."

The American whipped out his beautiful and businesslike blade. It impressed the ruffians more than the pistol. They gave back a step or two. Decies ducked under the sail and waved his hand to the mate.

"Slaver—leaking. Hold full of slaves dying of thirst. We'll stay aboard. Tell Sir Hallam."

The mate ordered his lascar oarsmen to give way. Decies rejoined Lochinvar, with a curt command to the muttering Swahili sailors: "Stand aside, you beggars."

As the ruffians sullenly obeyed, Decies and Lochinvar pushed past them and climbed the ladder of the poop deck that roofed the low cabin.

Beside the half-caste helmsman

stood a scowling old Arab. As the white men came near, the dhow skipper changed his look of murderous hate to an expression of mingled cunning and offended dignity, to which, when he caught a close view of Lochinvar's sword-knife, was added an expression of eager covetousness.

"*Salaam Allicum*," he greeted in feigned welcome, and he bowed until his broad turban touched the deck.

As he rose he fixed his beadlike eyes on the sword-knife, either overcome with greed to possess it or scheming to divert suspicion from himself by pretending not to see the anger of his visitors. "The sayid bears an old broken sword. I will give an elephant tusk for it—a small tusk. The steel is bad, but as it is an Arabic sword and I am an honest trader—"

"You scoundrel!" broke in Decies, white-hot with righteous wrath. "Honest trader—you! Your hold is packed full of slaves. It would serve you right to shoot you down like a dog."

The Arab's eyes widened in a look of utter astonishment and protest.

"The sayid is mad!" he shrilled. "Slaves—in my dhow? I am Abdul bin Djabir, a merchant of wealth and standing. The sayid hears how well I speak his tongue. I am a friend of all white men, and well known at Zanzibar. The sayid is mad to say I have slaves in my dhow. The slave-trade was stopped when I was a young man."

"Those wretched prisoners in your hold?" questioned Decies.

"My papers are below—good papers, signed at Ibo, a port of Mozambique. Your people bring men in ships to work. I do the same. All those Makuas signed contracts to work in Muscat. The Portuguese sayid at Ibo is witness."

"You say you have papers to show they are contract laborers?"

The Arab smiled cunningly and waved his hand. "The mark of every man is sealed."

Lochinvar cut in hotly: "Papers or not, you ought to be strung up for treating the poor devils the way you've done—packed like sardines in that horrible hole and dying of thirst."

The Arab lifted his clawlike hands heavenward. "Allah bear witness, I left Ibo with a great tank of water. Three days ago it broke loose in a squall and went overboard."

"Three days ago! They've had no water for three days?" cried Decies.

"There has been no rain, *sayid*. A few lacked strength. They have died. It is my loss. Give me water for them, and the rest will live."

"You'll go aboard the ship with us," said Lochinvar. "Order your crew to haul in on the line until we have a hawser aboard."

"Also tell off a number to get those men out of that hell-hole," commanded Decies.

"That would be bad. They would crowd the deck," argued Abdul.

Decies looked at him with the eye of a "hanging" judge. "You will give the order or you will be the first to go overboard to make room for your victims."

The Arab did not wait for the uplifting pistol.

He shrilled out orders and curses in Swahili that put every man of the crew into vigorous action. Those who were half-heartedly hauling in on the line suddenly redoubled their efforts. Others swarmed about the open hatchway and began lifting out the wretched prisoners in the hold.

"Tell your men to handle the poor devils gently," said Decies. "They may leave the dead below."

"The dhow leaks and the water is gaining, *sayid*. I have ordered the dead cast overboard," replied Abdul.

"She rides heavier than when we came aboard," confirmed Lochinvar. "The wrenching before they got the boom lowered must have opened up the leak."

"Very probably. I'll ask you to go forward and see that the scoundrels

cast over none that is not dead. I fancy they'll keep their hands off you while I stand by Mr. Abdul bin Djabir."

CHAPTER VII.

Chuba's Leap.

LOCHINVAR smiled at the inwardly furious and outwardly obsequious Arab and jumped down from the poop. But his smile vanished when he came to the hatchway and saw the emaciated wretches who were being drawn up out of the foul, black hold. Many looked like dying men. Every fourth or fifth one was already dead.

Instructed by their skipper, the hastily laboring crew laid each corpse before Lochinvar before casting it over the side.

He had no difficulty in telling the dead from the living. Those of the wretched creatures who still had life in them were at once partly revived by the fresh air when lifted out of their noisome, smothering prison.

The men engaged in bringing up the human cargo worked with feverish energy.

Despite the efforts of the gang of bailers, the leak continued to gain and the water was rising in the hold. Yet Decies had told the skipper with deadly earnestness that he should go down with his dhow if a single prisoner was left below deck.

Urged on by the shrill commands of their master, the dusky crew redoubled their efforts. Every man realized that there was utmost need of haste if all were not to go down with their steadily filling vessel.

Fortunately the binoculars aboard the Ourebi had disclosed the state of affairs in the dhow even before the mate returned to report what Decies had told him. A hawser had been attached to the line and was being paid out for the dhow crew to haul in and make fast.

Before the men in the dhow's overhanging prow had the end aboard the boat returned with three breakers of water, all of which the mate succeeded in pitching over into the waist of the dhow.

Lochinvar at once knocked in the bungs and told off three of the crew to give a few sips of the precious fluid to each sufferer in the long row already laid out on deck. None of the crew attempted to obtain a drink.

There had been a cask of water left aboard. Only the wretched prisoners had been forced to suffer the real agonies of thirst.

A yell from the bows gave the welcome news that the linemen had got the hawser aboard and were making fast. Attached to the end of the hawser they hauled in a basket-sling large enough to hold six or eight persons.

It was rigged to a running line from the steamer. Decies now went forward with the skipper, who, under the shouted directions of the mate, had the hawser loosened and then made fast well up on the mast.

At once the heavy line tautened as a steam winch aboard the Ourebi began to take in the slack. While the dhow was being hauled as close under the ship's side as was safe in so heavy a sea, Decies, pistol in hand, ordered all but a few of the crew aft to bail and to finish clearing the hold of its human cargo.

"Command that the slaves be brought first to be hauled aboard the steamer," he directed Abdul.

The Arab threw up his hands.

"*Bismillah!* Have I not told the *sayid* they are not slaves? They are free laborers. The dhow is filling fast. There will not be time to save all."

"They go first," stated Decies.

Abdul scowled up at the iron side of the steamer. He was in the power of the white men. He could only protest in words: "Eblis! Can it be the will of Allah that true believers should perish while Kafir dogs are saved?"

"Have your free laborers carried forward," said Decies, his jaw out-thrust. "If one of your damnable crew tries to get into the sling before every slave is safe I will kill him."

The last pretense of friendliness vanished from the Arab's evil face. But he gave the Englishman's order. Several of the crew hurriedly began to drag forward the helpless victims of their callous brutality.

Eight were hoisted up and jammed into the sling, which swung from the mast. The line first brought aboard was fast to the sling, and the load of frightened Makuas was sent sliding down the sag of the hawser.

The line from the ship to the sling at once began to haul in with the rapidity of steam power. The sling slipped swiftly along the hawser. At the lowest bend of the hawser the occupants of the sling were submerged in the top of a wave as the dhow dipped into a trough.

But before any of the Makuas could drown they were dragged through the wave and on up the swaying hawser to the steamer's bulwark. Though terrified, all had been refreshed and partly cleaned by their dip in the cool, pure seawater.

The moment the sling had been emptied it was sent slithering back down the hawser, with a breaker of water for make-weight. The men in the dhow's bows did not need to be urged to gather in the line with utmost haste.

All the crew now understood the situation as fully as their skipper.

Hardly was the sling inboard when it was reloaded to its utmost capacity and started back. As before, it swirled down through a wave-crest and carried its dripping load up to safety.

Other loads followed in rapid succession. Aboard the steamer, no less than in the dhow, every one except the half-unconscious slaves knew that the leaking craft must soon go down. She was steadily settling as the leak gained

on the ineffective buckets of the bailers. Before the last of the squatting prisoners in the hold had been dragged out on deck the water was up to their chins.

Twice the scowling Abdul had choked down his wrath and begged leave of the stern-eyed young Englishman to go aft for his papers.

Both times Decies refused. But when Lochinvar sang out that the last prisoner was clear of the hold Decies shouted to him to look in the cabin for the ship's papers.

Lochinvar paused only long enough to set every available member of the crew to bailing.

He picked his way aft over the closely laid rows of rescued prisoners to the cabin door. It was fast. A blow of his heel broke the antique Arab lock.

When he entered he found most of the space under the poop deck tightly stowed with bags of provisions on a foundation of elephant tusks. But in the midst had been left a small cubby, or stateroom, whose Oriental drapery proved it to be the sleeping quarters of the skipper.

The entrance passage was so narrow that Lochinvar, coming directly in from the full sun-glare, could not at first see anything in the gloomy interior.

He bent over and began to grope his way around the little cell. At the third step his outstretched hand touched a roundish, woolly object. The object moved downward, and a faint shriek told him what he had found.

"Woman—native!" he exclaimed. "She'd have been left in here to drown!"

The huddled outline of the frightened creature was becoming visible to his staring eyes. He grasped her wrist and dragged her, shrieking, out of her place of concealment.

When he got her into the open he saw that she was a young girl of Bantu stock a perfect black Venus in form,

But her flat negroid face was hideously disfigured with scar tattooing and that most frightful of ornaments, the *pelele* lip-ring. Her entire costume consisted of a fringed apron no larger than Eve's fig-leaf.

Lochinvar released her wrist and dived back into the cabin.

When he came out he carried a small Oriental rug and a box that contained the dhow's papers. He wrapped the rug about the cowering girl and motioned her to go forward.

Trembling, but obedient to the strange white-faced being, she hurried before him over the outstretched forms that cluttered the deck.

"Hello," said Decies, when they came up into the bows. "What's this—a female slave?"

"Not a slave!" hastily replied Abdul. "She is one of my wives."

"One?" queried Decies.

"The Koran allows good Mohammedans four wives," Lochinvar reminded him.

"Put her in the next sling," ordered Decies. "Any more women aboard?"

"Only this one," answered Abdul. "There was another girl. I gave her to Chuba. She died."

"Who is Chuba?" demanded Lochinvar.

"The man you knocked down. He is my headman—my mate."

"Oh, that fellow." Lochinvar smiled. "He's one of those I made get down in the hold to pass up the prisoners. Kept him down till the very last."

"Good work," said Decies. "What's in the box?"

Lochinvar raised the lid and showed a number of charts and sealed papers. Abdul started forward, quivering with apprehension.

"Do not lose them!" he shrilled. "I will be hanged!"

"More chance you'll be drowned," rejoined Lochinvar.

The sling was just being hauled in-board. He handed the box to its owner, and catching up the girl, lifted

her within reach of the men in the rigging.

She was swung up into the sling and sent spinning away in company with six or seven of the half-dead men of her tribe. Abdul, clutching his precious papers, quickly began to recover assurance.

His avarice at once cropped out.

"My ivory!" he wailed. "At Ibo I could have sold it to a Banyan for two thousand pounds. I would not be robbed. Now all must sink into the sea and be lost."

"Kismet!" scoffed Decies.

The Arab held out one of his claw-like hands in supplication.

"Be merciful, *sayid*! What do you care for those dying Kafir dogs? First save my ivory."

Decies' florid face purpled. The veins on his forehead began to swell. He raised his fist.

"Easy—easy," interposed Lochinvar. "He's only an Arab. Leave him to the authorities."

Decies hesitated and looked about at the Ourebi. "I would like to be the magistrate who tries him."

"It's a matter that may be settled out of court," humorously replied Lochinvar. "At least we're settling fast enough. The rotten old hulk is taking water like a sieve. No use bailing. I'll go aft and batten down the hatch. That may hold in enough air to keep us afloat a while."

"We're losing no time," said Decies. "Forty-five or fifty off already. Three more loads will clean up these helpless beggars."

"Good thing. The rest of us can jump clear if we have to. There comes another boat to stand by us in case the old tub founders."

Cool and smiling, the American made his way aft amid the yelling crew. He found the water in the hold almost up to the hatch-coamings.

At his gestured orders the men who were bailing out of the hold flung down their vessels and clapped on the hatch. As soon as it was made fast

he set them to lightening ship by casting overboard everything loose or detachable.

Even the great boom was unshipped and heaved over the side with its furled sail.

After this Lochinvar took his gang aft to the cabin and started to breaking out its stores. Dozens of bags of sesame were dragged out and flung overboard in rapid succession, and soon the sacks of grain were interspersed with magnificent elephant-tusks, many of which weighed over a hundred pounds.

From the bows Abdul espied the wasting of his precious ivory and raised a shriek of remonstrance. But already the stern had settled so low that the cabin was half-flooded, and the men worked on with desperate energy, regardless of the curses of their skipper.

The leader of the gang was the ferocious-looking, filed-toothed Chuba, whom Lochinvar had knocked down when he first came aboard. The big ruffian appeared almost as cool as the white man.

He stood inside the cabin encouraging his fellows and heaving out tusks and sacks of grain for others to cast overboard.

He held them to their work even when the last of the slaves were put into the sling and the members of the crew who had continued bailing at the well rushed forward, their bare feet splattering the water that had already begun to seep up through the deck seams.

The sling came and went with eight of the crew in it. Again it came back and again started out loaded. The dhow was now very low. Her main deck was awash. Had not the hawser held her head-on to the waves she must have rolled her gunwales under and filled.

"May take a slump any minute now," said Lochinvar. He signed to the men to give over their work and go forward.

Decies hailed him: "Bring your gang. There'll be room for some of them."

Lochinvar followed his men, the water in the waist slushing up over his knees as the dhow sluggishly rose and fell on the waves. In the bows were left only Decies and Abdul and three of the crew. Chuba and his fellows caught hold of the line and helped pull back the unloaded sling.

Abdul looked aft at the sinking stern of his craft and knelt to Decies in abject supplication.

"*Sayid*, I am an old man. I cannot swim like these others. At the best I would lose my papers and with them my honor. Let me go this time."

The young Englishman's lips tightened. "The skipper should be the last man to leave his ship," he stated.

"Oh, give the old scoundrel his chance," good-naturedly interposed Lochinvar. "If you let him drown he'll escape hanging."

"The deuce! that's so," said Decies. He gave the kneeling man a contemptuous kick. "Get up. You can go—though I fancy it'll be too late."

Abdul leaped to his feet and called shrilly to Chuba.

The big native caught up his master and lifted him to the men above, as the sling came inboard. With desperate haste the half-frantic Swahilis jerked their skipper into the basket and tumbled in after him. The sling slipped away down the hawser, leaving the two white men, Chuba, and four others of the crew on the dhow's bows. Five minutes would have been time enough for the sling to have been drawn up the hawser and jerked back to them.

But already the dhow was foundering. Even as, passing the sag of the hawser, the loaded sling plunged into the water, the sinking craft gave a peculiar wallow. Down went her stern, tilting the long bow upward.

"Jump!" shouted Lochinvar.

The others were already crouching.

They leaped with him—all except Chuba. The big savage had been standing close behind the American, his face stolid.

Suddenly his eyes flared with ferocious hate. A fraction of a second after the white man jumped he leaped after him.

As Lochinvar plunged into the water the feet of Chuba struck him from above, one on each shoulder. The blow was given with all the momentum of the big black's weight and his high bound through the air.

Lochinvar was driven down, far down into the green depths!

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 Biggest Diamond

By
Fred Jackson

Author of "The Masked Bride," "Hunter's Wife," "A Self-Made Widow," "Through the Dark," etc.

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS

AT a house party Schuyler Nelson shows his guests the Little Brother to the Stars, which he has bought from the Raja of Matan — the biggest diamond in the world. He announces his engagement to Mrs. Genevieve Howell. Molly Nelson is furious. Next morning Nelson is found murdered in his study. Kenneth Henley, a reporter on vacation, takes charge. Suspicion falls on Molly, who had quarreled with her father during the night. The safe is opened and the diamond is found to be missing. Inspector Merril declares his belief that Molly is guilty and her Aunt Johanna Nelson is an accomplice.

CHAPTER X.

The Net.

HENLEY stood staring at the other man thoughtfully for a long time after he had spoken. The red-haired assistant and the coroner were beginning to collect their properties for an immediate departure. Neither was paying much attention.

"You are going to work around to the murder by tracing the diamond?" repeated Henley. "Is that what you mean?"

"Exactly. The whole case seems to hinge on it."

"Good. Then we can work together. It makes no difference whether you think Miss Nelson guilty or not. You'll do nothing about involving her, or expressing your suspicions until you've something more than a theory, and I know you'll never have anything more. When we locate the gem it won't be in Miss Nelson's possession, nor will we be able to connect her with it."

"That remains to be seen," said the other coolly. "Let's sidetrack discus-

This story began in The All-Story Cavalier Weekly for July 18.

sions and get down to business. I want to question the servants next."

"I'll have them all up here," said Henley, moving toward the bell and ringing it.

Judson answered, and in response to Henley's orders was soon ushering in the entire domestic staff.

There were eight house servants, and a more frightened and nervous lot of individuals it would have been impossible to gather together. You would have thought they were all guilty and condemned, to see their maneuvers.

The inspector had a difficult hour dragging out of them the next to nothing that they knew.

Judson, who had been Nelson's valet, was the only one who was able to throw a ray of light upon the mystery.

He declared that he had been waiting in Nelson's bedroom while Nelson talked with Molly in the study. He said it was his custom to wait up to attend his master, no matter what the hour, and he was accordingly waiting when the interview between father and daughter was in progress.

He said that he could hear occasional sentences, although he made no attempt to do so. He also heard the lamp smash, but did not go in, being reassured by the sound of their continuing conversation.

He said he must have dozed after that, for the next thing he knew he heard the clock striking twelve-thirty.

Hearing no sounds from the study he had gone to the door and had looked in.

A woman, he said, was standing there facing Nelson, but her back was toward him, and in the swift glance he got he could not distinguish her.

Nelson had caught sight of him almost instantly and had dismissed him for the night, and the woman had shielded her face with her scarf as though unwilling to be recognized.

Judson said that he had not thought this unusual at the time, but later,

thinking it over, he had wondered if the woman had been Miss Molly. It had occurred to him that Miss Molly would not have been likely to shield her face.

This testimony pleased Henley a great deal.

"It's plain enough!" he cried. "Another woman went to the study after Molly left."

"Not necessarily," answered the inspector. "If Molly had been contemplating a murder it is quite conceivable that she would wish to conceal her identity."

"What sort of scarf was it," he asked Judson, "that the woman drew over her face?"

"I don't know exactly," said Judson. "But she was wearing it over her shoulders until she lifted it up to hide her face."

"Would you know it again if you saw it?" asked Henley.

"No, I'm afraid not, sir," answered Judson regretfully. "I'm sorry."

"It's no matter," responded Henley.

The inspector then questioned the butler, Simmons.

Simmons, while he had not been able to add to their clues, was able to narrow down their field somewhat. He reported that the walls surrounding the place were finished off on top with very sharp spikes, so that scaling them was difficult and dangerous; that the gates were closed and bolted every night at sundown unless some one of the family was out, and that five watch-dogs were loose in the grounds.

For an outsider to come in and remain undiscovered seemed to Simmons impossible. He declared that it had been tried many times, but never with much success.

"If this tale is true," said the inspector cheerfully to Henley, "we have the guilty party under our eyes, without a doubt. For every one who was under the roof last night is still here."

"Right," agreed Henley frowning.

That view of the matter disturbed him.

He found no satisfaction in the thought that Nelson's murderer and the diamond thief dwelt near by him. He could not imagine any one else in the party being any guiltier than Molly.

As he sat silent there in the study, going over in his mind the whole confusing thing, it seemed to him that he must be dreaming it.

It was more like some fantastic nightmare than like any actual happening.

Yesterday they had all been so placidly idling along, playing bridge or pool, dancing, reading aloud, swapping stories, doing the usual things one does over a week-end out of town before the out-of-doors is quite inviting.

There had been nothing to distinguish this particular party from the innumerable others that had preceded it. There had been no hint of brewing storms.

Then, during dinner, Nelson's two announcements had been made—those two announcements that were to change the whole course of several lives.

He had acquired the biggest diamond in the world for his collection, and he had announced his engagement to Mrs. Howell.

All this that had happened since was the result of those two revelations. Henley felt this strongly.

Because of them the whole party had been plunged into a hideous series of nightmare experiences—murder, robbery, suspicion.

The things that he had written of, time and again, and had seen in the lives of others, had come close to him—close enough to jeopardize his peace of mind.

For an instant he wondered if he could possibly be dreaming. Then he smiled faintly at his own absurdity.

No, it was all too real.

The grim-faced inspector, still wrangling with Simmons, proved that.

He came back to what had been said about the spiked fence and the watchdogs in the grounds.

That meant that some one in the house had killed Nelson and stolen the diamond. Some one he trusted had betrayed him.

A servant?

It seemed improbable. The whole lot of them had so little intelligence. And only Judson could go and come through Nelson's rooms with any safety, and Judson had been with Nelson for ten years.

Besides, his attitude that morning had been convincing.

Judson was out of the question. So were the others.

A guest, then? Some one who had eaten Nelson's bread?

But which one? Whom could the big diamond tempt?

Aiken? He was a collector, too, but not a thief, nor yet a murderer. The old man's kindly eyes and whitening hair recurred to Henley.

Crane, then? But Crane was rich; had more money than he needed. And he cared nothing for gems.

Greene, then? Greene was poor enough, but he was devoted to Nelson, and he was not murderous by disposition. He was a mild youth, even tempered, peaceful.

Diane? Of course not.

Mrs. Howell, then?

She might have visited him in the study, but she had no reason to kill him.

Unless he had decided to change his mind and withdraw from the engagement.

Would she be likely to kill him then?

Henley visualized her, recalling her flashing dark eyes, her proudly uptilted head, her finely wrought, beautiful features.

There was spirit in her—pluck, too—temper. If her pride was wounded, or if she felt herself deserted and betrayed—

Assuredly, under certain circum-

stances, it seemed to him more than likely that she could be tempted to lose control of herself and attack any one or anything that irked her.

But Molly had said that her father refused to reconsider and release Mrs. Howell.

Had he altered his decision after Molly had gone? Had he determined to yield? Had he obtained an interview with the lovely widow to explain his predicament, and had she, in a fit of rage and wounded pride, attacked him with the jeweled war-club that had been for years an ornament in the study?

It all seemed plausible enough. But it was only a theory, of course, depending for foundation upon a fact that was not established—the fact that Nelson had changed his mind and had determined not to marry Mrs. Howell.

How to establish this? That was the question.

And also—how to explain the disappearance of the diamond.

Had Mrs. Howell stolen that also?

Had she taken it for motives of her own—for financial reasons or because the stone had fascinated her?

Or had she taken it to escape suspicion?

The inspector broke in upon his reflections.

Advancing and staring down at Henley, he said:

"Well, what have you been planning?"

"Nothing," said Henley. "I've an idea or two of course. But I won't take up your time with my theories. What do you propose doing next?"

"Searching for the stone," answered the inspector calmly. "It must be somewhere in the house. I'm going to get permission to search thoroughly for it. Any objections to my searching your rooms?"

"None whatever," answered Henley, shrugging.

"Good! That'll give me a precedent to go upon. While I'm searching

your rooms you might gather the household together again—on the veranda, we'll say—or anywhere you please. The veranda sounds best to me, because there aren't many places out there where such a shiner could be hidden if any one happen to have it about him, you know."

Henley nodded.

"I suppose I can manage it."

"Break away, then!"

The inspector began examining the study casually.

"I'll leave you on one condition," said Henley. "That you apprise me if you come across the gem."

"Good Lord, don't you trust me?" gasped the inspector. "You've been reading the papers."

"It isn't that," said Henley, moving toward the door. "I—A good deal depends upon where that stone is found."

"Right!" agreed the inspector. "I'll tell you as soon as I locate it. May as well begin here, though I don't expect to find it in this room."

"Why not?"

"This room's too much in the public eye. The thief would have known that. He would have hidden the thing some place that was easy to reach, so he could get it again without attracting attention. For first guess I'd say it was in his room or on his person."

Henley nodded.

"That sounds plausible," he admitted. "You'll try the rooms first, while I keep the occupants down-stairs—is that it?"

"Yes. Then the occupants themselves if the stone hasn't turned up. So be sure you give them no time to get rid of it. Get them there without breathing the word, 'Search.'"

Henley went off to carry out his instructions.

Knocking at Molly's door first, he asked her and Johanna if they'd mind coming down to the south veranda. Then he went on, summoning the others.

He had chosen the south veranda

because it was walled in with glass and was unaffected by the peculiar spring out of doors.

It was plainly furnished in wicker and chints and offered few opportunities for the concealing of a diamond so large as the Little Brother to the Stars. So it corresponded to the police inspector's description.

When he had summoned them all he went back to Molly's door and waited there for her to appear.

She came, almost at once, the first of them, and she came alone.

She had changed the black habit for a plain black house-gown of clinging silk, and she had smoothed her hair, so that in these two particulars she looked more herself; but her face was still strangely pallid, and her eyes were heavy.

She glanced up into Henley's face wistfully as she advanced.

"What is it?" she asked wearily; "more cross-questioning?"

He shook his head.

"Not exactly. Where is Aunt Johanna?"

He had called her that for years.

"Down-stairs, arranging for the funeral," she answered slowly, and her voice had in it a curious note of wonder.

It was as though she were still unable to grasp clearly the thing that had befallen.

"My father's funeral!" she repeated. "My *father's*! Last night he was thinking of marrying. To-day—"

Her voice died away into silence.

She drew nearer Henley and slipped one hand under his arm, almost confidently.

"I keep saying it over and over to myself," she said. "But somehow it doesn't mean anything. It doesn't seem true."

"Don't think of it," he said gently, leading her toward the stairs.

Her face was tilted up to his.

"You don't think I did it, do you? Do you?" she cried wistfully, pleadingly, like a child.

"I know you didn't," he answered emphatically.

She breathed a little sigh.

"I think he does," she said.

"Who?"

"The inspector. Is he going to examine me again?"

Henley shook his head.

"No. He is going to search the house now for the big diamond—all the rooms—so he wants the occupants out of them."

Molly raised wide, rather frightened eyes to his.

"He's going to search all the rooms? All of them?"

"Yes."

"Mine?"

"Yes—why?"

"For the diamond?"

"Yes."

"Not for anything else? He won't look for anything else?"

"No-o. What is troubling you?"

"Suppose he doesn't find it in the rooms?"

"Then," said Henley slowly, "he'll search us—our persons—or have us searched."

They had reached the sheltered veranda by this time and halted, facing each other—the first there.

Molly was gazing up at Henley with something very like terror in her eyes. He was beginning to be a little alarmed.

"What is it?" he asked. "Surely, you haven't the diamond?"

"N-no," said Molly.

"Then you've nothing to fear."

"Yes," she whispered slowly, "I have something to fear. You don't know. If they search me they'll—they'll find something else!"

Warm color suffused her face. Her eyes fell from his.

"I've something they mustn't find. A package—a small one. I have it here in the bosom of my gown. What shall I do?"

She was clinging to him helplessly now, her frightened face raised to his. And, though her eyes met his

again, there was something now deep down in them—a barrier.

The windows to her soul were closed, and her color was fading.

"If it isn't the diamond you've nothing to be alarmed about," said Henley. "They're not interested in anything but the diamond."

"Yes, yes! You don't understand. They'd be interested in this!" she cried. "I must hide it. No one must see it. Where can I put it?"

She slipped one hand into her corset and drew forth a small package wrapped in white paper, tied securely, and sealed.

It was just large enough to have contained the missing diamond.

Henley gazed at it, and from it to her.

"What is it?" he asked through dry lips.

"I can't tell you. Hurry! We must hide it before they come, Kenneth!"

He found himself taking it into his hand.

He had not lifted the big diamond the night before, but this seemed heavy enough to contain the stone as near as he could judge.

"What are you going to do with it?" she whispered.

He slipped it into his pocket.

"If they find it on me no harm will be done," he said. "They can't make out a case against me."

"But it must not be found on you, either. It must not be found at all. Here—hide it here!"

She indicated frenziedly a tall plant that stood in a jardinière near by.

Between the pot and the jardinière there was a space large enough to contain the package.

"They're sure to look there!" he cried.

"Kenneth! Please!" she gasped.

He yielded and dropped it in just as Crane and Mrs. Howell appeared.

Trembling, Molly sank into a wide wicker chair.

"What now?" asked the widow, frowning.

She, too, had changed from the soft morning gown to a trim, dark tailored suit. She wore her hat, too—a small one, with a dark motor-veil thrown back from her face.

"Are we to be released and permitted to go home?" she added, regarding Henley.

"Not yet, I'm afraid," said he.

"But this detention is illegal. I've had my lawyer on the telephone. He declares emphatically that I am legally free to leave here as soon as I please unless held on a charge of murder."

She began drawing on her gloves.

"And I intend to assert my right the instant my maid finishes packing," she ended grimly.

Crane frowned and stroked his short mustache. Henley shrugged.

"I hope you will not do that, Mrs. Howell," he said. "It would create a most unpleasant impression. It would influence the police to believe you have some dark, mysterious reason for hurrying away."

She glared at him disgustingly.

"My reason isn't in the least mysterious," she answered. "I can hardly be expected to remain in a house where I am extremely unwelcome—more than unwelcome. I need not point out to you or the police that my presence here can only be a forcible reminder of—of certain unpleasantnesses. If a man's death is preferred to his union with me—"

"Mrs. Howell!" cried Henley as Molly shrank back.

"Genevieve—really!" breathed Crane. "I'm afraid you are too upset to realize what you are saying."

Mrs. Howell resumed her struggle with her gloves. Her eyes were cast down. From the expression of her face it was evident she was fighting back tears.

"I want to go away from here," she said. "I must go away. Ogden"—she lifted her great dark eyes to Crane, tears shining in them—"you will arrange it?"

Crane looked rather dubious.

"I'll do what I can—certainly," he said. "Can't things be arranged," he asked Henley, "so that Mrs. Howell can go back to town at once?"

"You appreciate her position, I am sure. Mr. Nelson's sudden death has been no less a horror and a shock to her than to his family. And the—perhaps—natural attitude of Miss Nelson and Miss Johanna has hurt her very much. Can't the necessary formalities be disposed of quickly?"

Henley nodded.

"Perhaps. The inspector is searching the rooms for the missing diamond. If he fails to find it he'll search our persons—with our permission, of course. Then, I dare say, he'll make no further attempt to hold us here."

"Search *us*?" gasped Mrs. Howell. "As if he suspected *us* of stealing it! Is such an affront to be offered *us*?"

She rose angrily, indignantly, her dark eyes firing.

"It's merely a formality made necessary by the peculiar circumstances surrounding this death," answered Henley. "It is just as the inspector pointed out to me—only the thief need protest against the search. No one else will be seriously inconvenienced."

"I don't agree with him!" cried Mrs. Howell. "I should be seriously inconvenienced by such a search. I should be annoyed and humiliated. And I should be delayed, too. I want to get away from here. No one has the right to search me or my belongings, and I refuse to submit to such an outrage!"

"Genevieve," protested Crane, "if the others all submit, we must, I am afraid."

"I won't! That's final."

"Then," said Henley, "you may be held as a suspicious person. The inspector would have the power to make such an arrest under the circumstances."

"Arrest?" she gasped, sinking helplessly into her chair again.

"After all," said Crane, "what harm can they do if they search you?"

"I don't want a lot of strangers prying into my personal effects. I won't have it!" cried Mrs. Howell. "I'll get my lawyer on the phone at once and find out if I am compelled to submit to this."

She rose and moved toward the door.

Henley started forward, frowning.

"Mrs. Howell, I beg your pardon, but I have been commissioned to let no one leave this veranda until the inspector comes. Please make my task an easy and a pleasant one?"

She turned furiously.

"Do you mean that I am a prisoner here?"

"Certainly not. The inspector simply requests you not to leave the veranda until he has completed his search of the rooms."

"Do you mean our rooms are being searched now?"

"Yes," answered Henley. "That is why I summoned you to the veranda."

Mrs. Howell turned swiftly toward the door as though to go at once and stop the search.

But the door was blocked by Aiken and Diane and Greene and Johanna—all of whom were being driven out by two big policemen.

"Of all things!" gasped Diane. "They're actually searching our rooms now. Kenneth?"

She hurried toward her brother.

"Can they do that?"

"I'm afraid so," said Henley. "After all, what difference does it make?"

"None," said Aiken, sighing and sinking wearily into a big chair. "The circumstances justify the means he has adopted."

Johanna had gone straight to Molly, who was sitting pale and motionless, her head dropped, her hands clasped in her lap.

Greene and Diane were seating themselves gloomily in the Gloucester hammock.

Crane was arguing with Mrs. How-

ell in whispers, and she was vigorously shaking her head in protest.

Henley paced the floor.

"In a way," he said, "it's an advantage—this search. It relieves us of responsibility. Better to have it proven that you are not guilty than to be suspected!"

"Do you mean that for me?" cried Mrs. Howell indignantly. "Do you mean that I am suspected of knowing anything about this affair?"

"Well," answered Henley gravely, "not exactly suspected. None of us imagine for an instant that you had any hand in it, of course, Mrs. Howell; but Judson has just informed us that another woman visited Mr. Nelson in his study last night after his daughter had gone, and it seems to us quite possible that you know something that you haven't told us. For instance—"

What he was about to say was never put into words, for Crane, rising suddenly, advanced a few steps and faced him.

"Henley," he said, "there's no use my holding out any longer. I give myself up. I killed Nelson in self-defense."

CHAPTER XI.

The Mystery Deepens.

ABSOLUTE silence followed Crane's impulsive words.

All eyes were fixed upon him—some in horror and unbelief, some in startled astonishment.

No one quite believed him at first. There seemed no reason for his killing Nelson. There had been no quarrel of any sort between them.

Besides, Crane seemed the last man on earth to commit a murder. There was little of the elemental man about him. He was so perfectly controlled always—so thoroughly well bred.

He never lost his temper. He never permitted himself to be too much moved.

Consequently, the idea that he could

be the guilty man had entered nobody's head.

"Well," he added presently, wearying of the long silence, "don't you think you'd better notify the police and end this very unpleasant situation? I killed Schuyler Nelson. I'm the man they want."

"Nonsense! Impossible!" gasped Genevieve Howell, staring.

"It is not impossible, Genevieve," he answered. "You are surprised, of course. I was a little surprised myself."

Even now his perfect self-control was in evidence.

He made his fearful admissions without the least uncertainty or distress.

He said "I killed Schuyler Nelson" as casually as he might have said "I had my breakfast."

It seemed to Henley he must have taken leave of his senses completely.

"Do you realize the seriousness of this confession you are making, Crane?" he cried.

Molly had risen, wide-eyed, white-faced, and was straining for his answer, her hands locked together nervously.

"Perfectly," answered Crane. "I did it in self-defense. I believe that sort of thing is pardonable?"

"If you can prove it—yes," answered Henley.

He turned and looked at Molly.

One hand had crept up to press upon her heart. Her eyes were closed. Johanna had an arm about her.

Henley glanced back at the others.

Diane was frowning, incredulous still. Aiken and Greene and Genevieve Howell were staring fixedly at Crane, as though to penetrate his mask of stolidity.

He was lighting a cigarette nonchalantly.

"You desire me to make public your confession?" asked Henley.

"Assuredly. By all means. At once," answered Crane. "It was thoughtless and inconsiderate of me to

permit the rest of you to be inconvenienced over this affair. I should have denounced myself at once, but I—"

His glance wandered to Genevieve Howell's anxious face.

"I wanted to see if any one else would denounce me," he ended.

Henley hesitated, suddenly made up his mind, and moved toward the door that led into the hall.

The two policemen that had driven the guests out were stationed there.

"Please send for the inspector at once," he said. "Tell him the quest is ended. The murderer has confessed."

One of the policemen started off instantly to carry the message.

Henley came back to Crane's side.

"You had better see your lawyer before you say any more," he advised.

Crane shrugged and made no answer.

The others had all drawn away from him as though he were in some way polluted; but they were watching him in horrified fascination.

Only Molly was not. She had her face hidden in her hands and was crying softly.

The inspector appeared almost instantly. His eyes flashed over the group as he crossed the threshold and then came to rest inquiringly upon Henley's face.

"You sent for me?" he asked.

"Yes," answered Henley. "Mr. Ogden Crane has confessed to the killing of Mr. Nelson."

"Mr. Crane?" repeated the inspector, swinging round upon the gentleman.

"In self-defense," Crane added, flicking the ash from his cigarette.

The act in itself was intentionally theatric. But his lowered brows and half-closed eyes indicated that he understood perfectly the danger of his position.

"Do you appreciate the significance of what you have said?" asked the inspector.

"Fully."

"Do you realize that your own statements now may be produced at your trial to condemn you?"

"Murder as self-defense is justifiable," answered Crane. "It was his life or mine."

The inspector turned and, raising his voice, cried:

"Lafferty?"

One of the policemen at the door approached.

"Take down what this man has to say," ordered the inspector.

Lafferty produced a small note-book and a pencil and sat down.

"You'd better see your lawyer, Crane, before you say another word," urged Henley anxiously. "You are taking a very serious risk."

"Yes—he's right. Ogden, for pity's sake!" added Mrs. Howell.

Crane smiled at her faintly and turned to the inspector.

"I'll make a full and free confession, telling exactly what occurred, on one condition."

"Well?" asked the inspector.

"That you give my fellow guests leave to go their ways. I had no accomplice. No one else was concerned in this murder but me. There's no earthly reason why their luggage should be searched, or why they should be detained."

The inspector scrutinized Crane.

"If your story rings true I'll do as you wish," he answered promptly. "My business is to catch the murderer, not to inconvenience your fellow guests."

"Very good, then," said Crane. "Here is the story: I killed Schuyler Nelson because I had to. I didn't really intend to, either, as a matter of fact.

"I didn't go to his study to kill him. I didn't even intend to kill him when I struck him. I had my eye on the diamond, that's the whole thing. I wanted it. I don't know why. The instant my eyes fell on it at dinner I had an overpowering instinct to get it.

"If it is true that big stones of that

sort exert a malevolent influence over people, that's what happened to me. I couldn't think of anything else all evening. I, who had no earthly use for the thing—I, who had always been an honest, upright, law-abiding citizen, found myself turning thief.

"It was impossible to overcome the impulse. I waited until I thought every one in the house asleep, then I went to Nelson's study intending to steal the thing. By a lucky chance I knew the combination of the safe."

"How did you know it?" asked the inspector, interrupting.

"That isn't important. I knew it, that's enough. The key to the gold box I didn't have and couldn't get, but I counted upon carrying off the box and prying it open afterward.

"So I went to the study. Nelson was still up. He suspected my reason for coming there at that hour.

"We quarreled. He grew angry and said unpleasant things. I answered him. He came at me with the war-club. I tried to prevent his getting at me.

"In the struggle that ensued—both of us tussling for possession of the weapon—it struck him on the temple and he went down, dying instantly. In a panic of fear over what had happened, I fled back to my room."

"At once?" asked the inspector interestedly.

"Yes."

"Without even stopping to take the diamond?"

"No-o. I stopped to take the diamond."

"Then it was you who took the key from Nelson's neck?"

"Yes."

"And you who stole the diamond from the safe?"

"Yes."

"You can produce the diamond, then—now?"

"I can," admitted Crane, nodding.

"Prove it."

Crane smiled faintly, meeting the inspector's eyes.

"No, I think not," he answered gently. "I think not."

The others, sitting motionless through his confession, stared up at him now in bewilderment and some disgust.

He seemed unconscious of them, however. His eyes remained upon the inspector's.

"You refuse to produce the diamond? You have no intention of returning it?"

"None," he answered. "I've hidden it. I have no intention of returning it. Since I am going to pay so dearly for it, I may as well keep it. Don't you think?"

"I think that you are a very clever man, Mr. Crane," answered the inspector, "but not quite clever enough to pull the wool over my eyes as you are trying to do. Until that diamond is in my hands not one of your fellow guests is permitted to leave this house!"

"What?" cried Crane angrily.

"Not one."

"But you promised to release them!"

"On condition that your story rang true."

"Well?"

"It doesn't. If you want to know it, it's my opinion that you had an accomplice, and that your accomplice is trying, with your assistance, to get away with the stone. But the little trick isn't going to be pulled off. In spite of your confession my search goes right on."

Crane's brows came down. His eyes flashed.

"So," he said, "the search goes right on, does it, in spite of your promise to me?"

"It does," answered the inspector, nodding, "unless you produce the stone as evidence of your sincerity."

"Very well," answered Crane grimly. "Search away, then. Find it. If you think I've an accomplice who has the stone, do your best to find it. And when you've failed at that,

try to convict me. I repudiate my entire confession."

"Your repudiating it will do you little good, I am afraid," answered the inspector. "We have it down in black and white, witnessed."

"Lies from start to finish," answered Crane, shrugging. "And I can prove it!"

"Indeed?" cried the inspector.

"Wait and see."

"I will," answered the other grimly. "But meanwhile I'll do you the honor of believing you. Kelley, this man is under arrest. Lafferty, tell the others to report to me if they find anything, and see if Miss Scott has come yet."

Lafferty departed.

Kelley slipped the handcuffs upon Crane, who politely aided him.

Then Crane turned and looked at Mrs. Howell thoughtfully. She was gazing at him as he had never seen her gaze before—anxiously, wistfully, her coldly beautiful face slightly flushed.

Turning his eyes from her again, Crane gazed up at the ceiling and remarked casually in French:

"If the diamond could be smuggled to me before they search our persons no one else need be involved in this affair."

The inspector, who did not understand French, turned sharply and cried:

"Stop that!"

Then he looked about to find from the expressions of the others the one for whom the message had been intended.

This was difficult, however, for all the others had understood and had been astonished at the remark—all save Henley, that is.

He thought of the little package that Molly had given him and that he had slipped into the jardinière. And he became convinced now that it contained the diamond.

Until then, he had not been absolutely sure. But now—

It became plain. Crane had not the

gem at all. He knew Molly had. He had confessed to save her.

But why? Surely there could be only one reason. He knew that she was guilty—and he loved her.

A storm of jealousy swept through him.

He had never had the least suspicion that Crane harbored a deep affection for Molly. He was so much older, to begin with. He was forty years old at least, and Molly was nineteen.

Crane had always passed as Nelson's friend rather than as Molly's, even though they had been thrown together a great deal. And, lately, he had been numbered among the lovely Mrs. Howell's admirers.

To find him, therefore, sacrificing himself so heroically for Molly's sake, disturbed Henley. He turned to Molly anxiously to discover if she would attempt to avail herself of his generosity and slip the diamond to him.

But she still sat with her face hidden in her hands.

Henley told himself that he knew now why she had wept at Crane's confession.

She knew he was innocent. And she was moved by his nobility in trying to save her. Maybe she was even beginning to love him a little.

"I will create an opportunity," said Crane again in French. "If you desire to hand over the gem to me, cough. I will attempt to escape. In the confusion the transfer can be effected."

He listened. Everybody listened, but no one coughed.

Henley had no desire to add to his rival's heroism by handing over the package from the jardinière. He thought it safer there than in Crane's possession.

And then Lafferty returned, followed by a middle-aged, rather grim-looking woman, dressed in brown.

She had sharp, brown eyes, pointed features, and freckles. Her hair was dull brown, and rather thin. She had a motor veil tied securely over her brown straw hat.

"Ah, Miss Scott!" cried the inspector, nodding. "I want you to take these ladies, one at a time, into the nearest room and search them thoroughly. A very large diamond has been taken from a safe in the house. I want to find it!"

Miss Scott nodded, and began to peel off her gloves.

"Which one first?" she asked, matter-of-factly.

Diane volunteered.

"I'll go first," she said, rising. "Come into the music-room, Miss Scott."

Miss Scott followed her in.

"Lafferty," said the inspector, "take the men."

"And begin with the prisoner," added Crane.

Lafferty and Kelley lead Crane toward the library. The others waited in silence.

No one was in a very good humor. But there was little wonder at that.

The day had been one of horrors so far, and it was not yet half over. First, murder had stalked among them. Then the robbery of the diamond had been discovered. Then they had all been cross-examined. Then Crane had confessed.

Now a general search was being conducted.

It was an odd ending to a pleasant little week-end party.

Henley turned and studied Molly. She had lifted her face, tear-wet and wistful.

And as her gaze met his he felt that somewhere there was a great mistake—she could not have been guilty of the crime that Crane evidently suspected her of. Nor would she permit him to sacrifice himself for her.

This conviction brought him tremendous relief.

He rose, careless of the inspector's grim gaze, and crossing, sat down near her, murmuring some words of comfort and consolation, assuring her that if she would only be brave things would speedily right themselves.

"But my father," she answered, shaking her head. "He's gone—forever. Nothing can give him back to me."

"Perhaps he's not unhappy," said Henley. "He's gone on, you know, into bigger fields."

She sighed, and was silent, until Diane came back with the grim Miss Scott.

Nothing had been found upon Diane.

Mrs. Howell, protesting vociferously, and threatening no end of lawsuits, went next.

And Crane was brought back and Aiken carried off in his place.

In this fashion, one by one, the whole company was searched, even Henley and Miss Johanna and Molly submitting.

The big diamond, however, was not found.

Crane beamed upon the inspector as the truth of this became apparent—and Crane's amusement in no wise added to the inspector's peace of mind.

Rising grimly, he glanced slowly around the circle of curious faces.

"No one," he said, "is to leave this house without my permission. Kelley, see that this command is carried out. Station guards. That diamond is here and I mean to find it! Lafferty, have the prisoner taken away."

"To jail?" asked Crane interestedly.

"To jail," answered the inspector.

Crane shrugged.

"At least," he said in French to the ceiling, "while they busy themselves over me the trail of the real offender is overlooked! *Tres bien!*"

Then he suffered himself to be lead off.

Henley approached the inspector.

"It isn't necessary for us to remain in this one spot, is it?" he asked. "Aren't we to have the freedom of the house? I want to phone my paper. And nobody's had luncheon."

"Yes," agreed the inspector, "you may have the run of the house."

They tramped off eagerly and scattered to their respective rooms, passing several nonchalant bluecoats in the halls.

Henley mounted the stairs directly behind Molly, and as she turned to enter her own door, she called back to him in a whisper:

"I depend upon you to recover my package."

Then she disappeared.

CHAPTER XII.

Another Theory.

HENLEY phoned to his paper a more complete account of the murder, and Crane's confession of guilt, adding, however, his own belief that Crane was not really guilty.

Who was guilty, he had still no vague idea. But he had a feeling, somehow, that men of Crane's sort don't murder, nor yet steal.

There was something unconvincing in the fellow's explanation.

Whatever his reason was—whether he believed Molly to be guilty or not—he was obviously sacrificing himself to spare some one else. This much seemed plain to Henley.

And so he phoned it in to the paper for the evening edition.

So far no other paper had gotten any details, because the police refused to admit even the pressmen.

Convinced that the big diamond was still in the house, even though it was not in the safe, the inspector would not hear of admitting any one except his own tried and trusted men.

The reporters, therefore, howled without the gate and got what pointers they could from the coroner, the red-haired assistant, and the police.

Consequently, the most distorted versions of the affair got into print.

Having discharged his duty to his paper, Henley bethought himself of Molly's mysterious package and turned his face toward the south veranda.

But when he reached there, sauntering aimlessly enough, he found that the inspector had established his headquarters there.

"Looking for me?" he cried, raising his eyes to meet Henley's.

Henley hadn't been, but he had no intention of letting the inspector suspect his real object.

"Well—ye-es," he admitted. "I thought I'd like to hear your opinion of the case now in the light of recent developments."

He threw himself into a big wicker chair opposite the inspector and offered his cigarette-case.

The inspector declined with a shake of his head.

"Still think Miss Nelson guilty?" asked Henley, lighting his cigarette.

"No," answered the inspector slowly; "not exactly. I've changed my mind a little."

"Good!" cried Henley. "Whom do you suspect now?"

"Crane," answered the inspector.

"Really? You think his confession was *bona fide*?"

"I do. I'd stake my reputation on it. He killed our man as sure as my name is Merrill."

"But he claims he can prove he is innocent."

"Pure bluff to make me stop the search. When he made that confession a while back he was hard pushed. He was scared that any moment would bring the shiner to light, and with it the identity of the person who is implicated with him. And he wanted to prevent that."

"Do you think so?" cried Henley. "Whom do you suspect besides Crane, then?"

"The widow," answered the inspector, leaning forward confidentially—"Mrs. Howell."

"Mrs. Howell?" Henley stared. "But she was engaged to marry Nelson."

"I know. If I size things up right, that is one of the reasons why the old man was put out of business. Haven't

you had your eyes open? This Crane is in love with her!"

"With Mrs. Howell?"

"Of course. A blind man could see that. He's out of his head over her. I shouldn't be surprised to find he did the old man up just because he was jealous.

"But he's too clever to give that away. He knows that no jury would acquit a man who murdered a rival over a woman—just in a fit of jealousy. Oh, no! He's not taking any chances like that. He's a live one!

"Self-defense is his plea. That's why he took the diamond and why he's holding it out to make the thing seem consistent."

"Now that you mention it," admitted Henley, "I remember his name has been coupled with Mrs. Howell's."

"Sure it has," answered the inspector. "Here's the way I size the thing up: Mrs. Howell goes to the study last night after Miss Nelson leaves. Maybe Crane saw her and followed her. Maybe he went of his own accord.

"Suppose he was worked up over the announcement of the engagement. They fight. Crane does for the old man and the widow agrees to stand by him. They lift the diamond partly because the widow likes it and partly to throw us off the scent. She hides it in her stocking, say."

"Mrs. Howell?"

"Yes. Being the dead man's *fiancée*, who'd suspect her? Get the idea?"

"Yes."

"Well, when you're all together out here and he knows you are going to be searched, he confesses. Why? To keep us from finding the diamond on the widow."

"Good Lord!" cried Henley. "It sounds straight enough."

"Of course it does."

"But the diamond wasn't on the widow!"

"N-no," admitted the inspector gloomily; "that's where she was clev-

erer than he thought her. She managed to get rid of it somehow. The Lord knows how. We've gone through her luggage with a fine-tooth comb, and Miss Scott swears she didn't drop the stone on her way to the music-room or while she was in there."

"She'd provided for such an emergency, then," said Henley. "She had hidden it previous to her summons to come down here."

"I guess that's right."

"And she tried to cast suspicion upon Miss Nelson at your inquest, so that she wouldn't be suspected."

"Right!"

Henley whistled.

"What are you going to do now?"

"Keep on looking for the present. Then if it doesn't turn up I'll turn her loose and shadow her. I'd take my oath she's got that diamond, or else she can reach it if she wants to."

Henley thought of the package that Molly had given him and wondered.

Was the diamond in it? Or was it something else of importance to her, but having no bearing upon the case?

What else could it be? What else would she try to hide from the eyes of the police?

He remembered her expression, her tears, when Crane confessed to the murder and the theft.

Why had she cried?

It was all very perplexing. He sat scowling at nothing and pondering the matter.

Inspector Merrill watched him.

"Well, how does it look to you?" he asked presently.

"All right," answered Henley. "I see no flaws anywhere."

"There was nothing Crane said in French to disapprove this theory?"

"No," answered Henley.

"What did he say? Seeing as we're kind of working together in this, you might put me next—"

"Certainly," agreed Henley. (It was to his interest to keep the inspector friendly.) "He said something to the effect that whoever had the dia-

mond ought to slip it to him before the search began. He said it would be better to have it found on him."

"Who did he say this to?"

"No one in particular. He just said it as if any one who wanted to could take advantage."

"That was the first time, eh?"

"Yes," answered Henley.

"And the second—"

"He said that the more time you wasted over him the longer you'd be in hitting the right trail."

"There!" cried the inspector eagerly. "Doesn't that prove he has some powerful reason for shielding somebody? And whom would a man take such chances for but the woman he's in love with?"

"I guess you are right," agreed Henley.

"I know I'm right," cried Merril, "and I'm going to prove it by finding that diamond and getting Judson to identify her dress and scarf. He's got to remember how the woman in the study looked."

"That would round out your case nicely," admitted Henley.

Simmons came to the door of the veranda and announced:

"Luncheon is served."

And the inspector and Henley went in together.

The package remained in the jardinière.

Molly did not appear at luncheon. But Miss Johanna did, mindful of her duty toward her guests.

Grim, erect, arrayed in unrelieved black silk, she sat at the head of the table in her brother's place.

Beside her sat Aiken—silent, too—and looking very depressed; then Diane, then Greene, then Mrs. Howell, then the inspector, with Henley next, and at Miss Johanna's right.

Nobody seemed inclined to talk much.

What was there to say at such a time? The presence of death and disgrace weighed too heavily.

Crane's absence and Nelson's and Molly's spoke too eloquently of the day's horrors.

Simmons served with funereal mien, attended by one cat-footed second man. It was a ghastly meal.

At the end of it every one rose with alacrity, but the rest of the house was no more cheerful.

Henley, going up to his room for a cap and a light coat, in order to take a stroll in the grounds, was joined by Diane, who slipped her arm through his and entered his sitting-room with him.

Even the guest-rooms were built in suites of three—bedroom, sitting-room and bath—and in the little sitting-room that had been assigned to him, Diane closed the door behind them and regarded her brother anxiously.

"I want you to help me," she said, "without asking questions or making guesses. I want you just to help me and to forget immediately afterward all about the whole transaction. Will you?"

Henley regarded her in some astonishment.

It was plain, at a glance, that she was considerably disturbed.

Her color, usually so vivid, had deserted her. Her eyes were worried. Her mouth drooped at the corners.

The full-blooded, strong, and defiant young woman who had kept the opposite sex on their knees in a state of everlasting devotion—yesterday—and all the days before—had undergone a curious transformation.

Her self-confidence seemed to have deserted her. She was white and wistful now as Molly herself—she who had always rather scorned Molly's shrinking timidity.

"Of course I'll do anything I can for you. That goes without saying," he said slowly. "But what's happened? What's gone wrong? I think you make a mistake in refusing me your confidence."

"I don't refuse you my confidence," she said. "Only this is different. It's

really nothing. It will be quite all right in no time, if you'll only lend a hand. It's money I want."

"Money?" He was astounded.

"Yes. I've gone through my allowance. I need about three thousand dollars."

"Three thousand?" he repeated, startled.

"Haven't you that much?"

"Yes—of course," he answered slowly. "I have it. I've more than that put by. But isn't it rather a lot of money for you to be needing so urgently?"

"You mustn't ask questions," she said. "Please."

"But I can't help wondering and being troubled."

She drew a long breath.

"I know," she said miserably. "I know. But there was no one else to whom I could go. And I can't explain."

He drew nearer and put his hands on her drooping shoulders, horrified to find tears in her eyes.

She had never been the weeping sort. She had always been as steady-going and as level-headed and as capable of looking out for herself as a man.

Therefore her tears frightened him.

"I don't want to pry into your affairs, Di," he said. "You are entirely capable of managing them yourself, I know. But I want to feel that you trust me—that's all—and that you wouldn't hesitate to come to me for anything, no matter what the circumstances. You do feel that, don't you?"

"Yes," she said, her eyes down.

"That's all right, then. If you can't tell me what's bothering you now, don't worry about it. I'm content to let you be the judge of that. Only don't think I'd judge you or criticise you or be unsympathetic if you ever did anything foolish or if you made any sort of mistake. Is it three thousand, even, you want?"

"Yes," said Diane in a low voice.

He crossed to the desk and drew out his check-book.

"It will be a check, of course. You don't mind that?"

"No," said Diane.

He continued writing.

"Miss—Diane—Henley," he read aloud as he wrote, "three thousand—and no—so!"

He tore off the check and came back with it, waving it for the ink to dry.

She took it.

"Thank you," she said. "And don't worry. There's no occasion to. Truly. I give you my word for that."

He nodded.

"Right-o! I'm glad to hear it! If you need any more you've only to ask. I've heaps!"

"Thank you," said Diane.

She was about to add something more, but she thought better of it, and moved hastily toward the door.

There again she hesitated, but overcame the impulse to explain and passed out, leaving her brother staring after her with knitted brows.

"Three thousand," he thought. "What on earth can she want with that?"

CHAPTER XIII.

The Garden.

HENLEY got his cap and his thick, gray sweater-coat and his pipe—and thus fortified against a long, dreary afternoon, he descended to the lower floor and passed out into the garden.

It was his idea, first of all, to see if the south veranda was empty.

If it was, he meant to recover Molly's package. If Merrill was still there, he planned to go off somewhere and watch until the coast was clear again.

The coast was not clear yet.

Merril was gone, it is true, but he had left a stout policeman in his place.

Henley was a little troubled by this.

Had Merrill discovered the package, and was he keeping guard to see who would try to reclaim it?

Or was he just suspicious?

Or had he left the guard there mere-

ly because the south veranda overlooked the driveway as well as the road from the rear of the estate?

It was impossible to decide. To begin with, Merrill might have told him if he had found the diamond.

He pretended to be making a confidant of the newspaper reporter, for he was trying hard for advancement. He had his eye on a political career, and he did not underestimate the advantage of strong newspaper allies.

However, he might be concealing this one thing, knowing Henley's fondness for Molly Nelson.

Henley sauntered on, smoking, trying to puzzle the thing out.

There were so many curious sides to the whole affair. Molly's giving him the package—Crane's confession—his sentences in French tending to create the impression that he was sacrificing himself for some one else—Mrs. Howell's anxiety to escape being searched and her desire to get away—Diane's pressing need of money.

He could formulate no theory that would explain all of these things.

Of course, some of them might have nothing whatever to do with the murder of Nelson.

That was the really trying part of it all. It was impossible to distinguish relevant incidents from irrelevant ones. That was what complicated things and made the career of a sleuth so very difficult.

The life of the actors in this little drama did not begin the night of the murder. They had been living long before that, involving themselves in other messes.

So Molly's package might not contain the diamond; Crane's confession may have been inspired by some outside affair—perhaps a desire upon his part to establish an alibi against some other charge that threatened him.

(Henley's imagination was running riot now.)

Mrs. Howell might be eager to return to the bedside of a dying child whose identity she was keeping secret.

Diane might—surely did—want the three thousand dollars to pay some pressing, overdue dressmakers' bills.

Her brother had observed quite lately that she was outdoing herself in the matter of stunning toilets.

She always had dressed rippingly. But she seemed to be really outshining herself these days.

He had reached the newly pruned rose-bushes—all set out carefully in the gardens that Nelson had had remodeled against Molly's return from school.

For Molly loved roses, as her mother had loved them before her.

In the little white-latticed summer-house, in the very midst of the gardens, she was wont to sit through the long afternoons, sewing or reading or talking—painting a little—or writing letters.

And there tea would be served regularly, the guests strolling in for it from tennis-courts and golf-links, from walks or drives or tête-à-têtes.

And Molly would pour it, looking fresh and sweet as her own roses, and attending to the business as seriously as though it were the most important thing in the whole wide world. But that was how she did things always. She took everything about life seriously.

Taught carefully by old Johanna, she had really put into practise the old copy-book text that the rest of us ignore:

"What is worth doing is worth doing well."

So Molly would pour the tea exactly to the individual liking of each of her many guests, and would glance up with the very tiniest and politest expressions of regret at the men who preferred something stronger.

She was not a modern girl. She was as old-fashioned as Johanna could make her.

She could sew and cook and keep house. She did not believe in suffrage nor in eugenics. She had not outgrown the faculty of blushing.

Henley stood staring at the garden, rather scant, still, the bushes just beginning to boast leaves, the buds and blossoms still to come. He stared at the white latticed summer-house, empty now and desolate.

And he thought he must be dreaming that this tragedy had occurred here at Rósedale.

How many years he had come here for a month at least through the summer, reading and walking and thinking with Molly—sailing her boat on the lake in the rear—making love to her in honest boy-fashion—adoring her—serving her.

It seemed to him as he looked back now that he had always been in love with Molly since the first glimpse he had ever had of her; her plump and dimpled little legs in pink half-hose, her brown hair in pigtails looped up with pink bows, her little frocks all stiff and shiny-white and outstanding.

From the very first she had conquered him. And he had never been able to break her spell.

He turned from the rose garden to retrace his steps and found himself face to face with the girl herself.

She wore a rough gray coat that covered her completely from her throat to her ankles, and a sort of soft felt hat with a quill in it.

Between hat and coat her slender, oval, wonderfully mobile face shone out at him, framed in the shining tendrils of her wind-blown hair.

"Molly!" he whispered, whipping off his cap and putting his pipe behind him.

She nodded slightly, her blue eyes fast on his.

"I saw you from the window," she said, "and I had to come down. You looked as lonely standing here as I felt. Besides, I wanted to ask you about the package."

He frowned and glanced toward the house.

"It's still in the jardinière, so far as I know," he answered regretfully. "I've been watching my chance to get

it back for you, but there seems to be always some one there. Don't worry, though. It will be all right, I know."

"If they found it they'd open it," said Molly. "There's nothing on it to stop them. And then—"

She looked frightened at the thought.

"They mustn't open it," she said. "They mustn't!"

"If it isn't the diamond," said he, "why not?"

She shook her head gravely, her eyes fast on his still.

"It isn't the diamond. I told you that, Ken. Don't you believe me?"

He colored.

Until that moment he actually hadn't, in spite of the fact that he loved her, in spite of the years he had known her, in spite of the knowledge that she would have had no need to steal what must descend to her, any way, in the natural course of events.

The mystery surrounding the package and her fear of having it found upon her person had influenced his judgment. Now, however, staring deep into her honest eyes, he felt that he had wronged her tremendously by his suspicion.

It made no difference that he would have loved her and would have helped her even if she had the diamond. He had suspected her.

And he dared not tell her so. He felt that he had failed her.

"Yes," he said, "I do believe you. Of course I believe you, dear. And if I can do anything, in any way, to get your package back for you, unopened, I'll do it. You must know that."

She drew a long breath.

"You are very good to me," she said. "And just when I need it most. I feel as if I am quite alone in the world now—in a horrible, horrible world of sin and shame and crime and cowardice and deceit.

"Everything has changed since yesterday. It isn't the same place, Kenney. If my father had just died it would not have been so bad. But this

way, and just after we had quarreled for the first time in our lives, Ken."

Tears burned in her eyes and rolled slowly down her cheeks.

"I know," said he, drawing her hand gently through his arm and beginning to lead her off down the path. "I know just how unhappy you are. But you are not to blame, you know. You couldn't help the quarrel. You acted as you thought best—as you thought right!"

"And if he can look down and see you now, he knows that, and he understands your point of view and loves you for it. For he knows now that his affection for Mrs. Howell was an earthly infatuation after all, and he regrets it for her sake as much as for yours."

Her tears had dried. She was gazing off ahead, vaguely, with yet a curious intentness, as though she could see things that were hidden from his sight. Her blue eyes were bright.

"Do you believe in fate, Kenney?" she asked slowly, almost in a whisper.

"Emphatically," he answered. "Do you?"

"This way: I believe that some of us have certain destinies, certain things to do, and that it is our mission in life to do them. I think the whole scheme of things is laid out for this end. It's thinking this way has made my whole life easier for me.

"You've no idea how I wanted my mother when I was a little girl. All the other little girls I knew had mothers. I had only Aunt Johanna.

"Dear old Aunt Johanna. She tried her best to make it up to me. But she couldn't.

"I remembered my mother, although I was only four when she died. And how I missed her. She was so soft and so fragrant and so beautiful. And she used to pet me and fondle me.

"Aunt Johanna never could. She's one of these undemonstrative women whose great warm hearts are walled in by icy cells.

"The only way I ever learned to

endure it was by thinking that we've all something to do; that life is a serious business trip on which we are sent from heaven for some special mission. My mother's, I thought, was done, and God had let her come back."

He was staring at her wonderingly. "You figured this all out yourself?"

"Yes. That is, I got the first idea myself. Maybe my mother pitied my unhappiness and whispered it into my ear. At any rate, I asked Aunt Johanna if it wasn't true, and she admitted that it was.

"Then I began to feel selfish for wanting to keep my mother here any longer than she had to stay. Heaven is so much nicer, of course. Now my father has finished his work and has gone back. I don't want to be selfish over that either, but it leaves me so alone."

"Do I count for nothing?" asked Henley gravely.

"N-no—not for nothing—but—"

"For very little?" he persisted.

"N-no—"

"I don't want you to hesitate. I want you to be quite sure of just how much I do mean to you. I want to mean—very much—everything!"

Her hand trembled upon his arm. She raised wide, concerned eyes to his face.

"Oh, Kenney, please don't—not now!" she cried.

"Why not?"

"My father—"

"He's gone. I think he would be happier to know that you and I had settled things, and that you had me to look out for you. He liked me."

She nodded mutely.

"And we mustn't send him back to heaven with a single feeling of uneasiness or regret. He mustn't be concerned about you."

She drew closer to him.

"But what would be said of me if we—we—"

"Married?"

She nodded, coloring deeply.

"Now, so soon?" she added wistfully. "They'd say I should have waited. They'd call me heartless and unfeeling. They'd say I hadn't shown the proper respect."

"Nonsense. We could do it quietly, without pomp or display. And I should have the right to protect you and take care of you. You can't be left to face things alone, dear, with only Aunt Johanna behind you."

"I don't know," she said uncertainly. "I don't know what to do!"

He looked down eagerly into her troubled face.

"Don't you love me enough to marry me?" he asked.

A very faint smile lighted her eyes.

"You know I do. You know I've never even thought of marrying any one else."

He was relieved.

"What difference what the hypocritical world says, then?" he asked.

"We shall both know we have offered your father's memory no disrespect. But the living must not be sacrificed to the dead. Let me decide this question for you. We will be quietly married to-night."

"Oh, no!" she protested. "Not to-night. I couldn't."

"To-morrow morning, then?"

"No, not until after the—the funeral. We must wait that long, at least."

"Very well. If you insist upon the delay, I'll yield that much. But—we'll be married directly after the funeral, then, and go away somewhere—abroad, perhaps. You and I—"

"And Aunt Johanna," said Molly; "we can't leave her behind, after the years she's spent attending me."

He smiled.

"Even Aunt Johanna, if you please," he agreed.

"It will be such a mournful honeymoon—with the bride in mourning," she sighed.

"You need not confine yourself to black! White was mourning long before black was—and purple, too."

"Yes," she added slowly, "that's quite true. My father didn't believe in mourning either. But my Aunt Johanna is going into black."

She shook her head.

"Poor Aunt Johanna. It's a curse to be so reserved and silent and secretive as she is. I never realized how much she cared for my father until now. She doesn't speak unless you speak to her, and then sometimes she doesn't hear you. And she doesn't cry. She just sits silent, staring at nothing—staring—staring."

Henley turned and looked at her. He was frowning slightly.

"I thought she got on beautifully with your father?" he ventured.

"N-no. They rarely agreed. They were always at loggerheads over something, and they both had awful tempers. Isn't it odd that brothers and sisters can seldom live in harmony together?"

He was silent—thoughtful.

He remembered now that Nelson and his sister had never agreed, and that Miss Nelson seemed very much affected by her brother's violent end.

She had been the first to reach his door when Henley had mounted the stairs that morning, and there she had fainted at the first glimpse of Nelson's prostrate form.

Since then, too, she had been silent—dazed—stunned.

Henley glanced into Molly's face. She was watching him anxiously.

A thought flashed through his mind—an unwelcome, disturbing thought.

Had she been speaking of Miss Johanna to sound him out? Had she led the conversation in that direction to discover if his suspicions concerned themselves with Miss Johanna?

Had she lied to him about the diamond? Was it in the package? Had Miss Johanna taken it, to avert suspicion from herself?

Had she killed her brother—in a quarrel over Molly and Mrs. Howell?

Here was a new, fairly plausible

theory—with some slight foundation in fact. The package was there, tangible enough.

But would Molly lie to him, even in Miss Johanna's behalf? Wouldn't she trust him?

"What are you—thinking?" asked Molly anxiously. Her blue eyes were fixed upon his face.

"I was wondering," he answered, "just how much you trust me?"

"How much I—"

She did not finish.

"How much *do* you?" he repeated.

"Do you trust me enough to bare your heart and soul to me? You have said that you will trust your future to my keeping. Will you—would you trust your life in my keeping, too?"

"Why not?" she whispered sweetly.

"And the life of some one else, dear to you?"

Her expression changed. She whitened.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean if some one near and dear to you were in danger through some impulsive deed—which was instantly repented—do you believe in me and trust me enough to trust this secret to my keeping?"

"Why, to be sure!" she cried.

"Are not my friends your friends now? Aren't the things that are dear to me dear also to you? Aren't we to be one? What do you mean, Ken? What have you been suspecting?"

He saw that she was searching his face eagerly.

"I was suspecting," he answered slowly, "that you know who killed your father!"

She turned ghastly white now and caught her breath.

"What makes you say that?" she whispered, frightened.

"I can't help thinking it—from your attitude."

"You mean you just guess it?"

"Yes, of course."

"And you don't actually know anything?"

"No."

She seemed relieved and yet not completely relieved—almost a little regretful, too.

It was as though she would have liked him to know, although she could not tell him.

"I don't know who killed my father," she said. "I don't know."

"But you've a strong suspicion?"

"I—yes—I suspect some one. But I daren't say whom. I daren't. Not even to you. It isn't my secret. It's nothing I can talk about, even to you."

He nodded.

"I know. Don't talk about it. Answer me just this one question: Is Crane the man you suspect?"

"No," she answered slowly.

"Does he know whom you suspect?"

"No, I think not; I don't see how he could know."

Henley drew a great breath of relief.

"Then he is on the wrong track, too. Merrill is. I was. I doubt if any one will ever guess."

Molly looked up at him.

"If they find that package in the jardinière they'll guess," she answered slowly. "There is all the necessary evidence there."

He gasped.

Then she had been lying. The diamond was in the package, after all.

"The diamond is there?" he asked.

"N-no. Not the diamond. I don't know where that is."

He was completely puzzled now.

If Miss Johanna had killed her brother, and Molly knew it, and had the evidence of the crime in that package, what had she in it? What evidence could there be besides the diamond?

He dared ask no more questions. It was plain the subject was a painful one to her. But he would have given a good deal to know.

"I can mold the newspaper stories at least," he said, thinking what must be done to avert suspicion from Miss Johanna. "I can do my darnedest to

keep people from suspecting. And Merrill and I are friendly. I may be able to sidetrack him. What do you suppose induced Crane to confess to something he didn't do?"

"I have no idea," answered Molly slowly. "I was amazed. I could hardly credit my own ears."

"Merril thinks that he is really guilty—that he is involved with Mrs. Howell, and that she had the diamond. He thinks Mrs. Howell had it hidden on her and that Crane confessed in order to prevent its being found."

Molly gasped.

"But why should they want to harm my father? He was going to marry Mrs. Howell. And he was Crane's good friend."

"Merril thinks the diamond and Crane's jealousy were responsible!"

"Crane's jealousy?"

"Of your father."

She shook her head.

"Men of his sort don't kill that way. He may have confessed because he thought Mrs. Howell implicated. That hadn't occurred to me. He has been rather fond of her, I think."

"But she didn't do it. Why, my father was in love with her—would have married her—was determined to, in fact. He told me he had quite made up his mind. He thought me selfish and childish for trying to interfere. He thought her a splendid type of woman."

"That knocks Merrill's theory into a cocked hat, of course. He had an idea your father meant to yield to you and break off the engagement with Mrs. Howell. He thought Mrs. Howell had grown indignant over her dismissal and had retaliated impulsively. That Crane had heard—had come in—and the diamond had been stolen to avert suspicion."

She shook her head and sighed.

"I think not," she said. "But since he thinks this, don't undeceive him. Let him try to prove it."

Henley nodded.

"Of course. We must play for time. The more delay there is the less chance of their finding any real clues. We'll have the study overhauled as soon as they give us leave."

"The study is all right. They'll find nothing there, I think," said Molly. "But—my package!"

They had come in sight of the south veranda. The stout policeman was still sitting there, dreaming.

"Can't you attract his attention while I get it?" she added gravely. "Isn't it worth a trial?"

Henley turned and studied her thoughtfully.

"Do you think you could do it—slip it out of the jardinière without his hearing you?"

"Yes, yes!" she answered positively.

"The risk is enormous. If he hears you or sees you he'll compel you to turn over the package to him."

"But he'll not, and I can't endure this awful suspense, knowing that he's sitting there with my package so near at hand. Besides, I want to know if they have already found it or not."

He nodded.

"Very well, if you like, I'm willing to chance it."

"We'll both go out on the veranda. I'll address him. If he gets interested and you have a chance, try to recover the thing. Otherwise not. To let him see that you are interested in the jardinière would be very bad policy."

"I understand," said the girl.

They went up the front steps and through the main hallway to the south veranda.

As they stepped out there the stout policeman rose and turned so that he faced them, and, incidentally, the jardinière.

He saluted.

"You are one of Inspector Merrill's men?" asked Henley, returning the salute.

"Yes, sir; I am," said the policeman.

"Is the inspector about?"

"No, sir. He's gone into town, sir. Is there anything wrong?"

"N-no—nothing special," answered Henley hesitatingly. "I just wanted to speak to him about something. Thank you."

The policeman looked dubious as Henley seemed on the verge of departure.

He had seen Henley and Molly walking in the garden and deeply engaged in conversation, and he had wondered of what nature their conversation was.

Apparently now they had been talking of the case, and they had something more to tell.

"We might reach the inspector on the telephone, sir," said the policeman, "if it is important. He went to the central office straight from here."

"No, I—I hardly feel inclined to do that," said Henley.

Then Molly spoke up softly, eagerly:

"Why not, Kenneth? This discovery may shed an entirely new light on the whole case. I think it most important that the inspector know at once."

"Do you?" asked Henley, turning to her anxiously and ignoring the policeman. "But I don't think it a good idea to mention it over the phone. I'd better not be seen even going to the phone. Perhaps if we wait the inspector will be back."

"Maybe not in time, though," warned Molly.

Henley hesitated.

"But it will simply forewarn them if I phone the inspector. You must realize that. They'd know instantly that I'd got wind of something, and they'd begin to cover their trail."

"I could phone, sir," suggested the stout policeman eagerly, "and just drop a word to the inspector to come right back."

Molly beamed. Her face lighted. She dazzled the stout policeman with her smile of approval.

"The very thing!" she cried. "Why didn't we think of that?"

"Too excited," said Henley briefly. "Shall we wait here, officer? There's a phone in the music-room."

"Thank you, sir," said the stout policeman. "And if you'll just be keeping your eye on the road, sir—"

"Right!" agreed Henley.

The stout policeman vanished. Henley turned and took a swift survey of the landscape.

"All serene!" he whispered softly to Molly without turning.

Molly dipped her hand into the jardinière, found the package, and drew it out.

And as she lifted it to thrust it into the pocket of her coat Mrs. Howell stepped out upon the veranda in time to see.

CHAPTER XIV.

La Comtesse.

MRS. HOWELL said nothing.

She merely halted, threw up her head, and fixed her great, dark, beautiful eyes upon Molly.

Molly, frightened, startled, trembling, attracted Henley's attention by her low cry of distress.

"Mrs. Howell!" she breathed.

Henley swung round. In a flash he guessed the situation.

"It was there?" he asked Molly, to be quite sure.

"Yes," answered Mrs. Howell calmly; "it was there, and she got it. She has it now in the left outer pocket of her coat."

"Good!" cried Henley gaily. "Skip with it, Molly, before the guardian of the law comes back."

Molly turned toward the doorway. "I think," broke in Mrs. Howell's voice, staying her, "you may save yourself the effort. I shall merely send the guardian of the law after you."

"But, Mrs. Howell," cried Henley, meeting Molly's appealing eyes, "you don't understand—"

"I do understand, to your very

great regret," answered Mrs. Howell. "I understand a number of things."

Her eyes flashed from Henley to Molly. And they seemed strangely cold eyes now—cold and brilliant like jewels.

Molly drew nearer Henley, holding out her hands appealingly.

"What shall we do now?" she whispered, terrified.

"Mrs. Howell," said Henley, "you go with Molly to her sitting-room and wait there for me. Give us a chance to explain. If our explanation isn't satisfactory there'll be still time enough to tell the police what you've seen."

She hesitated, her eyes fixed upon Henley's.

Then slowly she nodded.

"Very well. You shall have your chance to explain," she said, rising. "But I warn you it will have to be a very complete and convincing explanation."

Henley bowed.

Mrs. Howell and Molly reentered the house, the stout policeman stepping aside at the threshold with a bow to let them pass.

Then he advanced eagerly to Henley.

"He's coming right out by motor!" cried the stout policeman with much satisfaction. "I told him to hurry. I told him you'd made a grand discovery that'd change the whole face of things."

"Good!" cried Henley, nodding. "Now, if you'll excuse me I'll go back and watch them. Let me know the minute the inspector comes."

The stout policeman nodded with an expression which might have been translated:

"Trust me for that!"

Henley went slowly up the stairs to Molly's sitting-room.

They'd got the package back, right enough; but they'd decoyed Merrill back from town on a wild-goose chase, and they'd got Mrs. Howell to reckon with.

Things did not look exactly bright for them.

Mrs. Howell was seated quietly in Molly's biggest armchair, watching the girl who was pacing the floor nervously.

Molly had thrown off her hat and coat. She looked infinitely smaller and slighter without them.

Mrs. Howell, who was a rather tall, splendidly formed woman, seemed to loom above her.

She was dressed in black—still wore the black tailored suit and small black traveling hat, in fact, that she had donned in the morning. She was evidently prepared to depart the instant Merrill gave her leave.

The black clothes became her, throwing into high relief her unquestionable beauty. She had very pink-and-white skin, which, if it owed its brilliance to artificial means, was so well done that the eye could not detect the fact.

She had red-brown hair—luxuriant, soft, shining—and great brown eyes, with a sort of reddish glow to them, too.

Her nose was small and straight. Her mouth was full-lipped and deeply colored. Her eyelashes were very long.

Seated there, facing the girl, she was like a great florid American beauty rose beside a small, white, common garden variety.

Henley measured them with his eyes an instant from the threshold. Then he advanced, closing the door behind him. He observed with some satisfaction that Miss Johanna was not there.

Before he could speak Mrs. Howell opened fire.

"I am astonished to find you involved in this affair, Henley," she said. "I have made no secret of my suspicions of Miss Nelson from the first. But you—"

"Your suspicions of Molly are quite unjustified—entirely unjustified," answered Henley. "As for your good

opinion of me, Mrs. Howell, I hope I deserve it; I believe I do—in this instance, at least. If you imagine that what you have just seen on the veranda has anything whatever to do with Mr. Nelson's death, you are very greatly mistaken."

He said it as though he were speaking the truth.

After all, the situation demanded a lie; Molly's happiness was worth a lie—a thousand lies.

"Yes?" repeated Mrs. Howell patiently. "Do you deny that Miss Nelson had something hidden in that jardinière that she desires to keep from the eyes of the police?"

"No," answered Henley. "That would be absurd. But I do deny that Miss Nelson is in any way involved in the distressing affair of last night. She left her father in good health—alive—determined to marry you. From that moment until I met her this morning with the news, she was unaware of her father's death or anything connected with it!"

"And the package?" asked Mrs. Howell.

"It is not the diamond, if that is what is in your mind," said Molly. "It is something else; something that—that my father desired to keep from the eyes of the world."

Mrs. Howell raised her dark brows curiously.

"Another gem, then?"

"No, not a gem."

"What, then?"

"Does it matter?"

"Not in the least to me—except that I feel it my duty to tell the police what I know about this affair. I feel that my affection for your father demands that.

"If you can convince me that you are in no way involved I will keep silent, but not—not unless you convince me. You can't expect me to take your word under the circumstances. Why, a lie more or less would disturb no one at such a moment.

"If you are involved in your fa-

ther's murder you'd hardly admit the fact to me. On the other hand, if you are not involved, and if the diamond is not in that package, you could speedily convince me of that by opening the package."

"I cannot!" cried Molly weakly.

"Suppose the diamond is in the package—but Miss Nelson is not involved, in spite of that?" asked Henley.

"How could she have come into possession of the stone otherwise?"

"Suppose her father gave it to her last night?"

"Improbable. He promised it to me as a wedding gift."

"Suppose, then, that the person who accidentally killed him gave it to Miss Nelson to—to avert suspicion?"

"That person should be made to come forth and confess. Isn't Ogden Crane locked up in the place of this person you two are trying to conceal? Is that just or fair?"

"Suppose that it is a woman," asked Henley—"a woman of gentle birth and breeding?"

Mrs. Howell sat gazing critically at him.

"That woman," said she grimly, "by taking Schuyler Nelson's life, defrauded me of a share of his estate and of the big diamond that is missing. As his wife I should have inherited a third of his fortune at his death, and I am only twenty-six. I was certain to outlive him.

"Moreover, he had promised me that diamond for a wedding gift. I've lost not only a man who loved me and would have given me his name, his care, his social position, and his affection, but a great deal of money. Why should I regard this woman with any leniency? She did me an ill turn!"

Henley got the point. He drew nearer, his eyes fast on hers.

"And if this were all remedied—if you were to get the spoils of your victory just the same—"

"The money, one-third of his estates, and the big diamond?"

Henley turned to Molly.

"Will you give her one-third of the estate and the big diamond for her silence?"

"If the big diamond is recovered," answered Molly, her disgust of Mrs. Howell showing plainly.

"That won't do," said the older woman grimly. "You must hand over the big diamond now. It's worth two million dollars to me to get it within the week."

"But I haven't it!" protested Molly.

"How is it worth two million to you?" asked Henley.

She reflected.

"I'll tell you," she said then slowly.

"But I warn you, if you attempt to use this information against me, I shall find means of retaliating!"

Her expression changed. The look of soft, alluring femininity vanished as if by magic.

Her rosebud mouth set in lines of determination. Her dark eyes flashed. Her arched brows came down.

It was the face of a keen, shrewd *intrigante* into which they both gazed wonderingly.

"You have known me as Mrs. Genevieve Howell," she went on. "I am not Mrs. Genevieve Howell. I adopted the name for convenience. I am the Countess Du Lacoir. You have heard of me, possibly, as *le comtesse*?"

Henley, looking puzzled, shook his head. Molly still stared wonderingly.

"Well, I am a secret agent, a free-lance, a mercenary at the disposal of any country willing to pay my fees. My headquarters are in Paris. There I have won a certain fame. Here—where I was born—I am so little known that I have gone about for months as Mrs. Genevieve Howell without being recognized.

"I came to New York," she went on, "at the instance of the Raja of Matan. He offered me two million dollars to recover for him the Little Brother to the Stars."

"My father's diamond!" gasped Molly.

"No—the raja's diamond, really. The raja never sold it to your father, as your father believed. Some trusted servants of the raja stole it and sold it without the raja's knowledge.

"He was wild with rage when he discovered what they had done, and had them put instantly to death. There is a legend to the effect that the happiness of Matan is so closely connected with the diamond that the loss of one means the loss of the other. And the raja believes implicitly in this.

"When he found the diamond gone he sought to buy it back from Mr. Nelson, but Mr. Nelson refused to sell at any price. So there was nothing left but for the raja to have it stolen.

"He sent some of his own agents, I believe, a French spy or two, and me. The one of us that returns the stone within the week gets two million dollars.

"That sum—tremendous as it seems to us—means nothing to the raja, who is one of the richest men in the world. He wants the diamond this week, because his son and heir is to marry a princess of Tambur next month."

Henley was leaning forward incredulously.

"Do you mean to say all this is true," he gasped—"this Arabian Nights sort of story?"

Mrs. Howell nodded, her dark eyes narrowing.

"True as gospel! The raja himself is here in New York in disguise. He depends upon me to save him."

"And you—you were marrying my father simply to get this diamond?"

"No. I admired and respected him. I wanted to be taken care of. I was sick of living by my wits—sick of it!" cried Mrs. Howell. "He was fond of me. We understood each other. I could have made him happy."

She threw up her head abruptly and shrugged.

"But that's all over," she ended. "I'm back in the game again. And I'm at the end of my rope. I spent all the money I had to dress the part

of Mrs. Howell and rent the necessary jewelry. I must get that diamond. Are you going to give it up to me, or must I tell my story to the police?"

Henley looked at Molly.

"After all, it is legally the property of the raja, if what you say is true," he said, turning back to Mrs. Howell. "And I suppose you could get it to the raja without any one's knowing where you got it, or anything like that?"

"Yes," said the woman, her nostrils dilating.

Henley glanced again at Molly.

"What do you think?" he asked.

"If I had the diamond I'd give it to her, certainly," she answered. "But where am I to get it?"

He rubbed his head hesitatingly.

"Quite so. Where?" he repeated.

Mrs. Howell faced Molly.

"My dear child, what do you gain by pretending that you haven't this diamond?" she asked. "Don't you realize I shall tell the police and they will compel you to produce your precious package?"

"And don't you realize that once the raja's brood discovers where the stone is they'll be after it again, hot-foot? Why, your life would be sacrificed without a scruple."

Molly whitened.

"But I haven't the diamond. I haven't. Truly. I should give it to you if I had. I hate it. I hate all jewelry. I never have worn any. I don't make a god of glittering baubles as some women do. I wouldn't so far ape the savages as to wear beads in my ears, or on my fingers, or strung round my neck and arms. A diamond to me is as worthless as a bit of glass the same size. I value a pink bead as highly as a pearl. Neither is very useful."

She leaped up, her eyes shining.

"If I had the thing I'd throw it into the sea so that no more lives might be lost over it, no more blood shed, no more quarrels occur, or kingdoms totter. My father would not be lying there dead now but for that stone. So much your story has told me.

"I had thought another reason behind his violent end. But I begin to think one of your raja's agents has made away with him and the jewel, too. I advise you to communicate with him and see!"

She crossed to the desk and produced the white wrapped package that she had locked in there.

Bringing it back with her she broke the seal and began to unfasten the cord. Henley and Mrs. Howell watched her anxiously, breathlessly.

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.

LOVE'S TOLL

By Agnes Balestier

IN Love's surrender freely gave I all,
Content that in one hour of my life,
With Passion blind you counterfeited Love,
And soothed the fears with which my heart was rife.

To you, 'twas but a transient, thoughtless whim,
An hour swiftly gone and lightly spent,
Forgotten ere another hour had sped.
To me, it was a lifetime—to repent.

The Quitter

By Jacob Fisher

Author of "The Cradle of the Deep," etc.

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS

IN Quebec Ransford Hallam proposes again to Sophia Burton. She tells him to become a man before she will marry him. She admires a beautiful fur coat worn by a woman, and he says it is made of baby musk-ox skin. He will get her a coat like it, thereby proving his manhood. He goes north. At the end of the railroad he finds that Angus McAvey, former factor, has just been killed by Sandy, a Yellow-Knife Indian, whom he had killed on the same draw. He gets dogs and two Indians and they head for the Great Slave Lake. On the edge of the Barren Ground he finds Norma Leonard in her home by her dead father. The Indians are frightened and disappear in the night. He has heard wailing.

The girl explains that the wailing was due to eolian harps in the roof and trees, and that the Indians had been afraid of them. She agrees to help him find his musk-oxen if he will help her find a ledge of gold that her father and Angus McAvey had found and lost. He agrees, finding that she knows nothing of civilization—not even how to read. They start on the hunt, and when Ransford has killed and is getting the pelts of the unborn baby oxen, she attacks him furiously. He masters her, but they are both wounded. Being without antiseptics, they start for the nearest post. As they reach it he falls unconscious.

CHAPTER XVIII.

The Trading Post.

NEARLY twenty-four hours later when Hallam opened his eyes he was lying in a small cabin of logs, into which the afternoon sun was pouring through a three-pane window.

At first he could not remember. Then it came to him that this must be the trading-post.

He lay still, with his eyes fixed on the smoky rafters. The last he could recall was the lake, the interminable length of frozen lake, with Norma beside him, he dragging the sledge, she aiding him when he stumbled.

How he had finally reached the post he had no idea. The interim was a blank.

He threw off the heavy woolen quilt and sat up. There was a movement beside the bunk, and Norma appeared as if from nowhere, her face anxious.

"Ransford?"

"Norma!"

Hallam saw that she was dressed no longer in her own garments of young caribou-skin, but wore a man's woolen shirt, tucked into a pair of heavy short trousers buckled below the knee, woolen socks, and her own seal boots. Her hair still hung in its thick braids before her shoulders, but it was rough and sadly tangled.

She was smiling, but her face looked thinner and there were shadows beneath her eyes.

"Norma!" he exclaimed, slipping from the edge of the bunk, "how is it with you?"

This story began in *The All-Story Cavalier Weekly* for July 11.

"I am well," she answered.

"How long have I been sleeping?"

"Since last night. It is now late afternoon."

"And you?"

"Oh, I have slept in the bunk here beneath you. The factor has given us this cabin while we stay here."

"And did he give you those clothes, too?" asked Hallam, with a grin.

"Yes," she said in a matter-of-fact way. "There are some for you," and pointed to the opposite wall.

The cabin was warm, and Hallam, looking about, saw a stove in one corner with a fire glinting through the cracked door.

"Has the factor a wife?" he asked, wondering why she had chosen to share the cabin with him.

"I don't know. There is a woman—an Indian woman, very fat and ugly, who cooks for him."

"And your shoulder?" he asked.

"I have not looked at it," replied the girl, "but I wish you would get it well as soon as you can. I hate being one-armed."

Hallam considered.

"I will go and find the factor. What is his name?"

"Stevenson."

He asked her about their arrival and she told him of their leaving the sledge on the lake and of his collapse.

"I made them bring you here," she said, "where I could watch you. When you could not speak to me I was afraid, but after I had eaten I slept, and then I waited. I am glad you are well again."

"Good girl," Hallam approved. "My, but I'm hungry. I suppose we couldn't get that sledge to-night. I want it, or rather what is lashed in the bow of it; but the factor must not know. Skins like those were what cost McAvey his job. He'll be on the lookout."

"Why is that?" asked Norma.

"It's against the law. The skins are barred from trade and it is an offense to be caught with one."

As he spoke he pulled on his moccasins. "I'm going to see the factor. Will you wait here?"

The girl nodded and he went out.

The post consisted of several log buildings, and looking about for the source of timber supply Hallam saw along the edge of the lake a growth of spruce and stunted birch. The sun was setting and he looked up the length of frozen whiteness in search of the black dot on the ice that would be the sledge. Nothing was to be seen.

He stepped back to the door.

"How far up the lake is the sledge, Norma?"

"About two miles, I think. I remember that it was around that point you can see jutting out. I have looked. You cannot see the place from here."

Hallam felt relieved, but he resolved to go for the skins that night.

He walked across the hard-packed snow of the factor's yard and walked in without ceremony.

The place was like an oven and smelled vilely of many things, principally fat meat, cooking. He saw a huge man in undershirt and trousers seated on a bench before the red-hot stove. His great stomach protruded in a paunch, creased by his waistband, and his shirt above it was stained with smears of tobacco-juice.

As he heard the door open the man turned and Hallam noted the heavy jowl, with its sparse and tobacco-stained beard crowned with a heavy, greasy mop of sandy-graying hair. His eyes were light blue and watery and one of them walled outward.

"Huh!" grunted the man. "Ye've come to life, hae ye?"

"You're Stevenson, the factor? My name is Hallam."

"I'm pleased to meet wi' ye, Meester Hallam. We ha' nae had a veesitor for mony a day. How is your gude woman? She's keepit close by ye sence ye came. I know her by her fayther, Norman Leonard, the auld hermit, though I ha' nae set een on him lang syne."

"He's dead," said Hallam briefly. "I'm taking his daughter out of the country."

"Dead!" exclaimed Stevenson. "When?"

"Ten days ago."

"And yersel', Meester Hallam?" asked the factor, spitting at the hissing stove, "will ye nae sit doon?"

"Prospecting for an American concern," lied Hallam readily. "Copper and coal."

"Ye dinna tell," mused the factor, "and wi' what luck?"

"Found both," answered Hallam, taking a seat opposite, "I was on my way back when I came across Leonard's camp. He had died that morning and the girl was alone. I stayed, and that night my two Indians deserted. They believed the place was haunted."

"Aye," said the huge Scotchman, "I hae heard o' that. It was no canny, I've been told."

"I took the girl and started so we might get out on snow. The dogs got the spring sickness and died. So here we are. The girl has a hurt shoulder. She will need some attention."

"Weel, weel. That is nae so gude," reflected Stevenson.

"Mr. Stevenson, have you a medical kit with some antiseptics and bandages?"

"I dinna ken," said the factor, rising. "The company g'ies us mony things we hae little use for."

He went to a chest at one side of the low room and pawed about in it, finally bringing forth a square box with a red-cross label.

"Tak' it, Meester Hallam," he said, "I hae ne'er turned the key in the lock these twa year."

"Much obliged to you," said Hallam, rising.

"Bring the lass back wi' ye," said the factor, waving a hand like a ham; "we'll be eatin' soon."

Hallam found Norma sitting before the small, hot stove, her elbows on her knees, her chin in her palms.

"I do not like this place," she said as he came in.

"No more do I," he replied. "But we have no choice for the present."

"I do not think I shall like *people* very well," she went on; "I do not like Stevenson nor the Indian woman. There are two or three Indian men, too. I never liked Indians."

"My dear girl," said Hallam, looking over the contents of the medical chest and noting with satisfaction that it contained bichloride tablets, "I like them even less than you; but the world is not made up of Indians. When your shoulder is well we will go."

"How?" she asked, looking at him.

"The way we came, if we can get a dog-team."

"The snow is going," she replied. "In a week there will be no traveling. There is a south wind in the air now. I can feel it."

"How soon will the lakes be open?"

"Perhaps three weeks."

"Then we shall have to wait. It will be nearly that before you are fit to travel."

She said nothing, and he noticed that her lips closed tightly.

There was water boiling on the stove, and filling a basin, Hallam dropped a blue tablet in it to dissolve.

"Norma," he said, "will you let me look at your shoulder?"

"Yes," she said, a little wearily.

He loosened her heavy shirt at the neck, stripping it down, and cut the wrappings away with his knife. What he saw surprised him. The flesh was black and blue as from a severe bruise, but the skin was healing cleanly, without a sign of suppuration.

To make sure, he washed the wounds and bandaged them with fresh gauze. When he had finished she went to her deerskins, thrown in the lower bunk, and brought him her comb.

"Please," she said, shaking back her neglected hair. "You don't know how it feels."

He did better this time, but as be-

fore, his nearness to her, the intimacy that his touching of her hair implied, the sweet smell of its masses, cool and silken upon his hands, made him fight to keep from taking her close in his arms.

He recognized a primal passion straining at the leash and it left him trembling, for he also recognized in his companionship with this girl a sacred trust not to be broken by word or act.

By her voluntary choice of this cabin with him, rather than quarters with the Indian woman, she had placed upon him a responsibility that he could not shirk. He felt that instinctively she distrusted the factor, and that she had turned to him, perhaps without knowing why.

Circumstances had made him her protector. No greater wrong could befall than that he should forfeit that claim upon him.

How far the light that had come to her on the day she had received her injury had penetrated her womanhood he could only surmise, but that what she had seen had developed within her, as yet vague and unrecognized, the instinct of the maternal, he could not doubt.

He remembered the night—that white night when he had tossed, tortured with weariness in the *igloo*—how she had touched his face with her hand, gently, as a mother might have done, and how he had fallen asleep with his cheek pillowed upon her palm.

As he looked at her now he saw in her a child, trembling on the threshold of that knowledge which would make her a woman, unconscious of danger, yet vaguely aware of something that caused her concern, trusting him absolutely, looking to him and to his worldly wisdom to keep her from evil. And as he looked he swore that she should not find him wanting.

As he dropped the lid of the red-cross box she looked up.

"Are you going to do nothing for yourself?" she asked.

Hallam laughed. "I had pretty nearly forgotten."

"That is not true, Ransford," she contradicted, gravely. "You were waiting, so that I would not see. You have helped me and done your best for me. I must help you."

She looked away for an instant. "I was the cause of it," she said.

It was the first time she had referred directly to his wound since she had aided him with the first bandage; but he saw now that she had been thinking of it and that it had troubled her.

Without protest he slipped out of his coat and rolled his sleeve high.

The wrappings had slipped and the dried blood made an ugly sight. She paled a little, but going to the basin she soaked a piece of gauze as she had seen him do and carefully washed the long cut. It was healing, though not so cleanly as her own.

With Hallam smiling at her concern, she wound a clean bandage, and when it was done he showed her the marvels of the safety pin—the first she had ever seen.

When he had pushed it through and sprung the point into place she looked up with a sweet wistfulness in her eyes that he had never seen before. Her hand somehow slid within his.

"What is it, Norma?" he said.

"I—don't know," she whispered.

Her gaze fell, and her head, as she stood close, was bowed a little until it almost touched his breast, and for an instant her dark hair swept his lips.

In her slim wrist he felt the throbbing that came from her heart. He was sure she must hear the faster beating of his own.

CHAPTER XIX.

The Man Learns.

IF Hallam had not made a sauce of his full day of fasting he would have been repulsed by the fare that was spread upon the greasy board of Stevenson.

There was fried caribou meat, ill-baked sour bread, and tea that made him wonder at the inventions of man. As for Norma, she did not even pretend to eat.

They sat opposite Stevenson, who eyed her between knife-fuls with a glance that seemed to Hallam almost obscene. The Indian woman, whom Stevenson called Myra, served them, shuffling about the room in her moccasined feet, wiping her hands on a smeary apron.

The trader noticed that Norma was not eating.

"Ye're not ower ravenous the nicht, Mistress Leonard," he said, thrusting his head toward her in an elephantine attempt at jocularity. "Maybe the deer meat is an auld story to ye; but we hold oursels in luck to hae it."

Norma looked at him but did not answer. Hallam, to divert their host, began to talk of matters in the world outside; but he soon saw that the man was not listening. He evidently knew little and cared less for the events of civilization.

When at last the meal was over, Stevenson pushed his stool back from the table, yawned, and disappeared in an inner room. Hallam caught a silent appeal from Norma's eyes.

"Yes," he nodded, "go if you like. I'll come as soon as I can."

The girl slipped out and Hallam waited. The trader soon reappeared and settled once again into his place by the fire. The room was like a sweat-box, but the Indian woman brought a basketful of wood and stoked the fire until the dirty-white barrel of the stove glowed red.

"Now, Myra, wumman," called Stevenson, "we'll see if that aboriginal brain o' yours is more addled than mine the nicht."

The squaw obediently appeared bearing a checkerboard, so worn and so befouled with the pawing of dirty hands that its squares were nearly obliterated. She drew up a stool, and with the board upon their knees the

pair settled down to an evening of domestic entertainment.

Hallam stayed to watch, and if possible gain an insight into the mental make-up of the trader. The woman, he saw at once, played the game with extraordinary skill, barely hesitating over problems that seemed to Hallam difficult. She won with ease, and Stevenson reached for his pipe, swearing under his breath.

Again the woman won, and they started a third game. Hallam could see the man's face working and waited for the explosion.

Sure enough it came. Myra had pushed into his king-row for a second time when he brought his heavy hand down on the board with a crash that scattered the pieces far and wide.

"Wumman! Ye're no playin' me fair, ye auld deevil. Awa wi' ye, makin' a mock o' me before strangers. Oot!"

The squaw fled, and Hallam, who had seen no unfair move on her part, recognized in Stevenson's simulated rage a subterfuge against a third and most ignominious defeat. He rose, disgusted.

"Sit ye doon, Meester Hallam; sit ye doon. Maybe I am a bit hasty noo an' then, but ye'll find me none the waur for a' that."

Hallam pleaded weariness.

"It is rather an imposition to come down on you like this at a time of year when provisions are running short," he said, "but you can see that we have no choice. I hope you can take care of us until Miss Leonard's shoulder is well and she is fit to travel."

"Ye'll no hae to worry ower that, Meester Hallam. Ther'll be victuals a plenty such as they are, an' the company bids us be hospitable."

He waved his hand and sank back into his chair as Hallam closed the door, a great inert mass of human flesh, dulled and brutalized by long isolation.

Outside the moon was shining, and

Hallam looked longingly at the lake, blue-white in its radiance. He had meant to slip away before and make an attempt to bring in the sledge, but now that he had pleaded weariness to Stevenson he could not go openly.

He knocked softly on the cabin door.

"Ransford!"

He entered, to find Norma stretched upon his bunk. She rose and slipped over the edge, and in the dim light of the single oil-lamp he saw that her cheeks were wet with tears. She did not try to hide them, but stood like a child before him, frankly showing her troubled face.

Surprised, he went quickly to her and, as he might have done with a child, laid an arm comfortingly about her shoulders.

"What is it, Norma?"

She did not answer, and he sat down and drew her beside him. She dropped suddenly to the floor and, laying her arm across his knees, buried her face in it and began to sob.

For an instant a hundred thoughts swept through his mind. Had anything happened?

This was not like Norma, the strong, self-willed, self-reliant Norma he had known; the haughty, imperious Norma of their first meeting; the Norma who in her own strong arms had borne the body of her father to his grave; who had, with the courage of a man, led him into the white desert of the barren grounds with only a compass as a guide, and who like a valkyr had fought at death grips with him in the snow.

He would not have dared to offer sympathy to that woman. But here was another personality—just a young girl, it seemed to him, her heart overflowing with something that was hidden. He felt somehow responsible for it.

As she knelt there, like a picture moving on a screen, the events of the last few days flashed before him. Her dead father, the loss of whom was the

loss of the only friend she had ever known; the loss of her dogs, which he knew was more cruel than she had allowed him to see; the strange awakening of the latent motherhood within her—an awakening that had come prematurely, before even the woman had been born.

What must have been the doubt, the anguish that had come with it, like a flash of light before eyes that cannot see or the jarring of thunder upon ears that cannot hear?

Now she was in this strange place, forced to sit under the ogling glances of a coarse-grained, brutal animal, the first of its kind of the man-tribe that she had ever known.

She was homeless, alone, heartsick for the want of human love.

Hallam's arm about her shoulders stiffened, and he drew her closer to him, his hand stroking her hair. A great tenderness rose in him and his heart swelled with it, spreading through him a warmth that was like nothing he had ever known.

He bent over and spoke.

"Norma! Dear! Sweetheart!"

It may have been the tenderness in his voice, it may have been the throb of his heart, or it may have been the touch of his hand, but it brought from the girl a cry that Ransford Hallam never forgot.

The love-starved barrenness of her whole life was expressed in it; her motherless childhood, her friendless, lonely youth; her years of solitude in the company of an old, stern man—a recluse, a misanthrope, soured by tragedy or by disappointment, who had had no tenderness in him, and who had reared his child a stoic like himself. It came to Hallam that for the first time in her whole life this girl was feeling the emotion of human sympathy, conveyed from him to her by his hand and his voice and heart.

He saw it, he felt it, and gladly he opened the floodgates and let the tide rush through.

Her arm lay about his neck and her

face was pressed close to his breast—so close that he could feel her breath warm upon it. He caught her hand in his and kissed it. He caressed the smooth, dark head and laid his lips upon it and his cheek, talking the while, not as a lover talks, but as a mother might.

There was no emotion of sex. It was an outpouring of simple tenderness, of gentleness, of pure, great sympathetic love such as lies latent in all mankind, seldom aroused to such warmth as Hallam had found within him.

After a time she ceased to sob, but she still clung to him as if loath to lose her new-found treasure. The lamp burned dim, sputtered, flared, and went out, leaving them in the path of moonlight that poured through the window. They might have sat there for hours.

Quietly he talked to her—talked of his own home, of his people, his mother, his childhood; and she listened, asking questions now and then, showing him the wonder that she felt—she who had never known the love of any one.

At last it began to grow cold in the cabin. The fire burned itself out and the chill of the night crept in about them.

"Do you think you could sleep now?" he asked.

She nodded, but he could see that the great loneliness was still upon her.

He spread the quilts smooth for her and held out his hand. She lay down quietly, and he covered her. Then he stooped close.

"Good night, dear," he said, and she felt upon her lips the first kiss they had ever known.

CHAPTER XX.

Six Little Musk-Ox Skins.

RANSFORD HALLAM was not a dreamer. His interest in life was a day-to-day affair. He had never

been forced to look ahead beyond the current diurnal activities of his kind.

He had no ambition other than to please himself; consequently life held no serious purpose for him. There had never been any real problems to solve; no real parting of the ways had as yet been reached by the path his career had followed.

But on this night, as he lay in his rough bunk above that of Norma Leonard, something came out of the darkness and smote him between the eyes, and forced him for the first time in his life to take stock of the future.

What was to become of Norma Leonard? He had found her. He had taken her from the only home she had ever known, and he was as firmly bound in responsibility for her welfare as if he had been her father.

That his companionship had already compromised her in the eyes of the world, had the world known, he did not for an instant consider. It seemed as natural to be sleeping in the same room with her as to be eating at the same table.

But he was about to place her in a far more dangerous position.

When the spring opened and the waterways were released they would leave the northland. What, then, was to become of this girl of the snows and the barren grounds? No native brought from the heart of a savage jungle could be more ignorant of the world and its ways.

Unable to read or write, uninitiated into the simplest phases of modern life, unschooled in the very elements of knowledge of which a child of five would be possessed, this girl stood on the threshold of civilization as utter a stranger as if she had dropped from a solitary existence in the moon. She had no means of support; not even garments in which she could appear before men.

And he, Ransford Hallam, clubman, *dilletante*, society trifler, was responsible.

For a long time Hallam stared into

the dark and thought. He recalled the bargain he had made with her; that if she aided him in his hunt he was to aid her in her search for the gold reef that her father had spent his life in seeking.

She had carried out her part of the agreement. He must be as faithful.

But the gold appealed to him neither from a standpoint of adventure nor that of gain. Even if they should succeed, inaccessibility would render it valueless, unless its riches should be so apparent as to make development feasible. But this possibility was so remote that he scarcely gave it a thought.

It was plain to him that she was to be his protégée—an obligation in the name of humanity.

His friends would learn of her—his women friends—Sophia Burton would know of her.

When then? Could he expect that the worldly wise Miss Burton would believe the truth as he should tell it? Could he expect any one to believe it?

The more he pondered the more often he came back to the single solution he was able to devise. A convent, the nearest convent to rail-head; Norma there to learn what the nuns could teach.

But as often as he arrived at this settlement of his problem he rejected it. He could not imagine Norma Leonard, the girl of the great north, who had grown to womanhood among the four wild winds, who had roamed the barrens and the forest, the lakes and the rivers, as free as the caribou—his mind could not picture her living in the restraint and the sanctity of the church.

She would be like a caged bird, or, more likely, a caged panther. He had seen them in menageries, and he knew that they were unhappy.

He thought of all the women he knew, and vainly sought for one who might believe and who would help him, even to the extent of taking the girl under her own tutorship.

He could not find one.

Naturally his thoughts harked back finally to Sophia Burton, not because there was in his heart that real feeling of devotion that a lover should have, but because she had become a habit with him. From her it was an easy step back to the challenge that had brought him into this perplexing situation.

He remembered the six skins that he had taken, still warm, from the six little shapes that lay so redly upon the snow. He had got them! He had proven himself.

He hesitated. What had he proven—that he was a man, or merely a butcher?

Still, they were his, and he would carry them to the girl who had sent him for them.

And this brought him again to the present. The skins were on the sledge, in hourly danger of discovery by the first Indian who might pass up the lake. He must bring them in and hide them, until they were ready to leave.

Even as he turned the matter over in his mind, he decided that no time could be better than the present. With the post asleep he could slip out unseen and fetch the pelts before daylight.

To decide was to act, and Hallam cautiously sat up and listened. Norma was asleep, breathing regularly and quietly. He slipped to the floor and found his moccasins and coat. As he reached the door his feet struck a stool, and it fell over with a thump.

Norma was instantly awake. She leaned from her bed and saw him standing in the path of moonlight.

"Ransford, what is it?"

"I was worried about the skins, Norma, and I've made up my mind to fetch them."

The girl rose from her bunk and slipped into her moccasins.

"It is a good plan," she said. "I will go with you."

He tried to dissuade her, but she was firm. He could not find the sledge in the darkness, she argued, for the moon was about to set.

She was so insistent that Hallam, surmising that she disliked being left alone, finally consented, and after listening at the door for some moments they slipped out into the night together.

The moon, nearly full and swinging low in the west, showered the world with silver light. The air was soft, with a south wind stirring; and though the snow was frozen hard, there was not frost enough to make their footsteps creak.

Silently the man and the girl crept down the bank to the lake and headed north for the long, black point. After half an hour of brisk walking they reached it and made out what they sought, a black dot less than half a mile distant.

The skins were as they had left them, frozen iron-hard. Hallam flung them to his shoulder.

"We will leave the sledge," he said, "and come for it openly in the daytime, as if we had nothing to hide."

By the time they started back the moon had dipped below the ridge and was gone. As they approached the post Hallam stopped, listening for any sound of man or beast. But there was none, and they climbed the slope cautiously and in silence.

When they reached their cabin they had seen or heard no one. The skins were safe.

Hallam hid them under the boughs of his bunk, and presently both man and girl slept again.

When they awoke it was daylight and a gentle rain was pattering on the roof. They sought breakfast in the factor's camp and found Stevenson, heavy-eyed and stupid, already at table. There was caribou meat again and coffee of sorts.

Hallam, hungry after his night exercise, ate heartily, and he was glad to see Norma's appetite returning. When the meal was over Norma helped the Indian woman with the dishes, while the men smoked.

"The winter is breaking, Meester Hallam," said Stevenson, nodding at the rain outside. "It is a south wind, and the travelin' is ower, I'm thinkin'."

"That reminds me," said Hallam, "our sledge is on the lake, with our rifles and other duffel. I'll have to fetch it."

"Your sledge?" inquired Stevenson.

"After the dogs gave out I hauled it to within about two miles. It lies around the long point."

"Weel, aweel! Ye'll no hae to fetch it for yoursel', Meester Hallam. There's Injuns here that do naething but eat my victuals."

"Very well," said Hallam, "I will be obliged to you."

"Myra," called Stevenson, "tell the two lazy varmints that call theirsels' your brithers to gang oot to the lang point an' fetch a sledge they'll find there."

The men departed; and while Hallam waited he pretended to read a torn, paper-covered novel that he discovered lying in the dust over a cupboard. But he watched the factor, who sat by the stove, smoking and glancing covertly from time to time at Norma as she came and went, busying herself at tidying the room.

Hallam did not like the look in the pale-blue eyes. He had seen it before in the restaurants of Broadway, in the boulevards of Paris, in Piccadilly Circus, and he knew it for the look of the wolf.

He saw that the Indian woman had noticed it, too, and he resolved that Norma should never be left alone.

From time to time Stevenson rose heavily and entered a back room, returning after a few moments to resume his pipe. He became more talkative, and asked Hallam many questions about the big Canadian cities that he had not seen for three years.

This loosening of the factor's tongue Hallam began to connect with the visits to the back room. After one of his

excursions he passed close to him. As he had suspected, he caught the odor of alcohol.

The man was a drinker—a solitary drinker.

The two Indians came toiling up from the lake dragging the sledge, and Hallam and the factor went out to meet them. The soaked sleeping bags were hung in a shed to dry, while Norma took charge of the other belongings except the two rusting rifles, which Hallam brought in and cleaned in the main camp.

While he was at work the squaw came to the door and beckoned to Stevenson. He went out, and Hallam could hear him at the rear door in guttural conversation with one of the Indians in the man's native tongue.

Returning, the factor announced that the men had seen a herd of caribou crossing the lake, and that if Hallam and Norma wanted diversion the fresh meat would be acceptable.

Hallam, who could scarcely refuse to hunt for the post, where he was a self-invited guest, promptly accepted the hint and went to find Norma. The girl, glad of anything that would take her away from the post, was ready in a moment. The drizzle had ceased, and the sun was beginning to shine through the breaking clouds.

"The men will bring in your game wi' the dogs," called Stevenson as they left.

They caught the last of a large herd of deer going over the long ridge on the west shore, and each brought down two.

As they turned toward the post again Hallam said:

"Norma, what do you think of our host, Stevenson?"

"I do not like him," the girl answered quickly. "I do not like this place at all."

"Well," he replied, "I don't blame you. I don't like Stevenson, and I don't trust him. Watch him, Norma. Never be alone with him. I will try

never to leave you, but you must be on your guard."

"Why?" asked the girl, her straight brows drawing together.

"He drinks," Hallam told her; and then, suspecting that she would not know what he meant, added: "He drinks stuff called alcohol; and when he gets too much it may make him quarrelsome and—well, perhaps dangerous."

"Are you afraid?" she asked, looking at him quickly. There was a sudden, shocked comprehension in her eyes that puzzled him.

"Not for myself. I have had experience with such men. I know about what they will do, but you do not. You must be watchful. If he should ever touch you, call for me. If I should not be near—"

"Well?" asked the girl coolly.

As Hallam spoke he unclung the heavy automatic he wore beneath his coat and buckled it about Norma's waist, out of sight.

They walked on for a time in silence. Hallam could see that the girl was thinking hard.

Finally she spoke.

"Ransford, has this anything to do with my being a woman?"

"It has everything to do with your being a woman."

"Do women in the cities go about armed?"

"No; there are laws that protect them and officers of the law."

"Otherwise they would not be safe?"

"Perhaps not."

"I think it must be very hard, this being a woman," she said thoughtfully.

When they reached the post they went directly to their own cabin. As they entered Norma stooped and picked from the floor a sprig of spruce.

The girl looked at Hallam.

"I swept the floor just before we left," she said.

In an instant Hallam had stepped to his bunk and pulled aside the boughs

of the balsam mattress. The bundle of baby musk-ox skins was gone.

CHAPTER XXI.

The Solitary.

"IT was a trick," exclaimed Norma, speaking first.

"A trick?"

"The caribou hunt. Stevenson suspected. He sent us away and then searched."

"How could he have suspected?" Hallam queried half to himself. "No one saw us go."

"The Indians must have seen our tracks," said Norma.

"But we left no tracks. The snow was frozen. Neither of us broke through once."

"Perhaps not," she returned, wiser in northland lore, "but our weight packed the snow a little. When the rain came the tracks would show."

Hallam paced up and down the little cabin. There had been a time when he would have abandoned the skins with hardly a thought, merely for the sake of the better speed of a lighter load, but that necessity had passed, and to have them taken from him in this sneaking fashion angered him.

At once their value to him rose manifold. They were the fruit of his labor, of the hardship he had undergone; they were his proof that he had accomplished something — not much, perhaps, but still the thing he had set himself to do.

Suddenly it occurred to him that his task was not yet done. It was one thing to shoot musk-ox, and evidently quite another to bring home the trophies of the hunt.

He was still under the test. He must still make good.

"Confiscated!" broke from him. "but I won't have it. I want those skins. I've got to have them. I *will* have them!"

The girl had been watching his face, her own shadowed with perplexity.

"Why do you want them so much, Ransford?" she asked finally.

Hallam halted in his stride. The question displeased him. Instinctively he did not wish to tell Norma of Sophia Burton.

"I don't think you would quite understand, Norma," he said more quietly. "A certain person with whom I had had an argument accused me of always failing under difficulties. It annoyed me, for I knew that it was true, so I told the person that I would go into the north and bring back these skins. I must do what I promised, you see. I cannot fail now."

"Ransford, was the person a woman?"

Hallam started. He had not expected so keen a question. How had she guessed?

"What makes you think that, Norma?"

"I cannot imagine a man wanting such things, so it must be a woman."

"Well, it *is* a woman."

"And," questioned the girl, her eyes still straight in his, "did she know how you would have to get them?"

"Yes."

For a time she stood looking at him, saying nothing, then her gaze dropped and she turned away.

Hallam stood staring at the disordered bunk. Suddenly he wheeled and was gone, leaving the door open behind him. He walked straight to the factor's door and went in. The squaw, Myra, was sweeping up the space about the stove.

"Where's Stevenson?"

The question was bitten off short and Hallam's jaw clenched tight.

The woman looked up, her eyes moving slowly to his face.

"Steven' seeck," she said finally.

"The devil he is! He was well enough two hours ago. Where is he?"

"He seeck," repeated the squaw stolidly.

"Well, I want to see him."

"No see him. Seeck. Lay down."

Exasperated, Hallam's eye fell on the door at the rear, through which he had so often seen the factor disappear. He started for it. Before he had moved two steps the squaw blocked his passage.

"Get out of the way," he growled roughly. "Stevenson's in there. I'm going to see him."

The woman placed her back against the door.

"No see Steven'. Seeek," she doggedly repeated.

Hallam was about to force her aside when he heard the lock click and saw Myra swiftly withdraw the key and drop it into her capacious bosom.

He felt that it was no use. He might break the door with an ax, but that would bring the Indians, and no one could tell what might happen. Besides, he had Norma to think of.

His hands were tied. He shuddered to think of her fate should anything disable him.

The squaw stood resolutely before the door of her master, watching Hallam with narrow, beady eyes.

"How long will he be sick?" Hallam asked, instantly thinking how foolish his question sounded.

"Three day, maybe four," was the prompt reply.

A light dawned. Stevenson was drunk. It had been coming on for a day or two. He was a periodical, and the woman knew how long it was likely to last. Inadvertently she had given him the truth.

He turned away. As he opened the outer door he found himself face to face with Norma. She was standing close, as if listening, and he saw her hand slip from beneath her coat where he had buckled the automatic.

Hallam stood a moment looking down at her and watching the color rise red in her cheeks.

"Thank you, Norma," he said quietly. "What made you think of that?"

"I don't know. You looked so—so—"

Hallam laughed. "Anyhow, I'm much obliged," he said. "It's good to feel that one has a pal."

"Where is Stevenson?" she inquired as they walked back.

"The squaw says he's sick. I believe he's drunk. I've been watching it coming on. He may be playing 'possum to avoid meeting me, but I've heard that many of these outpost factors are solitary drunkards—and with their stringent rules against liquor, too!"

For four days they saw nothing of Stevenson. Inquiries were in vain. Hallam could elicit nothing from Myra but the monotonous assurance, "He seeek."

After the rain the weather had turned warm and the snow was going fast. On the south slope of the ridge across the lake brown patches appeared, and one morning a flock of crows flew over, screaming loudly. At night it froze lightly, but the warm sun of the morning quickly dissipated the frost and resumed anew its advancement of spring.

Time hung heavily on Hallam's hands until he found a box of paper-covered novels on a shelf. They were an ill-favored collection, but he devoured them one after another.

One, "Ivanhoe," he saved for the last, and as he threw himself into his bunk to begin it he noticed Norma eyeing the book wistfully.

He had entirely forgotten that she could not read.

"Norma, I'll read this to you if you'd like."

When he saw the delight that shone in her face he reproached himself for not thinking of it before. He wondered how much she would fail to understand, and told her that she must interrupt whenever she was puzzled.

But she did not interrupt, and until his unpractised voice grew husky she sat listening, wonder in her eyes at this new world that had been suddenly opened to her.

"It's wonderful," she sighed, as he

laid the book down. "Could I ever learn, just a little?"

"Of course you could," he told her, wondering why he had never thought of this, too. "I'll teach you. We'll begin now, if you like."

Though "Ivanhoe" is hardly a primer, Hallam made it serve fairly well, and after she had learned the alphabet he made her piece together simple words and then point them out in the text.

It became to her the most fascinating of occupations, and for hours together she would sit, brows knitted, working away with the stub of a pencil he had found for her, absorbed, eager, and determined.

On the fifth day Hallam, passing the door of the house on his way to the lake for a pail of fresh water, caught a glimpse of the factor inside. He stopped and went in. The man was sitting as usual by the stove, drinking tea from a bowl.

"Glad to see you about again," was Hallam's greeting. "Sorry you were laid up. Nothing serious, I hope?"

The factor merely grunted. Hallam saw that his heavy face was pastily pale and that his hand shook painfully, slopping the hot tea on the floor. His eyes were bloodshot and bulging, and his lower lip hung slack. There could be no doubt of the cause.

Hallam stood for a moment looking down at him.

"Well," Stevenson snarled without looking up, "what do ye stand there for?"

"Stevenson," said Hallam quietly, "I want those skins."

The factor started and the bowl dropped from his hand. He cursed and stood up shakily. Then he sat down again, the sweat standing out in drops on his forehead.

"Ye no can hae 'em," he snapped, his voice cracking and quavering.

"They're mine," said Hallam, still calmly. "I've traveled over a thousand miles for them, and they're mine."

"They're confeescate under-r the law," snarled Stevenson, "an' ye'll no hae them."

"You are not the law.

"I *am* the law, and ye're a law-breaker. I put ye under-r arrest, ye poacher."

Hallam smiled, for the threat seemed empty.

"Ye are under-r arrest," went on Stevenson, "an' the mounted 'll es-corr't ye out of here when the ice breaks."

Hallam saw that it was of no use to argue with a whisky-sick man on the ragged edge of delirium tremens.

"We'll talk again when you are—better," he said, and left the house.

The next day Hallam saw the six little pelts stretched on frames in the sun, with one of the Indians close by watching them—and him.

The next day they were there, and the next. Then they appeared no more.

Hallam and Norma were allowed the run of the post, but if they left its confines one or the other of the Indians silently followed them, his rifle in the hollow of his arm. Hallam's own rifle, and Norma's, hung on a pair of caribou horns in the factor's house, but they did not attempt to remove them.

Once over his debauch the factor drank nothing. His moroseness disappeared and he became roughly sociable. Hallam, however, avoided him, spending his time in his own camp with Norma, who was deep now in the mysteries of her mother-tongue and making rapid progress.

At the end of a week the ground was bare, save for a hard-packed drift here and there under the shade of a ledge or on the northerly slopes. The ice of the lake, shot through by sun and wind, was blackening in patches, and water was visible about the shores.

Several birch canoes, which had been stored during the winter, were brought out, pitched and overhauled in readiness for the impending break up.

Birds were appearing, and already the grass close under the house walls was beginning to turn green.

Spring was at last at hand.

Norma's wounded shoulder healed rapidly, with no sign of infection, and Hallam's scratched arm gave him no trouble.

As the black patches grew on the lake and the weakening ice gave signs of an early break-up, Hallam's thoughts began to dwell constantly on the means for getting away. That Stevenson actually intended to hold him until a member of the northwest mounted police could come to take him out under arrest as a poacher, he could hardly believe; yet it was possible and worthy of being discounted in his calculations.

With the whole country overflowing with water from the melted snows, the only mode of travel was by canoe. Hallam considered that he and Norma might steal away in one of the half dozen craft now on the lake short, but that would mean pursuit and a hard chase, and also would entail the abandonment of his musk-ox skins.

These, Hallam was determined to have. He surmised that they were stored with the company's stock of fur in the loft over the post "store," which adjoined the factor's house.

But the Indians used the lower floor as their sleeping quarters, and there was little or no chance of gaining an entrance at night. In the daytime any approach to the building was sure to be observed.

For several days freezing weather delayed the break-up, but then came a southerly wind with hot sun, and one day, as Hallam and Norma were hard at their daily lesson they heard a shout that brought them to the door.

Where before had been a stretch of treacherous, mottled surface there was now blue water. The ice, as if by the magic touch of some unseen hand, had disappeared. In the coves sheets of it still lay, but the main reaches of the lake were clear.

The Indians were already launching a canoe. Hallam turned to Norma.

The girl's eyes were upon the water. She said nothing, but in her face he could read her longing to leave this place, where always she was under the eyes of a repulsive brute whom she feared, vaguely without understanding why.

"You want to go, Norma?"

"Yes, Ransford."

He saw that they must. To stay longer was impossible. Skins or no skins, he could not allow this girl to gain her first introduction to his world through the bars of a jail window, or from the crime-laden atmosphere of a magistrate's court.

As he looked at her, wistfully gazing at the open lake, he made an oath under his breath that whatever the sacrifice, she and her welfare should be his first care and responsibility.

CHAPTER XXII.

The Factor Makes an Offer.

HALLAM stood alone in front of the factor's house, watching Stevenson's plodding bulk as he came up the path. At the door the man halted and Hallam faced him squarely.

"Stevenson," he began, "the lake is open. I want to be on my way. But I want my skins. They are my property. They will not be sold. No one shall suspect you. Name your price."

Hallam saw the Scotchman hesitate.

"I will give you," he said slowly, fixing the factor with steady eyes, "one thousand dollars for those skins."

Stevenson visibly wavered. A thousand dollars was more money than he had ever possessed at one time in his entire life.

"One thousand dollars," repeated Hallam.

The factor dropped his gaze to the toe of his shoe-pack and reflected. After a moment he raised his head, leering cunningly at his tempter.

"Aweel," he said, "that's a muckle of siller. But a mon's conscience, maybe, is o' mair consequence. Hae ye the mony wi' ye, Meester Hallam?"

Hallam smiled at the thought of conscience in this man.

"Of course not," he replied; "but it's easy enough. The name of my house is known wherever there are banks. You will only have to send some one you trust to railhead with me. If I fail to make good there are the skins as evidence, and a warrant should be an easy matter."

Stevenson's face soured.

"What do ye tak me for, young mon? An eediot? So e'en ye did mak' your worrd gude and pay the siller, would I be sic a fule as to trust a mongrel Dog Rib wi' it? Na, na, ye maun think o' some simpler way?"

"Well, there's one simpler way."

"I'm listenin' to ye."

"Go out yourself."

"Na," replied Stevenson, shortly. "I canna. It is no my year."

Hallam's thoughts ran swiftly. His resources were narrowing.

"Stevenson," he said, "listen to reason. Suppose you send me out under guard as a poacher. What proof have you got that I took those skins?"

"The skins," answered the factor shortly.

"And your word and that of these Indians, whom you admit are not trustworthy, against mine. After all what have you to gain? What have you laid against me?"

"Naething, Meester Hallam, but a sense o' duty well pairformed," said the factor smugly. "There's ane factor deescharged by the company for this verra thing. I'll no be wishin' to follow him. I hae nae wish to hear Angus McAvey laughin'."

"Angus McAvey'll not be laughing, Stevenson."

"No?"

"Angus McAvey's dead."

"Mon, ye dinna mean it! When?"

"I saw him buried from his hotel

at railhead the day before I came north. He was shot behind his own bar by a half-breed. It was old man Leonard's half-breed, Sandy. McAvey killed him, too. They drew together."

"Norman Leonard's Sandy!" marveled Stevenson. "At railhead! What was Sandy doin' at railhead?"

"Killing McAvey, apparently," replied Hallam. "At least that was the first and only thing he did during his brief sojourn."

Stevenson seemed about to say something, but checked himself, and looked away.

"Aweel," he said at length. "Angus McAvey was a verra violent mon. His end was like him."

The factor's voice trailed off, and again he seemed to reflect. Finally he glanced over his shoulder as if to make sure no one was within ear-shot, and turning laid a hand on Hallam's shoulder.

"Meester Hallam," he said, "I hae no wish to be harrd on ye, though a mon maun be faithfu' to his trust. I'll no detain ye. Ye are free to gang as ye like, an tak' the bit pelties wi' ye, but," he added, shoving his heavy face close to Hallam's and speaking in a low growl, "ye agree to gang alane."

For an instant Hallam failed to grasp his meaning. Then his face flamed, and he stepped back.

"Do you mean that you would keep Miss Leonard here?"

"Aweel," Stevenson muttered, "ye hae naething else to offer."

Hallam's fist with his body-weight behind it struck the factor full on the jaw, and the man went down like a polled ox. Dazed, shaking his head from side to side, he slowly got to his knees and then stood swaying on his feet, spitting forth a stream of foulness and profanity.

Hallam, his first fierce rage cooled to the temper of steel, stood watching. Suddenly, with surprising quickness, the factor's big arm shot out.

Hallam side-stepped with the agility of youth, and his knuckles smashed

into Stevenson's face. The man staggered, blinded by the blow, then dropped his hands. His right slid behind him, and there was the flash of a knife.

Hallam struck again, a clean, right-hand blow to the chin, and for a second time Stevenson went down. The knife flew from his hand, and he lay there, a huge bulk of unconsciousness in the tender, sprouting grass.

As Hallam stooped to pick up the knife he heard a step. He seized it quickly and turned, prepared for anything. But it was Norma. Her eyes were wide with anxiety, and in her right hand gleamed the automatic.

Hallam heard a movement within the house.

"Put that up, Norma," he said quickly and turned to face the Indian woman who came running.

"Your lord and master has been arguing with me," he said to her, "he may need you presently."

The woman bent over the fallen man, casting at Hallam a look of hate, and at the same time one of admiration. She could not altogether refuse to acknowledge one whose fist was weightier than that of Factor Stevenson.

Hallam touched Norma on the sleeve, and they started toward their cabin. Suddenly Hallam halted, turned, and disappeared through the door of Stevenson's house. In an instant he was back with the two rifles that had hung on the wall and the cartridge belts that dangled from them.

"Take these and hide them, Norma," he whispered.

The girl was gone in a flash, and Hallam walked back to where the squaw was endeavoring to rouse Stevenson.

"Get some water," he ordered.

She brought it in a pail, and Hallam liberally soused the prostrate man's head.

He opened his eyes, blinked, snorted and sat up. One eye was rapidly closing, and his lips were cut.

He saw Hallam.

"Damn you," he swore, "I'll have the blood o' ye, you an' yours!"

He caught sight of Myra, and his utterance was choked as if a hand had grasped his throat. The squaw looked rapidly from one to the other of the two men and began to talk to the factor in her own tongue. He struggled to his feet, shaking off her clutching fingers, and raising his hand struck her cruelly across the mouth.

"Be still, you red limb o' hell," he snarled, and swaying still, lurched past Hallam into the house. Hallam saw him enter the rear room and heard the door slam before he turned away.

As he reached the cabin he saw Norma watching from the door.

A wild thought seized him. The Indians were on the lake. He had the rifles. Why not make a dash, recover the skins and make a getaway?

But instinctively following the girl's gaze he saw that the Indians were already landing and running up the bank. Both had rifles in their hands.

Myra stood calling to them.

The chance, if it had been a chance, was gone.

"Have you hidden the rifles?" he asked.

"Yes, in a dead birch behind the camp."

"Good, but we'll have to find a better place than that. Whatever you do, never be without the gun you wear. It's war, from now on."

"Tell me, what was it? Why did you strike him?"

"It was an insult. You wouldn't understand. It was something that no man could listen to."

The girl searched his face keenly, but she asked no more questions.

Stevenson did not appear again that day, but each time Hallam left his cabin one or both of the Indians stood waiting, armed, and followed wherever he went.

Hallam paid not the slightest attention, but walked about the post as

usual, chopping and carrying wood for the stove, and fetching water. But when he was away from the cabin he noticed that Norma was always standing in the doorway, watching.

In the later afternoon they saw a canoe coming down the lake. There were three Indians in it, two men and a squaw, bringing the furs of their winter's trapping.

As they landed, Hallam saw them in grave conference with the post natives and knew from the pointings and head shakings that without doubt his guard was being doubled.

The chance of making a dash for liberty was being cut in half.

CHAPTER XXIII.

Gone!

DURING the next forenoon two more canoes and six Indians arrived, so that the red men's colony began to assume considerable proportions. They pitched their deerskin teepees on the shore, and lay in the sun, and smoked, apparently in no hurry to do their trading or to leave the sociability of the post.

Hallam, awake now to every possibility of escape, thought of bribery. There surely must be one who would allow his greed to overcome the policy of obedience to the company which insured to him a livelihood.

But here again Hallam encountered what to him was the strangest of limitations, the lack of money, or any other thing of value. Promises, he knew, were so many empty words.

During the day it became apparent that Stevenson was drinking. He avoided Hallam as if he were a thing of evil, but the factor's beef-red face and his thickened utterance, betrayed him.

Hallam spoke of it to Norma.

"I wonder where he keeps his liquor," he said. "If we could only locate it and steal enough to befuddle some of these aborigines we might

make a getaway with a fair start before we were discovered. At any rate I can think of nothing else."

In vain Hallam watched the factor's house in the hope that some time during the day it would be left unguarded long enough to allow him to reconnoiter; but either Stevenson or the squaw, Myra, was constantly about.

"There's no chance," he said. "We're too well watched."

Toward night it became evident that the Indians were getting ready for some sort of festivity. A quantity of fire-wood was being carried to the shore, and a freshly killed caribou was being prepared for roasting. Another canoe bearing three squaws had come down the lake in the afternoon, and the women were engaged in preparations for the feast.

As Hallam and Norma stood near their cabin, watching the fire grow brighter as the shadows fell, one of the post Indians came to them and conveyed the information that they were expected to attend the ceremonies.

Hallam saw in this much more than a polite attention. Stevenson, knowing that they must be guarded, had chosen to have them where they could be well watched during the confusion that would come with the eating and dancing.

But Hallam was not loath to accept the command, both for himself and Norma. The dance would be a novelty and an evening's entertainment, a moment of cheerfulness in the dreariness of their predicament.

The entire post assembled at dusk in the glare of the fire, about which the squaws were roasting the haunches and saddles of deer meat. Stevenson, in an erectness of semialcoholic dignity, sat apart on the bottom of an upturned barrel, waiting for the dancing to begin.

Before long two young Indians stepped into the circle of firelight, bowed to the factor as honorary master of ceremonies, and began a slow, rhythmic stepping about the heap of

blazing logs, to the accompaniment of a dirgelike chant. As they passed the group on the far side of the fire two other Indians fell in behind and the chant continued.

The fifth time around all ten of the Indian men were in the circle.

The squaws, unable to leave the cooking meat, squatted on the ground and helped in the chant, which now began, to quicken and grow louder. The men moved faster, beating each foot twice on the ground at every step, bending and straightening their arms in rhythm, twisting their bodies into ungainly attitudes, grimacing and raising their voices to a howl.

The dance had continued but a short time when the squaws broke in with the announcement that the roasts were done. Without ceremony the dancers ceased to step and howl, and made a rush for the scorching venison, which they tore into chunks with their hands and fell upon like hungry dogs.

Hallam and Norma, being offered a share, accepted it; but as the meat inside was nearly as raw as when it was killed, they could make no more than a pretense of eating.

The liver, as the titbit of the feast, was cooked on a spit by Myra and delivered to Stevenson as the guest of honor.

The dogs, of which the Indians had brought nearly a score, sat just outside the circle, eying the feast hungrily, and fighting like demons whenever a cleanly picked bone was tossed to them.

Hallam marveled at the men's capacity. The huge, half-raw lumps of meat disappeared with amazing quickness. The idea seemed to be that quantity and speed of deglutition were most desirable in their code of table etiquette, and that he who devoured the greatest amount in the shortest possible time was possessed of the most polished company manners.

In the middle of the meal Stevenson disappeared, but within a few minutes returned to his place, though he ate no more.

When the meat was gone and everybody was gorged to distention, a big, dark-faced Indian, who seemed to have some authority among them, began a song, evidently of thanksgiving. He chanted wearisomely for some minutes, and then the others took up a sort of refrain, weirdly savage in its shrill harshness.

Hallam watched the factor, who had just made a second surreptitious excursion. His face was fire-red, his eyes watery, and his breath came in stertorous wheezings. Hallam saw that he was rapidly becoming grossly drunk, and the thought came to him that if he should persist until he reached the stage of stupefaction, there might be in some way an opportunity of reaching his liquor supply.

But the man had a Scotchman's hard head. It might be hours before he drank himself into a sodden sleep.

The dance was about to begin again. Hallam glanced at Norma, standing just behind him in the shadow. Her eyes, too, were fixed on Stevenson.

The squaws now joined the men. Fresh wood sent the flames leaping high, the dogs chorused their howlings and yelpings with those of the dancers, and the real frolic of the night began.

Hallam, interested in the strange spectacle, became absorbed in watching the antics of a young Indian and a young squaw, who seemed to be carrying on something of a flirtation. He turned to call Norma's attention to the pair and found her gone.

Wondering, he became aware that Stevenson, also, was not in his place.

Vaguely disturbed at the coincidence, he determined to follow. He drew back farther into the shadow, intending to slip away, when he saw Myra, who was dancing with the rest, dart a swift look at him as she passed. As she turned and footed it on the other side of the fire he saw her glance at Stevenson's empty barrel.

A look of anger came to her eyes, and in an instant she dropped from her place and disappeared in the darkness.

Remembering the woman's looks and her actions on the day before, when she came to the factor's aid, Hallam suddenly realized that the squaw was consumed with jealousy.

How her instinct had told her of Stevenson's vile plan to detain Norma, Hallam could not imagine; but that she had scented such a plot he had no doubt. Her reign as mistress of the factor's house she believed was at stake, and she would go to any length to frustrate such an attempt upon her position.

Fully aroused to the possible danger in which Norma might stand, he backed deeper into the shadows; and was about to make a break in the direction of the house when Stevenson, swaying drunkenly, came out of the darkness and stumbled to his seat.

Almost at the same instant Myra reappeared across the circle, her eyes seeking Hallam. Instantly he moved back into the lighted area.

"Myra!" called the factor. "Where are ye, wumman?"

The squaw crossed to him.

"Oh, there y' are, limb o' hell. Wheresh the key to my room, wumman? Ish losht? Go fin' it. Lock th' door. Bring key here. Unner-shtan'? Bring it here."

As Stevenson spoke Hallam heard a light step and, looking up, saw Norma. A feeling of great relief came to him. He had been more anxious at her absence than he knew.

"Can't we go?" the girl asked. "It seems as if that howling would ring in my ears forever."

"Not yet," Hallam whispered; "Myra noticed your absence. She has been watching."

The squaw, casting a glance backward at them, departed, and they turned again to watch the monotonous circling of the ring of human figures.

For hours, it seemed, the dance continued. Myra, returning with the missing key, did not again join the others, but squatted at Stevenson's feet, waiting for his first snore, when she promptly rose and dragged him off to bed.

Finally the dancers grew weary. One by one they dropped out from sheer exhaustion, and at last, when the pile of logs was no more than a bed of redly glowing coals, the last young man fell limply in the worn path his feet had trod and the feast was over.

It was well after dawn when Hallam and Norma were awakened by the sound of oaths and blows.

Running to the door Hallam looked out and saw Stevenson beating the squaw brutally with a brass cleaning-rod. Between blows he cursed her.

"You will steal my whuskey for your ane black flesh an' blud, will ye? Take that one, noo, an' that. Damn ye for a lyin' squaw wumman! Not twa gill left in the barrel, an' the spigot standin' wide open. Waste as weel as stealin'! Gude liquor, ye thief, wasted like water an' the cellar reekin' fit to drive a mon mad!"

The beating was renewed until the squaw, tortured beyond all bearing, suddenly caught the factor by the ankle, tripped him and ran as fast as her bulk would allow toward the teepees on the shore.

Norma, who had joined Hallam at the door, stood staring after her.

"What was he beating her for?" asked the girl as the factor, still mouth-ing oaths, lurched back into his house.

"Some one has stolen his whisky," replied Hallam, "and they left the spigot running, so that what wasn't taken ran out. He's pretty close to a madman, now. I expect he needs a pick-me-up pretty badly this morning."

Stevenson was, indeed, in a pitiable condition. A periodic drinker, cut off from his whisky supply at the beginning of a debauch, he was as nearly a lunatic as might be, but he had sense enough to know that if the liquor had been stolen it had been drunk by this time, and he did not attempt to search for it.

Myra's attempts to pacify him were in vain. Each time she tried to approach him he drove her from the house with curses.

Finally a sullen gloom took the place of violence, and, locked in his room, probably recklessly consuming what dregs were left in the barrel, he was seen no more that day.

The Indians, after their strenuous night, lay in the sun, loafing and smoking. Hallam moved freely about among them, seeking to ingratiate himself in the forlorn hope of finding one who could be bribed to part with a canoe in return for his rifle—the only thing he possessed of the least value to an Indian.

But he found no opening. The men had been warned.

For the first time in his life Ransford Hallam was in the particular situation that Sophia Burton had imagined—a tight place, where all his wealth and influence were discounted to the zero mark.

He realized it, and recognized that here was the real test. Was he to allow circumstances to overwhelm him, rule him, cause him to sit down and wait, or was he to rise above them and force an opening—take the fighting chance?

He felt singularly helpless and inadequate, like a man who essays a game the rules of which he does not understand. Had he been alone he would have felt freer to take chances, but now any overt act on his part would most certainly result in his close confinement, leaving Norma at the absolute mercy of Stevenson.

The young Indian and the girl whom he had noticed during the dance were continuing their flirtation. They sat apart from the others, talking and laughing until they noticed that Hallam's attention was fixed on them. Thereupon they ran one of the smaller canoes into the water and set off across the lake.

He had considered them as more nearly possible of approach than any of the others, and now that he had unwittingly aroused their prejudice his

heart sank as if the last hope were gone.

In the course of an hour they returned, and Hallam noticed that they landed at a considerable distance down the shore, leaving the canoe out of sight behind a clump of willows, ready, perhaps, for some clandestine excursion later on.

He marked that the spot could not be seen from the factor's house nor from any of the teepees, and hope rose again. If he and Norma could reach the canoe unobserved, they might launch it and be away down the lake before their absence was discovered.

It was a more or less desperate undertaking, for they would have no provisions, but they would have their rifles, both for defense and for game, and with them they might live if pursuit were not too determined.

He went to tell Norma of his plan, but found her heating water for a bath and was refused admission, so he drifted back among the lodges on the shore to keep himself informed as to the movements of the young Indian and his sweetheart.

It had been nearly dusk when Hallam had sought Norma. It was dark, now, and in leaving the teepees he was nearly knocked down by running into the hind quarter of a caribou, hung on a limb.

Immediately the thought of food for their venture came to him, and he flung the meat over his shoulder.

As he reached the cabin he was surprised that no light greeted him. Norma had probably covered the window, he thought, and going to the door, he knocked, calling softly.

There was no answer. He called again in fear and pushed the door partly open.

Still no answer. The cabin was dark. He entered quickly and made a light.

The room was empty—Norma was gone!

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.

"DAD"

By

Albert Payson Terhune



Author of "A Complete Tweed Suit," "Articles of War," "The Sword of Ali Diab," etc.

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS

NEAR the end of the Mexican War, when Zachary Taylor was superseded by "Fuss and Feathers" Scott, Lieutenant-Colonel James Brinton, of Taylor's army, was overcome with *pulque* and insulted General Scott. The latter cashiered him. Brinton went home to Ideala, Ohio, where he tried to dull his disgrace with drink. Fourteen years later it is the opening of the Civil War. Brinton, known as "Dad" by the whole town, sees his son enlist for commercial reasons, and urged by his grandson Jimmie, enlists himself as "James Dadd."

Dad is ordered to take important despatches to General Hooker. Four guerrillas chase him through a wholly Confederate district and he is sheltered by a little woman, the widow of Captain Ehud Sessions, who fought in the Mexican War. He falls in love with her, routs the guerrillas with Captain Sessions's sword, and is given it by the little woman. Although it develops that he was intended to be captured so that the despatches would fall into the hands of the enemy, he is made a lieutenant by General Hooker, and thereafter a captain, for bravery. While the Army of the Potomac is retreating from Richmond, the enemy makes a flank attack. Just as the men are wavering a small figure on horseback dashes up with a drum, screaming, "Charge!" It is Jimmie.

"Battle" Jimmie, as he has come to be called, leads the Union troops to victory with his drum, Dad beside him. After the battle he tells of having run away to enlist, and being too young, simply playing drummer wherever there was need. During the retreat that follows, Dad rescues his son Joe, who is wounded, and Jimmie brings up Mrs. Sessions, who has become a nurse. She shows that she loves Dad. While the Army of the Potomac is following Lee's army into Maryland, Jimmie's horse runs away. Dad follows. They find an important general order of the Confederate army giving Lee's plans. "Hands up, Yanks," says a voice.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

Check and Countercheck.

DAD wheeled. At the hillock's foot, just in front of him, a bare ten feet away, stood a man in the frayed and stained gray uniform of a captain of Confederate cavalry.

A path, running down the hill, wound through thick undergrowth beyond. And along this thicket-grown path, from somewhere in the rear of

the Confederate army, the captain had evidently ridden.

At sight of the two Northerners he must have dismounted; for his horse stood directly behind him among the high screen of bushes.

So silently had he approached, and so engrossed had Dad been in the mighty fate that hung on his own strangely acquired tidings, that no warning of the enemy's approach had come to put him on his guard.

This story began in the All-Story Cavalier Weekly for July 4.

And now the boy on the hillock crest and his grandfather near the hillock foot found themselves looking into the steadily leveled mouth of an army revolver.

The Confederate eyed them with a slight smile of almost deprecatory politeness.

"Hands up, I *said*," he repeated.

"Hands up, Jimmie!" called Dad cheerfully, over his shoulder. "He's got the drop on us. And a loaded pistol is apt to be a nasty thing to argue with. It's got a snappish way of insisting on having the last word."

He set his grandson the example by raising his own hands well above his head. Striding forward toward his captor, he smiled back into the Confederate's smiling face and said:

"What next, sir? We seem to be at your orders. Or, rather, at your pistol's. What do you want of us?"

"Why," said the captain politely, his soft, slurring accent unruffled by the faintest trace of excitement, "I'm mighty sorry to discommode you, suh. But I'm afraid I'll have to get you-all to walk ahead of me a half mile or so along that path to where my company is resting for dinner.

"After that I'm afraid it'll be Libby for you, suh, and Bell Isle prison for your little orderly up yonder. Off'cers to the right; privates to the left. May I trouble you to stand still in that uncomfortable attitude just a minute longer, suh?"

Shifting his pistol muzzle ever so little, and embracing both Dad and Jimmie in the same glance of his sleepy eyes, the Confederate raised his voice.

"You orderly up there!" he called. "Walk back to that sorrel horse! Straight back! He's in line with you! Keep your hands up! Go back there and unfasten the bearing-rein from the bit. Then, with your hands still up, come down this slope in the same line and tie this gentleman's wrists together with the rein.

"You see, suh," he explained courteously to Dad, "the way is pretty

crooked. And there's bushes both sides of the road. I can't quite make certain of you both, walking ahead of me, unless at least one of you is tied. Hurry up there, orderly! Get me that rein."

"I'll see you and Jeff Davis and Bob Lee and all the rest of the South in Kingdom Come, first!" shrilled Jimmie. "I put up my hands because Dad told me to. Not because I'm afraid of that pop-gun of yours. But if you think I'm going to tie him up for you—say, Reb, I could pretty near lick you myself. And I'll try it, if you're man enough to gimme half a show by pocketin' that gun."

"They breed 'em game in your part of the world, sonny," smiled the captain. "And now that you've said your little piece, just shut up on the heroics and do as I tell you. A bullet hole in your little stomach would be a mighty unbecoming sight. Step lively!"

"I won't!" roared Jimmie. "You soft-voiced bully! I'm getting to hate every bone in your body. Dad! Dad! Say, can I put my hands down, and I'll take a chance with his gun. I licked Roddy Slade, and Roddy's pretty near as big as that Reb is—I can do *him*, I bet you!"

"Jimmie!" called Dad, his voice steady with a gentle authority. "Do as he says."

"Dad!"

"Exactly as he says," ordered Dad.

"Oh, Dad! Let me—"

"Jimmie! Obey orders."

There was now no doubt as to the authority in Dad's voice. Jimmie groaned aloud and started at snail-pace toward the sorrel.

"I'd a lot rather charge a gun battery," he lamented. "Say, Reb, I'm doing this because my grandfather tells me to. And he's my s'perior officer. Not because you told me to, or because I'm scared of your gun. And say, you! Don't you go getting the notion Dad's a-scared of you, either. He isn't scared of anything. I don't

know why he's surrendering, but if he's doing it, it's all right, somehow."

Still grumbling, mouthing horribly murderous threats, the boy began to unfasten the bearing rein from bit and saddle bow.

"You'll pardon my grandson's heat, sir," apologized Dad to his captor. "He's only a youngster, and he hasn't learned philosophy yet. You see, we—

"Pardon me, captain," broke off Dad, with a sudden wide grin as his eyes changed to drop from the Confederate's face to the leveled revolver whose muzzle was now less than a yard from his own chest, "but when you try to hold men up with a pistol, mightn't it be just a trifle wiser to see that your pistol is cocked?"

The Confederate involuntarily glanced down at his weapon—which, by the way, chanced to be fully cocked—and at the same instant Dad struck.

He struck palm-wide with the speed of a cat. His open hand smote the Confederate across the knuckles; all the force of trained sinews and scientific skill behind the lightning-swift blow.

The pistol was knocked clean out of the captain's hand and tumbled into the bushes; happily and irretrievably removed from the situation.

Dad's hand in a flash was at his own holster.

But too late he remembered that he had left his pistol in his tent—having had no idea that he should be riding that day beyond his own army's lines. He knew, too, that Jimmie was unarmed; for he himself had very vigorously vetoed the boy's yearning to keep on carrying a huge revolver.

The ruse, to this point had succeeded with ridiculous ease. The Confederate, deceived by his captive's meek submission, had been wholly unsuspecting.

Wherefore Dad had been able, without trouble, to edge up within striking distance and by use of a time-honored trick to distract and then disarm his would-be captor.

But as he reached in vain for his pistol the situation shifted once more. For the captain, his revolver lost, whipped out the light cavalry sabre he carried, and, springing forward, swung the slender blade aloft for a stroke that should avenge his tricking. His colossal and courteous calm had momentarily forsaken him.

There was no time for Dad to snatch his own sword, no chance for thinking. But the blind instinct, wherewith a thousand primeval ancestors have succeeded in enrolling themselves among the "fittest," came to Dad's aid.

As the sabre fell, he leaped back out of reach—yet barely far enough, for the blade grazed his arm in whizzing past; grazed it, glancingly; shearing a gash in coat and shirt sleeve, and the deflected blade raising a welt on the flesh of the upper arm.

Before the weapon could be swung aloft for a second slash, or its wielder's arm shortened for a lunge, Dad was at the Confederate's throat.

Bare-handed, unafraid, he ran in; too close to his foe to allow the use of sabre play. The instinct that had prompted him to dodge and then to attack, had also warned him to come to grips before the sabre could be put to use.

Had Dad sought to strike or to keep for an instant longer at long range, the sword would have rendered him helpless. As it was at close quarters he rendered the sabre a handicap rather than an aid to his enemy.

Dad's right hand found the captain's throat. His left shot aloft and seized the wrist that brandished the sabre. His lithe old body twisted forward and sideways into the "hiplock."

The Confederate, meantime tugging furiously to free his own imprisoned sword-arm, struck with all his might, his left fist clenched, at Dad's face.

Dad ducked and the blow landed full on the tough crown of his head.

Dad saw a choice assortment of stars, but he held his grip, dogged,

tense, unyielding in spite of the dizzy nausea that the head blow had caused him.

The Confederate, on the contrary, cried out in sharp pain, and Dad, with a grim thrill of joy, knew why.

The fist, crashing with all its force on Dad's skull, had met the same fate as has many a pugilist's in landing a blow in the same inauspicious spot. Two of the Confederate's fingers were broken by the jarring impact, and his wrist was badly sprained.

Dad, instinctively seeking to protect his own face, had resorted, without intent, to a favorite street fight maneuver; by opposing his head-crown to a blow instead of his jaw. Hundreds of hands have been broken or put out of commission by that simple ruse.

The Confederate's left hand being helpless, Dad shifted his own right from the man's throat to the sword wrist. A heaving wrench of both hands and the saber flew from the captain's back-twisted arm.

Jimmy (who, during the second or two that had elapsed since Dad and the Confederate had so unexpectedly shifted their rôles of captor and captive, had stared fascinated at the fray) now jumped forward with a whoop and snatched up the fallen saber.

"Where'll I give it to him, Dad?" he yelled exultantly. "Not to hurt him much, but to make him let up on you."

"Keep out of this!" panted Dad.

He could not, now, use his sword with honor, and it would hamper him. Leaping back he unbuckled belt and all, flung them in Jimmy's direction, and closed again.

Disregarding the broken hand, the Confederate threw both arms about the old man in a right unloving embrace, and the two crashed to earth.

Over and over they rolled; the Confederate pounding and struggling like mad; Dad seeking merely to gain the upper hand.

Jimmy danced about them, saber threateningly poised, shouting:

"Surrender, you! Surrender or I'll stick this sword into you!"

He could not have carried out his threat, even had he so chosen. For the two men on the ground were so inextricably snarled together and were writhing and pummeling and shifting their relative positions with such suddenness, that the boy could not possibly attack one of them without an equal chance of injuring the other.

Presently they were on their feet, and Dad secured the hold he had been groping for. By use of a simple old wrestling trick known to athletes of those days as "bustling the bridge," he whirled his foe full a yard in air and brought him down breathless on his back with a thump that half stunned the fallen man. As he fell Dad heard the shoulder bone crack.

Dad wasted no time. Kneeling on the Confederate's forearms, he called to Jimmy:

"Son! That paper? Is it where I dropped it? The one I was reading when—"

"Lemme help you hold him down, Dad!" pleaded the boy, unhearing. "Maybe he'll—"

"Jimmie!" roared Dad, the old voice vibrant with an authority the lad could not disregard. "Listen to me! (No, I don't need any help. Keep away from his feet). That bit of paper you found. The one that scared your horse. The one I was reading. Where is it? Find it! *Quick!*"

He bent to the task of quieting the wriggling Confederate; then went on: "Find it! Is—"

"Here it is," said Jimmy, sighting the fallen paper a few feet away and going to pick it up. "But, say, let me help—"

"Have you got it?" demanded Dad, far too busy with his fallen antagonist to look around.

"Yes, sir. Here it is. Oh, Dad, smash him! Don't let him wriggle free. Why don't you hit him? He ain't really down! Make him say he's had enough. Want any help, sir?"

Shall I pitch in, too? Or can I sick Emp onto him? I—"

"Quick, son!" broke in Dad, his voice shaken by passionate earnestness, as he bent every atom of strength to maintain his position above his foe. "Take that paper, jump on the horse in the path yonder, and *ride* straight to General McClellan! I pointed out his headquarters to you. Get that paper to him. No matter what happens to stop you. *Get* it to him, and tell him how we found it. *Ride*, lad! Hang on by mane, or saddle, or any way you like, but *ride*! It's for our country. It may even save the Union. You can serve America to-day better than fifty generals. Get that paper to him! Into his own hands! *Ride* the horse to death if you have to!"

Each sentence came in a shouted gasp. At the first words the Confederate had redoubled his struggles and, by a mighty heave, had all but reversed their positions. Despite the handicap of a broken hand and wrenched shoulder the Southerner was fighting like a wildcat.

And knowledge of the injuries made Dad gentle in dealing with him. The old man struck no blow; merely held to earth his writhing opponent, and shouted the gasping commands to his grandson.

In all his fifteen years, Battle Jimmie had never heard so excited, so madly pleading a tone in his beloved grandfather's voice.

In no way understanding the cause for the vehemence, he felt none the less the pressing need to obey. If, in that tone, Dad had bidden him eat one of the horses, Jimmie would at once have started to gnaw the nearest hoof.

He ran down the slope, seized the rein and pommel of the captain's horse, a black Virginia thoroughbred, scrambled to the saddle, sticking the sheet of paper inside the neck of his shirt, and dug his heels into the horse's side with every ounce of his energy.

Much has been written—chiefly in verse—of the intelligence and loyalty

of a thoroughbred horse. But that same loyalty and intelligence does not prevent him from allowing himself to be ridden away by a thief from under the very eyes of his master.

Wherein even the best horse appears to show infinitely less sense and affection than does a mongrel dog or even an alley cat.

Under his new and clumsy rider's exhortations, the black thoroughbred bounded up the slope.

"I'm off!" called Battle Jimmie, stopping. "But—say! I wish I could stay and help you. Are you dead sure you can finish licking him without me, Dad?"

"Yes!" gasped Dad. "Go—Everything depends on it! You're carrying the fate of the whole army! *Ride!* And—God go with you, lad!"

"All right, sir! Get back there, Emp! Go back! Wait for Dad! You can't keep up with me!"

Over the hillock crest swept the black horse, the boy clinging to his mane and, by kicks and shouts, urging him to stop speed. Over the hill summit and down the steep slope and on until the thud of hoof beats died on the straining ears of Dad.

Then Dad turned back to the business in hand; first angrily shoving off Emp, who, with shrill barks, had been encircling the fighters, seeking for a good chance to sink his teeth into some part of the Confederate's struggling anatomy.

But there was little more to do. With a final kick and a straining heave of the shoulders, the Southerner's body all at once grew limp.

"Fainted from the pain, poor cuss!" mused Dad, rising. "But maybe it's best to make sure."

He passed the dropped bearing rein about the senseless man's ankles; then fell to examining the hurt hand and shoulder. As Dad worked over him, the Confederate opened his eyes and lay very quiet, staring up at his conqueror.

"Nothing dangerous," cheerily re-

ported Dad. "Broken fingers and—I guess your collar bone needs attention."

CHAPTER XXIX.

The End of the Fight.

DAD subconsciously recalled what the captain said about his company taking their noon rest a half-mile beyond.

A cavalry company at that, from the captain's uniform and saber. Probably one of the many small bodies of horse thrown out to guard the rear of Lee's army and to forage.

At any moment some of the men in search of their leader might come down the winding path that led from their temporary bivouac to the hillock.

Yet Dad hated to leave temporarily helpless a man whom he himself had crippled. He hesitated.

"I—I suppose I am your prisoner, suh?" muttered the captain.

"You surrender?"

"I'm afraid I've no alternative. You have me at your mercy. And this confounded hand and arm are torturing me. They're useless. I surrender."

"Good," sighed Dad, in relief.

He was very tired. He wanted to sit down somewhere and get back his breath and his sorely overtaxed strength.

"There is my sword, on the grass yonder," went on the Southerner. "It is yours by right of war."

"My dear boy," laughed Dad. "I don't want your hardware. Keep it. What earthly use is it to me? It's a saber. And I'm an infantry officer."

"It is customary, suh, as you know," stiffly returned the captain, "for a prisoner to give up his sword to—"

"But, man, dear, you're not my prisoner," interrupted Dad. "I don't want you. What would I do with you? There are more men in the prisons now than we can afford to feed well."

"Do I understand, suh," asked the bewildered captain, "that you release me on parole?"

"Parole?" mused Dad reflectively. "I ought to, I suppose. I ought to demand your sacred word of honor that you'll never again draw sword in the Cause you think is right. That you go back home, eating your heart out, while your brothers are at the front.

"But I've had much those same things happen to me in my time. And it's a hell I wouldn't send my worst enemy through.

"No, Mister Confed, I'm not going to parole you or any other man. As far as I'm concerned, you're free to do what you want to."

"Do you mean that I—"

"By the way," went on Dad, "I had my grandson borrow your horse. I'm sorry. It was a military necessity. You can take that sorrel over there in its place. The horse is foundered, I'm afraid, but your regimental farrier can bring him back to condition in a day or so. And he's got good blood and plenty of speed in him."

"You mean, suh," muttered the captain, dazed, "that after capturing me you'll give me not only my freedom but a horse, as well?"

"I've tried to make it plain," said Dad patiently.

The captain made as though to speak; then turned his head abruptly away. When he faced Dad again, the look of physical pain in the sleepy eyes was all but effaced by one of utter shame.

"It is only fair to tell you, suh," he began jerkily, his glance downcast, like a scolded schoolboy, "it's only fair to tell you that I had every intention, a while back, of taking you and your orderly prisoner and turning you over to our provost marshal to be shipped off to prison."

"Well," responded Dad. "Suppose you had? That is your affair. Every man to his own whim. Perhaps when you get to my age, friend

you'll think twice before sticking a harmless old codger and a little boy into the living death of a war prison. Or perhaps you won't. It is your own affair, as I told you. And now let me finish with those hurts of yours. I must be on my way."

Briskly, if a whit stiffly, he went on with his "first aid" work. The Confederate, as in a trance, sat still, and let his conqueror work over him. He seemed for the time bereft of the power of speech.

Emp, ordered back by his master and scolded by Dad for interfering, had sat gravely on the hillock top, and with cocked head and critical eye had surveyed the combat below. Still brooding over Jimmie's defection and the cruel order not to follow, the dog remained on the hilltop and, the fight being over, fell to studying the world at large in the hope of seeing his master return, penitent at his act of desertion, and make friends with him again.

But Jimmie did not come back. Once Emp thought the boy was drawing near, for his keen pricked ears caught the sound of approaching horse-hoofs.

A second of listening, however, told him that these hoofs were walking; not galloping. Also, that there were several horses approaching in single file and from a direction opposite to that in which Jimmie had vanished.

The hoof-beats drew nearer. Emp's watchdog instincts—one of his multi-breed ancestors having perhaps been guardian of a farmstead—stirred within him. War experience had taught him that where there were horses there were likely to be men.

Indeed, his twitching, moist nostrils had already caught the scent of men—several men—strange men, approaching.

These outsiders assuredly had no right to intrude on Dad and the new friend, who were resting so comfortably. Emp's fur, between the shoulders and then down along the spine-ridge, began to bristle.

Far down in his thirsty throat a

growling "Woof!" was born. Then another.

Then the dog jumped to his feet, the stifled growls bursting forth in a storm of yapping barks.

Dad, at the shrill warning, glanced up at his task of surgery. He glanced up—to see at the path's end, a few yards distant, a half-dozen lean, finely mounted Confederate cavalymen, seated carelessly in their saddles and eying in grave astonishment the unusual spectacle of a Federal infantry major tending the hurts of a Confederate cavalry officer.

"Fortune of war!" remarked Dad, with dreary philosophy.

At his words, the Confederate captain looked up. And he, too, saw the clump of gray-clad troopers, barely ten yards off, staring down at him.

As they met their captain's eyes, the cavalryman's hands went up in salute. But their gaze still rested in wonder on the odd scene that lay before them.

"Friend," said Dad to the captain, "there's a favor I'd like to ask of you."

The Confederate looked up at him in quick surprise.

"It's this," continued Dad. "My sword here was given me by some one—by some one I care for. I wish you'd keep track of what becomes of it and where it's stored. Because some day I'm likely to be exchanged or set free in some other way, and when I am I want to get it back."

"I—I don't understand it, suh," said the captain.

Dad nodded toward the troopers.

"There doesn't seem much mystery about it," he said. "Both of my horses up there are too tired to go much above a walk. Even if I could get to one of them, your men would overhaul me before I'd ridden fifty feet. And your men are between me and the only cover I could hide in if I should try to get away on foot."

"My men?" repeated the captain dully. "Oh, yes! My men. I'd forgotten."

Rousing himself by strong effort from the inertia due to exhaustion and pain, he turned toward the troopers.

"Fauquier!" he drawled.

A corporal saluted.

"Go back to camp and have a stretcher brought here for me. I'm hurt. Take the men with you. 'Tention! Threes about! Wheel! Trot!"

Obedient, if still wondering, the perfectly disciplined Southern cavalymen wheeled and trotted off in double rank of threes along the path and its bush-encroaching sides.

"Suh," continued the captain, turning back to Dad, "you seem to have a singularly queer opinion of a Virginia officer's sense of decency. May I correct it by suggesting you mount one of those two horses up yonder and get well out of the way before my men come back? Good day, sir.

"And—thank you for a lesson in wrestling—and—and in other things."

CHAPTER XXX.

Battle Jimmie, Courier.

BATTLE JIMMIE was riding.

If his general posture on the black thoroughbred's back tended to suggest a monkey strapped to the back of a circus pony, he was none the less riding. And at a breakneck speed.

Wholly ignorant of horsemanship's finer shades, he yet had two great qualifications for a jockey: the lightest of weight and a stark dearth of fear.

He kicked his heels into the black sides of his mount just as often as he could remain in any one spot long enough to direct the kick, and ever and again he would release his grip on the mane long enough to wallop the straining black flanks with the bearing-rein he still held.

The splendid thoroughbred needed none of these incentives to flight. Indignant at his new rider's gawky horsemanship and at his ignorance at

the way a blooded horse should be handled, the black none the less realized that he was called upon to display his fleetest pace.

And he did it.

The futile little heel-thumps and the occasional larrup of the bearing-rein hurt the horse not at all. But they insulted his feelings, and he took out his indignation in the form of frantic speed.

Ears flattened back, head and neck in straight line with the withers; long, sinuous black body stretched out close to earth, the beautiful black cleared the uneven ground like a swallow.

A veteran of wild Virginia fox-hunts, the rough going was as nothing to him. Hill, plowed field, and gully were traversed as easily as level sward.

The rider's weight was a bagatelle, but the rider's behavior was a gross affront.

Jimmie, in his earlier and runaway ride of the day, had not been too excited to note his general direction—a trait taught him by Dad years before in their rambles through the Ohio forests beyond Ideala.

And the habit served him well today, for he was able with no difficulty to follow his former route on the return journey.

The black charger was perfectly amenable to the reins' guidance, and his gait was as easy as a hobby-horse's.

Presently the few spires of Frederick came into view; then the house roofs. Topping another rise, Jimmie found he was a scant fifty feet from the Frederick road.

For safer and smoother travel he guided his horse to it, the black clearing a low wall and ditch without breaking his smooth stride.

Down the Frederick pike the headlong ride continued. At a turn of the road two Union sentinels slung their guns forward and demanded the password. Jimmie had reached the Federal outposts.

The black sped between the two

forward pressing sentries, and Jimmie yelled:

"Courier! Despatches for General McClellan!"

Seeing that the boy was in blue uniform, the sentinels did not make even a futile effort to detain him.

Not until he had whirled past in a cloud of dust did one of them belatedly recall that the horse's saddle had borne in brass the letter "C. S. A." instead of "U. S. A."

And he and his comrade fell to speculating bewilderedly as to why a small boy courier in Union uniform should happen to be riding on a Confederate cavalry saddle.

On galloped Jimmie, giving the dust to the few riders and pedestrians, who now began to appear on the white turnpike.

Into Fredericktown and through its unpaved, rutted main street galloped the lad. The street through which, less than a week earlier, Stonewall Jackson had led his dusty legions.

From an upper window of one of the thoroughfare's wooden houses (according to a tale as apocryphal as it was dramatic) aged Barbara Fritchie had waved the bullet-ridden stars and stripes and by her gallant loyalty had touched the chivalric Southern chief's heart.

The sole basis for the Barbara Fritchie legend, moreover, according to Jackson's own tale and his staff's, was this:

As the Confederate swung down the street two little girls, each waving a tiny American flag, ran out from the sidewalk and shook their flags defiantly—almost in Jackson's very face—whereat, instead of fiercely ordering the flags to be fired on, Jackson had turned to one of his aids and smilingly commented:

"We don't seem to be especially popular here."

Jimmie, who had heard of neither the fact nor the more inspiring legend, dashed on, looking neither to right nor left. His horse, wholly unaided

by the rider, eluded the scant traffic of the street and saved Jimmie from more than one bad collision.

Pedestrians scattered to left and right before the thundering hoofs and yelled angry warnings after the fast-disappearing horseman. Mounted military men drew to one side and laughed aloud at the scarlet-faced little figure hunched over on the withers of the great charger.

Through the street and beyond galloped Jimmie. He drew up at last (with a suddenness that sent the horse back on his haunches and the rider well-nigh over his mount's ears) in front of a house whose walk from porch to road was patrolled by a sentinel.

On the veranda lounged several gaudily attired staff officers. From the porch roof jutted a white flagstaff, gold eagle crowned, supporting a huge silken American flag.

A quarter mile away that morning Dad had pointed out the house to his grandson as temporary headquarters of Major-General George Brinton McClellan, commander of the Army of the Potomac—a leader who partly for the sake of his middle name had held Jimmie's admiring curiosity.

Off the horse scrambled the boy, his body aching all over, and his short, cramped legs all but doubling under him. Through the gate he lurched and up the path.

The sentinel halted him before he had taken three steps.

"Courier! Despatches!" snapped Jimmie, and forestalled further argument or delay by ducking nimbly under the soldier's arm and scampering for the porch.

"Courier! Despatches!" he repeated grandiloquently to the veranda's occupants at large as he climbed the steps. "Where's General McClellan?"

A gorgeous staff officer bustled forward, stepping officiously between the boy and the open front door of the house.

"Despatches?" echoed the officer. "Give them here."

"Not much I won't!" retorted Jimmie. "These are for General McClellan. They aren't for any one else."

"I am General McClellan's acting secretary," his dignity rasped by a laugh from fellow officers lounging near by.

The spectacle of a small boy in a big uniform, caked with dust and horse-foam, defying the pompous acting secretary was one of mild joy to every one.

"I am General McClellan's acting secretary," repeated the officer impatiently. "I will take—"

"I wouldn't care if you was his maiden aunt," declared Jimmie stoutly. "Dad told me to give a paper to General McClellan himself. He didn't say anything 'bout giving it to any one else—even if the some one else happened to be wearing seven different kinds of gold lace. And what Dad tells me to do goes. Where's General McClellan?"

"Who's 'dad,' sonny?" laughed a colonel who was sprawling in the sun on the steps.

"He's my s'perior off'cer," returned Jimmie. "And he told me to—"

"Here!" snorted the secretary. "If you've got any papers, you little ragamuffin, give them to me. If you haven't, be off, or I'll take my riding-switch to you. I—"

"Look!" gasped Jimmie melodramatically, pointing a trembling, stubby forefinger over the secretary's shoulder.

The secretary involuntarily turned. Jimmie on the instant darted past him through the door and into the hallway beyond.

The dimmer light half-blinded the boy, coming as he did from the glare of the street. But he dared not pause. Vaguely, half-way down the long hallway, he saw a sentinel posted in front of one of several closed doors.

Jimmie needed no further direc-

tions. He made for that door. And the sentinel, who had beheld the scene on the porch, made for Jimmie.

The boy halted and attempted to dodge. Out went the sentry's arms to seize him. And, with a sudden lunge forward, crash went Jimmie's bullet-head into the pit of the soldier's stomach.

The sentinel doubled up in pain. But as he did so he managed to seize the boy by the coat-collar.

Wriggling eellike from the too loose garment, Jimmie leaped at the closed door, flung it open, rushed into the room beyond and slammed the door shut again behind him.

Two men were talking earnestly in an embrasure by a window.

One of them Jimmie recognized at once as General Hooker, whom Dad had pointed out to him a few days earlier. The shorter and stockier man he also recognized from a hundred photographs he had seen.

Plunging one hand into his shirt-bosom, and pulling forth the precious wad of paper, Battle Jimmie raised the other in salute.

"General McClellan," he said, "Dad told me to give you this. He says a whole lot depends on it. Read it. It's more interesting, maybe, than it sounds. Read it!"

CHAPTER XXXI.

Jimmie and the Generals.

THE two men had spun about from the window as the small human whirlwind burst into the room. Jimmie's first words had been launched at McClellan with almost incoherent velocity.

The Army of the Potomac's commander frowned in annoyed perplexity at the disheveled little apparition and the almost shouted address. Hooker, on the contrary, stared for an instant, then burst into a great guffaw.

The next moment the door burst open again.

In rushed the military secretary, very purple of face. Behind him was the stomach-smitten sentinel, his visage still greenish and pain-twisted from the blow.

"General!" spluttered the secretary. "I—this—"

"What does this mean?" sternly demanded McClellan, finding his voice. The sentinel, at a gesture from the secretary, collared the boy again and started to carry him bodily from the room.

"Wait, you!" shrilled Jimmie. "You lemme go! There's more to my message. I forgot. Dad told me to tell—"

"Shut up, you crazy little scarecrow!" growled the sentinel under his breath, bestowing a vicious shake which the boy promptly resented by an excruciating kick on his captor's shins.

"Dad told me to tell you how we came to find the paper," finished Jimmie loudly. "We picked it up on a hill out—"

The sentinel had him at the door of the room by this time, the empurpled secretary bringing up the rear.

McClellan, into whose hand Jimmie had thrust the crumpled and far from clean bunch of paper, let the document drop to the floor.

"Wait!" yelled the boy in despair. "A lot depends on it. Dad—"

"The brat is crazy," declared the secretary. "He came to the house here just now and said he was a—"

"Dad told me," squealed Jimmie, clinging to the door-jamb and hanging on for dear life as the sentinel sought to yank him free, "that I must—"

"Shut up!" exhorted the sentry. "And let go there!"

"A thousand apologies, sir," went on the secretary to McClellan, "for my allowing this intrusion upon your conference. It was not my fault, nor"—generously—"was it this sentinel's. I saw the boy assault him. He—"

"General McClellan!" howled Jim-

mie. "Pick up that paper and read it! Dad says it—"

"The boy," babbled on the secretary to all concerned, "was riding a horse with a 'C. S. A.' cavalry saddle. He—"

"Pick it up and read it!" wailed Jimmie again, feeling his hold on the door-jamb slacken under the mighty yanking of the sentinel.

The soldier loosened one tugging hand from Jimmie's shoulder long enough to administer a sound cuff on the lad's ear. Jimmie retaliated this time by flinging his head back sharply and with the crown of it catching the sentry a grievous whack on the chin.

"Lemme go!" he grunted. "Dad says the whole army's fate depends on—"

"Shall I have him turned over to the provost-marshal, sir?" obsequiously queried the secretary, "or—"

"Wait!"

It was "Fighting Joe" Hooker who, choking back his helpless laughter, shouted the order.

The secretary, his question half uttered, shut his mouth and stood at attention. The sentinel paused with uplifted fist poised in the act of seeking vengeance for the jaw-blow that had made him see stars and had loosened two of his best teeth.

Even McClellan turned from the turmoil to stare in surprise at his subordinate general.

"Wait!" repeated Hooker. "By your leave, General McClellan?"

He glanced at his chief for permission to take over the situation. McClellan nodded.

"I think, general," went on Hooker, "with your consent, we can do worse than to wait for a minute or so before consigning this baby wildcat to outer darkness. I don't at all understand what any of this means. But one or two things lead me to think it may be worth a question or two. It isn't an every-day occurrence for a boy in Federal uniform trousers to ride up on a Confederate army horse

and fight his way into the commanding general's presence, just for the sake of handing that commanding general a bunch of soiled waste paper. May I suggest, general, that we let the boy wait here an instant while we glance at the paper?"

He stooped and picked up the crumpled sheet, handling its unclean outer side gingerly as he proceeded to unfold it. Then he glanced at the written words, the others standing at gaze, McClellan vexedly chewing his mustache.

Hooker's thin face wore a mask of crass perplexity as his eyes ran down the sheet.

"General McClellan!" he exclaimed, his voice uncertain.

He handed the paper to his superior, who received it as under protest and cast his eye over its first few lines. Then his face all at once took on an aspect of amaze, ludicrously like that of Hooker.

McClellan strode hastily to the window embrasure, followed by Hooker. Side by side, their backs to the others, the two generals read and reread the paper.

Then they fell into eager, excited conversation, speaking in tense whispers.

Meantime the gorgeous secretary stood looking blankly at their backs. The sentinel, his hand still on Jimmie's shirt-collar, stared at everybody in turn, mouth ajar.

Jimmie alone had no special interest in the proceedings. He had delivered the mysteriously precious paper into General McClellan's own hands, as Dad had bidden him; and General McClellan had read it.

Nothing remained now but to obey Dad's second command to tell McClellan how and where the paper had been found. And as the sentinel had been called off from ejecting him from the room, there was every prospect that he would be able to perform this part of his mission, too.

But all in good time.

At present General McClellan seemed far too busy to listen. Soon, no doubt, he would get through making conjectures and begin to ask questions. That was the way with grown people.

In the mean time Jimmie had a chance to recall that he himself was a very tired, very ill-treated, very sore and dusty and thirsty and battered little boy.

Also, that Dad was far away from him and so was Emp. And he was among strangers who hadn't seemed especially glad to see him and who surely had treated him with more roughness than was absolutely needful.

Jimmie began to feel excessively sorry for himself. In fact, he was suddenly aware of a most unmanly and overweening desire to cry.

He was heartily ashamed of such a babyish impulse. He was a man of fifteen. But a very great many things had happened to him that day, and the day was not yet over.

He choked back the big lump in his throat and tried to square his shoulders and throw back his chest, no easy feat when the great, hulking sentinel's grip was still on his shirt-collar, almost choking him. Jimmie found himself wondering just how soon he could hope to be big enough and strong enough to lick a man of—well, of that sentinel's size!

Presently the wondering, whispered colloquy between the two generals in the window embrasure ended. McClellan and Hooker came back toward the center of the room.

McClellan seated himself at the table there, and with a word dismissed the sentry, who, releasing Jimmie, departed. The secretary, at a gesture from the general, followed the soldier, shutting the door behind him.

"Come here, my boy," said McClellan kindly.

Jimmie advanced. He felt no special awe for this great little man. All he wanted was to complete his mission,

get back to Dad's tent, and rest for a long, long while.

He wondered when Dad would return, and he resolved to learn from him every minutest detail of the duel. That Dad would worst his opponent Jimmie had not the faintest doubt.

For was not Dad—was he not Dad?

"Tell me," General McClellan was saying, "where and how did you get this paper?"

"We found it up on the top of a hill. It was lying there."

"What hill?" interposed Hooker. "Where?"

"Out yonder. Miles the other side of Frederick. Out toward Sharpesburg."

"Sharpesburg?" echoed McClellan. "Right in the track of the Confederate rear-guard. D. H. Hill's division. You must have been well beyond our lines."

"We were," said Jimmie.

"The paper was lying on the ground, you say?"

"Yes. Partly folded up, like it had dropped out of somebody's pocket," said Jimmie, seeking to finish the story and get away. "But the wind had opened it a little and it blew into the air, and my horse shied and I got thrown—he was running away, anyhow—and then Emp grabbed the paper, and I took it away from him and read some of it aloud. Just for fun. And Dad grabbed it and—"

"Hold on! Hold on!" demanded McClellan. "Go more slowly. It doesn't make sense. Who are Emp and Dad and—"

"Emp," said Jimmie in a tone of laboriously patient explanation as to a stupid pupil—"Emp is my dog. That isn't all his name; it's just the short of it. Dad's my grandfather. He's a brevet-major. I'm Jim Brinton."

"Brinton?" queried McClellan, repeating his own middle name.

"The soldiers call me 'Battle Jimmie,'" explained the lad.

"Battle Jimmie!" cried Hooker. "So you're the youngster who—"

"Yes, sir. I'm that one. Shall I go on about the paper?"

"Yes. More slowly."

"Dad read it, and he got all het up over it. And he said it must get here right away. That everything depended on it. And that must be so, 'cause Dad knows."

"So he sent you here with it?" asked McClellan. "If he is an officer in the army here, it would have saved time and explanation if he had brought it here himself."

"How could he?" flared Jimmie, instantly aflame at the implied slur on his idol. "How could he? Tell me that. He couldn't stop fighting, could he?"

"Fighting? No skirmish on the Sharpesburg road has been reported here. What troops were engaged? Do you know?"

"Dad was. And the Confed, of course."

"What Confederate?" asked the exasperated general.

"The one I left Dad thrashing. The one who said we were his prisoners. Dad licked him long before this."

"Hold on, sonny," intervened Hooker, forestalling a movement of vexed bewilderment on McClellan's part. "Let's get this straight. Just answer my questions."

In a dozen well-put queries Hooker got from the boy the whole story, beginning with the runaway and ending with Jimmie's arrival at headquarters.

McClellan's face lost its look of impatience as he listened; and it lighted into keen interest.

"This Dad of yours must be a paladin of valor, besides having a quick, cool brain of his own," he commented as Jimmie finished. "His country owes him an unpayable debt for sending this despatch to me so promptly. It is more important than I could make you understand. By the way, you haven't told us his name?"

"His name? Dad's? Why, he's Brevet-Major James Dadd. I thought I told you that."

The two generals exchanged a quick glance that was quite lost on Jimmie.

"James Dadd!" exclaimed McClellan.

"James Brinton," gravely corrected Hooker.

Jimmie wheeled on him.

"Who told you that?" he demanded truculently, eyes ablaze and red hair bristling.

"Never mind that, my lad!" laughed Hooker. "I—"

"Look here, you!" cried Jimmie, trembling with fierce indignation. "Now that you people have spied on Dad and spotted his secret, I s'pose you'll want to turn him out of the army. He said you might. He told me so before he joined. Well, if you do, it'll be the rottenest trick any one ever played. He's the dandiest fighter you've got. And he's the greatest man that ever was.

"Aw, let him stay!" he went on, his voice changing to an eager plea. "Let him stay! It'll kill him to be kicked out just when he's doing so fine and everything. *Please* let him stay. It wasn't his fault he was turned out of the army the other time, back in Mexico. Gee! if I could get you to understand what a grand man he is— Why, the fellers in the regiment—"

Hooker put a big, kindly hand almost in caress on the boy's heaving shoulder.

"There, lad!" he said in rough gentleness. "Don't waste all your good powder blazing into the air. There's no more danger of your Dad being kicked out of the army than of Jeff Davis becoming President of the United States.

"We all know the story. And we all honor him. Even President Lincoln knows it. And by this time tomorrow President Lincoln will know what Dad has done for the Union today in getting that paper to us.

"Now trot along. The paper you brought here is going to keep every general and every courier in the Army of the Potomac busy all day and all

night. There's no time to waste on boys. Not even on Battle Jimmies. Clear out and run along!"

He gave the boy a friendly shove toward the door. As Jimmie, dazed but infinitely relieved, passed out he saw the two generals, wholly oblivious of him, bending once more over the paper.

CHAPTER XXXII.

Love.

INTO Fredericktown rode Dad, astride the erstwhile runaway.

Since passing the Union outposts he had let the tired horse take its own gait. At his heels trotted Emp. There was no hurry. And Dad was tired.

From the sentry at the outposts whom he questioned he had learned of Jimmie's whirlwind passage down the road, and at the head of the main street of Frederick another query to a goober-vender elicited the fact that Jimmie had entered the town at a gallop nearly an hour earlier.

Satisfied thus in his mind as to the safety of his grandson and of the paper's delivery to McClellan, he slowed his weary mount to a walk and turned into a by-street which formed a shorter route toward the Federal camps.

It was a pretty lane into which he turned. Wide-branched trees met above its winding center. Golden glow and asters and phlox bordered the little gardens along either side.

A plump gray kitten in the middle of the byway was valorously stalking a covey of sparrows that flew away in bored annoyance as she crept near.

Emp proceeded to pursue the pursuer, who, after scratching his nose with unnecessary virulence, ran up a tree.

Emp returned sulky yet relieved to his post at the horse's heels. The lane was deserted of traffic. Somewhere in the arched trees above a late season mocking-bird was piping its clamorous sweet call.

The afternoon sun shone benignant-ly through a yellow dust-haze. Peace lay everywhere. Peace, flowers, bird-song—and the brooding hush of afternoon—in the very heart of a great war.

A white cottage, set somewhat back from the lane behind its own patch of green lawn, bore across its porch-front the sign:

THIRD AMBULANCE CORPS

Army of the Potomac

Temporary Headquarters

On the lawn two or three uniformed nurses sat in rocking chairs, scraping lint and sewing. On cots along the narrow porch lay several gaunt-faced, partly dressed convalescents.

Dad instinctively drew his horse to a standstill as he read the sign. The sewing nurses on the lawn glanced up as he halted.

One of them—a silvery-haired little woman in gray—gave a joyous exclamation and, springing to her feet, ran across to the open gate and out into the lane to greet the rider.

On the instant Dad was off his horse and advancing with gladly outstretched hands toward her.

"Emily!" was all he could find voice to say just at first.

"Oh, I was so hoping you'd find where we were, James!" she hailed him. "And that you'd come to see me before I left."

"Left? The corps is moved again?"

"No. But I'm detailed at one of the Washington hospitals. I'm to start first thing in the morning."

Dad had passed one arm through his horse's bridle. Now, with a very proprietary air, he tucked the little woman's hand under his other arm.

"Walk a way down the lane with me," he begged. "Now that you're going to Washington, I don't know when I'll ever see you again."

Eagerly she assented.

Followed by the amused smiles of the group of nurses on the lawn, the two elderly lovers sauntered down the deserted lane together, arm in arm, the tired horse following; the mocking-bird calling to them from the inter-laced green branches above.

For a space neither of them spoke. Dad forgot his weariness; forgot everything except the strangely sweet new sense of content; of reaching at last a safe and perfect haven after long years of storm-tossed misery.

The little old lady smiled up at him.

"It's—it's kind of like *home* to be walking with you, James," she said shyly.

Then, her housewifely eye beginning to take in details, she exclaimed:

"Land sakes, James Brinton, if you haven't gone and torn a great rent in the shoulder of your coat! Such a careless man I never did see! And you haven't even noticed it."

Dad looked down at the cut made by the Confederate captain's saber when, in the early stages of the encounter, it had grazed his upper arm.

"That's so!" he admitted shamefacedly. "I never noticed it. It was shiftless of me. I'll get it mended as soon as I go back to camp. You aren't ashamed to be seen walking with a man who's got a torn coat, are you, Emily?" he finished anxiously. "Because—"

She interrupted him with another exclamation as she looked more keenly at the rent.

"And the shoulder of your shirt, right under it, is torn, too," she said. "How could you ever get both of them torn like that and never know it?"

She stood still, disengaged her arm from his, and, with the air of a dress-making expert, drew the sides of the coat's rent together.

"Why, this isn't a tear," she went on, "it's a cut! A clean cut! How ever did you do it?"

She loosed her hold on the sides of

the cut and the released sections of cloth opened again.

So did the cut shirt-sleeve beneath them, revealing the angry red welt, like a whiplash mark, on the hard, bronzed flesh of Dad's upper arm.

"James Brinton!" she accused sternly. "You've been fighting again!"

"Yessum!" he confessed, hanging his head.

Once more, this time in swift solicitude, she was parting the rents in coat and shirt, and her cool, light fingers were on the burning hot flesh of the welt.

With the true nurse's deftness she explored the injury, sighing with happy relief on finding it so trivial.

"Tell me about it," she demanded.

Briefly, he told her; keen shame possessing him as he related, as modestly as possible, his exploit. She had taken his arm again, and as he talked they resumed their sauntering stroll.

When his recital was finished she pressed his arm tightly for an instant in silence. Then—

"Oh, I thank the dear Lord!" she breathed. "He brought you back safe!"

Dad's other hand closed over hers as it lay on his arm.

"Back to—to you," he said softly. And for a space they fell silent once more. But their walk waxed slower and his hand did not release hers.

"Emily," said Dad, at last, speaking with a rush, as one who fears his courage may desert him at any moment, "I guess you know how much I care. It's—it's just everything. I can't put it in any prettier words, because it means so much. Will—will you marry me?"

She looked up at him, her eyes big and dewy.

"Why, of course, James," she made answer in gentle wonder. "I thought you knew that."

Regardless of the distant nurses, regardless of possible onlookers from the scattered wayside houses, Dad

stopped stock-still, gathered her into his arms, then stooped and kissed her.

She raised her lips to his and smiled tenderly up at him.

Then of a sudden she drew back in ostentatious haste.

"There!" she declared vehemently. "It's true there's no fool like an old fool. Here I am, a woman with a married daughter, making a spectacle of myself in a public street. Shame on me! And shame on you, too, Jim Brinton!"

"I never dreamed," said Dad, "that shame could be such a nice thing. But you're wrong about one thing, deary. About our being old. For a lot of years I've been looking on myself as an old man. And now I know I'm not. I'm just a man. And as for you, Emily—why, I don't believe you'd know how to be old if you lived to be a million."

She laughed gaily, in dainty, old-world coquetry.

"I guess you've had plenty of practise in making cute speeches like that, James," she said. "You do it awful easy."

A momentary vision of nausea came to him of the barren stretch of years at Idealá, when he had believed that all good women shunned him as a drunkard; of his pitiful efforts to make friends with his son's wife; his avoidance of her social-climber women friends.

"No," he said shortly. "I've had no practise, dear. None."

She understood.

"I'll—I'll make it up to you, Jim!" she whispered tremulously. "All of it, dear man. All the horrid lonely years, and everything. I promise."

Another divine silence, broken only by the mocking-bird among the tree-tops.

"Emily," he said, "the tide is going to turn in this war. The next move will be the turning-point. And it'll turn hard. I'll be in the thickest of it, dear."

"But I've got a kind of feeling that

I'll get through it safe. Because your love will be taking me through it. And after that—"

"I'll be waiting, Jim," she said.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

War!

ALL day, along the steep banks of Antietam Creek, the battle had roared and bellowed and done its wholesale murdering.

All day, that red 17th of September, 1862,—“the bloodiest single day's fighting of the Civil War”—the Army of the Potomac had flung itself in dogged fury upon the V-shaped position of the Confederates on the creek's farther side.

It was the second day of the battle of Antietam; the first day having been consumed in a more or less ineffectual artillery duel, and in maneuvering for positions of strategic advantage.

Thanks to his foreknowledge of Lee's plans—and, incidentally, thanks to Dad and Battle Jimmie—McClellan had been able to take advantage of Lee's moment of comparative weakness by forcing battle upon him before Stonewall Jackson's force could return from the raid on Harper's Ferry.

Thanks, also, to a delay that has never been explained, McClellan had held off from the attack long enough to let Jackson's vanguard of ten thousand men join Lee.

Still, the bulk of Jackson's soldiers—the flower of the Southern host—were still absent when the battle was waged. Jackson, too, whose presence and whose counsels at such a moment would have been worth more than fifty thousand additional men, was still absent at Harper's Ferry.

Lee was thus coerced by McClellan into giving battle, with his ablest leader and his best fighters far away.

So much for the historic carelessness of the Confederate major-general, D. H. Hill, in losing an all-important paper on the way from Fred-

ericktown; a carelessness that did untold harm to his cause; and that perhaps might have done far more had McClellan seized all his opportunities instead of merely part of them.

Yet, as historians agree, the finding of the lost paper, and its falling into McClellan's hands, turned the whole tide of the invasion and changed Lee's most brilliant campaign into a costly failure. A failure that smote the Confederacy a well-nigh mortal blow on the bare heart.

On the morning of the seventeenth Hooker's corps was entrenched on the far side of the Antietam, the creek between him and the main Army of the Potomac. On the preceding afternoon, at McClellan's orders, Fighting Joe had crossed one of the creek's four stone bridges, defeated a Confederate detachment under Hood, and had seized on a position.

Now, on the seventeenth, Hooker received further orders to attack the Confederate line, engaging it closely; while the bulk of the main army should cross the creek under cover of the fighting and throw itself on the Confederates.

The plan met with only fair success; General Mansfield was killed early in the action. Hooker was wounded.

The embattled Confederates stood firm as a rock; and all day long, at close quarters, the mutual slaughter raged.

Four times with his regiment in Hooker's corps Dad led his men against the Confederate center. Four times the murderous volleys of the Southerners sent back the assailants, almost cut to pieces.

Once more, Battle Jimmie far to the fore, clanging on his deafening drum, the regiment charged with its brigade.

Half-way up the slope, Dad found himself senior officer, not only of his regiment, but of his brigade.

Battles makes field-promotion very swift.

Bareheaded, sword in hand, Dad

toiled upward, calling to his fast thinning ranks to close up and follow. At his side drummed Jimmie, crazy with excitement; screaming mingled insults, praise and encouragement to the survivors.

Like some gaunt old war spirit, Dad raged at the head of his men; a cyclone of lead roaring and whistling around him. His example, and that of the howling, drumming boy at his side, proved infectious.

With a gasping cheer the depleted ranks staggered forward in the wake of the gray-haired man and the drummer. Against the Confederate batteries they crashed, headlong.

There was a *mêlée* of hand-to-hand fighting for an instant; then a break and a scrambling run on the part of the defenders.

And the hill was won.

Dad whirled about on the handful of blue-coated victors who clustered around him, yelling ecstatically.

"Bully!" cried Dad. "Good boys! We've got the hill. Now to hold it until the support can come up. Captain Fitch, deploy—"

Dad saw ten million sparks leap into crackling life. A billion more exploded within his brain.

He fell from a great, great height into a cool darkness that lovingly wrapped itself about soul and mind and body.

Somewhere, he vaguely remembered, a battle was waging. But it had ceased to interest him.

Then he fell quietly asleep.

Dad shook off the sweet lethargy and opened his eyes.

There was work to do. He recalled everything now. The senior officers of his brigade were dead or incapacitated.

He had led his men up a hill that vomited fire and shot. They had barely won the summit.

This surely was no moment for their leader to drop into a doze. He felt heartily ashamed of himself.

With an effort he gripped at his sword-hilt—and his fingers closed weakly over the folds of a hospital sheet.

His newly opened eyes focused at last. Not on the blue sky, with its hell of flame and smoke, but on the dingy gray canvas ceiling of a tent.

This was all wrong. He raised himself on one elbow to peer about him.

A sharp dizziness well-nigh made him swoon. At the same instant he was aware that the unbearable din of musketry and artillery had ceased and that soothing quiet reigned everywhere.

Exhausted, he fell back, his head sinking into the depths of a soft pillow. Some one crossed the tent hastily and stood beside him.

It was Battle Jimmie.

For the briefest interval, as he lay blinking at his grandson, Dad believed they were back at Ideala, and that the boy had crept into his room, as had been his wont, for a good-night chat. Then he noted the lad's ill-fitting uniform, and reason came to its own again.

For a full minute they remained, without speech, looking into each other's eyes, while slowly Dad's brain cleared and he began to realize where he was.

"Dad!" whispered Jimmie at last. "Dad, do you know me?"

"Know you?" repeated Dad, in a weak but honestly surprised voice. "Why shouldn't I know you? What a crazy question, son, to ask me!"

Jimmie gripped one of Dad's hands in both his own.

"You're all right!" he exulted. "You're all right! The surgeon said if your mind was clear when you came to you'd be out of danger. Oh, gee, but it's grand to have you alive again!"

"Alive? What on earth do you mean?"

"Why—why, nothing," ended the boy.

"What do you mean, dear lad?"

insisted his grandfather. "Why shouldn't I be alive? I've been alive ever since I can remember. It's a kind of habit I got into ever so many years ago."

Jimmie giggled in sheer relief; a shaky giggle, but vibrant with sheer joy. His grandfather's voice was very weak and it faltered; but his grandfather's spirit still burned bright and strong.

And Jimmie rejoiced.

"Go ahead and tell me how I got here, and what's the matter with me," murmured Dad haltingly. "I'm in a hospital tent, I suppose."

"Yes, sir. Been here a week. Senseless all the time. Concussion of the brain, the sawbones called it. Said if you came out of it sane you'd be all right in just a few days. Oh, but it's been a rotten time, Dad! They let me stay, because I wouldn't keep out. But you kept looking so—so *dead*!"

The boy shuddered violently, then grinned again and squeezed Dad's hand.

"Tell me all about it, son," begged Dad. "Everything. From—from—"

"We'd just taken the hill," answered Jimmie, seeking to marshal his facts in correct order. "They were shelling us from a couple of batteries to the left. Some shells burst over us. A piece of one hit you in the head and over you went. Say, but I wished 'most a hundred times that it had been me instead."

Dad lifted a fractionally unsteady hand to his head. It was swathed in cold, wet cloths.

Jimmie went on:

"They didn't send us support and we couldn't hold the hill, but we toted you back with us."

"The battle?" asked Dad in sudden anxiety.

"It lasted till after dark. We didn't know who had won. Nobody did."

"But next morning Lee was gone. Helter-skelter back across the Potomac into Virginia again. Invasion busted up for good."

"Some of the fellers say the folks in Washington are giving Little Mac blazes for letting Lee get back safe into Virginia instead of catching him before he could get to the Potomac. But I kind of guess it would have been just a little bit like catching a rattlesnake by the tail."

"Anyhow, campaign's over, and Johnnie Reb won't stable his horses in Faneuil Hall *this* trip. Say, Dad, they're talking a whole lot about you everywhere—about how you—"

The boy checked himself. Through sheer weakness Dad had fallen asleep.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

The Man at Washington.

DAD sat in the late September sunlight at the door of the hospital tent where for ten days he had lain. Slowly but very surely the old, wiry strength was beginning to creep back to the lean body.

No longer did the slightest sudden motion or an effort to concentrate his thoughts set his head to aching blindly, and no longer did his knees buckle under him when he tried to cross the tent from bed to door.

Dad was well out of danger, the surgeons said. Nothing but a few more days of rest was needed to bring him back to health.

An injury to the head is always dangerous, but it has this redeeming quality—it does not long keep its victim in suspense. It kills, crazes, or gets entirely well in an unbelievably short time. The issue is settled, one way or another, in far less time than in the case of an equally severe wound in any other part of the anatomy.

The campaign was over.

The Confederate army, back in its lair, was licking the grievous wounds sustained in the Antietam fight. The Army of the Potomac, nearly thirteen thousand of its soldiers dead from that same fight, was resting on its doubtful laurels.

Here and there skirmish parties or small detachments of the rival forces were in motion, but between the main bodies of both armies brooded the truce of exhaustion.

The Federals that summer and early fall had invaded Virginia, and after a series of fearful defeats had been driven out. Lee in September had invaded the North, and had met with like fate.

The season was too far advanced for any more extensive operations, and a lull came.

Almost directly after Antietam's battle President Lincoln had electrified the world by issuing the so-called "Provisional Proclamation," declaring in effect that slavery within the limits of the United States was forever dead, and that every negro in America was henceforth a human being, not a piece of transferable property.

Three months later the more formal "Emancipation Proclamation" was to follow. But its forerunner, the provisional proclamation, quite as effectively struck the slavery shackles from a million wrists.

Lincoln had kept his solemn vow—the vow to free the slaves should the tide of invasion be turned.

All these bits of news as they reached camp were faithfully transmitted to Dad by that most zealous of nurses and entertainers, Battle Jimmie.

The old man listened in wondering gratitude as he realized the boundless fruitage of the finding of "Order 191."

To Dad the whole thing was a miracle, and most miraculous of all to him was the praise showered on his embarrassed self by his fellow officers.

"I feel like a blackleg, Jimmie," he confided to his grandson on this his first day of removal from the tent's interior to the sunshine outside its doorway. "I feel like the original man who stole the original other fellow's thunder. Here folks keep coming to the tent and shaking hands with

me and telling me what a big thing I did in getting that paper to Little Mac and what it's meant to the country and all.

"And I don't know which way to look. Anybody'd think I'd ridden up to General Hill and grabbed him by the throat and held him helpless in the presence of all his overawed men while I went through his pockets for the order, instead of our just happening by miracle chance to find it lying on the ground. Why, *any one* might have happened to pick it up. It's no credit."

"That's right," bravely agreed Jimmie, scratching Emp's rough head as the multibreed dog trotted back from a round of the cook-tents and lay down with a little grunt of repletion at his master's feet. "That's right. Any one *might* have found it, but 'any one' didn't. And if most folks had they wouldn't 'a' caught the point of it or known what to do with it. And it's dead sure they wouldn't 'a' thought to send it in a rush to Little Mac at the minute a man's fingers were trying for their throat.

"Oh, I guess there's one or two worse impostors than you, Dad."

The old man's tired eyes suddenly grew bright with happy expectancy. Jimmie without turning to look divined the cause.

"I can see fine out of the back of my head," announced the boy. "For instance, I can see the mail-courier coming down this row right now with the hospital post-bag under his arm."

He twisted his head as he spoke, and pointed in triumph at the approaching post-bag bearer.

"See!" he exclaimed. "What did I tell you? Sometimes it just fairly scares me to think how clever I'm getting to be. Lay back and rest. I'll jump over to the office tent, and I'll bring you her letter the second it tumbles out of the bag."

He was off at a dead run.

Dad looked after him with the feeble impatience of the convalescent.

Mrs. Sessions' letters had been the event of each day to him. Not until Dad had recovered consciousness had Jimmie written to the little lady that his grandfather had been wounded.

A line from a staff surgeon, written at Jimmie's plea, accompanied the letter, vouching for Dad's recovery.

The little lady, unable to leave her post at Washington, had done her best to atone for her absence by long daily letters—letters as spicily, sweetly old-fashioned as a garden of cinnamon roses and lavender—letters containing learned exhortation as to the care the patient must take of his precious self; throbbing with egregious pride at the wounded man's valor; seeking to entertain him by lively accounts of the daily happenings in Washington.

Small wonder that helpless old Dad looked forward to these daily epistles as a parched throat to cool drink.

Presently—or, as it seemed to Dad, after about two and a half centuries—Jimmie came back at the double.

"I'm sorry," began the boy ruefully, "but—"

The change in his grandfather's face made him cry out in hot contrition:

"Aw, I was fooling, Dad! I just wanted to have a joke with you like we used to. I'm a chump! Here it is—a dandy fat letter, too."

Dad seized the letter, laughing perfunctorily to show Jimmie he appreciated the jest that had constricted his heartstrings and throat. The boy tactfully withdrew to a little distance and proceeded to engage Emp in a thrilling game of "wrassle the bear," Emp reluctantly enacting the ursine rôle.

Dad opened the envelope with the luxurious slowness of one who seeks to drag out a pleasure to its utmost bounds. He smoothed wide the crinkly sheets with their fine, quaint handwriting, and began to read.

This letter began neither with admonitions to carefulness nor with eager queries as to his health. In fact, it could scarce be said to "begin" at

all. It started off in the very middle of the writer's burst of excitement.

Dad read:

Something *wonderful's* happened. It's got me so stirred up I don't know which end of it to begin to tell first, and my hand's all jumpy. Listen, Jim:

This morning, as I was coming on duty at the hospital, I could tell the minute I got into the big outer hall something was up. Everybody was hurrying around, all flustered and het up, but all looking pleased as Punch. And the orderly at the door told me President Lincoln was making an inspection of the wards.

I was crazy to see him; and I'd heard how he goes from bed to bed, talking to the sick soldiers just like they were his babies. So I started at a trot for the nearest ward, hoping I'd get one glimpse of him.

And as I was starting to scuttle up the main stairway, what should I do but run into a party of folks that was coming down from the wards. Some of the doctor and officers were with them.

And I pretty near collided, bang slap, with the gentleman who was coming down the stairs a step or two in front of the rest.

I stopped and said: "Excuse me, sir. I wasn't looking." And then I *did* look.

I looked up to where I thought his face would just naturally be. And I'm blest if it wasn't only his chest instead. I kept looking up—up—up—till my neck near got a crick in it. And at last I saw his face.

He looked about nine feet, thirteen inches high, and as thin as a rail. And his black clothes and his high pot-hat made him look a lot higher and thinner. But it wasn't his figure I found I was gawping at. It was his face.

Oh, Jim, such a face! Ugly, I suppose, and whiskered, and full of gullies and ridges.

But it's the strongest, wisest, kindest, wonderfulest face the Lord ever made. And the great big gray eyes looked as if they were holding the work and the bothers and the sorrows—and the fun, too—of the whole eternal universe.

Yes, you've guessed who it was. Mr. Lincoln. No less.

I just stood there, all flabbergasted; staring and curtsyng. And he kept looking down at me with the sweetest, friendliest smile you ever saw.

"Excuse me, sir," I says again.

"That's all right, little woman," he answers, in that deep, gentle voice of his. "The nurse deserves the right of way nowadays; even over the President. She earns it."

Just then, as I was moving aside (and longing, too, to thank him for being such a wonderful man) the superintendent steps up to him and says:

"Mr. President, this is Nurse Sessions you were asking about. Would you care to speak to her now? My office is here to the right. You won't be disturbed there."

Well, Jim, I could have gone through the floor, right then and there. I couldn't believe my ears were telling me the truth. What could Mr. Lincoln have to say to me? And how could I have been away when he asked for me?

I just stood trembling and looking foolish.

And then Mr. Lincoln was smiling and holding out his hand—I wanted to kiss it!—and saying:

"Mrs. Sessions, one of the reasons I came here this morning was for a little chat with you. Shall we step in here?"

And I followed him into the superintendent's office and he set a chair for me, just like I was a queen, and as if he was working for our folks.

We sat down. And here's what he said, as close as I can remember. And I guess I'm not liable to have forgotten the words:

"Mrs. Sessions," he began, "there is a very talkative little boy up in the Army of the Potomac. And it seems that after Antietam General Hooker sent for that little boy to ask him some questions about a wounded officer that General Hooker takes considerable interest in. And the boy, under Hooker's questions, blabbed about that officer's being engaged to marry a very lovely and dear little woman. General Hooker wrote to me about it. So I wanted a word or two with that little woman—about *him*."

Think of that, Jim! Just *think* of it. I made up my mind, that minute, I'd go to the hospital ear specialist right off and get him to find out why I'd taken to hearing things that couldn't possibly have been said to me.

But Mr. Lincoln went on, more serious: "Mrs. Sessions, I know Major Dadd's story. All of it. He's the kind of man I think I'd like to be friends with. Do you think he'd feel like meeting me?"

"Oh, Mr. President!" I sputtered.

I couldn't say another word.

"Because," he goes on, his mouth- corners twisting up in a smile, "I'd like to have him come to see me. We owe him a good deal. And I want we should pay some of that debt. If he hangs back, and doesn't think it's worth while to come, just you tell him I've a couple of little presents for him. One is from Congress. One is from me."

Yes, I was sure I'd have to go to that ear specialist, Jim!

"The present from Congress, ma'am," says Mr. Lincoln, "is a gold Distinguished Service Medal. It was voted him yesterday for his share in the Antietam campaign. But it wasn't voted to James Dadd. I've put an end to 'James Dadd's' existence with six strokes of the pen."

"I—I don't understand, Mr. President," I blurted out; and neither I did.

"James Dadd," he says, with another of those smiles that makes a body's heart go all warm, "James Dadd was a mistake. I've rectified it. He is James Brinton, henceforward and always. Tell him never to forget that. For it's the way his name has been altered on the army lists."

He kind of paused for a second, then he said:

"And, Mrs. Sessions, James Brinton is the name on a document I signed last night. I've about decided that Brinton isn't really worthy to be a brevet-major any more after the way he behaved in the Antietam campaign. So, to punish him, I've just signed a commission making him a brigadier-general instead."

I don't know, Jim, if it was then, or a while earlier, that I began crying. I guess it was then. I sat sopping my eyes and trying to say grand, eloquent things. But I could hear myself just saying: "Thank you! Thank you! Thank you!" all kind of sobby, over and over again, like a numb wit.

But he seemed to understand. I guess he always understands. That's what makes him different. He got up and took my hand again, and he said:

"Tell him next time you write. And tell him, if he's well enough, I want him to come to the White House next Tuesday afternoon. I want you to come, too, ma'am. And—don't forget to tell him to bring Battle Jimmie along. I want to thank him, too."

"And he and my boy, Tad, can get into mischief together while we old folks are gabbling."

He took his hat off of the table and he started for the door. When he got to the threshold he turned around and he said:

"A man who has never stumbled is to be envied, Mrs. Sessions. But a man who has stumbled and then fought his way back again, strong and firm, to his feet, is the sort whose hands *real* men like to shake. Tell him that, too, ma'am, when you write. I guess he'll know what I'm driving at."

Oh, Jim!

The old B. and O. station at Washington was crowded with hurrying

soldiers and civilians one early October afternoon in 1862. From an incoming train alighted three figures who caught the interested gaze of more than one passer-by.

The trio were a tall man in late middle-age, whose face was still thin and white as from sharp illness; a small and red-headed boy whose alert eyes gloated on the noisy bustle and confusion around him, and a small yellow dog, whose nondescript coat had been painstakingly washed and combed for the occasion until it shone (and reeked with the scent of Castile soap), and around whose short neck a wide red-white-and-blue ribbon was tied into a tremendous bow.

As the three comrades won their way clear of the station crowds and to the street outside a man in uniform stepped up to them.

"Major Brinton?" he asked cordially.

"Yes, sir," replied Dad, thrilling at sound of the old name.

"I am President Lincoln's military aid," said the officer. "I was sent here to meet you and take you to the White House. There is the carriage at the curb. I am very glad to see you, sir. Your services have been great.

"By the way," he added, glancing at Dad's belt, "this is not to be a

formal reception. It isn't necessary to wear your sword, if it incommodes you at all."

"This sword, sir," answered Dad, laying a reverent hand on its hilt, "was given me by a lady who's waiting for me at the White House. I promised her I'd never draw it without cause, or sheathe it without honor. I'm going to wear it to the White House and tell her I've kept my promise."

"As you wish," said the aid pleasantly. "The carriage is—"

"Will you mind, sir," interposed Dad, "if we march instead? Once I left the army—on foot. I would like to go on foot to a reward I don't deserve. A silly fancy, maybe. But I've looked forward to it a long, long time. Especially since I was sick. March, Jimmie!"

Word had passed around as to the trio's identity. A little crowd had gathered. From the onlookers, as Dad and Battle Jimmie fell into step, went up a cheer.

The two saluted, squared their shoulders, and set forth on their march of triumph, Emp trotting proudly ahead of them in all the glory of his patriotic ribbon and scoured coat.

And so did Dad Brinton come to his own.

(The end.)

A PILGRIM

By Richard Kirk

BECAUSE I came a dusty way,
As pilgrims must,
My garments and my feet are gray
With dust.

They scoff at me, who sought to win
What I adored;
This dust of earth, they call it Sin,
Dear Lord!

They Never Knew

By
David A. Curtis

CHAPTER I.

What the Miner Told His Lawyer.

I DEPOSITED one hundred and sixty \$10,000 United States gold certificates with the bank of John Morrill & Son at 4.40 P.M. yesterday. There can be no possible question of that fact, for I hold the certificate of deposit signed by John Morrill himself, and he does not pretend to deny it.

Yet I am told within twenty-four hours that the money has disappeared in some mysterious fashion and that I am going to have some delay and perhaps some difficulty in getting my money. If I did not know John Morrill and the reputation his bank has had for fifty years so thoroughly well, I would certainly think he had stolen it himself.

As it is, I do not know what to think.

Of course, the circumstances were unusual. If I had not such absolute proof, no one would be likely to believe that I had walked into a private bank at that hour of the day and deposited \$1,600,000 to my account.

I never had any such sum of money before, and I can see now that I ran a serious risk in placing it as I did, but at the time it seemed to me that I was absolutely safe in doing it. Even now I do not see what I could have done with it that would have been more prudent.

I have been prospecting in Colorado for two years, but never before this have I made a big strike.

I had done fairly well at that, for I suppose I could have shown up something like \$50,000 in real money that had come from a number of claims I had located and sold out for small amounts; but I had three or four that promised so well that I held out for big figures, and finally I sold one of them for \$1,600,000 in actual cash, and at the same time got assurances that I could sell another one in London for a still larger sum.

And I took the first train for New York, bringing the money with me. I did not even take the time to bank it there.

The buyers were three Englishmen, who told me they represented a syndicate in London which has been formed to invest heavily in Colorado mines. You know how the discoveries of silver out there have excited the whole world, and these three were sent as experts to investigate.

Knowing the value of ready money in a quick trade, they secured the gold certificates in New York and had them ready for immediate use.

I don't mind saying that I was nervous traveling with that amount of money in my pocket. I was not sound asleep for a moment on the train, and when I reached here I took a cab di-

rectly for Wall Street. I knew, of course, that it was after banking hours, but I also knew that Morrill sometimes stayed late in his private office, and my thought was that I might find him there.

I have banked with John Morrill & Son ever since I first had an account.

No house in the Street has any higher reputation than they have always had, and I felt assured that my money would be as safe in their care as it would have been in the Sub-Treasury. My thought was to place it, beyond the chance of loss and then take the first steamer for England.

With the letters I have I am practically certain of closing a deal there, and I do not propose to lose any time getting there if I can help it.

Well, I found John Morrill, as I hoped I would, and after a little difficulty with the old watchman at the door, I was shown into his private office.

He was not disposed at first to do any business after hours, but when I explained the urgency of it he consented readily enough to receive the deposit. He counted the money carefully and made a memorandum of the numbers of the gold certificates.

Then he made an entry of the transaction in what he said was his private cash-book, telling me the books of the bank were all locked up, as I knew, of course, that they were, gave me a certificate of deposit for the amount, and put the money in his private safe.

Relieved at last of all anxiety about that, I went to a hotel and slept fourteen hours without waking.

To-day they tell me my money is gone, and they pretend they do not know what has become of it!

CHAPTER II.

What the Banker Knew.

WHEN Frank Rodney came into the bank about half past four that afternoon to deposit the money

he had made by his very successful operations in Colorado I was considerably annoyed.

In the first place, I do not like to transact business out of business hours. It is irregular, and one of the traditions of the house of John Morrill & Son is that whatever is irregular is likely to be unsafe.

It is part of that ultra conservatism that has always been a characteristic of the bank, and no small part of the reputation which has been builded up in three generations is founded on conservatism. If my grandfather had not been so extremely cautious as he was, the bank never would have survived the great panic of 1857.

And my father inherited the trait.

For myself, I was trained from boyhood to adhere strictly to the principles on which the success of the bank has always rested; and ever since I became the surviving member of the firm my sole ambition in life has been to keep that reputation unspotted to the end. For, as I am the sole surviving member, so I shall be the last, for I have no son.

In all human probability I shall never have one. There was a time when I had great hope of different things, but since that dream ended so sadly as it did I have had no interest in anything outside of the bank.

But, although Rodney's request that I should receive his deposit at that time was certainly irregular, and though I laid some stress on that point when he proposed it, it is the policy of the bank to do anything in reason to accommodate our depositors, and after he had told me of the circumstances I consented and did actually take the money.

I am particular in explaining these details, because the transaction was the first one in the history of the bank that ever gave rise to a suspicion of the absolute integrity of its management. To my mind, this is at least a partial explanation of the extraordinary situation in which I afterward

found myself, but there are others who were involved in it who hold a different opinion.

They say, truthfully enough, that the presence of that particular sum of money in my private safe was only a coincidence, and that the trouble arose from entirely different circumstances.

My own feeling is, however, that while the trouble was certainly independent in its origin of anything in which Rodney was concerned, it would not have assumed the form that it did if I had not consented to a most irregular transaction.

On that particular afternoon I had stayed after hours for the purpose of studying my own condition. I might have done that at home, it is true, but I felt it better to do it in the atmosphere of business, while at the same time I would be free from any of the distractions of business.

I needed the absolute seclusion of my own little parlor in the bank, and at the same time I wanted to keep my mind fixed on the requirements of my position in the world of finance. For my condition was extremely serious, and I was more disquieted than I had ever been before under any circumstances.

The affairs of the bank were never in a more satisfactory shape.

It had seemed for two or three years that I had actually reached the position toward which the firm had been steadily progressing for a full half-century. The unswerving rectitude of our conduct of the business was universally recognized, and while there were many banks that outranked us in the volume of their transactions and in the extent of their resources, there was none that stood higher in reputation than the private bank of John Morrill & Son.

It was not, therefore, with any business anxiety that I was concerned.

In fact, the only matter connected with the bank that had arisen in a long time that had given me any anxiety had been the death of our old cashier, who had been with us from the day

my grandfather started the bank, and who might have been a partner in the firm had it not always been our desire to retain the entire control in our family.

When he died it was, of course, necessary to choose his successor, and there was some difficulty.

In the usual course, Charles Lang would have taken his place, for he was next in the order of promotion, and there was only one reason why I did not make him cashier, for I had absolute confidence in him, not only in regard to his honesty, but also as to his judgment and ability.

He had entered the employ of the bank as a mere lad, and had remained with us ever since, proving himself entirely faithful and exceptionally capable. If any man ever deserved the promotion, he certainly did.

I had always had the highest regard for him, and I talked the matter over with him very frankly.

The sole trouble was his youth.

He was little over thirty and had the appearance of being much younger. And I felt that it would be a mistake to put so young looking a man in a position in which he would represent the bank to our customers in such a capacity.

We had always paid the most careful attention to the minutest details in which the bank should not only deserve the confidence of the public, but should maintain the appearance of extreme conservatism. It is, perhaps, owing to this habit of particularity that I am so careful to set down the smallest matters that led up to the great catastrophe that befell me.

Lang was disappointed, of course.

I knew that perfectly well, and I felt sorry for him, which was one reason why I explained the situation to him so carefully. But he took it very well, and remained at the teller's desk, giving us the same loyal service that he had always given, and I took Benjamin Gregory in as cashier.

He had been with us some three

months at the time when Rodney made his memorable call after hours, and had given entire satisfaction; but his engagement, as an outsider, was also, in a certain sense, an irregularity.

We had always before selected men in our own employ for any vacancy that might occur in our force, taking no one into the office from the outside, excepting as beginners, and training them for promotion.

I had considered myself fortunate, however, in being able to secure such a man as Gregory, for he had an enviable record which I had carefully investigated, and, so far as I had been able to learn, was in every way well qualified for the position.

As I said, he gave perfect satisfaction from the first. I had not, it is true, entrusted him as yet with the combination of the locks of the safe; but that, I felt, was an excess of caution. No one had ever known that combination excepting ourselves and our old cashier.

Since his death I had always opened the safe myself.

And, of course, I was the only one who ever knew the combination that would open my private safe, in which I left John Rodney's money that night. Those two secrets I kept even from Gregory for a time, but the first one I fully intended telling him as soon as I should have tested him thoroughly; and I had already begun to feel that I was doing him an injustice in not confiding him with it.

It was therefore no question of business anxiety that troubled me that afternoon.

I was entirely free from that; yet I had never been so profoundly disturbed as I was at that time by the condition in which I found myself, and I was utterly unable to account for it. The fact that I could not account for it was by no means the least thing that troubled me, for I felt that if I could understand it I would be better able to restore my mind to its normal condition.

The trouble, so far as I could judge, was entirely mental, and I had begun to fear lest I had fallen into a strange sort of insanity, the more alarming because it seemed to threaten the overthrow of everything there was in life that made it precious to me.

I had found myself meditating seriously on the possibility of embezzling so vast a sum that the whole Street would be staggered by the loss, and I had been constructing plans to escape with my booty, concealing my own identity, and fleeing to some other part of the world, where I would enter upon a life of almost unimaginable luxury and indulgence in unholy pleasures.

It was no sudden freak of the imagination that had come to me, as strange fancies are liable to come to any one, only to be dismissed as disordered fantasies. When the thought first came I had been amazed rather than horrified.

It seemed preposterous that such a man as I knew myself to be would entertain such notions seriously; but as time went by I found myself dwelling on them, and it seemed to me as if I were carefully planning to carry them out to actual performance. I had begun to realize, or at least to fear, that I might make the attempt, for I had apparently suddenly developed a dual personality.

On the one hand, I felt that I had no reason to believe that I was in any respect different from the John Morrill who was born into an honorable estate, who had maintained the reputation of his house with scrupulous care, and who had by his own exertions increased that reputation in no small measure.

No man on earth had a better right to stand erect among his fellows, demanding and receiving their respect.

On the other hand, while I was fully conscious of my own unsullied honor, and was proud of it—possibly inordinately proud—I was also conscious of a deliberate purpose to abandon everything that could make life worth living to a man of my character

and training, and to become a criminal and an outlaw, for the sake of such an after life as filled my true self with indescribable horror and disgust.

For these meditations of villainy had continued until I had become aware of a fixed intention to put them in execution. I was only waiting until I should have fully matured my plans and a favorable opportunity should present itself.

No man knew better than I knew how easy it would be for one in my position to arrange matters so that he could at a given time walk out of his office with an enormous amount of money in his pockets, and without any suspicion at the time existing in the mind of any as to his purpose.

It is impossible to understand the financial system of the world without giving careful consideration to the possibility of just such a happening, and the higher the standing of the man is the more easy would it be for him to do exactly that thing if he should decide to do it. Of that I was fully aware.

Following the crime would come, of course, the necessity of avoiding discovery for a sufficient time to enable him to disappear so completely from his usual surroundings that he could not be traced when he chose to appear elsewhere with his identity so thoroughly disguised that recognition would be impossible.

This called for the most elaborately careful preparation, and I was engaged night and day in studying that part of the question.

The opportunity could be found easily enough when I had fully determined the details of my escape. The slightest error in those calculations would be likely to defeat my purpose, and I was considering the way in which I could be sure of avoiding such errors.

It was all sheer madness; but I was so thoroughly obsessed by it that, as I said, I had begun to suspect myself of incipient insanity.

So terrifying was the mere thought of such a calamity that I had resolved to sit alone by myself for a time, facing the facts as they existed, and make a desperate attempt to analyze them. If I should be unable to find any means of freeing myself from so monstrous a condition of mind I would be forced to seek outside help against myself.

I could not quite see at that time what kind of help I required, but help of some sort I must have. It seemed inconceivable to me, even then, that I should have fallen into such a state, but I could no longer doubt that I was in peril of overwhelming disaster.

I had not foreseen any interruption, and I had given no special instructions to the doorkeeper who would remain on duty till I should leave the bank, so that he was entirely justified in speaking to me when Frank Rodney came and insisted on seeing me.

If I had told the watchman I was not to be disturbed, Rodney would not have been allowed to enter; but as it was, I consented to see him because of his urgency, though I was annoyed at his coming at such a time.

After he had gone, leaving his money with me, I remained, still pondering the problem I had to master and thinking also, with a sort of grim amusement, of the notable illustration he had given me of the ease with which I could carry out the nefarious schemes I was engaged upon.

The sum he left with me, implicitly trusting not only my integrity, but my ability to keep it for him beyond any possibility of loss, was not large enough to serve, by itself, the purpose I had in view; but it was undeniably large enough to indicate how easily I could put myself in possession of such an amount as I had in contemplation.

Here was a man who had toiled and schemed successfully for the accumulation of a fortune sufficiently ample to satisfy all his reasonable requirements for the remainder of his natural life.

Getting it absolutely in his possession, he had handed it over to another man, in exchange for a bit of paper containing a mere memorandum, and had rushed off in the quest of other fortunes, which, when he should have attained them, he would doubtless dispose of in a similar fashion.

Of course, his absolute reliance was placed on the monetary system of civilization.

That is unquestionably the most perfect which the ingenuity of mankind has been able to devise; but it rests entirely, in the last instance, upon the personal honor of the individuals who are responsible for the management of its details. The failure of one of those persons in the faithful observance of his duties is at any time liable to disturb the workings of the system; and to my mind, at least, the steadiness of its operation throughout the world affords testimony of the admirable character of mankind in general.

Yet here was I, one of the really important factors in the system, actually engaged in the serious contemplation of such an act as would go far toward destroying the faith of humanity in its own rectitude, at the very moment when I was receiving the most positive proof of the confidence that was placed in me.

As the realization of this came to my mind, I was stricken with such a sense of horror that I verily believe I was near fainting.

The foundations of the world seemed to be breaking away under my feet, and I experienced something closely akin to the physical sensation of falling from a great height. For I knew at that moment that I had fully determined to carry out the incredible evil that I had conceived, and my whole nature revolted.

Yet, even as my reason reeled, and I finally perceived that I had indeed fallen into such an abyss of evil as I had never before imagined, I found myself smiling with keen appreciation of the grim and awful humor of it all.

The thought of the havoc I was about to produce seemed to me to be most exquisitely enjoyable. I, John Morrill, one of the mainstays of commercial honor in my own corner of the world, had become an arch-villain who was about to do incalculable mischief to the existing order of things, and I found joy in the thought.

I leaned back in my chair and began to laugh.

Attached to my desk was a small mirror which I had had so placed that by looking into it at a slight angle I could see the outer office of the bank without turning my head. It was one of the small details of the arrangement of the office which I had found suited to my convenience, and which was frequently of service to me in business hours.

Now, as I leaned back, my eye fell on this mirror.

Naturally I saw in it the reflection of my own features, distorted as they were by that fiendish laugh, and for a moment or so I laughed the harder, most horribly amused at the grotesque image of malignant depravity the glass presented.

Then I became aware of a most wonderful thing. The features I beheld were most certainly my own. There could be no doubt of that. Abominably vile as the reflection was, I recognized myself in it, but I also saw something else.

Looking at me out of my own eyes was the soul of another person.

At first it seemed as if it must be Satan himself who had for some dire purpose taken possession of my personality and was using it for the furtherance of his design. So masterful and triumphant was the look that I felt for the instant the profound despair of one who sees the final disappearance of his last hope.

Then, yielding myself to the fearful fascination of that gaze, I began to perceive that it was not Satan who was looking, and very slowly I came to a recognition of who it was.

Another man—and I knew in some mysterious way, but very positively, who it was—was looking at me out of my own eyes, and was gloating over the wreck of my character in truly fiendish fashion. Wholly overcome by the horror of the situation, I rose and fled from the place in a blind panic.

Just what I did for the next few hours I do not know, only that I seemed to be trying to escape from my own bodily presence.

There was such a sense of contamination in me that my only hope appeared to lie in the possibility of ceasing to be myself; but how I tried to do this I cannot tell. It was a strange sort of madness, and I recognized it as such.

I must have sent word in some way to Stilson Harmon to come to me; for I found myself that night in my own library at home, waiting for him, and fully confident that he was coming. Moreover, he came; and to my great satisfaction I found myself able to tell him calmly and connectedly of all that I had experienced, excepting that I could not force myself to tell him whose identity I had discovered as my own dual personality.

I wanted to tell him, for I had great faith in his ability, he being the most renowned physician in the city at the time; but I was unable to do so.

Then my recollection fails me entirely as to an interval of many hours.

CHAPTER III.

What the Doctor Knew.

WHEN I received a note from John Morrill, asking me to come to his house in Washington Square, I had a curiously distinct impression that it was no ordinary call that he wanted me to make.

So strong was this feeling that I made some effort at the time to account for it, but I was unable to do so. It was nothing unusual as close friends for us to spend an hour or so together.

He had never been a patient of mine, strictly speaking; for, to my certain knowledge, he had never been in need of a physician.

In all my acquaintance there was no other man who had seemed to be so well balanced as he had always been, physically, mentally, and morally. The intimacy of our friendship, which began in early life and had continued without a break, was such as to enable me to speak positively on this point.

Professionally, therefore, there had never been any relations between us, though my father had been his father's family physician; and I knew, without anything having even been said on the subject, that he would call on me in case he should ever require medical or surgical aid. His health, however, had always appeared to be perfect.

There was no hint of illness in the note, nor was there any urgency expressed; and I was therefore at a loss to account for my instant conviction that he was in great need of aid.

In the light of what happened later, this feeling of mine seems especially significant; and I am glad that I made the effort to explain it to myself at the time. By the process of elimination which I began immediately, I was enabled later to come to a definite conclusion as to the mysterious impression I received, though at the time it puzzled me considerably.

I first looked at the note carefully.

It was a mere line on his club stationery, saying "Dear Doctor, I would like to see you to-night. If you can come to my house you will find me there." And it was written and signed in his usual neat, plain handwriting without a sign of agitation or haste.

There was nothing out of the ordinary in that, and I next considered whether I had knowledge of anything which could cause him anxiety, but there was nothing. I even questioned the messenger who brought the note as to his appearance when he sent it, but learned nothing.

It was one of the Club servants who

had known us both well for years, and he told me that Mr. Morrill appeared to be perfectly well and undisturbed when he sent the note. He even seemed surprised that I should ask such questions.

But I knew on the moment that John Morrill was in trouble.

There was no question as to my going, aside from that, and I sent him a note, saying that I would meet him in an hour, but I learned afterward that he left the club immediately after sending to me, evidently not expecting an answer.

It all seems trivial, but as I think of it now it is intensely interesting. In some way, not possible of explanation, he had conveyed a thought to me a call for help.

I found him alone in his library.

There was nothing unusual in his appearance or his manner. He greeted me in the same pleasant, unaffected way as always, and thanked me with the gentle courtesy that was characteristic of him for my promptness in coming. Then when we were comfortably seated he said, as if quite casually, "I want you to tell me what is the matter with me."

I was watching him closely, partly from professional habit, but particularly on account of the thought that was in my mind, but I could detect nothing even suggestive of trouble, and being careful to offer no suggestion on my part, I answered him in the same casual way.

"Suppose you tell me," I said, "what you think is the trouble. There is nothing wrong in your appearance."

"I'm very glad to hear that," he said with a curious air of relief, "but I have come to a point at which I distrust all appearances. First tell me if it is a physical trouble. I may be out of order in some way I do not understand."

I felt reasonable sure on that point, but to satisfy him I put him through a thorough examination without discovering anything which would cause

any anxiety whatever. And he seemed relieved also to hear that.

"Then it must be entirely mental," he said, and proceeded to tell me a most extraordinary story of how he had been tormented by disordered thoughts of preposterous villainy, and how these thoughts had so taken possession of him that he was no longer able to control them, but had actually conceived a fixed purpose of putting them in operation.

I understand that he has already written down a statement of his experiences while engaged in the struggle he made to preserve himself from a fate which he had then come to regard as inevitable, so I will not undertake to repeat the story.

It is a gruesome one and I listened to it with astonishment.

At first I thought lightly of it, saying to myself that he was more imaginative than I had supposed, and that by studying the problems and conditions of finance he had been brought to an undue consideration of the consequences that would follow if some one in a position similar to his own were to suddenly prove false to his obligations.

It was a case of overwrought nerves, I thought, resulting from too close application to business, and I came near prescribing the usual vacation and change of surroundings with the rest that comes from a complete diversion of thought.

As he continued, however, describing his condition with lucid particularity, I began to look differently at it.

The steady poise of character in such a man as John Morrill could not be so profoundly disturbed as his had evidently been by any mental suggestion that was merely supposititious. It was plain to me that some deeper and more potent cause existed, but I was at a loss to surmise its nature.

The state of mind into which he had fallen was so abhorrently evil that it could not have come so suddenly as it had in any way that seemed natural.

The more clearly he told his story the more difficult it was to understand it, and the more interested I became.

I was myself badly worn out by hard, continuous work for many hours when I received his curiously compelling summons, and I would certainly have excused myself from compliance with it if it had not been for the feeling I have mentioned, that it was no ordinary call.

Now, however, as I began to see the real importance of it, I forgot my fatigue in the interest that came from the study of a thoroughly abnormal case. I roused myself to vigorous action, and gave my utmost ability to the consideration of the most abstruse problem of mentality I ever encountered.

It was well, as the event proved, that I was able to do so, for I was taxed most heavily that night. Had it not been that I was fairly well equipped in a branch of study which was at that period considered extra-professional, the results of the night's work would probably have been in the last degree disastrous.

The first clue I caught to the problem came when Morrill began telling of his sensation of dual personality.

I had paid great attention to the experiments of Charcot and others in France, in the line of what afterward came to be called hypnotism, though I had said little on the subject either publicly or privately, as it was discredited generally by the profession, and was, at best, to be regarded as still in the theoretical stage.

I had no mind to be classed with those who make claims without adequate proof, and I had remained non-committal in the controversies that were already raging.

I had, however, conducted many experiments of my own in private, and had become thoroughly convinced that there was truth in the proposition that under some circumstances it is possible for one person to gain a more or less perfect control over the mind of an-

other, even to the extent of substituting his own will for that of his subject.

So far I had accepted privately the claims of the French school, though I had not acknowledged even so much as that to any one. And it flashed upon me as Morrill talked that possibly the explanation of his difficulty was to be sought in this direction.

There was, however, another thing of which I had convinced myself by study and such observation as I had been able to make.

It was that no person of normal conditions, free from serious defect of some sort, either mental, moral, or physical, could be made subject to hypnotic control. In every case of which I had knowledge the subject of that control was imperfect in some way originally, or had been enfeebled by disease to such a degree as to be unable to resist the influence of the operator.

And it was not possible for a normal individual to abandon his own self-control sufficiently to become a satisfactory subject, supposing that he might for some reason desire to do so.

I believe even yet, despite all that is argued to the contrary, that this is positively true, and that it is the all-sufficient safeguard of humanity against the evils which would almost certainly ensue if hypnotism were all that it has been claimed to be.

It was therefore plain to me that here was no case of mere hypnotism.

Such a man as I knew John Morrill to be could not have been subjected to the mentality of another person by hypnotism alone. I was positive as to that, and yet the thought persisted, and when he reached the point in his narrative at which he told me that he had recognized the personality of another man looking at him out of his own eyes in the mirror, I grasped at a possible solution of the matter.

"Who was that man?" I asked him, but he answered, "I cannot tell you."

There was a certain finality in his tone that indicated either a determination on his part to go no further in his revelation or his inability to tell, and for a moment I was staggered. Then the obvious thought came that if he had recognized the man as he said he must know who he was, and I said that to him rather sharply.

"There is no use in giving your physician a half confidence," I said.

"I realize that fully," he replied, "and you must not misunderstand me. I know who it is, and I want to tell you. It seems to me that if you knew you could help me greatly, and I do not see how you can if I do not tell you, but I cannot. I do not know why I cannot, but my lips refuse to act when I try to pronounce his name."

He spoke slowly, almost painfully, seeming to find some difficulty in saying even as much as he had, and I perceived that I had come to a crux of some sort.

His perfect frankness forbade the thought that he was wilfully concealing anything from me, yet if I was to do anything it was necessary for me to have that knowledge. I tried to argue with him, though I felt it would be useless, and so it proved.

"This is folly," I said. "You know who it is. Tell me."

But he replied: "I cannot. It is not that I will not. I am simply unable."

"John," I said, "we seem to be in deep water. You must find some way to help me if I am to do anything for you. See if you can write the name down on paper."

For it seemed possible that he was suffering from what might be called a sort of nervous paralysis that would affect his vocal organs, and that might not extend to the prevention of some other form of expression.

He caught at this suggestion eagerly, and, picking up a pencil, tried, or seemed to try as nearly as I could judge, to write something on the paper that lay under his hand.

But his hand remained motionless, and after a few moments he dropped the pencil. He said nothing, but there was an expression of despair on his face that made words unnecessary.

In the face of this strange situation, it seemed as if nothing could be done, and I also remained silent, studying to the best of my ability. Again and again the thought of hypnotism came up, only to be dismissed because of my conviction that he was not a possible subject.

I could find no other explanation, however, and presently the thought came to me that, although he was certainly immune from its influence in his normal condition, it might be that he was now so broken down mentally as to enable me to hypnotize him myself and compel him to give me the information he was unable to convey, desirous as he was that I should have it.

This thought was strengthened as I continued to look at him in my study. It seemed as if he had abandoned all thought of struggling to help himself, finding that to be hopeless, and was relying solely upon me.

Of itself this attitude on his part would go far toward putting him in a condition favorable to the experiment I finally resolved to try.

He continued to look steadily at me, and for a considerable period I kept my eyes fixed intently on his, striving to make my own as brilliantly clear as possible, and at the same time exerting all my will-power in the effort to bring his will under my complete control.

If I should succeed it would be proof to me that hypnotism was purely mental in character, as I had always believed it to be, though at that time there was much controversy about it.

Putting aside, so far as I was able, all doubt in my mind as to the feasibility of my experiment, and ignoring my own misgivings, which were serious, as to the propriety of a proceeding which I certainly regarded as ex-

tra-professional, to say the least, I persisted in my effort until after a time I recognized, or thought I recognized, the fact that he had relinquished all hold on his own personality, and that for the time he was a mere puppet which I could force into any act that I desired.

Even then I felt the need of extreme caution.

There was no longer any doubt in my mind that he had been dominated most mysteriously by some person who had for reasons of his own exerted his power in a most monstrously malignant fashion, and my task was not merely to discover the identity of that person, but to find means to free my friend from his influence.

My only weapon was hypnotism, which I did not pretend to understand very well. The other man's power evidently came from some knowledge that was far beyond anything the hypnotists had discovered, for the manifestations of it so far transcended any experiment on record as to seem supernatural, though, of course, I could not admit anything as being supernatural as a matter of fact.

I even thought of the scriptural phrase describing those who were "possessed of a devil," or by a devil, as it would now be written and the phrase seemed to fit my friend's condition most admirably; but there was one particular in which I thought I could see a reasonable hope.

He had declared that it was a man who was looking at him in the mirror, and, more than that, he had recognized the man.

It was my business to find out who this man was and contest with him on his own ground. I was so far carried away by the extraordinary circumstances of the case as to find myself wondering whether it might really be a devil masquerading as a man, in which case I might very probably be worsted in the contest. That thought, however, I am recording only to show how gravely I was affected by the sit-

uation. I put it from me at the time impatiently and resolutely.

Proceeding thus cautiously with an overbold experiment, I had first to demonstrate that I had actually hypnotized John Morrill before attempting to make him tell me what he was unable to tell of his own volition. This, however, proved to be easy, and I did it to my entire satisfaction.

I knew that John Morrill detested tobacco in any form, and, taking a lead-pencil from my vest-pocket, I said to him peremptorily: "Smoke this cigar."

He took it unhesitatingly, and, putting it in his mouth, bit off the end. Then, striking a match which I handed to him, he went through the motions of a smoker.

It was perfectly evident that the experiment was successful so far. He was entirely unconscious of the absurdity of what he was doing.

Then, fully realizing the gravity of my next step, I took it, though I doubt if I would have done so if I had foreseen the immediate consequences, for they were fairly appalling at the time.

I said to him: "Tell me who it was you saw looking at you out of the mirror." And he answered without the slightest hesitation or emotion: "It was Benjamin Gregory."

I had heard the name before, for I knew of the changes in his bank; but for the moment I did not recall it. "Who is Benjamin Gregory?" I asked, and he said: "He is my cashier."

"What do you know about him?"

"I thought I knew all about him," said Morrill, "but now I am very doubtful. There is something I do not know, but what it is I do not understand."

"Can you get him to come here now?"

"I can send for him."

"Do so," I said, and, turning to his table, he wrote a short note, sealed it, and rang for his man.

I kept my eyes fixed steadily on him, for I would not run any chance of losing the control I had gained over him, and as I looked I studied the manner of his acts, watching intently for some indication of a knowledge on his part of what he was doing, but there was none.

From the time that he took the pencil from me he had acted and spoken like a cunningly constructed automaton without an impulse or emotion of his own, doing absolutely nothing whatever excepting what I willed him to do. And this condition continued for many hours, being only interrupted briefly once, as will appear, by a phenomenon for which I was not responsible.

The man came, and Morrill handed him the note without a word. He was too well trained to misunderstand or to show curiosity, but I was unwilling that he should perceive anything unusual, and I said to him: "Bring Mr. Gregory back with you."

He knew me perfectly well, and apparently took it that the errand was mine, as indeed it was, so with a mere glance at his master, as if to see that he approved, he bowed and went out. John Morrill's people all loved him and served him well.

While the man was gone, which was probably half an hour, I had leisure to think over the course of action I should take if Gregory appeared.

It would, of course, depend on his attitude and the developments of the interview; but one thing, I considered, would be absolutely indispensable—all relations between this man and John Morrill must be broken off as completely as possible and without delay. There could be no hope in any half measures.

So, after determining on this, I said to Morrill: "John, when Gregory comes in, if he does come, tell him to resign his position as cashier in your bank."

As I think it over now I can fully understand that I was meddling with

his business affairs in a most unconscionable fashion. I could have said nothing to a business man like John Morrill that was better calculated to provoke a stern rebuke; but I was so fully awake to the peril of the situation that I was prepared to take any step that seemed necessary, and I was greatly relieved when he, instead of reproving me indignantly, as I half expected him to do, notwithstanding his condition, sat motionless and expressionless as he heard my words.

If I had not known the condition he was in I might well have thought that he did not even hear me.

As it was, I was satisfied on that point, and, as I reflected, I would get the advantage of the first blow in the struggle that I foresaw with Benjamin Gregory. How great or how small that advantage might prove to be I had no means of telling; but I could not doubt that a man who had gone as far as he had done would refuse to abandon the ground he had gained without fighting to retain it.

For I was already convinced of what afterward proved to be the truth, incredible as it still seems to be.

Then John Morrill and I sat in silence, I preparing myself as well as I was able for an unprecedented experience, and he seemingly without a thought of any kind in his mind.

It took all the force I could summon to enable me to stand the strain of the unnatural situation, and I was wrought up to a high pitch of excitement when the door opened and the man ushered Benjamin Gregory into the library.

CHAPTER IV.

The Encounter.

I HAD never seen him before, and in the mental turmoil of the hour that had just passed I had given no thought as to what he would look like; but I was conscious of being surprised at his appearance when he entered.

I imagine I had unconsciously pictured him as something resembling ordinary humanity in his general outlines, but with an uncanny look of power and malevolence. What I saw was a gentleman in evening dress, who could not at the first glance have been distinguished from any one of the hundreds you may see at the opera-house almost any evening.

There was, however, a look in his eyes that, once perceived, made everything else about him insignificant. They were most unusually large eyes, set deep under brows that were almost cavernous.

I find myself unable to remember the rest of his face with any clearness. The eyes, however, as I was presently to learn, could be expressionless at one moment and eloquent of many things the next. His voice was that of a man of culture, quiet and well modulated.

He bowed slightly to Morrill as he entered the room, paying no attention to me, as was natural and correct.

When the man had withdrawn Morrill said without preface: "I have sent for you, Mr. Gregory, to say that you must resign your position at the bank immediately." They were the last words he uttered until hours later.

I naturally expected some manifestation of surprise from Gregory, but his poise was perfect.

"I presume," he said coolly, "that you will tell me the reason for such abruptness." Gently and suavely as he spoke, it seemed to me that he was gathering his energies for a determined effort to maintain the advantage he had obtained over the man who was ostensibly his master, but whom he had made his puppet.

A mere look was all he gave Morrill; then, seeming to realize immediately that he would get no explanation from that quarter, he turned to me.

"This is your doing, Dr. Harmon," he said abruptly.

As I think of it now it seems probable that he thought to surprise me by calling me by name, but it was no un-

usual experience for me to be so addressed by strangers, and I was too carefully on guard to betray surprise if I had felt any.

His words were a peremptory challenge, and I accepted it instantly.

"You have said it," I answered as crisply as he.

"Then I will ask you the reason for making so strange a demand of a man of whom it is evident that you know nothing."

"It is enough that I have reasons," I said, "and before I discuss them I insist that you comply with the demand. I do not propose to parley with you while you remain an employee of Mr. Morrill's."

"Oh, very well," he said with an open sneer, and, seizing a pen, he wrote a few lines rapidly and offered me the paper.

"There is my resignation," he continued. "You will realize, no doubt, that it is of no importance whatever. My relations with Mr. Morrill will remain exactly as they were after you have exhausted your futile attempt to interfere in what does not concern you."

It was, of course, open to me to refuse all discussion with him and leave the matter to Morrill's decision when he should be himself again; but I felt that this would be indeed futile, since Gregory would undoubtedly resume, or try to resume, his sway over his victim, as he was indirectly threatening to do.

My business was to discover if possible the nature of that sway, and the means by which it had been established, and the immediate step was to continue to talk with Gregory.

Therefore, I was pleased, rather than displeased, when he went on: "I have complied with your demand, foolish as it was, and as you must see that it was, and now I demand of you the reason for it, since Mr. Morrill is in no condition to explain at present."

"My reason," I said, "is that it is essential to Mr. Morrill's safety that

all connection between you and him should be entirely severed."

"You are fencing," he said quietly. "My connection with him is merely a business one, and has been maintained with scrupulous care on both sides. The books of the bank will prove that there has not been the least irregularity. What excuse has Dr. Harmon for interfering with it?"

"I know nothing and care nothing about your business connection," I replied, "excepting so far as it has enabled you to exert an influence over Mr. Morrill which no man is justified in exerting over another."

"Nevertheless," he interrupted, "you have yourself tried in a most bungling fashion to do precisely what you most unjustly accuse me of. I have read enough of the latest fad in your profession to know that you have hypnotized Mr. Morrill."

"He is to all appearance entirely unconscious of what is going on in his presence. What do you suppose his attitude will be when he realizes that you have presumed to interfere with his business affairs?"

It was plain that he was trying to put me on the defensive, and that I could not allow.

"It is you who are fencing now," I said. "I repeat that his business affairs are no concern of mine, but John Morrill is my friend as well as my patient, and I propose to rid him of the spell you have in some unaccountable way cast over him."

"His mind is filled with disordered fancies of unspeakable crimes which you have managed to implant there, and he is filled with such horror at his own condition as you cannot understand."

"I can very well understand that a man who has always been upright should feel a certain horror at himself if he thinks of becoming a criminal, as you accuse your friend of doing, but your statement is wildly absurd. Your own mind is evidently disordered. How do you know that he is in the

condition you describe, and how can you possibly connect me with it?"

That was one point which he seemed not to understand, and I was careful not to enlighten him.

"It would not be possible for a person of your caliber," I retorted contemptuously, "to have even a faint comprehension of the horror an honorable man would experience at the realization of such a condition as you have brought him to. That, however, is unimportant."

"The matter to be determined is your absolute withdrawal from your infamous attempt to pervert John Morrill. I insist, therefore, that you cease from all communication with him and let him alone entirely. Since you have been discovered, it would be useless for you to persist in your effort."

"This is mere madness," he said, shrugging his shoulders. I knew from his eyes that he realized the fact that he was indeed detected, but his affectation of indifference was a bit of admirable acting, and I saw that he would still be a formidable adversary.

"As nearly as I can understand what seems to be incomprehensible," he continued, "you are charging me with being in some way responsible for some sudden outburst of depravity in the mind of your friend."

"Putting aside, for a moment, the absurdity of such an accusation against him, it seems plain that if he has gone astray mentally or morally, the person who has perverted him is yourself. It is you who have hypnotized him. What grounds have you for accusing me of doing it?"

"Both Mr. Morrill and I have positive knowledge on that point," I said, "but I shall not play into your hands by telling you how we learned it. It is enough to warn you that any further attempt on your part will be made at your peril."

"What you might have succeeded in doing if you had not been found out is conjectural only, though it is not

hard to imagine your intention. You are a most dangerous villain beyond a doubt, but with a knowledge of what you are doing it will not be difficult to defeat your purpose."

"It would be easy for me to call you a fool," he replied with deliberate insolence, "if I were coarse enough to bandy epithets with you, but you will permit me to say that you serve no purpose by stooping to intemperate language."

"For your own sake you should be more considerate. Think a little. You are not talking to an inferior. My own standing among men is not less honorable than yours, though I cannot claim Dr. Harmon's eminence in the professional world; eminence, by the way, which he is likely to forfeit should he make public the extraordinary behavior he is guilty of just now."

"You cannot substantiate any charge against me, and yet you are undertaking to destroy my career and my character. It would not be hard to injure yours by telling some of your brother physicians what you have done to-night."

I winced inwardly, knowing the truth of this, but my conviction as to his guilt was too positive for me to waver even slightly.

"Nevertheless," I said very distinctly and deliberately, "I demand of you once more that you abandon the exercise of the devilish art, whatever it is, which has enabled you to control your master as you have done. More than that, I warn you that you are a marked man from this time on. Any further attempt by you to practise that art at the expense of Mr. Morrill, or any one else, will be made at your peril."

He looked at me curiously for a moment, and then said:

"It is still difficult to understand you, and even more difficult to take you seriously. May I ask what you propose to do if I treat this as an unaccountable outburst of insanity on

your part and go on, as I certainly shall do, attending to my own affairs in my own way, precisely as if I had not had the pleasure of meeting you?"

His tone was even more insolently defiant than his words.

I saw that he fancied he had brought me to the end of my resources, not seeing any way in which I could interfere with him if he should indeed ignore me, as he evidently intended to do, and if he should endeavor, at least, to retain his mastery of John Morrill.

But I also saw, or thought I saw, to my inward satisfaction, that he was surprised and disconcerted when I said quietly: "In that case I shall hand you over to the police."

"It is not possible that you mean what you say!" he exclaimed; but I replied: "I most certainly do."

"That would be, of course, an awkward thing for me," he said, "and perhaps it might be somewhat serious for a time. There is a certain stigma in the fact of being arrested, even when there is no definite charge that can be brought to justify it. But if you will think a moment, Dr. Harmon, you must realize that it would be much more serious for you, and even calamitous to your friend, the Wall Street banker."

"In the first place, you would have to produce evidence of some offense of mine to substantiate any accusation you might bring against me, and this you would be unable to do. My accounts at the bank, as I have already told you, are correct to a cent, and I defy you or any other man to put his finger on any unlawful act that I have ever committed."

"If you should go into court with any such cock-and-bull charge as you have made here to-night the judge would probably order an examination made to determine whether you are really as insane as your words indicate. Moreover, I would most assuredly bring a suit against you for false imprisonment, and would undoubtedly obtain heavy damages."

"But," he continued, "the result would be even more disastrous to the friend whom you say you are trying to serve. The good name of a banker is his most valuable asset. How long do you think his credit would last if it were known that he is, as you say he is, preparing to embezzle the money intrusted to him?"

I had not said anything of the sort, and this slip, the only one he made in the entire conversation, was proof enough that Morrill's story was true, in part at least. This man knew what was in Morrill's mind.

I was filled with a sort of cold fury at the thought, and it stiffened my resolution, though it was true enough, as he had pointed out, that an appeal to the law might be hard to justify and would very probably prove to be futile.

His jeering suggestion of insanity was negligibly unimportant, but I would certainly risk my reputation for professional skepticism should I declare publicly the conclusion I had formed. At this point it may be well to say that I would never have written this account of the case had it not been for the final outcome of it.

However, I could see no alternative at the time.

It was likely enough that a resort to criminal proceedings would appear banal enough, but I felt, as keenly as Morrill had felt, the necessity of getting some help in coping with such a monster as I had discovered, and I determined to persist.

He looked at me with an air of triumph, evidently believing that I must acknowledge the force of his argument, but I answered him promptly.

"Nevertheless," I said, "I shall hand you over to the police."

"Very well," he retorted with a show of indifference. "Then there is nothing more for me to say at present." And he leaned back in his chair, offering no further protest or comment, while I scribbled a short note to

Police Inspector Byrnes, who was at that time in charge of the detective bureau at police headquarters.

I had more than an ordinary acquaintance with that unusual man.

If any one could handle so difficult a case as this promised to be, without injury to any innocent person, and with proper severity toward a malefactor, it would be he. Under the administration of the law which was then in existence wide latitude was given to him in the employment of such methods as he deemed expedient, and his efficiency had been well proven.

Suave and self-possessed in his manner, he was prompt and determined in handling the problems that presented themselves to him in the many perplexing cases that were referred to him from time to time. Whatever else might be said of him, there was no question as to his tact, or as to the vigor with which he would act, should action be required.

I felt that it would be safe to appeal to him, if indeed there were any safety in the step I was taking.

I wrote the note, and, ringing for Morrill's man, I told him to take it to police headquarters and deliver it personally to Inspector Byrnes. Should he not find him there, he was to find him as quickly as possible and bring me an answer forthwith.

When the man had gone I faced Gregory again, not having looked at him directly for a little time. His eyes were fixed on Morrill with an expression of virulent malevolence such as I have never seen before or since.

It actually seemed to flow from him like a darting flame. Involuntarily I looked at Morrill, and for a moment I could not believe what I saw, he was so wondrously changed.

He was a man of more than average stature and had been sitting erect in a dignified, easy position, the picture of a vigorous man in perfect health, but in the short interval since I had looked at him before he had collapsed.

His attitude remained almost the

same, but it seemed as if he had suddenly shrunk to pitifully small proportions, so that his clothing appeared to belong to some one else.

I do not say that he was actually reduced in size as he seemed to be, but that was the impression I caught. It was as if the flame from Gregory's eyes was withering him away.

His head sagged forward, and the pallor of approaching death was on his face. His hand, which had rested easily on the arm of his chair, had slipped off and now dangled at the end of a lifeless arm.

"What are you doing?" I almost shouted at Gregory, so great was my consternation.

"Another silly question," he said mockingly. "I am doing nothing whatever, as you see for yourself." And it was true that he had not stirred from his seat, but there was no question as to what was happening.

"You are killing this man," I retorted. "He will not live five minutes."

"I really do not think he will," said Gregory with calm indifference; "but how can you imagine that I—"

"Then I'll tell you what will happen," I interrupted, drawing my revolver from my pocket and leveling it at him. "If you do not restore him to health in less than that time I will blow your brains out."

There are many well-meaning, short-sighted people who inveigh bitterly at the habit of carrying firearms, and I am not prepared to deny that there is some force in the arguments they advance against it.

My own opinion, however, is that it is well for a man to be prepared, so far as he can, for any emergency that may arise, and it has happened to me more than once that I have derived considerable satisfaction from the knowledge that I could protect myself, if necessary, by the use of a pistol, but never until that moment was I so rejoiced as I was then to think that I carried one.

On the instant I saw that I had reached Gregory's vulnerable point—the only one I had discovered.

He was mortally afraid of physical violence. His face changed as suddenly as if he had dropped a mask, and in place of the insolent indifference he had displayed up to that point he showed cowardly fear. Instead of speaking calmly and smoothly, as he had been doing, he fairly stammered. "You ruffian!" he said. "Put down that gun!"

"Do what I say," I returned, "or I will certainly use it."

It was the only argument that remained, but even as I advanced it I felt more than doubtful of the issue. I could not doubt this man's power, superhuman as it was, to deal death by the exercise of his will, for he was actually doing it in my presence, but it did not follow from that necessarily that he was also able to restore life to a dying man by a similar miracle.

Nevertheless I realized that no other way remained open in which John Morrill could be saved.

As a physician I knew that I could not cope with the cause of his condition, not understanding it in the very least, but as a man I could not only threaten, but act, and I was wrought to such a pitch that I would assuredly have shot his murderer without hesitation and regardless of consequences had it not been for the slender chance that he would be able to undo his fiendish work as readily as he was doing it.

I read in his face immediately that I had succeeded.

There was no error in his instant perception of the situation, and he tried no argument with me. His own terror of death was unmistakable, but he made no appeal, evidently realizing that he had himself only one chance.

The expression of his face changed incredibly. In place of the malignant hate that blazed from his eyes a moment before there came a look of

beneficence as he turned them upon Morrill again.

He did not change his attitude nor speak a word, but as I glanced back and forth from him to Morrill in fearful anxiety I saw Morrill's appearance change. The pallor disappeared from his face and his natural color came back.

He straightened up slowly in his seat, or seemed to do so, and to increase again to his former size, though the change was gradual rather than sudden. Long before the five minutes had expired, however, he looked again as he had before. His arm still hung beside him, but it no longer seemed to be the arm of a dead man.

I did not dare at that moment to withdraw my attention from Gregory long enough to make any thorough examination of Morrill's condition, but I waited till I was satisfied from his appearance that he was not in any immediate danger, which, as I said, was only a matter of moments. Then I spoke.

"Have you restored him completely?" I said. "I must take your word for it for the present, but you hardly need be told of the consequences if you try to deceive me."

"He is in precisely the same condition that he was when I entered the room. I have not undone the effects of your own clumsy experiment in elementary hypnotism," replied Gregory with sullen malice; "but otherwise he is normal. Now put away that gun. There is no more to be said between us and I will not talk under duress."

"Never mind about the gun," I retorted, still holding it aimed at him. "I find it is the only argument you respect, and I may need it at any moment. Now I demand of you again that you wholly abandon the attempt you are making on John Morrill and leave him unmolested in future."

"And again I refuse to say anything so foolish," he replied. "It is true enough that you have stumbled

into a partial understanding of John Morrill's condition, but evidently you fail to see that it is I, not you, who can make demands and enforce them.

"You might, of course, carry out your threat of shooting me but for the fact that you are a greater coward than I. You have not the courage to kill me in cold blood, whatever you might have done a moment ago on a sudden impulse. I defy you to shoot, though you are at this moment considering whether to do it."

This made me shudder again, for it was perfectly true. I was trying to justify in my own mind the impulse I felt, and I was unable to do it.

Seeing my quandary, he went on with a sort of swaggering exultance:

"Consider the peril you are in yourself. It will be perfectly easy for me at the moment your friend the inspector enters to make you turn that pistol against John Morrill and kill him. In that case what would be your situation?"

"You talk wildly," I exclaimed, but I knew that he was thoroughly aware of my sudden fear lest he might indeed be able to do even that, for I had no standard by which I could gauge the extent of his power, and he went on as if explaining to a child:

"It would, of course, devolve upon me to explain the murder, and I would testify that I had been summoned by Mr. Morrill for a consultation as to the possibility of complying with your demand for some unreasonable sum of money; that I had advised against it, and that Mr. Morrill had refused, after a long discussion, to advance it, and that you, in an outburst of rage, had killed him.

"Your own plain statement of the actual facts would not be listened to for a moment, and no jury on earth would even want to hear my denial of any such story as would be the only defense you could make. On the other hand, your friend, the inspector, would be compelled to corroborate me as to the essential part of my story."

This was not all that he said, for he continued at great length to picture the hopelessness of any attempt I could make to clear myself from the consequences of the crime he was proposing to make me commit.

But I paid little attention to anything more, for as he talked I thought I could see how he was proposing to himself to accomplish it.

It was plain that he was trying to set up a control of my will power similar to that which he had established over Morrill's. Had it not been for my positive knowledge of what he had done it would have seemed a preposterous attempt, and I would have given it no consideration whatever, but in view of what I had just seen it seemed clear that my only safety lay in opposing my strength to his.

That it would be a desperate struggle I had no doubt, and I would not have entered it willingly, but there was nothing else I could do. I dared not leave him alone with Morrill, and it was impossible to get assistance till Inspector Byrnes should arrive, if indeed the man should succeed in bringing him.

So began the most remarkable duel that ever occurred since Jacob wrestled all night with the angel, and it was purely a mental encounter, for neither of us stirred from our seats.

More than once as I strove mightily to throw off the influence that I could feel, though I cannot describe it, I tried to nerve myself to use the pistol I had in my hand, but I could not do it. To that extent he certainly prevailed against me. Happily he succeeded in nothing more.

Had he taken me unawares I cannot say what the outcome might have been. As it was, I had need of all my strength to keep from being overmastered. I have only a confused recollection of the time that passed before the inspector arrived, but as I recall it I seem to have been like one swimming for his life against what felt like an almost resistless torrent.

At last the man came back, bringing Inspector Byrnes with him, and I doubt if that official, wide as his experience was, ever discovered so strange a situation as we three presented.

Morrill remained as he had been for what seemed to me an age, a mere lay figure, making no response to the inspector's salutation. Gregory was equally impassive, having evidently determined to say nothing till called upon.

He had been defeated in his supreme effort, but there was no telling what resources he had in reserve. I was myself almost entirely exhausted, and must have shown it in my appearance, for the inspector looked at me, and at the pistol in my hand, very curiously.

"I have sent for you, inspector," I said without preface as soon as the man had withdrawn, "to ask you to make an arrest. This man here is Mr. Morrill's cashier, Benjamin Gregory. I charge him with having attempted to kill Mr. Morrill in my presence just now, he having been detected in serious wrong-doing and forced to resign his position in Morrill's bank. His written resignation lies there on the table. If I had not been armed and had not threatened him with this pistol he would have succeeded."

"This is a serious charge, doctor," said the inspector. "What has Mr. Morrill to say?" And he turned toward him.

"Mr. Morrill can say nothing just now," I replied. "He has been hypnotized, and any words he might utter at present would be put in his mouth either by myself or Gregory. He was unconscious of the attempt on his life, but he will corroborate the other part of the charge when he recovers consciousness."

"Then what does Mr. Gregory say?" asked the inspector, turning to him.

"I do not know what I can say, excepting that the whole thing is incomprehensible to me," answered Gregory.

"I was sent for by Mr. Morrill an hour or so ago, and on arriving found him as you see him now. Dr. Harmon says he has been hypnotized, and I presume that may be true, though I do not pretend to understand anything about hypnotism. At all events, he has not spoken or stirred since I came in.

"Dr. Harmon, however, has acted most strangely, and it appears to me that he has gone mad. He accused me of having embezzled money from the bank, and when I laughed at him, knowing that no such charge could be substantiated, he drew a pistol and demanded that I write my resignation.

"I did that readily enough, knowing, of course, that it would mean nothing under the circumstances, and not caring to argue with a madman. Then he sent for you, and held me at the point of the pistol till you came. That is all I know."

The inspector looked back at me, and I realized the hopelessness of entering on an argument against so plausible a statement.

It would all have to be thrashed out later on, as a matter of course, but my present concern was to have Gregory removed in safe keeping for the time, so that I could give my attention to Morrill, whose condition certainly demanded it.

"I repeat the charge," I said. "Mr. Morrill's life is not safe with that man at large, and he will substantiate what I say when he is himself again. Until then it is a question of veracity between us two, and there is no way to settle it. I have prevented the murder once, but I warn you, inspector, that this man is the most dangerous criminal I ever heard of."

I stopped at that, knowing I could add nothing to it, and seeing that the inspector was already inclined to think I was unduly excited.

"I need not warn you in return," he said, "that it is a serious matter to bring such charges against a man in Mr. Gregory's position. If you insist

upon it I will arrest him, but it is you and not I who will be responsible for it. You will have to appear in court to-morrow morning against him. It will be in Jefferson Market, and you must be there by nine o'clock. Meantime you'd better give me that pistol."

"I will be there," I said, handing him the weapon, "and I take the full responsibility."

"Then come with me," said the inspector, and Gregory arose readily enough without a word.

CHAPTER V.

The Next Morning.

AT seven o'clock in the morning I was forced to acknowledge that I was, to all appearance, beaten.

I had failed entirely to restore Morrill to consciousness. For a long time I tried alone, save for what assistance I had from his man and his house-keeper, to rouse him from the condition he was in, but though I felt positive that I had withdrawn the hypnotic influence which I had myself exercised over him, he remained inert.

I could detect no symptoms of his physical condition that seemed in the least degree abnormal, but on the other hand there was no evidence whatever that he had mental perception of anything. It was as if his mind was dead, and his body in perfect health.

As the morning came on, and I reflected on the circumstances of the night, I was greatly alarmed at the prospect of the coming day.

There was a serious situation for me to face in the police court, for it was plain that I would not be able to count on Morrill to back up the charge I had made, and my own position in face of the plausible denial that Gregory would be sure to make, would be gravely embarrassing; but that gave me comparatively little concern.

I could probably obtain a postponement of the case by certifying as a physician that my principal witness

was too ill to appear in court, or if I should decide that to be unadvisable, I could withdraw my charge and stand the consequences of the suit for damages which Gregory had threatened.

That might be of serious importance to me, but it seemed trivial in comparison with the consequences that might follow at the bank in the absence of the two men who had charge of its affairs. I was too ignorant of the details of business to determine how grave the situation would be, or to advise as to what should be done in the emergency, but it was plain that I must do something since I was responsible for having brought it about.

Fortunately, I was well acquainted with William Wright, who was John Morrill's counsel, a man of strong common sense and learned in the law.

There could be no better man to consult as to what should be done with reference to the bank's affairs, nor, under the circumstances, could there be a better man for me to retain as my own counsel in the legal difficulties in which I had involved myself.

Moreover, it was clear that Morrill would have to be under the constant supervision of a competent physician until he should regain his senses. I could not bring myself to admit the probability that he might never regain them, yet I saw that even that might happen.

For the time, however, he could not be left alone, and it was imperative that the physician attending him should have a thorough understanding of the case, so I resolved to send for Mr. Wright and my own office assistant, Allan Smith, and to explain the situation to them both at the same time.

Therefore, at eight o'clock I was telling the story of the night to them while Mrs. Grannis, Morrill's elderly and estimable housekeeper, sat beside him with his door open, under strict orders to call for me instantly if any change should appear in his condition.

It was natural that my two listeners

should be deeply impressed by what I told, but I saw with satisfaction that Allan Smith's interest was entirely professional, and that he, having studied hypnotism with me, was less surprised than another man would have been by so strange a recital.

Mr. Wright's attitude, on the other hand, I found extremely disconcerting. It was plain enough from the beginning that he was skeptical, not as to the occurrences, but as to my interpretation of them.

He had evidently no faith whatever in any theory of hypnotism regarding it, as the outside world generally did at that time, as a fanciful explanation of phenomena which physicians were unable to understand, and which were of doubtful authenticity at the best.

His reason revolted at being asked to believe that any man, especially any such a man as John Morrill, could possibly have any such experiences as that which I was narrating.

Moreover, having an abrupt and authoritative habit of speech, he did not hesitate to declare that I had acted with extreme folly from the very beginning, and that in having procured Gregory's arrest, I had blundered grossly.

"No judge or jury on earth," he said, "would give a moment of consideration to any such story. Much less would they listen to such a charge as you say you intend to make against a man of Mr. Gregory's standing. I don't mind telling you that your case is absolutely hopeless."

"Possibly so," I answered, "but there is no time to argue that question just now. I shall ask you to do the best you can with it when it comes up, but the matter immediately in hand is to determine what is to be done at the bank."

"God bless my soul! So it is," he exclaimed in great perturbation. "It is more serious than I perceived. Do you say that Morrill will be unable to go to the bank this morning?"

"I cannot say what may happen in

two hours," I replied, "but at present he is certainly unable to do so, and I see no reason to suppose that he will come to himself for a time."

"And Gregory will not be there," he said, still more perturbed as he began to realize the situation.

"Not unless he escapes from the police," said I rather sarcastically, for, to say the truth, I was somewhat nettled at his attitude.

"Then we must have Lang here at once," he said; "but he must be told as little as possible of this preposterous farrago of witchcraft. If such a batch of nonsense gets to be talked about it will do Morrill a vast deal of harm."

I was tempted to retort hotly, but the unwisdom of an argument at that time was too apparent, and when I learned who Lang was, I agreed readily.

So Lang was sent for and presently appeared.

He seemed greatly surprised to learn that neither Morrill nor Gregory would be at the bank that morning, and I fancied for a moment that he had some inkling of more than Mr. Wright told him, for I let Wright do the talking. This impression I dismissed, however, when I saw how steadily he replied to Wright's questions.

He could attend to the business easily enough, he said, if the safe could be opened, but he did not know the combination, and without getting at the books he would be helpless to do anything.

And Mr. Morrill himself, he added, was the only one who could open the safe. The manufacturers might do it, but they certainly would not without an order from Mr. Morrill personally.

"If he cares to trust me with the combination," he said, "there will be no trouble, but—"

He said no more, but his gesture was eloquent of dismay. Wright and I looked at each other. There was only one thing possible, and I went to Morrill's bedside, putting Mrs. Gran-

nis out of the room and closing the door.

To my great surprise, when I asked him to write the combination for Lang's use, he did so unhesitatingly. In a sense, this seemed encouraging, but when I tried to converse with him, he paid no further attention to me, and the thought came to me that he was still under Gregory's influence, and that he had given up his secret in obedience to Gregory's will.

The thought was terrifying, indicating as it did that I was playing into Gregory's hand, but I put it from me, saying to myself that I was overwrought by the events of the night, and was becoming absurdly fanciful. Calling Dr. Allan Smith to take my place, I joined the others, and gave Lang the paper.

He looked at it, saying nothing, but showing by his expression that it was what he had asked for.

Then, after he had departed, Mr. Wright and I set out for the police court.

CHAPTER VI.

The Police Inspector's Account.

MR. MORRILL never applied to me for information about the man whom he took in as cashier of his bank after his old cashier died, but if he had done so I could have told him, nothing to Benjamin Gregory's discredit, though I knew a great deal about him, as I did about most of the men who were at all connected with the transaction of important business in Wall Street at that time. It was my business to know.

So when Gregory became somewhat prominent, as he did, I investigated him as a matter of routine duty.

The only thing I learned which might have made me distrust him was that he had left several situations in different financial houses, one after another, but this, I learned, was in each instance a change for the better,

and was therefore evidence in his favor, rather than against him.

He was a bachelor, and he had one acquaintance that he probably considered entirely secret, but as it involved him in no scandal and in no pecuniary extravagance for a man of his income, there seemed to be no reason to expect any serious consequences from that.

It was therefore no concern of mine. Aside from that, all that I learned about him was wholly favorable.

So, naturally, I had no thought of him in my mind when I received an urgent note from Dr. Harmon asking me to come to him at once at Mr. Morrill's house. Gregory was there, however, when I arrived.

Dr. Harmon's explanation of his reason for sending for me was certainly remarkable. If it had been made by an ordinary man I would have set it down as a wild dream, but there was some evidence to show that it was at least partially true, and coming from him I could not ignore it.

He had Gregory covered with a pistol, and he charged him with having attempted to kill Mr. Morrill by hypnotic suggestion, as he called it.

I knew, of course, in a general way, something about hypnotism, though all that I had ever seen of it seemed to me to be rank humbug; but there was no question about Mr. Morrill being in some strange condition.

He made no answer when I spoke to him, and so far as I could judge he did not even know that I was in the room, though he seemed to be wide awake and physically uninjured. I can only explain it by saying that he appeared to be dazed, but that is hardly correct. He did not look confused, but seemed to be entirely unconscious of what was going on.

Gregory spoke plausibly enough, claiming that he did not understand what Dr. Harmon was talking about, but I perceived that the question was not one that I could decide without se-

rious risk of committing an error, one way or the other.

It was one to be settled in court if it should prove possible to settle it at all. My safest course would be to arrest Gregory, to hold Dr. Harmon responsible for the arrest, and to pass up to the court the responsibility of discharging the prisoner if the evidence should appear insufficient to justify his detention. I had no mind to be held accountable for so serious a matter as arresting an innocent man or letting a guilty man go.

I therefore told Gregory he must come with me to headquarters, and we left the house together. As we walked across Washington Square, he said: "Inspector, I am so taken aback by this amazing action of Dr. Harmon's that I hardly know what to say."

"It would be best for you to say nothing," I advised him, for I was doubtful of the charge against him, and did not wish, without further light on the subject, to entangle him in any compromising statement. Had it been an ordinary case I would have encouraged him to talk, though as the law required, I would have warned him, as I did, that whatever he might say would be likely to be used against him.

"You know," I continued, "that what you tell me will be evidence in the case."

"That is exactly what I had in mind," he answered. "So I was going to ask you to excuse me from saying anything."

It was rather amusing, under the circumstances; but I was, on the whole, favorably impressed, for he had the bearing of a man who appreciated the gravity of his position, without being greatly alarmed by it. So there was nothing more said between us.

I had him put in one of the cells at headquarters, and in the morning I detailed Officer Lanigan to take him to court.

About an hour later two officers brought Lanigan back to my office, reporting that they had found him sit-

ting on a bench in Washington Square, apparently unconscious of anything that was going on around him. They had brought him in without difficulty, but had been unable to get him to explain how he came to be sitting there. And they had seen nothing of Gregory.

In the light of what Dr. Harmon had told me the night before, I had no difficulty in surmising what afterward proved to be the truth, though it was some hours before Lanigan was able to give an account of the facts. And while I was trying to get his story, Dr. Harmon and Mr. Wright came to the office.

They had been to the court, and not finding the prisoner there, had come directly to me for an explanation. Under the circumstances, I could have asked for nothing better, and I took them both to the inner room where I had Lanigan.

The doctor examined him carefully and then declared that he was, as I had supposed, in a hypnotic condition. He said the influence would probably pass away in a few hours, but that for the present there was nothing that could be done excepting to keep him undisturbed and wait.

Mr. Wright was plainly incredulous at first, but the evidence was too strong; and he admitted, after a time, that no other explanation seemed possible. Then he made what I considered a most sensible suggestion.

"No one outside of us three knows what has happened," he said, "and until Gregory is found, if he ever is found, it would seem best that no one else should know anything about it. If Gregory really has the power that Dr. Harmon says he has—and this officer's condition certainly seems to indicate that he has something of the sort—we will all have enough to do in watching for his next move.

"Dr. Harmon had best go back to Morrill's house and remain with him. I will go to the bank; for, although Gregory will not be likely to make his appearance there, he may try in some

way to make trouble, and in the mean time I assume that the inspector will make every possible effort to find him. It seems evident that nothing is safe while he is at large. The whole thing is incomprehensible to me, but it is necessary to admit facts; and the facts, so far as they appear, are certainly alarming."

We all agreed to this, and they went away. I immediately sent out as many men as I could spare, with instructions to look for Gregory and bring him to me immediately, and then sat down with Lanigan to wait.

When he came to himself he told a straight story, though it was one I would not have listened to if I had heard it twenty-four hours earlier.

He said that he had started for the police court, as I had instructed him to, with his prisoner, and had gone as far as the square without anything happening. As they crossed the square, however, and were nearing the center of it, Gregory suddenly stopped and faced him.

When he looked in some surprise to see what had happened, he found Gregory's eyes fixed on him with a curious stare. It seemed, he said, as if they fairly blazed, and he felt as if fascinated. His own eyes remained fixed on Gregory's, and the only memory he had of what followed was that he gradually lost consciousness.

That was all we knew about Gregory till after it happened.

CHAPTER VII.

What the Lawyer Learned.

IN justice to myself, I wish to record at the outset my absolute disbelief in the conclusions which Dr. Harmon draws from a series of events in which he and I were professionally and intimately involved.

There is no doubt in my mind of the accuracy of his statement of the facts concerning which he is the only witness. Extraordinary as they were, the cor-

roboration of his story by the equally surprising occurrences that followed seems ample, and I am forced to admit that he tells the story truthfully so far as the actual occurrences go; but my reason rebels against his interpretation of them.

Still, it is true that I am unable to explain them in any other way than he does. Facts are facts, and cannot be denied, even though they cannot always be explained. And it seems to me the part of wisdom to accept them as inexplicable when they are conclusively proven, rather than to theorize about them in a manner that is repugnant to the dictates of common sense and the well-established laws of nature.

In setting down what I personally know of the circumstances in this case, therefore, I do not pretend to offer any explanation of them.

They parallel nothing within my knowledge, excepting the old-time stories of witchcraft and demoniac obsessions, which I have always regarded as unworthy of belief by any excepting the ignorant and superstitious. But, since what has happened may happen again, I record them that they may be of service in the future in determining the law governing them, whatever that may be.

When Dr. Harmon called me into the case and told me of what had happened during the preceding night, I certainly thought, what he said Mr. Gregory had claimed, that he had gone suddenly mad.

A more preposterous story I never heard. Only one thing deterred me from following my first impulse, which was politely to excuse myself and leave the house to attend to business I had on hand, which seemed to me at the moment to be of more importance.

That one thing was the condition in which John Morrill appeared to be. I had no faith whatever in hypnotism, regarding it, as it was generally regarded at that time, as a modern revival of the fantastic superstition of former days.

Morrill, however, if not hypnotized as Dr. Harmon asserted that he was, was plainly unconscious of his surroundings, though he was not asleep, nor did he appear to be suffering from any injury.

His appearance was natural, but I could not command his attention.

When Dr. Harmon suggested that he would probably be unable to attend to business that day and that the cashier of his bank was under arrest, I discerned a peril in the situation which Dr. Harmon only dimly understood.

In the absence of a responsible head, a mere trifle, no matter what it might be, was liable to make confusion; and confusion of any sort in the business of a bank might mean serious trouble, not necessarily, but possibly.

I therefore sent for Charles Lang, the paying teller, and explained the condition of things to him with some reservations. It was unnecessary and most ill-advised to think of telling him all the details, but it was most needful that he should not be taken by surprise when he found himself in charge of the business.

He did not seem to be surprised, but he staggered me when he said that Morrill himself was the only one who could open the safes. Unless they could be opened, business would necessarily be suspended for the day, and suspension is next door to failure in banking.

On the other hand, John Morrill would not be likely to forgive any one who should wrest his business secrets from him, even though it were done for his own benefit. And as he seemed to be unable to understand anything that was said to him, much less to speak or write, it seemed unlikely that we could learn anything from him.

We were therefore, between the devil and the deep sea.

It was better, however, to incur his anger than to merit it, as we certainly would have done had we remained inactive at such a crisis. Dr. Harmon had undoubtedly acted from worthy

motives, and he could not be blamed severely for the situation; but his interference had made it imperative that we should go a step farther.

I was therefore forced to approve of Lang's suggestion, though he made it hesitatingly, that he would have to be told how to open the safe.

How the secret was obtained from Morrill I do not know. Dr. Harmon got it. At least, he went to Morrill's room, for Morrill had been put to bed before I came to the house; and though I had seen him, Lang had not.

I did not think it advisable that he should see him, so he was merely told that Mr. Morrill was ill, and our conference with him was held in the library.

Harmon returned in a short time with something written on a paper and handed it to Lang. I did not look at it, nor do I think Dr. Harmon had done so, for we were both chary of knowing such a secret. But Lang read it, and seemed to be satisfied that it was what it afterward proved to be, the combination of the bank safe.

Had we foreseen the events of the forenoon, we would not, of course, have done such a thing, and I confess myself equally to blame with Dr. Harmon in meddling with an affair that neither of us fully understood. The necessity for some action, however, was perfectly plain, and we took the only course that seemed possible under the circumstances.

We had, or circumstances had, placed Lang in complete control of Morrill's bank, and we were to that extent responsible for what happened. Morrill was undoubtedly right afterward in holding us fully responsible, but I do not see, even now, what else we could have done.

I knew Lang very well, and I watched him carefully. There was no question about his being agitated.

"This is a great responsibility," he said, "and it seems wrong for me to have it put upon me without Mr. Morrill's personal orders."

But Dr. Harmon told him positively that Morrill could not on any pretext be disturbed for some hours, and I said to him: "Do you feel that you are not equal to the task? If you want any assistance, I will try to get it for you."

"Oh, so far as the transaction of business goes," he said, "there will be no trouble, but I feel almost like a thief in taking charge without being instructed to do so by Mr. Morrill himself."

"That feeling does you credit," I said, realizing that he might very naturally need to be reassured, "but you will have to take it from me that Mr. Morrill desires you to do so." And with this he seemed to be fairly well satisfied, for he knew me as Morrill's counsel. So he started out to business, and Harmon and I went to the police court, for it was nine o'clock.

Gregory was not there and for a moment I almost thought that Dr. Harmon was indeed under a delusion, and that nothing had occurred as he had related it. Obviously the best way to determine the truth was to go direct to Inspector Byrnes, which we did without loss of time, and in a sense I was relieved to learn from him that the facts were as I had been told.

Gregory had certainly been arrested the night before, charged with attempting to kill John Morrill, and though I was still indignant at the thought of Harmon having made such a charge on such grounds, the fact that he had done it and that the inspector had made the arrest gave color to the story.

But Gregory had escaped from the officer who had been sent to take him to court and the officer had been found sitting on a park bench in a dazed condition. He had been brought back to police headquarters and we saw him.

Harmon declared that he had been hypnotized.

Perhaps he had. I do not pretend to say what ailed him, but the inspector had been unable to learn any-

thing from him, and Harmon was no more successful. He was certainly in a curious condition, though Harmon and the inspector agreed that he did not seem to have been physically injured in any way.

So far as it went, this was corroboration of Harmon's story, and for the first time I began to feel serious alarm with regard to what Gregory might attempt next.

I would not admit to myself that he had any such mysterious power as Harmon declared he had, but the facts certainly indicated something of the sort, and though it seemed absurd to me, I felt that I was not justified in ignoring the possibility that he might really be as dangerous as Harmon insisted that he was.

I therefore went directly to the bank, arriving there about ten thirty.

Harmon started back toward Morrill's house, where his responsibility lay, and the inspector undertook to find Gregory and take him into custody again if it should be possible to do so.

At the bank I found Lang seated at the cashier's desk sealing a package of papers, which he handed to a messenger almost at the moment of my entrance.

He looked, as I fancied, somewhat anxious, but appeared to be entirely self-possessed and, so far as I could judge from appearances, confident of his ability to manage the business in any emergency that might arise. There was no sign, however, of any emergency.

The usual air of quiet activity was noticeable, and everything seemed to be going on smoothly.

A stranger would not have suspected the absence of the two principals, and no one behind the guarded counters gave any evidence of being overworked. I saw, of course, being as familiar with the scene as I was, that there had been some shifting of place among the employees, but the strict discipline apparent to a close observer

in any good bank showed no sign of relaxation.

Lang rose immediately on seeing me and led the way to Morrill's room, which was a trifle more retired than the cashier's quarters. I followed, saying nothing till we were alone, but noting with satisfaction the precaution he took against any hint of trouble reaching the other employees.

I asked him again if he required any assistance other than that of the regular force, or any additional supply of money, knowing that it would be easy for me to procure for him all the aid he might need, but he answered, as before, that there was no such necessity existing.

"I would, of course, be glad if Mr. Morrill or Mr. Gregory would come in," he said, "but in their absence I have done very well so far." There was no undue anxiety in his tone, and I was turning to go, after telling him to call on me instantly if there should be occasion, when a third man entered the room unceremoniously. He was a stranger to me, but I soon learned he was a customer of the bank named Frank Rodney.

He was much excited and seemed indignant as well. Presenting a paper to Lang, he said nervously: "I want that certified. I have to use the money within an hour."

I watched Lang closely as he took the check, for I suspected an emergency and wanted to see how he would bear himself, but his behavior in the face of a surprise was admirable.

He scanned the figures carefully for a moment and then said: "Of course you know, Mr. Rodney, that you will have to give security for such an accommodation as this. If you will—"

But Rodney interrupted him rudely. "Accommodation hell!" he exclaimed, raising his voice. "I deposited the money here yesterday, and now the teller refuses to certify my check. Where is Mr. Morrill? He took the deposit himself."

"In that case," said Lang coolly,

"you can certainly have the certification, but let me remind you that this is no place to make a disturbance. There is no occasion for you to get excited."

"Well, I reckon you'd be excited yourself," retorted Rodney with some heat, though he lowered his voice, "if you deposited sixteen hundred thousand one day and couldn't get two hundred thousand of it the next."

"One moment," said Lang, making no reply to this.

He left the room, and we could see him through the glass partition stepping over to the bookkeeper's desk. After looking over the books he returned, and offering the check back to Rodney, he said: "There is no such amount to your credit, Mr. Rodney, and, of course, I cannot let you have it without security."

This time Rodney shouted.

"What kind of a game is this?" he exclaimed. "I tell you I gave the money to Mr. Morrill himself in this room yesterday. He put it in that safe and gave me this certificate of deposit. Now I want the whole of it. I always thought this was a reliable bank, but if this is the way you do things it's no place for my money. I want it all immediately."

I restrained myself with some difficulty, for his behavior seemed outrageous, though he certainly had cause for excitement if the facts were as he stated. It was an excellent test for Lang, however, and I wanted to see how he would meet it.

He paid no more attention to me than Rodney did.

"I must tell you again," he said sternly, "that this is no place for brawling. If you made such a deposit yesterday, it must have been after hours, for there is no entry of it in the books of the bank."

"It was after hours," admitted Rodney.

"Then Mr. Morrill doubtless put it in his private safe. The big safe was, of course, locked for the night. And

he would make a memorandum on his private account-book of the transaction. But Mr. Morrill is not here."

"Well, open the safe, then, and see for yourself," said Rodney impatiently. "I tell you I must have the money immediately. I have made a new deal this morning, and there is a payment that must be made now."

"That certainly seems to be unfortunate," said Lang smoothly, "but I do not propose to open Mr. Morrill's private safe in his absence."

"But here is his certificate of deposit," urged Rodney again, offering the second piece of paper which he held in his hand for Lang's inspection.

Lang looked at it carefully and very deliberately, maintaining his poise perfectly. "It looks regular enough, Mr. Rodney," he said, "but I cannot accept a paper like that without verification, even supposing it were for a much smaller amount. Of course, if Mr. Morrill were here he could undoubtedly settle the matter in a moment, but—"

"Well, where is Morrill?" exclaimed Rodney, who was getting exasperated to a degree, and who certainly seemed to have grounds for complaint.

"He is at home, ill," said Lang.

"That won't go," replied Rodney. "He was perfectly well yesterday, and I tell you he took my money. Probably he has run away with it. I demand that you open that safe."

"I refuse to do so," said Lang steadily. I could see that he had grown white in the face, but he showed no sign of agitation, nor did he get excited when Rodney retorted: "Then I will find means to make you do it mighty quick. I'm not going to be swindled like this."

And he rushed out of the bank.

Lang and I looked at each other, and I still felt well satisfied with his appearance, but in order to test him further, I said: "Would it not have been well to open the safe? This may be a serious matter."

It was only as a test that I said it, for I thoroughly approved of his course, but I was startled by his answer.

"I did not tell Rodney," he said, "but this safe opens on a different combination from the big one, and Mr. Morrill did not send me the figures of this. Even if he had, I think I would have refused to open it. But this is most assuredly a serious matter," he continued. "Look outside."

What I saw on looking was sufficiently alarming to one who understood the signs of incipient panic. It takes little to arouse suspicion in Wall Street, and unfortunately, Rodney's excited utterances had some of them been loud enough to be overheard by everybody in the bank, and there had been a goodly number there.

Already there was a row of nervous looking men at the paying teller's window, and I saw others apparently write checks and take their places in the row within the space of a minute.

Others, again, were coming in with anxious inquiry depicted on their faces. It seemed incredible that news should spread as quickly as this evidently had, for it was only a few minutes since Rodney had come in, but the Stock Exchange was only a few doors away, and I suppose some one must have taken the intelligence there.

"Does it mean a run on the bank?" I asked Lang, though I knew well enough that it did.

"It certainly looks like it," he said, but even then, though he was whiter than ever, his voice was calm, and his manner was self-possessed.

"Can you meet it?"

"I think so. If it continues we may need help, but there ought to be no difficulty in getting that. There is no question of our solvency, but we may need ready cash before long. And in the mean time Rodney is likely to come back with a lawyer. I wish you would stay here a little while, if you can. I'll take my own place as paying teller, for there won't be much doing anywhere

else for a while, according to appearances, but you can call me in at any moment."

I assured him that I would not leave the place for a time, in any event, and he went outside. It would have taken a keen observer to tell that his smile was forced as he went back to his usual post, or that there was any effort to secure delay in the leisurely consultation he had with his substitute before resuming his duties there. But the excitement outside his window was evidently increasing. Cool as he was, I knew that he realized the imminence of a crisis.

For myself, I scribbled a note to my own office and sent it by a messenger that the old watchman of the bank summoned for me, and then settled myself to wait.

I must say, however, that I failed to take any great interest in the morning newspaper I pretended to be reading. Dr. Harmon had promised to send word immediately of any change that might occur in John Morrill's condition, so there was no use in sending an inquiry to him, and there was nothing to do but wait. I had to do that, however, for a short time only.

Rodney was certainly a quick man, for he came back, as Lang had said he would, with a lawyer, sooner than I had thought it possible. I recognized the lawyer as Henry Sharp, who knew me well, and whom I knew as a most aggressive practitioner with a reputation for considerable ability, but whose methods were sometimes considered questionable.

His standing, however, was sufficiently assured for me to meet him as a qualified attorney. And I found nothing to criticise in the attitude he took on this occasion.

"You are Mr. Morrill's counsel, I believe," he said pleasantly, after we had greeted each other, and I answered that I was.

"Then you can speak for him in his absence. I am informed that he is not at the bank this morning."

"Mr. Morrill is seriously ill at his home," I replied. "I left him there some two hours ago, under the care of his physician, who was not able to say positively what his trouble is, but who was very emphatic in saying that he could not be disturbed on any pretext whatever for the present."

"Most unfortunate," said Sharp. "But in the mean time the business of the bank is not suspended, I presume, in any particular."

"You can see for yourself that it is going on as usual," I said, motioning toward the outer room.

"I see that it is going on," he retorted, "but if it is as usual, why has my client been refused when he has come here for the money he has on deposit? Surely this is not usual."

"As to a question like that," I said, "the best course will be for you to confer with Mr. Lang, who is in charge." And I called Lang in.

In the interval that had elapsed since Gregory had made his escape from the policeman that morning much had occurred of which I know only by hearsay, but in the light of what I learned later it seems extraordinary that that young man should have maintained such control of himself as he did under Henry Sharp's severe questioning.

I sat by, prepared to come to his assistance if he should be confused or waver in the slightest degree from the line of conduct he had taken with Rodney alone, but he did not.

Sharp stated his case clearly and succinctly and Lang listened, admitting nothing and denying nothing. The certificate of deposit was written in a hand that might be Mr. Morrill's, he said, but he was not prepared to pay out money on the strength of it without corroboration of it.

As he had no record of it, he could not accept it as evidence.

Sharp blustered a little, but Lang was entirely unmoved by that, and even when the lawyer declared that he would make an immediate application in court Lang said that while he de-

precated it he could not prevent it, and most positively he would not presume to open Mr. Morrill's private safe without Mr. Morrill's personal instructions.

The utmost that he would do would be to send a statement of the case to Mr. Morrill's house and await orders. As to when he would get an answer he could say nothing. That would probably depend on whether the physician attending him would allow the letter to be given to him.

"That's altogether too uncertain," declared Sharp. "My client wants his money now, and if you refuse to give it to him our first step will have to be to apply for an order of the court compelling you to do so."

Lang bowed, but made no reply to this, having said his say, so I spoke up.

"It would be useless, of course, for me to deny your right to apply to the courts," I said, "but you must realize the gravity of such an act. It would not affect the solvency of the bank, but your precipitancy would imply distrust of the honesty of its management."

"And that is precisely what I have," broke in Rodney, who had held himself well in hand up to that time, but who was wrought up to the highest pitch of excitement, as was natural enough.

And Sharp retorted: "The gravity of our act is certainly no greater than the gravity of the situation, Mr. Wright."

"I do not deny that it seems important to you," I argued, "but would it not be much better to wait for some word from Mr. Morrill?"

"Wait nothing!" exclaimed Rodney. "If you had more than a million and a half in that safe and couldn't get at it when you wanted it, would you wait to hear from a man who, as you claim, can't be got at?"

His tone and manner were extremely rude, but I did not feel disposed to quarrel with him on that account, under the circumstances. I would not, however, make him any reply, prefer-

ring to appeal to Sharp's ethics as a lawyer. I undertook, therefore, to convince him that he might do great injury to an honorable man by rushing into court as he was proposing to do.

But he replied almost brutally, "Mr. Morrill's honor appears to be in question, and the only way to vindicate it would seem to be to produce the money."

So I saw it was useless to protest further, and he turned toward the door, together with Rodney.

Before they reached it, however, John Morrill walked in. What happened after is known to a number of persons.

CHAPTER VIII.

A Discovery at the Bank.

AS the banker entered his office it might have been noticed that he was rather pale and that his air was that of anxiety, as might be expected in view of the disturbed appearance of things in a place usually so well-ordered.

A less experienced man would readily have seen from the indications that something was amiss, even though he might not have understood the alarming character of it as Morrill did. Knowing the financial world as well as he did, he was fully aware of the peril of a panic to even the most substantial institutions, and he saw plainly the evidence of something very like a panic in his own place of business.

He bore himself, nevertheless, with outward composure, and there was nothing in his appearance to indicate the strange experience he had endured since leaving the bank the day before.

Rodney saw him first, and with what was almost a hysterical laugh of relief exclaimed, "Ah, Morrill, I'm glad to see you. They've been telling me you were sick, but of course—"

"I have been ill," said Morrill, checking him by a prompt reply, for

the other's speech was loud and excited. "But I am fortunately recovered," he continued, "and not too soon, judging from what I see here." And his eyes flashed indignation.

"Then you won't mind certifying this check for me," said Rodney, taking out the paper he had presented before. "They refused to do it a while ago, and when I demanded the whole of my deposit they refused that, but now that you are here it will be all right, of course."

There was, however, a doubtful tone in his voice that belied the confidence of his words.

"Just a moment," said Morrill. "You can certainly have your money whenever you want it, the whole or any part of it. But since you have been told so much as you have, it is no more than proper that you should also understand how the business of the bank should have been brought into such confusion. And that is exactly what I propose to have explained immediately.

"By what warrant," he continued, turning to Wright and Lang, and speaking with extreme wrath, "have you two assumed charge of my business? Who gave you authority to pry into my secrets? How did you learn the combination which would enable you to open my safes? And by what incredible mismanagement have you brought about such a condition as I find here now?"

Lang was silent, though it was evident enough that he was greatly agitated. He made no attempt to reply, but turned his eyes toward Wright in mute appeal. And the lawyer replied promptly.

"It is true enough, John," he said, "that I have assumed a great responsibility, and it may be true that I have interfered overmuch in your affairs, but the exigency was great, and can hardly be discussed before outsiders. I will go into that matter with you privately as soon as you like, but meanwhile you must not blame Lang.

"He acted under my explicit directions, and so far as I can judge he has done his duty most admirably. Put the blame on me if there is blame attaching to it, but I believe you will acknowledge when you understand it all that I did the only thing that was possible to do under the circumstances, and that I acted with the best intention."

"It is very possible," retorted Morrill with no abatement of his anger, "that I may admit a good motive and still bitterly resent such an unconscionable line of action as you have taken. It may be that much will depend on the consequences, and to judge from the situation now it does not seem as if they would justify you."

"In the mean time I want my money," interrupted Rodney impatiently. "Your private affairs are important to you, no doubt, but they do not interest me."

"True enough," replied Morrill, "and you shall have your money now." He turned toward his small safe as he spoke, and then paused suddenly. "Unless, indeed, they have opened this safe also. God knows what has been done here this morning."

Still Lang said nothing, but the lawyer said hastily, "That safe has not been opened. Lang refused to do it when Mr. Rodney demanded that he should."

"Then I have that much to be thankful for, anyhow," retorted Morrill as if begrudging the admission. And after busying himself with the lock for a moment he threw open the door.

The money was not there.

They watched him, not comprehending as he started with surprise at the first glance at the empty compartment where he had laid the certificates the day before, and then as he fumbled through all the other parts of the safe with hands that began trembling violently, and with eyes that were distended with sudden horror. And before

they could realize what he had seen on the instant, he turned on them, blazing with anger.

"It is gone," he exclaimed, "what have you done with it? The safe has been opened. Why do you deny it? Is it a conspiracy to rob me?"

For a moment no one spoke.

It was as if they were stunned. But Sharp recovered himself quickly and spoke up for his client. "You will admit, however, Mr. Morrill, that Mr. Rodney deposited sixteen hundred thousand dollars with you yesterday," he said.

And Wright was also quick. "We are not ready to admit that without proof," he declared, while Morrill seemed unable to say anything, so great was the shock he had had. "Mr. Morrill was not quite himself yesterday, and his recollection of what may, or may not have happened is not—"

But at this, Rodney interrupted again.

"Isn't this proof enough?" he demanded with the certificate of deposit in his hand. "I gave him the money personally, and he gave me this. What more proof do you want? I am the one that is robbed!"

"No, you are not," said Morrill quietly.

He raised his hand as he spoke, with a gesture that forbade discussion, but he seemed stricken with great and sudden weariness. "The bank of Morrill & Son has always paid everybody dollar for dollar, and please God it always will. We do not quibble, Wright, and we always admit the truth. You will get your money, Mr. Rodney, and very soon, though I cannot give you the whole of it this morning. The loss may cripple me and perhaps break my business entirely, but the honor of the house has never been stained, and it never will be."

His manner carried conviction even to Rodney, who, naturally enough, had been even more perturbed than any of the others in the little group. But he was also quicker than they to action

in an emergency, and his reply was eminently practical.

"That's all very well," he said, "and I reckon you are good for even that amount. If I had not believed that, I would not have placed it with you. But the thing to do is to find that money at once. It was there last night, for I saw you put it there. If it is not in the safe now, somebody has taken it out. Surely it can't be far away. Where is it?"

"Where is Gregory?" exclaimed Morrill suddenly, seeming to perceive for the first time that his cashier was absent.

No one answered for a moment.

Lang seemed incapable of speech, and Wright, realizing that Dr. Harmon had not told Morrill what had been done the night before was unwilling to say anything about it before Rodney and his lawyer, the more so because it seemed clear to him that Gregory could have had nothing to do with the disappearance of Rodney's money. When Morrill repeated the question, however, he answered.

"That's what we would like to know," he said.

"Hasn't he been here this morning?" demanded Morrill, in evident surprise, looking at Lang.

"No."

"Has anybody else been here?"

"No."

"Then who could have taken the money but you? And how did you learn the combination?"

The banker seemed as much disturbed by the loss of his secrets as he was by the loss of the money, but Lang made no reply. It was difficult to understand his attitude.

He showed neither indignation nor surprise at the accusation, nor did he look guilty, yet there was nothing that indicated indifference to the situation. On the contrary, he was keenly interested beyond a doubt, though he offered no suggestion of any sort.

Morrill looked at him in astonishment. "Did you take it?" he asked.

"Yes," said Lang calmly and unhesitatingly.

His avowal, and the manner of it, came as a culminating surprise in a series of surprises, but Rodney was the only one who showed satisfaction. Sharp had been quietly observant, and he looked incredulous, as if thinking it unbelievable that the real culprit should confess so readily. Wright was plainly amazed, and Morrill sank back in his chair as if suddenly and heavily smitten.

"Charles, Charles," he exclaimed brokenly, "the lad I have trusted and loved like a brother for all these years! It is not possible."

"Thank you for that, sir," said Lang, himself greatly moved; "but it was I who took the money."

"Well, where is it? Produce it," said Rodney roughly and impatiently.

"I cannot," said Lang, instantly resuming his former attitude.

"You cannot! What rot is that? What have you done with it?"

"I sent it away."

"Sent it away! Who did you send it to?"

"I cannot tell you that."

"You mean you will not."

"I mean I cannot."

"Who took it from you?"

"I do not know who he was. He came for the money and I gave it to him."

"Then you did open the safe?"

"Yes."

"You lied when you said you would not open it in Mr. Morrill's absence."

"No. I did not lie. I would not have done it."

"But you say you did. What do you mean?"

"I cannot explain. I opened it because I had to. I would not have done it if I could have helped myself. And I would not do it again if I could, but as a matter of fact I do not know the combination."

At this point Rodney gave up in bewilderment and began cursing violently, but Sharp intervened.

"It is evident that this man is fooling with us," he said. "He says he stole the money and sent it to a confederate, but he is only trying to gain time by confusing us with nonsensical talk. He should be locked up instantly and detectives put to work to trace the money."

"Surely it cannot be impossible to learn who that messenger was, supposing that there was one who took it away, as he says. If there was not the money must be here somewhere, and it can be found. You should have him arrested immediately, Mr. Morrill, before he can play any more tricks."

"One moment," exclaimed Wright, who had been studying Lang's face, and who thought he had a glimmering of the truth.

"There may be a clue to this," he continued. "Possibly we can find out about it without the scandal of a public search. Tell me, Lang, was that the money you were giving to a messenger when I came in this morning?"

"Yes," said Lang.

"And who was the messenger?"

"I do not know."

"Was it a boy or a woman?" asked Wright, suddenly recalling some indefinable peculiarity of appearance which he had seen without noticing particularly at the time.

"I really do not know," replied Lang, unmistakably surprised. "I thought it was a boy, but I paid no attention to him. I simply read the note he brought."

"Where is that note?"

"I sent it back with the money. That was what I was ordered to do."

"Ordered by whom?"

"I cannot tell you."

Beyond this he could not be made to say anything. Submitting without protest to a keen, merciless examination, he told readily enough that a note had been brought to him that morning by a messenger and that he had read it.

In it he had been told how to open

the safe, and ordered to open it and take out the bundle of certificates it contained; then to close it and send the certificates it contained therein to the writer, together with the note. He had followed the instructions exactly, but to his own surprise had been unable to recall the figures of the combination after closing the safe.

Questioned over and over again as to who had sent the note, he made only one reply: "I cannot tell." But once he added a remark that seemed curiously interesting to both Morrill and Wright.

"It is not that I will not tell," he said earnestly. "I want to, but I cannot."

Naturally, this seemed arrant nonsense to Rodney and Sharp, but to the others it seemed illuminating. The banker had sat back in his chair, saying nothing from the moment of his outburst of emotion at the confession of his favorite employee, but listening intently to the conversation.

When he heard this remark his eyes flashed with what seemed to be quick appreciation. Rising, he laid his hand kindly on Lang's shoulder, saying: "Go back to your desk, Charles. I think I can trust you as well as ever. We will fight this thing out together."

Then, as Lang turned away, half choking and speechless from emotion, Morrill turned to Rodney.

"Now," he said, "I will make the best arrangement I can with you at the moment. I cannot give you all your money at once, and if you press me too hard I will have to suspend payment until I can realize on my assets."

"You will be paid in full, as everybody else will. Thank God! I am able to do that, even if I do not recover the missing money; but it will take a little time, and it will mean winding up the business, for I could not possibly go on with the little I would have left."

"I'd certainly be sorry if anything like that should happen," replied Rod-

ney in a friendly fashion, "but of course you cannot expect me to suffer any such loss. If you will let me have what I need immediately, and give me security for the balance, I am willing to wait any reasonable time. But surely you are going to trace that money. It must be possible to find out what has become of it."

"Of course I shall," said Morrill impatiently, stepping to the door of the room as he spoke. Beckoning to the bank messenger, who stood outside, he said: "Go around to Inspector Byrnes's office and ask him to send one of his best men here immediately. Tell him I would take it as a favor if he could come here himself."

Then, turning back to Rodney, he said: "Give me that check and I will certify it now. And if you demand security for the balance I will arrange that during the day. You need have no apprehension."

CHAPTER IX.

The Inspector at Work.

AMONG the measures and methods adopted by Inspector Byrnes when he was in charge of the detective bureau of the New York police force, there was hardly one that has been more commented on, probably none that proved itself of more practical value than his establishment of a branch office of his department in the Wall Street district and of a systematic oversight of that field of temptation to the boldest criminals of the country.

Unlike some of his measures, this was taken with the greatest possible publicity.

All pains were taken to have it thoroughly understood not only by the criminals, but by those whom he strove to protect from the operations of criminals, that he was constantly on guard with a picked squad of the ablest detectives of his force. And

so arbitrary were his arrangements that he laid down a law of his own making that no man with a criminal record should under any pretext visit any portion of the city south of a fixed dead-line at John Street.

There were many sticklers for regularity who criticised the despotic character of this regulation, but its value was soon demonstrated so clearly that criticism was disarmed, and the regulation which he established without color of law passed into and became a part of the unwritten law of the community, and is still enforced, more or less rigidly, by his successors.

Nor is there any question now as to its wisdom.

So diligent was he in his attention to this part of his work that he spent much time in his down-town office, and, as it happened, he was there when the messenger came from Mr. Morrill. No tidings had come from the missing cashier; but his mind was still intent upon the mystery of the case, and he lost no time in going to the bank.

There he found Morrill and Wright still questioning Lang, who had been recalled to the banker's private room as soon as Rodney and his lawyer had left, satisfied with the arrangements Morrill had quickly made for the full payment of their claim.

Lang's demeanor, however, was unchanged, nor had they been able to go a hairbreadth further toward an understanding of his acts than before, though Wright had formed a theory. He had as yet told Morrill nothing of Gregory's arrest, being unwilling to enlighten Lang; and he looked with eager question in his glance at Inspector Byrnes as the latter entered the room.

The inspector's bland face told him nothing, and, being still cautious, he kept silence while the details of the robbery were being told to the master detective of his day.

He listened attentively, saying nothing until he had heard the whole story

down to the point at which Morrill had sent Lang back to his duties after his confession. Then he said abruptly: "Why did you do that? This man says himself that he is the thief."

Morrill hesitated.

"I cannot explain it," he said, "but I am certain in my own mind that he is not the real thief. I believe him when he says he could not help doing what he did, and I believe I know who made him do it."

"Who was that?"

Again Morrill hesitated. Then he said, as if hopelessly confused: "I wish I could tell you. It might help to clear up the whole matter. But I cannot."

"Where is your cashier?" asked the inspector, apparently taking no notice of the strange reply.

"I do not know. He has not been here to-day."

"Have you heard from him?"

"No."

Turning to Lang, the inspector looked at him steadily for some moments. That cold, questioning gaze was one of his favorite weapons, but Lang met it without flinching. So far from being embarrassed was he that it appeared as if he were earnestly desirous of aiding in the inquiry, but the inspector did not seem to be satisfied.

"You know, of course," he said roughly, "that your story is ridiculous. You are a man of intelligence. You realize that nobody can believe you for a minute."

"I realize that fully," said Lang so promptly that the inspector changed his tone.

"Then if you deserve the confidence Mr. Morrill seems to have in you," he continued, "you will help to trace this money."

"I only wish I could," said Lang eagerly. "If you can tell me some way that I can do it I will." And the inspector paused, but only briefly.

"You can at least give some description of that messenger who, you

say, was sent to you. You must have some recollection of what he looked like."

"I have tried hard to do that," said Lang, "but that is as strange as anything else in the matter. I cannot recall anything about his appearance, nor can I even recall the wording of the note he brought. All I know is that it told me how to open the small safe, and told me to get the money and send it by the messenger to the writer, together with the note. But I have told that much again and again. Mr. Wright asked me a curious question about the messenger, but I could not even answer that."

"What was it?"

"He asked if it was a boy or a woman."

"Why did you ask that?" demanded the inspector, turning to Wright.

Because I remembered a vague impression I had when I saw Lang handing over the package."

"You saw him hand it over?"

"Yes. I was coming into the bank at the moment, and I naturally supposed it was some routine business, so I paid no attention to it, as my mind was intent on other matters. I cannot even describe the messenger further than to say that he looked like an ordinary youth, rather undersized, and dressed in such an ordinary fashion that I do not know what he wore."

"As I say, my mind was full of other things, but when Lang told me that he was sending away the money at the moment I came in, I recalled an odd notion I had had of this youth looking like a woman in disguise. It seems as if I ought to be able to remember more, remembering that, but I cannot. You know what was in my mind, inspector?"

The inspector nodded, but though he questioned Wright closely for a few moments without learning anything more, his own mind seemed to be elsewhere, and he left abruptly, assuring Morrill that he would recover the money if possible.

His cab was waiting, and he drove to police headquarters, where he stopped only long enough to learn that no one of the men he had sent in search of Gregory had yet reported. Then he drove to Union Square, and bidding the cabman wait on the Everett House corner, he stepped to the hotel entrance and looked around.

Seated on one of the benches in the little park opposite was one of his own men. Going directly over, he sat down on the same bench, and lighting a fresh cigar, said in an undertone, "Has he been here?"

"I don't think so," replied the other in the same tone without turning his head, "but I'm not sure. A man went in there soon after I came out and stayed for over an hour. He did not look like Gregory, but he walked like him, and I sent Foster to trail him. They went east."

"Any one else go in or out?" the inspector asked.

"Yes, several; but I could not tell whether they went to her apartments or not."

"Was one of them a young fellow—hardly more than a boy?"

"Yes. He came out and was gone nearly an hour. Then he came back, and he is inside yet."

"See anything peculiar about him?"

"N-no," a little doubtfully. "I can hardly say I did, but I did have a queer notion about his walk. It was more like a woman's than a boy's."

The inspector made no comment. It was not the first time this man had had queer notions about the way people walked. Sometimes they had had important results. He chewed his cigar thoughtfully for a few moments, then threw it away.

Rising, he walked deliberately across the street.

Facing the square on the north side stood a brownstone mansion, built in a fashion that was already losing favor in the choice of New Yorkers, but still of imposing appearance. It had been one of a row of luxurious

homes, and it still stood as a reminder of days when the neighborhood had been the abode of wealth and fashion, being still unchanged exteriorly by the changes that had come with the growth of the city.

Change, however, had come to the interior.

No longer the home of its owners, it was divided into apartments, occupied by well-to-do tenants, who preferred its quiet elegance to the more modern conveniences of the newer flat-houses, as they were then called.

Among these tenants was Ruth Kendrick, a young actress, who was beginning to attract attention as a promising member of one of the stock companies which then represented the best that New York had seen in the development of dramatic work.

Making his way to the door of Miss Kendrick's apartment, the inspector said to the maid who met him: "Tell Miss Kendrick Inspector Byrnes wishes to see her." And he pushed his way without ceremony into the outer room, seating himself immediately and remaining seated when the lady appeared.

"I'm looking for Benjamin Gregory," he said abruptly.

Miss Kendrick raised her eyebrows.

"Where did he go when he left here?" continued the inspector, still more abruptly when he saw that no reply was forthcoming.

"There is some mistake," said Miss Kendrick coolly. "There was another man here this morning looking for somebody named Gregory. He had rather better manners than you," she added, rather as if making an interesting comparison than by way of a rebuke.

A grim smile overspread the inspector's face. "Allen is unnecessarily polite sometimes," he remarked. "Answer my question."

Miss Kendrick shrugged her shoulders.

"You are uncouth, sir," she said severely. "I know of no reason why

I should answer you even if I could, but as a matter of fact I do not know anybody by the name of Gregory. Will you kindly go, or shall I have you put out?"

"You know him very well," retorted the inspector, "and there will be some difficulty in putting me out. Answer my question."

"You are certainly impossible," said Miss Kendrick indignantly. And she turned to leave the room. But the inspector stood in front of her as she reached the door.

"Be reasonable," he said sternly. "You will be made to tell, and you might better make no trouble. Help me to find Gregory and there will be no necessity to arrest you."

"*Arrest me!*" exclaimed Miss Kendrick in amazement. "Why should I be arrested? And who is this Gregory you talk of? I do not know him."

"He is the man who sent you to Morrill's bank this morning, and you will be arrested for your part in the robbery."

Shrinking back as if from a blow, Miss Kendrick sank into a chair. "So it was a robbery," she murmured.

The almost inarticulate words were proof enough to the inspector that he was right so far; but, though he continued his questioning mercilessly, she would say nothing more, seeming indeed not even to hear his voice. Eagerly as he pressed the inquiry, he soon perceived that he was making no progress, and finally he said: "You will have to come with me. Tell your maid to fetch your hat, but you need not tell her you are under arrest. It will be better to go quietly."

Her manner was that of one half stunned, but she called the maid and went without remonstrance to the street with the inspector. Beckoning to his driver, he handed her into the cab and followed her inside. "Head-quarters," he said to the cabman as he entered, and they drove off rapidly.

As they started, the man who sat on

the bench in the park arose and walked briskly away.

CHAPTER X.

Flight.

THERE are few things that can be so simply and easily done, and which will alter the expression of the human countenance so greatly, as putting on a pair of colored eye-glasses, and when Benjamin Gregory turned away from the policeman who was taking him across Washington Square toward the police court, he took a pair of light-blue glasses from his pocket and put them on.

The circumstances of his arrest the night before had been so unusual that he had been treated with much consideration at police headquarters, and had not been subjected to the indignity of having his person searched.

Excepting that he was shown to a comfortable bedroom without any preliminaries whatever on his arrival, and that his excellent breakfast had been brought to him in that room without consultation of his preference in the matter, he might have been a guest in some quiet hotel.

Nothing had been said to him by any one from the moment of his arrival until after he had finished his breakfast. Then the policeman had appeared and said: "Come."

Rising immediately, he went without demur in company with his escort as far as the square, but after they had come near the center of it, where no one else happened to be at the moment, he suddenly stopped and faced squarely around toward the policeman. The latter was instantly alert, and turned also, but the question in his eyes was met by so strange a gaze from Gregory that he faltered and remained speechless.

As he afterward reported to Inspector Byrnes, he was unable to tell what happened after that till he was found by another policeman and taken

back to headquarters without his prisoner. What did happen was that he sat down on one of the park benches and remained there, while Gregory walked quietly away.

As he went he took the eye-glasses from his pocket and put them on.

The cashier's habit was usually to shave before dinner each evening, and the man who had appeared in John Morrill's library the night before in response to Dr. Harmon's summons was carefully and smoothly shaven of every vestige of beard, but the man with blue glasses who walked briskly though not hastily from Washington Square toward Broadway that morning wore a well-trimmed, heavy mustache, so well adjusted that even a careful observer would not have been likely to suspect that it had not grown where it appeared.

It might have been because of the glasses, or because of the quickness of his steps, that this man stumbled on a curbstone as he went. He did not fall, but he staggered so violently in saving himself that his hat fell off.

It was a tall silk hat, of the kind commonly worn at that period even in the morning by men who were particular in their dressing. When he picked it up it was dented and slightly soiled, and, regarding it with disfavor, he carried it in his hand to a hat store around the corner on Broadway.

"I want this blocked," he said when he entered, "and you can send it to my office. I will buy a soft hat to wear now."

"Yes, sir. What address?" said the hatter.

"Mr. Walker, 502 Broadway," said the other, and, selecting a broad, trimmed felt of good quality, he walked out. Proceeding to the door of Ruth Kendrick's apartment, he opened it with his own key and entered without ceremony.

She was seated at the piano, but, looking around as she heard his step, she arose, startled and indignant. "Who are you?" she demanded.

He said nothing, but removed his glasses, and her manner changed instantly, though there was deep reproach in her voice as she said: "This is certainly beyond all limits. Why do you come like this and at this hour? Don't you know that you will wreck me utterly? I have given you credit before for being at least careful, but you will strip me even of my reputation if you act like this. Have you no consideration whatever?"

Paying no attention to her words, he said: "Put on that suit of boy's clothes quickly. I want you to go down-town for me." And seating himself at a writing-desk in the corner of the room, he began selecting stationery, as if to write.

Miss Kendrick, though she was well liked and respected by her associates on the stage, was not a special favorite among them.

There was a certain aloofness about her, and a touch of austerity, in her manner which had served not only to protect her from scandal, but had led those who knew her best to believe that she was too absorbed in her profession to care for companionship, and she had never been known to respond even slightly to the advances of any of her numerous admirers.

So far as she knew and believed, not even her maid suspected the intimacy so plainly indicated at this moment, for her caller had hitherto been more than particular to avoid any occasion for remark. It had seemed as if he were as desirous as she of escaping observation.

That there was great and peculiar intimacy between them of some sort, however, could not be doubted.

Seemingly forgetful of the indignation she had just expressed, she turned away, and entering an adjoining room, closed the door after her, and he, not even turning his head, wrote a brief note very slowly and carefully.

No one without stage experience could have changed her appearance so quickly and completely as Miss Ken-

drick had done when she returned. In place of the graceful, slender woman there was a well-built youth not yet full grown, but with downy indication of a coming beard on cheek and lip. The luxuriant hair was hidden under a cap, and the attire was complete in every detail, neat and inconspicuous.

"Take this and bring me an answer," said Gregory. "Be careful not to show any appearance of haste, but do not lose an instant. Time is of the utmost importance. And above all things do not talk with any one, no matter what happens."

Glancing at the address she put the note in her pocket and left the room without a word, while he, with a satisfied smile, seated himself in an easy chair and remained motionless, apparently in reverie until, within an hour, she returned and handed him a small package.

Turning his back to her unceremoniously, he broke the seal and looked carefully at the enclosures. One of these was the note he had sent, and, after placing the remainder in an inside pocket, he carefully burned the note and ground the ashes to powder under his heel.

Then facing the woman, who stood expectant, he said, "You have served me well, and, though you had no option in the matter, I am not unmindful of all you have done. I will do you the greatest favor in return that can possibly be done. You will never see me again, and the only thing I shall require of you from now on is that you shall never acknowledge to any one that you have known me, or ever seen me."

His tone was not unkindly, though there was no suggestion of tenderness or regret in his manner. Saying no more and without waiting for reply, he passed through the doorway, leaving her gazing after him as if not comprehending what he had said.

For minutes that seemed hours she stood there, as one might do who had heard an unbelievable thing of vast

import. Then sinking into a chair she covered her face with her hands and wept long and bitterly.

He, on leaving the house, turned to the east and walked briskly. On reaching Second Avenue he turned again, this time toward the most populous district of the city.

At the lower end of the avenue he found himself on the border of the foreign quarter, already great and rapidly growing into a mongrel community within a community. Here was a jumble of settlements each peopled with immigrants from some alien land, and each with distinctive characteristics of its own, but all huddled together so closely in a labyrinth of narrow streets as to mingle together in a heterogeneous whole.

Here were entire blocks of houses swarming with little multitudes of outlanders from all parts of the world, integral parts already of the newest nation on earth, but not yet assimilated. Retaining their own customs and languages they seemed like a vast aggregation of tribes mingled together in hopeless confusion, wholly inharmonious and as strange to one another as they were to the well ordered community into which they had entered. One might walk for blocks through the neighborhood without hearing a word of English spoken, or seeing in the multiplicity of signs displayed a single one that indicated a native tradesman.

Much of this territory was practically unknown ground to the native population of New York at that period, and it had, from various causes, come to be like some outlying field, used by a careless farmer as handy ground on which to throw rubbish and waste.

It had happened in the rapid growth of the city that certain plague spots had appeared at various places, where all evil had centered itself, where crime was common and seldom detected; where outlawry found safe retreat, where no policeman dared venture alone, even in broad daylight, where impurity, sottishness and open violence

were unprevented and unrebuked, so that the city took shame for the disgraceful conditions after long enduring them, and took measures, not to abolish, but to scatter the evil, after the curious fashion of immemorial favor.

Wholesale reform was undertaken and the manner of it was to raze the buildings in which such conditions obtained, thus forcing the inmates to seek other quarters.

Whole blocks were demolished, new streets laid out and new buildings erected and promptly devoted to business purposes, so that the face of the town was altered and the human refuse which had housed itself in noisome clusters scattered itself whither it would.

Civic virtue was satisfied.

The plague spots had disappeared, and few took thought of the fact that the plague itself was infecting new neighborhoods. It was New York's way of cleansing itself. Long afterward it was said by a cynical observer, that New York fashion of cleaning the streets was to employ laboring men to sweep the dust into neat little heaps along the sides of the highways and wait for the wind to blow them away.

No neat heaps were made of the abominations that had accumulated in one place where the Five Points quarter was architecturally reformed, but the blustering breeze of circumstance wafted them away in all directions and the community rejoiced that the appearance of evil was destroyed.

What happened was the inevitable consequence that has always followed the similar attempts that have been made to combat the vile conditions that are found especially prevalent in certain localities.

A veteran policeman, himself of a not too savory reputation, commenting out of the wisdom of ripe experience on the notable reformation that was brought about through the efforts of a famous cleric, said with bitter scorn, "He found a case of smallpox, and scattered it all over the city."

The quarter in which Benjamin Gregory found himself that morning had suffered especially from the breaking up of aggregations of evil elsewhere.

The mean houses and narrow streets that were most available for those of small means, and that were already swarming with the poor, both native and foreign, offered available hiding places for the human rats that sought only to escape from open and orderly surroundings. There was little outward distinction between the haunts of criminals and the houses of those who fought in the ranks against destitution.

And it was here that he came seeking temporary seclusion while the inevitable search should be made for him. No detail was lacking in the astute plans he had made for ultimate escape, and the nearest hiding place was the best for a time.

Unnoticed by any excepting the man who followed him steadily at a little distance, he walked on through the crowded streets till he came to a little restaurant on the ground floor of a three-story building.

It was one of a row of similar houses, hardly distinguishable from other rows here and there in the neighborhood. The restaurant, though of the plainest appearance, looked neat. The sign over the door was in Yiddish.

Entering the place he ordered coffee, and when it was served by the proprietor himself, he asked in Yiddish if he could have a furnished room on the premises. Finding that he could, he asked to be shown to it, and after a brief inspection paid a week's rental and seated himself.

When the proprietor had retired he locked the door carefully, and going to the windows pulled down the shades.

Then taking from his pocket the package Miss Kendrick had brought him, he opened it eagerly, and counted the one hundred and sixty \$10,000 certificates it contained. Not until he had satisfied himself of the exact

amount did his features relax, but then he smiled exultantly.

"A very fine beginning," he muttered to himself. "Enough at one stroke to pay well for all the preparation, and enough to show how easily I can plunder the whole world with a little care. A few days of hiding and the world is at my feet."

Absorbed in thought, he was entirely unconscious of the silent removal of the plug that filled a small aperture in the wall of the room, and the substitution of a human eye for an inconspicuous figure in the wall-paper.

For a few moments only the eye gazed curiously at him as he fingered the money. Then, silently as it had been removed, the figure in the wall-paper was replaced.

Outside the house a powerfully built man was writing a note to Inspector Byrnes, asking for instructions.

CHAPTER XI.

Her Confession.

FOR the first time in her stage experience, Ruth Kendrick failed to appear at rehearsal that day.

When she was taken by the inspector to Police Headquarters she was led first to his private office, where she was curtly told to be seated, and for an hour or more no attention was paid to her by any one, excepting for the curious glances of those who entered from time to time.

Though she did not know it, she was undergoing the first part of the famous "third degree," by which the contumacy of many an unwilling witness was broken. Of the terrors of the succeeding stages she fortunately had no idea, nor, had she been told, would she have believed it possible that such refinements of torture could be inflicted as were practised at times upon those whom the inspector desired to conquer.

No record is known to exist of the use of physical violence on the hapless

victims of this modern inquisition, though tales have been told of cases in which mental maltreatment was carried to the very border-line of bodily indignities, but the inspector was, in an elementary fashion, well schooled in the art of torment and ruthless in his methods.

Shrewdly estimating the character of his prisoner, he surmised that the scrutiny she was undergoing was exquisitely painful to her, and in this he showed no contemptible knowledge of human nature, for the actress, whose endeavor was given to attract the attention of the public to her professional work, had the sensitive shrinking of the true gentlewoman from the scrutiny of strangers in private life.

Watching her closely, even while he busied himself in routine matters, the inspector perceived this clearly as the time went on, though he was apparently ignoring her presence, and he prolonged and intensified the ordeal by sending for man after man of his force, knowing that each one as he entered would stare at her, conveying by his look his impression that she was at least suspected of wrong doing.

To her it was a succession of subtle insults, none the less gross because unspoken, and the tension gradually became so intense that but for her unusual self control she could have shrieked with hysterical distress. And this, the inspector saw, though a less capable observer might have supposed her to be composedly indifferent to her surroundings.

Yet the breaking down for which he waited did not come, and being convinced after a time that she was stronger than he had suspected, he took another step.

"Shut the door, as you go out," he said to the subordinate to whom he had given orders concerning some investigation, and when that had been done he pushed back the papers on his desk and faced Miss Kendrick with a grim smile which she met with no visible sign of embarrassment.

"Has this gone far enough?" he said roughly. "You are now known to about twenty of the best detectives in New York as a suspicious character who has been under arrest, and whom it is his duty to watch carefully hereafter, under all circumstances. You will have to endure that as long as you stay in the city, unless you clear yourself, as you can do with a few words. Tell me where Benjamin Gregory is, and you will be protected so far as is possible. If you do not, you will certainly be held as his accomplice in a bank robbery, and that will mean a term in state prison."

She did not waver. "I have already told you I do not know this man Gregory," she said steadily.

"You say it well," he retorted, "but I have already told you that I know you are lying."

Her face flashed at the brutality of it, but she made no reply, and at the moment there was a knock at the door.

"Come in," said the inspector, and a messenger entered with a note. Tearing it open he read it, and his face lighted. Pressing a button he said to the man who entered: "Send Sullivan and Preston in here, quick."

And when they appeared, he handed them the note, saying "Go."

Then, when they were again alone, he turned to Miss Kendrick. "You have had your chance," he said, "but it is too late, now. I was going to send you to a cell, but I know now where Gregory is, and I will have him here inside of an hour."

"You can sit here till he comes, and by that time the whole force will know you." And he looked keenly to see her expression change, but it did not. Proudly indignant, she faced him, but made no reply, and shrugging his shoulders he turned again to his desk.

Hardly a second later, Miss Kendrick started violently, and gasped as if for breath. Then she cried out, "Oh! Oh!" and burst out in a fit of loud weeping and laughing, strangely mingled together.

Once more the inspector faced around, and for a short interval watched her doubtfully. Then, seeing that she was really in hysterics, he stepped to a water cooler in the corner of the room, and drawing a glassful of its icy contents deliberately dashed it in her face.

The shock steadied her, and in a moment more she gained her speech. "I can talk to you now," she said.

"I thought you would," he retorted contemptuously, "but it is too late to do you any good. I told you that just now. However, you can go ahead if you like, only anything you say is likely to be used against you."

But she said, "You do not understand. I would have answered you willingly enough at first if I could, but I was unable to do so. It was not fear, or reluctance to speak, that kept me silent."

"When you told me that I had been involved in a robbery I was not surprised, for I had suspected it, but I was powerless to speak, as I had been powerless to refuse doing what I did. I would gladly have told you all, then, but I simply could not. Now I can. I do not know why, but for the first moment in many weeks I can do what I like without compulsion."

"I know the man you asked me about, but I never knew his name. He told me much, but he never told me who he was, nor did I ever know any one who knew him till you came and questioned me."

"I never knew anything about him till I saw him one night in the audience and met his eye. On the instant I felt a strange and most terrifying sensation. It seemed to me as if my soul went out of my body, and yet there was no bodily sensation whatever. I can only describe it by saying that from that moment to this I have felt that I was not myself in any true sense."

"I have tried and tried to recover myself without the least shadow of success, and failing that, I have tried to analyze my condition in the hope of

understanding it, but all that I have been able to arrive at in that direction is to compare myself to a ship on a voyage, on which a sudden and mysterious thing might occur in midocean.

"The ship would sail on with no apparent change in her condition, and no deviation in her course that would be perceptible to any one but her commander. No visible accident would occur, nor would she seem to be any the less seaworthy. And no one but the captain himself would know that anything unusual had occurred. Even the captain would seem to others to be the same as he had been before, and no one else would know that he was no longer in command.

"He would continue to appear to manage the ship, and to direct her course, and every one who had any knowledge of her maneuvers would still be heard in his voice, and carried out as if given by him in the usual performance of his duties.

"So far as any one else could possibly discover, he would remain the captain, but he would know that another person was actually in command. And he would be utterly unable to make any one else understand that there had been any change.

"I know, of course, that this seems to be an impossible situation. It is even absurd to imagine that anything of the kind could happen under any circumstances, and if it is ridiculous, as it really is, to suppose that it could happen to a ship, it is still more so to talk of its happening to a human being. Yet that, or something analogous to it, is precisely what happened to me.

"My life went on to all appearance as it had gone on before. I continued to do my work as I had always done it, and no one, so far as I know, saw any difference in my habits, inside or outside the theater. I myself was not even able to see any change excepting the one awful difference of not being any longer subject to my own will. It was unbelievable, but it was true.

"This man, whom you call Ben-

amin Gregory, came up to me when I left the theater and spoke to me in the most matter of fact way. There was nothing insulting in his manner, and if any one saw him approaching me they must have supposed he was an intimate acquaintance.

"My impulse, of course, was to treat him as I would have treated any other presumptuous stranger who might have approached me in the same way, but instead of that, I answered him in the same fashion as he had spoken.

"Do not ask me why I did so. I cannot tell you. I only know I did what I did, because I could not do anything else. The unspeakable humiliation that befell me began at that moment, and I could no more avoid it than I could control the motion of the earth."

At this point Miss Kendrick paused in her story, and for some moments appeared to be unable to speak further.

The inspector had listened in silence, showing no surprise but the keenest interest in the strange narration. When she fell silent, he spoke no word, but continued to watch her closely, waiting for her to continue, and that she did presently, after an evident struggle to regain her evidently forced composure.

"I was deeply grateful to him for one thing only," she continued. "He was, or seemed to be, as desirous as I certainly was—to avoid letting any one know of our acquaintance. You must have known of it, for you came to me to ask about him, but how you learned of it I do not understand, for we were never together in public. So far as I know, no one ever saw us together.

"When he came to me this morning it was a great surprise, for he had never come at such an hour until this morning, and when he sent me to the bank as he did, I realized clearly enough that there was probably something wrong about it, but I went because I had no power to refuse.

"If I had my choice I would rather

die than tell you all this, but I see plainly enough the position I am in. You are the only one who can keep the whole world from knowing what I had hoped was a secret, and you know so much already that this is not a revelation to you, but only an explanation.

"You have proved to me that I am in your power as truly as I was, in a different fashion, his abject slave. If you see fit to do so, you can destroy me utterly by repeating what I have told you, and all I can do is to ask you to consider what end you will serve by doing it.

"How you have learned what you have is a mystery to me, but I could not deny, if I wanted to, that I went to the bank for that man and thereby made myself his accomplice. It rests with you to say whether I shall suffer for it.

"It seems to me that I have suffered too much already. If I felt myself guilty in any way, I would not complain, no matter what the punishment might be; but if I stood before my Maker this moment, I would say as positively, as I say to you, that I am not guilty of any wrong doing in this whole matter. What I have done, I have done. The wrong belongs to him."

Dramatic and even theatrical as was the form of words in which she told her story and made her appeal, she delivered them with the same earnest simplicity that had earned distinction for her on the stage, and her manner was not without its effect upon her single listener.

What he might have said or done, if he had not heard strange things so recently, cannot be told, for he was a hard man, devoid of mercy for any who fell in his hands as culprits, but he was very thoughtful as he listened, and, when she had concluded, he continued to look at her silently, considering what she had said.

She returned his gaze steadily.

Consciously, or unconsciously, she

was too wise to weaken her words by adding to them. Had he been less subtle of apprehension, he would have thought her indifferent as to his decision, so calm was her appearance, but he made no such mistake. Yet he continued to look deliberately at her so long that it taxed her powers severely to keep from breaking down again.

At length he said in very different fashion to his former words, "I will only ask you one thing more."

And she waited.

"Will you try to escape if I send you home?" he asked.

"I will not," she said as simply as if it were commonplace.

Then he pressed the button on his desk again and ordered a cab. When it came he escorted her to it.

"Tell the driver where to go," he said, and turned away.

CHAPTER XII.

At the Bank Again.

AT the moment when Miss Kendrick began talking to Inspector Byrnes, John Morrill raised his eyes from the papers he was studying and looked long and intently into the little mirror on his desk, in which he had read so strange a revelation only a few hours before.

Again he saw a smiling face.

It was the same face he had looked at before, but face and smile were both far different from what they had been. The features were, indeed, the familiar ones he had seen each morning of his life when he dressed himself, but in a single day they had grown haggard and, it seemed to him, thinner than they had ever been, since he grew into manhood.

Ineffaceable lines of suffering undergone in the day and night just passed, had appeared, here and there and the countenance was one of a man who had passed through the valley of the shadow of death into the greater depths of torment beyond.

As he gazed, the realization came to him that he had suddenly grown old and that the vigorous strength in which he had gloried, as strong men do, would never be his again.

The eyes were worn-looking and sunken, the mouth was set and even firmer in expression than ever before, though it seemed to tell of desperate resistance rather than of the pride of achievement, and the contour of the face was changed beyond the hope of restoration, but the smile that shone on the face he was looking at was one of great joy.

The vile glee that had gleamed from the eyes that had met him from the mirror before, telling of devilish plans of evil about to be consummated, had vanished entirely.

That other soul, that had leered at him so triumphantly with such appalling consciousness of mastery, was no longer there. In its place he recognized the clear integrity and honest purpose of his own stainless nature, and he rejoiced mightily, as one suddenly cleansed from unspeakable pollution. Wholly without understanding of the change that had come, he realized its nature, and knew, beyond a doubt that he was himself again.

A step behind him made him look around, and as he turned Charles Lang entered the room. "I came to you, instantly, sir," he said, "for only at this moment was I able to tell you what I have wanted to say all the morning."

"I think you hardly need to tell me, Charles, what it is," said the banker. "You sent that money to Benjamin Gregory, didn't you?"

"I did, but I do not know what made me do it. A note came from him, and when I read it, I did exactly what he told me to, but it did not seem to me as if I were really doing it. It seemed as if it were some other man who was using my fingers and body against my will. And after I had done it I was not able to tell anybody what I had done. I do not understand it at

all, but just now I found I was able to talk as I wanted to, and I came to you directly."

"Neither do I understand it," said Morrill, "but I have had some such experience as you have, and I, too, have suddenly found myself. Something must have happened to Gregory."

"But the money, sir. Do you think there is a chance of getting that back? If it is not recovered, I have not only ruined myself, but I have brought you near the edge of ruin."

"The loss of money never ruined any man, yet," said Morrill. "It may be that we shall not recover it, but if it can be done, I think Inspector Byrnes will do it. If it is never found again, we must do the best we can. We have found ourselves, Charles, and we have confidence in each other. Go back to your desk and remember that I trust you exactly as I always have done."

And with a strong hand clasp the two men turned back to their duties.

CHAPTER XIII.

At Headquarters.

AN hour later Detective Foster returned to Police Headquarters with one of the men the inspector had sent to his aid, bringing two prisoners whose battered appearance gave evidence of a fierce struggle.

"We caught them in the act, inspector," he said, "but it was too late to get the man I was after. They killed him just as we broke into the house. I would have gone in after him alone, if I had not known the place so well, but I thought it best to send for help instead of tackling the gang I expected to find single-handed. It's one of the worst panel houses in town, but no one would think it from the outside.

"The poor guy must have thought he was going into a respectable lodging house, and somehow they found out that he had money on him. From the looks of things they must have

sneaked upon him from behind, and struck him down without warning. We came on them just as they were counting the money, and here it is. There's more than a million and a half of it. I think I'd have skipped with it myself if I could have got away."

"Yes. That's what keeps most men honest," said the inspector, "but that's where the most of them slip up. This one seems to have had a pretty good idea, but he ought to have picked out his hiding-place beforehand. You followed the right man, but how did you know it was he? Allen wasn't sure of it."

"Neither was I, at first, but as he walked along I saw him feel of his mustache once or twice as if he was afraid it would come off, and I made up my mind he was disguised. Then when he entered the house I piped him off through the window and it looked as if he was a stranger there. It wasn't much to go on, but I thought I'd better bring him in, on general principles. I notified the coroner, sir, and left Sullivan in charge till he comes."

"Good work," said the inspector. "It will go on your record. Now take these two men to court and charge them with murder. Then go to Morrill's bank in Wall Street and tell him his money is found, and he can have it on proving property. Perhaps I'd better go myself though. Never mind about that."

Half an hour later, John Morrill heard good news.

CHAPTER XIV.

At the Club.

THE wine list of the Pontiff Club was the especial pride of its members, and there were still a few bottles in the cellar of a certain port too rare and too costly for common use. After John Morrill retired from business, however, he sometimes ordered a bottle of it for the delectation of his in-

timate friends when they dined with him, as Dr. Harmon and Mr. Wright occasionally did.

Not often did these three discuss, even among themselves, the events which had brought them so close together, for the subject was a painful one to Morrill, and he had never entirely recovered from the nervous strain he had undergone.

One night, however, fortified by such a dinner as was to be had nowhere else, and warmed by the mellow wine, he broached the subject himself.

"It seems to me now like a hideous and unbelievable dream," he said. "If it had not been proven to me so plainly that it all happened, I would certainly think it was that."

"A very natural feeling," said Mr. Wright. "No man can come in contact with the supernatural and realize the truth of it afterward."

"No," said Dr. Harmon, who delighted in teasing the old lawyer, "because no man can come in contact with what does not exist. Nothing can be supernatural, of course, though there are things which cannot be explained because of our limited knowledge of the laws of nature. It is not often that such things happen. If they happened oftener we would probably learn to understand them."

"Thank God they do not," said Mr. Wright, who was a devout man. "But you may quibble all you like about words. I call it supernatural."

"That is what most people would call it," returned Dr. Harmon gravely. "And that is why intelligent people generally refuse to believe such stories. They have been told from time to time, ever since the world began, but they seem so fantastic that they are commonly set down as pure inventions, whereas they are merely instances of some person consciously or unconsciously taking advantage of some abstruse law of nature that has not yet been discovered by the world."

"Take this very case of Gregory. He was unquestionably a deep stu-

dent, and perhaps the most astute man of our age. He certainly understood more of the mysteries of mind than any one else of whom I ever heard.

"The wonder was that, having such powers as he had, he should have chosen such ignoble aims for the exercise of them. Had he not been such a despicable criminal, he might have been a marvelous power for good.

"As it was, if he had not met the end he did, I would always have been sorry I did not shoot him when I threatened to do it. It would have been a terrible thing for me, but the only logical end for such a person as he was a violent death."

"It was well for me that it came when it did," said Morrill; "though, even as it was, he changed the whole

course of my life, and I shall never again be the man I was. I try hard not to dwell on the subject, but it comes up to me constantly, even in my dreams, and I suppose I will always feel the horror of it.

"There is one thing, though, that I often think of. It is fortunate, in a way, that his inclinations for evil took the turn they did. When I realize how thoroughly he was able to dominate other people I shudder to think of what he might have done had he chosen to exercise his powers at the expense of women. So far as I know, he never did that; but if he had, the consequences would have been too horrible to contemplate."

And the others agreed with him heartily.

(The end.)

Handing It to Higgins



By

Frank Condon

IF you were to stand on the corner of Main and Cross streets in East Woolwich any week-day morning at nine o'clock you would be certain to notice a number of things.

First, you would observe Tonson J. —familiarily known as "Old Miser" —Higgins, hobbling along on his way

to the bank, a bundle of papers under his arm and avarice in his eye. You would see him cross the road and enter the First National Bank, of which he was the president and principal stockholder, and subsequently there would be signs of increased activity within.

Then, if your eyes wandered farther down the hill, where Main Street runs into the long bridge, you would behold twin streaks of rust—the rails of the Woolwich and Waterville Narrow-Gage Railroad.

You would have to learn the story of the narrow-gage, Tonson J. Higgins, and Helen Dixon, daughter of Judge Dixon, who lived in the great white house at the top of Main Street beside the Methodist church, and this you could do by stopping the first resident of East Woolwich who approached you.

Up in New England, not many people can find the little town without the aid of a road map and a detective. The railroad time-tables print it in small italics, with "z's" and "r's" after it to indicate that perhaps your train will stop there and perhaps not.

Main Street runs up and down the hill from the red church with the white steeple to the mile-long bridge across the bay, and Cross Street bisects the principal thoroughfare. The seven brick structures are all on Main Street, which is a strictly business district, while on Cross Street are the rambling white homes of the townspeople.

The population of East Woolwich passed one thousand back in the days when Lincoln freed the slaves, and it has yet to reach fifteen hundred. Its people are placid, self-sufficient New Englanders, most of whom have never seen a large city, and the only universally unpopular man in town is Tonson J. Higgins of the bank.

Judge Dixon built the narrow-gage single-handed, and operated it for years.

It had been an ambitious project in the beginning. The southern terminus was East Woolwich, and the northern end was to have been New Eagle, sixty miles away; but, while the station was erected, New Eagle never saw the road itself, which extended only to Waterville, thirty-one miles from East Woolwich.

The country is rich in lumber, and for fifteen years the miniature locomotives dragged the tiny cars into East Woolwich, where the lumber was transshipped to Boston on the Maine and Northwestern road.

Financial troubles descended thick and fast upon the gray head of the venerable judge, and when he died there ensued litigation that wiped out his fortune and left to Helen Dixon nothing but the narrow-gage. Its prosperous days seemed to have passed.

There were five locomotives, a dozen passenger-coaches, and fifty freight-cars, and the entire equipment was run down and badly in need of repairs.

But, nevertheless, the Woolwich and Waterville Narrow-Gage continued to do business in a half-hearted sort of way. It brought the milk to the creamery, and its flat cars still toiled along creakingly under their loads of oak and pine.

Helen Dixon, living now in the white house with an aunt and one servant, entrusted the operation of the miniature system to her father's old employees.

She knew and cared little about finance and railroading. Her habits were simple and her expenses few, and things might have gone on in this peaceful fashion for years if Tonson J. Higgins had not thrust himself into the Dixon affairs in a most offensive manner.

Helen Dixon was as pretty and amiable as any young woman in East Woolwich, but it had never occurred to her to marry Mr. Higgins.

She looked upon him with the tolerant eye of youth appraising rather decrepit old age. In his life Judge Dixon had regarded the town's rich man as a penurious old wretch who was totally lacking in morals, charity, or the love of his fellow man, and who could derive pleasure from foreclosing a mortgage on a penniless widow.

Then the darts of Cupid or some

strange emotion infested Tonson J. Higgins, and he began to cast covetous eyes upon the blooming daughter of Judge Dixon.

The elderly suitor had never married, and East Woolwich said this was so because he was averse to spending the money necessary to support a wife; but he had seen Helen Dixon grow up from childhood into comely young womanhood, and when it was clear in his own mind that he wanted her it never occurred to him to doubt that she would give her consent.

He had money, so what more could a young girl desire, particularly one whose remaining possession happened to be a disintegrating single-track narrow-gage railroad?

For a long time after Mr. Higgins began to woo her Helen was puzzled by his attitude. She had inherited her father's distant dislike for him, and when it dawned upon her that Tonson J. was approaching an avowal of matrimony she hesitated between laughter and anger.

Then he suddenly proposed. Dressed in the black frock coat and silk hat the town had come to hate, he called one evening at the Dixon house, demanded to see its youthful mistress, and plunged at once into his subject.

"No, Mr. Higgins," Helen answered, trying to retain the calmness in her voice, "I'm sorry, but I cannot marry you."

"Why not?" he demanded.

"Because I don't love you."

"I've got money, and you know it."

"Some people don't marry for money," the girl said smilingly. "It is foolish to continue this talk."

"You're the fool!" Higgins retorted angrily. "Your father was a fool before you! He blocked me, and now you—"

"Good night, Mr. Higgins," Helen said, her eyes blazing.

"You'll pay for this!" the old man snorted, putting on his hat. "When people interfere with my plans I make them pay dear for it."

He left the house, slamming the door and passing from the vision of a very angry girl. And that, in brief, is how and why Banker Higgins turned his attention to the Woolwich and Waterville Narrow-Gage.

It was not long afterward that unfavorable things began to happen to the little railroad. The six-car freight-trains began to arrive in East Woolwich with empty flats instead of the usual loads of lumber. Investigation on the part of the freight superintendent revealed that the lumber-camps to the north were ceasing their activity on account of a "falling off of demand" in the Massachusetts markets.

What had actually happened was that Tonson J. Higgins had conferred with the owners and lessees of the timber-lands.

Tonson J. was a power among these men on account of certain dealings with the First National Bank, and when he suggested a certain course of action it was followed. The receipts of the narrow-gage dropped off alarmingly.

The line's treasurer held a number of melancholy interviews with Helen Dixon. Train-crews were laid off, and the rusty locomotives gave forth no hiss of steam.

What Higgins had threatened was coming true, and Miss Dixon was paying for her temerity in refusing to wed the town's rich man.

East Woolwich was indignant over the situation, but it could do nothing, and things were in this despairing state when the afternoon local on the Maine and Northwestern pulled into town and disgorged a tall young man named David Lamson.

Mr. Lamson came direct from Boston and was on a vacation. In the beginning he had hailed from East Woolwich, but the years of his absence in Boston had changed him, and the mark of the small town was to be seen neither in his garments nor his bearing.

A few of the townspeople greeted him as he made his way from the rail-

way station to the Aldine House, half-way up Main Street.

As he strode forward he glanced about him with the interest of one who has been absent for a long time from the old home town. There were few changes on the face of Main Street. The houses were the same, and Bill Perkins's grocery store was as devoid of paint as it had been seven years before.

"I've been working pretty hard down in Boston," Mr. Lamson explained to the proprietor of the Aldine House. "I thought a rest in the old place would do me good. It was always quiet enough to rest in."

"Your folks moved away, didn't they?" inquired Thomas Marrow of the Aldine. "Time certainly does fly. I'd scarce know you, Mr. Lamson, as the bare-legged kid who used to go by here with the fish-poles."

Lamson laughed, and a moment later walked up-stairs to the room assigned him.

There were few of the town's old-timers unknown to him, and among those he recalled with great distinctness was Tonson J. Higgins. Lamson had not been in town twenty-four hours before he had learned of the banker's latest pernicious activities and the ruin that was staring the Woolwich and Waterville in the face.

The story interested him for a number of reasons.

When he was a very young lad, old man Higgins had publicly whipped him for throwing snowballs in front of the bank, and he had never forgotten or forgiven the assault. In the old days, too, he had often envied the wealth of the Dixons that permitted them to ride about town in a high-wheeled carriage drawn by two prancing steeds, and he had stared at the yellow-haired girl with the awed admiration of the poor boy for the daughter of wealth.

Down in Boston he had often thought of Judge Dixon's daughter and wondered whether she had mar-

ried an East Woolwich boy. Now he came back home to find her still single and plunged in a mess of financial troubles that threatened even the stately white house on the hill.

In Boston, Lamson had worked his way up from the bottom of a famous financial concern. He knew more than a little of money matters, and as he pondered over the situation he found in the little town his interest steadily increased.

"Why not?" he asked himself. "She can do no more than refuse a friendly offer."

And so it came about that the young man from Boston presented himself at the Dixon home and met its mistress.

"You may not remember me," he said smilingly, "but I remember you very distinctly. Do you recall Davy Lamson, son of Mrs. Lamson, who used to live down by the bridge?"

"Indeed I do, and very well," Helen Dixon answered. "I remember you principally as the boy who caught the largest number of fish and who had the greatest number of freckles each summer."

Lamson laughed.

"I guess you're right in both cases," he said. "I've been gone some seven or eight years, and it makes a slight difference in a man's appearance. But I've come to talk business with you, if you'll pardon the unasked visit. If I can, I'd like to be of help to you. It's about Higgins."

They sat down on the veranda, and Lamson explained briefly the few facts he had heard since his arrival at the Aldine House.

"I'm afraid I don't know much about it," Miss Dixon remarked. "All I know is that Mr. Higgins is determined to ruin our little road, and, from the way things look, he will probably succeed. Without the lumber business, we will have to close up shop. Even with it, the road made very little money. Since father died it has been slowly running down hill."

"It began with his wanting you to

marry him, didn't it?" Lamson asked.

"Yes, and when I refused he threatened to make me pay dearly. This is what he meant."

When David Lamson left the girl he went away with a great many facts unknown to the people of East Woolwich and an engagement to return on the morrow. Instead of idling about town in white duck trousers, fishing, and sailing, as he had intended, Lamson discovered that his vacation would be spent in other ways.

He remained in town only a week, but he talked with Helen Dixon on numerous occasions.

He was no longer the penniless lad admiring the daughter of Judge Dixon from a great distance. Now he was her adviser, and while he owned no dying railroad, his finances in Boston were thoroughly respectable.

On their last meeting he said:

"I wish you would leave the entire business in my hands, Miss Dixon. I have had long experience and you have none, and I think I see the way out, providing you will agree to do implicitly as I suggest without asking me questions. Higgins is trying to harm you, and I have a very old score to pay off with this same banker. My methods are sometimes involved, and you may not be able to understand them, but there is a way of heading off the ruin Higgins threatens."

"I promise," Helen replied, laughing. "You are very kind to interest yourself in my affairs."

That evening Lamson returned to Boston, and, simultaneously, Tonson J. Higgins returned to town from a trip up-State.

Ten days later the young man again appeared in East Woolwich, but this time he came in a motor-car of considerable horse-power and size, and the town gathered about it admiringly when Lamson drew up before the Aldine House. The chauffeur was the latest thing in green livery, and about the whole thing was an air of solidity and affluence.

Coming down Main Street, Tonson J. Higgins observed the car and made inquiry.

"Not little Davy Lamson!" he exclaimed. "The boy must have prospered. I'll have to shake hands with him." He hobbled up the hotel steps and found Mr. Lamson in conversation with the proprietor.

"Howdy, Davy," he said with enthusiasm. "I'm Mr. Higgins. Glad to see you back in the old town, and glad you're doing well."

Mr. Lamson shook hands heartily.

Then he resumed his conversation with the hotel man, explaining that he was in East Woolwich on a matter of business and that he would require a desk and a few chairs in his room. Money would be no object, he said, whereupon the Aldine House man rubbed his hands cheerfully.

Mr. Lamson could have anything in his room that he desired, and everything would be done to facilitate his business and make his stay comfortable.

It would have made not the slightest difference to David whether Mr. Higgins accidentally happened by at the moment of his arrival or not. Eventually the banker would have known that the young Bostonian was in East Woolwich on business, but his being on hand merely simplified matters.

"Comin' back to do business, hey, Davy?" he said, after listening to Lamson's conversation with his host. "Well, you're in a good town. Plenty of business in East Woolwich. Anything in partic'lar?"

"Nothing I can discuss," Davy replied.

"When you want money at moderate rates, don't fergit the First National," continued its president. "No need to go to Boston for capital."

"I'll remember," said Davy. "If I need help I'll call around, but I believe I'll handle this alone."

Mr. Higgins went away with some curiosity stirring him. And Davy felt

that he knew whither the banker's steps would lead.

East Woolwich, as at present constituted, has no public telegraph office from which one may send or receive despatches. Down in the railroad yards a few rods distant from the passenger station stands the freight shed, and here Jim Biles, the freight agent and telegraph operator reigns supreme.

When you send a telegram to East Woolwich from the outside world it goes in over the wires of the Maine and Northwestern Railroad, and Jim Biles receives and reads it carefully.

He puts it aside until such time as he may see fit to deliver it to the one for whom it is intended, and generally its contents are absorbed by half a dozen citizens before it reaches the person most interested in it.

For thirty years Tonson Higgins and Jim Biles have been cronies, and for about that length of time the freight agent has owed the banker varying sums of money. The two have conducted a sort of secret business for mutual profit, and the telegraph operator has been in a position to convey important information to his ally on numerous occasions.

Every one in East Woolwich has known of the alliance, and therefore the telegrams sent home by residents of the town are usually in cipher. It has been said that Tonson Higgins has known the precise contents of every telegram received in the village for twenty years, or as long as Jim Biles has held the post of operator.

Davy Lamson was perfectly well aware of this situation.

He felt that Mr. Higgins would lose no time in communicating with his source of news, and he was right. The banker made straight for the freight yard and sought out his confederate.

"Jim," he said, "have you had any telegrams yet for Dave Lamson, the young feller who lived here in town until a few years back?"

"Not a word," replied the operator.

"Well, I'm interested in him. He's here on business and I'd like to know what it is."

"I'll take a copy for you of anything that comes," replied the honest telegrapher. The banker departed and Biles returned to his way-bills.

At the Aldine House young Lamson's room began to look like the office of a busy man. The big motor-car was always in evidence, sometimes anchored before the hotel and on other occasions making mysterious trips into the neighboring country.

On Sunday evening David called at the Dixon home for the first time. Helen received him graciously.

"I would like to know," he said after greeting the girl, "about how much the Narrow-Gage is worth as it stands to-day?"

"I couldn't say," she answered. "No one would buy it to begin with. It will probably be sold as old iron in the end."

"I've looked it over," Lamson went on. "Twenty thousand dollars would be a generous sum, wouldn't it?"

Helen looked undecided.

"But one hundred thousand dollars certainly would be a satisfactory price, would it not?" Lamson said. "Suppose you were to be offered one hundred thousand dollars. You would accept, wouldn't you?"

"Surely," the girl laughed. "But you are joking."

"I am not joking," he continued seriously. "You may be offered various amounts. Refuse them all until you are offered an even hundred thousand. Then accept. You will remember that you promised to do as I said."

"It will be an easy task to say yes to such an offer," she replied.

The firm of Watson, Kilgour & Fresman is one of the best known in Boston. They are celebrated railway attorneys, and have had their fingers in all the transit pies baked in New England for the past twenty years.

On Monday morning at eleven o'clock a telegram was delivered to David Lamson at the Aldine House, signed by Joseph Watson of the Boston firm. It said:

Things progressing slowly. Outlook favorable.

David read it, smiled and tucked it away in his pocket. At ten o'clock the same morning Tonson J. Higgins, sitting behind his big desk in the bank, had read the same telegram through the kindness of Operator Biles, and while it conveyed no information it pleased the banker. Later in the morning he made a brief visit to David's "office" and inquired if he could be of assistance.

"Not yet," David replied. "If anything turns up I'll let you know."

Tuesday at noon another telegram arrived from Boston, conveying the general information that the situation was improving hourly, and that something definite would surely be known before the week's end. On Wednesday came another telegram, and on Thursday a fourth.

The last telegram mentioned the Boston and Northern Railroad and the Maine and Northwestern, and after he had finished reading it, Tonson J. Higgins sat buried in deep thought.

He had been steadily cultivating young Lamson during the week to the neglect of the bank's business, calling at the Aldine House regularly and dropping into David's room after the manner of an old friend. The young man had received him amiably and had smiled good-naturedly over the banker's efforts to learn something of the business that brought him to East Woolwich.

"Too many cooks spoil the broth, Mr. Higgins," David protested. "I can't let you in on this affair because it doesn't wholly belong to me. I am simply working on one end of it and there are others to be considered. We've got to maintain secrecy for some time yet."

Saturday morning when the banker arrived at the Aldine House Lamson was sitting at his desk reading the contents of two special delivery letters. They were lengthy communications, and Higgins eyed them with some eagerness.

Ten minutes after Tonson J. appeared the lone bell-boy at the Aldine knocked at the door and informed Lamson that he was wanted on the telephone. The telephone facilities in East Woolwich are peculiar in that there is a central exchange on Cross Street to which one must go when it is necessary to use the wires.

The hotel has never owned a telephone.

"You will pardon me, Mr. Higgins," David said, reaching for his hat. "I'll be back shortly."

He dropped the letters he had been reading into their blue-stamped envelopes and thrust them into the roll-top desk. Then he pulled down the cover, and for a moment, with his body between the banker and his own fingers, he hovered above the desk.

One who happened to be watching those same fingers might have seen them close over a small wisp of tissue paper rolled into a cube. This he carefully inserted on the outside edge of the roll-top, between it and the groove in which the apparatus slides.

Higgins realized that the trip to the telephone exchange would require at least fifteen minutes.

He made certain that David had left the Aldine House by the simple process of watching from the window. Then he hurried over to the desk, pulled at the roll, and found that it gave readily. The little cube of tissue paper, unseen by the banker, rolled off and dropped to the floor.

And then, for the first time, Tonson J. Higgins learned what he had been seeking to know from the day Dave Lamson arrived in East Woolwich.

He jerked the letters from the envelopes and read them rapidly. They were written on the letterheads of

Watson, Kilgour & Fresman, of Boston, and signed by Joseph Watson, and they referred to the approaching consolidation of the Maine and Northwestern with the Boston and Northern line.

These two companies had been rivals and enemies for years, and while the Maine and Northwestern passed through East Woolwich, the Boston and Northern lay almost a hundred miles to the north.

Both systems depended largely for profits upon the freight business, and the Maine and Northwestern had all the better of the argument because of its more direct route from upper New England to Boston, which was the southern terminus of both roads.

Once consolidated, a number of important operating changes would have to be made, and the first and most natural of these would be the acquisition of the Woolwich and Waterville Narrow-Gage Railroad, not for the tiny locomotives and the diminutive cars, but for the right-of-way.

While a small road ran only to Waterville, it still owned the right-of-way to New Eagle, sixty miles in a direct connecting line between the Maine and Northwestern at East Woolwich and the Boston and Northern at Centerfield.

By widening the tracks to standard gage and acquiring the thirty-odd miles of new right-of-way north of Waterville the heavy freight traffic of the Boston and Northern would then travel directly south, joining the Maine and Northwestern at East Woolwich and cutting off over a hundred miles of the distance to Boston.

Tonson J. Higgins was aware of these facts.

But he was not aware that the officials of the two roads had been in conference at the Hotel Palace in Boston for five days or that Joseph Watson of the firm of railway attorneys was in touch with the Boston situation. He realized that the Woolwich and Waterville Narrow-Gage Road was

worth a few thousand dollars as it stood, but that a consolidation of the two larger lines would miraculously increase its value.

The banker began to understand the meaning of the vague telegrams David Lamson had been receiving from the Hotel Palace in Boston.

"On Saturday night," continued one of the letters, "I expect the final nail to be driven. As soon as the deal is settled and the papers signed I will wire you, as agreed, and in case you do not receive a telegram by nine o'clock Saturday night you had better call me up at the Palace Hotel.

"I have had assurances that both roads are merely awaiting the arrival of Vice-President Gardner, who is in St. Louis. He is due in Boston Saturday evening, and the whole thing ought to go through an hour after he gets to the hotel. It's a big thing for us, and it's up to you to close with the Woolwich and Waterville people immediately after you get the word from me.

"I depend on you to do this, because the new consolidation won't wait a minute. They've got to have the connecting link, and have already voted on it, and we can go over a hundred thousand for it and still clear a fortune. There are not thirty people in Boston who know anything of this deal, and the newspapers haven't even suspected it yet, but it will break Sunday sure, so you can see how little time you have."

There were other important items in the letters that made it clear to Mr. Higgins that David Lamson intended to buy the narrow-gage and resell it to the new consolidation, provided there was a consolidation.

He placed the letters in the envelopes, trembling with pleasure, and pulled down the roll top of the big desk. Then he returned to his place at the window, and when David returned, which he did in twenty minutes, the face of the wily banker was a mask.

David walked over to his desk and, after glancing toward the place where the thin tube of paper had rested, he pulled up the lid. There was a pleasant smile upon his face.

An instant later he saw the tissue paper on the floor, and he knew that Mr. Higgins had not been wasting his time during the fictitious telephone call.

"Any news to-day, Davy?" Tonson J. inquired, yawning.

"Not a thing. Dearest day I've had in weeks, and it's a good thing. I'm pulled down somehow. Think I've been working too hard."

Higgins grinned inwardly. He was thinking of the telegram expected to arrive that evening, and his thoughts also wandered to Jim Biles and a short conference with that worthy. Telegrams received in East Woolwich after six in the evening were never delivered until the following day.

The one from Mr. Watson of Boston certainly would not be delivered.

At four o'clock in the afternoon David went for a short walk before supper. Half a block distant from the Dixon home he encountered Helen and dropped into step beside her.

"I offer you seventy-five thousand dollars for the narrow-gage," he said briskly. "Refuse to accept it."

"I refuse to accept it," she answered dutifully.

"Remember that you have been offered that sum," he continued. "You are holding out for a hundred thousand."

"I understand you. I think you are a wizard."

"Anybody could be a wizard working for you," David laughed. "I think things are approaching a climax, and you must make no mistake. In case you sell the road, say this evening, you will have to have a certified check for the full amount."

Something at the supper-table must have poisoned Mr. Lamson, because he arose in great pain and went at once to his room after sending for Dr.

Murchison, one of the two physicians in the village.

The doctor said it looked to him like a touch of ptomaine poisoning, and David took the medicine prescribed and curled up beneath the blankets with an expression of pain on his countenance.

Shortly after six o'clock Tonson J. Higgins came in hurriedly, having learned of his young friend's sickness.

David groaned.

"You're the one man I want to see, Mr. Higgins," he said, smothering his pain. "I can trust you. This cursed attack has hit me at a most inopportune moment, and it may be necessary for me to get on my feet before midnight. I want you to do me a favor. Will you?"

"Certainly, David. I'll do anything for you."

"I'm expecting a telegram from Boston, and it ought to be here before seven o'clock. I wish you would call at the telegraph-office and see if it has arrived. If there is no telegram by eight, I'd like to have you telephone Boston for me."

"I'll be glad to do it, Davy."

"Then put down these names. If the wire isn't here by eight o'clock telephone the Palace Hotel in Boston and get Joseph Watson. Tell him that I am sick in bed and that you are acting for me, and have him tell you whether it is yes or no. Just that: yes or no. He will know what you mean and will reply with either word. And I hope it's no, because I want to remain in bed."

David groaned and turned over.

There was no telegram at eight o'clock, although Banker Higgins remained in the freight-office waiting for it. Thereupon he followed Lamson's instructions, went over to the telephone exchange and got into communication with Joseph Watson at the Palace Hotel in Boston.

After he had explained Lamson's illness, he asked:

"Is it yes or no?"

"It is *yes*," the voice of Mr. Watson replied, "and tell Lamson to move fast."

Higgins replaced the receiver and hurried back to the sick man.

"There was no telegram," he said, as Davy tried to sit up in bed, "so I telephoned as you directed, and Mr. Watson replied that the answer is *no*."

"Thank Heaven!" Davy answered.

"Anything else I can do for you to-night?" Tonson J. inquired.

"Nothing," said David.

"Then I'll be going. Good night."

The speed with which Mr. Higgins sailed up Main Street to the Dixon home at the top of the hill has rarely been equaled by any banker of his age. He pushed steadily on the electric button until the door was opened, and when Helen Dixon appeared he cast aside introductions and greeting.

"I want to buy the Woolwich and Waterville road," he burst forth. "How much 'll you take for it?"

"You want to buy it?" Helen replied in surprise.

"Yes, I want to buy it. How much?"

"How do you know that I care to sell it?"

"Anybody would be glad to sell the bunch of junk," he said. "It's worth fifteen thousand dollars. I'll give you twenty-five thousand."

Helen laughed softly.

"You are very generous, Mr. Higgins, as you always are. It may surprise you to learn that I have been offered seventy-five thousand."

"Who offered you that?" he demanded.

"Certain people who have nothing to do with you."

"I'll give you eighty thousand," said the banker after a tense pause.

"I cannot take it."

"Ninety thousand!" Higgins belated, mopping his wet forehead.

Helen placed a finger against her cheek and appeared to be buried in thought.

"I cannot take a penny less than a

hundred thousand dollars for the road," she decided. "If you are interested at that figure sit down. If not—" She waved an eloquent hand toward the door.

For a brief moment Higgins paused. Then he recalled the sentence: "We can go over a hundred thousand for it and still clear a fortune."

"I'll take it at a hundred thousand," he said explosively. "You're a danged fortunate girl, even if you don't know anything about business."

In half an hour Tonson J. returned to the Dixon home with three of his tamed attorneys, and the papers of transfer were drawn up and signed. When the party broke up Helen Dixon gazed at the certified check for the largest sum she had ever beheld.

"I did everything Mr. Lamson told me to do," she said, "and now I'm rich. I wonder what in the world has happened to the narrow-gage?"

The church-bells were calling the populace to service in the morning, and Tonson J. Higgins walked blithely down Main Street. Two figures approached him.

They were walking arm in arm, and as they drew near Mr. Higgins saw that they were David Lamson and Helen Dixon. A quick, queer feeling flashed through him.

"You're better, Davy?" he said, stopping.

"Yes, thank you," Mr. Lamson replied. "But I didn't get well quick enough to head you off on the narrow-gage deal, did I? So you played me false and bought it, didn't you? Do you know what happens to people who play underhand tricks on their friends? I wonder, Mr. Higgins, whether you can recall the time you whipped me in front of your bank before all East Woolwich?"

"What—what do you mean, Davy?" the banker quavered.

"Not a thing in the world," David answered. "I hope you have a lot of luck with your narrow-gage system,

because it will probably be with you a long time."

He moved away, leaving the banker assailed by a million sudden fears.

"David," said Helen soberly — she really did call him David—"will you tell me exactly why Mr. Higgins paid all that money for the road?"

"One can never explain the processes of another's mind," replied Mr. Lamson. "I presume that Mr. Higgins thinks something important is to happen to the line—possibly a combination between the Boston and Northern and the Maine and Northwestern.

"Why he thinks that I cannot say, because I did not tell him so, and neither did any one else, I am sure. Mr. Higgins has underground methods of obtaining information, and I feel certain he has used them. Do you recall my trip to Boston recently?"

Helen nodded.

"I have a very good pal down there named Joe Watson. He is a son of the celebrated railway attorney and a young man of great inventive powers.

While I was there he suggested that we consolidate the two railways I have mentioned just as a matter of experiment and see what would happen. I agreed and we cooked up a little business drama of our own. If a country banker of bad repute chooses to thrust himself into our little play it is his own affair, isn't it?"

"But will the Boston and Northern and the Maine and Northwestern consolidate?" the girl demanded.

"They may—in the next thousand years," replied David. "At present they wouldn't speak to each other."

On the following Monday morning the employees of the First National Bank, hearing a sudden commotion in the office of their president, opened the door. They found Tonson J. Higgins lying on the floor in an agony of rage, and in his hand was clasped a lengthy telegram, signed by the secretary to the president of the Boston and Northern Railway. The last line read:

You have evidently been imposed upon.

The Jeweled Blade



By

E. A. Morphy

WHAT especially impressed Wayland — apart from the beauty of the girl at the table—was the lurid monotony of red. The walls were covered with wa-

tered silk of a deep poppy color; the hangings were of the same vivid hue; the crimson lamp-shades diffused a similar tone into the very atmosphere.

Facing each other across the table

in the center of the room were a man and a girl. The man Wayland instinctively disliked.

The girl he considered the loveliest he had ever seen. She was of the characteristically Irish type—blue-eyed, dark-haired, sylphlike, exquisite.

Resplendent among a number of lesser ornaments upon the table between them gleamed a dagger of uncommon workmanship.

Sparkling incessantly, iridescent with a myriad facets of translucent glory, the jeweled handle of the weapon caught Wayland's observant eye and enthralled him.

The blade was of blue steel—dark and very venomous. But it was the malignant loveliness of the hilt that seemed to glitter a warning to Wayland that the place and the hour were pregnant with tragedy.

Though the girl's eyes were bluey-gray, they glowed black in the crimson half-light—blazing darkly with pride and indignation.

The man, who seemed alternately to smirk and cower under the lash of the girl's scorn, wore a number of rings on his fingers, and his evening suit was a trifle too theatrical in cut and trimming to be in precise good form.

Withal he was handsome in the way that some women like men to be—a neatly bearded Apollo, with crisp, curly hair and a supercilious attitude of self-conscious grace.

The discussion between the girl and the man was intermittent but painful; and, as Wayland dared not reveal his presence, lest by so doing he might compromise a fourth person whom it would be absolutely unthinkable to betray, he was glad that he had not heard much of what was passing between them.

He tried not to listen, not to watch; but in this he was unsuccessful. His mind refused to be distracted from the menace of danger.

At first the girl spoke in tones that throbbed with suppressed emotion.

She was obviously mastering by a great effort a surging outburst of passionate indignation.

"But I am your proclaimed fiancée!" she protested. "I am your betrothed! People know that I have let you kiss me!"

She seemed to shrivel with disgust and shame as she whispered the final accusation.

Instinctively she raised a filmy wisp of handkerchief to her cheek, as though to wipe off the very memory of a caress that was defiling.

Wayland felt himself blush for listening.

"And now you would jilt me!"

She laughed quietly but hysterically.

"You!" she repeated with withering scorn and increasing anger. "You would jilt me!"

The man grinned nervously.

Wayland did not catch what he said; but he spoke words that were light and made light of love and lovers. He was striving to stem the wrath of a Celtic woman, slighted in love, with pleasantly cynical badinage.

There was a pause. The girl gasped for breath and glared at the man with eyes that glittered in helpless fury.

The man came stealthily around the table toward her, shrugging his shoulders as one who argues with an invincible fool. He had nerved himself for this ordeal and was going to make an end of it.

"Let us shake hands and part!" he quoted flippantly. "'We can at least be friends!' Eh?"

Wayland felt that in another moment he must spring up and choke the man.

The girl turned white and shrank back from the outstretched hand with its tapering, much-beringed fingers.

Again she raised the handkerchief to her face, as though to save herself from pollution.

Alternately cowering and smirking, the man advanced a step nearer.

The girl gasped again. Something seemed to snap. Swift as light her

right hand snatched the dagger from the table.

In a flash it was over.

The girl was reeling backward with both hands clasped to her eyes. The man was staggering blindly, brutishly. A chair overturned under him; his clutch tore the cloth and its load of bric-à-brac from the table. Red froth bubbled from his mouth.

The jeweled hilt of the dagger stuck out gleaming against the snowy background of his shirt-front. The point of it was buried in his heart!

Then Wayland awoke!

East or West, in none of the five Continents, on none of the Seven Seas, lived a man less likely to dream or be moved by a dream than Peter Wayland. But on this occasion he sat up in bed and turned on the electric-light.

There was no trace of deception anywhere—no hint of trickery. Wayland was in his own room, his own bed.

But his body and mind were alike aquiver with the oppressively tangible reality of the girl in the red room, the murdered man, and the jeweled dagger.

He lay down and tried to go to sleep again, but failed. He got up and took a drink and went back to bed again and shut his eyes in a resolute endeavor to forget all about the business; but he remained awake until morning.

Whatever way he turned he was haunted by the beautiful face of the girl with the blue eyes and the ghastly horror of the final tragedy.

Even when he got up next morning and went out for a stroll the vision still lingered, and somehow he was unable to get rid of it. It would be wrong to say that it became an obsession; but it remained as a peculiarly vivid and persistent memory.

Wayland frequently found himself pondering how he could ever have come to associate so beautiful a girl with so unpleasant a man and so gruesome a tragedy even within the shadowy confines of a dream.

Her face, he realized, was of a type that held for him a remarkable fascination, and he could not conceive how a man could get engaged to that sort of a girl and then jilt her.

Such eyes as hers, he reflected, must be the windows of a very beautiful soul. Then again, how account for so hasty and passionate a murder if the girl really had so beautiful a soul?

The problem was insolvable. But Wayland knew that had he ever met a girl with that sort of a face in his own set he would have fallen utterly in love with her.

He hoped, therefore, that he would not meet such a girl; because, though heart-whole and fancy-free, he knew that some day he would be expected to conform to the desires of his family and the traditions of his race and marry his cousin, Edith Sandys.

And Edith was a very charming girl—blond, jolly, lovable, and with a fortune as attractive as his own. He would always like Edith, and she would always like him, too; and there would be dear little children of which they would both be very proud.

But there would not be anything that savored too deeply of romance about it all. There would be no straining of heart-strings. Everything would be very pleasant, and very even, and very *comme il faut*.

The very proposal, he realized, would be commonplace. He would have the ring in his pocket when he asked her to marry him, and she would say:

"Of course, Peter!" and give him her cheek to kiss, and say, "Oh, what a darling!" when she looked at the ring.

Withal, he liked Edith Sandys, for she was of his own set, a really good sort, and understood him as well as it is mete for any girl to understand the man she expects to marry.

Wayland often wondered how she would explain the existence of this hauntingly beautiful dream-murderess if he told her about it, and once or

twice he nearly broached the subject to her.

On each occasion, however, tact supervened. He kept his dream and its memory to himself.

One day he was again considering the matter. It was at afternoon tea in the Sandys' house, and the drawing-room was rather packed with the crush of Mrs. Sandys's callers.

At the moment the idea occurred to him he was holding his cup and saucer in one hand and passing the cake to Edith Sandys with the other.

The girl suddenly stopped with her hand poised above the piece of cake. Her merry eyes brightened joyously.

"Oh, there's Mary Dillon!" she exclaimed.

Wayland looked around and let his tea-cup fall with a crash in his amazement.

Exquisitely gowned, lovelier far than any memory of his dream had ever limned her, the girl of the scarlet room was emerging from the crowd and advancing with gladly outstretched hands to Edith Sandys.

The drawing-room seemed to spin on one corner and turn poppy-red.

The wonderful blue-gray eyes of the dream-girl glanced at him quizzically from under their long black lashes, and flashed an intelligent question at Miss Sandys.

She had evidently heard of the family hopes concerning a possible alliance between Edith and Wayland, and her eyes told his cousin that she approved the choice of fate. A dimple stole into one cheek elusively, fluttered there for a second, then hurriedly faded away.

Wayland thought his heart would stop beating.

The judgments of men differ widely as to what constitutes the acme of human loveliness; but Wayland, who knew that he had good taste, realized that for him at all events this was the most beautiful creature the world ever saw.

It was not the sort of beauty that

inflamed hot desire and the hunger to take her in his arms and smother her with kisses. It was rather of the type that excited in Wayland an admiration that was transcendent.

It was the beauty that one only sought to worship—the beauty that one might learn to love when one dared—the beauty that the knights of old builded in their fancies when they died for liege-ladies that they had never seen.

Thus it appealed to Wayland's human senses. But his intelligence reeled at the thrall of it.

Between him and the woman lay a blood-stained dagger with a glittering hilt of jewels. By her side—as a shadow—a murdered man staggered to the floor.

Overpoweringly, irrefutably, inexplicably, it was borne upon the mind of Wayland that the dagger and the man and the tragedy existed as really as did the woman herself.

"Is there anything the matter, Peter?"

The voice of Miss Sandys recalled Wayland to himself.

"Do look nice, please—for your own sake. I want to introduce you to Mary Dillon."

Mary Dillon said "How do you do?" to Wayland, and presently passed on, leaving a reminiscence of bewildering beauty and a soft Irish brogue, in every way the antitheses of tragedy.

"She is a very wonderful girl," explained Miss Sandys, "and she is very rich; but I don't think she has ever been very happy."

Wayland said "Oh, indeed!" in a manner so distantly courteous as to indicate that the matter was very sad but remotely impersonal. He no longer desired that Edith Sandys should ever hear about his dream.

"She is one of those Irish-American miracles," persisted Miss Sandys, "whose father made millions out of a hole in the ground and sent her to a convent in 'the ould dart' to be edu-

cated. Then he died. Her mother had died when she was only a baby; so she had nobody at all to look after her. And so—

Wayland nodded sagaciously. He knew how to make Edith Sandys talk.

"She never told me *all* about the rest of it," admitted Miss Sandys, "but I know that it was the wrong man that made love to her. I believe he is dead, or something, now."

The situation worried Wayland. He wanted to go away and think. His dream had turned into an obsession.

It was impossible for him to bandy any more pretty courtesies with Miss Sandys until he could effectually banish from his mind the alluring long-lashed eyes of Mary Dillon.

But Mary Dillon had returned from somewhere back of beyond in Italy or Egypt, and was going to spend the summer in England, and her friends happened to be of Wayland's more intimate set.

He got no opportunity to banish her from his mind. She entered the daily routine of his existence.

The conviction that there was more behind his original dream than the usual "stuff that dreams are made of" was strengthened every time he saw her.

She used gestures that were the gestures of the woman in the tragedy. She had a way of drawing herself up and backward, quickly and with pantherine grace, that was exactly what the woman in the red room had done before she snatched up the lethal dagger.

Occasionally she allowed her gaze to wander far away, dreamily, and then suddenly collect herself as one who acts a part.

And Wayland, who watched her like a hawk every instant he was near her, noted all these things and magnified them and linked them with what he had seen of the dream-tragedy.

Gradually, and contrary to every prompting of his intelligence and instinct of self-preservation, he realized

that the allurements of her personality were overpowering his logical aversion. He was falling under the magical thrall of her beauty and was beginning to forget about the dagger and the red room. He followed her hither and yon.

He danced with her, he took her in to dinner. Places that he went to and from which she was absent seemed desolate. He knew that she was not a person to idolize or worship—that somewhere behind the mask of incomparable sweetness was the spirit of a vampire.

Yet knowing this instinctively he allowed himself to be dragged deeper and deeper into the toils. He was falling in love with her. His reason was being overwhelmed by his heart.

Now and then he met Edith Sandys. It was inevitable that he should do so. He had never breathed a word of romance to her, though it was an understood thing on both sides that some day he would ask her to be his wife.

Edith Sandys had the joyous ways of a light-hearted English girl, and—after the fashion of her species—saw farther and felt more deeply than anybody dreamed.

She had always liked Peter Wayland. Now she realized that it was more than mere liking; but that was not for anybody else to suspect.

"Peter," said she one day, "do you know you are in love with Mary Dillon?"

Wayland looked at her with an expression as blandly vacuous as he could possibly assume.

"What nonsense, Edith!" said he. "If you only understood things you would know that she is the last girl on earth it could happen to!"

Edith Sandys smiled mischievously.

"Peter," she chided him, "I know more than you think I do. I know that this is the first time I ever saw you blush."

Wayland knew all about the moth and the flame, and he realized the folly of his own predicament in seeking the

society of a girl whose past he felt to be a blot.

Henley week saw him a guest at the same house-party on the river, and he had sought the invitation because he knew that Mary Dillon was to be there.

It was in the evening after the first day's races. The river was very wonderful, the moon was very fair. They sat together in a punt, drifting silently, happily, in a backwater among the shadows.

Wayland was watching her almost breathlessly. The spell of her beauty seemed strongest in the twilight.

The unfathomable loveliness of her eyes, the peach-blossom skin, the masses of wavy dark hair, the ineffable suspicion of sadness behind the smile which is the essence of the Irish character, were clouding reason out of the heart of Peter Wayland.

"I suppose," said he, when the silence began to press upon his folly, "I suppose you know you are very beautiful."

The girl leaned forward and clasped her hands over her knees. She looked into the face of Peter Wayland as one who seeks a sign, and Wayland felt his heart sinking.

"I have been told," said she, "that I am not ill-looking."

The picture of the jeweled dagger flamed before Wayland's eyes.

"Beware!" it seemed to say. The menace of it heartened Wayland, and the girl's eyes questioned him.

"Does he still tell you so?" asked Wayland with dry lips. "I suppose you mean some man told you, as I have done. Does he still tell you so? Has any one the right to tell you so?"

The girl looked calmly at Wayland and beyond him. She did not sigh audibly, but Wayland noted that she held her breath as one does who suppresses a sigh or an exclamation.

"No," she replied presently. "He does not tell me so any more. To tell you the truth, I think he grew to fancy that he had been mistaken. You see,

I am very candid with you, Mr. Wayland. And somehow I wish that he had been candid with me!"

The unfathomable eyes looked into Wayland's very coldly.

"But my mirror tells me I am not ill to look upon, and—"

Wayland raised an imploring hand.

"I am sorry!" he muttered. "I couldn't help asking you! Won't you please forgive me? I could not help asking you! I could not, indeed!"

The girl smiled graciously.

"There is no need to apologize, Mr. Wayland," she assured him. "You paid me a very nice compliment. I will reward you by telling you that the only man who ever paid me many such compliments—the man I was engaged to, I mean"—she spoke coldly and incisively—"is dead. I do not think it is likely that I shall ever again permit myself to enjoy similar compliments. You understand me?"

Her voice softened reluctantly. The brogue burred on her tongue. She seemed to be rather sorry for Peter Wayland as an individual, but glad that she had spoken bitterly to him as a man.

"I understand," said he.

Another punt glided past them, and they were silent until it had faded into the darkness.

"Is there anything else you would like to ask me?"

Wayland looked at the girl. She sat with an expression that suggested the bravado of nerves unstrung.

"There is one other thing I should like to ask you, if I may?" said he.

"It is a very nonsensical question and may seem to you very far-fetched, but it is one that greatly concerns me. It concerns me only because I thought it might concern you," he added hastily.

"That is why I want to ask you."

Miss Dillon raised her eyebrows in a gesture of astonished inquiry.

"Did you ever own a dagger with a jeweled handle?"

The girl took her hands from her face. Wayland fancied she went pale,

but in the moonlight it is difficult to tell. Anyhow, it was plain to him that the question was as disconcerting as it was unexpected.

"It was a very remarkable sort of dagger," he blurted on. "A big emerald at the top of the handle, then—"

"I know the dagger you mean," she interrupted. "I have it with me here in Henley. It was given to me by the man that is dead. I did not think anybody knew anything about it. Please take me home!"

Wayland dreamed that night of human vampires with unfathomable eyes of bluey-gray, and he awoke in the morning wondering if the river-trip that preceded the nightmare were really only part of the dream.

But he knew that such was not the case. He could still see the startled look in her eyes when he mentioned the dagger; he could still hear her warm brogue emphasizing the cold announcement:

"My mirror tells me I am not ill to look upon!" he could still smell the perfume of violets that clung to her white frock.

By right, he figured it, he should bid his farewells to his hostess and hark back to town on some suitable excuse. But he could not win himself away from the house that held his idol with the feet of clay. He must see her once again. He must—

A weird and disreputable idea entered the mind of Peter Wayland.

He must search her room for that dagger!

She would not let him fully describe it to her in the punt. She had shut him up peremptorily and asked him to take her back to the house.

Maybe it was a different dagger altogether. Maybe the tragedy of the scarlet room was, after all, only a dream!

Ah! If only that were so! He would make her forget the other man. He would make her forget everything but the worth of love undying!

He would make her his queen—his angel—his guiding-star and lantern to his feet! He would—

A rose-colored world would hem in the path through which he and Mary Dillon would wander, hand in hand, to paradise.

So Wayland framed neat excuses, and when the others took to the river he remained upon the lawn.

Thereafter he returned to the house—ostensibly to letters, but in reality to satisfy or kill forever the doubt that he now felt dragging at his heart and gnawing at his brain.

He must find that dagger. He must be sure about it!

He knew it was the real dagger, and therefore dreaded to seek it. But he must be sure—certain—before eternally abandoning his hope of winning the only woman that he would ever wish to be his mate. It might not be the dagger—the chance existed—it might not be quite the same.

The house was empty save for himself. The servants were on the lawn or down the river. Before ever starting upon his quest, however, Wayland already felt like a convicted thief.

That was a mere bagatelle. He had to be convinced of Mary Dillon's guilt or innocence.

He opened the door of her room stealthily—afraid of the sound of his own footsteps in the broad light of a July day. He held his breath and peered about furtively.

The room was pretty—ordinary. There were a couple of vases with flowers in them to brighten the simplicity of the furniture. There was no dagger anywhere.

Wayland noted everything—the orderly bed, the big trunks, the wardrobe, the dressing-table.

On the last-mentioned there were many fallals and boxes and cases and bottles such as women carry about with them, and one oblong leather case looked as if it could hold the dagger of the tragedy.

It was an ordinary sort of a silver-

mounted green Russia leather glove-box that a girl would be likely to fill with anything but gloves. Wayland sucked his dry lips as he contemplated it from a distance. Then he crept over to it, very gently, very slowly, treading softly on tiptoes.

He picked up the case and felt the weight of it. Loud cried his heart to him: "You are thieving in Mary Dillon's room! Gad!"

He cowered, but he still clutched the case to him.

"Open it!" prompted reason. "And know the truth!"

Wayland pressed the silver catch and raised the cover.

Glittering against the green velvet, venomous in its scintillant splendor, lay the jeweled dagger of the red room.

Wayland's face went gray. Slowly, mechanically, he closed the lid and let the box drop to the table. His danger, his shame, was forgotten. Huddling himself up on his knees, he rested his head in his arms.

"My God! My God!" said he. "It's true!"

The lock of the door clicked.

"Mr. Wayland!"

Wayland staggered to his feet like a drunken man that has been shot.

"Mr. Wayland!"

Standing with her back to the door, her accusing eyes ablaze with scorn and amazement, Mary Dillon watched him.

For a moment his parched lips could form no word. His staring eyes gaped at her; but though she saw that he had discovered the dagger, she gave no sign of fear.

"I could not help it!" he muttered. "I could not help it! I could not believe it! I had to come and see!"

A look of bewildered mystification came into the blue eyes of Miss Dillon.

"You could not believe what, Mr. Wayland?" she asked a trifle more kindly.

"The murder—the dagger!" gasped

Wayland. "You were so very beautiful! I will never betray you! I saw it all in a dream!"

Lilting a ripple of laughter, silvery as the song of the mating blackbird, Mary Dillon raised both hands to her breast.

"Murder, Mr. Wayland!" she ejaculated merrily. "Me a murderess! Oh, you silly man!"

The Irish eyes brimmed with the laughter that banished every frown of suspicion or sadness to the stars.

The gray went out of Wayland's face. It flushed with unspeakable gladness.

"I don't care whether you think me a thief or not, Mary!" said he. "But I love you better than all the world, and you know it!"

It was Miss Dillon that went pale. "I thought—I thought—" she began.

"I don't mind what you thought!" broke in Wayland. "I've told you the truth, Mary! I thought you murdered the man with the dagger; but nobody that did murder could laugh your laugh! May I love you?"

Mary Dillon looked up at Peter Wayland. She said nothing; but Peter caught her up in his arms and covered her face with kisses, and she seemed content.

In due time he took his arms away and told her the dream of the red room and the girl and the man and the jeweled dagger.

Again she laughed. And this time she crooned as well as laughed.

"Tell me, Peter," said she, "were you at the Academy this year?"

Wayland, deeply mystified, admitted having been at the opening function, but also confessed to having seen nothing but the people in the crush.

"Oh, but I beg your pardon, sir!" corrected Miss Dillon. "You must have seen one picture painted by the man who gave me the dagger—the man who is dead. It was called 'The Red Tragedy,' and I posed for the jilted girl!"

Votes for Men



Percy Atkinson

I HAD just returned to New York in 1923 after ten years absence, and I was walking down Broadway, giving the old town the once over, when a female person whose peculiar style of unbeauty was her surest protection against molestation drew near.

Looking up into my face she said, "Will you marry me?"

"No, ma'am," I said promptly.

"Ah," she said gloomily, "then you are already married?"

"Not so," I replied airily, "conceding that it is any of your business. And I may go so far as to state that I have no intention of getting married."

"Is that answer final?" she asked.

"Absolutely."

"Very well, then," she said. "I am forced to do my duty."

She stepped up to a policeman on the corner.

"Officer," she said, "arrest that man. He refuses to marry me. I demand that he be taken into custody."

The policeman caught up to me and tapped me on the shoulder.

"You are under arrest," he said.

"Wha—what for?" I asked.

"For refusing to marry this woman." He snapped the wristlets on me.

"Come with me."

"Why," I cried, "I never saw the brazen creature before in all my life."

"That makes no difference," the man said as we passed through the streets with a small crowd at our heels. "She has made the charge that you refuse to marry her. You do not deny it and that's all I know about it."

Anyway, I said to myself, when I get to the police station they will see that a mistake has been made, so I wont worry about it or say anything more until I get there.

When the officer lined me up at the desk the captain said briskly:

"What's the charge, officer?"

"He refuses to marry this woman," the policeman said, jerking his thumb in the direction of the woman who had accompanied us.

"Wh-e-e-w!" the captain whistled as he took a closer look at me. "Is this true?" he said, taking down the big book.

"Certainly it's true," I replied hotly. "I never saw her before in my life and that's a fact. It's ridiculous—preposterous. It's—it's—"

"Remember," the captain said, "anything you say now will be used against you. I have no desire to enhance your punishment."

After they had taken down snatches of my biography I was led to a cell. I can tell you I was mad clear through from top to bottom, inside and out, all the way across the board.

The first thing I did was to send for a lawyer.

When he arrived he asked me to tell him all about it.

He was very thoughtful.

"You're in something of a fix, old man," he said at last. "I personally don't see how you're going to get out of it."

"Oh, you don't, eh?" I replied. "Well, you must be a whale of a lawyer if you can't see almost immediately that this woman has absolutely no case against me. I tell you I never saw her before; I don't know who she is, where she came from, or—"

"Is it possible," the lawyer said, "that you are unaware of the bachelor law in New York State?"

"I've been abroad for ten years," I said. "Just got in last night and I was taking a walk when this person pulled that matrimony joke on me. I don't know anything about the confounded law you mention."

"That explains it," he said. "You see, when the women got the vote eight years ago the first thing they did was to pass a law making every single man, unwilling to marry, a felon. They even went farther and tacked on a clause to the effect that if a woman asked a man to marry him and he refuses he is to be brought to trial, and the penalty is not less than two nor more than ten years' imprisonment. So you can see, my dear man, that you're in something of a fix."

"Great Heavens!" I cried. "Isn't there some way out of this? Don't tell me I've got to spend the best part of my life in prison! What can we do?"

"Well," he said doubtfully, "I'll do the best I can. It might be possible to obtain the consent of the plaintiff to have you auctioned off in court."

"Auctioned off?"

"Certainly. I neglected to explain that if the plaintiff desires you may be brought into court, auctioned off and sold to the highest bidder among the women present. That is about the best we can do outside of pleading ignorance of the law, which might result in a light penalty—say five years or so. What do you say? Shall I try that?"

"Go ahead," I said lifelessly. "Anything is better than going to jail."

"All right." He shook hands with me briskly. "Keep up your courage. That's the main thing. I'll see you tomorrow."

After he left me I dropped down on the wooden chair with which the cell was equipped and I held my head in my hands. Auctioned off! It was a terrible fate for a strong, healthy man. I sure did curse the day I was born. But at any rate there was a faint ray of hope that some good, kind, gentle, and perhaps attractive soul, though I scarcely hoped for that, would buy me.

I tried to cheer up, but it wasn't much use.

The next day my lawyer returned and clapped me on the shoulder. He was fairly bristling with radiance.

"Good news!" he shouted. "I've fixed it!"

"Then—then I'm free?" I cried.

"Not so fast," he admonished me. "I've gotten the plaintiff to agree to your being auctioned off in court tomorrow at two o'clock. I had an ad put in the morning paper. Want to see it?"

He drew the newspaper from his pocket and pointed to a small paragraph in the advertising columns.

It read:

To be auctioned off in Judge O'Gorman's court tomorrow, January 14, 1923, at two o'clock—a bachelor. Five feet ten inches tall, light curly hair, small mustache. Salesman. Good dresser, moderate smoker, and a light drinker. A real bargain for those who wish a home broke, even-tempered man.

"How do you like it?" he asked as I handed back the paper.

"The description is all right," I said. "But let me tell you one thing, my boy: I'm not very strong for this business. Isn't there some other way out of it?"

"Sure," he said. "You can go to prison if you prefer. Though I'd advise you to take advantage of being auctioned. There's always a chance that you'll fall into the hands of some—er—desirable person."

"Do you know any?" I said. "I've got plenty of money. If you have any one in mind, you know, some nice girl—somebody attractive and all that—I'd appreciate it."

"By jinks!" his face lighted up. "I've got you. The thing's as good as done—settled. Trust me."

"How much will it cost?" I asked doubtfully.

"Let me see," he thought deeply. "I think it could be arranged for a hundred dollars easily. This girl I have in mind—good looking and all that—proud, too—fine girl—brown hair, black eyes—why, she's a perfect peach. A hundred will do it. I've seen them sold for as low as fifteen dollars, but you'll go to more than that. I would not be surprised to see you hit seventy-five or even a little more."

I handed him a hundred.

"Take it," I said, "and pull the deal. Give it to the girl and tell her—tell her—oh, tell her she'll never be sorry. I'm not such a bad sort, you know. There won't be any hitch in this, will there?"

"I don't think so," he said, pocketing the money. "Good luck to you."

He departed—went.

The court-room was crowded—standing room only. Women of every size, shape, and age, mostly advanced, were present.

I didn't see a soul there that measured up to what my lawyer had picked out for me—that is, I didn't see her at first; but when I sort of got used to the crowd and analyzed it there she was sure enough, and the only one in

the bunch that looked like a live one. It wasn't going to be so bad, after all.

My spirits rose and rose until I really began to enjoy it.

The auctioneer was a bald-headed, fussy little man. There were four others beside me to be put on the block. They saved me for the last.

One man went for six dollars, and he was dear at that; another brought twenty-five because his teeth were filled with gold; another hit thirty-two and then stopped there.

The one next to me was a sorry-looking figure. The auctioneer couldn't get a bid, and finally he gave it up and the man was led back to the cage.

At last the auctioneer came over to me and led me to the block, which was just below the judge's bench.

"Young man"—the judge glowered down upon me—"your case is a particularly sad one. You refused to marry the plaintiff on the open highway. I am sorry that I cannot impose the maximum sentence on you, but the leniency of the plaintiff is responsible for your having escaped a prison sentence. I trust you will show a proper appreciation of her kindness by leading a life of matrimonial rectitude. Proceed."

I thanked him and the sale was on.

The auctioneer looked me over well, and, stepping to the front, he cleared his throat as I mounted the block.

"Ladies," he said impressively, "it is my privilege to give you an opportunity that seldom occurs in this court. Now and again I have presented for your consideration most desirable specimens of the male sex. But to-day"—he smirked as he fiddled with his cravat—"I have to offer you a man without stain or blemish—of good and regular habits, sound of wind and strong of limb. He is, as Shakespeare says, one of whom all nature might stand up before the world and say, 'Here is a man.' How much am I offered?"

"Three dollars," from the rear of the room.

"Three dollars?" the auctioneer repeated derisively. "Why, that's an insult. Three dollars wouldn't buy the clothes on his back, and remember they go with him. Three—do I hear five? Do I hear five?"

"Five."

"Thank you—thank you. Going up—going up to be sold to the highest bidder. Do I hear six?"

"Six!" from an elderly lady with a black shawl.

I shuddered and looked toward the brown-haired, black-eyed girl. When would she start?

My eyes met hers. I smiled—she smiled.

"Seven," she said softly.

"Seven!" the auctioneer cried. "Going for seven; do I—"

He whispered in my ear: "Are you insured?"

"Four thousand," I said thoughtlessly.

This positively put new life in him.

"Why, ladies," he shouted, "this man is insured for four thousand dollars! Think of it! He is of almost inestimable value. And going for seven dollars! Do I hear ten?"

"Ten," from the elderly lady.

"Fifteen," from she of the hair, the eyes, and the figure.

"Twenty!" the old lady snapped, and the race was on.

The bidding went up and up. Others came in, stayed out, and came back again. New ones bid and dropped out, but the battle was between the young lady and the elderly person in the shawl, and it was a foregone conclusion that one or the other would land me.

Then the bidding passed a hundred, and the auctioneer fairly frothed and foamed. Even the judge was interested.

Now and again I threw a glance toward the young lady, and she returned it and kept right on going until the bidding struck the hundred and fifty mark.

Then I saw her weaken, for she had

used not only my hundred, but was throwing money of her own into it. I could tell that in a few minutes she'd have to drop out, and I would become the property of the determined person in the black shawl.

"One hundred and sixty-two! Do I hear five?" The auctioneer mopped his brow. "Do I hear—do I hear five? Five! Do I hear five? Going at one hundred and sixty-two—going at one hundred and sixty-two—sixty-two *once!* Going at one hundred and sixty-two *twice!* Going for the third and last time—third and last time for—*Sold* for one hundred and sixty-two dollars!"

It was over.

I stepped weakly from the block and fell into the arms of the auctioneer.

I had been sold to the elderly, black-shawled person for one hundred and sixty-two dollars. Oh, waves of despair and desolation engulf me!

I looked for the young lady, and she was standing by my side, her eyes filled with tears. The elderly lady was making her way through the crowd.

I didn't know what to do next. I'd never been sold before, so I waited until the elderly lady came up to me, and, grasping me by the arm, she said:

"Come along. What's your name?"

"Charles," I said humbly.

"It's a good name," she approved. "My third husband's name was Charles. I'm sure we'll get along real nice together."

She took me outside and we stepped into a cab.

"I do have the worst luck with husbands," she explained as we went on our way up-town. "Somehow or other, I never seem to be able to keep them. But they were all insured, and that was some consolation. I'd never take one that wasn't. You look strong and healthy, though; but I'm in hopes of keeping you for a good while. You are well, aren't you?"

"Yes, ma'am," I returned humbly. "But—I don't feel as well as I did, somehow."

"Oh, you'll get over that when you're broke in! I'll take good care of you. Don't you be afraid."

"When are we—er—going to be married?" I asked.

"We'll be married to-morrow," she said. "I was going to have the wash done to-morrow, but I can put it off. Have you got any baggage?"

"Only a few shirts and things at the hotel," I said.

"We'll get them to-morrow," she said. "If you need anything before then you can wear Henry's clothes. He was about your size."

Then she chattered along all the way, retailing anecdotes about the late and the latest lamented, whose name was Spriggs. She told me she had beautiful crayon portraits of all her past purchases in the front parlor, and that she'd have mine there as soon as the portrait man came around again.

She told me she positively prohibited smoking in the house and out of it, if she had her way; and she'd always see that I had my rubbers on when the weather was nasty and—well, she certainly was a conversationalist of a remarkably loquacious order.

From what I gathered, it was nothing for her to lose a husband on Tuesday, dash down to the court on Thursday, pick up a real bargain for about twelve dollars, and then about Saturday, when death came to his release, go back again and lead another captive into bondage. As a widow, she was excessively frequent and extemporaneous.

I thought of the nice, quiet, home-like, comfortable jail I had missed through the unwise advice of the lawyer. Yes, jail would have been a paradise in comparison with what I foresaw of a future with Mrs. Spriggs.

Suddenly our cab halted and there was some commotion out in the roadway. Bricks and stones were flying about, and one hit the window of the cab and smashed it.

A man's angry face peered through the window.

"Votes for men!" he cried.

"Wh—what is it," I asked Mrs. Spriggs—"a riot?"

"I dare say," she replied with set lips. "It's those militants again, I'll be bound. If the men expect to regain the vote they're going about it the wrong way, I can tell you. I hope you're not one of those who believe that men have any duties outside of the home."

"Oh, no!" I hastened to reply. "Man's place is the home," and as I said it something seemed quite familiar about the phrase.

"That's right," she said approvingly. "I was sure I hadn't thrown a hundred and sixty-two dollars away for nothing."

Just then the door of the cab was thrown open and Mrs. Spriggs was dragged to the street. She didn't like it; she hit out right and left, and clawed and tore, but it wasn't any use. The militants had her.

Maybe I didn't take advantage of this to make a get-away! I leaped out out of the cab and strolled very rapidly in the opposite direction, elbowing my way through excited groups of men and women who were rushing to the spot of conflict.

Once free I drew in a deep, adult breath, and I kept on going until I reached the Grand Central Station. It was my idea to get out of New York as quickly as steam and a mighty determination could take me.

I bought a ticket for New Haven and made for the train-shed where the Connecticut Express was waiting.

I am not sure how many men and babies I knocked over in my flight, nor how I got there; but just as I was putting my foot on the bottom step I heard a weak, tremulous voice say, "Will you marry me?" and I felt a hand on my arm.

"No!" I shouted back, and then the conductor cried, "All aboard!" the engine gave a mighty puff, and we were under way.

"Thank Heaven!" I dumped my-

self into a seat. "If ever I go to New York again it will be 'in the baggage-car ahead.' No more for mine."

I wouldn't have cared so much if I'd been drawn by a live one at the sale, but when my thoughts turned toward Mrs. Spriggs I shuddered all through my system.

The conductor took my ticket and passed on. I settled back into my seat, and after the fatiguing exercises of the afternoon I dozed off. The piteous cry, "Votes for men!" rang in my ears, while abaft my subconsciousness flitted Mrs. Spriggs, relict of the late and the latest lamented.

I was awakened by the train coming to a stop, and when I opened my eyes I saw we had reached a station. Several passengers got on, and my heart gave a hop, skip, and a jump when I saw that one of them was the young lady who had bid up on me in the court-room as far as the money lasted.

She took a seat beside me. She recognized me and blushed. I guess I must have blushed, too, for it was rather embarrassing to say the least.

"Please don't give me away," I whispered to her. "I—I've escaped."

She paled and gave a gasp.

"Oh," she cried, "how could you? Do you know the penalty you have laid yourself liable to?"

"No worse than the one I would have suffered in captivity," I said easily. "Anyway, I'll soon be over the State line, and then I can defy Mrs. Spriggs and all the minions of the law."

"Then—then you don't know," she returned tremulously. "The penalty for escaping is"—she leaned closer and whispered in my ear—"death."

Death! And I was so young, so unprepared!

"What can I do?" I cried. "Never—never will I go back to Mrs. Spriggs and the—the overshoes. Never will I languish in hopeless, loveless, cigarless captivity. Better death!" I exclaimed.

"There is a way out," she said softly, like a breeze moving the foliage.

"What is it?" I asked fearfully.

"You can marry some one else," she said, "and they cannot touch you."

"Who—what—where?" I stammered, a faint glimmer of hope shining through the trees.

"Me!" promptly. "Of course," she went on, "I know you think me very unmaidenly, but no more than you must have thought me back there in the court-room. I would have purchased you then, because I—I liked you, but I didn't have enough money."

"I'm sorry you didn't," I replied eagerly. "I had hoped that you would, but—Well"—I gave her hand a little squeeze—"we'll be married and that's settled. It's not the only way out, but it's the finest, grandest little way in the world. We'll get off at the next station, hunt up a minister, and then let Mrs. Spriggs, the frequent widow, do her worst."

"Oh, it isn't necessary to get married before a minister!" she said; "we can be married at almost any street corner."

"Come now," I protested; "I know I'm behind the times and all that, but to talk about getting married at street corners is exceeding the credulity limit."

"Why, certainly." She gathered up her wraps as the train stopped and I followed her. "Wherever have you been for the past eight or ten years?"

We were soon on the street in upper New York City—somewhere in the Bronx, I believe—and as we passed a busy corner she pointed out what looked like an extra large mail-box to me.

"We'll be married here," she said. "It won't take but a moment, and then you'll be safe."

We stepped over to the box, and she said: "Have you got a nickel in change?"

"Sure!" I handed one to her.

"Now, be ready to answer," she said, poising the coin in the air over

a slot in the top of the thing. "Are you ready?"

"Shoot!" I said as she took my hand.

Then coming from that box, as sure as you live, I heard the words of the marriage ceremony. You know them. They run something like this: "Will you have this woman?" and so on.

When it was over and we'd answered according to the same old specifications she pressed a button and a small phonographic black disk fell into the aperture below.

She took it out and smilingly handed it to me.

"Our wedding certificate," she said prettily.

Well, it sure did look a trifle different from the old-fashioned kind with father's and mother's picture on it, and roses and cupids and all that sort of thing; but then you can get used to anything, you know, and I was fast reaching a state where nothing that happened in New York would have surprised me.

"By jinks, that was a close shave!" I said to Rheba later in the evening as we sat at a table in Martel's on Broadway. We were enjoying our wedding dinner all by ourselves.

"Every time I think of that Spriggs person my blood runs cold. There's no danger of her getting me back, is there?" I asked anxiously.

"None whatever," Rheba smiled. "Under the fugitive bachelor law you are mine, and no one can take you away from me. Are you satisfied?"

"Satisfied"—I grasped her hand across the table—"is a poor, weak, inexpensive word to use with which to describe my state of mind. But I don't know of any other word, so we'll let it go at that."

"We certainly owe that lawyer a debt of gratitude," I said after the waiter had brought our order.

"What lawyer?" Rheba asked.

"Why—Jenks or Jinks—whatever his name was. You ought to know,

He gave you a hundred of my money, didn't he, to bid on me?"

"I—I don't know what you're talking about," Rheba said. "No lawyer gave *me* anything—why? I was bidding on you with my own money—money I'd saved up to buy a husband with. You thought—"

"Come now," I protested. "We're married and we can act like regular married folks—tell each other everything and—and all that. I don't want the money back, Rheba. You can keep it—"

"But I tell you I haven't got any money of yours. Isn't that enough?"

"Well," I said, "of course if you *say* you haven't got it—you haven't, but there's something mighty strange about this thing. Are you sure you—"

Rheba rose. She was evidently angry. She certainly plunged right into good old-fashioned domestic infelicity.

"Why, you—you!" she gasped. "I've—you—*man!*"

"Now—now," I said soothingly, "sit down, please. Don't make a scene here in a public place. I believe you. Lots of people wouldn't, but I do. Now—sit down."

"Oh!" she cried, reaching for her hand-bag. She fumbled with the catch, and after some probing she drew forth our marriage certificate, which I had given her to keep. "That for you!" She brought the disk down on the table and some of the pieces fell into the man's soup who sat back of us.

Believe me, that was bad enough—but not quite complete. No, it needed but one thing, and that happened almost immediately.

"There he is!" a feminine voice shrieked, and in another moment Mrs. Spriggs and her cohorts had me.

The old lady looked Rheba over carefully—in fact, the two women sized each other up well.

"Hussy!" Mrs. Spriggs snapped.

"You can't take me," I said triumphantly. "This lady and myself are married."

"Really?" Rheba raised her brows. "I hadn't heard of it."

"But," I gasped, "surely you can't deny the ceremony."

"Prove it," was all she said, and how was I to prove it? How, indeed? The proof was all over the floor, but it wasn't available as evidence.

"Now," Mrs. Spriggs said primly, "I ought to let you go to prison and—

die!" I shuddered. "But I'm not going to let one hundred and sixty-two dollars go to wreck and ruin. Take your hands off of him"—this to the men.

They released me, and she took me by the arm. "Come, Charles," she said, "I'll talk to you when I get you home."

And she did.



By Frank Leon Smith

ONLY fifteen minutes before Howard Nutting had departed with three photographs of the lovely Miss Gorman. He had promised her that he would guard them carefully and return them to her after they had been reproduced in his paper.

Fancy, then, her surprise when her father appeared at the house with a fashion magazine, between the pages of which reposed the three photos.

All fancied?

Now, consider the emotions of Mr. Nutting, the millionaire reporter for the *Despatch*, when he stepped from the platform of the scales in the subway station and discovered that the magazine and the pictures that he had deposited on the bench behind him

while he was weighing himself had vanished.

But do not listen to his soliloquy; for really he had had a good bringing up, and must have learned those naughty words from coarse characters.

You see, those pictures meant a great deal to him.

A celebrated surgeon had stated that Miss Isabel Gorman, a junior at Varnard, was the only perfectly proportioned girl in America. Also that she was extremely beautiful—with which opinion all who had seen her concurred.

The *Despatch* craved a picture of the present day Venus, and had assigned Mr. Nutting to get them. It was not a simple task.

Gorman père, better known as Battle-ship Gorman, who had retired from the ring with a large stock of winnings while he held the middle-weight championship of the world, was known to dislike reporters. In fact, city-room gossip had it that he spread ketchup on young newspapermen and ate them raw.

This must have been pure libel, for Peter Sullivan, another *Despatch* scribe who had been sent to fetch in the desired pictures, had been allowed to depart the Gorman villa in Brooklyn—nay, had been sped on his way by Battle-ship's toe, and returned to the office with a black eye as evidence that he had met the scrappy father and had not been detained.

Mr. Nutting, however, had been successful. When he called he was received by Miss Gorman, as Battle-ship was not at home.

It must be confessed that Nutting had a way wi' the wimmin. In a few moments they were old friends.

The conversation drifted to dancing, and she had expressed a desire to learn the maxixe. He had taught her in one short lesson—music by phonograph.

His reward was the photographs, which, as has been said, he was to guard carefully and return in good condition after they had been through the photo-engraving room at the *Despatch*. He had started for the office stepping high, for he had won where defeat seemed certain.

And now—

But in the living-room of the Gorman château Battle-ship is waiting for an explanation from his daughter.

A sturdy figure, Battle-ship; thick of limb, a chest like a beer keg, and a jaw on which many bunches of hard knuckles had beat in vain.

Now the shrubbery of the twin hedges over his eyes was twisted and knotted, and altogether he wore the expression of the man in the comic drawings who says " ? "

"How come these pictures in this paper?" he demanded.

His daughter gave a careless shove at the heap of blond hair which crowned her beauty and eyed him unfalteringly.

"What did you say?" she asked mildly.

He repeated the query and waved the photographs by way of emphasis.

"Why, father, they are photographs of me!" she cried in fine amazement—stealing a page from his book by sparring for time.

"Yuh, so it seems," he said dryly.

She took the pictures from him and gazed at them in innocent wonder, quite as though she had never seen them before. Her mind raced with questions concerning Mr. Nutting.

"Yuh," Battle-ship went on. "But what are they doing there? I picked up this book on a bench in the subway, thinkin' you'd be wantin' it—and now out drops them pictures of you. They cost me sixty dollars a dozen. Have ye fixed up a scheme to give 'em away with packages o' tea and fashing magazines?"

Miss Isabel laughed and pretended to swing an uppercut to the jaw that sporting editors likened to Gibraltar.

This little gesture never failed to please Battle-ship. He ducked with every circumstance of fear.

"G'long with your skylarkin'!" he grinned.

She gathered up pictures and magazine.

"Hazel Blount had some of my pictures," she said abstractedly. "Do you suppose she was taking them to be framed and mislaid them in the subway? Now I wouldn't be a bit surprised if that was it. Well, I'll keep them and ask her when I see her. Glad you happened to find them, father; Hazel would be so sorry—"

Battle-ship drew a cigar from his pocket and studiously read the inscription on the luxurious band. Then he stuck it in his mouth and fumbled for a match.

"Huh? Yuh. Well, it's a good thing you've got your old dad to be

pickin' up after you. Next I know it'll be your hat blowing round in the street."

He turned to the door.

"Where away, father?" Miss Isabel called.

"I'm going up-stairs to work on my patent, and I'll not be bothered—hear me?—I'll not be bothered till supper."

She dropped him a curtsy.

"It shall be even as you say, sire," she burlesqued, forefinger in her mouth.

He paused and regarded her thoughtfully.

"You're the prettiest gal in the world, so Dr. Dargent says, and he ought to know. That'll be bringin' reporters buzzin' round. Oh, oh!"

He grinned knowingly, stiffened his arms, and expanded his chest until it seemed that his vest buttons might pop across the room and break the windows. Then he exhaled strongly, clenched his huge right fist, and turned it in half circles.

Heaven help the luckless scribe who fell afoul of Mr. Gorman!

"Oh, oh!" he laughed again and skipped nimbly up the stairs to his den.

He was supposed to be working—as a hobby—on a little table device for removing the shells from boiled eggs. Indeed, he had invented such an appliance and had spent some time in perfecting it.

But now he had put it aside—without advertising the fact—and it served him as an excellent excuse for shutting himself up a few hours each day while he worked on his play.

Yes, he, too, was writing a play; although he would probably have punched the man who had the temerity to accuse him of it.

We will leave him to sweat over the R. U. E's, *et cetera*, and return to Miss Gorman.

She was displeased. She sat in a huge willow rocker and pouted. She shuffled the photographs in her lap and frowned.

When Nutting had withdrawn that

afternoon, he had stated that he would take wonderful care of those pictures. She had felt a bit guilty when she gave them to him. It was because of his charming frankness and evident honesty that she listened to his appeal.

Also—but no, we must not infer that she would have been pleased to see her picture in the *Despatch*. No, indeed; father wouldn't like it!

And Nutting had rewarded her trust by promptly losing the photos.

Just as she was thinking most beligerent thoughts the door-bell rang insistently, repeatedly.

Debonair and imperturbable as usual, Nutting was waiting outside, his forefinger on the push-button.

To reminisce, and I promise you it won't happen again in this story, Nutting's profane soliloquy in the subway had been of short duration.

When at top pitch he noticed a colored porter who was gathering up discarded newspapers, and to him he hustled with the query:

"Boss, did you see anything of a new magazine on this bench? I put it down a minute ago, and now it's gone."

The porter straightened jerkily.

"A gemmen wot got off'en de train jes' now picked it up and ca'ied it off. Was it yourn?"

"Yes. Which way did he go?"

The negro pointed.

Nutting bounded up the stairs to the street. Half a block ahead a man was adjusting a large magazine to a more secure position under his arm.

Nutting broke into a run. When on the point of snatching his property with a genial word of explanation he stopped short in amazement. He had recognized the ex-pugilist from sport-page likenesses.

"How in the name of old John Coincidence did this happen?" he muttered.

The pictures he had just borrowed from the daughter now on their way home in the clutch of the father!

It seemed to Nutting that he was

pitting himself against Destiny. In the absence of a better plan, he trailed the fast-stepping Gorman.

I must explain that on many occasions Nutting had returned to the office to report a bungled assignment. So adept had he become at explaining miss-fires that the entire staff usually gathered about the assistant city-editor's desk to hear his masterpieces.

The truth was that invariably Nutting was lucky with his assignments, and had everything his own way—up to a certain point—and then, somehow, the bottom dropped out.

He was not keen to add to his list of failures, especially on this occasion, as he had been instructed when leaving the *Despatch* office to get the pictures, and that he was not to come back without them. His job meant nothing to him financially, but it was an unfailing source of diverting adventures.

Also, he had developed the professional pride and loyalty that forbids the newspaperman to give up while there is a vestige of hope.

Should he hail Gorman and claim his property? Supposing Gorman had already seen the photographs, was it likely that he would surrender them?

The problem was just a leetle bit too tough for the reporter.

So he followed his man in the approved old King Brady fashion, and before he quite realized Gorman skipped up the stairs of his domicil and disappeared within.

Nutting turned and retraced his steps. He had decided to chance a fistic encounter with Gorman, to ask for an interview with his daughter and beg back the pictures.

His first move was to pave the way.

At a corner drug store he bought a huge box of chocolates, and then, for the third time that day he hurried to the Gorman home.

When Miss Isabel saw him at the door she was very angry. At least she told herself that she was. She let him ring for some time and then opened the door suddenly and confronted him.

"Oh, it's you, is it?" she said coldly. "What is on your mind?"

Nutting bowed in his best cavalier manner.

"I forgot to give you this when I was here before," he said humbly, and held out the box of candy. "I just thought I would run back and give it to you."

"What is it?" she demanded suspiciously, "a bomb?"

"No, lady," he said meekly, "it's a box of sweets, lady. Kin I come in?"

"No," she said, her frown struggling with a smile.

"Oh—I didn't know," he returned, and quietly blocked the door with his foot. "Er—nice weather we're having, Miss Gorman. At this time of the year one thinks—one thinks—"

"Some may, but not you," she remarked pleasantly.

"Oh, now—surely you are too harsh," he protested with a genial smile, and tightened his grip on the heavy candy box.

Miss Gorman smiled and turned her head.

"Yes, father, he's here now," she called to the empty hall. Then she looked hurriedly at Nutting, hoping to catch a sign of fear on his face.

He continued to grin, and said:

"Not to-day—I left my fright wig at home and my own hair refuses to stand on end. Listen, Miss Gorman, I'm awfully sorry about those pictures—really I am. It was this way. I bought a magazine to wrap 'em up in, and in the subway I wanted to weigh myself and I put the mag on a bench behind me and got on the scales, and when I turned around the mag was gone. Your dad had picked it up. I followed him, but he got here before I could catch him."

"You ran all the way, didn't you? You're panting even now," she said lightly.

"Oh, I flew; but he was too fast for me. Honest, Miss Gorman, if you'll let me have those pictures again I'll promise—"

"That's the best thing you do," she interrupted.

"Well, I won't promise then, but I'll swear to—"

"Mercy! Now he's going to swear!" she exclaimed. "I shall have to call my father, Mr. Nut, if you—"

"Nutting," he corrected; "Howard Nutting. You may call me Howard if you'll give me those pictures—"

"No, you can't have them again. You might drop them in the mail-box at the corner."

Nutting sighed dolefully.

"Oh, dear, now I've got to begin all over again. Say, Miss Gorman, just to decide a bet—are we likely to be interrupted? Is your dad handy by, or is he in the back yard sharpening an ax while you engage me in cheerful converse?"

"Don't be alarmed. Father is in his den and he won't be down until dinner time."

"Well, then, I think you ought to invite me in," he beamed. "It isn't right for us to be standing here—the Donahues or O'Briens, or whoever lives across the street are probably watching us, and you know how neighbors will gossip—"

She laughed gaily as she swung the door wide open.

"Come right in—but understand that the management assumes no responsibility—"

Nutting stifled a desire to whistle loudly and walked in.

"That's all right," he grinned, "and I'm going to put my hat right here on this table so I can grab it on the run."

When they had seated themselves he presented the box of candy to her.

"Now isn't this cozy?" he demanded as they munched on the bonbons. "You must admit that I have broken up the afternoon very pleasantly for you—Er—does your father wear rubber heels? I didn't notice when I saw him on the street."

"Are you becoming timid, Mr. Nutting?"

"Oh, no; just wanted to know—er—will he approach from the south or the west?"

Her eyes sparkled with amusement.

"I'll wave Paul Revere signals with lighted matches if you like," she volunteered.

"Very sweet of you," he said, burrowing for a nougat. "You better get busy and dish in if you want any of this candy. I'm eating it all up."

She made a careful selection from the box.

"Are all reporters as—as—" she began.

"As nice as me? No, indeed," he broke in. "With my savoir faire and bon hommie—get that? It's French or Greek or something—Oh, I'm there with the foreign lingo—Anyhow, I've made an art of what has been regarded heretofore as a sordid business."

"But, Miss Gorman, before I proceed with this fascinating subject—you will give me those pictures, won't you? Honest to goodness I'll hang on to 'em this time. I tell you what—I'll give you another maxixe lesson right now if you will—"

She eyed him a moment, then returned his smile. Rising, she brought the photographs from a side table and gave them to him.

"I know I oughtn't to—what will I say to father when he sees them in the paper?"

"Oh, he'll think we got them at the photographers," said Nutting easily. "Thank you so much. Now, if you will excuse me one minute—"

He went to the hall, stripped open his waistcoat, then buttoned it over the photographs. When he had tugged his vest into place he returned.

"I'm taking no chances," he explained. "What's that? Sounds of minstrelsy—w-e-l-l, look at the tune-barrow!"

Two tired Italians had stopped their street organ in front of the house and were giving a last recital before calling it a day.

Nutting swept the chairs aside.

"Ready for the second lesson?" he chuckled.

She turned to him impulsively.

"Some other time—you better go now—father might—"

"I always keep my promises," he said lightly. "Come on."

They danced.

When the Italians departed, Nutting sprang to the phonograph and cranked it madly.

"Mr. Nutting—I wish you would go," said Miss Isabel blushing; "father will be down any minute now and you—"

Nutting started a lively dance record and turned to her blandly. All thoughts of work and of personal danger had vanished.

"I don't get a chance to dance with the prettiest girl in the world every day," he whispered; "and anyhow, your father doesn't know who I am."

They danced.

"Let's try it just once more," he suggested when the motor had run down for the third time.

She offered no objection.

In his den on the third floor, Battleship threw down his stubby pencil and swore mildly. He had not been making the best of progress, and the idea of dinner appealed to him strongly.

He clattered down the stairs. In the hall, as he was about to shout a lusty greeting to his daughter, he espied Nutting's hat.

He picked it up. Pasted inside was a little typewritten slip which read, "Hands Off This Lid—H. Nutting—New York *Despatch*."

Battleship's teeth came together with a click. As he advanced to the door of the living-room he saw his daughter and Nutting swaying gracefully through the intricate figures of the maxixe.

When they whirled past the door she suddenly caught sight of her father and stopped abruptly.

Nutting, at a loss to understand reason for the delay, was about to speak when he noticed the grim figure in the hall. He gazed at Battleship in stupefaction.

"Father, this is my friend, Mr. Nutting," Miss Isabel quavered.

Battleship advanced and the reporter grew wary.

"H'ware yuh, Mr. Nutting? You're a reporter, ain't you?"

Nutting was busily cursing himself for not having departed before, but he nodded and smiled.

"Glad to know you, Mr. Gorman," he said cordially.

Battleship grasped his hand and leaned nearer. His mouth was grim, but his eyes were twinkling.

"Say, young man—will you teach me that step you were doin' just now? You're blamed good at it."

"Why, father!" Miss Isabel almost screamed, so great was her relief.

Gorman buttoned his coat and adjusted his cuffs.

"Oh, I ain't dead yet," he said, as though responding to a challenge; "I've been to dancin' school every afternoon this week. Come on, Mr. Nutting, if you're ready."

Nutting winked solemnly at Miss Isabel and advanced to meet the terrible Battleship.

AUTUMN FIRES

By Stella E. Saxton

A WHIRL of gipsying autumn leaves
Here at my feet the gay wind flings
With bloom of summer madness still
Aflame upon their fluttering wings.

My heart is like an autumn leaf—
Its lilting hopes, sun-kissed desires,
The young, green, leaping blood, by Time
Transmuted into red-gold fires!

HEART TO HEART TALKS

BY THE EDITOR

I WANT to turn the pages of *The All-Story* and *The Cavalier* backward for two years. Look over my shoulder and view the panorama of achievement that marks the past. It will give you some suggestion of what is going to happen in the future.

The ALL-STORY CAVALIER WEEKLY must progress, and its readers must be benefited by that progression.

If somebody told you that during the last two years you have had forty-four big novels—sixty dollars' worth of books—in *The Cavalier* and *The All-Story*, that had cost you a few trivial dollars, you would be inclined to doubt it. But here is a list of the forty-four novels that have been printed in these two magazines, every one of which was subsequently issued in book form by some leading publisher at an average cost to the reader of \$1.35 a copy. The list in full follows:

Hugo By Arnold Bennett	Jack Chanty By Hulbert Footner	Where There's a Will By Mary Roberts Rinehart
The Sword Hand of Napoleon By Cyrus Townsend Brady	One Million Francs By Arnold Fredericks	Two Shall Be Born By Theodore Goodridge Roberts
Another Man's Shoes By Victor Bridges	The Ivory Snuff Box By Arnold Fredericks	The Forest Maiden By Lee Robinet
The Vanguard By Edgar Beecher Bronson	As He Was Born By Tom Gallon	The Turn of the Sword By C. MacLean Savage
The Portal of Dreams By Charles Neville Buck	Under Handicap By Jackson Gregory	The Second Deluge By Garrett P. Serviss
The Call of the Cumberlands By Charles Neville Buck	The Stain By Forrest Halsey	The Souls of Men By Martha M. Stanley
Tarzan of the Apes By Edgar Rice Burroughs	The Snapdragon By Horace Hazeltime	Marama By Ralph Stock
The Inner Man By Florence Crewe-Jones	Who? By Elizabeth Kent	The Shadow By Arthur Stringer
The Red Nights of Paris By Florence Crewe-Jones	The Full of the Moon By Caroline Lockhart	One Wonderful Night By Louis Tracy
The Fighting Blade By Beulah Marie Dix	Pidgin Island By Harold MacGrath	Alias the Night Wind (Trilogy —3 Volumes) By Varick Vanardy
The White Waterfall By James Francis Dwyer	The Girl of the Golden Gate By William Brown Meloney	The Destroying Angel By Louis Joseph Vance
The Spotted Panther By James Francis Dwyer	As It Was in the Beginning By Philip Verrill Mighels	The Day of Days By Louis Joseph Vance
Darkness and Dawn By George Allan England	The Devil's Admiral By Frederick Ferdinand Moore	The Ghost Girl By Henry Kitchell Webster
The Cradle of the Deep By Jacob Fisher	Greater Love Hath No Man By Frank L. Packard	Princess of Sorry Valley By John Fleming Wilson
The Villa Mystery By Herbert Flowerdew	The Pirate of Panama By William MacLeod Raine	

No other magazine issued in this or any other country can show so great a list of first-class literature. I venture to say that no five magazines combined have a similar record. The future will be equally impressive.

I now beg to introduce the issue for August 1.



A very unusual story of unusual and interesting characters; a story of dramatic scenes and big, tense situations—a story of love and mystery—of the growth and

change of a man's soul, and of the struggles of a woman between love and hatred; such is

THE CROOKED STICK

BY STELLA M. DURING

which will begin in next week's ALL-STORY CAVALIER.

Mirabel Boyd, out at elbows, dead tired and famished, goes to a big hotel in London in answer to a letter that promises work for her. She fails to get the work, but sees that a young woman of about her own age, a woman richly and tastefully dressed, is terrified by a man with a frog's mouth, who has accosted her. On the spur of the moment *Mirabel* takes the young woman's part and backs up her denial of identity as "*Lady Crendon*."

Then *Lady Crendon*, for that proves really to be her name, takes *Mirabel* home with her in a sudden spirit of generosity and gives her everything she could want in clothes and comforts, telling her husband, *Sir John Crendon*, that *Mirabel* is an old school friend—which lie later gets her into difficulties, by the way.

And then *Mirabel* falls head over heels in love with *Berkeley Power*, a handsome young scoundrel and *Lady Crendon's* cousin. And *Mirabel* finds out just what kind of a scoundrel he is after—

But we're running away with ourselves and all but telling too much. Read for yourself and see what a powerful story Miss During has written. You know her work—"The Sword of Damocles" and "The Lure of Life" among others.

"THE CROOKED STICK" will be printed in five instalments.

There are plenty of men in the world with real physical courage, regular berserks who'd receive a bullet through the calf of the leg without flinching or beat a mutinous crew into submission with their bare fists. Very rarely we find men who have mental and moral courage as well.

THE GIRL ON THE JURY

BY H. P. DOWST

the novelette in the August 1 issue, introduces such a man.

He is accused of murdering his own brother! Everybody brands him "Cain"!

But all the while he is zealously guarding his brother's honor. How clearly he remembers his brother's face, pallid in death, with the terrible bullet wound near

the temple, and the text of the letter giving the reason for the deed.

The letter itself he keeps tucked away in an inside pocket where none may find it. For it explains that the brother he loved—the man that so many loved and believed in—was a common thief who robbed the bank that employed him, and who, in the fear of detection, had taken his own life.

Unless the bank discovers the loss, this hero determines, he will accept the suspicion cast on him, will go to jail and suffer death for killing his brother if need be.

He is a hero indeed. Aren't you anxious to read more about him?

"MOONSHINE MONEY," by Fermor Blanton Barrett, is a story, as the title would indicate, which concerns characters who live, fight, and die in the moonshine country. The *Shadburns*—father, mother, and sons—were bowed by years of toil. Just now they were in an awful predicament. The storekeeper had refused to give them groceries any longer unless paid for in cash. So the problem—how were they going to get money?—confronted them. Yes, how in thunder were they going to get money if the corn wasn't gathered? And how in thunder were they going to gather corn without a mule? From which you will deduce that the *Shadburns* just had to have a mule!

Now these people were all moonshiners and—would you believe it—they proposed to raise the money in order to buy that mule by having themselves arrested for illicit whisky making and confined in the pen.

Well, this is just what they did, and this is just how they got the money; but I can't disclose here the ingenious method by which they worked out the scheme. Moreover, I wouldn't advise you to try it yourself, because there are some people who prefer keeping out of jail and not having money.

"MRS. LINDERBY'S APPOINTMENT," by Arthur Chamberlain, is about a lady who was never on time. The world is full of such, God bless 'em! However, there comes a time when something is bound to occur, if the female of the species doesn't show up. The husband throws a few flip-flaps and curses the day he ever wed a woman who never keeps a date. However, in this particular story, for the first time in his life, *Mr. Linderby* misses his appointment with *Mrs. Linderby*.

What does she do?

You will laugh when you read next week what *Mrs. Linderby* did when she found out *Mr. Linderby* wasn't on time.

“HER NEIGHBOR,” by Carl Vincent Küsel, is a little drama of every-day life. Briefly, it's about a young wife who rebels at the kind of a life she is forced to lead on her husband's plantation. After a time she finds she has a neighbor—a woman whose plight and poverty are pitiable. At once the dissatisfied wife is brought to her senses.

I suppose all this seems very commonplace, but the story should draw this homely moral—no matter how badly off you are, there is some one worse off! Stick this over your desk, or your pantry door, good men and women, and let cheerfulness abound.

“SELDEN WARD'S FRAME-UP,” by Clare P. Peeler, is a story of grand-opera singers, and has to do with a few of the stars and the publicity man of one of these wonderful organizations.

Louise Vallier is a great star, and *Elinor Dalton* is a struggling writer. At first *Miss Dalton* pleases the famous artist, and then suddenly *Vallier* gets furious over some little inaccuracy and refuses to see the writer. When the girl finds herself so unjustly and cruelly treated, and with the ground pulled from under her feet, she actually contemplates suicide and arranges for this unfortunate ending. Just at this point *Selden Ward* comes to the front and frames-up a little job which turns black night into glorious day for all of them.

A very interesting and unusual story, this.

TWO GOOD THINGS IN ONE

TO THE EDITOR:

Just a few words of praise for your latest fiction venture. The present arrangement seems to me to be all that could be desired in a popular-priced, good fiction, weekly magazine. *The Cavalier* was very good. So was *The All-Story*. The combination is two good things for the price of one. Consequently the reader gets the best of the amalgamation.

I have been a reader of your magazines for years and can only say that they are in a class by themselves. Have no favorite authors, as all of your contributors seem to be able to hold my interest.

Wishing you all the success you deserve,

TREBOR D. JOHNSTON.

Atlanta, Georgia.

FIT FOR THE HOME CIRCLE

TO THE EDITOR:

Some months ago I wrote you a letter commending the stories about Mars by Burroughs. It is an equal pleasure to commend “The Scarlet Samurai,” by C. MacLean Savage. It is one of the finest stories I have ever read, both as to plot and structure. Mr. Savage can, however, improve on his etymology, more especially with reference to the use of the personal pronoun in its various cases and forms.

The ALL-STORY CAVALIER is a splendid magazine, and with very few exceptions avoids matters and allusions that would make it unfit for the home circle. I would suggest that even the rare instances where such things occur be eliminated in the future.

OSWALD N. JACOBY.

140 Nassau Street,
New York City.

WANTS MORE OF ZANE GREY

TO THE EDITOR:

I have been a reader of *The All-Story* for about a year and like it very much. The consolidation of *The Cavalier* and *The All-Story* makes a fine magazine.

The stories in *The All-Story* I liked best are “Wandering Men,” “The Great Secret,” “The Smoldering Past,” “Red Wampum,” “The Eternal Lover,” and “The Mad King.”

I think “The Lone Star Rangers” is going to be a fine story. Commission Zane Grey to write a baseball story.

Wishing the ALL-STORY CAVALIER WEEKLY much success,

DALE WALTON.

Denver, Illinois.

FROM A LIVE WIRE

TO THE EDITOR:

Just a line to say I am one of the army of readers of the ALL-STORY CAVALIER WEEKLY. I can hardly wait till the next issue comes. I think it was a great idea when you combined the two magazines.

“At the Earth's Core” is one of my favorites. Tell the author to get busy with the sequel. “The Mad King,” “The Great Secret,” “Wandering Men,” and “The Smoldering Past” were all fine. I am a telegraph operator and you can bet a good story comes in handy in the lonely hours. I have been a reader of *The All-Story* four years.

I will also say “No Kick Here.”

CLYDE M. HOSLER.

213 North Pomona Street,
Fullerton, California.

HOORAY FOR CAP VELVET!

TO THE EDITOR:

Enclosed find ten cents for which send me a copy of the last issue of *The All-Story*—May 9. It is the only one I have missed since *The All-Story* was published weekly.

The new ALL-STORY CAVALIER is *some* magazine. I see that some of your readers are kicking because you combined the magazines. If this amalgamation doesn't suit them there is nothing that will.

Let us have more stories by Varick Vanardy. "The Double Dealer" was fine.

I enjoy Burroughs's stories more than any others, only they do not end right.

Some one signing himself—or herself—"H. H." in the June 13 issue, writes that *All-Story* readers will not like *Cavalier* stories, and vice versa. If they are as good as "The Double Dealer," "Captain Velvet's Revolt," and such stories, I don't see how any one can help but like them.

CHAS. A. ANDERSON.

Box 57,
Castlewood, South Dakota.

LETTERETTES

I have read *The All-Story* for years and *The Cavalier* since it became a weekly, and this is my first letter.

I simply could not sit quiet and see H. H., of Massachusetts, abuse *The Cavalier*.

I have dropped all my monthly magazines and now take none but the ALL-STORY CAVALIER WEEKLY. I am unable to see any difference since the consolidation, and would suggest to H. H. that he (or she) give it a fair trial before condemning.

EVELYN RAYBURN.

4870 Winthrop Avenue,
Chicago, Illinois.

Have read *The Cavalier* for seven months and really think it is the best magazine I have ever read. I can't praise it enough to my friends.

"All for His Country," "Eyes That Saw Not," and "The Outlaw" were fine stories.

(Miss) JOY OLVER.

I want to congratulate you on having a contributor like Fred Jackson. I am a lover of his work. I have just finished reading "Beauty To Let," and would like to see more of his stories in the near future.

You certainly have a fine magazine in

12 A-S C

the amalgamated ALL-STORY CAVALIER WEEKLY.

I have been a reader since you started to publish *The Cavalier*.

ALLAN O. RHODES.

2 Spring Street,
East Hartford, Connecticut.

I am a subscriber to the ALL-STORY CAVALIER WEEKLY and like it very much.

It seems I am introducing your magazine down around here. As fast as I get them other people want them.

CHARLES SPENCER.

Harrowby,
Manitoba, Canada.

That I appreciate the ALL-STORY CAVALIER WEEKLY is evidenced by the enclosed subscription.

I want to say that "The Lone Star Rangers" is the best serial I have read since "Tarzan of the Apes." May the author's shadow never grow less.

L. B. MARTIN.

Graysville, Ohio.

The merging of the two best fiction magazines before the public was, beyond a doubt, a huge success, excellently planned and ably executed. The present line of fiction you are publishing undoubtedly affords the discriminating reader a wider scope in this class of literature and a more interesting type of material than any other publication of a similar nature.

J. D. WORTHINGTON.

Glendale, California.

Enclosed find two dollars to pay for our ALL-STORY CAVALIER WEEKLY for the balance of the year. We enjoy reading it very much. The serials and novelettes are just fine. We have taken it ever since it was a weekly and cannot possibly do without it now.

JAMES C. HALL.

R. F. D. No. 1,
East Barrington, New Hampshire.

I wish to compliment you on your magazine, especially since you combined the two weeklies.

I think Fred Jackson and Varick Vanardy are your two best writers.

Yours for good reading,

THOMAS G. BRUNS.

31 Kellogg Street,
Portland, Maine.

The White Albatross

By Bradford Burnham

ATREMENDOUS crash of the character that denotes splintered glass awoke all Estherville and brought all Estherville to the Porter farm. The ball-field, the benches in front of Al Lincoln's store, and Mrs. Hubbard's side lawn, where a party had been in progress, were speedily deserted and a crowding circle of panting Esthervillians, male and female, surrounded what had three minutes before been Amos Porter's precious greenhouse.

From the nucleus of the wreck a rickety whirl proceeded, died, and was followed by a series of coughs, which in turn were followed by a momentary silence.

Then from the hash of smashed glass and aeroplane frames emerged a form, clad in shredded masculine apparel. Powdered glass, saturated soil, and pulverized carnations covered him from head to foot, and as he got clear of the mélange and straightened up, blood dripped spiritedly from the fingers of one hand.

With the fingers of the other he delved into a lacerated pocket, drew forth the materials, and with a thumb and two fingers manufactured a shapeless cigarette.

"A match, if you please."

Not a hand started; not a mouth

closed. Porter himself was the object at which the repeated request was directed. He had advanced within the circle somewhat nearer the remains of his property, since he was specially interested.

He looked at the slight, cool form of the aviator; at the bleeding hand, and the passive, collected, dirt-stained face, which also bore a smile. In the face of that smile pity waned; concern for the injury vanished.

"Get out of here!" he screamed. "Do you know you've smashed my greenhouse and spoiled my flowers?"

"Of the former assertion, I am well aware. As to the corollary, that, too, sounds plausible."

"Shut up with your talk. What I want to know is what business you've got coming sailing out of nowhere and landing through my air on my private and personal property. Those carnations and roses were all sold; some swells across there at Newport ordered 'em last night.

"I'll have the constable after ye, I will. Oh, you'll pay me. I bet you will. Now get the thunder out of here. No, wait; we'll hold ye till the sheriff comes, every one else's been here ten minutes. He'll board ye for a while, he will."

"On the contrary," returned the

aviator. "You'll board me and give me lodging for a while. That's your pond over there, isn't it? Well, it's just the right size, and the fields adjoining it suit my purpose admirably. That's why I descended when I spotted it on my cruise above the State. The collision with your greenhouse was unlooked for, a mere minor miscalculation on my part. Now let's see; it's September. What will you charge me for a good room, board, and the use of the pond and meadows till Christmas?"

The mouth of Porter opened; the eyes of Porter blazed gaseous fire. Then the mouth closed and the fire died. From the lacerated pocket the youth had drawn a wallet; from the wallet he had drawn an inch thick package of rectangular papers, yellow on one side.

Porter lived by growing potatoes and carrying them in his sloop to New Bedford, and occasionally around Sakonnet to Newport and Providence.

In the summer months he supplemented this with supplying some of the summer cottages with flowers. He had had many set-backs this season, and potatoes were so low he feared they might not be worth the cost of ferrying them across the Bay.

So the slim, young man took the big front room. The window faced the little half moon of a cove which broke the shore-line of surf-wet rocks in front of the house and furnished shelter to Porter's sturdy sloop, Esther, named for his daughter.

The sea had made that daughter strong and fearless and beautiful. Sometimes she went with her father across to the New Bedford markets in the sloop, the trip always taking two days and sometimes more. Twice she had gone instead of him.

But usually she remained behind taking charge of the farm by day with all the efficiency and freedom of a Texas cowgirl; and in the evening dancing with all the boys in the village, or sitting beside one of them at

home. That one was usually Asa Bidle, big, overbearing, confident to the point of proprietorship — a pure, unadulterated son of the soil.

When Asa called the aviator would retire to the dining-room with a book on mechanics and sit opposite Porter, who always scanned the pages of the *Estherville Daily Siren* spread out upon the red table cloth when the lamp was lowered and lighted.

Soon the aviator began to prefer the evenings when Asa stayed in the village and shot pool. So did Esther, but he didn't know it. Asa did. Hate kindled, glowed, and flared up.

On the surface it took the form of crushing scorn.

"What's that fool feller going to do with his new-fangled invention, anyhow?" he exploded to Simon Aldrich his boon companion, and the perennial recipient of Asa's superior wisdom. "Maybe he thinks he's going to fly to Joopiter in it and bring back some valuable information and be a benefactor of this human race. Huh! Great stunt for a young feller to be doing with himself, puttering around with them things. They ain't no use to nobody, anyhow."

"It ain't a common aeroplane," protested Si, who had once seen a biplane at the Brockton Fair. "It's got wings like a bird, and some sort of webbed feet, so it can light on water's well as on earth; or on ice too, anything; it don't matter. He says it's more like a bird than any other machine, and he calls it the White Albatross because it's so big, and so strong, and can wander about for days and never get tired."

"White guinea pigs," sputtered Asa. "Let him go it, if he wants to break his fool neck. Only, Mister Flying Man from Noo Yawk City, you'd better not go to a getting soft on Esthy Porter, that's all I can say," and he gave the cue ball a vicious punch which lifted it neatly over the bunker onto the floor, and produced a jagged abrasion in the green cloth.

Si picked up the ball; then stopped and listened.

"Gosh, there he goes, now; at night, too."

The two stepped out into the moonlight and rubbered perpendicularly. A speck crossed the moon's face far above them. By and by a whirring sound proceeded from behind them, and increased, till out of the night appeared just above them the white form of the tremendous monoplane, skimming like a thing of life, close above them.

Again it circled toward them, this time dipping close to the roof of the pool room building, and disclosing beside the aviator, a second figure, a slender, delicate shadowy form; close, very close, to the man. From it a white handkerchief fluttered derisively, as they swooped down by them.

"By gum!" ejaculated Simon Aldrich, impressively. "They've got nerve, all right. She's one bunch of pluck. Think he dared her to go up with him?"

"Oh, what do I care if he did? No, she dared him to take her up," Asa growled angrily, knowing her better. "But this thing's gone far enough. It's time he got out of here. Hasn't Porter told the girl a hundred times that if she ever tried any fool stunts with him, such as going up in the dang thing, he'd turn 'em both out of the house?"

"P'raps worse things might happen, from their point of view," commented Si slyly, rejoicing at the other's discomfiture. "Porter's in New Bedford, you know, with the sloop. He cleared the harbor 'fore sunup."

Asa's wrath assumed the character of Vesuvius in eruption.

"Darn blast that there feller. 'Tain't fitten for him to be a staying up there, an' she too, with Porter away for three days. It's time something was done about this thing. He'd better git."

"Why don't you go up and tell him so?"

Si grinned; he had gathered in their acquaintance a fairly accurate estimate of his companion's negligible amount of valor.

Asa hadn't said much about the aviator's nerve. He had seen him go up in a forty mile gale, steer seaward, and vanish to be gone two hours. Si had been over on Martha's Vineyard that day, and said the aviator had "touched" there, then recrossed the Sound in the teeth of the gale.

"I'll let Porter handle it, I guess. She's still his'n, I suppose. But he'll do this once too often, and he'd better get out."

The possible ambiguity of the sentence didn't occur to Asa. As for the aviator, "getting out" was farthest from his mind. He was longing for winter, and a trial of the bird on ice, with his own patent skeeing skids.

"You see, by the use of these runners exploration of the Arctic and Antarctic becomes a simple affair," he explained to Esther, making some final adjustment to the giant machine's nervous system.

"The pontoon attachment permits it to light upon the water, and the skids give it a footing on ice. The wings steady it and sustain part of the weight at all times, so that the bird can alight readily on the crests of infuriated seas or slide safely over tiny ice floes that would not hold a man's weight."

He paused, glowing, and each felt the other tingle over the light contact of their fingers when she handed him a small wrench. She thrilled with enthusiasm and something else, a peculiar kinetic something which Asa had never generated nor transmitted.

"This winter it's going to be cold, I think, and I shall be able to try her out thoroughly on the ice of the pond and the heavy seas and broken floes of the Sound. Then some bright spring morning I'll fly away to Greenland and bring back some news of that forbidding interior. You know, the bird can cross the great ice-cap in

a day. Ice walls, glaciers, peaks, or broken ice-floes with mile-wide cracks—she'll laugh at them all."

"But you—the cold, the danger!" put in the girl timidly.

He looked at her whimsically.

"I'll come back—to Estherville," he said simply. Both smiled and were silent.

Porter's gruffness did not abate.

Were it not for the ridiculously high rent the young man was paying he would have bounced him long before this. Yet when Asa waylaid him in town one day and casually mentioned what city folks would have called the proprieties, but what he called "the looks of a leavin' them two alone there and you in Bedford," that young gentleman received as white-hot an address, advising him to mind his own business, as ever resounded in the assembly halls of a State Legislature.

Winter swooped down suddenly. The aviator grew daily happier and more fearless as the mercury forgot to rise, and they began cutting ice at the end of the pond.

Two weeks after the first sudden drop the Sound was full of floating ice and the lighthouse-keeper a mile off the Point came ashore on skates. A howler from the southeast set in, breaking up the ice, thickening the air with snow, and set a liner on the rocks of No Man's Land.

She was pulled off when it cleared.

Porter had a hard time of it with the sloop, but watched the barometer, and succeeded in making occasional trips to the old whaling port, returning with merchandise and other necessary commodities for the good people of Estherville.

It was humiliating, though, to work persistently to windward half a day and have that confounded aviator fly by him in a twinkling, stemming the furious air-currents with ease and directness. Porter looked at the great white bird which seemed alive, then cursed savagely as the sloop yawed a

little from his inattention and slopped an icy wave-crest over him.

That trip was too much for Porter, and he retired two days later to the kitchen with rheumatism and influenza, grumbling.

It was just like Esther. Winter had sent the price of potatoes suddenly soaring. The sloop's hold was full of them. Porter had a note due.

It was a clear, quiet, zero dawn when the sloop crunched through the ice cakes out of the little cove, with Esther skilfully guiding her through the rifts before the light breeze. Out around the lightship, through the Hole, and across the big bay—she knew every foot of the way as well as she knew every plank and fastening of the little craft that bore her name.

Porter swore. The aviator's face grew grave, and he looked at the sky and the glass. Asa played pool.

Toward noon that individual sauntered up to the Porter farm, and forgot the cold when he discovered the absence of the sloop.

"She can't have!" he muttered, and burst into the house.

Esther warmed herself in the sloop's tiny cabin as the dealer's men unloaded the barrels at the New Bedford wharf. She meditated. The sea was still fairly calm—the sky clear.

The moon rose at eight-thirty, and it was high tide a couple of hours later. She'd have a fair tide most of the way. If she waited till to-morrow a storm might keep the sloop there two weeks. The aviator liked nerve. Well!

By five o'clock the last barrel of 'taters was out, and half an hour later the small consignment of freight for the return trip was stowed in the little hold, and the hatch-cover held in place with iron strips tightly wedged with wooden pegs through stout staples.

A friendly shoreman raised the mainsail. Across the dock ran a puffing and gesticulating figure. The fig-

ure was Asa's. It was a long way around the head of the bay by rail, and the train had been late.

"Wait, Esther; you mustn't go now!" he shouted peremptorily. "Nobody ought to go out to-night. We'll wait till to-morrow and work her around then if the weather's fair. If not, we'll lay her up at Peters's yard and go back by train."

The girl looked at him curiously.

"Why did you come, Asa?" she asked mildly.

"To stop you, of course. Don't be a fool, girl! You know's well's I do why I came. Your going to marry me, and I won't have you settin' out like this. We'll stay here to-night."

"And the—the— How would the folks at Estherville look at that? I believe you've been worried already about my conduct. Well, I think I'll start now. I wish father had asked my friend, the bird man, to have come. He doesn't know how to handle a boat very well, but he wouldn't have been afraid to help me."

With an exclamation of rage, Asa jumped aboard, grabbed the ax which had been used for driving home the hatch wedges, and savagely cut the head and stern mooring lines with single blows. The sloop fell off quickly; the port was left behind.

Darkness and silence came on.

Neither the girl nor the youth were excelled by anybody along the coast in handling a small sailing vessel, but they had not had time to grow old in experience. Porter, had he been there, would have remembered to glance at the barometer, and would have noted its silent warning.

At nine o'clock Asa slacked the halyards and with numbed fingers tied a double reef in the mainsail, the girl at the helm skilfully luffing a bit to ease the pressure on the canvas.

It was easier to shorten the jib. Straight from the southwest it blew, steadily growing harder and crowding the ice floes densely along the north shore. Neither spoke.

Out of the west a vast whirling mass of blackness rose above the horizon and advanced slowly. It crossed the moon's face, blotting out its light as a candle would be snuffed out by a blanket thrown upon it.

With a shriek and a roar the angry mass dropped close above the little sloop, till the mast-head seemed engulfed by it. The wind blew instantly from the other direction, burying them in freezing spray.

Snow—fine, cutting, annihilating snow—thickened the spume-filled air and obliterated sight. Above the screeching hurricane came the faint sound of a liner's powerful siren.

While Asa clung to the coaming with frenzied grip, Esther felt her way forward and let go the halyards. The heavy sails came down only when the girl had adroitly brought the boat still farther into the wind, so terrific had been the pressure upon them.

The sturdy sloop lifted her head and under bare pole fought on.

A crash sounded up forward. The bowsprit had dipped beneath a huge ice cake and snapped off sharply. The shift in wind set the ice in motion again and the great cakes smashed into each other, driven in all directions by wind and currents.

The whole Sound was choked with the giant pieces of jagged ice.

Out of the night a great floe raced by, scraping the side of the sloop. Another followed. Then a third struck the shivering little boat amidships and drove her before it broadside, while the open water on the opposite side flooded the cockpit.

She brought up against a dagger-shaped floe, which thrust its sharp point through a plank. She trembled violently. Water poured in through the wound in the imprisoned craft.

Despair spurred the two helpless human beings into action. With the strength of the crisis the girl tore up the floor-boards and drove a piece of sail-cloth into the hole in the planking with an oar, checking the leak.

The boy caught up the cabin-lamp, emptied the kerosene on an old broom, and during a momentary cessation of the tempest ignited it and waved the flaring signal wildly on high.

Bud Parsons, of the Estherville life-saving station, was having a hard time on his patrol. The rocks were sheeted with frozen spray, and only by crawling in places on hands and knees could he make any progress in the teeth of the storm.

Yet persistently and untiringly he fought his way inch by inch, at length straightening up in the lee of a big rock to catch his breath.

He peered out upon the Sound. It seemed useless. The stinging spray, the blinding snow, shut out all view. The splintering ice cakes, hurled upon the rocks of the shore-line in wild fury, boomed in his ears like continuous thunder.

A brief lull.

The straining eyes of the hardy life-saver caught through the murk a lurid gleam, waving from side to side. Forgetful of the storm and numbing cold, he plunged back toward the station, lighting the answering torch as he ran—the signal of red whose message of hope has tightened the grip of many a despairing sailor upon icy shrouds.

Crushing, grinding, splintering, the great cakes of ice lined the shore, smashing on the rocks, leaping high in air, piling over one another, the playthings of the giant breakers. Nowhere was there a break; seaward they stretched into the obscurity.

The eager life-savers were baffled. The onlookers were hushed.

A score of heroes laid hold of the stout lifeboat and waded to their loins into the surf, indifferent to the cold. Ten figures, clad in oilskins, about whose waists cork jackets had been lashed, endeavored to climb in and seize the oars.

A giant comber towered above them, a huge ice-cake upon its summit. They hauled out the torn and crumpled

crew, and left the shattered boat a prey to the sea in its sovereignty.

All sensed that it was the sloop which was in distress. A steamer would have whistled. No other sailing vessel would have been in so close. Porter forgot his sickness and implored the life-savers to try again.

It was useless. A lifeline could not be shot so far out. No boat could live in that maelstrom of ice and water. The wind increased.

It was the first time the aviator had failed to light his cigarette on ascending. But his nerve was still present, as he slid the bird, shod with the skids, into the open, involuntarily bending his head to the gale.

Nobody on the beach thought of the birdman.

They hardly sensed what it was as he breasted the gale, close above them, and headed out to sea. The big wings trembled as the gusts struck them, but they fought on unexhaustedly, and disappeared.

Cautiously the birdman dipped nearer the crested seas. Great fields of broken ice were interspersed with wide patches of open water—of foaming, raging water, flecked with white. A dim gleam in the distance caught his eye.

The bow light of the sloop!

But as he maneuvered near it he could glimpse no shadowy mast, no outline of the sloop. Instead, huddled together on an ice-cake about an acre in size, which threatened to break up at any instant, were two forms, beside which the lantern still blinked dimly. Circling lower with great difficulty in the furious gusts, the aviator dropped the end of a knotted piece of stout manila rope and trailed it over the indistinct forms as he hovered above them, then glided past.

A tug on the rope; a jolt which shook the air-ship to the core. Then slowly, as the great bird planed upward, a weight on the end of the rope was lifted, and with this strange pendulum hanging from it, she turned her

back to the gale and sped like lightning toward the shore.

With infinite difficulty and constant interruptions as the bird gyrated, the man in control slowly hauled upon the rope hand over hand, tying the rope to keep what he had gained whenever he needed a hand to change a lever. It was no simple task.

Then suddenly as he peered down a feeling of disgust amounting to loathing swept over him. Instead of the dear form of the brave girl whom he loved, he beheld the inert shape of Asa Biddle, his hands clutching the rope with the bulldog grip of unconsciousness.

Angrily the aviator reached for his clasp-knife to cut the useless thing loose, that he might return to Esther.

Then he considered, all in an instant's time. The coward had shown a coward's chivalry, and in grasping the rope had left Esther to her fate. Nevertheless, he was a man. He was at his mercy. He would save him.

Into a snowdrift the white Albattross thrust her nose.

In an instant the bird-man was out and had cut the life-saving rope near Asa's body before the crowd reached them. Then, without a word, he turned the bird around, climbed aboard, and was off again.

The storm was clearly breaking, but the sea beneath him was as angry as ever. The wind had moderated the

merest trifle, and it didn't seem quite so cold.

"Now, once more, my beauty," the bird-man whispered to the powerful machine. "A good rest is coming. We'll soon make it now. There's the lantern!"

The glory of triumph shone in his face, and the hardship of the strange voyage never crossed his mind. He was thinking only of the girl—his girl, he felt sure now.

This time, as the wind had lessened a bit, he was able to bring the bird gently upon the big floe, which still remained intact with its precious freight, and slide across to her side.

To his surprise, Esther was standing up and smiling.

As she stepped nimbly into the seat beside him the moon burst forth through linings of richest silver and flooded them with light.

"You let that fellow go first?" he asked when the bird had begun its final trip across the ice-checked sea.

"Wouldn't you have had me do so, dear? Yes, I tied the rope to him. I knew you couldn't carry us both at once. He seemed quite willing," she added thoughtfully.

"Shall we keep on?" whispered the bird-man through the fur that covered her ears. "The town's almost below us now. With this wind behind us we can be in Boston in two hours."

"Full speed ahead," she replied.

I TRY TO FORGET YOU

By Ethel Blair

I TRY to forget you, but what can I do
 When everything lovely reminds me of you?
 There's the gold of your hair in the daffydowndilys,
 The grace of your form in the tall, swaying lilies,
 The red of your lips where the gay poppies gleam,
 The lilt of your laugh in the rippling stream,
 And all the blithe bird-voices, caroling clear,
 Set my truant heart singing: "I love you, my dear!"
 I try to forget you, but what can I do
 When everything lovely reminds me of you?



Frustrating Henrietta

By

Katharine Baker

"**I** SEE you've heard the news, too," said the cousin cynically.

Henrietta came to the fence, flattening the velvet bow at her neck with thin fingers.

"What news?" she simulated in languid interest. On her arm hung a brown Japanese flower-basket, in her hand were garden scissors; she had been cutting chrysanthemums.

"Jonty Hardy's come back to Tompkinsville," said the cousin. "Got off the train not thirty minutes since. The glorious tidings flashed through society. Bet you every girl on Market or Third Street is tying a new style of bandage around her head or inducing curls or conspicuously gardening in a cravat wired for electricity or otherwise doing homage."

Henrietta colored and once more settled the bar-pin of platinum and diamonds at her throat.

Henrietta had jewelry to throw at the dogs. She counted that day lost when a new style of pin got by her. Somewhat embarrassed, she cast back to her cousin's first hail.

"Well, naturally, I knew Jonty Hardy was coming," she retorted, "as he's got a job in father's bank."

The cousin was frankly astonished. His jaw fell.

"Hardy!" he exclaimed. "Hardy to clerk in a one-horse bank in a coun-

try town! I thought he was studying law. Why, his father was a leading jurist. He'd almost a national reputation."

"Maybe so," conceded Henrietta. "But the leading jurist left an estate of eight hundred and fourteen dollars. I guess Jonty would rather sink his talents in a country bank than starve studying law."

"Nice, practical study—law," demurred the cousin. "I hope to be partially self-supporting by the time I'm forty-five. Pity Jonty couldn't do without food and lodging for a couple of years while learning by heart just what sort of tenants were expected to do suit and service in the king's high court in William the Conqueror's time. Great help in orphans' court work."

Henrietta giggled.

"Is that honestly what Blackstone's about?"

"Yep. Explains how prehistoric man did things, so that a lot of old fogies can go on doing them the same way forever."

"Men are idiots." Henrietta dismissed the law. "Have a chryssy for your buttonhole?" she offered, selecting a pale pink flower.

He glanced down at his lavender shirt and tie.

"Thanks, no. I don't wish to look like a fraternity yell. Save it for some

strong, earnest brother in the bonds. Well, congratulations, Henrietta. I assume you pulled off this Hardy event for some wisely considered purpose of your own."

"I had nothing to do with it," maintained Henrietta.

"No? Excuse me. That'll be your bank some day, Henrietta. Not a bad job for a decent-looking young man. Of course, most of uncle's rheumatic old employees haven't any particular prospects. But Hardy—"

He paused, pulled off his soft hat, looked interestedly into it, replaced it on his head.

"I wonder what the devil it is about Hardy," he ruminated. "'S a mystery to me. Of course, I know he's the goods all right; and as far as I'm concerned, I never saw a more likable fellow.

"You can tie to him. He's good company. But he's a gangling creature, and his face any little boy could have chopped out with a hatchet. He never said a brilliant thing. He stood thirty in a class of thirty-nine. He's almost too lazy to eat. There isn't really anything wonderful about him."

"Is there anything wonderful about you?" inquired Henrietta tartly.

"Nothing. By the same token, a Y. M. C. A. baseball-player can cut me out socially. But any one of you girls would desert the varsity football star if Hardy whistled. So you had nothing to do with importing him? That's all right. The town girls won't let him be lonely."

"Oh, we're not so hard up for attention," Henrietta resented his tone. "If we're not satisfied with the town men, there are quite a few students."

"Students, however enthralling, are fickle," her cousin admonished her. "One has no permanent relations with students. Only strenuous young women who cling to the outskirts of society by their eyelids, ladies whose face is their fortune, desperately put that fortune to the touch and marry some pitiful, dazzled junior before he

has time to waken from his dream. No, nice girls do not take students too seriously."

"Though there's not much else to take," Henrietta reiterated her scorn of "the town men."

"Don't mind me," murmured the cousin. "We're used to your flattering opinion. Believe me, they'll be hot-foot after Hardy. A man with a job is like a head-hunter who has hacked off his first head. He becomes eligible. Farewell, Henrietta. I had an urgent appointment with Blackstone, Kent, and Brewster, but they'll have to wait. I wouldn't miss the bank on this eventful day."

He strolled on.

So if you could believe the jeweled Henrietta, she had nothing to do with Hardy's job. When old man Marr announced at dinner one night that Judge Hardy was dead and had left no estate, wasn't it natural for Henrietta to ask what would become of that nice son that was here at college until last year and had meant to go to Harvard law school?

And wouldn't a popular youth like that make a good receiving-teller? The Hardys had a name for integrity. Old man Marr took to the idea. Evidently Henrietta had nothing to do with it.

The bank was a busy scene.

Jonathan Hardy had appeared there promptly, ready to start work. But he wasn't accomplishing anything, for all afternoon solemn, innocent faces of fraternity brethren succeeded one another in the brass-latticed window of the receiving-teller, and Greek-letter greetings were pressed into his palms by the tangled fingers of his recent colleagues. The town girls couldn't show their joy so boldly.

Never before had they regretted the lack of money to deposit. Money, indeed, they had constantly desired, but with no such destination in mind. Now every feminine creature between sixteen and twenty-six dreamed of a nest-egg in the bank.

For Jonty Hardy was well beloved. Generally Myra Tompkins knew what happened before it fairly started occurring. You do if you are apprenticed to a country milliner. But this time by some strange chance Myra missed the news.

Farmers' wives do their buying Saturday afternoon. So Mrs. Rein, the milliner, always banked her money on Monday, and Myra had the job.

Therefore, with a bandbox for Henrietta Marr on her arm, and a shabby hand-bag on her wrist, Myra unsuspectingly approached the receiving wicket. There was nothing exciting about banking Mrs. Rein's weekly earnings, and Myra dressed the errand-girl part exactly.

Without recognition, Jonathan Hardy saw her round, little face where rivulets of pallor ran between crowded islands of freckle.

The moment didn't mean anything to Jonathan.

His engaging smile was purely reflex action. This raw sixteen-year-old appeared to know him, so he must respond. But at sight of him the day broke out in flags and illumination for Myra.

"It's awfully nice to see you back," she stammered.

Jonathan had heard the remark some four hundred times, but he accepted it courteously. What was this lank, breathless, freckled little dowdy to him? Her name was writ in water.

He did not suspect that she would daringly carve it in his career before she finished with him.

Henrietta was making a cake when Myra arrived with the bandbox, but she came in, unfastening a gingham apron and sliding rings over floury finger-nails. Henrietta did not feel quite decent without a few rings.

She tried on the hat, said "'S all right," and flung it carelessly aside.

Myra rather resented this high-handed reception of the Rein masterpiece. Mrs. Rein would sell a dozen similar ones to her country trade by

pronouncing the magic formula, "Henrietta Marr saw this model here and nothing would do but she must have it, though she'd already bought two in New York."

Henrietta scorned country millinery, but her father constantly urged her to "trade" in the town. It wasn't wise to antagonize local merchants. Mrs. Rein's uncle had been governor.

Her cousin was State treasurer and gave State funds to favored banks. Besides, she had a lot of influence with farmers, and as a banker's daughter, Henrietta knew how satisfactorily loans to farmers combine high profits with small risks.

II.

On Thanksgiving Day, Jonathan Hardy fished Henrietta Marr out of the creek.

Everybody was on the ice that day. Myra went down to watch. She wished acutely she had not outgrown her skates. She frowned with distaste at her number five shoes.

Henrietta, her thin face becomingly flushed, above new sables, sat on the bank extending a little foot. A kneeling senior fastened a skate to her boot.

Distracted with envy, Myra looked on.

"Boot and all, Henrietta's foot would rattle around in my shoes," said Myra to herself. Fate seemed convicted of gross favoritism. Henrietta's bewitching little fur cap soared far above the utmost adventure of Mrs. Rein's shop, far above anything Philadelphia or New York could originate.

Myra's appraising eye adjudged it to Paris, and Myra was right.

"It's her fourth hat this winter, and twenty-five dollars wouldn't pay for it," concluded the milliner's apprentice, who hadn't spent twenty-five dollars for all her winter wardrobe.

Hardy appeared on the bank swinging skates. Jonty skated pretty well, as he did most things, but it didn't matter how Jonty did things.

Every girl wanted to do them with him, quite regardless.

He surveyed the scene, the dazzling ice, the frost-blooming skaters, the group around Henrietta, Myra's dejected figure, a little apart. Jonty's good heart carried him to Myra's side.

It was no compliment really to have Jonty's attention. He nearly always bestowed it on wall-flowers and chaperons.

"Going to skate?" he asked cheerfully. "Can't I put your skates on for you?"

"I haven't any," said Myra, her soul overflowing gratitude and adoration. "I've outgrown mine."

Henrietta stood up and stamped, trying her skates. She turned to Myra with effusion.

"Oh, I wish I'd thought of bringing my old ones. They're too small for me. But I'm sure they'd fit you. Unless probably they'd be too large. You wear such tiny shoes." Henrietta approached mincingly and held her trim little boot by Myra's shabby one.

Myra drew back.

Henrietta couldn't wear anything larger than a three and used to call attention to the fact by devious catty ways. She loved to borrow other girls' overshoes, protesting laughingly that she knew she could never get them on, and then, apologetically returning them because somehow they wouldn't stay on at all.

What a bother, and how absurd, and she simply knew they were too large for you, as small as your shoes looked.

"I can borrow you a pair, I'm sure," volunteered Hardy.

Farther down the bank the Baptist soprano had just come ashore. She had to sing at a vesper service and was taking off her skates. Hardy stood before her, cap in hand.

"I never can remember that little girl's name," apologized Jonathan, "but she's left her skates at home. If you'll lend her yours, Miss Spangler, I'll bring them back this evening."

Miss Spangler's dull countenance

shone with delight. She, too, adored Hardy.

For a memorable half-hour Myra skated with him. Wholly overcome by the honor, she spoke only to answer in timid monosyllables. A very stupid half-hour for him, only Jonathan was used to being kind to timid, unresponsive creatures.

Still, it was almost a relief when he saw Henrietta's fur cap disappear under the ice, because it gave him something real to do.

Henrietta was cracking the whip, and she was the lash end of a long line. Carelessly the senior loosed his grip. Henrietta's wrist wouldn't stand the strain.

She went spinning off alone toward an air-hole. It was a deep place in the creek. Boys had been drowned there. Henrietta broke through the thin ice and vanished.

Nobody could be less heroic in his methods than Hardy. But he was prompt. He dropped Myra's hand, advised her to "stand still," and his long, unhurried stroke carried him to the place of Henrietta's disappearance. The whole formation of the whip had halted and looked helplessly on.

"Get planks. Get a rope," he called, and lightly and casually skated into the hole.

After all he had to manage it himself. He found her somehow under the water, clung somehow to the breaking edge until he came to solid ice, and somehow dragged her out.

"The fur hat's done for," reflected Myra unfeelingly as she beheld Henrietta's limp form wrapped in overcoats.

Hardy sat down and began to undo his skates. Water dripped from his red sweater and froze falling. The senior cast a coat upon his shoulders. Myra flung herself at his feet to help with the wet skates.

"Good Heavens! Don't do that!" he restrained her almost petulantly.

Myra stood back and watched him, dumbly conscious that she had in some

way offended the lord of the world. He looked up from the second fastening.

"I imagine I'd better not stay to get those skates for Miss Spangler. Do you mind seeing to them?"

"Don't be silly," Myra condemned him, and broke into a smile.

Hardy wasn't in the bank for several weeks. He had a bad cold that threatened pneumonia.

They said old man Marr wanted to carry him up to the house to be properly looked after, but Hardy wouldn't consent. By universal acclamation, Hardy belonged to Henrietta now.

Myra herself could not but realize it, unwillingly enough. Myra had no personal hopes. She was too young and too humble-minded.

But it did seem profane to abandon the flower of civilization to Henrietta.

The week before Christmas Henrietta gave a party. College-town parties can't well come in the holidays as most parties do, because all the men go home.

Tompkinsville rather expected to hear Henrietta's engagement announced at that party, but nothing was said. However, Henrietta shone, with a string of rhinestones in her hair.

Most of the inexperienced guests believed them to be diamonds, confiding in the well-known prosperity of old man Marr, and not knowing much about diamonds. There were paste buckles in Henrietta's lovely satin slippers and real diamonds on her fingers and her neck. Henrietta was radiant as a firefly.

Her gown likewise deserved attention.

"Gosh, Hen!" exclaimed her cousin, moved to admiration; "some kleid!"

"Poiret made this gown," assented Henrietta, "and Poiret knows a thing or two."

Myra realized it. Myra was there also. Nobody minds your occupation in Tompkinsville if your family is satisfactory.

You will be snubbed if you are a poor relation, but you will be invited.

Myra looked the resigned wallflower in a plaid voile wisely discarded by a niece of Mrs. Rein's, and cheap patent leather slippers that didn't fit. Mrs. Rein gave her the slippers, a premature Christmas gift.

The shoe man's nefarious wife had bought an Easter hat, paid one instalment, and finally offered to let Mrs. Rein "take it out in trade."

The shoe man was surly and reluctant when they came to choose the slippers, and couldn't find Myra's size in a kind any one would want. It was a good chance to get rid of old stock.

Still they seemed very luxurious to Myra until she saw Henrietta's.

Although it was Saturday night, when one does a roaring business, Mrs. Rein let Myra off at six.

"Turn about's fair play," she said kindly. "I may be needing you to help me in the house Christmas day. My uncle, the Governor, is coming through town some day next week, and it's just possible he may be here for Christmas dinner."

Myra promised unlimited assistance. She would have traded a month of holidays for the evening of the dance.

"Did you return Miss Spangler's skates for me?" asked Jonty Hardy's amiable voice. Yes, he was actually going to talk to her. He had come in late, and he wasn't dancing. Occasionally he grew hoarse and coughed.

"You've been away from the bank for weeks," said Myra sympathetically.

Hardy laughed. "My luck."

"Don't you like banking?"

"Well enough. I'm not keen."

"My father was a lawyer," Myra submitted.

"Mine too," Hardy echoed.

"Didn't you like law?"

"You bet I liked it. Couldn't afford to study it though."

"Lots of men do that haven't any money," said Myra.

"I'm lazy and extravagant," Hardy excluded himself from this band of self-denying enthusiasts.

His pleasant conversation drawled on through four dances. Henrietta saw, and her eyes glittered more than her rhinestones and diamonds. She came to Hardy with executive directness.

"Jonty, I want you to take Louise Maxwell out to supper. You'll excuse him, Myra."

Jonty obeyed, and Myra stood alone. The cousin, strolling by, stopped to speak to her.

Henrietta returned, and smiling, took his arm. "You're to take Mary Birney," she said as she pulled him away.

By twos and threes the company dissolved into the dining-room. The musicians were left, and Myra. At first she was merely embarrassed and aggrieved.

Then all such humble sentiments were drowned under a rising tide of fury.

Myra, hitherto mildness itself, felt a murderous spite against Henrietta. Henrietta, who had everything; Henrietta, indulged and adulated; Henrietta, about to marry the desired of all hearts, could not let him talk for a little while to a girl who had nothing; but she must hold that girl up to public scorn, forlorn and friendless.

Myra longed to put Henrietta to death slowly and painfully.

But Henrietta would live and marry Jonathan Hardy. Though a viper, she would marry Jonathan. Myra, in a passion of resolve, determined that it should not be.

How it should be prevented she did not specify to herself.

Even if Henrietta had known Myra's decision it wouldn't have worried her much. A puppy would have seemed to Henrietta a more dangerous adversary. And her cousin, reappearing in the doorway, saw only a meek, depressed, freckled little girl in an ugly plaid voile.

"Come along, Myra," he said good-naturedly. "Come out and sit with our crowd. I'll get a chair."

III.

It was the day before Christmas.

Behind the screen in the show-room Myra was trying on a fur cap. She had made it of a worn-out muff found in the attic, and it was a very good imitation of Henrietta's spoiled one. Somebody lumbered across the shop floor.

"Sarah Rein!" called a man's voice.

"Just a fresh old farmer," said Myra to herself, condemning the bucolic accent, and turned to face the intruder who had passed the forbidden screen.

He was a big, unwieldy old man, badly dressed and tired-looking.

He stood regarding Myra in her dashing fur cap and her white apron, among the wire bonnet-frames and gaudy ribbons, the monstrous flowers and dyed feathers of her trade. He smiled at her with homely understanding. And Myra liked him.

"Hello, sister," he saluted her. "Where's Sarah Rein?"

"I'm afraid she's too busy just now to see any one," apologized Myra. "She's in the house making cookies for Christmas."

"Well, don't call her if she's busy," agreed the homely old man.

He removed a half-made violet turban from the cushion of the rocking-chair and sat down. When presently Myra recognized that this was the gubernatorial uncle himself that had become the least important thing about him.

The uncle knew everybody, and passed judgment with kindly acumen.

He remembered Myra's father. "A smart trial lawyer," he commended her late parent. Then he smiled reminiscently. "Always sort of hated to finish up a case, even when collecting the fees was the only thing left to do."

Myra agreed that money had been naught to her father.

"Do you take after him, sister?" inquired Mrs. Rein's uncle.

"I don't know. I never had any money," explained Myra. She thought of Henrietta. "If there was anything coming to me, I'd collect it all right."

"Lawyers frequently don't seem to leave their families much," the uncle reflected for her comfort.

Myra reverted to the person oftenest in her thoughts.

"I guess Judge Hardy had a fine practise, but he didn't leave any estate either. His son had to go to work in Marr's bank here."

"Best thing for a young fellow. Money spoils young men. They ought to get to work." The Governor would not sympathize.

"But he wanted to be a lawyer," objected Myra.

"Then why didn't he be a lawyer?"

"He had no money to go to law-school."

"Shucks," said the Governor contemptuously. "When his father wanted to be a lawyer, he went and was a lawyer. Jonty Hardy hadn't a red cent from home, and I know it. What's the matter with his boy? If he'd the spirit of a sheep he'd get into some attorney's office and hustle for a living. He can't amount to much, sister."

Hot red spots appeared on Myra's cheeks. She leaned forward and berated the Governor.

"I guess it isn't so easy to get into offices. I guess students in offices have to pay fees too."

"Why, surely, sister." The Governor was pacific. "Unless they work like the devil."

"If Jonty Hardy had come to your office," pursued Myra stubbornly, "would you have let him study with you, and earn a living working, and helped him to get a start afterward?"

The Governor deliberated.

"I guess maybe I might have."

Myra sprang to her feet, tearing off the white apron.

"I'll send him to you," she announced.

The Governor caught her dress.

"My dear child, I don't want him."

"You see," said Myra, a sudden flatness in her tone, "you won't really take him. You won't give him a chance. People are good at talking. But there's no chance if you haven't any money."

The Governor released her gown and settled back. He looked somewhat embarrassed.

"It never pays to go headlong, sister," he apologized. "Many an able man has a son that ain't worth hell-room."

"Everybody thinks a lot of Jonathan Hardy," Myra defended the youth.

"His father won every case he ever tried against me," admitted the Governor. "A blame persuasive fellow. Strong on equity."

He fell to musing.

"What is equity?" inquired Myra.

"It's the under-dog's hold. 'That wherein the law, by reason of its universality, is deficient.'"

He smiled up at her wrinkling his kindly eyes. "It's young Hardy's chance that I don't owe him—but his father would have given it to my son, if I had one. Run along, sister, plague take you, before I change my mind."

Myra stood balancing at the door, keen to be gone.

Jonathan Hardy was mildly perplexed by the sight of her fur-crowned head before his wicket. This wasn't Mrs. Rein's banking day, and Myra hadn't the habit of "running in" to the bank, lately so fashionable in Tompkinsville.

"I came about your own affairs, Mr. Hardy," said Myra.

Jonty's face stiffened. He was not grateful for interest in his private business. Myra saw, undaunted.

"You told me," she began, "you wanted to be a lawyer, only you couldn't afford it. Governor Muller is at Mrs. Rein's to-day, and he's as good

as promised to take you into his office. He could give you such a splendid start. He leaves at 4.35. You'd have to see him right away."

Jonty's expression grew unpleasant.

"Thank you awfully for your well-meant—for your courtesy," he said with stifled wrath.

Really, to have a milliner's apprentice meddling in his career was too much. And Jonathan had resigned himself to banking and Henrietta.

The die was cast against glory and hard work in his mind, though Henrietta did not know it yet. Time enough for telling her. Jonathan was always dilatory.

"Do you mean—you won't go to see him?" asked Myra amazed.

"Afraid I can't manage it," replied Hardy, and Myra saw the extent of her defeat.

He would stay in Tompkinsville by preference. He would bank. He would marry Henrietta. Henrietta was to win at every point.

All Myra's quiescent, slavish mind rose tumultuous in arms.

"Oh!" she flouted him. "You are disgusted. You think I'm Miss Busybody Thankless. And just for that you'll throw away the chance of your life. Goodness! if I were a man I'd not do errands in anybody's shop, though my father didn't leave money.

"If I were a man, and everybody liked me, I'd turn my gifts to money. I'd go into law and politics, where you belong. If I was lazy, I'd be ambitious even more. I wouldn't let that ruin me. But you don't care. It's true what the Governor said. If you had

the spirit of a sheep you'd get into some attorney's office and hustle for a living. Or you couldn't amount to much."

Hypnotized, Hardy stared at her. Myra went on sternly.

"The Governor said, 'When his father wanted to be a lawyer he went and was a lawyer. What's the matter with his boy?'"

Hardy flushed and lowered his eyes. Across the bank Henrietta's cousin stood gazing. Now he approached.

"But you don't care," repeated Myra, swiftly reverting to her commonplace voice. "You're too busy thinking I intrude."

She turned and went out.

"Gosh all hemlock! Jonty, the girl's beautiful," stated the incredulous cousin. "And I never noticed her any more than a speckled toad. Considerable fireworks, too."

Hardy did not respond.

"What are you indicted for?" pursued his inquisitive friend. "I'd instantly withdraw my account from this bank, if I had one. A man must be unutterably base to make a lady look at him like that."

Still and grim, his harsh mouth immovably set, Jonty began to gather up his books.

"School's over," said the cousin. "Disdain not our simple pleasures. Athens, too, was a country town. Shall we go down to stand around Jerry's corner and watch the mail go out?"

"Thanks," said Jonathan. "I've got an appointment to see an old friend of my father's. He leaves at four-thirty-five."

M Y S T E R I E S

By Winifred Welles

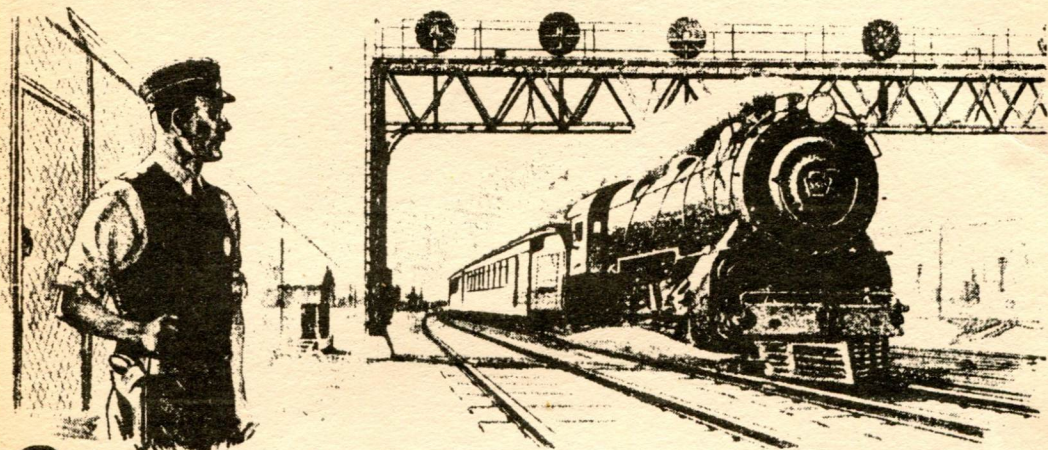
OH, Sphinx immutable,
You minx inscrutable,

Who crouch upon the distant desert sands
And silent gaze above your folded hands—
Don't fancy you're the only mystery,
For one exactly like you married me.

You Sphinx unguessable,
Minx irrepressible,

Who smile beneath your boudoir cap demure—
That you're the Egypt lady's twin I'm sure.
Riddles to set man's maddened mind awirl;
And, after all, your answer is—just girl.

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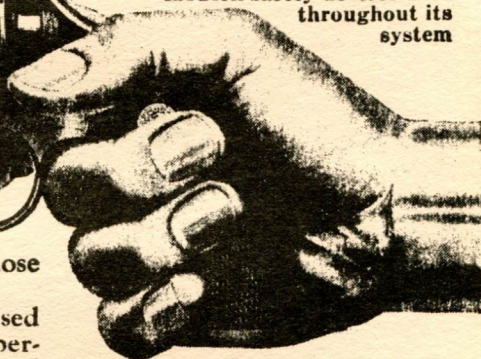
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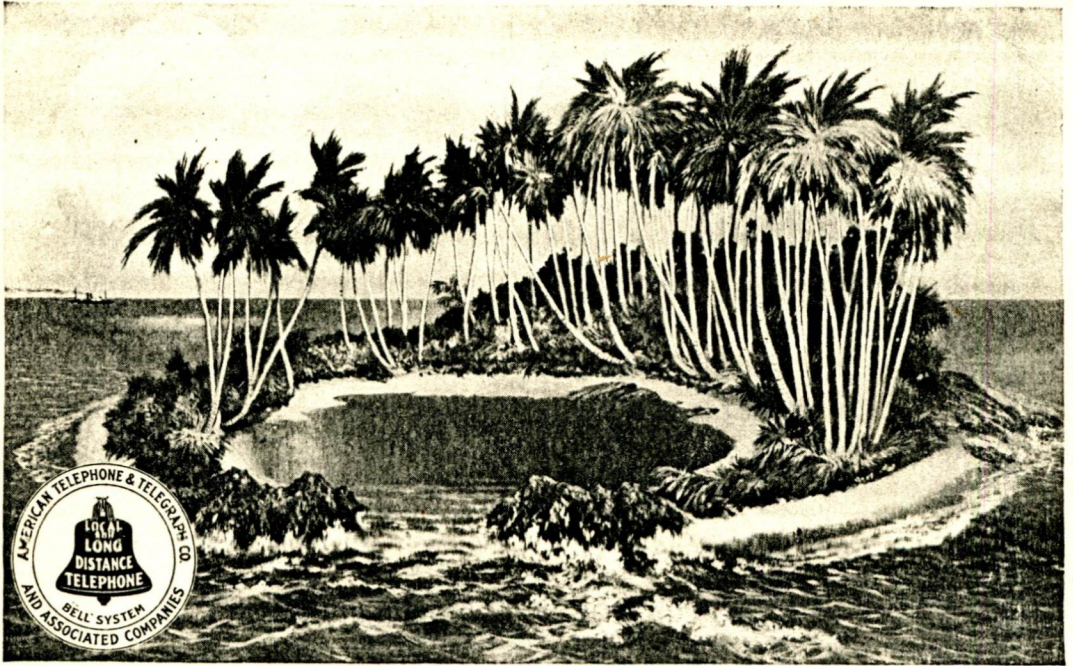
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In the depths of tropical seas the coral polyps are at work. They are nourished by the ocean, and they grow and multiply because they cannot help it.

Finally a coral island emerges from the ocean. It collects sand and seeds, until it becomes a fit home for birds, beasts and men.

In the same way the telephone system has grown, gradually at first, but steadily and irresistibly. It could not stop growing. To stop would mean disaster.

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Each new connection disclosed a need for other new connections, and millions of dollars had to be poured into the business to provide the 8,000,000 telephones now connected.

And the end is not yet, for the growth of the Bell System is still irresistible, because the needs of the people will not be satisfied except by universal communication. The system is large because the country is large.

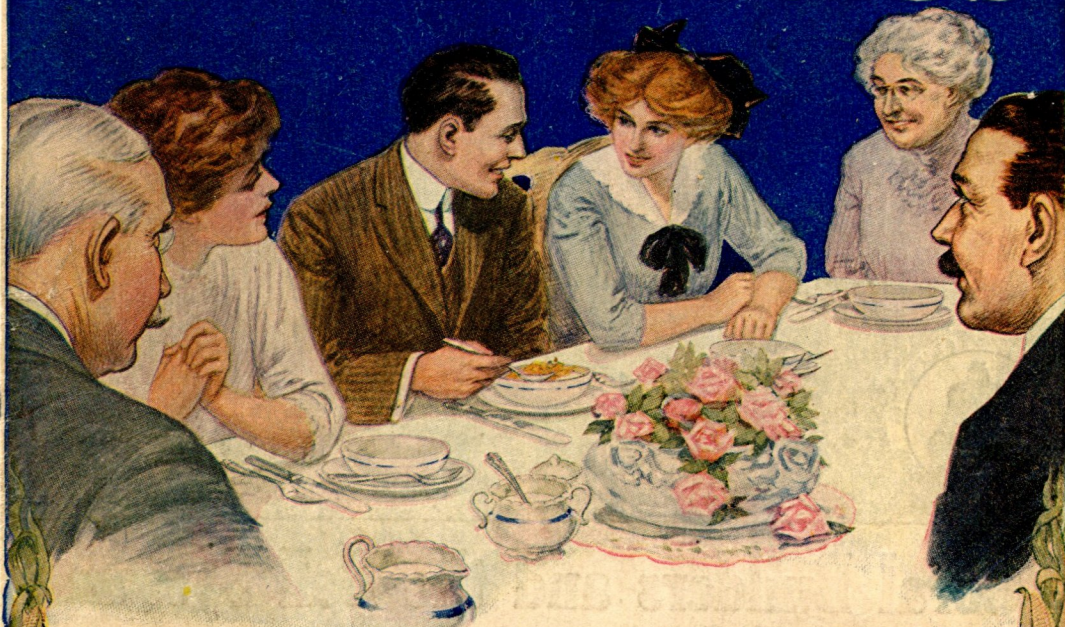
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